

Student Policy Regarding Expression, Demonstrations, and Sponsorship of Speakers and Organizations

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SECTION I. PURPOSE

This student policy is intended to establish expectations regarding St. Thomas student expression, participation in demonstrations at St. Thomas, and St. Thomas sponsorship of student organizations and speakers selected or invited by students or student organizations.

SECTION II. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all St. Thomas students, both undergraduate and graduate, regardless of whether the student is a degree-seeking student. This policy does not afford a venue for demonstrations by individuals who are not St. Thomas students.

SECTION III. STUDENT EXPRESSION

The University of St. Thomas mission, convictions, policies and applicable law together comprise our community standards. These community standards establish the expectations that apply to every person who is invited and chooses to join the St. Thomas community. The St. Thomas mission, convictions and policies have been developed collaboratively by our university community. They distinguish our community from other academic communities and reflect our community's unique identity and mission as a Catholic university.

- As an academic community, St. Thomas is committed to fostering an educational environment that promotes open dialogue and discussion; promotes the development, expression, exploration and evaluation of ideas; subjects ideas to critical thinking and rigorous analysis reflecting a diversity of perspectives; values expertise and originality; and promotes continuous reflection and awareness of self and others. Free inquiry and free expression are indispensable elements of an academic community.
- As a Catholic university, we recognize the additional responsibility of each member of our community to respect the inherent dignity of each person; to foster an environment that promotes the exploration and thoughtful evaluation of personal beliefs and values; and to consider the moral implications of our beliefs, values and ideas, including their effects on others.

Subject always to these considerations, St. Thomas both allows and encourages students to openly discuss, ask questions about and explore challenging and controversial ideas in their personal search for truth at St. Thomas. Students may engage in expressive activities, including dissent, protest, and taking reasoned exception to the information and views offered in any course or university-sanctioned activity. In doing so, they have a responsibility to express views in a reasonable and orderly fashion consistent with this and other student policies. Student expression cannot interfere with the rights of others, impede the progress of instruction, or disrupt the processes of the university.

It is also the university's view that educational objectives can best be accomplished through intentional planning, listening, reflecting and interacting. Accordingly, when challenging or controversial issues arise that affect large segments of our community, St. Thomas will offer forums through which these issues may be considered in an educative manner consistent with our community standards, without reproach or reprisal for participation in good faith.

SECTION IV. DEMONSTRATIONS

St. Thomas recognizes that participation in an organized demonstration can be a meaningful and powerful way to express beliefs, values and ideas. St. Thomas students are free to organize and participate in campus demonstrations that employ nonviolent methods such as marches, rallies and protests that reflect the principles of Catholic social teaching¹ and the best practices of nonviolent movements.² Demonstrations violate this policy if they do one or more of the following:

- a. Deny or infringe upon the rights of St. Thomas community members or visitors
- b. Obstruct or restrict the free movement of persons
- c. React to the peaceful dissent of others by attempting to deny their rights
- d. Deny access to offices or other facilities to St. Thomas community members or guests
- e. Endanger the safety of any person on campus
- f. Result in the violation of laws or the destruction of property
- g. Have a commercial or business purpose

Students, including student groups and organizations, planning to hold a demonstration must complete and submit a "[Notice of Intent to Demonstrate](#)" form, available in the Dean of Students Office, at least 48 hours in advance of the planned demonstration. These forms require students to identify such matters as the proposed time, place and manner of the demonstration along with a general plan for the event. The Notice is consistent with best practices of nonviolence that promote transparency and open communication, and it allows St. Thomas to make appropriate logistical arrangements. Upon receipt of the completed Notice, the Dean of Students Office will consult with organizers of the demonstration and with the appropriate school or college dean, if applicable, to establish the plan for the event, including reasonable parameters of time, place and manner, and will work with Campus Scheduling Services to reserve space and make other logistical arrangements. The dean may consult with appropriate St. Thomas personnel to ensure there is appropriate campus communication about the event.

The planning process is intended to be a consultative and collaborative process that facilitates students' opportunity to express their views while assuring that students and St. Thomas fulfill their responsibilities related to the event. St. Thomas may require the demonstration to be rescheduled or may prohibit the demonstration if it determines that the demonstration poses a substantial risk to the community or St. Thomas property.

The allowance of student demonstrations does not imply sponsorship of the demonstration by St. Thomas or that the views of the demonstrators are supported or endorsed by St. Thomas.

¹ See "[Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#)".

² See [Justice and Peace Studies](#) course content on active nonviolence.

SECTION V. SPEAKERS AND PERFORMERS SELECTED BY STUDENTS OR STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

External speakers and performers who are sponsored or invited to campus by St. Thomas students or student organizations must agree to refrain from presenting and performing material that is defamatory, obscene, or contravenes the St. Thomas Convictions Statement (available at <https://www.stthomas.edu/mission/>).

SECTION VI. SPONSORSHIP OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Consistent with our identity as a Catholic university, St. Thomas will not sponsor student groups, organizations or activities that promote beliefs that are contrary to Catholic teaching.