# Academic Freedom Committee (AFC) 2026 Report

Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee
February 17, 2026

# Recommendations of Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee (AFC) 2026

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**Schedule:** Committee charged: September 3, 2025, Report submitted: February 25, 2026

**Charge 1:** Higher education is grappling with the challenge of balancing free expression with concerns that certain forms of discourse alienate community members, resulting in reduced participation in academic discourse and increased self-censorship among students and faculty. The Academic Freedom Committee shall research and recommend best practices for fostering viewpoint diversity and cultivating a pluralistic learning environment, while simultaneously supporting all community members' sense of belonging and engagement.

**Charge 2:** At least 113 colleges and universities have adopted or endorsed the "Chicago Statement" (also known as the "Chicago Principles") or a substantially similar statement, that establishes guidelines for freedom of speech and expression on campus. The Academic Freedom Committee shall review the Chicago Statement thoroughly and make a recommendation about whether Northeastern should officially adopt it. If it recommends adoption, the Committee shall work with the Office of General Counsel to draft a resolution for Faculty Handbook inclusion. [FOECommitteeReport.pdf](FOECommitteeReport.pdf), [Chicago Statement: University and Faculty Body Support | The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression](#)

**Charge 3:** Northeastern University is committed to fostering professional and respectful debate regarding differing views, in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect, as articulated in the Faculty Handbook's "Statement on Free Expression." [Academic Freedom – Faculty Handbook](#)

The University has not clearly defined the foundational concepts of "civility" and "respectful debate." This definitional gap presents several institutional risks: ambiguity regarding what constitutes acceptable parameters of expression; risk of inconsistent application of free expression policies; and possibility of undue restrictions on legitimate free expression. To provide clear, consistent standards that preserve the integrity of free expression while maintaining the professional discourse essential to academic excellence, the Academic Freedom Committee shall collaborate with the Office of the Provost to:

1. Create specific definitions for "civility" and "respectful debate"
2. Define conduct that crosses the line and constitutes violations of university standards
3. Provide illustrative examples of both acceptable and unacceptable behaviors
4. Develop a protocol to communicate these definitions clearly to the University community
5. Develop a protocol to ensure that enforcement of policy violations is consistent and unbiased

# Executive Summary

**Introduction**  The Committee's three charges are interconnected: best practices for fostering viewpoint diversity, pluralistic learning environments, and belonging; evaluation of whether NEU should adopt the Chicago Principles on academic freedom and free expression; and the question of defining civility and respectful debate. The Committee investigated these topics through faculty surveys (November 2025), peer institution research, stakeholder consultation, and scholarship review.

**Findings**  The committee found evidence of academic freedom and free expression concerns at Northeastern:  NEU ranks 253 of 257 institutions in [FIRE's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings](#) (a 75-place decline); 40% of faculty have recently begun self-censoring in the classroom; 61% of faculty lack confidence that administration would protect controversial speech; and one in five faculty are reluctant to share political views. Furthermore, student representatives shared student concerns about faculty self-censorship.  The Student Government Association endorsed the Chicago Principles in November 2025 (24-8 vote).

**Charge 1**  The committee recommends a multi-layered approach:  Classroom pedagogical practices; faculty development and support; institutional programs; and institutional neutrality as the foundational principle. Institutional neutrality (the university refraining from taking positions on contested political or social issues unrelated to its mission) creates space for genuine viewpoint diversity by ensuring the institution does not predetermine acceptable views. This approach, recently adopted at Stanford, MIT, Harvard, and Cornell, enables all other recommendations.

**Charge 2**  By 4-1 vote, the committee recommends endorsement of the Chicago Principles. The Chicago Principles prioritize broad freedom of expression with narrow exceptions. Key differences from NEU's current statement: NEU conditions expression on "civility" while Chicago states civility concerns "can never justify closing off discussion of ideas". Furthermore, Chicago addresses time/place/manner restrictions, legal limitations, applies to all community members (not just full-time faculty at NEU's American campuses), and protects against the "heckler's veto."  The committee views academic freedom and free expression as the primary value supporting the university's mission, with civility and belonging as important secondary values promoted through Charge 1 practices.  A dissenting opinion by Professor Anna Lamin is presented at the end of the report.

**Charge 3** Stakeholder consensus indicates that defining "civility" and "respectful debate" precisely is neither feasible nor advisable. The committee recommends encouraging these values through pedagogical practices (Charge 1) and treating civility as an educational value to cultivate through practice rather than a regulatory condition restricting behavior.

**Resolutions** The committee presents the following resolutions:

1-Resolution to share best practices with relevant units
2-Resolution to consolidate and communicate existing university rules on classroom recordings
3-Resolution for the Faculty Senate to Endorse Institutional Neutrality for the University and its Leaders
4-Resolution for Faculty Senate to Recommend Board of Trustees Endorse Institutional Neutrality for the University and its Leaders
5-Resolution for the Faculty Senate to Endorse the Chicago Statement
6-Resolution to Edit the Faculty Handbook's "Statement on Free Expression"
7-Resolution for Faculty Senate to Recommend that Board of Trustees Endorse the Chicago Statement
8-Resolution for next year's SAC to charge a committee with improving academic freedom for faculty not covered by the Faculty Handbook

**Implementation** The committee recommends, for adoption of Institutional Neutrality and of the Chicago Statement, that Implementation Working Groups be created in Spring 2026 for target implementation in Spring 2027.

**Recommendations** The committee presents 17 recommendations for best practices and suggests that these be developed following a phased implementation: develop faculty training, encourage new pedagogical practices, assess impact through annual reporting on student/faculty surveys, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) rankings, and integration metrics.

**Conclusion** These mutually reinforcing recommendations position academic freedom and free expression as the primary value enabling the pursuit of knowledge, while promoting civility and belonging through practice. Success means students can engage across differences, faculty can confidently facilitate difficult conversations, and the university protects expression while fostering belonging.

# Table of Contents

# Introduction and Definitions

As the Academic Freedom Committee, our recommendations on the specific charges given to us are driven by our understanding of academic freedom as a lodestar for the University, whose core mission is the production of knowledge and the pursuit of truth through research, teaching and learning.

Academic freedom protects expert scholarly discourse, research and teaching, and discussion of the institutional policy framework in which research and teaching occur. Such discourse is inherently open to and indeed welcomes arguments and challenges that are likewise founded upon reason and evidence. Therefore, this protection extends to presenting and debating ideas across the range of recognized academic opinion, including controversial or heterodox perspectives, when such presentation serves legitimate pedagogical purposes or advances knowledge through reasoned inquiry. Whether expression meets these standards is determined primarily through peer review and professional judgment by those with relevant expertise.

The university is our society's special institution for deep and sustained study, the production of knowledge, and the pursuit of truth. The meaning of truth differs across scholarly disciplines, and faculty in law, engineering, chemistry and literature seek it in different ways.  Controversial political and social issues, while not present in all parts of the curriculum, are germane to many disciplines and courses, often intertwined with contested questions of value and rival schools of thought with distinguished intellectual traditions.  The university should serve as a forum, in appropriate disciplinary contexts, for comprehensive presentation of the notable arguments and strongest evidence on multiple sides of public controversies, thus promoting understanding through instruction and advancement toward better solutions by research. This commitment to intellectual thoroughness distinguishes the university's mission to advance knowledge from the goals of other institutions in society.

The charge given to this Committee references several aspirational values: *belonging*, *viewpoint diversity*, *pluralistic learning environments*, *civility*, and *respectful debate*. These values are aligned with Northeastern University's Strategic Plan, which wisely notes that:

> "To fully understand and solve problems in the context of the human world's interactions, we must sustain a continuous dialogue among people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, ideologies, and intellectual traditions—the varied contexts

that make up the human family." (Northeastern University, 2021).

Such overarching objectives gain specific and tractable meaning when understood through their instrumental relationship to academic discourse. Because academic inquiry engages with unsolved problems and perennial questions, it inherently embodies a particular kind of pluralism – cogent but differing viewpoints sharpen each other and aid the progress of knowledge. Civility, in this context, means maintaining the conditions necessary for productive intellectual exchange. Moreover, preparing students for civic and professional life requires that they develop the capacity to engage productively across differences.

**Academic Freedom Distinguished from General Free Expression**
This Committee's charge centers on academic freedom, not free expression generally. While related, these concepts are distinct in crucial ways that shape our work and recommendations.

*Academic freedom* is a professional norm rooted in the nature of scholarly inquiry itself. It exists prior to legal protections and extends more broadly than the law recognizes. The American Association of University Professors has articulated and defended this professional standard since 1915, but it drew directly on the norms then existing in the German universities, and the ideals behind academic liberty have historical roots that date back to the very formation of the university in the medieval era.

*Free expression* is much broader in scope, encompassing communication generally and applying to all persons. In American law, the First Amendment protects individuals from government censorship across the full range of expression—political advocacy, religious speech, artistic creation, and everyday conversation. This protection applies in public forums and state institutions, but not generally in private settings. Importantly, First Amendment rights are subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, including those consistent with the function and nature of educational institutions where expression occurs. Yet free expression, like academic freedom, is also a principle prior to law, rooted in the requirements of truth-seeking and free society. As Cato's Letters observed in 1723: "Without freedom of thought, there can be no such thing as wisdom; and no such thing as publick liberty, without freedom of speech" (Gordon, 1723).

Academic freedom can be understood as a deeper and more specialized form of this broader freedom of expression. Both serve the fundamental purpose of pursuing truth and sustaining democratic life, and academic freedom flourishes within a broader

institutional culture of free expression. The additional protections for academic freedom, whether or not legal in nature, derive from the presumed additional depth of professors' thoughts and the professional quality of their speech within their areas of expertise (Rabban 2024).

Given this understanding, our committee focuses primarily on faculty academic freedom, though we recognize students participate in this freedom in limited ways commensurate with their emerging expertise. As Justice Frankfurter wrote in *Wieman v. Updegraff (1952)*, "It is the special task of teachers to foster those habits of open-mindedness and critical inquiry which alone make for responsible citizens". The Supreme Court has similarly emphasized "independent and uninhibited exchange of ideas among teachers and students." (*Regents v. Ewing*, 1985). Academic freedom protects the conditions necessary for this exchange.

# Method

1. The committee researched the topics in traditional academic journals and in higher education trade publications (see References and Appendices provided).

2. The committee researched topics in professional association policy statements, such as the AAUP, as well as nonpartisan higher education advocation organizations such as Heterodox Academy (see Appendix A and References).

3. The committee invited stakeholders and community members for open conversations about the charges and conducted interviews with interested student organizations (see Appendix B).

4. To gather information on faculty attitudes and opinions regarding the charges, the committee created and analyzed questions that were included in the all-faculty Qualtrics survey. Results of questions including Likert-type, rankings and "check all that apply" and open-ended) from the November 2025 survey are provided along with cross tab analysis conducted using demographic questions including gender identity, faculty status, college, and campus (see Appendices C, D, E). For instance, Q223_1 "In my personal teaching experience, I have recently begun avoiding certain topics in my classroom" resulted in a bimodal distribution for all faculty that could be further explored by distributions at the college level (see Appendix D).

5. The committee also reviewed results from relevant surveys:  the "Many Voices, One Northeastern" survey (Spring 201; 2023); the committee was given access to both by the NEU's Director of Survey Research and Assessment (University Decision Support). It also reviewed results from a survey conducted by the Educational Freedom Project, an independent student organization at NEU, "Assessing Community Sentiment on Campus Climate, Student Rights, and University Governance at Northeastern University" (EFP, 2025).

6. The committee's charges are connected to ongoing political discussion, and while the committee did consult related press coverage, it prioritized the materials described above.

7. AI Assistance Disclosure: AI tools were used to assist in researching and summarizing the preparation of this report. In addition, AI was used to slightly edit several sections of this report. All content, recommendations, and sources cited herein were independently verified and evaluated by committee members prior to inclusion. The committee takes full responsibility for the accuracy, appropriateness, and integrity of all information presented in this report.

8. At the end of the report there is a dissenting opinion on Charge 2 by one member of the committee, Professor Anna Lamin.  It is included exactly as delivered.  The dissenting opinion is authored solely by Professor Lamin, and the committee is unable to comment on the opinion.  The rest of the report has been approved by all five committee members.

# Resolutions

## 1-Resolution to share best practices with relevant units

WHEREAS the Charge 1 asks the Academic Freedom Committee to research and recommend best practices for fostering viewpoint diversity and cultivating a pluralistic learning environment, while simultaneously supporting all community members' sense of belonging and engagement; and

WHEREAS the Academic Freedom Committee has presented 16 recommendations based on information given by Northeastern faculty in a response to the all-faculty survey and based on research of relevant literature; and

WHEREAS many of these recommendations connect to the ongoing work done by CATLR, ADVANCE and the Office of the Chancellor; and

WHEREAS the Academic Freedom Committee has produced a memo cover letter, included in Appendix G of its report;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate Agenda Committee deliver a memo, that shares the recommendations in Charge 1 for consideration for future programming, to CATLR, ADVANCE, the Office of the Chancellor, and any other parties that SAC believes would be interested in the research.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Senate Agenda Committee consider charging an appropriate committee next year with evaluating the feasibility of enhancing Northeastern's civil discourse curricula, including appropriateness of adding a "civil discourse" NUPath attribute and a "viewpoint diversity" TRACE student evaluation question.

## 2-Resolution to consolidate and communicate existing university rules on classroom recordings

WHEREAS academic freedom is a fundamental condition of teaching and learning in the classroom, which is a space for intellectual exploration and risk-taking; and

WHEREAS faculty are concerned about academic freedom in the classroom, [1] faculty report self-censorship in the classroom, [2] and students are concerned about faculty self-censorship in the classroom; [3] and

WHEREAS there is an emerging national trend in unauthorized recording of classes, sometimes with the content being shared publicly such as online, in group chats, and with media; [4] and

WHEREAS Northeastern University currently offers important protections for faculty and students that define the classroom during instruction as a limited educational forum with instructors having discretion over whether to permit recording and students having a right to opt-out of recording, and these protections are articulated in a variety of material -- policies, rules, information webpages, toolkits-- that make it somewhat difficult for faculty and students to easily locate the rules;

BE IT RESOLVED that the administration and the faculty senate work together, following shared governance norms, to consolidate and communicate the rules regarding classroom recording, with an information statement (a digital "1-pager") be distributed to all faculty and students, that this one-pager be included in new faculty and student orientation materials starting Fall 2026, and that a short version be prepared as optional text for faculty to include on syllabi.

[1] Northeastern University All-faculty survey (Q224): "Please consider the academic freedom and free expression concerns listed below. Which of the following do you worry about personally? (Select all that apply), 63 % of faculty responded, "The content of classroom discussion/lectures."

[2] Northeastern University All-faculty survey (Q223_1): "In my personal experience, I have recently begun avoiding certain topics in the classroom," 40 % of faculty responded that they either agree or strongly agree (M=2.95, N=463). Appendix C.

[3] Interview, Student Government Association (SGA) of Northeastern University with Academic Freedom Committee, Thursday, October 16, 2025. SGA leaders report that students are sharing stories of faculty who seem to avoid controversial topics in the classroom.

[4] On cases nationwide:  Gavin Escott, The Chronicle of Higher Education, "The Classroom, Caught on Camera: Professors and students are increasingly worried what they say in class could end up on the internet; A 'Crisis Situation,'" 10 December 2025.

# 3-Resolution for the Faculty Senate to Endorse Institutional Neutrality for the University and its Leaders

WHEREAS the university's core mission is the production and transmission of knowledge through research, teaching, and learning—a mission that requires maintaining the university as society's preeminent space for open inquiry where competing ideas are tested through evidence and argument rather than predetermined by institutional orthodoxy; and

WHEREAS official institutional statements on matters beyond the university's core educational and research mission create several interrelated problems: they imply institutional orthodoxy that chills dissent from faculty and students who disagree; they displace the individual expert voices that should be engaging these issues; they privilege the institution's voice in domains where it is not the scholarly expert; they risk societal perception of the university as a political actor rather than a knowledge institution; and they erode the legitimate authority universities have earned in their actual domains of expertise; and

WHEREAS Northeastern University has issued statements on events that do not directly concern the institution's core mission, which can lead to requests that the university opine on myriad events; and

WHEREAS institutional neutrality — meaning that the university as an institution refrains from taking positions on political, social, or policy questions except where they directly affect core mission or operations, while individual faculty, students, and staff retain full freedom to express their views — is a well-recognized [1] and long-standing [2] principle for maintaining universities as spaces for open inquiry and genuine intellectual pluralism;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate endorses the principle of institutional neutrality for Northeastern University, as described below:

a)  The university and its leaders may speak officially on matters that directly affect its core educational and research mission (such as academic freedom, educational policy, research funding, accreditation) and matters essential to its operations (such as legal obligations, campus safety, student access, institutional autonomy).

b)  The university and its leaders will exercise institutional restraint on matters that do not directly affect its core educational and research mission or operations (such as taking positions on social and political issues unless those issues threaten the mission of the university and its values of free inquiry).

c) Boundary determinations — deciding whether a given issue relates directly to the university's core mission — will inevitably involve judgment and good-faith disagreement, with policies applied consistently regardless of viewpoint or political valence, and using shared governance mechanisms.

d) Faculty, students, and staff retain full freedom to speak on any topic in their individual capacities, to conduct research on any subject, to teach according to their scholarly judgment, and to engage in civic and political activity. No individual should face sanction for expressing views that differ from any actual or perceived institutional position.

[1] As of late 2024, at least 148 institutions of higher education have adopted policies of institutional neutrality, including Dartmouth College, Yale University, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Tulane University, Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Princeton University. Arnold, A., Shaw, E., Tenhundfeld, N., & Barbaro Simovski, N. (2025, March). *The rising tide of institutional statement neutrality: How universities are rethinking institutional speech*. Heterodox Academy. https://heterodoxacademy.org/reports/a-revival-of-institutional-statement-neutrality-how-universities-are-rethinking-institutional-speech-in-2024/

[2] The modern concept can be traced to the 1967 "Kalven Report" from the University of Chicago, which recommends a "heavy presumption against the university taking collective action or expressing opinions on the political and social issues of the day" because it emphasizes that "the instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic**." (**Kalven, Harry (Chairman) "Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action." University of Chicago, November 11, 1967: https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/KalvenRprt_0.pdf

# 4-Resolution for Faculty Senate to Recommend that Board of Trustees Endorse Institutional Neutrality for the University and its Leaders

WHEREAS the university's core mission is the production and transmission of knowledge through research, teaching, and learning—a mission that requires maintaining the university as society's preeminent space for open inquiry where competing ideas are tested through evidence and argument rather than predetermined by institutional orthodoxy; and

WHEREAS official institutional statements on matters beyond the university's core educational and research mission create several interrelated problems: they imply institutional orthodoxy that chills dissent from faculty and students who disagree; they displace the individual expert voices that should be engaging these issues; they privilege the institution's voice in domains where it is not the scholarly expert; they risk societal perception of the university as a political actor rather than a knowledge institution; and they erode the legitimate authority universities have earned in their actual domains of expertise; and

WHEREAS Northeastern University has issued statements on events that do not directly concern the institution's core mission, which can lead to requests that the university opine on myriad events; and

WHEREAS institutional neutrality — meaning that the university as an institution refrains from taking positions on political, social, or policy questions except where they directly affect core mission or operations, while individual faculty, students, and staff retain full freedom to express their views — is a well-recognized [1] and long-standing [2] principle for maintaining universities as spaces for open inquiry and genuine intellectual pluralism;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate recommends that the Board of Trustees endorse the principle of institutional neutrality, as described below, at their next meeting.

e)  The university and its leaders may speak officially on matters that directly affect its core educational and research mission (such as academic freedom, educational policy, research funding, accreditation) and matters essential to its operations (such as legal obligations, campus safety, student access, institutional autonomy).

f)  The university and its leaders will exercise institutional restraint on matters that do not directly affect its core educational and research mission or operations (such as taking positions on social and political issues unless those issues threaten the mission of the university and its values of free inquiry).

g) Boundary determinations — deciding whether a given issue relates directly to the university's core mission — will inevitably involve judgment and good-faith disagreement, with policies applied consistently regardless of viewpoint or political valence, and using shared governance mechanisms.

h) Faculty, students, and staff retain full freedom to speak on any topic in their individual capacities, to conduct research on any subject, to teach according to their scholarly judgment, and to engage in civic and political activity.  No individual should face sanction for expressing views that differ from any actual or perceived institutional position.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that following a Board of Trustees endorsement, the administration, in consultation with Faculty Senate Leadership, establish in Spring 2026 a working group comprising faculty, administrative, and student representatives to:

a) develop guidelines for implementing the principle of institutional neutrality university-wide;
b) develop an oversight or review mechanism, following shared governance norms, to ensure it serves its intended purpose of protecting open inquiry and intellectual pluralism;
c) steer the process towards implementation with target date of Spring 2027.

[1] As of late 2024, at least 148 institutions of higher education have adopted policies of institutional neutrality, including Dartmouth College, Yale University, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Tulane University, Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Princeton University.   Arnold, A., Shaw, E., Tenhundfeld, N., & Barbaro Simovski, N. (2025, March). *The rising tide of institutional statement neutrality: How universities are rethinking institutional speech*. Heterodox Academy. https://heterodoxacademy.org/reports/a-revival-of-institutional-statement-neutrality-how-universities-are-rethinking-institutional-speech-in-2024/

[2] The modern concept can be traced to the 1967 "Kalven Report" from the University of Chicago, which recommends a "heavy presumption against the university taking collective action or expressing opinions on the political and social issues of the day" because it emphasizes that "the instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic." **(**Kalven, Harry (Chairman) "Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action." University of Chicago, November 11, 1967: https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/KalvenRprt_0.pdf

# 5-Resolution for the Faculty Senate to Endorse the Chicago Statement

WHEREAS Northeastern University is committed to experiential learning, interdisciplinary research, and the pursuit of knowledge through free and open inquiry, which requires robust protection of freedom of expression for all members of the university community; and

WHEREAS Northeastern University ranks 253rd out of 257 institutions in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, earning an overall score of 46.8 out of 100 and a grade of "F" for its speech climate (reported by media outlets such as *Newsweek, The Boston Globe, CBS News Online* and *The Huntington News)*, representing a decline of 75 places from the previous year; [1] and

WHEREAS recent events at Northeastern, including concerns raised by last year's Faculty Senate's Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee regarding university communications about demonstrations and free expression in AY2024-25, [2] and the controversy around a planned academic lecture in March 2025 that resulted in a deplatforming penalty from FIRE [3] demonstrate concrete problems that have resulted in reputational damage and diminished academic offering to the NEU community, requiring institutional reform; and

WHEREAS a question in the recent faculty survey demonstrates a majority of faculty have low confidence (61% "not very" or "not at all confident") that the administration would protect a speaker's rights to express controversial views; [4] and

WHEREAS the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago (the "Chicago Statement"), issued in January 2015, articulates core principles regarding freedom of expression that have been adopted or affirmed by over 100 colleges and universities, including Princeton University, Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Brandeis University, Boston University, MIT, and Stanford University,  and represents a widely recognized model for institutions seeking to strengthen their commitment to free expression; [5] and

WHEREAS the commitment to free expression in the Chicago Statement is broader than NEU's Statement of Free Expression in the Faculty Handbook because the Chicago Statement covers all university community members while NEU's statement covers only full-time faculty at NEU's American campuses (because the Handbook does not cover part-time faculty and does not cover faculty at NEU's Canadian and London campuses); and

WHEREAS the commitment to free expression in the Chicago Statement is deeper than NEU's Statement on Free Expression because NEU's Statement clarifies that the university's responsibility to protect and support free expression is for expression that

occurs "in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect" while the Chicago Statement recommends the fullest possible expression clarifying that "although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas;" and

WHEREAS a clear institutional commitment to freedom of expression will enhance NEU's reputation, support the academic freedom of faculty, enrich the educational experience of students, send a clear signal to the media, and uphold the University's mission as a global research university dedicated to teaching, discovery, and engagement with society;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate of Northeastern University endorses the "Chicago Statement."

[1] Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), "2026 College Free Speech Rankings," Published Online September 2025 (retrieved 19 September 2025): https://www.thefire.org/college-free-speech-rankings

[2] Northeastern University Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee Report (April 2025), pg. 13-14 & appendix 7: https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/Report-Academic-Freedom-Ad-Hoc-Committee-AFC-April-16-2025.pdf

[3] "Fire Letter to Northeastern University," from Aaron Corpora (FIRE, Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy) to Dean James R. Hackney (Northeastern University School of Law), 25 April 2025 (retrieved 19 September 2025): https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/fire-letter-northeastern-university-april-25-2025

[4] 2025 Northeaster University All-faculty survey, question (Q276_1), Likert-type, 5-point confidence scale, $M$=2.20, N=289. (Appendix C).

