

Wilfrid Laurier University Freedom of Expression Resolution

The opening line of Wilfrid Laurier University's official statement of Values, Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles states:

"Wilfrid Laurier University recognizes that intellectual inquiry, critical reflection and scholarly integrity, are the cornerstones of all universities, including our exceptional institution."

It is axiomatic that intellectual inquiry, critical reflection and scholarly integrity are NOT POSSIBLE in an institution that prevents *some* ideas from being articulated. Any censorship of ideas, no matter how repugnant some may deem them, prevents Wilfrid Laurier University from meeting the chief values, or "cornerstones", required to function as a university.

Recently, there have been instances where certain Laurier staff, students, and/or faculty have actively sought to censor the freedom of expression of others on campus. This resolution seeks to call an end to such practices and to endow the University and its members with an institutional commitment to the right of free expression.

Because Wilfrid Laurier University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the Laurier community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the institution, Wilfrid Laurier University fully respects and supports the freedom of all members of the Laurier community to discuss any issue that presents itself.

Of course, the ideas of different members of the Laurier community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of our university to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although our institution greatly values civility, and although all members of the Laurier community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. Wilfrid Laurier University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, or that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests. In addition, Wilfrid Laurier University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the Laurier community. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with, or contravenes, the institution's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In condensed terms, this policy clarifies that Wilfrid Laurier University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the Laurier community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the Laurier community, not for Wilfrid Laurier University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the Laurier community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of our institution's educational mission.

As a corollary to Wilfrid Laurier University's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the Laurier community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Although members of the Laurier community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, Wilfrid Laurier University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

This resolution is adapted and excerpted from the 2015 University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression.