

Additional University Policies Related to Expressive Activity Prepared by the Office of the Provost, October 2023

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(Note: the current Academic Freedom policy is available here – [BOT policy 4.2.2](#))

Teaching FAQs on the Office of the Provost includes this section:

Q. Free Speech in the Classroom: What does GVSU say about this topic?

A. There are several places to look.

- GVSU has [an extensive \(password-protected\) site “Expressive Activities & Grounds and Facility Use”](#) where several detailed questions on free speech in the classroom are addressed. That website begins with this statement: “GVSU is a community of scholars. Like most universities, our basic purposes are to advance, to disseminate, and to apply knowledge. An essential condition for achieving these purposes is freedom of expression and communication. Without this freedom, effective sifting and testing of ideas ceases, and teaching and learning are diminished.”
 - GVSU’s [Political Activity Policy](#) includes excerpts from the [Academic Freedom policy](#), as well as the following: “Classroom discussions of candidates and ballot questions must be related to course content as described in the catalog and course syllabus. A reminder to students to register to vote and to vote is permissible.”
 - The Dean of Students has published [a website on the topic of “expressive activity” on campus](#). It includes tips for engagement with “expressive activity you find offensive”.
 - Also published are [guidelines for expressive activities in specific public gathering spaces at GVSU](#).
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Grounds and Facilities Usage Policy – [SLT policy 10.4](#)

Introductory part of the policy:

Pursuant to Article VIII of the Michigan Constitution of 1963, Grand Valley State University (“the University”) has the responsibility to serve as a public institution of higher education. To carry out this Constitutional mandate, the University owns and/or controls property and facilities. The University has established the following grounds and facility use policy to ensure the University’s educational mission is actualized, while allowing for the exchange of ideas.

This policy applies to all buildings, grounds, and other spaces owned or controlled by the University.

For purposes of this policy, the term "Expressive Activity" includes:

1. Meetings and other group activities of students and student organizations;
2. Speeches, performances, demonstrations, rallies, vigils, and other events by students, student organizations, and outside groups invited by student organizations;
3. Distributions of literature, such as leafleting and pamphleting; and
4. Any other expression protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

University property is primarily dedicated to academic, student life and administrative functions. But it also represents the "marketplace of ideas," and especially for students, many areas of campus represent a public forum for speech and other Expressive Activities. For students and registered student organizations, certain areas of campus are venues for free expression, including speeches, demonstrations, and the distribution of literature, as provided by this policy.

The University shall not consider the content or viewpoint of the Expressive Activity or the possible reaction to that Expressive Activity in applying this policy. The University shall not impose restrictions on students, student organizations, or university employees due to the content or viewpoint of their Expressive Activity or the possible reaction to that Expressive Activity. In the event that other persons react negatively to a student's, registered student organization's, or university employee's Expressive Activity, the University (including representatives from the Department of Public Safety) shall take all necessary steps to ensure public safety while allowing the Expressive Activity to continue, unless the University’s operations are materially and substantially disrupted.

No Expressive Activity shall be permitted to violate or hinder the rights of others within the campus community.

The University does not assume any obligation or responsibility for the content of the materials distributed.

POLICY STATEMENT

Political activity of faculty and staff members at Grand Valley State University as addressed in the Grand Valley State University Board of Trustees' Policies [BOT 4.1.6.3](#), in pertinent part, states: “The University affirms the rights of its faculty and staff members as citizens to be active in political affairs which do not conflict with the professional standards and ethics in employment.”

Further, the Board of Trustees address the subject of Academic Freedom of faculty in the Grand Valley State University Board of Trustees' Policies [BOT 4.2.2](#) specifically sections 2 & 3:

2. Faculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter, which has no relation to their subject. (The words faculty member as used in this document are understood to include the investigator who is attached to an academic institution without teaching duties.)

3. University or university faculty members are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As persons of learning and as educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times act in a professional and responsible manner, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not institutional spokespersons.

In addition to University policy, state law, specifically the Michigan Campaign Finance Act, regulates political activities of public bodies, such as state universities, and its employees.

PROCEDURES

In light of University Board of Trustees' policies and state law, the following guidelines are intended to help faculty and staff with compliance:

1. Faculty and staff members may engage themselves, as private citizens, in political activities including support or opposition to candidates for office or ballot questions on their own time. If you are working for the University and charging your time to a federal grant, any activity to support a political candidate or ballot question must be conducted on personal time. For questions about federal grants, contact the [Office of Sponsored Programs](#) for more information.
2. University departments or programs may sponsor presentations and discussion groups about an upcoming election provided that the purpose is to provide factual information on a political subject or issue if the communication does not support or oppose a ballot question or candidate by name or clear inference.
3. Classroom discussions of candidates and ballot questions must be related to course content as described in the catalog and course syllabus. A reminder to students to register to vote and to vote is permissible.

4. Faculty and staff members may express their support or opposition to candidates or ballot questions by wearing buttons.
 5. Faculty and staff members, as private citizens, may elect to lend their names to support one or more candidates for office or in support of or opposition to a ballot question. However, care must be exercised to assure that the faculty or staff member does not use their University title in relation to such advocacy.
 6. Faculty and staff members shall not use University resources for political activity to support or oppose candidates for office or ballot questions. "University resources" includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. University funds or money administered through a University budget;
 - b. University facilities including office space or meeting rooms (except speech in open forum areas) or use of University office address;
 - c. University equipment including office or cellular telephones, computer hardware or software, printers, copiers and facsimile machines;
 - d. University-provided email addresses or use of the University email system;
 - e. University supplies including stationary, paper, postage, pens, pencils, and other office supplies;
 - f. University identifying marks including trademarks, logos, University letterhead, and University titles; and
 - g. University time including when the faculty or staff member is working or the use of clerical or student worker time.
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Conflict of Interest Policy – [BOT policy 4.1.6.3](#)

4.1.6.3 Political Candidates or Office Holder. The University affirms the rights of its faculty and staff members as citizens to be active in political affairs which do not conflict with the professional standards and ethics of their employment. It shall be the responsibility of the President (or designee) to ensure that conflicts involving professional standards and ethics do not occur with University faculty and staff members who are political candidates or office holders, and to take such steps to protect the University as may be required.

Policy Prohibiting Title IX Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Discriminatory Harassment – [SLT policy 9.1](#)

Section III on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom

Because freedom of expression and academic freedom are fundamental to GVSU's academic mission and must be protected even when the views expressed are unpopular or controversial, GVSU will take both into account when determining whether Harassment has occurred and what type of remedy, if any, is appropriate. This Policy is not intended to proscribe or inhibit any form of speech that is protected by federal or state law, including the First Amendment, or any conduct which arises for legitimate academic and pedagogical purposes, including intellectual inquiry, debate, and dialogue.

Collegiality Policy – [SLT policy 3.3](#)

Excerpt:

A range of thoughtful perspectives is necessary for open inquiry, liberal education, and a healthy community. Recognizing this, we seek and welcome a diverse group of students, faculty and staff. We value a multiplicity of opinions and backgrounds and seek ways to incorporate the voices and experiences of all into our University. We value our local community and embrace the participation of individuals and groups from Michigan, the nation and the world. We also encourage participation in educational opportunities abroad.

In order to foster a healthy and diverse environment, we will act with integrity, communicate respectfully, and accept responsibility for our words and actions. This University is a community whose varied functions, responsibilities, and contributions are supportive of the instructional, research, and service mission of the institution. Collegial interactions as referenced throughout this policy are those interactions that occur among and between colleagues, subordinates, supervisors, administrators and students. Collegial interactions are essential to support that mission in an effective, efficient, and ethical manner.

Faculty Responsibilities – [SG policy 3.01](#)

First paragraph of the policy:

The role of a faculty member involves an interlocking set of responsibilities to students, to colleagues in both the institution and the wider profession, to the institution itself and its surrounding community, to the advancement of knowledge and understanding in the faculty member's field, and to the ideals of free inquiry and expression. Normally, these are articulated as the areas of teaching (Regular Faculty) or professional effectiveness (Library Regular Faculty), scholarship and creative activity, and service, as outlined in the Board of Trustees' Policies [BOT 4.2.9](#).

Professional Ethics – [SG policy 3.05](#)

First paragraph of the policy:

The University recognizes that membership in the academic profession carries with it special responsibilities and that the University bears a responsibility for articulating and maintaining ethical standards. The University normally handles questions concerning propriety of conduct internally by reference to either faculty committees convened to review particular infractions or to standing committees such as college personnel committees.

Obligation of Employees (Oath of Teachers) – [BOT policy 4.1.10.3](#)

4.1.10.3 Oath of Teachers. Before serving in a teaching position, an appointee will have taken and subscribed the following oath or affirmation as required by Act 23 of the Public Acts of 1935: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States of America and the Constitution of the State of Michigan, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of my position according to the best of my ability."

Conflict of Interest (SLT) – [SLT policy 10.1](#)

Introductory paragraph:

In the pursuit of its mission, Grand Valley State University through its Board of Trustees, Senior Leadership Team, faculty, staff and other representatives operates with the highest level of ethical behavior including, but not limited to, acting with integrity, reasonableness and fairness in our dealings, and avoiding bias or undue influence. Consistent with these values, the Board of Trustees has adopted institutional policies for identifying and managing potential, actual and perceived conflict of interest situations, including Grand Valley State University Board of Trustees' Policy BOT 4.1.6: Conflict of Interest and Grand Valley State University Board of Trustees' Policy BOT 7.9: Economic Development.

Links to Relevant GVSU Websites:

Division of Student Affairs

Dean of Students Office – Expressive Activity at GVSU

<https://www.gvsu.edu/dso/expressive-activity-at-gvsu-32.htm>

Event Services – Public Gathering Space/Expressive Activity

<https://www.gvsu.edu/eventservices/public-gathering-spaceexpressive-activity-42.htm>

Division of Inclusion & Equity

Expressive Activities & Grounds and Facility Use – includes FAQs (some content is dated)

<https://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/expressive-activities-grounds-and-facility-use-143.htm>

Resources webpage

<https://www.gvsu.edu/inclusion/catalog-index.htm#/>

Campus Climate Concerns – Our commitment to addressing campus climate concerns

<https://www.gvsu.edu/cc/>