

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

This document is the parent policy for any College procedures. Questions regarding this policy are to be directed to the identified Policy Owner.

Category:	D. Community & Corporate Relations
Policy Number:	D05
Approval Date:	February 15, 2024
Effective Date:	February 15, 2024
Policy Owner:	President

Objective:	<p>Everything we do at Olds College of Agriculture & Technology (the “College”) is centered around creating an exceptional learning environment for our students and working together to advance all aspects of the agriculture industry. As a post-secondary institution, we provide an environment where our faculty, staff, students, industry partners and Alberta’s producers can explore the challenges facing our world and together investigate solutions.</p> <p>The College is proud of its long-standing and continuing commitment to protecting freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, and the related freedoms of conscience, religion, association and peaceful assembly, as enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This includes protection for the most vulnerable members of our community.</p> <p>The College is committed to creating an environment that encourages open discourse, celebrates diversity and respects the independent viewpoints of its community. As such, the College acknowledges the importance of impartiality and will not, as an institution, take political or social stances other than those consistent with its academic mandate, policies and values.</p>
Policy:	<p>The College is a place of free and open inquiry in all matters. All members of the College community are guaranteed the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn. The College is a community of diverse viewpoints, encompassing the Board, administrators, students, faculty, staff, alumni, college guests and volunteers.</p> <p>It is essential to maintain a neutral institutional position on politics or social issues in order to honour this diversity and preserve an environment where the free exchange of ideas can thrive. It is not the role of the College to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable or even deeply offensive. Mutual respect and civility are valued and expected, but do not constitute sufficient justification to limit free expression.</p>

The College greatly values safety, inclusion and civility, and all members of the College community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect. Concerns about civility and mutual respect will be carefully balanced against providing an environment where ideas are discussed, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

To support an environment where the free exchange of ideas can thrive, the College will uphold the following principles:

1. **Respect for Thoughtful Discourse** – The College values the diverse range of beliefs and opinions within its community. It is a place that encourages respectful discourse. It will not forestall such discourse by speaking with an institutional voice on matters outside its purview.
2. **Impartiality** – The College will remain impartial on matters of a political, social or ideological nature, other than those consistent with the College’s academic mandate or policies.
3. **Freedom from Bias** – The College will maintain its neutrality and will not be influenced by the personal beliefs and opinions of its leadership, donors or other stakeholders. The College stands as a collective entity that transcends the diverse perspectives of its individual members.

Members of the College community have the right to criticize and question other views expressed on campus, but must not obstruct or otherwise interfere with others’ freedom of expression. Instead of the institution, individuals should make their own judgements and challenge ideas they oppose, rather than acting to suppress free expression.

The College may restrict freedom of expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that promotes hate speech, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that otherwise limits the effective functioning of the College. In addition, the College may reasonably regulate the time, place and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the College.

The College shall apply the principles of freedom of expression and adhere to a position of neutrality consistently and without discriminatory or preferential treatment toward any individual or group. The fact that an individual or group is permitted or invited to carry on an expressive activity on campus does not mean that the views of that individual or group are representative of the College’s views as an institution, or the views of its leadership. By adhering to the principles of institutional neutrality, the College seeks to maintain a welcoming atmosphere that supports intellectual exploration, diversity and open discourse.

Definitions:

Freedom of Expression: the right to speak, to be heard and to participate in political, artistic and social life.

Neutrality: tolerance attributable to a lack of involvement.

Related Information:

C07 Space Utilization & Allocation Policy
[Statement on Institutional Neutrality](#)
[The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
[Chicago Principles - Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression](#)

Related Procedures:

D05 Freedom of Expression Procedure

Review Period:

3 years

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New: February 2024