

FREE SPEECH

What Does It Mean?

The First Amendment of the Constitution

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

“After all, if freedom of speech means anything it means a willingness to stand and let people say things with which we disagree, and which do weary us considerably.”

~ Zechariah Chafee, Professor of Law, Harvard Law School
(Freedom of Speech, Harcourt, Brace and Howe. 1920, p. 366)

Freedom of Speech, Expression, and Assembly on a Public Campus

Public colleges and universities are often places where people exercise free speech rights guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Some individuals and groups may express opinions others find offensive or hurtful, sometimes deeply so. You may well wonder why a university would allow speech that is hateful. A public university has an important constitutional duty to uphold the free speech rights of all people, *without regard to content*. Even though the views expressed may contradict the values of Middle Georgia State University and its community members, the University holds the First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of expression and the right to assemble peaceably as essential rights of a free people.

Suggestions for Responding to Objectionable Speech

- 1. Keep Walking:** While speakers have the right to speak, you do not have to listen. You can change your route and choose to deny the speaker an audience for speech you find objectionable.
- 2. Hands off:** Whatever you do, make sure not to physically engage with speakers in any way. Some speakers may try to provoke a response from you. Touching, pushing or striking speakers may lead to criminal charges as well as violations of the Student Code of Conduct. Do not let speech that offends you turn into an arrest or charges against you.
- 3. Engagement:** If you choose to engage, do so in a manner that educates others on your perspective. Arguing, shouting, and profanity are unlikely to change the opinions of others whose beliefs you do not share. The Office of Student Affairs can help with coordinating counter speech events
- 4. Connect with others:** If you are concerned or upset by the views expressed by speakers on campus or online, get involved with student organizations and university offices that share your interest. You can also communicate your concerns with representatives of your Student Government Association.

RESOURCES

There are several resources at Middle Georgia State available to answer your questions or concerns about speech, expression, and assembly on campus:

OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

100 University Parkway
Macon, GA 31206
Student Life Center - 277 (Macon campus)
vpsa@mga.edu
478.757.7383

University Counsel
Office of the President
Administration Building (Macon Campus)
478.757.2666

For information about Middle Georgia State's Freedom of Expression Policy (6.4), visit: policies.mga.edu

MGA.EDU/FREE-EXPRESSION



Middle Georgia
State University