



University of Toronto – 2022 Annual Freedom of Speech Report
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Preamble

The commitment to free expression is one of the hallmarks of excellence at the University of Toronto. For over 25 years, the University of Toronto has had a [formal policy framework](#) that sets out its commitment to free expression. This framework has helped the University promote and protect free expression while reaffirming the importance of free expression to the core research and teaching missions of the University. This framework also allows the institution to deal effectively and in a principled fashion with issues and disagreements that naturally arise in the pursuit of truth and the advancement of knowledge, especially at an institution of U of T's size and scope. We anticipate that this policy framework will continue to serve the University well for years to come.

Institutional culture & policy framework

In 1992, the Governing Council of the University of Toronto approved the University's [Statement on Freedom of Speech](#) and [Statement of Institutional Purpose](#).¹ These Statements have served as the cornerstones upon which the University of Toronto has built its commitment to free expression. In particular, the Statement on Freedom of Speech explicitly confirms that free expression is a core value of the University:

[T]he essential purpose of the University is to engage in the pursuit of truth, the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. To achieve this purpose, all members of the University must have as a prerequisite freedom of speech and expression, which means the right to examine, question, investigate, speculate, and comment on any issue without reference to prescribed doctrine, as well as the right to criticize the University and society at large.

The policies also highlight two features of free expression that are critically important in the University context. First, the Statement of Institutional Purpose makes clear that free speech can be uncomfortable. The right to free speech, it stipulates, is “meaningless unless it entails the right to raise deeply disturbing questions and provocative challenges to the cherished beliefs of society at large and of the university itself.” Every member of the University community should be prepared to confront opinions they find erroneous, unreasonable, or even deeply offensive. Such confrontations are part of the contest of ideas that drives discovery, understanding, and knowledge.

¹ It is worth noting that the University of Toronto's *Statement on Freedom of Speech* and *Statement of Institutional Purpose* predate the University of Chicago's “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression” – singled out by the Province as an example Ontario's universities should follow – by more than two decades.

Second, the Statement on Freedom of Speech recognizes that the right to free expression imposes an accompanying responsibility upon its adherents. All those exercising their freedom of expression must comply with the applicable laws of Canada and Ontario. But more than that, the exercise of free expression “depends upon an environment of tolerance and mutual respect. Every member of the University community should be able to work, live, teach and learn in a University free from discrimination and harassment.” Threats or acts of violence are intolerable – the University will act swiftly and resolutely to protect and support its community. Indeed, such behaviour stands in direct opposition to free speech and subverts the contest of ideas at the heart of the University’s mission. Over the years, the University’s commitment to free expression has been affirmed and enhanced, resulting in a policy framework that includes the [Policy on the Disruption of Meetings](#) (1992), the [Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence](#) (2006), the [Policy on the Temporary Use of Space](#) (2010), and the [Policy on Open, Accessible and Democratic Autonomous Student Organizations](#) (2016).

The University has also been working to help educate members of its community and the general public about the importance of free expression to the objectives of post-secondary institutions. This has included the launch and broad promotion of an [institutional website in 2017](#), as well as discussions with internal academic administrator groups of Principals and Deans, department Chairs and Directors, student services staff, University and College governing bodies, and groups of students and student leaders. This year, senior administrators participated in free speech professional development opportunities, including webinars held by the [Academic Freedom Alliance](#) and the [National Centre for Free Speech and Civic Engagement](#). Senior administrators have also been invited to give presentations to professional organizations such as the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), highlighting the University of Toronto’s longstanding and widely recognized approach to these issues.

Section A: Institutional Policy

Has your institution amended its free speech policy (or policy framework) since the time of your 2021 report? If so, please explain the reason for the change and provide the link to its location on your institutional website.

No.

Where are members of the institutional community (or guests) directed when there is a free speech related question or complaint about an institutional event? Please provide contact information.

A number of administrative offices at the University of Toronto support the various policies and statements that make up the University’s policy framework pertaining to free speech. Those offices respond to any concerns brought to their attention that might result from events or incidents, or from individuals who feel their right to freedom of expression has been infringed, curtailed, or suppressed. Depending on the nature of the concerns raised, different offices may be involved.

Expressions of concern regarding external booking requests are considered by the campus where the booking is sought:

- Conference and Events Services at the University of Toronto Mississauga;
 - confserv.utm@utoronto.ca
- Conference Services at the University of Toronto Scarborough;
 - conferences@utsc.utoronto.ca
- Academic + Campus Events at the St. George Campus;
 - ace.team@utoronto.ca

More generally, expressions of concern at the institutional level are considered as follows:

- the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students for concerns raised about events hosted by autonomous student groups;
 - vp.students@utoronto.ca
- the Division of the Vice-President & Provost for concerns raised about academic speech or public statements of a faculty member;
 - provost@utoronto.ca
- the Division of University Advancement for concerns from alumni and benefactors;
 - dua.events@utoronto.ca
- the equity offices on campus for incidents involving alleged discrimination and harassment;
 - <https://hrandequity.utoronto.ca/inclusion/equity-offices/>
- the Office of the Governing Council for concerns involving the University's governance bodies or processes;
 - governing.council@utoronto.ca
- the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Office for concerns involving access to information or privacy;
 - <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/fipp>.

In addition, the Office of the President and all other senior executive offices receive expressions of concern relating to their areas of responsibility.

This multi-pronged approach allows students, staff, faculty members, and members of the community at large to direct their concerns to the office that holds accountability for their stakeholder group or the particular policy at issue. It also provides the community with multiple channels through which members can engage with the University.