[5] FIRE "Chicago Statement: University and Faculty Body Support" (retrieved 19 September 2025): https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/report-committee-freedom-expression-university-chicago-september-22-2015

# 6-Resolution to Edit the Faculty Handbook's "Statement on Free Expression"

WHEREAS Northeastern University is committed to experiential learning, interdisciplinary research, and the pursuit of knowledge through free and open inquiry, which requires robust protection of freedom of expression for all members of the university community; and

WHEREAS Northeastern University ranks 253rd out of 257 institutions in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, earning an overall score of 46.8 out of 100 and a grade of "F" for its speech climate (reported by media outlets such as *Newsweek, The Boston Globe, CBS News Online* and *The Huntington News)*, representing a decline of 75 places from the previous year; [1] and

WHEREAS recent events at Northeastern, including concerns raised by last year's Faculty Senate's Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee regarding university communications about demonstrations and free expression in AY2024-25, [2] and the controversy around a planned academic lecture in March 2025 that resulted in a deplatforming penalty from FIRE [3] demonstrate concrete problems that have resulted in reputational damage and diminished academic offering to the NEU community, requiring institutional reform;

WHEREAS a question in the recent faculty survey demonstrates a majority of faculty have low confidence (61% "not very" or "not at all confident") that the administration would protect a speaker's rights to express controversial views; [4] and

WHEREAS the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago (the "Chicago Statement"), issued in January 2015, articulates core principles regarding freedom of expression that have been adopted or affirmed by over 100 colleges and universities, including Princeton University, Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Brandeis University, Boston University, MIT, and Stanford University,  and represents a widely recognized model for institutions seeking to strengthen their commitment to free expression; [5] and

WHEREAS the commitment to free expression in the Chicago Statement is broader than NEU's Statement of Free Expression in the Faculty Handbook because the Chicago Statement covers all university community members while NEU's statement covers only full-time faculty at NEU's American campuses (because the Handbook does not cover part-time faculty and does not cover faculty at NEU's Canadian and London campuses); and

WHEREAS the commitment to free expression in the Chicago Statement is deeper than NEU's Statement on Free Expression because NEU's Statement clarifies that the university's responsibility to protect and support free expression is for expression that occurs "in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect" while the Chicago Statement recommends the fullest possible expression clarifying that "although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas;" and

WHEREAS a clear institutional commitment to freedom of expression will enhance NEU's reputation, support the academic freedom of faculty, enrich the educational experience of students, send a clear signal to the media, and uphold the University's mission as a global research university dedicated to teaching, discovery, and engagement with society;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate requests the revision of the Faculty Handbook's "Statement on Free Expression" to reflect the perspective represented by the Chicago Statement, along the lines suggested in Appendix I, with the final language to be confirmed by the Academic Freedom Committee in consultation with the Faculty Handbook Committee, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of General Counsel, and that the Academic Freedom Committee shall present the proposed revision to the Senate in April.

[1] Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), "2026 College Free Speech Rankings," Published Online September 2025 (retrieved 19 September 2025):  https://www.thefire.org/college-free-speech-rankings

[2] Northeastern University Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee Report (April 2025), pg. 13-14 & appendix 7:  https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/Report-Academic-Freedom-Ad-Hoc-Committee-AFC-April-16-2025.pdf

[3] "Fire Letter to Northeastern University," from Aaron Corpora (FIRE, Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy) to Dean James R. Hackney (Northeastern University School of Law), 25 April 2025 (retrieved 19 September 2025):
 https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/fire-letter-northeastern-university-april-25-2025

[4]  2025 Northeastern University All-faculty survey (Q276_1) , Likert-type, 5-point confidence scale, $M$=2.20, N=289

[5]  FIRE "Chicago Statement: University and Faculty Body Support" (retrieved 19 September 2025): https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/report-committee-freedom-expression-university-chicago-september-22-2015

# 7-Resolution for Faculty Senate to Recommend that the Board of Trustees Endorse the Chicago Statement

WHEREAS Northeastern University is committed to experiential learning, interdisciplinary research, and the pursuit of knowledge through free and open inquiry, which requires robust protection of freedom of expression for all members of the university community; and

WHEREAS Northeastern University ranks 253rd out of 257 institutions in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, earning an overall score of 46.8 out of 100 and a grade of "F" for its speech climate (reported by media outlets such as *Newsweek, The Boston Globe, CBS News Online* and *The Huntington News)*, representing a decline of 75 places from the previous year; [1] and

WHEREAS recent events at Northeastern, including concerns raised by last year's Faculty Senate's Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee regarding university communications about demonstrations and free expression in AY2024-25, [2] and the controversy around a planned academic lecture in March 2025 that resulted in a deplatforming penalty from FIRE [3] demonstrate concrete problems that have resulted in reputational damage and diminished academic offering to the NEU community, requiring institutional reform;

WHEREAS a question in the recent faculty survey demonstrates a majority of faculty have low confidence (61% "not very" or "not at all confident") that the administration would protect a speaker's rights to express controversial views; [4] and

WHEREAS the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago (the "Chicago Statement"), issued in January 2015, articulates core principles regarding freedom of expression that have been adopted or affirmed by over 100 colleges and universities, including Princeton University, Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Brandeis University, Boston University, MIT, and Stanford University,  and represents a widely recognized model for institutions seeking to strengthen their commitment to free expression; [5] and

WHEREAS the commitment to free expression in the Chicago Statement is broader than NEU's Statement of Free Expression in the Faculty Handbook because the Chicago Statement covers all university community members while NEU's statement covers only full-time faculty at NEU's American campuses (because the Handbook does not cover

part-time faculty and does not cover faculty at NEU's Canadian and London campuses); and

WHEREAS the commitment to free expression in the Chicago Statement is deeper than NEU's Statement on Free Expression because NEU's Statement clarifies that the university's responsibility to protect and support free expression is for expression that occurs "in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect" while the Chicago Statement recommends the fullest possible expression clarifying that "although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas;" and

WHEREAS a clear institutional commitment to freedom of expression will enhance NEU's reputation, support the academic freedom of faculty, enrich the educational experience of students, send a clear signal to the media, and uphold the University's mission as a global research university dedicated to teaching, discovery, and engagement with society;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate recommends that the Board of Trustees endorse the "Chicago Statement" at their next meeting.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that following a Board of Trustees endorsement, the administration, in consultation with Faculty Senate Leadership, establish in Spring 2026 a working group comprising faculty, administrative, and student representatives to:

d)  develop guidelines for implementing the principles of the "Chicago Statement" university-wide;
e)  develop an oversight or review mechanism, following shared governance norms, to ensure it serves its intended purpose of protecting open inquiry and intellectual pluralism;
f)  steer the process towards implementation with target date of Spring 2027.

1] Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), "2026 College Free Speech Rankings," Published Online September 2025 (retrieved 19 September 2025): https://www.thefire.org/college-free-speech-rankings

[2] Northeastern University Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee Report (April 2025), pg. 13-14 & appendix 7: https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/Report-Academic-Freedom-Ad-Hoc-Committee-AFC-April-16-2025.pdf

[3] "Fire Letter to Northeastern University," from Aaron Corpora (FIRE, Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy) to Dean James R. Hackney (Northeastern University School of Law), 25 April 2025 (retrieved 19 September 2025):
 https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/fire-letter-northeastern-university-april-25-2025

[4]  2025 Northeastern All-faculty survey, question (Q276_1), Likert-type, 5-point confidence scale, *M*=2.20, N=289. Appendix C.

[5]  FIRE "Chicago Statement: University and Faculty Body Support" (retrieved 19 September 2025): https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/report-committee-freedom-expression-university-chicago-september-22-2015

# 8-Resolution for next year's SAC to charge a committee with improving academic freedom for faculty not covered by the Faculty Handbook

WHEREAS Northeastern University is committed to experiential learning, interdisciplinary research, and the pursuit of knowledge through free and open inquiry, which requires robust protection of academic freedom and freedom of expression for all members of the university community; and

WHEREAS Northeastern University articulates its protection of academic freedom and free expression in the Faculty Handbook; and

WHEREAS the Faculty Handbook applies to only full-time faculty at NEU's American campuses, because the Handbook does not cover part-time faculty and does not cover faculty at NEU's Canadian and London campuses; and

WHEREAS if the Board of Trustees endorses the Chicago Statement, as requested in Resolution 7, which would improve the free expression rights of all community members, there would remain important elements of academic freedom to be endorsed for faculty who are not covered by the Faculty Handbook;

BE IT RESOLVED that next year's Senate Agenda Committee shall assign to an appropriate committee the charge of researching how to improve academic freedom for faculty who are not covered by the Faculty Handbook.

# Charge 1 Discussion of Findings

## Section Executive Summary

This section of the report addresses best practices for cultivating learning environments where students and faculty feel comfortable expressing diverse viewpoints while maintaining academic rigor and belonging. Our recommendations emerge from faculty survey data, established scholarship on inclusive pedagogy, and comprehensive efforts at peer institutions, particularly Harvard University's Open Inquiry and Constructive Dialogue Working Group.

## Key Findings:

**Evidence of self-censorship and speech climate concerns at NEU.** Survey data reveals that 40% of faculty have recently begun avoiding certain topics in the classroom, with faculty expressing fear about engaging controversial subjects and concerns about retaliation. One faculty member noted: "I live in fear at Northeastern, at multiple levels, so I try to avoid conflict as much as possible."

**National context mirrors local concerns.** Harvard's parallel study found that 45% of students are reluctant to share views in class, and only 32% of faculty feel comfortable discussing controversial issues outside the classroom (2024). FIRE reports that 40% of conservative students and 21% of liberal students report they self-censor "fairly often" or "very often." This is not unique to NEU but represents a broader challenge in higher education.

**Costs of inaction are significant.** Northeastern ranks 253 out of 257 institutions in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. When students and faculty self-censor, students lose opportunities to develop critical thinking skills essential for citizenship and professional life. Faculty avoid teaching important but controversial topics. The pursuit of knowledge is impoverished when inquiry is constrained by fear rather than guided by evidence and reason.

**Existing belonging initiatives should continue.** Northeastern has offered workshops and programming for inclusive learning environments through CATLR and other offices. The committee affirms that these initiatives should continue and views the recommendations below as complementary, not substitutions.

## Recommendations:

By committee consensus, we recommend a comprehensive four-part framework comprising 17 specific recommendations:

**(1) Classroom pedagogical practices** (11 recommendations): Establishing clear technology policies that prohibit recording and social media use during class to protect candid discussion, evidence-based teaching strategies including co-creating ground rules, requiring evidence-based argumentation, implementing structured perspective-taking exercises, teaching the principle of charity, and scaffolding difficult conversations.

**(2) Faculty development and support** (3 recommendations): Systematic training in facilitating difficult conversations, explicit protection for faculty who teach controversial topics using pedagogically sound methods, and review of investigation procedures to ensure they foreground academic freedom principles.

**(3) Institutional programs and policies** (2 recommendations): Establishment of a civil discourse curriculum (potentially through a new NUPath attribute or 3-credit courses) and annual reporting on viewpoint diversity climate with transparent metrics.

**(4) Institutional neutrality as founding principle** (1 recommendation): Adoption of a policy whereby the university refrains from taking institutional positions on contested political or social issues unrelated to university operations, while protecting robust individual expression across the ideological spectrum. This principle—adopted by 113+ institutions including recently by Stanford, Northwestern, Harvard, and Brown—creates the foundation enabling all other recommendations by ensuring the institution does not predetermine the outcomes of dialogue.

The committee views these recommendations as mutually reinforcing: institutional neutrality establishes the foundation, faculty development provides the tools, institutional policies create accountability, and classroom practices operationalize these principles in daily teaching. Together, they position Northeastern to fulfill its Strategic Plan commitment to "the production of knowledge depends on the complexity and dialogue that emerges from intellectual, political, and ideological diversity" while preparing students to bridge the divisions that increasingly characterize democratic society (Northeastern University, 2020)

**Related Resolutions:**

Four resolutions accompany these recommendations:

- Resolution #1 to share best practices with relevant units
- Resolution #2 to consolidate and communicate existing university rules on classroom recordings
- Resolution #3 for the faculty senate to endorse institutional neutrality for the university and its leaders
- Resolution #4 for faculty senate to recommend board of trustees endorse institutional neutrality for the university and its leaders

## The Committee's Charge

The Academic Freedom Committee was charged to *"research and recommend best practices for fostering viewpoint diversity and cultivating a pluralistic learning environment, while simultaneously supporting all community members' sense of belonging and engagement*."

## Pluralism, Viewpoint Diversity, and Belonging

The terms in our charge—pluralism, viewpoint diversity, and belonging—are often used in overlapping ways, and their meanings vary among different users and across different contexts. Without claiming to be globally definitive, the Committee approaches these ideas and their relationships in the following way:

**Pluralism** is the broadest of these concepts. In an academic context, pluralism describes a learning environment in which people from many different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and traditions engage with one another and with ideas. It encompasses diversity of ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic background, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, geographic origin, and political and ideological perspective. Pluralism goes beyond diversity of demographics to include the active practice of learning across differences, taking seriously perspectives different from one's own, and recognizing that complex questions benefit from multiple approaches and frameworks.

**Viewpoint diversity** is a more specific concept within pluralism, focused on the range of perspectives—particularly political, ideological, and moral perspectives—that are present and can be openly expressed in academic settings. Viewpoint diversity is especially

relevant when addressing contested questions in society: issues where substantial portions of the population hold competing views that influence policy and culture. The goal is not to achieve artificial ideological balance or to treat all views as intellectually equivalent, but to ensure that students encounter the strongest scholarly arguments on genuinely contested questions. Viewpoint diversity serves knowledge and is not an end to itself.

**Belonging** represents Northeastern's specific commitment that all members of our community—regardless of background, identity, or viewpoint—should feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully in the university's academic and social life. Differences should not create barriers to participation in learning, research, or community engagement. Importantly, belonging, pluralism and viewpoint diversity in our view should be mutually reinforcing; students feel they belong before they risk sharing unpopular viewpoints, and exposure to diverse viewpoints helps them to understand they can belong despite differences. Indeed, Northeastern's Office of Belonging has affirmed that: "Our university is stronger as a result of the varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that all members of our global community bring to the pursuit of knowledge. Embracing this pluralism is not the work of one office, department, or academic unit…. By harnessing the power of our differences, we will continue to light the path to bold new ideas and life-changing discoveries" (Northeastern University, 2026). The Committee recognizes the work of CATLR, ADVANCE, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of Belonging in supporting student success and creating welcoming campus environments. The principles articulated in this report complement and reinforce this work by ensuring our university actively embraces pluralism.

## Pluralism and Viewpoint Diversity in the University

Pluralism is essential to the university's educational mission and to preparing students for life in a diverse democracy. At its core, pluralism requires that we collectively accept the reality and persistence of human differences. People will continue to hold different religious and philosophical convictions, different political commitments, different cultural practices, and different approaches to perennial questions. People will come to the university from different backgrounds, carrying different expectations about higher education. The pluralistic response is neither to attempt molding all others into a common pattern—erasing differences through enforced conformity—nor to separate ourselves into homogeneous divisions that never meaningfully interact with those who differ from us.

Instead, pluralism calls us to engage across these persistent differences: to understand perspectives we do not share, to find common ground where possible, and to disagree constructively where necessary. Universities serve this mission by creating structured opportunities for students to encounter diverse perspectives, to feel confident that they will not be subject to personal discrimination for their own differences, to practice the skills of constructive dialogue, and to develop the intellectual humility necessary for learning from those with whom we disagree. As Northeastern's Strategic Plan states, "the production of knowledge depends on the complexity and dialogue that emerges from intellectual, political, and ideological diversity" (Northeastern University, Beyond the Academic Plan, page 2).

Viewpoint diversity, that element of pluralism that references the presence and open expression of competing perspectives on contested questions, serves the pursuit of knowledge in several ways:

**Strengthening critical thinking**: As John Stuart Mill argued, those who know only their own side of a case know little of that (1859). When students must articulate the strongest arguments for positions they disagree with, they develop a deeper understanding of their own positions and the capacity to revise their thinking when evidence warrants.

**Understanding contested questions**: For genuinely contested issues—where substantial portions of society hold competing views that influence policy and culture—students cannot properly understand the debate without examining the strongest arguments from all significant participants. This applies both to perennial questions of human experience (meaning, morality, justice) where multiple philosophical traditions offer competing frameworks, and to contemporary policy debates involving complex empirical and normative matters.

**Preparing for citizenship and professional life**: Graduates will encounter people with diverse perspectives throughout their lives in democratic citizenship and collaborative work. Universities must prepare students to engage productively across ideological differences, to find common ground where possible, and to disagree constructively where necessary.

Engagement with diverse viewpoints does not mean treating all views as intellectually equivalent. When scholarly consensus exists based on overwhelming evidence that a position is false (e.g., that the earth is 6,000 years old, that vaccines are a principal cause of autism), faculty need not present such views as equally credible alternatives. However, understanding why people hold such views, and how to address them through reasoned

argument, remains educationally valuable. The criterion for inclusion considers whether a view is: (1) held by a substantial portion of the population, (2) exerts significant influence on policy or society, and (3) cannot be definitively refuted through evidence and scholarly consensus. This protects academic standards while ensuring students understand the actual debates shaping society. Where genuine knowledge has been established, viewpoint diversity on a specific point naturally lessens. Yet for contested questions, particularly those involving values, priorities, and uncertain empirical matters, maintaining space for multiple rigorous perspectives serves the pursuit of truth.

## Challenges for Northeastern

**Survey Evidence**:

The FIRE Survey ranked Northeastern 253 of 257 universities for speech climate overall, and 214th for political tolerance.

The One NU survey found that roughly one in five faculty members are reluctant to share their political views has remained consistent across both the 2021 and 2023 surveys, suggesting this is a persistent challenge rather than a temporary concern. This pattern underscores the need for us to be intentional about creating spaces on campus where viewpoint diversity is not only welcomed but actively cultivated. This commitment to free thought and speech will enhance engagement and belonging, enriching the educational experience for students and the intellectual environment for faculty (One NU survey, 2021; 2023).

Our 2025 faculty survey revealed:

- Faculty report difficulty getting "students to express views that run counter to the prevailing liberal viewpoints"
- Some faculty express fear about engaging controversial topics: "I live in fear at Northeastern, at multiple levels, so I try to avoid conflict as much as possible"
- Faculty worry about consequences: "Faculty need assurances from the administration that their academic freedom will be protected. Students may not like being challenged, and the current political environment offers them many opportunities to retaliate against any felt discomfort"

**National Context**: Harvard's Working Group found that 45% of students are reluctant to share views in class, and only 32% of faculty feel comfortable discussing controversial issues outside the classroom (2024). The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression

(FIRE) reports that 40% of conservative students and 21% of liberal students self-censor "fairly often" or "very often."

**The Cost of Inaction**: When students and faculty self-censor, students lose opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and to prepare for citizenship and professional life. Faculty avoid teaching important but controversial topics. The pursuit of knowledge is impoverished when inquiry is constrained by fear rather than guided by evidence and reason.

**Alignment with Northeastern's Commitments**: These recommendations operationalize Northeastern University's established values. The Academic Plan states: "To fully understand and solve problems in the context of the human world's interactions, we must sustain a continuous dialogue among people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, ideologies, and intellectual traditions." President Aoun has affirmed that "our ability to acquire and disseminate new knowledge depends on our ability to embrace diverse cultures, viewpoints, and experiences" (Aoun, 2020).

While these commitments have been successfully applied to international and intercultural engagement, faculty surveys document that we have not adequately addressed the challenge of dialogue across domestic political and ideological differences—the form of diversity that faculty and students report as most difficult to navigate on campus.

# Recommendations

**Overview**

Our recommendations focus on: (1) classroom-level pedagogical practices, (2) faculty development and support, (3) institutional policies protecting open inquiry, and (4) institutional neutrality as the foundation enabling all other practices.

The recommendations are intended as multi-step process, and the committee suggests: first, develop training for faculty; second, encourage faculty to incorporate new pedagogical practices in the classroom; third, gauge impact on student learning.

The recommendations in (1) and (2) have also been prepared as a memo for CATLR and ADVANCE, titled "Memo: Best Practices for Viewpoint Diversity and Pluralism – Classroom Pedagogical Practices," so they might consider these ideas in their programming. (The open form responses from the faculty survey are also included in the memo.) The memo is presented in Appendix G. Resolution #1 is a resolution for the Senate Agenda Committee to deliver the memo.

## Classroom Pedagogical Practices

### Recommendation 1: Co-Create Ground Rules and Community Agreements

**Principle**: Establish clear norms for civil discourse through collaborative development with students at the beginning of each course.

**Evidence Base**: Educational research demonstrates that collaboratively developed ground rules generate buy-in and shared accountability. Several respondents in the faculty survey identified useful practices along these lines, e.g., "In the first day of class I set a code of conduct for civil discourse, acknowledging that there are many reasonable perspectives and no 'right' answer" (Faculty Survey Response, Pluralistic Learning).

**Recommended Practices**:

- Co-develop norms with students on day one, integrating both belonging and viewpoint diversity
- Post norms visibly in course management systems
- Reference norms when discussions become tense
- Distinguish between challenging ideas (required) and attacking persons (prohibited)

## Recommendation 2: Require Evidence-Based Argumentation

**Principle**: Establish that claims must be supported with credible evidence and that arguments should be grounded in reason rather than assertion. Viewpoint diversity serves knowledge, not ideology: the goal is to understand the strongest evidence-based arguments for competing positions on contested questions, not to treat all views as equally credible regardless of evidence.

**Recommended Practices**:

- Require students to support claims with scholarly sources
- Teach students to distinguish evidence from opinion, facts from values
- Model grounding arguments in data and research
- Hold all arguments to equal standards of evidence regardless of political orientation
- When students use charged labels, require them to define terms precisely and demonstrate how specific phenomena meet those definitions. For instance, "If a student labels something as 'fascist', I would ask them to define that term and how that phenomenon is fascist, rather than just using the label" (Faculty Survey Response, Intellectual Diversity)
- Distinguish between: (1) questions where evidence-based scholarly consensus exists (students should understand this consensus and its basis); (2) questions where reasonable scholars disagree (students should understand multiple rigorous perspectives); (3) positions that lack scholarly support but are widely held in society (students should understand why people hold these views and how to address them through reasoned argument)

## Recommendation 3: Implement Structured Perspective-Taking Exercises

**Principle**: Use pedagogical techniques that require students to engage seriously with viewpoints they may not hold. The goal is not to achieve artificial balance, but to ensure students can articulate the strongest—not the weakest or most caricatured—version of positions they disagree with. Students cannot properly evaluate a position unless they first understand its most compelling formulation.

**Recommended Practices**:

- Assign students to argue positions they don't hold ("steelman" papers)
- Rotate "devil's advocate" roles systematically

- Use "ideological Turing tests" where students must summarize opposing arguments persuasively enough that holders of those views would recognize them
- Randomly assign debate sides
- Require essays explaining how reasonable people might hold views students disagree with
- For positions that lack scholarly support but are widely held, have students explain why people hold these views and how to address them through reasoned argument rather than dismissal

## Recommendation 4: Teach the "Principle of Charity"

**Principle**: Explicitly teach and model interpreting others' arguments in their strongest, most reasonable form before critiquing them. In addition to other pedagogical values, this practice, if regularly adhered to, will likely reduce self-censorship among those with heterodox views, leveraging existing viewpoint diversity while advancing belonging objectives.

**Recommended Practices**:

- Explicitly teach charitable interpretation as a course norm on day one
- Model by restating student comments generously before responding
- Intervene when discussions devolve into strawman attacks or dismissive characterizations
- Create feedback loops where students internalize this norm and begin self-correcting
- Frame as essential intellectual skill, not just politeness

## Recommendation 5: Distinguish "Safe to Be Wrong" from "Safe from Critique"

**Principle**: Create psychological safety for expressing unpopular views while maintaining intellectual rigor through substantive critique.

**Faculty Implementation**: "Creating genuine intellectual safety while maintaining rigor. Establishing environments where students feel they can voice unpopular or minority viewpoints without social penalty, while still holding all arguments to high standards of evidence and reasoning. The goal is making it safe to be wrong or unconventional, not safe from critique" (Faculty Survey Response, Intellectual Diversity).

**Recommended Practices**:

- Clarify that psychological safety means no social penalty for unpopular views

- Maintain that intellectual rigor requires substantive critique of ideas
- Frame classroom as experimental space for trying out ideas
- Normalize mistake-making and perspective evolution as part of learning

## Recommendation 6: Scaffold Difficult Conversations Over Time

**Principle**: Build trust and rapport before addressing highly charged topics by beginning with less controversial subjects.

**Faculty Implementation**: "Readings to stimulate discussion are purposely chosen to begin with less controversial or flashpoint topics so that we discuss more controversial issues later in the semester once rapport and trust have been built. This IS an essential skill to model in a classroom and a key benefit to a college education" (Faculty Survey Response, Pluralistic Learning).

