

Statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities

Academic institutions exist for the transmission of knowledge, the pursuit of truth, the development of students, and the general well-being of society. Free inquiry and free expression are indispensable to the attainment of these goals. As members of the academic community at The George Washington University, students should be encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth.

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The freedom to learn depends upon appropriate opportunities and conditions in the classroom, on campus, in all learning experiences regardless of modality, and in the larger community. Students should exercise their freedom with responsibility.

All members of the academic community share the responsibility to secure and to respect general conditions conducive to the freedom to learn, regardless of the mode of interactions, including face-to-face and virtual, digital, or online settings or through electronic media. The university has a duty to develop policies and procedures that provide and safeguard this freedom.

The George Washington University believes that the procedures, rights, and safeguards outlined below are indispensable to achieving the goals desired – freedom to teach, to learn, and to search for truth.

The primary purpose for the maintenance of conduct in the university setting is to protect the university community and to establish clear standards for civil interaction among community members. The university's goal, through the maintenance of standards set forth in the Code of Student Conduct (Code), is to help students experience democratic citizenship and its attendant obligations and responsibilities.

I. Basic Assumptions

A. Freedom of Expression

Student organizations and individual students shall be free to examine and to discuss all questions of interest to them and to express opinions publicly and privately. They shall be free to support causes by orderly means that do not disrupt the regular and essential operation of the institution. At the same time, it shall be made clear to the academic and the larger community that students and student organizations speak only for themselves in their public expressions or demonstrations.

GW students have the rights and responsibilities of a free academic community. They shall respect not only their fellow students' rights but also the rights of other members of the academic community to free expression of views based on the pursuit of the truth and the right to function as citizens independent of the university.

B. Freedom from Unlawful Discrimination

The university will not permit unlawful discrimination on grounds of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital or familial status, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, and/or other characteristics protected by applicable law in any university-recognized area of student life. However, those organizations that are social fraternity and sorority groups may limit membership on the basis of sex.

C. Professional Rights of the Faculty

Nothing in this Statement shall be deemed to revoke or alter any right a faculty member may have under the Faculty Code or other applicable agreement with the University.

D. Student Rights in the Governing of the University

The university is a community of scholars engaged in the search for knowledge. Students, faculty, and administrators participate in this search. In light of this, the student body shall have clearly defined means, including membership on appropriate committees and administrative bodies, to participate in the formulation and application of the institutional policy affecting student affairs. The concern of students, however, legitimately extends beyond what has normally been considered student affairs. Their interest in academic policies, for example, is a development to be encouraged bearing in mind the teaching-learning context of the university community.

II. Students in Academic Programs

The professor in the course and in conference should encourage free discussion, inquiry, and expression. Student performance should be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards.

A. Protection of Freedom of Expression

Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.

B. Protection Against Improper Academic Evaluation

Students should have protection through orderly procedures against discriminatory or capricious academic evaluation. At the same time, they are responsible for maintaining standards of academic performance established for each course in which they are enrolled. Except in instances that involve a reported student concern based on allegation of unlawful discrimination for which other remedy is provided under [“Discrimination, Harassment, and Related Retaliation Compliance Procedures,”](#) a student who alleges an instance of arbitrary or capricious academic evaluation shall be heard and the allegation reviewed through faculty peer review procedures established by the dean and faculty of the school in which the contested

academic evaluation took place. An allegation of improper academic evaluation may proceed either through the faculty peer review procedures established by the dean or the [Discrimination, Harassment, and Related Retaliation Compliance Procedures](#) (not both). Should the faculty member persist in refusing to alter the academic evaluation at issue, notwithstanding a finding by the peer review processes in favor of and upholding the complaint of the student, the Dean's Council, and the dean shall afford the student an appropriate remedy after consultation with the peer review body.

C. Protection Against Disclosure

Information about student views, beliefs, and political associations, which professors acquire in the course of their work as instructors, advisors, and counselors, should be considered confidential. Protection against disclosure is a serious professional obligation. Judgments of ability and character may be provided under appropriate circumstances, normally with the knowledge or consent of the student.

D. Standards of Behavior in Courses

The primary responsibility for managing the learning environment rests with the faculty. Students who engage in any prohibited or unlawful acts that result in disruption of a class may be directed by the instructor to leave the class for the remainder of the class period. The term "prohibited acts" includes behavior prohibited by the instructor (including, but not limited to, making unauthorized recording of, or using unauthorized technology in, any part of a class, online meeting, or other academic settings, persistently speaking without being recognized or called on, refusing to be seated, leaving or entering in a manner that is disruptive.). It must be emphasized that this provision is not designed to be used as a means to punish classroom dissent. The expression of disagreement with the instructor or classmates, by itself, is not disruptive behavior. Longer suspensions from a class or dismissal on conduct grounds must be preceded by a student conduct process, as set forth in the Code.

