

Free Speech Policy

Category: Operations

Approval: Board of Governors

Responsibility: President's Office

Date: November 30, 2018

Policy Statement:

Trent University's vision statement commits it to the creation of "vibrant, engaged and sustainable communities of learning, teaching and research committed to free enquiry and expression." In keeping with this, the Members of Trent University (faculty, staff and students) have the right to freely examine, investigate, speculate upon, debate and comment on issues and ideas including the right to criticize popular points of view and society at large.

Trent University views engagement with difficult and controversial ideas to be an essential part of the education (and research, which we consider a form of education) we provide. In view of this, Trent is committed to open discussion and free inquiry and does not attempt to insulate its students, nor its faculty, from ideas or opinions that they disagree with or find offensive. The right to free expression is a necessary precondition for the University to accomplish its essential purpose: the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, the testing of new ideas and the advancement of learning.

While members of the University are free to criticize and contest the views of others, their right to free speech does not include the right to obstruct or interfere with the freedom of others to express their views.

The right to free speech does impose accompanying responsibilities. Such responsibilities include respecting privacy and confidentiality as required by the law and University operations; respecting faculty and adhering to course content; and a commitment to adhere to professional academic standards.

This policy does not excuse hate speech, defamation, slander, or actions or speaking which is not compliant with the Human Rights Code; the Criminal Code of Canada; provincial regulations and Trent University's Violence and Harassment policy. Trent reserves the right to deny access or remove persons who act in ways that compromise others' rights to safety and security. The University may reasonably regulate the time, place and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University.

As a University, Trent is committed to an environment that embraces viewpoint diversity. It aims to support its students and faculty achieve their full potential by facilitating the expression of their diverse perspectives.

Free Speech Processes

The University's free speech policies and processes apply to faculty, students, staff, management and guests of the University. Concerns, complaints or questions about particular situations will be investigated in a manner that considers this statement on free speech; relevant legislation; the University's violence, harassment and discrimination policies; the University's discipline procedures for students, faculty and staff; and the following key University documents. When complaints against the University on free speech grounds cannot be resolved internally, complainants may refer them to the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman.

Collective Agreements:

Trent's collective agreements with full-time faculty (TUFA, clause 1.2.3), part-time faculty (CUPE Local 3908, Unit 1, clause 1.07) and student workers governed by CUPE Local 3908, Unit 2, 16.01, all recognize academic freedom, which incorporates free speech, asserting that the members of our academic community are entitled, regardless of prescribed doctrine, to freedom in carrying out research and in publishing the results thereof and to the freedom of teaching and discussion.

Students:

Trent's Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities (Section 2: Fundamental Rights & Freedoms, points 9 & 11) asserts that "every student enjoys the freedoms of: 9. Opinion, expression, belief and political association" and has a responsibility to respect the rights of other members of the Trent community in this regard. Engaging in ongoing disruptive behaviour that prevents sanctioned events from proceeding may be subject to this Charter and be subject to disciplinary action. Student complaints may use the Student Charter's complaint resolution process (outlined in section 6).

Contact Officer:

President

Date for Next Review:

November 2021

Related Policies, Procedures & Guidelines

- a) The Trent University Charter of Student Rights and Responsibilities
- b) Trent University Faculty Association (TUFA) Collective Agreement

Policies Superseded by This Policy:

- a) N/A