

Institutional Neutrality Policy

The mission of the University of Kentucky is to improve people's lives and advance Kentucky through excellence in education, research and creative work, service and health care. As a learning institution, the dissemination of ideas, debate and open inquiry are essential to this mission.

For these reasons, and as a public institution of higher education and state agency, the university applies a policy of viewpoint neutrality to all practices and procedures. This policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of an individual's political or social viewpoint and promotes intellectual diversity within the institution. As such, the university does not take official positions on or issue public statements about societal issues and events that do not directly impact the mission or function of the university. The university may issue public statements about internal issues or events at the institution as well external issues and events that directly impact the university's operations or ability to pursue its mission.

Additionally, the university does not require any individual to endorse or condemn a specific ideology, political viewpoint or social viewpoint to be eligible for hiring, contract renewal, tenure, promotion, admission or graduation.

This policy seeks to create space for the many voices on our campus and ensure that we are fostering conversations between varied perspectives, rather than issuing statements of a particular view on matters external to UK. With or without a public statement regarding a specific event, the university is always committed to bringing together many people in one community, putting students first and taking care of our students, faculty and staff.

For the purposes of this policy, public statements include:

- Campus-, unit-, college- or department-wide emails
- Messages published on websites
- Messages published on printed materials
- Social media posts on UK accounts
- Statements made to news media

This policy in no way impacts an individual's First Amendment rights to voice their views, on behalf of themselves and not the institution, nor does it impact a faculty member's academic freedom or ability to speak as a subject matter expert within their domain of expertise.

I. External Issues and Events

Tragedies, newsworthy events and political issues affect our nation and world every day. UK recognizes the impact these events can have on our community and provides support to constituencies through a variety of ways.

At the same time, the university does not take official positions on or make public statements about societal issues and events external to the university unless the external issue or event impacts the university's operations or ability to fulfill/pursue its mission. Some examples of external issues and events include acts of violence, political issues, international affairs, natural disasters or public policy.

The university may, however — through its Office for Student Success, Human Resources and other units — provide more personalized outreach to students, faculty or staff impacted by a particular distressing event by offering resources, gatherings and other forms of support.

The dissemination of ideas, free debate and open inquiry are essential to the university's mission of education, research and creative work, service and health care. When it comes to societal issues or external events, rather than issue a blanket statement, our institutional priorities are to create space for the nearly 60,000 diverse voices on our campus, foster conversations and offer support to community members.

Furthermore, broad institutional statements — communicated via emails, social media posts and news media — are often inadequate for processing traumatic societal events that impact people in different ways.

II. Administrative and Academic Units

- I. The university's policy on viewpoint neutrality applies to administrative and academic units across the institution. Additionally, the president and the president's designated spokesperson are the only people who speak on behalf of the institution.

II. Therefore, university leaders, colleges, departments and units should not issue any institutional statements. This includes statements about external issues/events and campus issues/events and applies to messages communicated via:

- Campus-, unit-, college- or department-wide emails
- UK websites
- Printed materials
- UK-affiliated social media
- Media statements

III. For issues or events specific to the college, department or unit, academic and administrative units must work with UKPR&SC prior to issuing public statements.

III. Faculty and Academic Freedom

This policy respects and upholds principles of academic freedom. A faculty member has the right to make statements as an individual, scholar or subject matter expert, provide perspective and speak to the media, but they should always take care to reinforce that they are speaking as an individual or in their capacity as a subject matter expert, not as a representative of the institution unless so designated by the president.

IV. Advisory Bodies

- I. The university's official advisory bodies – part of the institution's shared governance structure – include the Staff Senate, Student Government Association and Faculty Senate. These bodies represent their respective constituencies in working on issues at the university, including advising the president and executive leadership. As such, these bodies may issue public statements or pass resolutions on university issues impacting their respective constituencies without institutional coordination or approval. These bodies should communicate that they are speaking for the advisory body, not the institution. Additionally, these public statements about UK issues or events should still adhere to Section VI.III of this policy.
- II. The university's official advisory bodies should not issue public statements about external issues and events, which may include acts of violence, political issues,

international affairs, natural disasters or public policy. Read Section I for more information.