III. Student Participation in Academic Policy-Making

In light of the basic assumption of student involvement in academic affairs, each department or academic unit administering a degree program should encourage the formation of an organization of its majors to reflect student views on matters of academic policy, and each department or other academic unit administering a degree program shall establish an advisory council representing faculty, students, and others as deemed advisable so as to provide a meaningful exchange of views on departmental policies among the parties so represented; provided, however, that the application to specific individuals of department policies on salary, promotions, and tenure is a matter of faculty and administrative responsibility.

In addition, clearly defined means for student participation in academic policymaking at the college or school level of the respective college or schools, where college- or school-wide advisory councils have not been established in accordance with the provisions above, shall be developed by faculty-student committees.

IV. Students as Members of the University Community

A. Student Government

The university recognizes the right of students to form and democratically elect their governing bodies as a means to participate in the discussion of issues and problems facing the academic community. The governing bodies shall function as representatives of the student to the administration and faculty of the university, as well as to the entire community.

The electorate of a university-wide student government shall consist of the entire student body. Any elected members of a governing body representing less than the entire student body shall be elected in such manner as to create or preserve essential representational equality.

B. Student Organizations

1. Freedom of Student Association

The students of The George Washington University are free to organize and join organizations to promote their common and lawful interests, subject to university regulations. All members of a student organization must be currently registered students of the university. The fact of affiliation with any extramural association or national organization or political party should not itself bar a student organization from registration or recognition. However, action may be taken to ensure that the university does not, through the activities of student organizations, stand in violation of laws that place limits on the use of university resources related to political campaigns. The administration and faculty shall not discriminate against a student because of membership in any student organization meeting the conditions of this section.

2. Registration, Recognition, and Disclosures

All student organizations shall be registered and recognized in accordance with university regulations in order to receive the benefits of the use of university facilities and other university benefits. Registration or recognition may be withheld or withdrawn from organizations that violate university regulations. Registration and recognition procedures shall require the identification of responsible officers. On a case-by-case basis, upon request of the university, organizations may be asked to provide a list of all members of their group to the Office for Student Life.

Once recognition of a student group or like organization has been withdrawn, no actions may be taken at or within the university in the name of that group or organization.

Students who do so may be subject to student conduct action.

3. Use of University Facilities

Meeting rooms, technological resources, other university facilities, and funding should be made available, on an equitable basis, only to registered student organizations. Access to facilities shall be consistent with the primary use of these facilities and access to funding shall be provided to the extent funding for other

university purposes permits. Use of facilities shall be in keeping with the best interests of the university.

4. Signing Contracts

Under the Bylaws of the university, only designated officers of the university may sign contracts binding on the university. Students may not sign contracts or agreements in the name of the university or a student organization or otherwise commit university or organization funds. Students who do so shall be held personally and financially liable for all costs and commitments made. Students should refer to the resources provided to student organizations, including policies and guidelines, found on the Office for Student Life website for information on contracting procedures.

C. Student-Sponsored Forums

Students shall have the right to assemble, to select speakers, and to discuss issues of their choice, provided that the assembly is lawful in nature, does not interfere with the processes of the university, and does not infringe upon the rights of others. The university reserves the right to prohibit assemblies having in its judgment the clear likelihood of failing to meet one or more of these conditions.

Students shall be allowed to invite and hear any person of their own choosing, subject to the conditions listed here. Those routine procedures required by the university before a guest speaker is invited to make an appearance shall be designed only to ensure that there is orderly scheduling of facilities, adequate preparation for the event and that the occasion is conducted in a manner appropriate to an academic community. The control of university facilities shall not be used as a means to restrict a guest speaker's expression solely on the basis of disapproval or apprehension of that speaker's ideas or motives. However, it shall be made clear to the academic and larger community by sponsoring organizations that sponsorship of guest speakers does not necessarily imply university approval or endorsement of views expressed.

Students must recognize their responsibility to uphold the right of free speech and to permit invited speakers to appear and speak without disruption. The members of the university community are urged to hear all sides of controversial issues represented.

D. Assembly, Petitions, and Demonstrations

The George Washington University is committed to the protection of free speech, the freedom of assembly, and the safeguarding of the right of lawful protest at the university, including in virtual, online, and digital settings. Therefore, student organizations and individual students shall have the right to engage in behaviors such as distributing pamphlets, collecting names for petitions, and conducting orderly demonstrations provided these actions are not disruptive of normal university functions and do not encompass the physical takeover or occupation of university facilities and spaces, whether or not they are in use at that time.

While all students have the right to dissent and to protest, these rights shall not be exercised in such a manner as to obstruct or disrupt teaching, research, administration,

conduct procedures, or other university activities. No one group or organization holds a monopoly on dissent or on freedom to hear all sides. Further, the fact that students may pursue their interests through speech and assembly at the university does not abrogate their accountability as citizens to the laws of the larger society, and the university is entitled to reflect these constraints in its own regulations.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the university recognizes that protecting impromptu and spontaneous assembly for the purpose of expression, protest, and dissent is essential to fulfilling this commitment. Thus, the lack of a reservation to use space or other university resources is not by itself a basis for terminating any expressive activity, including impromptu activities, unless the protest or assembly conflicts with a previously scheduled event in the same location or is identified as engaging in behavior prohibited under university policy.

