

STATEMENT ON HARASSMENT, FREE SPEECH, AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM¹

While it is the policy of the College to maintain an environment free of unlawful harassment, the College is also an institution of higher learning with a profound commitment to the free expression and testing of ideas – whether or not those ideas are controversial or unpopular – for such freedoms are essential to the search for truth, the central purpose of any institution of higher learning. The College’s commitment to freedom of speech generally, and to the particular ideals associated with academic freedom, requires that the advocacy of ideas in instruction, by both faculty and students, be protected, and requires the College to protect the rights of its faculty and students to pursue controversial, provocative, and unpopular topics and ideas in their teaching, learning, and research. Moreover, rights of free speech and expression are not only at the core of the College’s mission, they are also protected by state and federal law, which limit when offensive speech or expressive conduct may be punished.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that some forms of expression are not legally protected and do not play any meaningful role in the exchange of ideas. Such forms of expression may, indeed, inhibit that exchange, thereby denying some individuals full participation in the life of the academic community. Speech or other expressive activity can and will be grounds for discipline when it (1) materially or substantially disrupts class work or involves substantial disorder to College activities, (2) invades the legal rights of others, (3) amounts to “fighting words,” (4) is likely to provoke imminent lawless action, (5) constitutes defamation or obscenity, or (6) rises to the level of unlawful harassment. Labeling such improper activity as “speech” does not make it permissible, either under the policies of the College or under the law.

¹ This Statement is intended as a general statement about Free Speech and Academic Freedom. It does not modify, adopt, or replace any existing legal standards or any College policies.