**Recommended Practices**:

- Progress from simple to complex discussions
- Build relationships early in semester before controversial topics
- Use community-building activities
- Acknowledge that trust requires time to develop
- For high-conflict topics (e.g., Israel-Palestine, abortion, immigration), use highly structured discussion formats and provide multiple ways to participate

## Recommendation 7: Provide Multiple Expression Pathways

**Principle**: Offer both private and public venues for students to express developing ideas.

**Recommended Practices**:

- Include anonymous reflection opportunities
- This may be integrated with recommendations on scaffolding as students develop comfort over time, first expressing views privately, then publicly
- Provide individual written assignments alongside class discussion
- Recognize differential comfort levels while encouraging growth
- Use structured protocols ensuring all voices heard (think-pair-share, round-robin, fishbowl)

**Recommendation 8: Teach Cognitive Biases and Media Literacy**

**Principle**: Provide meta-awareness of how polarization occurs through psychological and technological mechanisms.

**Recommended Practices**:

- Integrate teaching about confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and other cognitive biases
- Analyze how algorithms create echo chambers
- Examine media bias across political spectrum
- Attend trainings on forms of potential bias you may be unfamiliar with, such as CATLR's recent workshops on bias in AI models
- Teach students to recognize their own biases and how personal backgrounds shape perspectives
- Include "lens self-awareness" activities early in courses

## Recommendation 9: Include Diverse Course Materials

**Principle**: Assign readings representing multiple viewpoints and present sources as arguments with purposes, not transparent truth. The goal is not ideological balance for its own sake, but ensuring students encounter the strongest scholarly arguments on contested questions.

**Evidence Base**: While not specific to Northeastern, Shields, Avnur and Muravchik's (2025) analysis of millions of college syllabi found that on controversial topics, canonical texts representing the most typical view within academia were typically assigned without their scholarly critics, creating 'closed classrooms.'

**The Viewpoint Teaching Principle**: VanderWeele (2025) proposes: "If many people believe X about topic Y, and many others do not, then a course on Y should ideally include the strongest arguments for, and against, X." This principle applies when:

- The belief is held by a substantial portion of the population
- The belief exerts significant influence on policy or society
- There is not definitive scholarly consensus that renders the position untenable

**Recommended Practices**:

- Assign readings from multiple scholarly traditions on contested questions
- Include historical and cultural context for understanding different perspectives

- Present materials as arguments requiring evaluation, not as transparent truth
- Ensure major scholarly controversies are represented in course materials (not just the dominant view)
- Display/cite scholars from full range of intellectual traditions
- Use examples that don't assume cultural/political knowledge of only some students
- For perennial questions (meaning, justice, human flourishing), present multiple philosophical and religious frameworks
- For public controversies, ensure students understand the strongest arguments made by all significant participants in the debate
- Distinguish what is established through evidence-based consensus from what remains contested among reasonable scholars

## Recommendation 10: Adopt Modified Chatham House Rules

**Principle**: Protect students from social media exposure and online harassment by establishing non-attribution norms for classroom discussions.

**Evidence Base**: Harvard Business School, Kennedy School and Law School have all adopted Chatham House Rules, and their use is growing elsewhere. One respondent on the faculty survey noted "One approach I've found particularly effective is adapting Chatham House rules for classroom discussions… students may freely use the ideas and arguments discussed in class, but may not attribute specific statements to identifiable individuals outside the classroom setting… This creates psychological safety for students to articulate unpopular or exploratory positions without fear that their comments will be shared on social media" (Faculty Survey Response, Pluralistic Learning).

**Recommended Practices**:

- Encourage faculty to adopt modified Chatham House Rules for controversial discussions
- State policy clearly in syllabi: students may use ideas discussed in class but may not attribute specific statements to identifiable individuals outside the classroom
- Explain rationale: protecting learning environment, not secrecy

## Recommendation 11: Establish Technology and Social Media Policies

**Principle**: Prohibit recording and social media use during class to protect candid discussion.

**Evidence Base**: Harvard's report found that "educators reported concerns about classroom surveillance, given the proliferation of recording devices… The ease of posting

negative comments about classroom conversations on social media disincentivizes spirited debate" (2024).

**Recommended Policies**:

- Prohibit audio/video recording without explicit instructor permission
- Provide accommodations as necessary, e.g. supporting students through Disability Access Services
- Prohibit social media use during class sessions
- Prohibit posting screenshots, quotes, or content identifying speakers
- Explain policies in syllabi with educational rationale
- Adapt where necessary to remote-learning and hybrid teaching models, such as allowing anonymous submission of comments or questions during discussions

This best practice has been presented as Resolution #2 (see page 13).

## Faculty Development and Support

## Recommendation 12: Provide Faculty Development and Training

**Principle**: Offer systematic training in facilitating difficult conversations and managing controversial topics.

**Evidence Base**: Harvard recommends "recognize and support educators, including untenured faculty and non-ladder instructors, who are skilled facilitators of controversial subjects." (2024)

**Recommended Implementation**:

- Establish train-the-trainer program for faculty in targeted programs (law, public health, policy, social sciences)
- Provide workshops on facilitating difficult conversations, including:
    - Protocols for before, during, and after controversial discussions
    - Managing "hot moments" in classroom
    - Balancing intellectual challenge with relational safety
    - Modeling uncertainty and intellectual evolution
- Create community of practice for faculty to share strategies
- Offer teaching center support and consultation
- Develop resource library of pedagogical tools
- Include in new faculty orientation

## Recommendation 13: Protect Faculty Who Teach Controversial Topics

**Principle**: Explicitly state that engaging controversial topics using pedagogically sound methods will not negatively affect employment decisions.

**Evidence Base**: Faculty in the faculty survey worried that "rigorous teaching could adversely affect teaching evaluations—and because teaching evaluations factor into employment decisions, they also worried that unfavorable student reactions… could negatively affect their prospects for tenure or contract renewal."

**Recommended Actions**:

- Issue clear statement supporting faculty who engage controversial topics pedagogically
- Review teaching evaluation processes to ensure they don't penalize intellectual rigor
- Provide mentoring for faculty teaching controversial material
- Consider difficulty of material when evaluating teaching effectiveness
- Ensure faculty understand they have institutional backing for academically appropriate content

## Recommendation 14: Review Investigation Procedures

**Principle**: Ensure that investigations of alleged discrimination, harassment, or bullying foreground academic freedom principles.

**Evidence Base**: Harvard recommended reviewing "the institutional apparatus for investigations of alleged violations… to ensure that they foreground academic freedom in interpreting, applying, and enforcing the policies." Faculty and students worried that "classroom debates could trigger complaints and investigations; consequently, they choose to self-censor." (2024)

**Recommended Actions**:

- Train investigators in academic freedom principles
- Ensure procedures distinguish protected academic discourse from prohibited conduct
- Include academic freedom experts in review of classroom-related complaints
- Provide clear standards distinguishing robust intellectual exchange from genuine harassment
- Develop protocol for consistent, viewpoint-neutral enforcement

- Develop and distribute informational material to help ensure understand the investigation procedure

# Institutional Programs and Policies

## Recommendation 15: Establish Civil Discourse Curriculum

**Principle**: Develop systematic training in civil discourse as educational and professional competency.

**Evidence Base**: Harvard recommended developing "a required teaching module for new undergraduates on constructive disagreement. The ability to engage controversial subjects effectively can be taught and learned. This skill can and should be framed as an important aspect of educational and professional competency." (2024)

**Recommended Implementation**:

- Explore developing curriculum, possibly by creating a new NUPath "Civil Discourse" attribute, or through 3-credit courses in multiple disciplines with core elements of civil discourse and constructive disagreement
- Initially target programs with professional need: law, public health, public policy, social sciences, along with early undergraduates
- Include curriculum on: cognitive biases and media literacy; principle of charity; evidence-based argumentation; structured debates on controversial topics; transfer to professional contexts
- Establish train-the-trainer program for faculty facilitators
- Create peer facilitator program using course alumni
- Connect to Northeastern's co-op program as career-ready competency

These best practices have been presented in Resolution #1 (see page 12).

## Recommendation 16: Establish Annual Reporting and Review

**Principle**: Create transparency and accountability through regular assessment of viewpoint diversity climate.

**Recommended Metrics**:

- Student surveys on comfort expressing diverse views (disaggregated by political orientation, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, first-generation status, major, year)
- Faculty surveys on self-censorship and comfort engaging controversial topics
- Faculty surveys on ideological and political views, measured along with other aspects of faculty diversity
- FIRE ranking progress (current: 253 of 257)
- Review of formal complaints and investigations
- Integration metrics: students' ability to form relationships across difference; productive disagreement without relationship rupture

**Implementation**:

- Annual comprehensive assessment with public reporting
- Transparent data on both belonging and viewpoint climate metrics
- Identification of areas needing improvement and showcase of successful initiatives

### *Institutional Neutrality*

## Recommendation 17: Adopt a Policy of Institutional Neutrality

**Principle**: The university should refrain from taking institutional positions on contested political or social issues unrelated to university operations, while protecting robust individual expression across the ideological spectrum.

**Definition**: Institutional neutrality means that the university as an institution does not take positions on political, social, or policy questions except where they directly affect university operations or academic freedom. Individual faculty, students, and staff retain full freedom to express their views and engage in political activity.

**Historical Foundation**: This principle originates in the University of Chicago's 1967 Kalven Report (Kalven et al., 1967) which established that "the university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic." As of late 2025, a large number of institutions have adopted institutional neutrality policies, including Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Brown, Northwestern, and Tufts (Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, n.d.).

**Why Institutional Neutrality Is Essential**

First, institutional neutrality respects institutional competence and preserves legitimate authority.

The university as an institution possesses expertise in education and research administration, but lacks institutional competence in most matters of political and social controversy. Institutional statements crowd out the individual expert voices of faculty members who should be engaging these issues based on their specialized scholarly knowledge – the institution's voice doesn't add to academic debate, it flattens and supplants it.  Universities have earned legitimate authority in specific domains – evaluating scholarship, certifying educational achievement, maintaining academic standards. When we speak beyond our competence, we erode the connection between institutional authority and actual expertise, contributing to declining public trust. By exercising restraint, we enable rather than displace genuine expertise and preserve the legitimate authority essential to our educational mission.

Second, institutional neutrality creates space for genuine viewpoint diversity and protects dissenting voices.

When universities make institutional statements on contested issues, they create perceptions of institutional orthodoxy that chill dissent from faculty and students who disagree, regardless of intent. Even well-intentioned statements signal which views are acceptable, making it more difficult for those with contrary positions to express them without appearing to oppose the institution itself. Moreover, such statements generate expectations that the university will comment on subsequent events, creating impossible-to-fulfill demands and making the selection of which topics receive institutional attention a politically charged decision reflecting unstated priorities. For examples of Northeastern's past statements on matters beyond core mission, see Appendix G.

Third, institutional neutrality preserves trust within and beyond the university community.

Internally, when the institution appears to favor particular views, faculty and students holding contrary positions reasonably fear consequences for expressing them, leading to self-censorship that undermines genuine intellectual diversity. Survey evidence from Northeastern shows that approximately one in five faculty and students already fear sharing their views—institutional position-taking on contested issues risks worsening this climate. Externally, institutional position-taking contributes to declining public trust in higher education, as universities are increasingly perceived as political actors advancing particular ideological commitments rather than knowledge institutions

committed to open inquiry. This declining trust threatens the university's long-term sustainability and effectiveness in fulfilling its educational mission.

<u>Fourth, institutional neutrality enables effective pedagogy.</u>

The classroom practices recommended above—presenting multiple viewpoints, requiring students to argue positions they do not hold, teaching the principle of charity—are undermined when institutional statements suggest which conclusions are acceptable. Students cannot genuinely engage in open inquiry when the institution has already signaled the "right answer." Faculty may feel pressure to align their teaching with perceived institutional positions or may hesitate to present perspectives that appear to contradict institutional stance. Institutional neutrality protects the intellectual independence essential to rigorous teaching and authentic student learning, ensuring that conclusions emerge from evidence and argument rather than institutional authority.

<u>Fifth, institutional neutrality fits with Northeastern's role as a global university</u>

Institutional neutrality is particularly appropriate for Northeastern as a global university with campuses across multiple states and countries, each embedded in distinct political environments where views on issues or topics may differ considerably.  Rather than being pulled toward adopting a particular local perspective, a stance of restraint provides a policy guardrail against such pressures.

**What Institutional Neutrality Means in Practice**:

The university will:

- Refrain from institutional statements on partisan political issues, domestic policy controversies, or international conflicts except where they directly affect the core mission or university operations.
- Distinguish clearly between institutional speech and individual expression by faculty, students, and staff
- Protect robust debate among community members across the ideological spectrum
- Ensure policies are applied consistently regardless of viewpoint
- Avoid using institutional resources to advance political or ideological positions
- Assure that the university will not be used as an ideological platform or instrument of orthodoxy, whether by internal or external actors.

The university will continue to:

- Make statements on issues directly affecting university operations (funding, accreditation, academic freedom)
- Speak on matters of educational policy and academic values
- Advocate for the conditions necessary for education and research
- Protect community members from discrimination and harassment
- Respond to events directly affecting campus safety and operations

**Relationship to Other Recommendations**: Institutional neutrality is a foundation enabling all other recommendations. Without it:

- Ground rules lack credibility ("the institution already told us what to think")
- Evidence-based discourse is undermined ("institution has predetermined conclusions")
- Faculty fear consequences for presenting disfavored views
- Students perceive penalties for expressing minority positions
- Civil discourse training appears hypocritical

**Implementation**:

- Adopt formal policy of institutional neutrality
- Train administrators on distinguishing institutional from individual speech
- Review past institutional statements to identify areas of concern
- Establish protocol for when institutional statements are necessary

This best practice has been presented as Resolutions #3 and #4 (see page 15 and 17).

## Conclusion

These recommendations constitute a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to cultivating pluralistic learning environments where viewpoint diversity and belonging are mutually reinforcing rather than competing values. They build on Northeastern's established commitments to dialogue across differences, extend proven practices to address domestic political polarization, and align with best practices at peer institutions. They also move to safeguard pluralistic values and an open, welcoming campus culture proactively against threats to academic freedom from wherever derived.

The Committee wishes to re-emphasize these recommendations aim not at artificial ideological balance or treating all views as intellectually equivalent, but at ensuring students encounter the strongest scholarly arguments on contested questions in an

environment that protects them from personal discrimination. For perennial questions of human experience, questions of meaning, morality, and justice, students benefit from understanding multiple philosophical traditions and personal backgrounds rather than presuming definitive answers. For matters of public controversy, students cannot understand debates without examining the best arguments made by all participants. Where evidence-based scholarly consensus exists, that consensus should be taught—but students should understand its basis and how to address contrary views held by substantial portions of society through reasoned argument. The mechanism for reducing viewpoint diversity should be evidence and reason, not suppression.

Implementation will require sustained commitment, adequate resources, and visible leadership support. As faculty responses emphasized: "Starts at the top—leadership must model open and constructive dialogue" (Faculty Survey Response, Intellectual Diversity). The university must demonstrate through actions, not just words, that viewpoint diversity is valued and that faculty who engage controversial topics pedagogically will be supported.

Success will be measured not by achieving particular political ratios but by creating conditions where:

- Students develop skills to engage across ideological differences
- Faculty feel confident facilitating difficult conversations
- Students and faculty both see the university stepping up as an institution to protect their right to free expression
- The pursuit of knowledge proceeds through evidence and reason
- The university serves all of society, not just those sharing prevailing campus views
- The university is open to all elements of society who seek to learn
- Northeastern rises as a leader in preparing students for democratic citizenship

As Northeastern University's strategic plan states, "the production of knowledge which depends on the complexity and dialogue that emerges from intellectual, political, and ideological diversity" (Northeastern University, 2020). Implementing these recommendations positions Northeastern to meet that challenge by preparing students to bridge the divisions that increasingly characterize American society. Whatever our individual ideologies and perspectives, our devotion to educational excellence and the pursuit of knowledge unites us. Through these recommendations, we can build a university community where that shared purpose flourishes.

# Charge 2 Discussion of Findings

Charge 2: Review the Chicago Statement thoroughly and make a recommendation about whether Northeastern should officially adopt it.

**Section Executive Summary**

This section of the report examines whether Northeastern University should officially adopt the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago (2014), commonly known as the "Chicago Principles" or "Chicago Statement." The Chicago Principles prioritize the broadest possible freedom of expression on campus with only narrow exceptions and have been adopted by over 100 colleges and universities.

**Key Findings:**

**Evidence of academic freedom and free expression concerns at NEU.** Survey data shows 40% of faculty have recently begun avoiding certain topics in the classroom. NEU ranks 253 out of 257 institutions in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's 2025 College Free Speech Rankings (a 75-place decline from the previous year), and 61% of faculty have low confidence that administration would protect controversial speech. The Student Government Association endorsed the Chicago Principles in November 2025.

**Significant differences between NEU's current statement and the Chicago Principles.** NEU's Statement on Free Expression conditions free expression on "civility," while the Chicago Statement explicitly states that civility concerns "can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas." Additionally, the Chicago Statement addresses time/place/manner restrictions, legal limitations on speech, and applies to all community members, whereas NEU's statement is limited to full-time faculty at U.S. campuses.

**Strong scholarly support for and free expression.** The AAUP—the cited authority in NEU's Faculty Handbook—takes a position aligned with the Chicago Principles, stating that "no idea can be banned or forbidden" and that speech restrictions, even well-intentioned ones, constitute mission failure. Research suggests exposure to challenging viewpoints provides educational benefit, and there is no workable alternative to protecting broad expression.

**Concerns about potential negative consequences.** Critics argue the Chicago Principles may prioritize free expression at the expense of truth-seeking, that incivility can itself limit speech for marginalized groups, and that such principles are often inconsistently applied

in practice. Some scholars contend that in specific cases involving historically marginalized groups, equality should take precedence over unrestricted expression.

**Recommendation:** By a vote of 4-1, the committee recommends that the Faculty Senate endorse the Chicago Statement and request Board of Trustees endorsement, with revision of the Faculty Handbook's free expression statement to reflect the Chicago Principles. The committee views academic freedom and free expression as the primary value supporting the University's mission, while recognizing that civility, respectfulness, and belonging remain important secondary values best promoted through the practices outlined in Charge 1.

**Structure:**

Section 1 introduces the charge.  Section 2 compares the NEU statement and the Chicago statement.  Section 3 presents the committee's findings of concerns about academic freedom and free expression at Northeastern.  Section 4 presents the arguments supporting the Chicago statement.  Section 5 presents the arguments against the Chicago statement.  Section 6 presents the committee's synthesis and its recommendations, and this section is supported by 4 of the 5 committee members.

## SECTION 1:  Introduction: The Chicago Principles and Committee Charge

The Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago (2014), articulates core principles regarding freedom of expression on a university campus. It is usually called either the "Chicago Statement" or the "Chicago Principles" (Chicago Principles, 2014), and is available in its entirety at the end of this report (Appendix A).

The Chicago Principles can broadly be characterized as prioritizing the broadest possible academic freedom and freedom of expression on campus, allowing only narrow exceptions.  Because Northeastern University is a private university, faculty do not have special First Amendment rights on campus; the Chicago Principles might be considered as a statement that faculty expression should be as free on campus as it is on adjacent city streets.

Charge #2 asks the committee to recommend whether or not NEU should affirm the Chicago Principles.  The Chicago Principles have been adopted or affirmed by over 100 colleges and universities.  The Chicago Principles represent a widely recognized model for

institutions seeking to strengthen their commitment to academic freedom and free expression.


## SECTION 2: Comparison: NEU's Statement vs. Chicago Principles

NEU has a "Statement on Free Expression" as part of the Academic Freedom module of the Faculty Handbook. The question, therefore, is: would it be an improvement to adopt the Chicago Principles over the current NEU Statement? The committee identified 4 key differences between the two statements:

1. **Treatment of civility as a condition for speech:** The statements differ in terms of the concept and word of "civility". NEU conditions its Free Expression statement on participants being "civil", while the Chicago Statement does not (see below, emphasis added).

   NEU Statement on Free Expression: "A foundational principle of Northeastern University is that a global, multicultural, diverse and inclusive community is vital to learning, discovery, and innovation at the highest levels of human endeavor. Further, we believe that an institution of higher learning has a responsibility to foster a community that protects and supports free expression, welcomes open dialogue on critical issues, and maintains an inclusive educational environment where diverse views can be safely expressed and debated by community members in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect" (NEU Faculty Handbook).

   Chicago Statement: "Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community." (Chicago, 2014)


2. **Time, place, and manner restrictions:** The statements differ in terms of references to time, place & manner limitations on free expression (such as no bullhorns at midnight).

   NEU Statement on Free Expression does not mention time, place and manner limitations.

   The Chicago Statement describes the need for time, place & manner limitations and argues that these should be narrowly construed:

"The University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas" (Chicago, 2014) .

3. **Legal limitations on expression:** The statements differ in terms of references to the legal limitations on free expression.

   Chicago Statement reference to expression "that violates the law" provides flexibility across jurisdictions while maintaining clear commitment to free expression: "The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. The University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University." (Chicago, 2014)
   NEU Statement on Free Expression does not mention the legal framework.  Because Northeastern University has campuses in different American states and in different countries, different legal frameworks apply (e.g. Title VI and Title IX in the USA, Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada, varying state harassment and defamation laws).

4. **Scope of coverage: who is protected:** The statements differ in terms of the scope of who is covered

   NEU Statement as part of the Faculty Handbook, it applies only to full-time faculty at USA campuses.  Part-time faculty, and faculty in Canada and the UK are not covered by the Handbook.

   Chicago Statement covers all community members (emphasis added):  "Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees *all members of the University community* the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, the University of Chicago fully respects and supports the freedom of *all members of the University community* 'to discuss any problem that presents itself.'" (Chicago, 2014)

5. **Heckler's veto.** The statements differ in terms of addressing the shutting down of speech that is often called a "heckler's veto," when otherwise permissible speech is silenced, because of actual or anticipated hostile reactions from opponents.  An example of a heckler's veto is the disruption of an invited campus speaker event by attendees who shout down the speaker.  Another example is the acceptance or ratification of a heckler's veto by the administration when they anticipate opposition, either by directly forbidding or by making onerous requirements that burden those trying to speak rather than those trying to restrict speech.

NEU Statement on Free Expression does not reference explicitly or implicitly the heckler's veto.

The Chicago Statement encompasses heckler's veto scenarios (without using that specific term):

"As a corollary to the University's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it."

## SECTION 3:  Evidence of Academic Freedom and Free Expression Problems at NEU

The committee began by asking if there is a problem with academic freedom and free expression and academic freedom to be solved at NEU.  The committee found evidence that there is a problem, including:

1. Faculty self-censorship: survey evidence of "silence in the classroom"

   Survey research shows that faculty have begun self-censoring.  The is a national trend and is also clearly evident at NEU.  In the November 2025 all-faculty survey, in response to the question: "In my personal experience, I have recently begun avoiding certain topics in the classroom," 40 % of faculty responded that they either agree or strongly agree ($M$=2.95, N=463).

   Some differences in agreement were found across colleges. Notably, 62 % of faculty in the D'Amore-McKim College of Business ($M$=3.65, N=48) responded that they had

recently begun avoiding certain topics in the classroom, while this was true of only 20 % of faculty in the College of Sciences (*M*=2.48, N=95).

Nationwide research on faculty concerns in the classroom. A recent report "Silence in the Classroom" reported that "27% of faculty feel unable to speak freely for fear of how students, administrators, or other faculty would respond" and "42% of faculty reported being likely to self-censor in classroom discussions." (Honeycutt, 2024). A survey by *Inside Higher Ed* Hanover Research (N=1,100) found similar patterns. Notably, "over half said they've often or occasionally altered language in something they've written out of worry it might cause controversy" and "one in four respondents said they've often or occasionally refrained from assigning students texts or articles that might be considered controversial" (Quinn, 2024).

2. National rankings: NEU ranks 253 of 257 in campus speech climate

   Annually, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression publishes its College Free Speech Rankings. In the most recent 2026 rankings, NEU ranks number 253 out of 257 institutions, earning an overall score of 46.8 out of 100 and a grade of "F" for its speech climate, and is noted by name in the annual report as among the worst five universities in the nation under this ranking. NEU's current rank represents a decline of 75 places from the a survey conducted in 2024.

   Furthermore, in April 2025, FIRE sent a letter to NEU alleging viewpoint discrimination in invited speaker academic events (FIRE, April 2025).

3. Faculty lack confidence in administrative support for controversial speech

   Results from the November 2025 all-faculty survey demonstrated that on a scale of 1 to 5, 1=Not at all Confident, 5=Extremely Confident, a majority of faculty (61%) have low confidence,( responding "not at all confident" or "not very confident") that the administration would protect a speaker's rights to express controversial views (see Q276, *M*=2.20, N=289, Appendix C).

4. Student perspective: SGA endorsement and concerns about faculty self-censorship

On 17 November 2025, the Student Government Association voted to adopt the Chicago Principles.  The legislation "A Senate Resolution to Create Light, Truth, and Courage Reforms" (SR-FA-25-102), proposes that "the adoption of the University of Chicago Principles would promote open dialogue both inside and outside the classrooms" and that adopting these principles "will better align Northeastern University policy with its mission statement, creating a more welcoming environment enabling everyone to thrive, succeed, and feel a strong sense of belonging."  The resolution passed by vote 24-8 with 3 abstentions (Oakes & Lyle, 2025).

Furthermore, in stakeholder conversations, the committee discovered that students are concerned about faculty self-censorship in the classroom.  The classroom is arguably the most important space at any university.  It is where students and faculty interact, and it is a space with academic freedom and free expression concerns.

6.  The committee was made aware that faculty have expressed concerns about the new "Demonstration Permit Application" as restrictive of their free expression.  The permit requires a faculty member to answer the questions "How are you advertising?" and "Do you anticipate any non-NU participation?".  The application then clarifies that that "non-NU affiliated individuals are not allowed, per policy."  The form opens the possibility of denying a demonstration under the rationale that any publicity of an event on social media or on the web creates an irrebuttable presumption that non-NU affiliates will be present.

## SECTION 4:  Arguments Supporting the Chicago Principles

The committee found arguments in favor of the Chicago Principles.  This section presents a snapshot of different positions in favor of Chicago.  It is not a comprehensive review.

AAUP Policy Statement

When researching perspectives on the Chicago Principles, the committee gave special weight to the AAUP position because it is the cited authority in the NEU Faculty Handbook's Academic Freedom Module.  The committee found that, in general, the Chicago Principles are in line with the AAUP's position on free expression and campus speech codes.  Here are the main AAUP points and relevant considerations for NEU:

1.  AAUP adopts free speech maximalist position

The AAUP position on speech might be described as a free speech maximalist one:

- o "On a campus that is free and open, no idea can be banned or forbidden. No viewpoint or message may be deemed so hateful or disturbing that it may not be expressed" (AAUP 1994).

2. AAUP warns against well-intentioned speech restrictions

The AAUP asserts that even well-intentioned restrictions on free expression, such as a desire to prevent racist speech, should be avoided:

- o "In response to verbal assaults and use of hateful language, some campuses have felt it necessary to forbid the expression of racist, sexist, homophobic, or ethnically demeaning speech .... [W]hile we can acknowledge both the weight of these concerns and the thoughtfulness of those persuaded of the need for regulation, rules that ban or punish speech based upon its content cannot be justified." (AAUP 1994).

3. Free expression as precondition for academic mission

The AAUP position on free speech, including offensive speech, is a principled position related to the university's mission:

- o "Free speech is not simply an aspect of the educational enterprise to be weighed against other desirable ends. It is the very precondition of the academic enterprise itself" (AAUP 1994).

- o Accordingly, curbing speech constitutes mission failure: "An institution of higher learning fails to fulfill its mission if it asserts the power to proscribe ideas—and racial or ethnic slurs, sexist epithets, or homophobic insults almost always express ideas, however repugnant. Indeed, by proscribing any ideas, a university sets an example that profoundly disserves its academic mission" (AAUP 1994).

4. Practical difficulties of implementing speech codes

The AAUP position is also based on practical considerations about the logistics of implementing speech restrictions.

- o "A speech code unavoidably implies an institutional competence to distinguish permissible expression of hateful thought from what is proscribed as thoughtless hate" (AAUP 1994).

Perspectives in Higher-ed Trade Publications and Peer-Reviewed Scholarship

5. Disrupting speakers contradicts academic freedom

There is broad agreement that disruptions to planned speakers that are meant to "shut down" these speakers are contrary to academic freedom in both peer-review scholarship and trade publications. For example, Staley argues that Chicago's commitment to defending free speech – allowing controversial viewpoints to be heard and debated – provides the greatest educational benefit. Exposure to opposing viewpoints, even objectionable ones, allows students to understand and intellectually refute bad ideas rather than simply suppressing or avoiding them. Universities should invite uncomfortable ideas (Staley 2019).

6. Psychological research: no workable alternative to free speech

Taking a psychological science approach, Ceci & Williams argue against speech restrictions. Although the authors do not directly reference the Chicago Principles, they reference related University of Chicago publications about free expression (including Ellison 2020 & Zimmer 2016). They propose 2 core principles to guide campus speech:

Their first principle is "There is really no alternative to free and open speech". The analysis is that there is no better alternative to free speech:

- o "Almost any speech act is offensive to some group: talks on abortion, gay marriage, affirmative action, sex differences in spatial ability, Black Lives Matter (BLM), the origin of the universe, immigrants, fetal stem cells, drilling in the Artic, White privilege, and so forth, offend the moral sensibilities of some groups and can be sources of genuine stress and discomfort. Some advocates of safe spaces regard the discussion of such topics as forms of violence to be banned. Because almost anything can be offensive and cause stress to someone, the least tolerant individuals will get to decide what speech is permitted on campuses ... There is simply no better alternative than to allow those with unpopular views to express them and to allow those wishing to hear them to do so. ... This principle, which essentially amounts to the assertion that there is no

satisfactory alternative to free speech, is superordinate to the following corollaries."

The authors suggest two subordinate corollaries to the first principle: "humility" and "marketplace of ideas". Apropos the former: psychological research shows that we all have biases; education should instill modesty about our opinions. Apropos the latter, open debate allows better arguments to prevail over time; silencing opponents forces views underground. The topics of "civility" and "viewpoint diversity" are also addressed as best practices in Charge 1 of this report.

Their second principle is that "College experiences should involve challenging our beliefs even when those experiences go beyond our comfort level." In their view, the hearer's discomfort with arguments does not constitute violence by those making the argument. The authors contend that universities should expose students to identity-challenging viewpoints and disconfirming evidence:

- "Exposure to controversial points of view does not constitute violence."
- "Indeed, colleges owe it to their students to challenge their views by considering opposing viewpoints, even identity-shattering ones, and to force us to grapple with disconfirmatory evidence."

The authors also suggest two subordinate corollaries to the second principle: "No group decides for all" and "Protestors have rights too." The former is the idea that no campus faction should determine what the entire community can discuss. And latter is the idea that critics should have venues to express disagreement (rebuttals, Q&A) without preventing others from hearing speakers. The topics of "heckler's veto" and "constructive disagreement" are also addressed as best practices in Charge 1 of this report.


<u>Northeastern-specific context</u>

7. NEU context: "civility" lacks agreed-upon definition

   Last year's Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Committee found that there is no agreed-upon definition of civility and respectful debate, which leaves considerable grey area for discretion and interpretation. (NEU-AFC, Spring 2025).


8. NEU stakeholder consensus: defining civility is not feasible

This year's Faculty Senate asked campus stakeholders about the feasibility of defining "civility" and "respectful debate". The consensus was that it is not recommendable, as a matter of principle and in terms of practical considerations, to proscribe definitions of civility and respectfulness. This point is discussed further in Charge 3.

9. Unanswered questions if NEU does not adopt Chicago Principles

If NEU does not adopt the Chicago Statement, questions about academic freedom and free expression should be addressed. The practical dimensions referenced by the AAUP (described in point #4 above), should be considered within the NEU context:

- When conflicts arise at NEU (such as over controversial topics), who should decide what expression is allowed and what is not: department chairs, deans, administrators, others?
- How should they decide: by established protocols, by their personal judgement on a case-by-case basis, by a transparent committee, by a secret process?
- Are decisions subject to appeal or oversight, and if so by whom?
- How will NEU ensure that the decisions are guided by the principles of academic freedom and free expression?
- How will NEU safeguard against the suppression of expression a heckler's veto?

Historical Precedent in American Higher Education

The committee further found that support for the position represented by the Chicago Principles can be seen over the long chronological span. Earlier moments of political tension on American university campuses, such as in the 1960s and 1970s, resulted in reports that articulated the core value of free expression to the university mission.

While Northeastern University experienced campus speech controversies during this time, the committee did not find any formal reports on the events (NEU Library, 2020). The committee consulted a contemporaneous report from Yale University.

10. Historical support: Yale 1974 report as precedent

Following a series of events on controversial topics on campus, the "Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression at Yale" (1974) articulates the value and priority of free expression. The Yale report describes the core value of free expression in a university's mission:

- o "The primary function of a university is to discover and disseminate knowledge by means of research and teaching. To fulfill this function a free interchange of ideas is necessary not only within its walls but with the world beyond as well. It follows that the university must do everything possible to ensure within it the fullest degree of intellectual freedom" (Yale, 1974).

And the Yale report describes that the value of free expression has priority over the value of civility, suggesting that a university should seek to inculcate a culture of civil discourse but that the value of civility is secondary to the value of free expression:

- o "Without sacrificing its central purpose, [the University] cannot make its primary and dominant value the fostering of friendship, solidarity, harmony, civility, or mutual respect. To be sure, these are important values; other institutions may properly assign them the highest, and not merely a subordinate priority; and a good university will seek and may in some significant measure attain these ends. But it will never let these values, important as they are, override its central purpose. We value freedom of expression precisely because it provides a forum for the new, the provocative, the disturbing, and the unorthodox. Free speech is a barrier to the tyranny of authoritarian or even majority opinion as to the rightness or wrongness of particular doctrines or thoughts" (Yale 1974).

The historical context shows that the concerns represented by the Chicago statement, and debates about the depth and scope of academic freedom and free expression, have shaped American higher education for a very long time.

The committee also found arguments against adoption of the Chicago Principles.  The following section presents a snapshot of different positions in favor of Chicago.  It is not a comprehensive review.

## SECTION 5: Arguments Against Chicago

Faculty Survey

The faculty survey administered in Fall 2025 included several questions related to Charge 2.

1. Q221_1 (N=437) asked whether Northeastern faculty value academic freedom over civility. This focus is deliberate as the inclusion of a 'civility provision' in Northeastern's

Statement on Free Expression a main difference between that policy and the Chicago Principles.  It asked faculty to rank the values of "civility", "academic freedom" and "belonging" relative to one another. As shown in the ranking results for Q221_1 Appendix C:

- 25.6% of respondents, the largest group, ranked Civility first, ahead of Free Expression, and placed Belonging last.
- 17.6% of respondents, the second largest group, ranked Civility first, ahead of Belonging, and placed Free Expression last.

Combining all the responses and just examining the primary value:
- 43.2% of faculty ranked Civility as their first and primary value;
- 28.6% of faculty ranked Free Expression first and their primary value;
- 28.1% ranked Belonging first and their primary value.

Civility therefore emerges as the dominant priority, surpassing Free Expression by a 14.6% margin. Meanwhile, Free Expression and Belonging are effectively tied as secondary values.

2. Q195 (N=382) asked how community members should respond when a speaker on a controversial topic is invited to campus. The answer options were drawn from behaviors that commonly occur in real campus settings, and faculty were allowed to select multiple responses. The "Check all that are appropriate" results for Q195 are shown in Appendix C and below:

- 88% of respondents indicated that "standing outside the event" and "holding signs outside the event" are appropriate.
- 59% indicated that "chanting outside the event" is appropriate
- 4% indicated  that "shouting down a speaker during the event" is appropriate
- 2% indicated that "blocking access to the venue" is appropriate

Taken together, these results demonstrate a consistent principle: as incivility and disruption increase, faculty overwhelmingly reject such behaviors. Support does not gradually taper off, it collapses.

3. Q196 (N=333) addressed a situation that commonly occurs on campus: a demonstration that includes students and faculty members. Here, we asked what is appropriate for those demonstrating to engage in. Again, faculty were allowed to select

multiple responses, "Check all that are appropriate." The results for Q196 are shown in Appendix C and provided here:

- 83% view "chanting loud repetitive phrases" as appropriate.
- 58% view "Protesting overnight" as appropriate.
- 38% view "set up an encampment" as appropriate.
- 26% view "shouting remarks at students as they pass by the protest" as appropriate.
- 18% view "entering buildings while classes are in session" or "occupying buildings" as appropriate.

Taken together, these results show that faculty strongly support protest activity so long as it remains relatively non-disruptive, but approval collapses as actions become more intrusive and less civil.

4. Q224 (N=388) considered the specific contexts in which faculty express concern about academic freedom and free expression and asked faculty to "Select all that apply." The results for Q224 are shown in Appendix C and listed here:

- 63% in classroom discussion
- 59% in external grants and funding
- 54% in academic research
- 29% in inviting guests to speak in classes
- 31% in speakers invited to campus (outside of class)
- 34% in using personal versus university devices and Wi-Fi

Taken together, these results show that faculty concern about academic freedom is concentrated in core academic functions, such as teaching, research, and funding.

Perspectives in Higher-ed Trade Publications and Peer-Reviewed Scholarship

5. Other Principles besides Academic Freedom are also important

The Chicago Principles promote academic freedom *at the expense* of other principles that are fundamental to a university. Academic freedom is not the only principle that is fundamental to a university. Other principles are also fundamental. But the Chicago Principles elevates academic freedom above all other principles. For instance, freedom of expression can come "in direct tension with the fundamental regard the university must also have for the truth" (Wood, 2015). In doing so, the Chicago Principles elevate misrepresentation, lies, fabrication above the pursuit of truth, because they protect "the liar in his exercise of the right" (Wood, 2015).

This conflicts with the pursuit of truth, which is fundamental to a university and another governing principle which is "the need to provide students with a coherent education" (Wood, 2015). This puts the Chicago Principles in conflict with the fundamental purpose of a university. We must "understand this freedom not as an end in itself but as purposeful – which in turn means that we must pay attention to its purposes" (Wood, 2015).

6. Incivility can limit speech

The university has a "responsibility and interest in creating an environment that ensures freedom of expression for all students, faculty, and staff" (Spencer, Tyahur & Jackson, 2016: 55). This is the reason to view "civility as a condition for academic freedom and not always an obstacle" (Spencer et al., 2016: 55). Civility supports a university's obligation to maintain an environment where *all* can speak. This builds on a common argument that "speech that poisons the communal well can reasonably be limited or forbidden" (Behrent, 2019). Universities are public goods of inclusiveness and this requires groups to acknowledge that "society is not just for them" (Waldron, 2012).

By signaling respect for the dignity and personhood of others, civility makes individuals more willing to voice ideas, ask questions, and engage in disagreement without fear of ridicule, harassment, or intimidation. In this sense, civility does not suppress disagreement; rather, it creates the conditions under which disagreement can occur productively and repeatedly. An environment characterized by civility is therefore not merely polite, but "academically engaging and intellectually generous" (Spencer et al, 2016: 61) because it creates space for open inquiry, encourages risk-taking in thought, and enables a wider range of voices to enter academic conversations, thereby strengthening, rather than weakening, academic freedom.

7. Inconsistent Application

While the Chicago Principles are often presented as a neutral and robust defense of academic freedom, their adoption has frequently been accompanied by inconsistent and selective application in practice. Critics note that institutions invoking the Principles tend to enforce them unevenly, protecting some forms of expression while sanctioning others that are politically or administratively inconvenient, thereby undermining the very neutrality the Principles purport to guarantee (Fish, 2014). Even universities adopting the Chicago Principles often retain broad administrative latitude to discipline speech when reputational, legal, or donor pressures arise, revealing a gap between formal endorsement and operational reality (Nelson, 2019).

8. Distinction between speech and protest

While speech is generally considered protected, there is consensus that protest oftentimes is disruptive and goes against the mission of the university. Thus, the argument is that the Chicago Principles only protect speech, but not protest (Ford, 2024), which can disrupt learning and the functioning of a university.

9. Prioritizing free speech perpetuates uneven hierarchies

Academic freedom advocates too often overlook how power and inequality shape who is actually able to participate in the marketplace of ideas and on what terms. This is especially evident when "expression targeting a historically marginalized group undermines the educational opportunities and environment for members of that group in the university community" (Feldman, 2024: 816). In these circumstances, "equality should take precedence over free speech" (Feldman, 2024: 815). This is because marginalized groups are already disadvantaged and when speech targets them, this speech "aligns with and reinforces those structures of power" (Feldman, 2024: 817). This parallels arguments that the benefits of free speech are unevenly distributed, with economic and racial privilege determining who gains the most from expansive speech protections. Prioritizing free speech over concerns about civility can perpetuate these inequalities (Behrent, 2019).

10. Civility as a precondition has historically been supported

Arguments around the regulation of racial epithets and vilification on university campuses predate the Chicago Principles. Colleges and universities long struggled with how to respond to rising racist speech on campus (Altman, 1993). One response was to regulate speech that harasses students on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, sexual orientation, or national and ethnic origin. Importantly what constituted harassment included personal vilification "directly to the individual or individuals whom it insults or stigmatizes; and makes use of insulting or "fighting" works or non-verbal symbols" (Lawrence, 1990: 451).

## SECTION 6: Synthesis and Recommendations (by vote 4-1)

Considering the arguments in favor and against the Chicago Principles, the committee finds that, in balance, endorsing the Chicago Principles would be an improvement for Northeastern University.

This does not mean that the committee advocates for a "wild west" approach to expression on campus. The committee recognizes the value of civility, respectfulness, friendship and belonging in all areas of campus life, from the classroom to the quad to the cafeteria to the

department conference room.  With its recommendation to endorse the Chicago Statement, the committee considers academic freedom and free expression to be the primary and dominant value to the University's mission.

Endorsing the Chicago Principles creates momentum to improve civil discourse and debate on campus as an essential part of NEU's mission.  Indeed, endorsing the Chicago Principles shines a spotlight on civility and respectfulness, on civil disagreement and debate, and on collegiality, friendship and belonging.  The best practices articulated in Charge One capitalize on that momentum.

The committee recommends the following four resolutions:

- The committee recommends, by vote of 4-1, that the Faculty Senate of Northeastern University endorse the Chicago Statement. This is presented in resolution #5.

- The committee recommends, by vote of 4-1, that the Faculty Senate of Northeastern University requests that the Board of Trustees of Northeastern University endorse the Chicago Statement. The committee further recommends that, if the Board of Trustees endorses the Chicago Statement, a working group to be formed for implementation. This is presented in resolution #7.

- The committee recommends (4-1) that Northeastern University's faculty handbook statement of free expression be revised to reflect the substance of the Chicago Statement.  This is presented in resolution #6.

- The committee recommends (4-1) that next year's senate address the topic of academic freedom for all faculty, including faculty at international campuses and part-time faculty.  This is presented in resolution #8.

# Charge 3 Discussion of Findings

**The Committee's Charge**

Charge Three asks the committee to define "civility" and "respectful debate" and to provide illustrative examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

## Recommendation: avoid proscriptive definitions of *civility* and *respectful debate*

Northeastern University does not have formal definitions of *civility* and *respectful debate*. Instead, university stakeholders and leaders approach these terms through what might be considered a "common understanding", referencing other terms such as politeness, courtesy, and professionalism.

University leaders recommend avoiding more specific definitions, because doing so might unintentionally make important concepts such as these limiting rather than encompassing and guiding.  Put simply, university stakeholders do not support a "regulatory understanding" of *civility* and *respectful debate* that seem to be requested in Charge 3 (especially points 2 and 3).

Even if university leaders and the committee supported defining these terms, it is difficult to imagine finding consensus. For example, some consider *civility* to be an ethical ideal of sincere love and respect for neighbors, while others understand it to be a minimum standard of social courtesies that help make peaceful coexistence possible (Newhouse, 2025).  While, at first glance, the latter might seem a simpler approach to achieving consensus, it quickly becomes complex:  Does swearing in a seminar breach the standard? Does online shopping while attending a lecture?  Does raising one's voice in a debate? In a global university, there are standards and expectations for civility, can change depending on the culture and context (Hofstede, 1984).

Regarding the charge to provide illustrative examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior, it is likewise difficult to imagine finding consensus on the finer points.  For example, the All-Faculty survey found that, as the level of disruption increases, the percentage of faculty that found the behavior appropriate decrease.Q195 asked about appropriate behavior when a speaker has been invited to campus to present research on a controversial topic (Appendix C.) The results demonstrate that, as the level of disruption increases (such as shouting down the speaker or blocking access to the venue), the

percentage of respondents that found the behavior appropriate decreases. And Q196 asked about appropriate behavior when a mix of students and faculty are participating in a demonstration on campus that has been approved by the university administration (Appendix C). The results demonstrate that, as the level of disruption increases (such as occupying buildings), the percentage of respondents that found the behavior appropriate decreases. These results demonstrate that respondents found protest activity appropriate, so long as it remains relatively non-disruptive. Overall, these two questions suggest that respondents share some baseline ideas about acceptable behavior: most consider shouting down speakers, blocking access to venues, and occupying buildings to be unacceptable.

Beyond such baseline behaviors, the All-Faculty survey found a range of opinion about what might be acceptable and unacceptable behavior. For example, Q222-1 asked respondents to rate the appropriateness of classroom scenarios, one of which concerned "Offensive but prevalent views: A student presents and argument, that while held by a substantial proportion of the people (such as religious positions on social issues) contains viewpoints likely to cause offense to some class members." Regarding this scenario, 40% of female faculty found this acceptable as did 48% male faculty (Appendix D), showing substantial division. Put simply: the results suggest that it could be difficult to find consensus on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior beyond some baseline ideas.

The committee recommends that the university community is best served by a capacious understanding of the term *civility* and *respectful debate*. The committee supports the "common understanding" approach currently used by university leaders. Furthermore, the committee agrees with university leaders that a "regulatory understanding" of *civility* and *respectful debate* – with proscriptive examples of appropriate and inappropriate behavior – would not serve the university community.

This does not mean that the committee recommends "anything goes." Instead, the committee finds that the legal framework for harassment and defamation provides a minimum standard for behavior. Related, reasonable restrictions on time, place and manner of discourse – such as no bullhorns at midnight – provide another minimum standard for behavior (for example, for the Boston campus, ACLU-MA, 2024).

### *Civility* and *respectful debate* at the University

Rather than trying to define *civility* and *respectful debate* -- and then trying to monitor or regulate behavior accordingly -- the committee finds that it is more productive to examine why these concepts are important at the University.

Civility and *respectful debate* are a means for maintaining the core mission of the University, which is the production of knowledge through research and teaching. Examples of how *civility* and *respectful debate* can help advance the production of knowledge could include the Chatham House Rule for classroom discussion and Roberts Rules for department meetings, both of which can help create an environment in which members of the community put forth their best arguments on a topic. The appropriateness of these sorts of strategies for encouraging *civility* and *respect* will vary in different settings. These strategies are not the end-goal, but rather a method for getting to the target outcome which might be debate over a historical question in the classroom or discussion about a curriculum change in a department meeting.

Put simply: at the University, *civility* and *respectful debate* are important but they are not the main goal of the institution. Instead, they can help further the main goal, which is the production of knowledge.

## Recommendation: Focus on practicing rather than defining

*Civility* and *respectful debate* should be encouraged, with a serious institutional commitment and investment to training students in the practice of civil discourse on campus, and professional development for faculty in pedagogical strategies for fostering civil discourse in the classroom. It is most difficult to practice civil discourse when there is passionate disagreement on a subject (Newhouse, 2025), which can happen when courses concern controversial topics, and special support should be given to faculty who teach these courses.

The committee's recommendation for Charge 3 is linked to the best practices presented in Charge 1. The committee recommends best practices, many of which train students in the practice of *civility* and *respectful debate* and provide professional development to faculty for incorporating new pedagogical strategies. Charge 1 recommendations include:

- o  Classroom Pedagogical Practices (11 recommendations);
- o  Faculty Development and Support (3 recommendations);
- o  Institutional Programs and Policies (2 recommendations)

The committee recommends these best practices as practical strategies for practicing *civility* and *respectful debate*.

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# Appendices:

- Appendix A – Chicago Principles FOE Committee Report
- Appendix B – List of stakeholders consulted
- Appendix C – Faculty survey results and demographics
- Appendix D – Faculty survey cross tab analysis
- Appendix E – Open ended response summary
- Appendix F – Northeastern University Campus Messages
- Appendix G – Memo to CATLR, ADVANCE
- Appendix H – List of existing rules regarding classroom recordings
- Appendix I – Example revisions to the Faculty Handbook Statement on Free Expression

# Appendix A – Chicago Principles FOE Committee Report

# (Commonly known as "The Chicago Statement.")

Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression

*The Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago was appointed in July 2014 by President Robert J. Zimmer and Provost Eric D. Isaacs "in light of recent events nationwide that have tested institutional commitments to free and open discourse." The Committee's charge was to draft a statement "articulating the University's overarching commitment to free, robust, and uninhibited debate and deliberation among all members of the University's community."*

*The Committee has carefully reviewed the University's history, examined events at other institutions, and consulted a broad range of individuals both inside and outside the University. This statement reflects the long-standing and distinctive values of the University of Chicago and affirms the importance of maintaining and, indeed, celebrating those values for the future.*

From its very founding, the University of Chicago has dedicated itself to the preservation and celebration of the freedom of expression as an essential element of the University's culture. In 1902, in his address marking the University's decennial, President William Rainey Harper declared that "the principle of complete freedom of speech on all subjects has from the beginning been regarded as fundamental in the University of Chicago" and that "this principle can neither now nor at any future time be called in question."

Thirty years later, a student organization invited William Z. Foster, the Communist Party's candidate for President, to lecture on campus. This triggered a storm of protest from critics both on and off campus. To those who condemned the University for allowing the event, President Robert M. Hutchins responded that "our students . . . should have freedom to discuss any problem that presents itself." He insisted that the "cure" for ideas we oppose "lies through open discussion rather than through inhibition." On a later occasion, Hutchins added that "free inquiry is indispensable to the good life, that universities exist for the sake of such inquiry, [and] that without it they cease to be universities."

In 1968, at another time of great turmoil in universities, President Edward H. Levi, in his inaugural address, celebrated "those virtues which from the beginning and until now have characterized our institution." Central to the values of the University of Chicago, Levi explained, is a profound commitment to "freedom of inquiry." This freedom, he proclaimed, "is our inheritance."

More recently, President Hanna Holborn Gray observed that "education should not be intended to make people comfortable, it is meant to make them think. Universities should be expected to provide the conditions within which hard thought, and therefore strong disagreement, independent judgment, and the questioning of stubborn assumptions, can flourish in an environment of the greatest freedom."