E. Student Publications and Media

The student press and media shall be free of censorship and advance approval of copy while being governed by the canons of responsible journalism.

Editors and managers of student publications or broadcast stations shall be free from arbitrary suspension and removal because of student, faculty, administrative, or public disapproval of editorial policy or content. Only for proper and stated causes shall editors and managers be subject to removal, and then by orderly and prescribed procedures. Such removal shall be deemed a form of student conduct action and therefore subject to fundamental fairness in student conduct cases. The agency responsible for the appointment of editors and managers shall be the agency responsible for their removal.

Even though certain publications may be financially dependent on the university, in the delegation of editorial responsibility to students, the university shall provide sufficient editorial freedom and financial autonomy for the student publications to maintain their integrity of purpose as vehicles for free inquiry and free expression in an academic community.

All student publications that are published and financed by the university shall explicitly state on the editorial page that the opinions expressed are those of the publication and are not necessarily those of the university or the student body.

Any committees for the supervision of such publications or media shall have student members.

V. Regulations Concerning Student Life

A. The Enactment of Regulations

University-wide regulations intended to formalize general standards of student conduct may be recommended to the Board of Trustees by appropriate committees composed entirely of students or jointly of students, faculty, and administrative representatives. University-wide regulations do not contemplate specialized regulations or rules

governing academic, business, administrative, or contractual matters, nor rules or regulations published by administrators, students, or faculty for the control of facilities or programs, such as those not normally submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval. Generally understood standards of conduct, such as respect for the persons or property of others, continue to apply and may form the basis of student conduct action though nowhere specified in particular detail.

It is the intent of this section to bring students into active participation in the formulation of certain university-wide regulations and to encourage the inclusion of students as active participants in the formulation of those regulations to the extent that such involvement can be accomplished reasonably and practicably.

B. Standards of Fairness and Student Rights in Student Conduct Cases

The George Washington University respects and is determined to protect the individual dignity and educational access of its students. At the same time, it requires that students comply with those conventions and regulations of university life that are necessary to maintain order, to protect individuals and property, and to fulfill its purposes and responsibilities as a university. To this end, the university realizes that the prevailing rule in matters of student conduct must continue to be that of common sense, and excessive legalism can only disserve the university and its community of students, faculty, and staff. The model for student conduct procedures that the university adopts is that of the administrative process, not that of the criminal or civil courts.

The university student conduct process should not become excessively legalistic or adversarial. The student conduct bodies may find it necessary to remind parties, witnesses, or support persons that the proceedings are not criminal or civil trials, that criminal or civil standards and rules of evidence are not controlling, and that the student conduct bodies shall enjoy considerable discretion to interpret, vary, and waive procedural requirements to the end that a just and fair decision may be obtained.

Following an alleged act of student misconduct, and until the final disposition of the charges, the status of a respondent shall not be altered nor will their right to be present at the university and to attend courses be suspended, except when interim suspension is assigned because the continued presence of the respondent in the university community poses a threat to any person or to the stability and continuance of normal university functions.

The status of a student may change for reasons that are not related to student conductor for reasons that are not based on student conduct action under the Code. Status changes that are administrative, academic, or in the interest of the security of the university community are not governed by these student conduct procedures.

VI. Students as Members of the Community

Students who violate a local ordinance or any law risk the legal penalties prescribed by civil or criminal authorities. An educational institution need not concern itself with every violation. Nevertheless, the university may take student conduct action against those students whose behavior off university premises is a violation of the Code, considering the seriousness of the

alleged conduct or proximity to the university or university-sponsored or affiliated events. This could occur not only in local neighborhoods, but also during study abroad or internships, through virtual, online, or digital settings, or through electronic media, among other situations or settings. Conflict Education & Student Accountability (CESA) will make determinations about such student conduct action on a case-by-case basis.

No student conduct action shall be taken by the university against a student for engaging in activities such as political campaigning, picketing, or participating in public demonstrations, so long as the student's behavior during such events does not otherwise violate university policy.

VII. Interim and Emergency Powers, and Implementation

A. Amendment, Interim and Emergency Powers

Amendments to this Statement may be initiated by the Provost, the Dean of Students or their designees. Substantial amendments will be shared with the Faculty Senate and Student Association prior to implementation. All amendments must be approved by the Provost and University President.

Nothing in this statement can infringe or intends to infringe upon the authority of the Board of Trustees to amend the statement. Further, this statement shall not prevent administration of the university from taking such action as it deems necessary to the functioning or welfare of the university in any matter prior to the approval action of the University President.

B. Implementation

After approval by the President, the provisions of this statement shall be put into effect in a manner that provides for both speedy implementation and orderly transition.

Adopted by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, August 7, 1970.

Last modifications effective August 15, 2023