

KETTERING

generates lasting ideas, and that the members of its community have a responsibility both to speak and to listen.

The University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, and it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn. Insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, the University fully respects and supports the freedom of all students, faculty and staff “to discuss any problem that presents itself.”

Of course, the ideas of different members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas or opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although the University values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility of maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can be no justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. The University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat of violence, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise incompatible with the functioning of the University. In addition, the University may reasonably restrict the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In a word, the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation should not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make their own judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by opposing it vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is one of the University's most important responsibilities.

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For members of the University community, as for the University itself, the proper response to ideas they find offensive, unwarranted and dangerous is not interference, obstruction, or suppression. It is, instead, to engage in robust counter-speech that challenges the merits of those ideas and exposes them for what they are. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

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