



UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Title: Institutional Statements Policy
Effective Date: November 1, 2024
Issuing Authority: Board of Trustees
Policy Contact: Vice Provost
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Purpose

This policy is intended to guide university leaders as they consider whether to issue a public statement on behalf of the university, a college, or an academic or administrative unit.

Scope

University leaders include the president, provost, members of the president's cabinet, vice presidents, vice provosts, deans, associate deans, chairs, directors, and others who, if communicating publicly in their official capacity, are likely to be perceived as speaking on behalf of the institution or one of its subunits or committees.

Exclusions

Board of Trustees

Policy Statement

Founded by Baptists in 1833, Mercer is an independent university that remains grounded in a tradition that embraces freedom of the mind and spirit, cherishes the equal worth of every individual, and commits to serving the needs of humankind. As a reflection of this heritage:

- We encourage our students to discover and develop fully their unique combination of gifts and talents to become leaders who make a positive difference in the world.
- We seek to inspire members of our community to live virtuous and meaningful lives by using their gifts and talents to serve the needs of humankind as an expression of their love for God and neighbor.
- We seek to enrich the mind and spirit by promoting and facilitating an open and rigorous search for truth and understanding, including an examination of the moral, religious and ethical questions of this and every age.
- We affirm and respect the dignity and sacred worth of every person and celebrate both our commonalities and our differences.

These core commitments from the University's Mission require that we cultivate an environment in which our members may engage in respectful debate, ask difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and express informed opinions. Diversity of thought, ideas, and culture are core strengths of a university. University leaders have the responsibility to fulfill the

commitment to these core strengths by protecting all modes of investigation that produce, expand, and refine knowledge. The University fulfills this commitment, in part, by providing the conditions within which strong disagreement, independent judgment, and the questioning of all assumptions can flourish. The role of the University and its leaders is to empower our community members to think, to speak, and to serve. Our role is not, with limited exception, to end debate with official declarations.

To ensure the full freedom of faculty, students, and community members to express their views, the University shall refrain from establishing partisan institutional positions that are not directly related to the core mission and functioning of the University. The University affirms its commitment to uphold institutional neutrality on political and social issues in a manner consistent with the 1967 “Kalven Committee Report on the University’s Role in Political and Social Action” which is summarized by the given relevant excerpt.

The instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic. It is, to go back once again to the classic phrase, a community of scholars. To perform its mission in the society, a university must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures. A university, if it is to be true to its faith in intellectual inquiry, must embrace, be hospitable to, and encourage the widest diversity of views within its own community. It is a community but only for the limited, albeit great, purposes of teaching and research. It is not a club, it is not a trade association, it is not a lobby.

Since the university is a community only for these limited and distinctive purposes, it is a community which cannot take collective action on the issues of the day without endangering the conditions for its existence and effectiveness. There is no mechanism by which it can reach a collective position without inhibiting that full freedom of dissent on which it thrives. It cannot insist that all of its members favor a given view of social policy; if it takes collective action, therefore, it does so at the price of censuring any minority who do not agree with the view adopted. In brief, it is a community which cannot resort to majority vote to reach positions on public issues.

The neutrality of the university as an institution arises then not from a lack of courage nor out of indifference and insensitivity. It arises out of respect for free inquiry and the obligation to cherish a diversity of viewpoints. And this neutrality as an institution has its complement in the fullest freedom for its faculty and students as individuals to participate in political action and social protest. It finds its complement, too, in the obligation of the university to provide a forum for the most searching and candid discussion of public issues.

Moreover, the sources of power of a great university should not be misconceived. Its prestige and influence are based on integrity and intellectual competence; they are not based on the circumstance that it may be wealthy, may have political contacts, and may have influential friends.

From time to time instances will arise in which the society, or segments of it, threaten the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry. In such a crisis, it becomes the obligation of the university as an institution to oppose such measures and actively to defend its interests and its values. There is another context in which questions as to the appropriate role of the university may possibly arise, situations involving university ownership of property, its receipt of funds, its awarding of honors, its membership in other organizations. Here, of necessity, the university, however it acts, must act as an institution in its corporate capacity. In the exceptional instance, these corporate activities of the university may appear so incompatible with paramount social values as to require careful assessment of the consequences.