The words of Harper, Hutchins, Levi, and Gray capture both the spirit and the promise of the University of Chicago. Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, the University of Chicago fully respects and supports the freedom of all members of the University community "to discuss any problem that presents itself."

Of course, the ideas of different members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.

The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, wherever they wish. The University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University. In addition, the University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the University. But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.

In a word, the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the

University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose. Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University's educational mission.

As a corollary to the University's commitment to protect and promote free expression, members of the University community must also act in conformity with the principle of free expression. Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.

As Robert M. Hutchins observed, without a vibrant commitment to free and open inquiry, a university ceases to be a university. The University of Chicago's long-standing commitment to this principle lies at the very core of our University's greatness. That is our inheritance, and it is our promise to the future.

Geoffrey R. Stone, Edward H. Levi Distinguished Service Professor of Law,

Chair

Marianne Bertrand, Chris P. Dialynas Distinguished Service Professor of Economics, Booth School of Business

Angela Olinto, Homer J. Livingston Professor, Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, Enrico Fermi Institute, and the College

Mark Siegler, Lindy Bergman Distinguished Service Professor of Medicine and Surgery

David A. Strauss, Gerald Ratner Distinguished Service Professor of Law

Kenneth W. Warren, Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor, Department of English and the College

Amanda Woodward, William S. Gray Professor, Department of Psychology and the College

# Appendix B – List of Stakeholders Consulted

The committee consulted the following university stakeholders, either via Microsoft Teams conversations or via email (at committee's request, in the interests of time).

**Consultation:**

1. Michael Armini, Senior Vice President for External Affairs

2. Debra Franko, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

3. Kenneth Henderson, Chancellor and Senior Vice President for Learning

4. Lisa Sinclair, Vice President of Legal Affairs and Deputy General Counsel

5. Bridget Smyser (CoE), Chair of the Faculty Senate Belonging Committee

6. Michael Sweet, Director, Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning through Research

7. Beth Winkelstein, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Consultation with students:**

8. Student Government Association President Julian Herzing-Burkard and Executive Vice President Dylan Lee

9. "Educational Freedom Project" (an independent student association) leadership team, including Zi Glucksman, Kaia Hayashida, Jenssen Sebree

**Brief information requests:**

Lisa Commendatore, Senior Director, Boston Orientation & Family Program

Diana Danelian, Director for Survey Research and Assessment, University Decision Support

Madeleine Estabrook, Senior Vice Chancellor for Student Life

Michele Grazulis, Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer

Alexis Goltra, Chief Privacy Officer, Office of the General Counsel

Consultation requested:

Presidential Council on Belonging leadership team (consultation not possible for scheduling reasons)

# Appendix C – 2025 All-Faculty Survey - Results

**Q51** – Select your faculty status

**Q52** – What is your current faculty rank?

**Q53** - What college/school(s) are your faculty appointments?

**Q54** - At which university campus do you primarily teach?

**Q146** – What is your Gender identity

**Q195** - A speaker has been invited to campus to present research on a controversial topic. Is it appropriate for university community members to do the following? (check all that are appropriate)

**Q196** - A mix of students and faculty are participating in a demonstration on campus that has been approved by the university administration. Is it appropriate for university community members to:

**Q221** Assume that the values of "civility", "belonging", and "free expression" are core values of Northeastern University. In your opinion, which is the primary value? In other words, when these values come into conflict, which ordering best reflects your personal priorities?"

**Q222**. Please rate each of the following classroom discourse scenarios on a scale from 1 to 5 whereby 1=Completely unacceptable 2= Mostly unacceptable 3= neither acceptable nor unacceptable 4=Mostly acceptable 5= Completely acceptable Or Alternatively select, "Depends on context" or "No opinion"

**Q222_1** Inflammatory Labeling: "A student makes a counterargument that avoids personal attacks but frames the opposing viewpoint using inflammatory language, such as by describing it as 'totally anti-American' or 'totally racist.'"

**Q221_2** Offensive but Prevalent Views: A student presents an argument that, while held by a substantial portion of people (such as traditional religious positions on social issues), contains viewpoints likely to cause offense to some class members."

**Q223** - Please state your agreement or disagreement with the following statements, 1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree.

**Q223_1** In my personal teaching experience, I have recently begun avoiding certain topics in my classroom.

**Q223_2** Viewpoint diversity is important on a college campus (representing different views on contested social issues.)

**Q223_3** It would be conducive to viewpoint diversity on campus if Northeastern adopted 'institutional neutrality,' under which the university and its leaders refrain from issuing official statements about public matters not directly affecting the core function of the university.

**Q224** - Please consider the academic freedom and free expression concerns listed below. Which of the following do you worry about personally? (select all that apply)

**Q224_8**_TEXT - Other - Text

**Q276** - Please rate the statement below using the following scale from 1 to 5: 1=Not at all confident, 5=Extremely confident

**Q276_1** How confident are you that Northeastern administration would defend a speaker's right to express controversial views?

**Q225** [Open-ended] -If appropriate, given your subject matter, describe concrete approaches you have used or observed that successfully cultivate a pluralistic learning environment where students and faculty feel comfortable expressing diverse viewpoints while maintaining academic rigor.

**Q226** [Open-ended] - Based on your experience in higher education, what specific strategies or practices, if any, do you believe are most effective for promoting intellectual diversity and encouraging engagement with multiple perspectives in academic settings?

## Q51 - Select your faculty status:

573 Responses
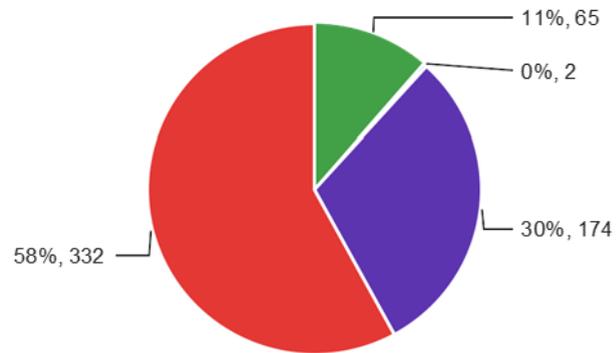


Legend: Full time tenure track · Part time faculty · Full time tenured · Full time non tenure track

| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | Full time non tenure track | 57.94% | 332 |
| 2 | Full time tenured | 30.37% | 174 |
| 3 | Part time faculty | 0.35% | 2 |
| 5 | Full time tenure track | 11.34% | 65 |
|   | Total | 100% | 573 |

## Q52 - What is your current faculty rank?
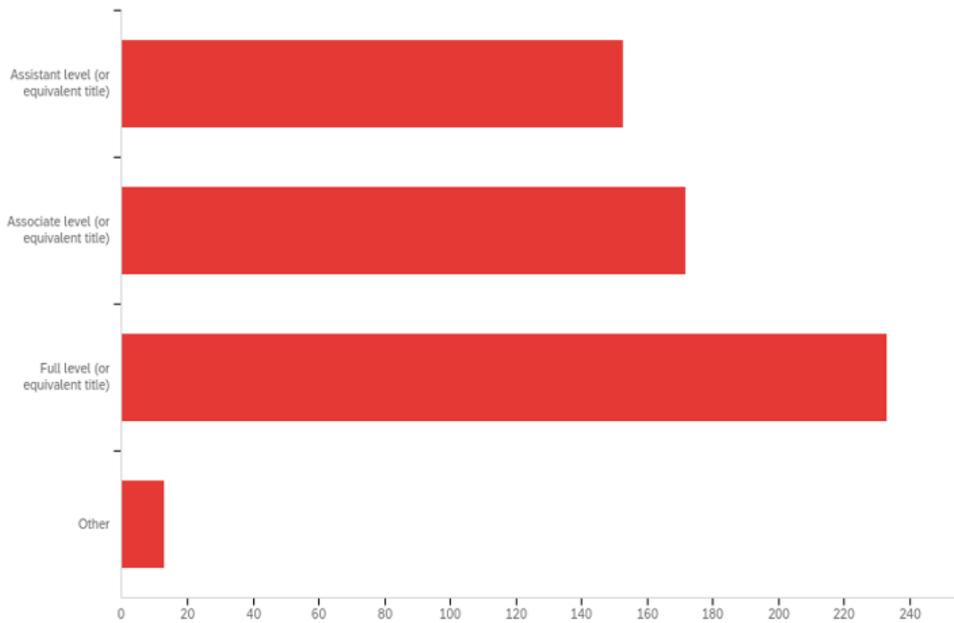


| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | Assistant level (or equivalent title) | 26.80% | 153 |
| 2 | Associate level (or equivalent title) | 30.12% | 172 |
| 3 | Full level (or equivalent title) | 40.81% | 233 |
| 4 | Other | 2.28% | 13 |
| | Total | 100% | 571 |

## Q53 - What college/school(s) are your faculty appointments? (if you are jointly appointed please select more than one)

569 Responses
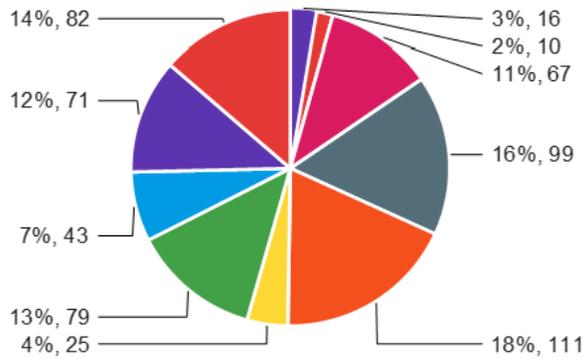


- School of Law
- Mills College at Northeastern
- D'Amore-McKim School of Business
- College of Social Sciences and Humanities
- College of Science
- College of Professional Studies
- College of Engineering
- Khoury College of Computer Sciences
- College of Arts, Media and Design
- Bouve College of Health Sciences

| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | Bouve College of Health Sciences | 13.60% | 82 |
| 2 | College of Arts, Media and Design | 11.77% | 71 |
| 3 | Khoury College of Computer Sciences | 7.13% | 43 |
| 4 | College of Engineering | 13.10% | 79 |
| 5 | College of Professional Studies | 4.15% | 25 |
| 6 | College of Science | 18.41% | 111 |
| 7 | College of Social Sciences and Humanities | 16.42% | 99 |
| 8 | D'Amore-McKim School of Business | 11.11% | 67 |
| 9 | Mills College at Northeastern | 1.66% | 10 |
| 10 | School of Law | 2.65% | 16 |
|  | Total | 100% | 603 |

## Q54 - At which university campus do you primarily teach?

565 Responses
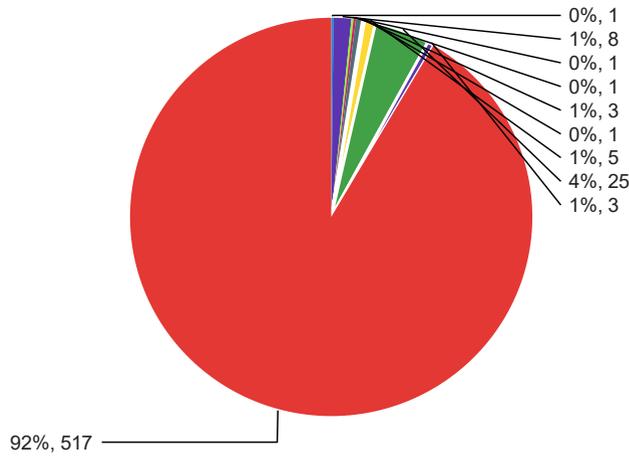
Legend:
- Arlington
- Vancouver
- Toronto
- Silicon Valley
- Seattle
- San Francisco
- Portland
- Oakland (Mills College at Northeastern)
- Charlotte
- Boston

Pie chart labels: 0%, 1 — 1%, 8 — 0%, 1 — 0%, 1 — 1%, 3 — 0%, 1 — 1%, 5 — 4%, 25 — 1%, 3 — 92%, 517

| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|-----|-------|
| 1 | Boston | 91.50% | 517 |
| 2 | Charlotte | 0.53% | 3 |
| 3 | London | 0.00% | 0 |
| 4 | Oakland (Mills College at Northeastern) | 4.42% | 25 |
| 5 | Portland | 0.88% | 5 |
| 6 | San Francisco | 0.18% | 1 |
| 7 | Seattle | 0.53% | 3 |
| 8 | Silicon Valley | 0.18% | 1 |
| 9 | Toronto | 0.18% | 1 |
| 10 | Vancouver | 1.42% | 8 |
| 11 | Arlington | 0.18% | 1 |
| 12 | Miami | 0.00% | 0 |
| | Total | 100% | 565 |

## Q146 - What is your gender identity: - Selected Choice

14%, 79
2%, 10
0%, 2
2%, 10
50%, 279
32%, 176
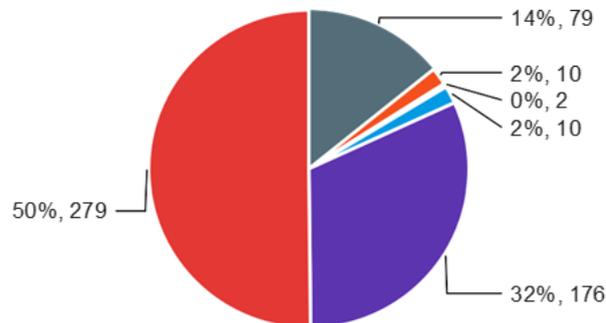
Legend:
- Prefer not to answer
- Prefer to self describe
- Transgender man
- Non binary
- Cisgendered man
- Cisgendered woman

| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | Cisgendered woman | 50.18% | 279 |
| 2 | Cisgendered man | 31.65% | 176 |
| 3 | Non-binary | 1.80% | 10 |
| 4 | Transgender woman | 0.00% | 0 |
| 5 | Transgender man | 0.36% | 2 |
| 6 | Prefer to self describe | 1.80% | 10 |
| 7 | Prefer not to answer | 14.21% | 79 |
| | Total | 100% | 556 |

Q195 - A speaker has been invited to campus to present research on a controversial topic. Is it appropriate for university community members to do the following? (check all that are appropriate)

382 Responses
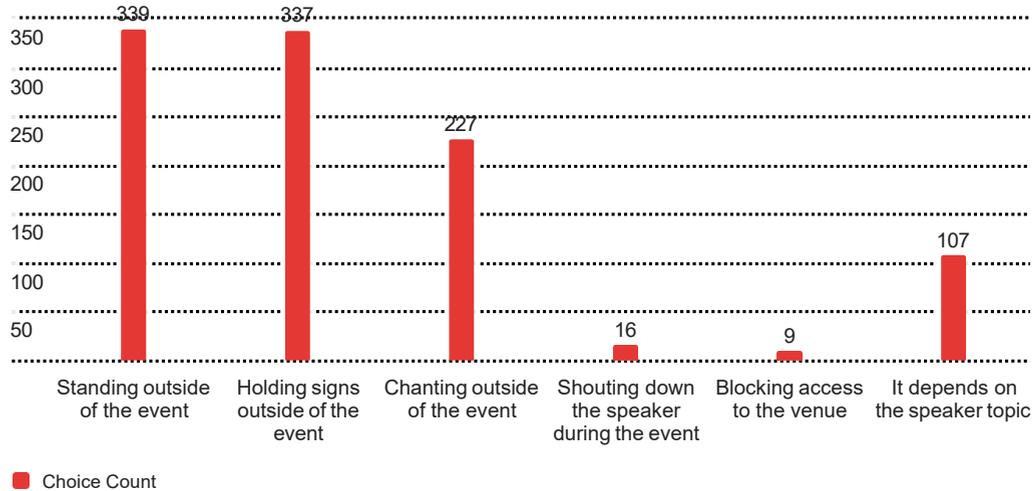


| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | Standing outside of the event | 32.75% | 339 |
| 2 | Holding signs outside of the event | 32.56% | 337 |
| 3 | Chanting outside of the event | 21.93% | 227 |
| 4 | Shouting down the speaker during the event | 1.55% | 16 |
| 5 | Blocking access to the venue | 0.87% | 9 |
| 6 | It depends on the speaker topic | 10.34% | 107 |
| | Total | 100% | 1035 |

Q196 - A mix of students and faculty are participating in a demonstration on campus that has been approved by the university administration. Is it appropriate for university community members to do the following? (check all that are appropriate)
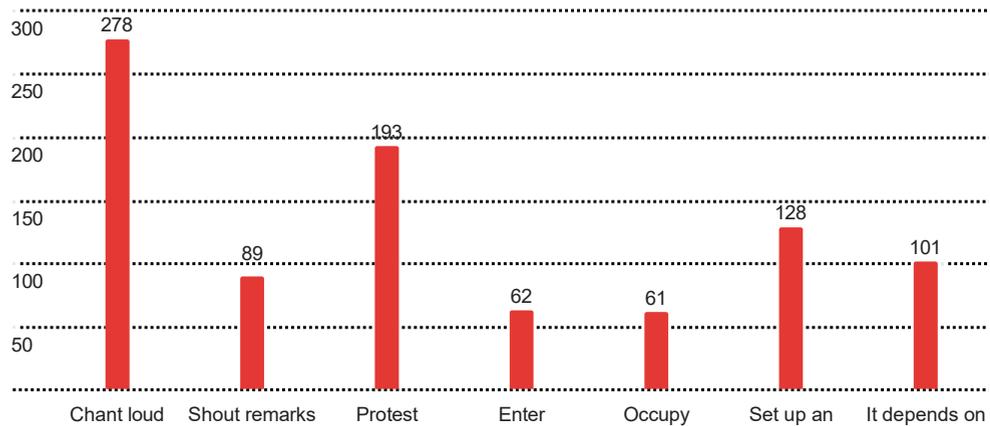
333 Responses



| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Chant loud repetitive phrases | 30.48% | 278 |
| 2 | Shout remarks at students as they pass by the protest | 9.76% | 89 |
| 3 | Protest overnight | 21.16% | 193 |
| 4 | Enter buildings while classes are in session | 6.80% | 62 |
| 5 | Occupy buildings | 6.69% | 61 |
| 6 | Set up an encampment on campus | 14.04% | 128 |
| 7 | It depends on the protest topic | 11.07% | 101 |
| | Total | 100% | 912 |

Q221 - Assume that the values of "civility", "belonging", and "free expression" are core values of Northeastern University. In your opinion, which is the primary value? In other words, when these values come into conflict, which ordering best reflects your personal priorities?"

437 Responses
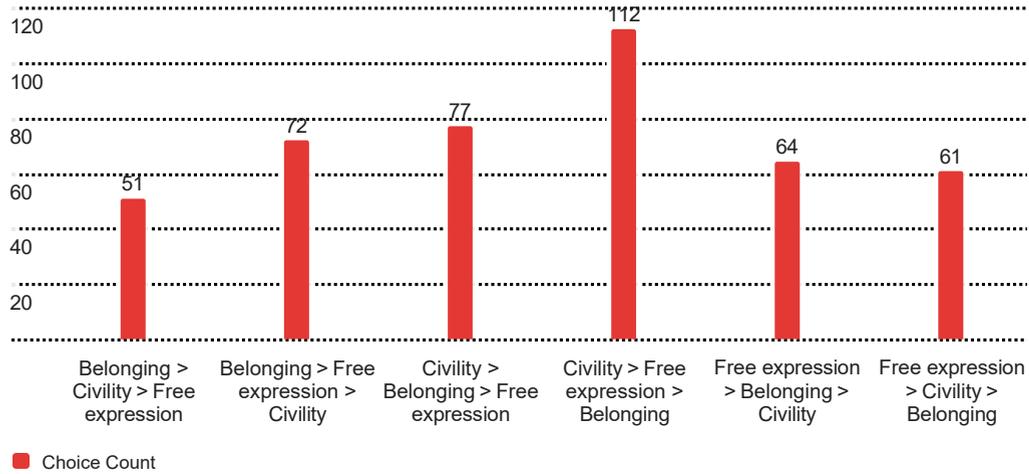


| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | Belonging > Civility > Free expression | 11.67% | 51 |
| 2 | Belonging > Free expression > Civility | 16.48% | 72 |
| 3 | Civility > Belonging > Free expression | 17.62% | 77 |
| 4 | Civility > Free expression > Belonging | 25.63% | 112 |
| 5 | Free expression > Belonging > Civility | 14.65% | 64 |
| 6 | Free expression > Civility > Belonging | 13.96% | 61 |

Q222_1 - Inflammatory Labeling: "A student makes a counterargument that avoids personal attacks but frames the opposing viewpoint using inflammatory language, such as by describing it as 'totally anti-American' or 'totally racist.'"

438 Responses
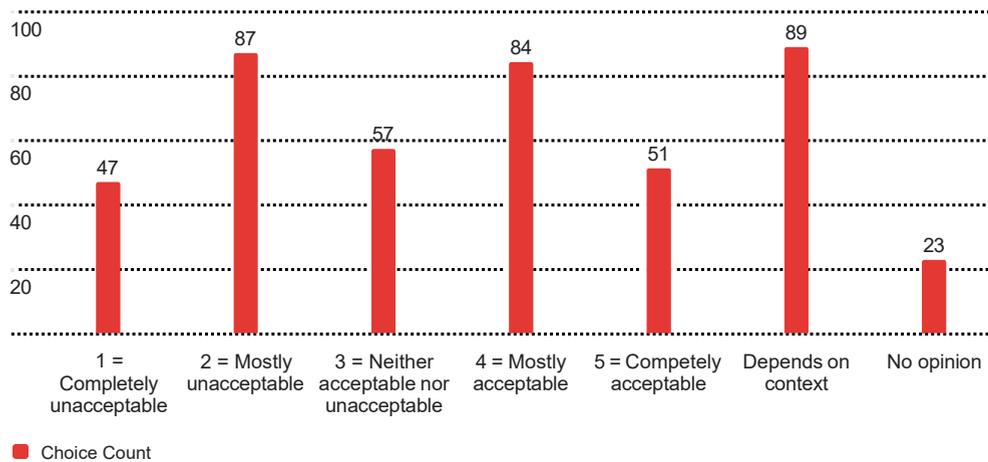


Q222_2 - Offensive but Prevalent Views: "A student presents an argument that, while held by a substantial portion of people (such as traditional religious positions on social issues), contains viewpoints likely to cause offense to some class members."

436 Responses
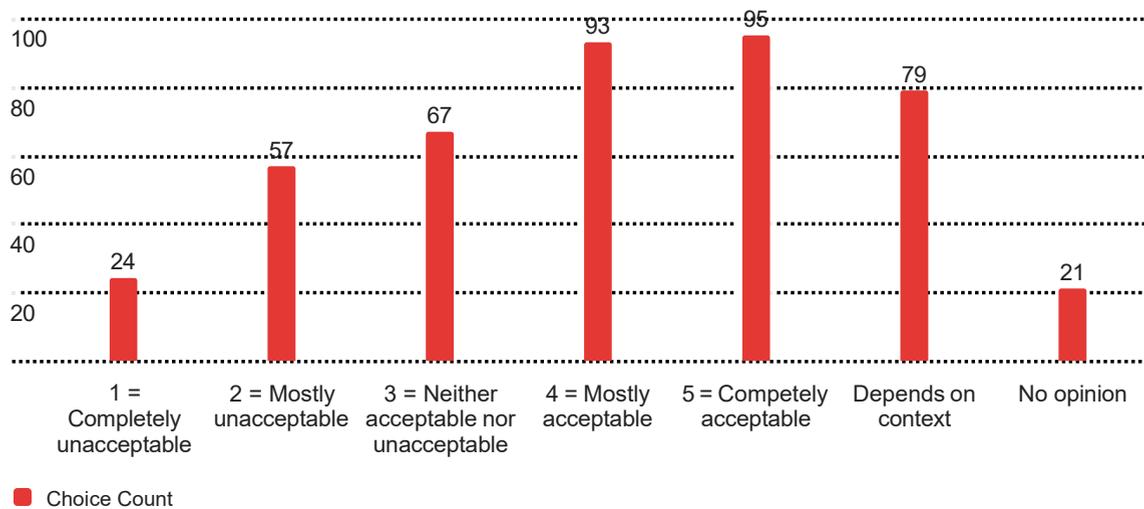
## Q223_1 - In my personal teaching experience, I have recently begun avoiding certain topics in my classroom.

