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President's Advisory Committee
Statement on Free Expression and Institutional Speech

Universities exist to pursue knowledge in the service of truth. This pursuit depends both on the freedom to challenge orthodoxy and on the opportunity to develop perspectives grounded in evidence and shaped by the give and take of intellectual engagement.

A spirit of inquiry animates the work of the university. Through restless, robust questioning of the status quo, addressing present-day problems and historic wrongs, our University community strives to deliver insight and invention. Whether in concert with prevailing wisdom or in defiance of it, Northwestern University faculty and students have wide-ranging liberty to pursue their scholarly, pedagogical, intellectual, and artistic activities. Northwestern's motto, "whatsoever things are true," reminds us to persevere in our mission.

At Northwestern, our aspirations for intellectual engagement are rooted in our commitment to dialogue. Over fifty years ago, the influential Faculty Planning Committee's Community of Scholars report identified among its priorities developing "the complex of qualities that characterize the educated [person] as a social being." Social beings operate in community with one another. In dialogue, participants listen as well as speak, allow—as far as possible—the good faith of others' arguments, and remain open to the possibility of persuasion. Even if unmoved in their views, they will be better able to defend them after the crucible of debate. It is through inclusive engagement across difference, where arguments encounter counterarguments, that learning happens.

Dialogue is not domination or denigration. Shutting down or shouting down a speaker with whom one disagrees not only demonstrates a refusal to listen but also prevents others from doing so. Speech that impedes or is intended to prevent others' participation hinders the vitality of our intellectual community. In this light, free speech

The exception to this rule covers matters that directly affect University operations. But even such statements should be rare: Northwestern must take pains to avoid coercing dissenting community members into silence.

By limiting University statements, we do not endorse a simplistic vision of “university neutrality.” The very reason for this limitation is our firm commitment to values about which we are not neutral: fostering open and equitable ~~d&I~~ (n)-3: