

R F2017.01

A Resolution to Reaffirm This Body's Commitment to Free Speech and Encourage The University to do the Same

A bill for the consideration of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Student Government

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Whereas, the mission of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Student Government (hereafter LSA SG) is to “actively seek the voices of LSA students and advocate their interests to improve academic and non-academic life”;¹ and,

Whereas, it is the opinion of the government that recent events at various universities, most recently Middlebury College², have made it abundantly clear that the traditional commitment of a university to the free and open exchange of ideas is in danger because this commitment is not being observed by a significant number of students, administrators, and professors; and,

Whereas, it is the opinion of the government that the University of Michigan itself is not immune to such intolerance³; and,

Whereas, it is the opinion of the government that the passivity with which many students and faculty address the indispensable principle of free speech has been made abundantly clear in the recent events on other college campuses where intimidation and physical aggression have been used to deter those who voice differing political ideologies; and,

Whereas, LSA SG condemns the use of physical aggression as a form of protest of political discourse in favor of peaceful demonstration; and,

Whereas, commentators from across the political spectrum,^{4,5} have noted with disappointment that modern-day campus culture is one of stifling homogeneity, as opposed to an environment which fosters dynamic and free-ranging debate. Campuses sorely lack viewpoint diversity, a necessary hedge against dangerous groupthink; and,

¹ The Constitution of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Student Government. Article II

² <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/03/04/middlebury/hAfpA1Hquh7DIS1doiKbhJ/story.html>

³ http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2016/09/black_lives_matter_protesters_1.html

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/11/opinion/sunday/the-dangerous-safety-of-college.html>

⁵ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/02/06/time-end-leftist-impunity-glenn-reynolds-column/97521138/>

Whereas, the Chicago Principles of Free Expression⁶ state “the University is committed to the principle that it may not restrict debate or deliberation because the ideas put forth are thought to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed”; and,

Whereas, the Chicago Principles of Free Expression maintain that “the University may properly restrict expression, for example, that violates the law, is threatening, harassing, or defamatory, or invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests”; and,

Whereas, the government views these principles to accurately represent the goals of a university that is committed to free speech while also recognizing the narrow circumstances where speech must be restricted.

Be it therefore resolved, LSA SG reaffirms its commitment to the First Amendment in all its fullness and to Students’ Right to Free Speech listed under Article VIII Section 1 of the “Constitution of the University of Michigan Ann Arbor Campus Student Body” making it clear that our community is committed to non-obstructionism with respect to events on campus (i.e. protests are supported only insofar as they do not deprive other students of their right to speak, invite others to speak, and hear others speak); and,

Be it further resolved, LSA SG endorses that the Chicago Principles of Free Expression be adopted as the official university policy regarding speech, and calls upon the University to include viewpoint diversity—particularly political diversity—in its diversity policies and in its efforts to diversify the faculty and the curriculum; and,

Be it further resolved, LSA SG will encourage the University to reaffirm its commitment to free speech with a statement of its own, update its “Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression” statement to endorse the Chicago Principles of Free Expression, and commit to improving the viewpoint diversity of its faculty; and,

Be it finally resolved, LSA SG will send this resolution along with a statement to Central Student Government, President Mark Schlissel, and Dean Andrew Martin.

⁶ <https://freexpression.uchicago.edu/page/statement-principles-free-expression>

Statement:

Dear _____,

Recent events at various universities, most recently Middlebury College, have made it clear that the traditional commitment of a university to the free and open exchange of ideas is in danger. The values of free speech are in jeopardy as this commitment is not being observed by a significant number of students, administrators, and professors; the University of Michigan is not immune to such intolerance. The passivity with which many students and faculty address the indispensable principle of free speech has been made abundantly clear by recent events where intimidation and physical aggression have been used to deter those who hold differing political ideologies.

This intolerance is not welcome on our campus and LSA Student Government formally reaffirms its commitment to the principles of free speech that are meant to guide discourse on any university campus. Furthermore, we encourage the University, historically a bastion of free speech, to do the same. LSA Student Government encourages the University to adopt the Chicago Principles of Free Expression as the official University policy regarding speech. These principles outline a commitment to protecting the rights of every speaker to express their ideas, so long as they do not infringe on the ordinary activities of the University, and also to protecting the rights of those who disagree to protest and demonstrate in a peaceful and productive manner.

Free speech is a right and a liberty that we hold, and in no other place is it more important than university campuses. Free and open discourse is essential to not only our education, but the preservation of ideas and the progress of thought. It is our responsibility, as bearers of this right, to protect it, and to let it flourish so that we might continue to uphold the legacy at this University of free and open discourse.