440 Responses
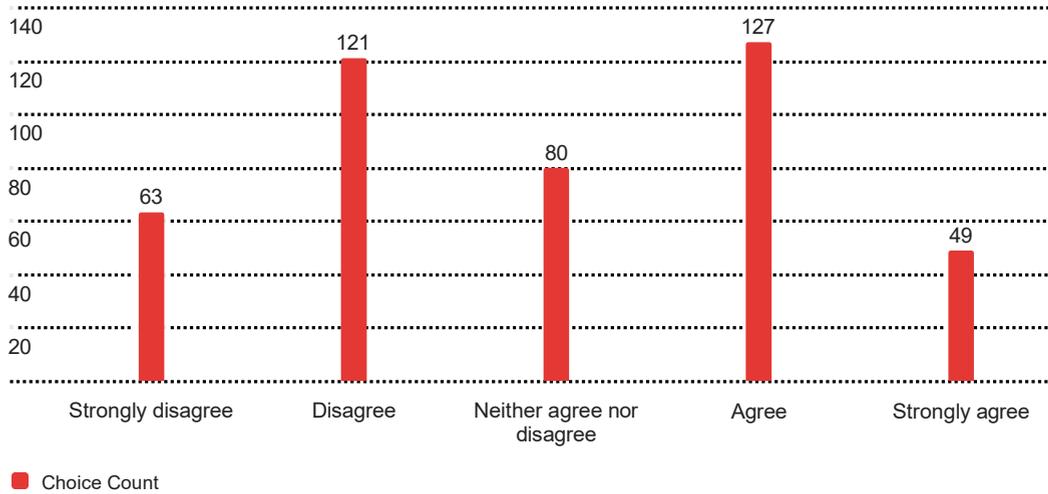


Choice Count

## Q223_2 - Viewpoint diversity is important on a college campus (representing different views on contested social issues

442 Responses
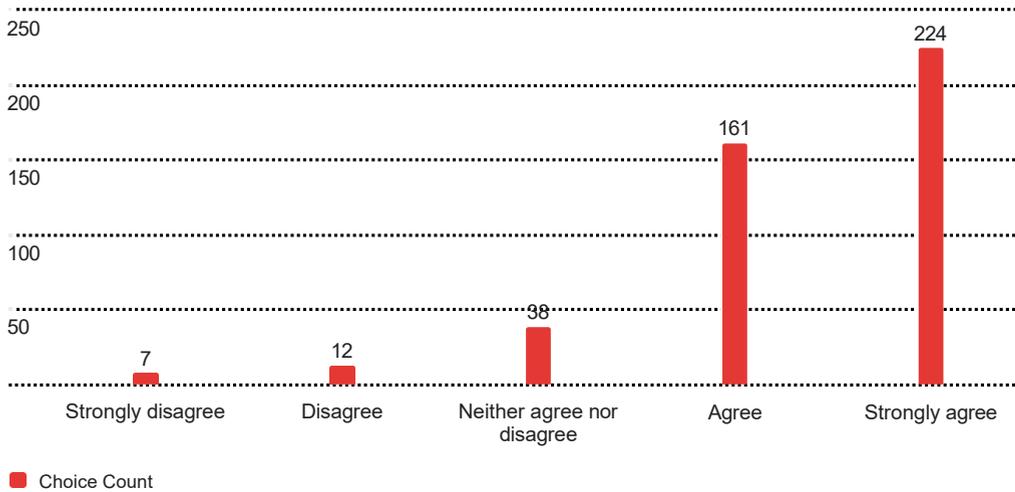


Choice Count

Q223_3 - "It would be conducive to viewpoint diversity on campus if Northeastern adopted 'institutional neutrality,' under which the university and its leaders refrain from issuing official statements about public matters not directly affecting the core function of the university."

431 Responses
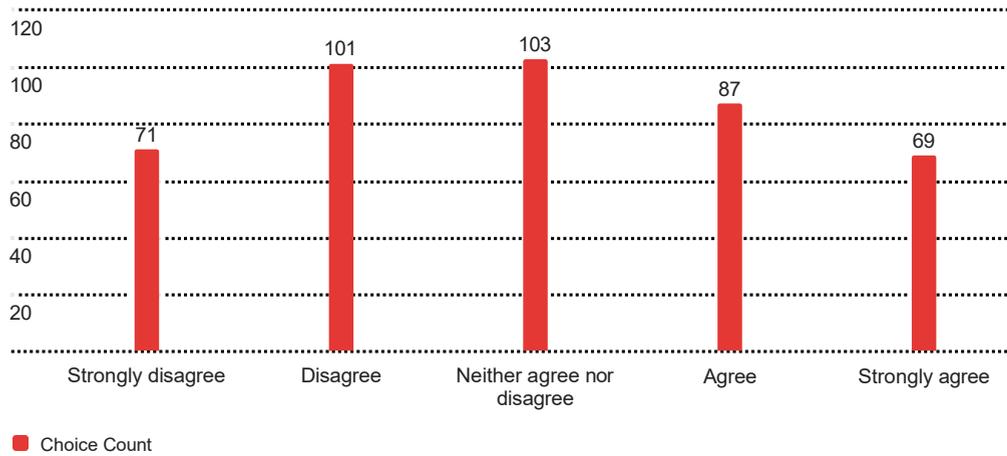


Choice Count

Q224 - Please consider the academic freedom and free expression concerns listed below. Which of the following do you worry about personally? (select all that apply) - Selected Choice

388 Responses
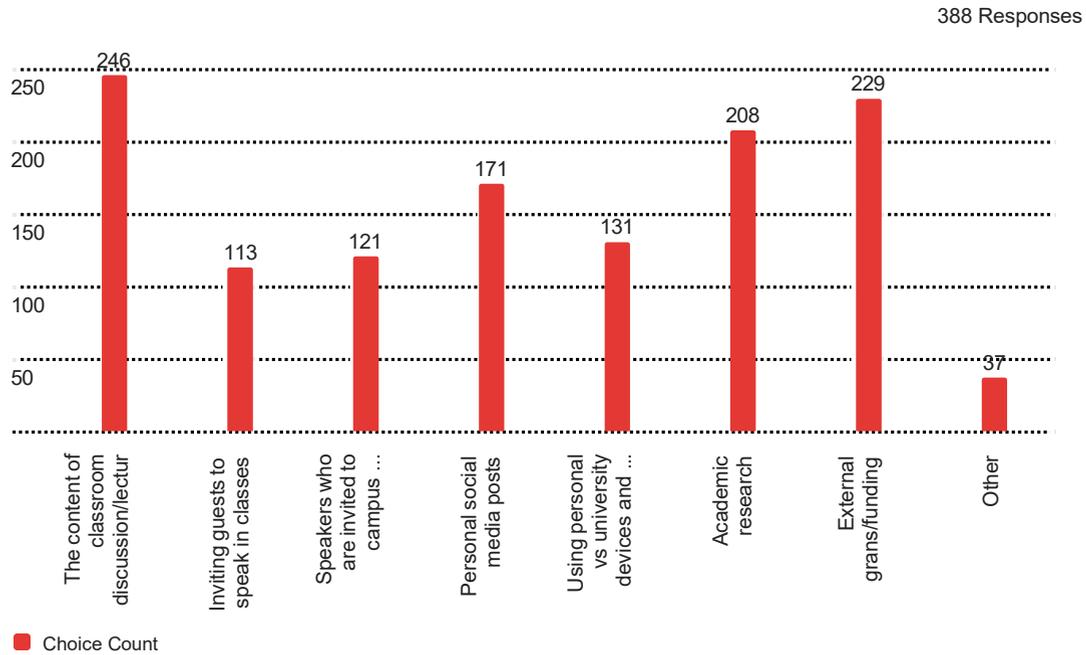


| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | The content of classroom discussion/lecture | 19.59% | 246 |
| 2 | Inviting guests to speak in classes | 9.00% | 113 |
| 3 | Speakers who are invited to campus (unconnected to classes) | 9.63% | 121 |
| 4 | Personal social media posts | 13.61% | 171 |
| 5 | Using personal vs university devices and Wi-Fi | 10.43% | 131 |
| 6 | Academic research | 16.56% | 208 |
| 7 | External grans/funding | 18.23% | 229 |

Q224_8_TEXT - Other - Text

Other - Text

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I worry about "getting in trouble" for speaking about DEI and social justice in my classroom.

The fact that I am an academic of colour residing in Canada, makes me nervous to cross the border. I have turned down travel opportunities to the Boston campus fearing for my safety. Border checks include scan of personal devices and social media posts.

It's unclear if you want me to say that I'm personally worried about these things even if it's not me that would directly experience them. For example, I don't invite speakers and I don't post on SM, but I am personally worried about protections for these freedoms. (And I'm also worried about people taking their freedoms too far.) Similarly, when you asked whether a protest behavior is appropriate, I said several were inappropriate to me, in a personal sense, but that doesn't mean I think they should be punished. More like shunned.

Attending protests and demonstrations

Administrative bloat; stale incompetent administrators across university layers; wasteful hiring of external people to teach us how to be better; inappropriate title assignment to people who do not earn those academic titles (e.g. Dean with a B.S. degree is unacceptable).

Being in Engineering, many of these issues do not enter the conversation.

The University going the way of Columbia and getting essentially put under political management by an authoritarian government.

personal values of social justice, diversity, and inclusion - these do not feel supported

I don't understand the question. Am I worried these things will cause problems, or that they won't be allowed?

I have no major concerns about academic freedom and free expression at Northeastern.

I worry about all of these because I have no trust that the administration will take any course of action but the most expedient.

Arguments that waste time and resources. The gov't typically has a compelling interest to regulate time, place and manner of free speech and assembly

Inviting the police onto campus to harass, arrest, and assault students who are protesting against genocidal action

All of the above

Northeastern does not protect academic freedom, nor freedom of speech or any other freedom. Northeastern only protects Northeastern (the institution, brand, the money, etc, but not the individual faculty nor individual students).

It is difficult to predict how the university will handle an incident because there is no clear definition of what does and does not qualify as affecting "the core function of the university."

Political attacks from Right & Left. Administrative overreach by NU bureaucrats.

safety

student recording sessions …you really cannot tell if they are when on zoom..

I worry about the future of research that involves currently "unfundable" topics

Q276_1 - How confident are you that Northeastern administration would defend a speaker's right to express controversial views?

289 Responses
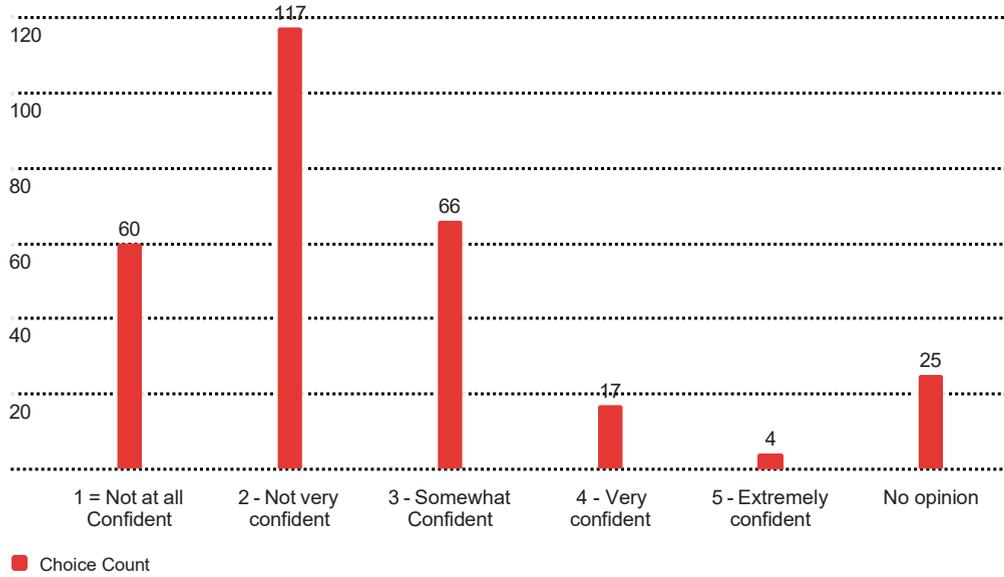


| # | Answer | % | Count |
|---|--------|---|-------|
| 1 | 1 = Not at all Confident | 20.76% | 60 |
| 2 | 2 - Not very confident | 40.48% | 117 |
| 3 | 3 - Somewhat Confident | 22.84% | 66 |
| 4 | 4 - Very confident | 5.88% | 17 |
| 5 | 5 - Extremely confident | 1.38% | 4 |
| 6 | No opinion | 8.65% | 25 |
|   | Total | 100% | 289 |

# Appendix D – Faculty Survey cross tab analysis
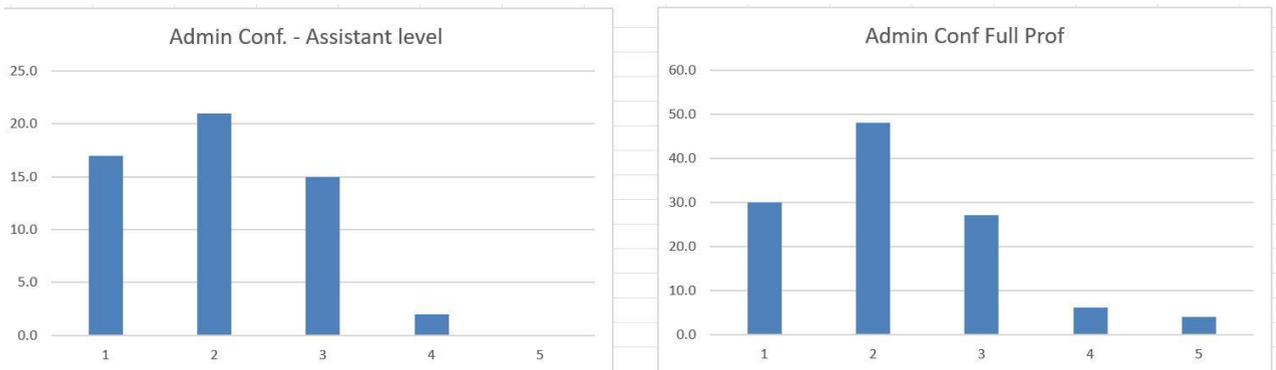


*Q76 Comparisons: Confidence in administration x Faculty Rank*
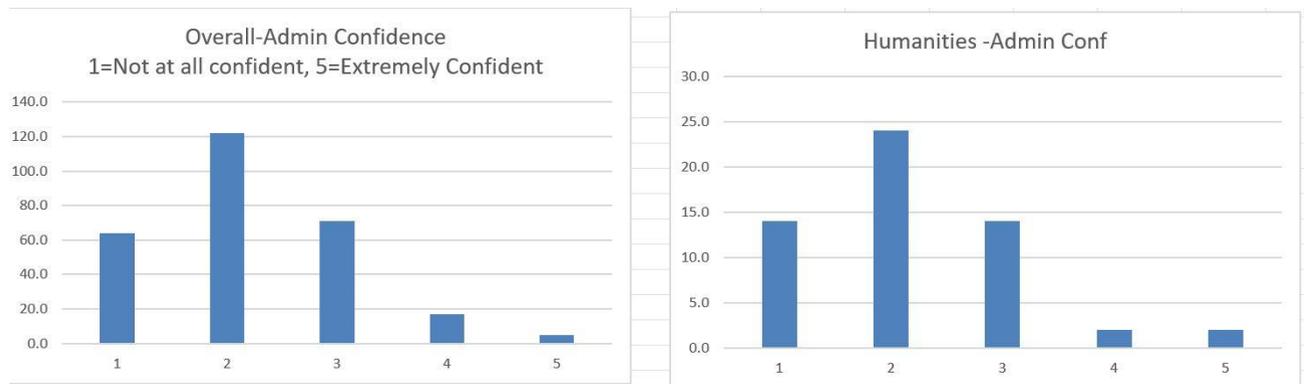


*Q276 Comparisons Confidence in administration x College*
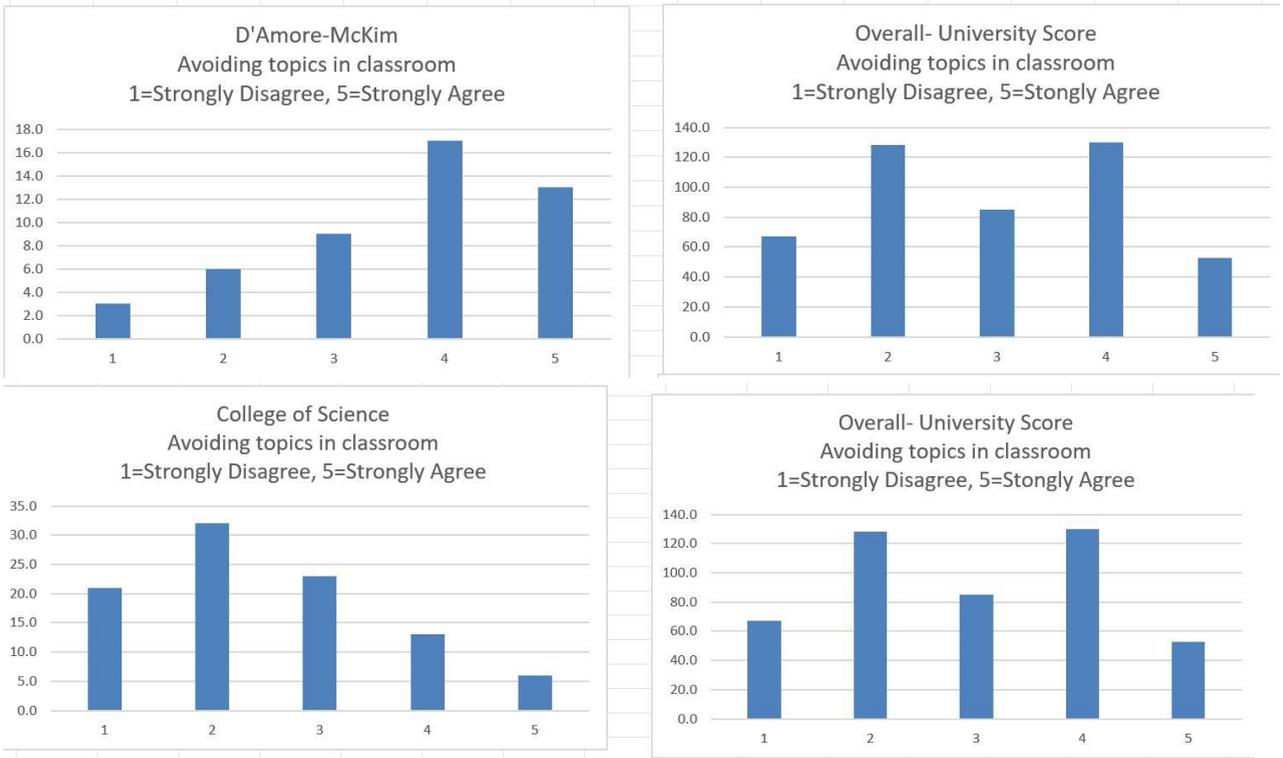
*Q223_1 Comparison: Avoiding topics in classroom: Overall x College*
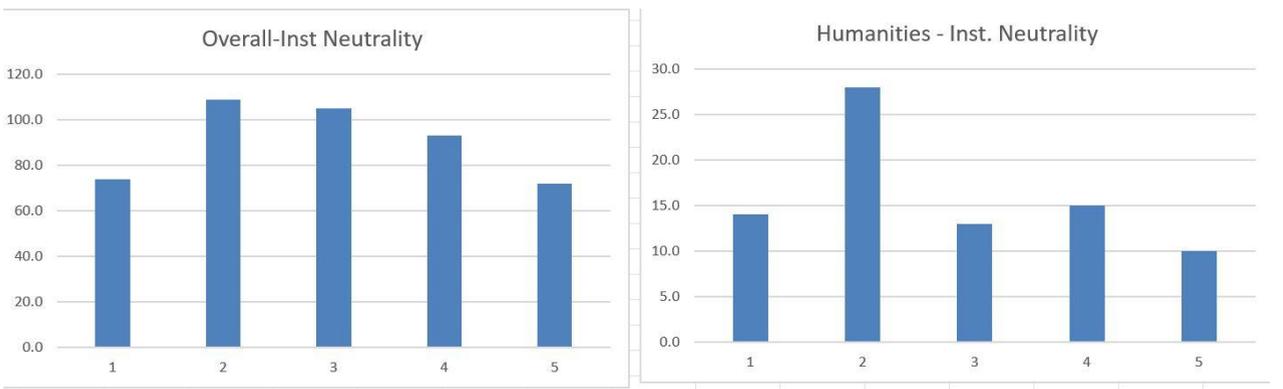


*Q223_3 Comparison: Institutional Neutrality Overall x College-Humanities*
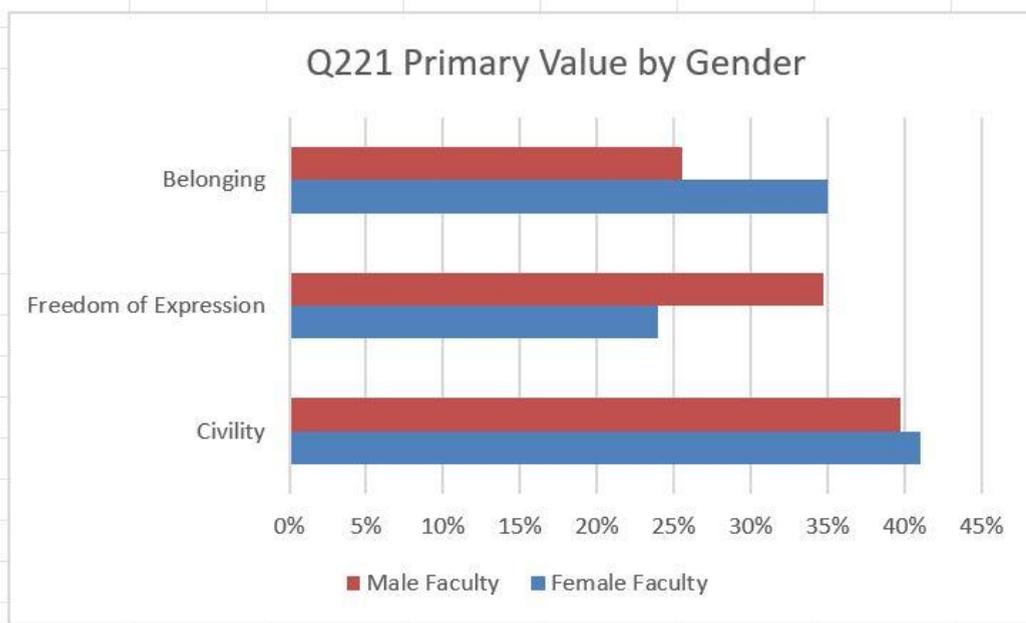
Q221 Primary value X Faculty Gender: Male, Female responses
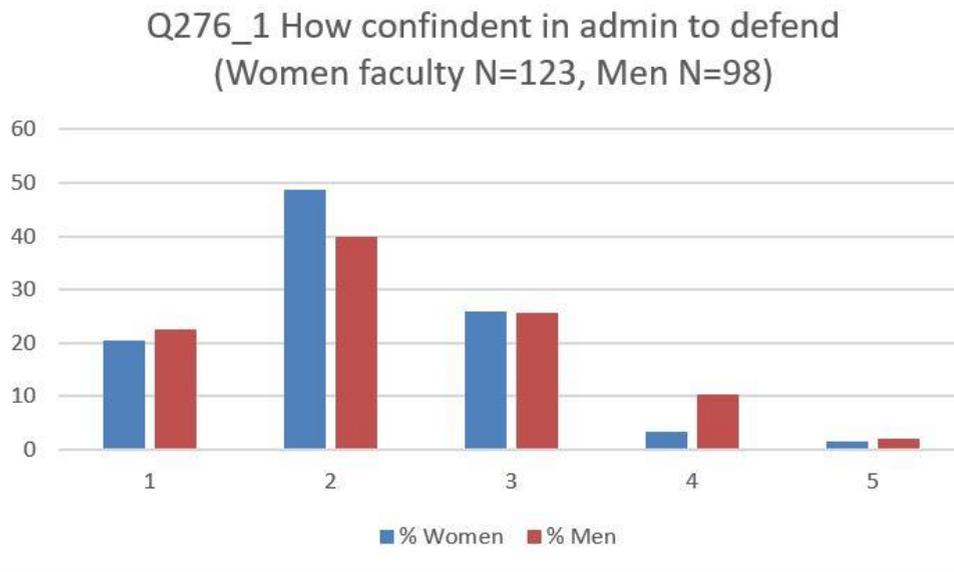


Q276 Confident in administration to defend a controversial speaker X Gender

Q223_1 Avoiding Topics by Gender

Q223 Avoiding topics in the classroom X Gender

# Appendix E – Open ended response summary

Q225-If appropriate, given your subject matter, describe concrete approaches you have used or observed that successfully cultivate a pluralistic learning environment where students and faculty feel comfortable expressing diverse viewpoints while maintaining academic rigor.

1.      PLEASE NOTE THAT "VIEWPOINT DIVERSITY" IS CODE FOR RIGHT-WING SPEAKERS AND CURRICULA. I DON'T LIKE THE USE OF THAT PHRASE IN THE ABOVE QUESTIONS.

2.      Everyone is so sensitive about every little subject matter - so I give trigger warnings in an email when I know my lecture will make issues of politics a relevant part of the discussion. We walk on eggshells in the classroom. You can't even teach math without offending someone.

3.      I dedicate several lectures to discussions on ethics in my field, using case studies, thought experiments, and open discussions. These often bring up opposing opinions on various topics, but with a few ground rules surrounding civility, these end up being an extremely enriching experience - students show high engagement and work on their argumentation skills.

4.      I have frequently played devil's advocate to voice views that are not popular, when students are reluctant to do so.

5.      Simply to get student to speak up and engage.

6.      I state from day 1 that I am trying to build a community where diverse perspectives are welcome and expected.

7.      Students respect as I, while acknowledging my own viewpoints (professional and personal), present multiple (more than 2) perspectives in their depth, often with historical and cultural context.