What is your institution's policy on holding events where there are security concerns? To your knowledge, were there any instances where a non-curricular event did not proceed due to security concerns or their related costs?

The Policy on the [Temporary Use of Space at The University of Toronto](#) (2010) articulates the principles governing the temporary use of University space by internal and external groups. Among those principles, the Policy sets out the following standard regarding the fairness of costs:

External groups must at least cover the full costs associated with room bookings. Our students, through their fees, should not be subsidizing external bodies. Internal groups, on the other hand, pay only minimal fees – nothing near full costs. We normally do not charge recognized campus groups and student societies at all, except for reasonable cost recovery for additional services beyond making the space available (such as post-event cleaning).

Between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022, non-curricular event space on our campuses was considerably restricted as institutional, provincial, and other measures responding to the COVID 19 pandemic were implemented. These measures included closures, limitations, and strict safety protocols. During this time period, no events at the University of Toronto were cancelled due to security concerns or their related costs.

Section B: Complaints

Between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022, did any member of the institutional community (or guests) make an official complaint about free speech? If yes, please provide a general description that protects the privacy of complainants.

If there has been an official complaint (or more than one):

What were the issues under consideration? Please identify any points of contention (e.g., security costs, safety, student unions and/or groups, operational requirements, etc.).

and

How did the institution manage the free speech complaint(s)? Was the complaint addressed using the procedures set out in the policy? How were issues resolved?

The University received one official free speech complaint between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022.

In January 2022, the University's Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office received an official complaint expressly invoking the Office's "mission statement". The complaint was brought by the University's Association of Palestinian Students and called on the University to postpone a non-curricular lecture on Antisemitism to be delivered by a guest speaker. The complaint alleged that the guest speaker had given lectures in the past that the complainants found offensive. They asked that the University postpone the scheduled event and find a new speaker. The complainants were invited to meet with the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office and discuss the complaint and the University's commitment to free speech. The event proceeded as planned.

In addition, in September 2021, the University received a letter and petition from a number of individuals concerning a global, virtual academic conference titled 'Dismantling Global Hindutva' (DHG). The letter and the petition were part of an international effort directed at the institutions and individuals named in conference materials. The petitioners alleged that the University was among approximately 45 co-sponsoring institutions and claimed that the conference was promoting offensive,

'Anti-Hindu' ideas. The petitioners requested "the removal of [the University's] name and logo from the DGH website, promotional materials, and social media posts." In response, the petitioners received a letter from the University noting that several University of Toronto faculty members would be engaged in the conference in their academic capacity. The letter went on to reaffirm the University's commitment to the "principles of human rights, equity and inclusion particularly as they underpin the promotion of free flow of debate involving a range of diverse ideas and beliefs." It also noted that "Freedom of speech, academic freedom and the value of human rights are at the heart of the university's mission." The letter concluded: "U of T remains committed to the lawful freedom of speech in order to pursue truth, advance learning and disseminate knowledge." The University does not consider this episode to be an official free speech complaint.

Section C: Summary Data

Please provide the following summary data for free-speech-related official complaints received by the institution:

Number of official complaints received under the free speech policy relating to curricular and non-curricular events.	1
Number of official complaints reviewed that did not proceed.	1
Number of official complaints where the institution determined that the free speech policy was not followed appropriately.	0
Number of official complaints under the free speech policy that resulted in the institution applying disciplinary or other institutional measures.	0
To your knowledge, were any free speech complaints forwarded to the Ontario Ombudsman?	0

To the best of your ability, please provide an estimate of the number of non-curricular events held at the institution between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022. Non-curricular events include, for example, invited speakers, sporting events, rallies, student life/student affairs events, conferences, etc., as opposed to regular events held as part of an academic program or course.

***We acknowledge the difficulty of tracking events held remotely due to campus closures caused by the pandemic and recognize that institutions may be unable to provide a complete response to this question for 2021-22.**

The University does not track non-curricular online events. Given that many non-curricular activities were conducted in an online format due to measures implemented in response to the pandemic, we are unable to provide a complete estimate for 2021-22. Nevertheless, and recognizing that some of

these events may have moved online, we estimate that 2,500 non-curricular events were held at the University of Toronto (including all three campuses) between August 1, 2021 and July 31, 2022.

Institutional Comments

The University of Toronto's policy framework on freedom of expression, with the University's [Statement on Freedom of Speech](#) and [Statement of Institutional Purpose](#) at its core, has been in place for over 25 years.

This framework is at the heart of the University of Toronto's commitment to excellence in higher education and advanced research. Debates, unconstrained by preordained conclusions or fear of exclusion, are fundamental to the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and understanding. The interaction and competition among new, unfamiliar, and sometimes uncomfortable ideas, perspectives, and beliefs stretch our understanding and knowledge, sparking breakthroughs in fields from art and architecture to physics and philosophy. As our [Statement on Freedom of Speech](#) states:

The existence of an institution where unorthodox ideas, alternative modes of thinking and living, and radical prescriptions for social ills can be debated contributes immensely to social and political change and the advancement of human rights both inside and outside the University.

At the same time, the University continues to emphasize that freedom of speech can function effectively only when it comes with the responsibility to respect the rights of others to free speech. Shouting down or silencing others suppresses speech and so stands in opposition to the principles of free expression. Standards of respect, decency, and inclusion are not in tension with academic freedoms. On the contrary, they ground and support such freedoms.