

## **FREE SPEECH AT UIUC IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

Months of unrest across scores of American campuses have sometimes been accompanied by police action that undermines the right to free speech and peaceful protest at colleges and universities. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Local Chapter takes an interest in these issues because—as first articulated in its 1915 Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure—one of the AAUP’s central missions is to define and defend academic freedom and faculty responsibilities within higher education. From that standpoint, we hope that the University of Illinois and all members of its communities will seek to maintain conditions for a safe and robust exchange of viewpoints. Like many other organizations that have spoken on this topic, we support the rights of students and faculty to engage in peaceful protest, as well as the rights of other members of the campus community to respond to such protests peacefully. We condemn unjustified uses of police power to curtail or punish speech.

In challenging times like this, we hope that the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign will continue to distinguish itself from many campuses across the nation as a place that upholds the ideals of free speech by limiting law enforcement action to the maintenance of conditions of safety for all members of our community. While recognizing law enforcement can sometimes be needed to protect members of our community from harm or violence, we stress the importance of de-escalation to prevent violence and the use of police force only as a last resort.

Throughout American history, peaceful protests have provided important methods of political expression. So too have some forms of civil disobedience. While the fortitude it takes to engage in civil disobedience can magnify the power of

expression, history suggests that the most powerful expressions of civil disobedience are non-violent. We hope that members of our communities who may engage in civil disobedience will reflect on that history. If part of the poignancy of civil disobedience lies in accepting a risk of arrest for major obstructions of university functions, then we hope any arrests will be carried out and responded to in a peaceful manner, with all parties showing respect for the inherent dignity of persons who find themselves in any role. That too is part of the best civil disobedience traditions.

We recognize that some speech by leaders or participants in public demonstrations—or by those who respond to them—can produce fear among members of vulnerable minority, religious, racial, or national groups. When that speech crosses the line into hate speech, we condemn it—whether it is against Jews, Palestinians, or any other members of our communities. But we also understand that what counts as hate speech and what is perceived as such is a hotly debated topic. The U.S. Constitution provides limits on when speech can be sanctioned by the state or by public universities. Even speech that is constitutionally protected can, however, make it difficult or impossible for members of our community—including Palestinians, Jews, and members of our other vulnerable populations—to flourish and succeed. We urge the University to use thoughtful methods to promote a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members of our communities, including in circumstances of protest and counter-protest that many universities around the nation are currently finding challenging.

Times of passionate moral conflict provide universities with opportunities to model and support conditions for the safe, robust exchange of ideas on difficult topics. These are opportunities to do what a world-class public university can do at its best:

support inquiry, debate, learning, and teaching. We applaud those students, faculty, and police who have been approaching current controversies peacefully, and we call for all parties to continue their discussion, education, and debate with the frank, non-violent expression of views that can help make our university a place for all of us to learn and grow. Democracies thrive on vigorous debate, and one of the purposes of higher education is to help students develop their capacities for effective citizenship. In that spirit, we welcome differences of opinion while opposing violent acts, intimidation, threats, and expressions of prejudice from students, faculty, police, and visitors to our campus. We also note that long-term educational projects may be needed to foster capacities for civil discourse, counter the sustained effects of discriminatory speech, and support a welcome and inclusive climate for all members of our community to learn, work, and grow.