8.      Case study discussions that focus on ethics in controversial issues.

9.      I refrain from giving my opinion on a subject, and ask for student views. I let the students share their views among themselves and simply facilitate the discussion. I believe that I model respectful behaviour to the students so I have never had an issue with a student acting inappopriately in terms of the way they frame their arguments.

10.     Acknowledging diverse viewpoints and the fact that people having different points of view is normal, but requiring civil (non-inflammatory) discourse about the issues, if/when they arise

11.     refer to persons as "they"

12.     Role-play exercises in which students are asked to represent or swap positions on various issues

13.     It is not possible to express opinion in any classes

14.     It is really hard to get students to express views that run counter to the prevailing liberal viewpoints commonly found on campus. I sometimes voice these opinions so students don't have to so that we can still have a discussion of the merits of ideas, but there is never really anything resembling vigorous debate on most of the topics in my courses (mostly climate change and climate change impacts).

15.     I make sure that students never know my political beliefs or who I voted for - I think it is inappropriate for faculty to try to indoctrinate our students (which occurs on campus - I know because I hear horror stories from other students and even my own children). When giving examples of entrepreneurs and business leaders, I always try to include individuals from diverse political backgrounds, race, and gender.

16.     Let's take a step back and explore what we mean by diverse viewpoints. To be clear, it is not a diversity of viewpoints to give a platform to someone promoting genocide, for example.

17.     Encourage students to contribute whenever possible. Redirect their comments, if necessary.

18.     In the first day of class I set a code of conduct for civil discourse, acknowledging that there are many reasonable perspectives and no "right" answer but that the important thing is critical thinking and being able to assess a situation from many different viewpoints and "metrics" of success.

19.     politics i have heard students on campus stating their professor is sharing their political beliefs ( not sure if true but that is wrong) Removing the personal and talking about facts not opinions is the best way to handle it and opposing views are welcome as long as they are not targeted and personal

20.     I discuss Chatham House rules for class conversations. I encourage students with divergent views to respond to one another rather than ask me for my views. I address my

own identity as it relates to the course content to explain my motivations and interests in the topic.

21.     Through scenarios + readings that allow students to see other ways of being and other possibilities from around the world. The the discussion is focused elsewhere, but I try to connect it to the current landscape in the United States.

22.     Inclusive STEM Teaching Project @ Northeastern (ADVANCE Office program) - learning how to create an inclusive classroom environment for ALL students to feel that they belong at Northeastern

23.     I encourage students critical thinking in my class, challenge their thinking, let students ask questions to each others, promote listening and respect, group work, tell them I am available to discuss any issue they have with another student or faculty, and develop trust when they do come to me as I act on what they say or explain why it's not possible after investigating the problem myself. My overall attitude is benevolent, doing my best for them and at the same asking them to perform as best they can and encouraging them. Being open and non judgmental. Being myself.

24.     It is important to establish "ground rules" for challenging conversations in class

25.     I always try to use neutral and inclusive language and would encourage diverse viewpoints under the professional code of conduct.

26.     Anonymous reflection/ anonymous submission to open-ended questions

27.     I use this space to comment on the previous 6 questions/items, which I left empty. To be honest, I think they make absolutely no sense. In my opinion, context is fundamental to comment or makes decisions, and those questions heavily lack the level of contextual detail necessary to allow for a proper sharing of perspectives. Without more context, any comment/answer would sound dangerously simplistic.

28.     Mutual respect must be emphasized.

29.     Frame certain topics less as "should we/shouldn't we talk about them" and more about how we got to that point or what the consequences are. How did a viewpoint start and evolve to the current moment, for instance.

30.     In class debates where students are broken into groups -- each group takes one side of the argument (does not mean that it is your point of view). Assigning reading that includes different points of view on the same issue and leading a discussion or in class written response.

31. "Subject matter: the mathematics of decision making Example: Highlight that people have different objectives, goals, and metrics, for what they consider a success. How can that be represented in modeling? What are the implications of this? How does the ""optimal"" decision change relative to what metric you are measuring it against. What are the unintended negative consequences that could come from these decisions? Who is being left out of the decision making?"

32. I assign readings that reflect different views on a topic and give students opportunities to deliberate which arguments they find most persuasive and why. I model scholarship as not knowing all the right answers, but as curiosity and systematic inquiry.

33. "In my courses, particularly [content redacted for privacy] I design the curriculum to cultivate a pluralistic learning environment through deliberate inclusion of diverse voices, methods, and contexts. We engage with texts, artists, and scholars from a wide range of cultural, disciplinary, and ideological backgrounds, ensuring that students encounter multiple frameworks for understanding art, technology, and social change. This pluralism extends beyond readings: we regularly host guest speakers and analyze exhibitions that foreground perspectives across race, gender, geography, and institutional position. Students are encouraged to situate their own viewpoints within these intersecting discourses, developing both intellectual openness and intellectual rigor. By modeling how rigorous debate and inclusivity reinforce—rather than dilute—academic excellence, these courses create a space where difference is not simply represented but actively theorized as central to the production of knowledge."

34. I establish classroom ground rules/expectations of behavior that encourage honesty and also center respectfulness, kindness, and civility. I provide guidance regarding ways to engage constructively with and to provide constructive feedback to others.

35. I think setting the tone explicitly that we should respect all viewpoints and hear people out is necessary. However, it is also necessary to note that folks should address others in a level-headed manner.

36. Try to encourage a supportive environment and respect each others options

37. In my experience, my students have not yet been ready to productively engage in discussions that extend beyond the core instructional content of the course.

38. I indicate that civility has to be a high priority if we are to learn from each other.

39. Using case studies of real-life examples to discuss belonging in an evidence-based way

40.     In general, I feel a university can model this by holding conferences, round tables, etc. on controversial topics, allowing controversial speakers to speak, and at the same time providing forums for students to address their concerns.

41.     "Cuban Revolution, debate about it "

42.     Classrooms must be built on trust, between students and between students and professor. Civility and openness to alternative viewpoints must be the basis on which exchange occurs.

43.     I emphasize civility, non-inflammatory language, the use of strong evidence, and the importance of using only credible/high quality sources of evidence. All NU students have equal access to high quality evidence sources — we can all use them.

44.     funding for vaccines in first vs third world nations, rare diseases, impact of global health on our nation

45.     Set expectations at the beginning of the semester of how sensitive topics will be discussed in class.

46.     "Insisting students ground arguments and interpretations in details of object of inquiry Class contracts in which the class agrees on a set of behavioral guidelines, which we can then reference if they are violated Community building activities building relationships and trust"

47.     Be polite. Do not assume bad intent. Be humble with the students.

48.     I have not been in this situation.

49.     Community Agreements

50.     my syllabus says 'imagine your family/the world is listening to what you say in class' - would you be OK them hearing you say this… if not , then consider not saying it.

51.     Please stop focusing on identify politics. We should teach students how to think, not what to think. Stop cancel culture. Adopt the Chicago principles for academic freedom. Allow faculty to discuss controversial topics. Remove save spaces.

52.     One approach I've found particularly effective is adapting Chatham House rules for classroom discussions. At the beginning of controversial units, I establish that students may freely use the ideas and arguments discussed in class, but may not attribute specific statements to identifiable individuals outside the classroom setting. This framework has proven valuable in several ways. This creates psychological safety for students to articulate

unpopular or exploratory positions without fear that their comments will be shared on social media or used against them later.

53.    In corporate meetings on strategic issues, frank and candid discussion is encouraged without personal attacks.

54.    frequent class check ins. Transparently discussing areas of concern.

55.    Explicitly naming and mentioning controversial issues and establishing clear and reliable discussion guidelines in various contexts (eg, in-person, online, other)

56.    diversity & inclusion statement in syllabus & during course orientation

57.    I foster a pluralistic learning environment by implementing cultural awareness, facilitating open dialogue, and designing inclusive group activities. My course goals are to ensure that diverse viewpoints are respected while academic rigor is maintained through evidence-based discussion and structured reflection.

58.    not usually a problem in my discipline

59.    I think creating some clear ground rules for discsussions as a class can help with this… students seem pretty respectful of one another despite differences.

60.    Students create their own agreements from day 1.

61.    I am honest with my viewpoints, mention my fear, and welcome diverse viewpoints. I mention I like to dialogue and create a safe space for students to do so. There is no secret - honesty is the way to do it.

62.    Establishing a setting for empathy and open mindedness. We discuss controversial topics in my class without issues because as a class we spent time creating this safe environment first.

63.    Scaffolding lessons for why classroom seminar discussion should be different from, say, dorm room discussion. Training students to see that real civic freedom comes from engaging with difficult topics, assessing our own faulty reasoning, adopting a "critical assent" disposition towards texts instead of a "hermeneutic of suspicion."

64.    dei / politics

65.    Debates on topics in my subject

66.    I live in fear at Northeastern, at multiple levels, so I try to avoid conflict as much as possible.

67. I bring in current events when they relate to class topics. In doing so, I am very careful about expressing that my point of view is one of many and I hope they get exposed to others in classes with other professors.

68. I use a "devils advocate" role in small group discussions where one student must take on the responsibility of expressing alternate viewpoints if there is a consensus among the group on a topic. It forces them to think about conflicting views.

69. Being transparent about the conduct expected in the classroom and providing guidelines on group discourse

70. Provide specific frameworks of analysis and expression that guide how students present their opinion on a given topic.

71. Allow civil discussion that is delivered in a respectful manner.

72. Creating a positive and welcoming classroom community.

73. We have discussions in one of my smaller classes and before doing so, I work to establish rapport, and we discuss the need for civility to all members of the class. It takes several weeks to establish that the classroom is a safe space for difficult discussions, and readings to stimulate discussion are purposely chosen to begin with less controversial or flashpoint topics so that we discuss more controversial issues later in the semester once rapport and trust have been built. This IS an essential skill to model in a classroom and a key benefit to a college education. It cannot be removed or overlooked by a sole focus on "college as a stepping stone to a good job". It may indeed be that too, but it should NOT be ONLY that.

74. I ensure that there is diverse representation when discussing historical figures in my field.

75. The day after the 2024 election, we had a vigorous discussion in which pro-Trump students and horrified anti-Trumpers aired their views. It was contentious, but civil.

76. Teaching basic science, I can't think of any situations that social issues have come up, so far. However, I haven't had anyone challenging scientific principles such as evolution.

77. viewpoint diversity is welcomed - it does need to be respectful. Trying to be respectful and welcoming to everyone is critical

78. I actively solicit counterarguments (whether they reflect one's own convictions or not) to avoid an ideological echo chamber

79.     The vast majority of faculty are professionals who are able to set aside personal views and know how to run a class in which all students feel as comfortable as possible.

80.     I listen and try not to take a side.

81.     I don't ask them for their personal opinions as a neuroscience teacher, I ask them for evidence-based arguments. In science, I don't care what you believe, I care what there is evidence for.

82.     Open non judge-mental communication, cultural competence and active listening

83.     I am clear with students when expressing something that is an opinion rather than a scientific finding. Sometimes I offer my opinions and experiences as encouragement for students to express themselves without worrying about being judged.

84.     create a classroom based on mutual trust and committee to learning. It is under-appreciated and under recognized work, but vital. This requires small, seminar-based classrooms free of recording devices.

85.     Fact based candor

86.     "The below is from the Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides on Wednesday, February 19, 2025 event. Show curiosity. Asking the counterparty to ""help me understand…"" Show concern/empathy. If the counterparty is emoting, do not ignore their emotions. Acknowledge their challenging situation or frustration. Show bigger picture/expand the perspective. Try to connect what the person is concerned about to something bigger that will provide clarity and hope. "

87.     teaching skills for difficult conversations, using experiential learning activities in which students experience challenges they need to reflect on, using texts that help us apply theory to the real world

88.     "remaining curious asking clarifying questions knowing when to break from the conversation in order to allow people to reset returning to topics if it feels unfinished or an unsatisfactory conclusion to the discourse recognizing that we may not all agree, but we needto remain grounded in facts, research, and evidence"

89.     I find breaking the ice socially with the class as much as possible early in the term so that they can know each other as people before they see each other as just their opinions helps to lower the temperature.

90.     Presenting previous times in history when people in academic spaces argued about tough topics! Offering empathy for most perspectives but being clear that we can hold space for different experiences while knowing there are boundaries when it comes to

safety. We always have a right to safety in a classroom, but we do not always have a right to be comfortable. And some of the conversations that are most crucial to advancing belonging often involve discomfort for everyone.

91.     Creating a safe, accepting classroom environment where discrimination and hatred are not tolerated.

92.     In my classes, I talk a lot about how research is conducted. When the research is about a controversial subject, this gives students the opportunity to express their opinions about how the research was done, without attacking views of their fellow students. I encourage them to treat class time as a professional environment.

93.     Emphasizing to students the importance of respectful discourse in the classroom and inviting (sometimes urging) them to disagree with me on various topics.

94.     One has to demonstrate, model, and openly discuss how have controversial discourse. Students at any stage of training cannot be expected to know how to do this without your setting an example in the context you are conducting work or teaching in. In my first class we establish rules for discussion and practice with topics that are in-line with learning objectives (e.g., current research findings in which there are 2 opposing camps or perspectives). Students can effectively generalize from this to discuss more sensitive topics with the same respectful tone and delivery.

95.     Sites of Conscience dialogue technique. It's very useful

96.     Free speech with differing opinions is healthy. Being challenged with opposing beliefs helps everyone understand each other. It is good for students to debate or argue for and against topics that are popular in the media or are ethical.

*Q226-Based on your experience in higher education, what specific strategies or practices, if any, do you believe are most effective for promoting intellectual diversity and encouraging engagement with multiple perspectives in academic settings?*

1.      Invited talks, seminars, events - but we don't have the money for those things now.

2.      Providing readings that represent different perspectives; assigning students to argue various sides rather than (or in addition to) asking them to voice their personal opinions.

3.       I had always been more diverse and pluralistic than other schools based on its history of a working school for low and moderate income families, off all races snd origins. Our price tag and exclusivity puts a challenge ti what we have always done naturally, without thinking. Now, we need to think.

4.      Get outside your discipline! Silos breed myopia.

5.      I think allowing students to share their views but also asking them to back up what they are saying with evidence - for example, if a student labels something as 'fascist', I would ask them to define that term and how that phenomenon is fascist, rather than just using the label.

6.      requiring/teaching debate (and critical thinking about information sources), teaching how to deal with information or views that are personally offensive (versus trying to eradicate them), demonstrating media bias on BOTH sides of the political spectrum (e.g., Fox/MSNBC). Teaching cognitive biases (via psychology or behavioral economics) that lead to polarization of views. Teaching the ways that traditional media, social media, online content, and generative AI contribute to echo chambers and polarization of views.

7.      setting the appropriate example - "walk the walk"

8.      Emphasizing that a classroom discussion can be a place to try out new ideas, make mistakes, and walk them back if needed without social repercussions

9.      We need to encourage students to share their thoughts and opinions, right now we are all too afraid to speak and it this continues we will change the rights and freedoms of future generations

10.     Being open minded and consciously NOT sharing my own political beliefs with students.

11.     Diversity of viewpoints is cultivated all over the university. Where I am concerned this question is coming from is a discussion around whether extreme, far right

misinformation or hateful/abusive language should be allowed on campus. Allowing a diversity of perspectives does not mean we stop protecting our students from those that would harm them.

12.     Emphasis on scientific method and objective research. Our arguments are built on empirical evidence, not personal opinion.

13.     I think this is what the scientific method is - acknowledge that there is a difference between "opinions" and "positions based on evidence" and encourage discourse to be evidence-based as much as possible.

14.     setting ground rules for a conversation

15.     Assigning a range of readings. Including open-ended questions in lecture and discussion. Asking students to write personal, reflective essays that allow them to explore their own ideas without fear of finding a right answer.

16.     Allowing for student to work on projects that they are interested in developing for their portfolios or careers.

17.     Open discussion, where everyone gets to be heard, but respect for one another is required. I taught for 2 years at [location redacted] and they did this very well. They would send out emails telling us that the Middle East conflict, for example, evokes strong emotions and they respect multiple points of view, and reminded us that we can have different opinions and still care for one another and respect one another as family. Yes, they really stressed the "family" language. [identifying remarks redacted].

18.     Provide countervailing opinions and strategies, teaching students to challenge their views and enabling them to learn how to be skeptical.

19.     Inclusive STEM Teaching Project @ Northeastern (ADVANCE Office program)

20.     This is tough high level question… it involves faculty hiring and students recruitment policies - then management and promotion to support all talents. I think that community/minorities support/affinity groups are important, and mentoring for faculty - But these are not specific to academia.

21.     Making class and safe space to express opinions.

22.     Principles in the book, "The Coddling of the American Mind," has good insights on why diverse perspectives are vital on campuses. I'd say ensuring civility in dialogue is fundamental to effectiveness with the notion to "attack the problem, not the person."

23.      "I believe that students should be able to defend their views. I believe that as educators we should allow students to entertain multiple perspectives, but that we should also challenge them to defend those views and not simply fall back on rhetoric. I believe this can be done in a respectful way that leads students to more deeply engagement with the material. However, I do not that this entails that any and all viewpoints are correct, valuable, or defensible. But, even if a viewpoint is unacceptable, it should be raised and challenged. This does place a bind on inviting speakers, however, as often they are brought to campus to popularize a position, and not to submit it to scrutiny. Likewise, debates are not a venue for seriously challenging ideas, and are largely an exercise in rhetoric. I think the best discussions of controversial topics will take place in a classroom setting where mutual trust has been built among students and teachers. To do this, though, faculty need assurances from the administration that their academic freedom will be protected. Students may not like being challenged, and the current political environment offers them many opportunities to retaliate against any felt discomfort, unless faculty have a strong commitment from administration that they will receive support in this pedagogical mission."

24.      Listening. Being trained on making and receiving critiques.

25.      Ideas being hypothesized and tested, so that the dominant ideas and perspectives in any given field are based on merit and academic rigor.

26.      Faculty and students acknowledging value of diverse points of view and -- even if you disagree -- respectfully engaging with them.

27.      Including diversity of voices in assigned readings and case studies; not presenting sources as transparent vectors of information but as arguments with purpose, intended audience, claims and evidence

28.      "Perhaps the university should avoid assuming a set of values that may not be shared by all, and instead focus on the core value of a university which must be the honest, although always imperfect, pursuit of truth. Other than that, maybe just stay out of things, say nothing? It would also help to recap with faculty what ""academic freedom"" actually means and does and does not protect. I know some faculty who believe our academic freedom is in the first amendment (?!) A professional organization [redacted] had an informative panel session with a higher ed lawyers from public and private universities on the limits of academic freedom, and it was quite good. I've seen nothing from my own university. It would certainly help if we faculty knew the university would actually have our back in cases of academic freedom, where I suspect many of us are pretty sure the university would happily scapegoat or even turn on a faculty member that was

inconvenient. I don't often agree with FIRE, but you must admit, Northeastern's score at 253 of 257 institutions is horrifying."

29.    open civil discussion

30.    Civility, respect, and finding common ground

31.    We must continue to recruit and retain racially, culturally and gender diverse individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds and continue to engage in practices that promote feelings of belonging and connection. Representation and belonging both matter.

32.    I think it's important to have a assignments/opportunities for students to state their ideas where only you as the instructor will see them as well as more public opportunities. Thus, students can choose when to express what.

33.    Creating genuine intellectual safety while maintaining rigor. Establishing environments where students feel they can voice unpopular or minority viewpoints without social penalty, while still holding all arguments to high standards of evidence and reasoning. The goal is making it safe to be wrong or unconventional, not safe from critique.

34.    We should prioritize raising our academic standards to be on par with internationally competitive benchmarks (for example, the kinds of expectations routinely seen in high-performing systems such as Singapore or Japan). Once we have successfully elevated the academic baseline, we will be in a stronger position to engage in more ambitious and wide-ranging discussions in class.

35.    Promoting civility and discouraging generalization/labeling. It has become OK - even for faculty - to label those on the political right as transphobic racists. I try to be circumspect and teach students that skill.

36.    It would be very helpful if both sides of the argument were presented regarding controversial topics. For example, NU did not take a formal position on the Isreal/Hamas conflict, but the outrage towards Isreal massively overwhelmed the outrage towards Hamas. Where was the campus outrage when Hamas killed, raped and butchered so many innocent Israelis? It paled in comparison to the response to Isreal.

37.    Faculty and students should not feel uncertain or afraid to exercise the right to protest. They should not feel afraid of retribution from the university, including strange and reductive posts from the University's own social media accounts. It was extremely disheartening to see the official language regarding the student-led protests in May 2024, with no redaction, correction, or apology.

38.     Still working on this one. But I do believe that, while everyone has the right to civilly state their position, they have no right to expect there will be no push back or answer.

39.     Creating expectations around classroom discussions and interactions as a class at the beginning of the semester.

40.     Having a diverse and international student body and developing a classroom space that allows for safe and honest discussions.

41.     Students need to be taught how to argue in a civil way and should be encouraged to arrive at ideas based on critical discourse. They need to go back to the basics first.

42.     My classes are technical, but I always listen to all perspectives and discuss their merits in the technical field.

43.     I encountered more intellectual diversity at my last institution. There, it was often enough to validate that I saw/heard students and valued their perspective, and then be rigorous about everyone keeping conversation on-topic and grounded in the details of objects of inquiry and in historic/social context. But that was a different time...

44.     Be polite. Do not assume bad intent. Be humble with the students.

45.     Doing point-counterpoint discussions using published research in scientific journals.

46.     Focusing on difference between respectul disagreement and dehumanizing language.

47.     "we can agree to disagree BUT science is science"

48.     Please stop focusing on identify politics. We should teach students how to think, not what to think. Stop cancel culture. Adopt the Chicago principles for academic freedom. Allow faculty to discuss controversial topics. Remove save spaces.

49.     "1. Structured Devil's Advocate Exercises: I regularly assign students to argue for positions they don't personally hold on controversial topics. For example, in discussions about economic policy, I'll have self-identified progressives defend free-market approaches and vice versa. This forces students to engage seriously with opposing arguments rather than dismissing them, and I've found it builds both intellectual empathy and argumentative rigor. Students often report that the exercise made them realize the strongest version of the opposing view was more compelling than they initially assumed. 2. Establishing Clear Norms for Charitable Interpretation: At the course outset, I introduce the ""principle of charity""—the practice of interpreting others' arguments in their strongest, most reasonable form before critiquing them. I model this consistently by

restating student comments generously before responding, and I intervene when discussions devolve into strawman attacks or dismissive characterizations. Over the term, students internalize this norm and begin self-correcting. This creates space for genuine intellectual exploration because students feel their views will be engaged seriously rather than caricatured, which encourages them to voice unpopular or minority positions."

50.     Transparency and the tone is set by the Dean, etc.

51.     exposing to conflicting opinions in assignments. Asking students to use critical thinking to discuss topics. This semester my science class has an AI assignment hoping to help them see its strength and limitation and acceptable use .

52.     Create a learning environment.

53.     Modeling the ability and disposition to question assumptions, even when these are considered to be mainstream or common in the community

54.     Based on my limited higher education experience, I have found the most effective strategies to promote intellectual diversity and engagement with multiple perspectives include fostering inclusive dialogue through structured discussions, incorporating diverse course materials and viewpoints, and creating safe , brave spaces for respectful discussion.

55.     The main strategy I take is to better define terms and norms. "Intellectual diversity" and "viewpoint diversity" are both poorly defined terms. I support diverse views that are neither hateful nor factually wrong, but do not support a diversity that includes highly false or hateful views. The current WH administration is imposing numerous restrictions on universities in order to support "viewpoint diversity", which for them means more conservative views, even when certain of those views are factually wrong and/or hateful. The faculty senate should clarify what it means by "viewpoint diversity," and which perspectives (such as the innate inferiority of certain races or genders, a view that is highly prevalent among the public) are not part of that diversity goal.

56.     encouraging people to contribute many ideas and respectfully challenge ideas

57.     posting multiple points of view for student use/review on the topic

58.     Discussions in class, giving everyone the opportunity to share ideas, explicitly recognizing that we won't always agree (and that this is okay). People are pretty respectful of each other in person; it's online where things get tricky.

59.     Collaborative and diverse faculty hiring practices

60. Giving opportunities for students to reflect on their opinions and express them orally or writing (for more safety, security)

61. Administration must be transparent, have an accurate pulse on how the students and faculty are feeling, and establish an environment of respect and trust by communicating that everyone will be supported. People tend to be civil if they feel they are being heard and something will come out of it.

62. Practicing strong institutional neutrality. All figures exercising disciplined ethics about characterizing viewpoints they disagree with. Refraining from soft ideological purity tests for faculty searches and other selection practices. (This is a HUGE blind spot and problem.)

63. Listening to why people have different views, hearing their logic, not always debating or correcting.

64. "Assigning students to group projects ensuring diverse members "

65. Talk to the students and create a safe environment

66. "Protect freedom of speech at all costs. Also freedom of ideas, academic freedom, etc. I also want to say that your question above regarding ordering free expression with ""civility"" and ""belonging"" is bogus. It's a good example how, no matter whether your intentions are good or bad, you got trapped into language. Because free expression is a relatively well defined concept that everybody understands. Whereas ""civility"" and ""belonging"" are vague, ambiguous, subjective, culture-dependent, ill-defined, and therefore ultimately meaningless. Such questions tell me that your stance is already biased against freedom of expression."

