

Free Speech Policy

Category: Operations

Approval: Board of Governors

Responsibility: President's Office

Date: November 30, 2018; revised March 28, 2025

Purpose:

Trent University ("Trent" or the "University") is committed to the principle of freedom of expression, which includes freedom of speech and means the ability to examine, question, critique, investigate, inquire, speculate and communicate on issues and society at large without deference to prescribed doctrine.

The purpose of the Free Speech Policy is to ensure that members of the Trent University community should be able to work, live, teach and learn in an environment free from discrimination, harassment and violence. As a University, Trent is committed to an environment that embraces viewpoint diversity. It aims to support its students, faculty, and staff to achieve their full potential by facilitating the expression of their diverse perspectives. 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.

Scope:

This Policy applies to all members of the Trent University community including:

- Employees (full-time, part-time, sessional, contract, temporary, casual and otherwise);
- Students (full-time and part-time);
- Members of the Board of Governors, and its advisory and ad hoc committees;
- Volunteers, coaches, interns and contractors who provide products, services or research, while on campus;
- Individuals who are located on campus while employed by another organization (e.g., employees of faculty/employee/student unions);
- Visitors, including guest speakers.

Policy Statement:

Members of the Trent University community are free to criticize and debate. Trent University does not attempt to insulate its students, faculty or staff from ideas or opinions that they might disagree with or find offensive. Members of the Trent University community also are free to engage in peaceful assemblies and demonstrations, and to make reasonable use of University facilities, subject to Trent University policies and regulations. However, these freedoms do not establish a right to engage in unlawful activities, nor to participate in assemblies and demonstrations that are in contravention of University policies or regulations, or federal, provincial or municipal legislation. This policy needs to be applied consistent with relevant collective agreements and the Trent University Student Charter.

The right to free speech does impose accompanying responsibilities. Such responsibilities include but

are not limited to treating respectfully all members of the Trent University community; respecting University policies or regulations; respecting privacy and confidentiality as required by the law and University operations; and a commitment to adhere to professional standards. This Policy does not excuse hate speech, defamation, slander, or actions or speaking which violates 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.

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 the Student Charter and be subject to the complaint resolution process and discipline therein.

Complaints

The University's Free Speech Policy applies to members of the Trent University Community. Concerns, complaints or questions can come up in many different contexts. A complaint that raises free speech will be investigated taking into account this policy, and under the appropriate process depending on the context of the complaint. This could include:

- An investigation under the Trent University Discrimination Policy
- An investigation under the Trent University Violence and Harassment Policy
- A disciplinary investigation consistent with the applicable collective agreement
- A discipline process under the Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities.
- Another process as appropriate.

Complainants are expected to file their complaints as soon as possible after the incident(s). Complainants who are unclear as to how to proceed with their complaint should contact the Executive Director in the President's office for assistance.

Trent University will make every effort to investigate the complaint within 30 days. When complaints raising free speech rights cannot be resolved internally, complainants may refer them to the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman.

Contact Officer: President

Date for Next Review: February 2030

Related Policies, Procedures & Guidelines:

- a) *The Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities*
- b) *The Discrimination and Harassment Policy*
- c) *The Violence and Harassment Policy*
- d) Trent University and Trent University Faculty Association (TUFA) Collective Agreement
- e) Trent University and CUPE 3908, Unit 1 Collective Agreement
- f) Trent University and CUPE 3908, Unit 2 Collective Agreement

Policies Superseded by This Policy

- a) N/A