

Free Speech, Protests and other Expressive Activities on Campus: Know Your Rights & Responsibilities

There are several events held each year on campus – speakers, political rallies, demonstrations, and non-political activities such as sporting events – which may inspire you to exercise your rights under the First Amendment. As a state institution of higher education, the university celebrates, honors, and respects the First Amendment and your right to free speech. However, those rights are not without limit, and it's important to understand what constitutes protected expressive activity and what is not permitted at this public university.

CSU's Policy on Free Speech and Peaceful Assembly

CSU has a Free Speech and Peaceful Assembly policy (policylibrary.colostate.edu/policy.aspx?id=696). This policy describes how your rights to free speech and peaceful assembly are afforded and protected by the university and outlines the limits for expressive activities, such as:

- **Disruptive Activity:** Any act that unreasonably interferes with the rights of others to peaceably assemble or to exercise the right of free speech, disrupts the normal functioning of the university, damages property, or endangers health or safety is specifically prohibited.
- **Reasonable Access:** The university is required by law to provide and maintain reasonable access to, and exit from, any office, classroom, laboratory, or building. This access must not be obstructed at any time.
- **Symbolic Protest:** Displaying a sign, gesturing, wearing symbolic clothing, or otherwise protesting silently is permissible unless it is a disruptive activity or impedes access to facilities. In addition, such acts should not block the audience's view or prevent the audience from being able to pay attention to a lawful assembly and/or an official university event.
- **Unsafe Items:** The display of firearms or weapons and the illegal possession of firearms or weapons, as well as the possession of torches or other items with an open flame greater than one inch, sticks, poles, shields or other items that may be used to cause injury are not permitted. Persons may carry signs or flags as long as those signs or flags are not attached to a stick or pole. In addition, depending upon the event and its location, the university may have additional restrictions that limit the possession of other items.

It is critically important to remember that ***silencing or attempting to silence a speaker or disrupting an event is not protected by the First Amendment, and may result in serious consequences under state law and the CSU Student Conduct Code.***

Don't be used as a Political Prop

Resist being baited into a heightened level of emotional reaction or engagement by individuals or groups whose messages you oppose, and be aware that they might try to use you as a prop by videotaping or photographing your reactions to use on social media platforms and online publications for their group's own promotion, recruitment, rhetoric and fundraising purposes.

Object to a Speaker?

If you object to a speaker coming to campus or their message, consider doing the following:

- Avoid the event to minimize attention for the speaker and their agenda
- Attend the speech and express counter views during permitted open comment
- Participate in a peaceful protest
- Schedule an alternative speaker
- Schedule an alternative event

CSU Public Spaces and the Restriction of Expressive Activities during Late Evening, Overnight

The Free Speech and Peaceful Assembly policy also includes information about locations on campus where people may gather to peaceably assemble. For example, The Lory Student Center Plaza that is traditionally open to all individuals for the purpose of exercising free speech and peaceful assembly during university business hours, in accordance with the university's Free Speech and Peaceful Assembly policy. Space on the LSC Plaza may be reserved by academic and administrative units or registered student organizations on a first-come, first-served basis.

Individuals utilizing the LSC Plaza for expressive activities must comply with the policy's prohibitions against disruptive activity, possessing unsafe items, or threatening or using force or violence. Peaceful assembly and expression are protected by the First Amendment; engaging in acts of violence is not protected and violates university policy and state law.

Due to safety and security concerns and potential impact on the university's operations, ***the LSC Plaza, as well as other public areas on campus are closed for any event, demonstration, meeting, assembly, or other expressive activity after 7:00 p.m. and before 7:00 a.m.,*** unless a prior reservation for an official university event has been approved by the university.

Principles of Community and Free Speech

CSU is committed and required by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to an open exchange of ideas and dissenting points of view, even when such expression might be deemed offensive and run counter to our Principles of Community (diversity.colostate.edu/Principles-of-Community/) or other institutional values. It is important to remember that embracing free speech is a core value, and our Principles of Community declare that the university is "committed to freedom of expression, critical discourse, and the advancement of knowledge." We also uphold the rights of our campus community to present counter-arguments and speak back through peaceful protest and other peaceful means.

For more information on free speech on campus, please visit the university's First Amendment webpage: FirstAmendment.colostate.edu/