V. Statements Made in Private Capacity

- I. All community members have free speech rights as enumerated in the U.S. Constitution. Those rights are sacred to who we are as an institution of learning and inquiry. At the same time, though, there is a difference between individual speech rights and perspectives and offering statements on behalf of the institution through a person's administrative role, including the use of institutional platforms such as websites or social media accounts.
- II. To be sure, any community member may express their views as a private individual. Those statements must not include any content that suggests the message or communication represents any academic or administrative unit, activity or initiative of the university.
 - a. University email, social accounts or web addresses should not be used when issuing statements in a private capacity.
 - b. Elements of the University of Kentucky Visual Identity should not accompany such messages, including the university name, logo or associated images, unless used as part of a position title by a faculty member to demonstrate a field of study or subject matter expertise.
 - c. University stationery, backdrops or signature lines, either in print or electronically, should not be used for statements made in private capacity.
 - d. When speaking at professional or academic conferences or engaging in activities related to professional associations, community members should make it clear that they are speaking for themselves and not for the institution.

VI. Public Statements on UK Issues

- I. If a decision is made to issue an institutional statement or message about an internal issue or event at the institution, or an external issue or event directly impacting the university's mission or operations, UKPR&SC will coordinate.
- II. Only the president or his designee speaks on behalf of the university. As previously stated, administrative and academic units do not issue their own institutional statements and must work with UKPR&SC to issue unit-specific public statements.

- III. In accordance with university Administrative Regulations and other policies, including [HR Policy and Procedure #76 Political Activities and Public Office](#), [Administrative Regulation — Ethical Principles and Employee Code of Conduct](#), [Administrative Regulation 10:4 — Social Media Policies and Guidelines](#), [The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) and [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#), among other policies, public statements must not do any of the following:
- a. Include any messages that promote, endorse or oppose political campaigns or candidates for elected or appointed government office, or comment in support or opposition to specific legislation in ways that would be subject to lobbying rules or IRS restrictions for non-profit organizations.
 - b. Threaten, harass or discriminate.
 - c. Release private or confidential information, including, but not limited to, information related to the academic records, health status or personnel records of individuals at the institution.
 - d. Violate the rights of an individual or an organization to its intellectual property.
 - e. Violate the Employee Code of Conduct.

VII. Supporting Our Community

- I. University leaders and all members of the campus community can help address concerns and pain following issues, tragedies and unsettling events in more personal and productive ways. This support should be coordinated with UKPR&SC and appropriate university departments such as the Office for Student Success and Office of the Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration.
- II. Support could include:
 - a. Sharing well-being resources with [students](#) and [employees](#) in need of support.
 - b. Hosting or attending listening sessions with appropriate support for those struggling with grief or stress.
 - c. Joining or supporting panel discussions, information sessions or other opportunities that share perspectives and historical context.
 - d. Coordinating events or projects that offer support to those directly impacted, such as a supply donation drive.

- e. Supporting vigils or events that allow individuals and groups to grieve and share resources.
- f. Participating in UK information sessions or trainings that prepare for crisis situations, such as an [active aggressor training](#).
- g. Sharing ways to [report](#) incidents of discrimination, harassment or sexual misconduct, or violations of our values, codes of conduct or the law.
- h. Reaching out personally to those affected by a tragedy or event to check on their well-being. If you are concerned about a student's well-being, submit the [Get Help Form](#).

VIII. Additional Resources

- [HR Policy and Procedure #76 Political Activities and Public Office](#)
- [Administrative Regulation — Ethical Principles and Employee Code of Conduct](#)
- [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#)
- [The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)
- [Administrative Regulation 10:4: Social Media Policies and Guidelines](#)
- [Brand Guidelines](#)