

POLICY STATEMENT ON UPHOLDING FREE SPEECH

“The objects of the colleges are to offer a comprehensive program of career-oriented, post-secondary education and training to assist individuals in finding and keeping employment, to meet the needs of employers and the changing work environment and to support the economic and social development of their local and diverse communities” (Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002).

Freedom of expression, which means the right to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn, must be protected as it is essential to discovery, critical assessment and the effective dissemination of knowledge and ideas and leads to social and economic advancement.

Colleges must be places that allow for open discussion and free inquiry where diverse voices can be heard and ideas and viewpoints can be explored and discussed freely and debated openly without fear of reprisal, even if these are considered to be controversial or conflict with the views of some members of the college community. Although colleges greatly value civility and all members of colleges share responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, it is not the role of colleges to shield members of the college community from ideas and opinions that they may find disagreeable or offensive. It is up to individuals and not colleges to make such judgments for themselves and to debate and challenge ideas that they find unacceptable.

Members of the college community are free to criticize and contest the views of others; however, they may not obstruct or interfere with the freedom of others to express their views. The rights of others to express or hear ideas must also be respected. Colleges may reasonably regulate the time, place and manner of freedom of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt normal college operations and ordinary college activities or endanger the safety of others.

Speech that violates the law, including the Ontario Human Rights Code, is not allowed. Speech that constitutes harassment, a threat or hate speech is not allowed. Other context-specific boundaries to freedom of expression may also apply, such as those arising out of the terms of employment and collective agreements.

This policy statement is aligned with other college policies, all of which shall be read in harmony.

Existing college mechanisms and processes will be used to handle complaints and ensure compliance with the policy. Complaints that remain unresolved may be referred to the Ontario Ombudsman. Existing disciplinary measures will apply to those whose actions are contrary to the policy.

Colleges will consider official student groups' compliance with the policy as a condition for ongoing financial support or recognition, and encourage student groups to adopt policies that align with this policy.

This policy comes into effect on January 1, 2019 and applies to all college employees, students, guests and others who are present at the college.