

## **AURORA UNIVERSITY**

### **Statement on Free Expression and Civil Discourse**

Aurora University is defined in its mission statement as “an inclusive community dedicated to the transformative power of learning.” The University therefore embraces principles of free expression and civil discourse, which it views as central to its ability to fulfill its transformative mission.

Aurora University affirms that its campus community has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference, to engage in civil discourse and respectful disagreement, and to seek, receive, and impart diverse ideas in University venues.

Aurora University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, ensuring that all members of the University community have the broadest possible latitude to listen, speak, write, think, and learn. The University will seek to cultivate and maintain a culture of curiosity and academic rigor that inspires the pursuit of cumulative knowledge as understood within and across disciplines. Amidst the pursuit of knowledge, all members of the University community have the freedom to discuss any problem or topic, in alignment with University policies and mission and in a manner that does not inhibit the functioning of the University.

As part of its commitment to freedom of expression, Aurora University recognizes a special obligation to encourage and ensure inclusion of members of historically marginalized groups who often have been excluded or discouraged from participating in discourse. As an inclusive community, Aurora University endeavors to make all members of our community feel welcomed, affirmed, included, and respected. As such, Aurora University does not tolerate speech that violates anti-discrimination, harassment, and retaliation policies or laws or the legally-protected privacy rights of community members.

Aurora University encourages the diversity of ideas and welcomes productive debate as a characteristic of an academic community because difference is essential to a transformative learning environment and to the cultivation of critical thinking. The University’s role is not “to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive”; rather, the University seeks to cultivate and model responsible civil discourse around diverse perspectives that is founded on mutual respect, which includes a focus on substantive topics rather than personal attacks. Individual members of the University community are responsible for discerning the validity of arguments for themselves and then acting on their own judgments, not by seeking to suppress speech, but by respectfully contesting the ideas they oppose. The University encourages all community members to contest ideas responsibly and to participate in spirited debate as part of its educational mission to engage in critical thinking and lifelong learning.

Moreover, the University’s commitment to free expression and civil discourse does not mean the University must itself remain neutral to ideas or beliefs expressed within or about its campus community. As an institution, the University has the responsibility and the autonomy to communicate its values and principles, consistent with its institutional mission.

*Affirmed by the Faculty Senate and approved by the Board of Trustees, October 2023. This statement is modeled on the University of Chicago Report from the Committee on Freedom of Expression 2014, which has been adopted by more than 100 colleges and universities nationwide.*