67. Making sure students have the opportunity in classes to talk to each other. They bring the diversity to the classroom. The other is having articles assigned that present debates on a topic and having students consider the multiple perspectives on an issue.

68. "Accept engagement with ""controversial"" topics as legitimate areas of discourse but with the expectation that all parties (students, faculty, staff, guests) justify the positions they hold with real evidence Assume that others with whom you disagree are making their arguments in good faith unless there is clear evidence to the contrary Expose students to a broad variety of perspectives and show the strengths, weaknesses, and evidence for and against different ideas"

69. The engagement begins with admissions to bring multiple view points and lived experiences into the classroom.

70.     invite students to moderated panel discussions representing diverse .perspectives, modeling civil disagreement. Teaching debate techniques. Offer students opportunities to unite behind common university traditions outside of class. NU is lacking school traditions and spirit events that foster engaging with different perspectives. This will have positive repercussions in both academic and non-academic settings.

71.     Having support and guidelines/guidance from upper administration (e.g., college level) to help navigate these situations

72.     Classroom space needs to feel safe for the expression of different perspectives. How can we understand each other better and emphasize where there is common ground rather than differences?

73.     Talking with each student about what they think about issues in the world.

74.     If "intellectual diversity" means affirmative action for conservative scholars, then none are effective because it's a stupid, fake idea.

75.     Building trust in small-group or dyadic settings (smaller classes, mentoring situations, peer relations, etc.) so that more difficult or controversial issues can be discussed only after all parties know that it is safe and fair to assume good intentions by all parties. This is a process, and requires time to build. This is a downside of an outside speaker coming to campus unless there is a process by which the "civil rules of the road" can be made clear to all parties.

76.     I just want to make the point that "intellectual diversity," while important, should not be used as a code word for "hire more conservatives." Intellectual diversity means hiring marxists, anarchists, luddites, etc.

77.     Any and all views that do not include hate speech should be respected at the University level. Instead of assuming that protest is the only way to respond to something we find offensive, setting up opportunities for open discussion and civil debate actually moves conversations forward.

78.     "Universities should be safe places to engage in diverse opinions and discourse. Educating learners on how to manage language (""names will never hurt me"") may go a bit farther than eliminating inflammatory labelling and/or offensive views. Learners should also understand that disengaging in self-identified offensive language/views could be the best strategy to reduce/eliminate that viewpoint versus offering oxygen to them (by standing outside a room, chanting, etc.) where hostility can increase and erupt into something devastating. Viewpoints need to be heard in order to create education on finding

common ground versus a sense that everyone must engage in ""group think"". Critical thinking skills should become a critical component to higher education practices. "

79.     I don't believe that professors should obscure their political views,

80.     Building trust with your students by meaningfully engaging with them and supporting them to disagree with me and each other, but always respectfully. this requires being respectful and welcoming, but also holding everyone accountable (including myself) to be respectful and welcoming of each other.

81.     Encourage students who disagree with me to continue to do so through critical, constructive dialogue.

82.     Our universities should seek intellectual rigor and truth. In the process we should have room from approaching problems from any angle. The idea however that universities should have "viewpoint diversity" to please particular political critics rather than to increase our understanding of an issue should be antithetical to the mission of universities.

83.     Allowing for people to disagree.

84.     By being open myself, listening and modeling the behavior I want to encourage.

85.     Ensuring diversity in the student body. Ensuring that students argue viewpoints from a warrant or evidence. Encouraging systems literacy.

86.     Starts at the top -- leadership must model open and constructive dialogue.

87.     Not doing things like shut down the Palestine protests

88.     Setting ground rules, like explaining that discomfort isn't equivalent to dangerous, and modeling compassion and empathy for everyone.

89.     Learning how to engage civically.

90.     Listening Skills 101 generally...and not equating "you disagree" with "you must be not listening or not understanding" or worse..."you must be a bad person."

91.     texts from multiple viewpoints, teaching about justice, teaching skills to students about navigating difficult conversations

92.     provising access to all sides of a perspective, supporting research and discourse, remaining focused on evidence, research, and evidence to support intellectual diversity

93.     Well-developed DEI policies and offices tasked with specifically bringing marginalized communities into the University, through funding, scholarships, workshops, hiring practices, and so forth. To be clear, by marginalized communities I mean women,

racial and sexual minorities, and other such groups, not merely those with radical political views.

94.     Do thorough research on sensitive topics. Be thoughtful and considerate.

95.     Clarity of ground rules up front, letting students know what they can expect and how they are expected to contribute

96.     Courses that cover a wide array of minority perspectives and experiences.

97.     It's finding the right people, people who can express their side of a viewpoint without insulting the other side.

98.     Faculty and students--particularly those who are traditionally underrepresented in academia--are the best resources for this. It is important to give faculty and students from underrepresented groups a voice and to amplify their concerns, as they bring enhanced intellectual diversity and important--yet often unconsidered--perspectives in academic settings.

99.     students need to feel like it is safe to share ideas that feel personal especially if they believe they are in the minority. it can be uncomfortable but it can be done in a productive way.

100.    Sites of Conscience dialogue technique and having experience and being comfortable in holding a room together during uncomfortable conversations

101.    On important issues, highlight points and counterpoints to foster intellectual diversity, broadens people's perspectives, and increase inclusion.

102.    Less bureaucracy.

103.    Not having such biased NEU news outlets. We need more unbiased writers; the anti-Trump and anti-GOP rhetoric is divisive and not helpful.

104.    I try to keep arguments in the classroom data focused and point out instances where each side of the political divide has made decisions or enacted policy that are in alignment with data.

105.    cognitive flexibility- students need to be given tools to allow them to develop the ability to examine an idea or point of view from a variety of perspectives.

## Appendix F – Northeastern Campus Messages

In recent years at Northeastern, campus  messages have ranged from heartfelt letters to the community on international conflagrations such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and matters of urgent national concern such as a wave of anti-Asian violence in 2021, to sympathetic messages following international tragedies such as the attacks in New Zealand in 2019, to messages of comfort following national political events such as the election in 2016.

For example:

1. "The Invasion of Ukraine," Northeastern University Campus Messages, from President Aoun to Members of the Northeatsern Community" 4 March 2022.
   https://president.northeastern.edu/category/messages-writings/campus-messages/

2. "Condemning Anti-Asian Violence," Northeastern University Campus Messages, from President Aoun to All Members of the Northeatsern Community" 17 March 2021.
   *https://president.northeastern.edu/2021/03/17/condemning-anti-asian-violence/*

3. "The Tragedy in New Zealand," Northeastern University Campus Messages, from President Aoun to All Members of the Northeatsern Community" 15 March 2019.
   *https://president.northeastern.edu/2019/03/15/the-tragedy-in-new-zealand/*

4. "Unity, Respect, and Inclusion," Northeastern University Campus Messages, from President Aoun to All Members of the Northeatsern Community" 14 March 2016.
   https://president.northeastern.edu/2016/11/14/unity-respect-and-inclusion-2/

The full list is available:

https://president.northeastern.edu/category/messages-writings/campus-messages/

# Appendix G – Memo to CATLR, ADVANCE

Memo

From: Faculty Senate *ad hoc* Academic Freedom Committee

To:      CATLR, ADVANCE, Office of the Chancellor

Re:     Sharing research on best practices

[*SAC: please add date*]


Dear colleagues,

We are writing to share with you the results of our work.  Our committee was given three charges.  Charge 1 tasked us to research and recommend best practices for fostering viewpoint diversity and cultivating a pluralistic learning environment, while simultaneously supporting all community members' sense of belonging and engagement.

Our report to the Faculty Senate included 17 best practice recommendations.  In our estimation, there is considerable connection between our recommendations and the ongoing work of your offices.  And based on the recommendation of university leadership, we would like to share our report for your consideration.

We have thus asked the Senate Agenda Committee to share with you our analysis of Charge 1.  Our full report is available on the senate webpage [*SAC: please add link*]


[*SAC*: *please add the "Discussion of Findings: Charge 1" which is pages X to Y of the AFC report*]


Sincerely,

Michelle Rego (CPS), Co-chair of the Academic Freedom Committee 2025-26

Louise Walker (CSSH), Co-chair of the Academic Freedom Committee 2025-26

Charles Keckler (CPS), member of the Academic Freedom Committee 2025-26

Anna Lamin (DMSB), member of the Academic Freedom Committee 2025-26

Jack Thomas (Koury), member of the Academic Freedom Committee 2025-26

# Appendix H – List of existing rules regarding classroom recordings

**List of existing rules regarding classroom recordings**

The committee researched the existing rules regarding classroom recordings at Northeastern

University.  The committee found relevant rules articulated in a variety of material— policies, rules, information webpages, toolkits—that, taken together, define the classroom during instruction as a limited educational forum with instructors having discretion over whether to permit recording and students having a right to opt-out of recording. Upon consultation with administration, the committee discovered that some of these rules might be outdated.

Here is a summary of our findings.  Quotes from websites retrieved 31 January 2025.

1. According to the Office of General Counsel's webpage "Photo and Video Toolkit", permission is required to film or record a student, and permission is required to film or record a guest speaker.

    ⇒ https://generalcounsel.northeastern.edu/about/photo-and-video-toolkit/

    ⇒ Key quotes:  "Do we need permission to film or record a guest speaker?  Yes. A speaker owns the right to distribute his or her lecture, or may have transferred those rights to a third party, such as an agent. Rights to photograph, film, redistribute or post a speech online are often limited."

    ⇒ And "Do I need to ask a student for permission before filming or recording?  Yes. A student may elect whether to give permission to film or be recorded, especially during class. In addition, a student owns his or her own academic work, including papers, media presentations, research projects, etc. The University cannot use students' work without a written agreement to do so."

2. According to the "Policy on Copyright" (Policy 206-USA), faculty own the intellectual property rights to lectures, and unauthorized recording and distribution might be a copyright infringement.

    ⇒ https://policies.northeastern.edu/policy206-usa/

⇒ Relevant definition: "**Pedagogical Work** means teaching material(s), which are not Directed Works, created by faculty primarily for instruction of university students, and include, but are not limited to, syllabi, curricula, exams, sample exam answers, course materials, lecture notes, slide decks, individual illustrations, video clips, audio clips, class exercises, class assignments and recorded classes."

⇒ Relevant policy language: "**Ownership of Pedagogical Works.** Pursuant to the Faculty Handbook module on Pedagogical Works, ownership of Pedagogical Works which are not Directed Works reside in the faculty author(s)"

3. According to the "Policy on Student Rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)" (Policy 106), recordings containing other students' voices and/or images are education records and distributing these without consent violates FERPA and may result in federal complaints.

⇒ https://policies.northeastern.edu/policy106/

⇒ Key quotes, relevant definition of education record: "Information about an individual student that is maintained by the university in connection with his or her attendance, recorded in any medium, including, but not limited to, handwriting, print, tapes, computer files, video or audio files, film, microfilm or microfiche".

⇒ Relevant policy section on who has access: "Student educational records are accessible to university officials (including persons or companies whom the university has put under contract, such as an outside attorney or auditor) who have a legitimate educational interest in the information contained in the records and who seek access for the purpose of performing their job functions."

4. According to the "Policy on Appropriate Use of Computer and Network Resources" (Policy 700), it is prohibited to use university systems to harass and prohibits obtaining copyrighted material without permission.

⇒ https://policies.northeastern.edu/policy700/

⇒ Key quote: "Part 6 **Posting of Personal Information/Web Pages/Other Electronic Writings.** Users are responsible for the timeliness, accuracy and content/consequences of their personal information, web pages and other electronic writings. Personal information of members of the Northeastern community, including but not limited to students, faculty and staff, may not be posted or maintained on public networks or sites, unless the user fully complies with applicable laws, regulations, and university policies governing handling of personal information."

5. According to the NUFlex Recording Policy, recording is allowed only at the instructor's discretion, and any recordings are not to be shared beyond enrolled students.

   ⇒ https://nuflex.sites.northeastern.edu/faqs/

   ⇒ Key quote: "Can the instructor record the real-time session? Recording of classroom activities is up to the discretion of the instructor. Recordings should not be shared with audiences beyond the students in the class. To record a class, an instructor must alert the students at the outset. If there are objections, the instructor must either allow for opt-out or terminate the recording."

6. According to the Information on Photography from Northeastern University's "Brand Center", signed consent forms are required for recording in private settings like classrooms.

   ⇒ https://brand.northeastern.edu/design-and-experiences/photography/

   ⇒ Key quote: "According to the Office of the General Counsel, photo/video professionals must obtain signed consent forms to take photos, audio, or video in private settings, such as classrooms and other areas not open to the public. If the event is a gathering of many people, the photographer or videographer can post "Photographer/Videographer/Audio Recording in Area" signs at entrances in lieu of consent forms. Consent forms are not required for images captured outdoors or in other public spaces. However, please ask permission when possible."

7. According to the Disability Access Services Policy, accommodations are allowed for DAS-approved students.

   ⇒ https://disabilityaccessservices.northeastern.edu/facultystaffresources/

   ⇒ Key quote: "Recording Device in Class. The student can use a recording device in class (their own or software provided by DAS). Please announce to the class at the start of the term that recording will be taking place, without naming the student. If any student objects to being recorded, or if your course involves confidential information protected by HIPAA, please contact the DAS for guidance."

# Appendix I - Example revisions to the Faculty Handbook Statement on Free Expression

This appendix presents an example of how the Faculty Handbook could be edited to reflect the perspective represented by the Chicago Statement.  If the Faculty Senate approves Resolution #6, the Academic Freedom committee will consult with the Faculty Handbook Committee, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of General Counsel to finalize the proposed revisions and present these to the Senate for vote in April.   In the example below, deleted text is intentionally indicated by red font strikethrough and added text in blue font.

**Statement on Free Expression:** A foundational principle of Northeastern University is that a global, multicultural, diverse and inclusive community is vital to learning, discovery, and innovation at the highest levels of human endeavor. Further, we believe that an institution of higher learning has a responsibility to foster a community that protects and supports free expression, welcomes open dialogue on critical issues, and maintains an inclusive educational environment where diverse views can be ~~safely~~ expressed and debated by community members ~~in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect~~.

To embody these principles, Northeastern is a place for its community members to engage in open discourse on conflicting and diverse views and/or ideas, including those that others may find unwelcome, controversial, disagreeable, or even offensive. In upholding this commitment, we recognize that while the University values civility and all members share responsibility for fostering mutual respect, the desire to maintain an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect can never override our obligation to protect free expression. Even when speech troubles or offends members of our community, concerns about its impact cannot justify suppression. ~~In the spirit of free expression, the university encourages professional, scholarly and respectful debate and critical thinking regarding differing views~~. In this way, we enhance and increase opportunities for learning and expanding thought perspectives through experience and engagement with those whose opinions and experiences differ from our own.

The University may restrict expression that breaks the law, defames individuals, threatens or harasses others, violates privacy or confidentiality, or directly prevents the University from functioning. The University may also set reasonable guidelines for when, where, and how expression occurs to maintain normal operations. These are deliberately narrow carve-outs from our foundational principle of expressive freedom. Such restrictions must

be content-neutral and never employed in ways that compromise our commitment to fully open exchange of ideas.

The University's commitment to free expression requires reciprocal obligations from all community members. Community members have every right to criticize speakers and contest ideas vigorously, but crossing the line into disruption, obstruction, or preventing others from hearing opposing viewpoints violates our shared commitment to free expression.  University must therefore actively nurture free expression while preventing those who would silence views from undermining this foundational principle.

This statement on free expression is neither intended to contravene Northeastern's long-standing policy regarding academic freedom, nor imply acceptance of discrimination on the basis of protected categories ~~or other forms of communication or action that violate university policy~~.

# Minority Report

By Anna Lamin, Faculty Senator from D'Amore-McKim School of Business

My opposition to adopting the Chicago Principles rests on several interrelated concerns.

- **They weaken Northeastern's existing free-expression framework by downgrading *civility*.** Northeastern's current Statement on Free Expression explicitly links free expression to civility and mutual respect. This connection is intentional and central to how expression is meant to function in an academic community.
- **They conflict with faculty values.** Faculty survey data show that a majority of Northeastern faculty rank civility as the primary institutional value, support protest only when it remains non-disruptive, and overwhelmingly reject shouting down speakers or occupying buildings.
- **They do not match faculty views about where academic freedom matters most.** Faculty locate their greatest academic freedom concerns in teaching, research, and funding, which are domains governed by professional, civil norms, not in disruptive protest surrounding speakers.
- **They risk reducing, rather than expanding, meaningful expression.** Without civility as a governing parameter, expression can devolve into harassment and intimidation, encouraging self-censorship and rewarding the loudest and most aggressive actors. Civility is therefore a precondition for robust discourse, not an obstacle to it.
- **They are unnecessary to address policy scope.** If the goal is to clarify coverage for part-time or international faculty, more direct institutional solutions exist that preserve Northeastern's current framework without importing a different model.

Taken together, these points show that adopting the Chicago Principles would move Northeastern away from a framework that reflects faculty preferences, supports learning, and protects genuine academic freedom—while offering no clear benefits that cannot be achieved through better-targeted alternatives.

## 1. The core issue: Chicago Principles weaken Northeastern's emphasis on civility

The key difference between Northeastern University's existing "Statement on Free Expression" and the Chicago Principles is that Northeastern's statement explicitly ties free expression to community standards of respectful engagement. Northeastern's statement includes the following:

> "where diverse views can be safely expressed and debated by community members in an atmosphere of *civility and mutual respect*" (emphasis added).

This clause is not incidental. It makes clear that civility and mutual respect are not optional ideals, but integral to how free expression is meant to operate in a university environment. In contrast, the Chicago Principles place far less emphasis on civility as a governing norm, which risks reframing campus disagreement as a domain in which disruption and intimidation are tolerated as inevitable byproducts of "free expression."

## 2. Faculty preferences align with Northeastern's current approach

Importantly, Northeastern faculty themselves place a clear priority on civility. The Academic Freedom Committee included several questions in the Fall 2025 faculty survey that addressed this issue directly. The results are unambiguous: as behavior becomes more disruptive and therefore less civil, faculty support drops sharply.

Four key questions illustrate this pattern:

1. Question: Assume that the values of 'civility', 'belonging', and 'free expression' are core values of Northeastern University. In your opinion, which is the primary value? In other words, when these values come into conflict, which ordering best reflects your personal priorities? (437 respondents out of 589 total respondents answered this question)

The results in Figure 1 show that faculty overwhelmingly prioritize civility by a majority. In fact, roughly one-third more respondents rank civility as the primary value compared to free expression or belonging.
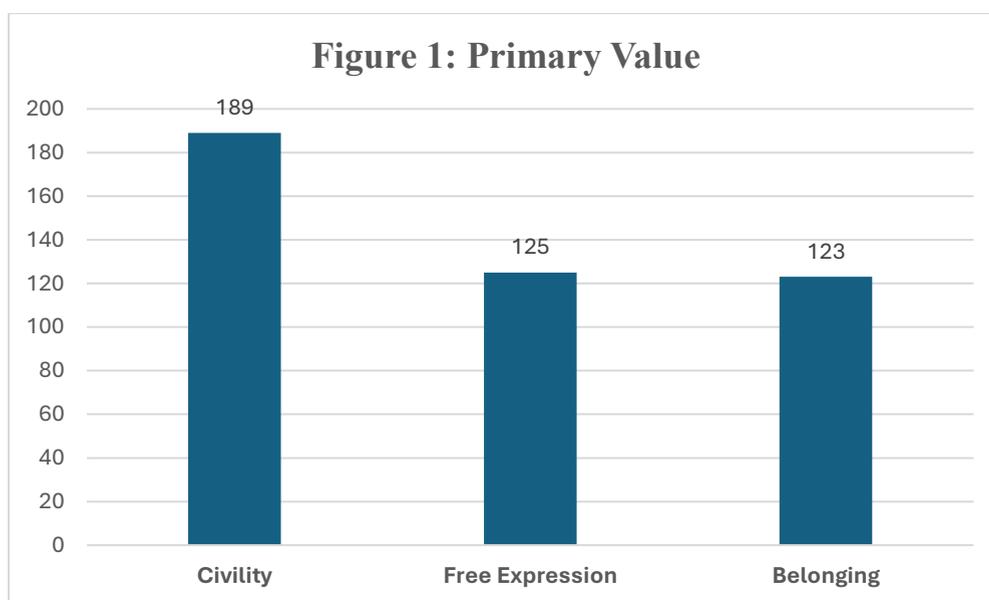


Figure 1: Primary Value

Table 1 shows the breakdown by college. What is apparent is that civility is ranked as the dominant value by faculty at the majority of colleges, including: 1) College of Science, 2) College of Engineering, 3) Bouvé College of Health Sciences, 4) College of Social Sciences and Humanities, 5) D'Amore-McKim School of Business, and 6) College of Professional Studies.
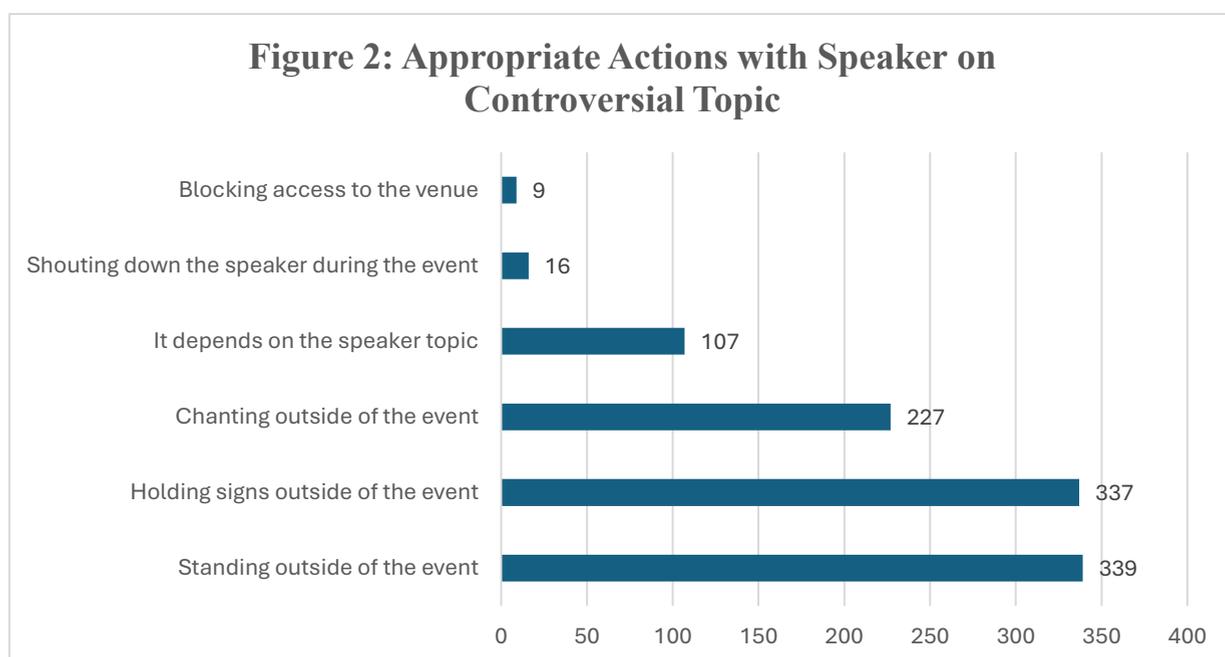
## Table 1: Primary Value by College

| College | Civility | Free Expression | Belonging |
|---|---|---|---|
| College of Science | 37.5 | 29.5 | 21.5 |
| College of Engineering | 35 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| Bouvé College of Health Sciences | 30.5 | 11.5 | 17 |
| College of Social Sciences and Humanities | 27 | 22.5 | 23 |
| D'Amore-McKim School of Business | 25.5 | 8 | 15.5 |
| College of Arts, Media and Design | 13.5 | 16 | 16 |
| College of Professional Studies | 9 | 5 | 5 |
| Khoury College of Computer Sciences | 6.5 | 8.5 | 8 |
| Mills College at Northeastern | 1.5 | 5.5 | 0 |
| School of Law | 1 | 4 | 3.5 |

Notes: *n*=432 respondents; There were 26 responses from faculty with joint appointments. Each of these was allocated a weight of 0.5 to each college to which the faculty member belongs to.

2. Question: A speaker has been invited to campus to present research on a controversial topic. Is it appropriate for university community members to do the following? Check all that apply. (383 respondents out of 589 respondents answered this question)

Figure 2 shows that very few faculty view actions such as shouting down a speaker (4%) or blocking access to an event (2%) as appropriate responses to a controversial campus speaker. By contrast, roughly 88% of respondents consider standing outside the event or holding signs to be acceptable forms of protest. These results show that as behaviors become more disruptive, faculty support drops very sharply, highlighting the importance faculty place on civility in campus discourse.



Figure 2: Appropriate Actions with Speaker on Controversial Topic

| Action | Count |
|---|---|
| Blocking access to the venue | 9 |
| Shouting down the speaker during the event | 16 |
| It depends on the speaker topic | 107 |
| Chanting outside of the event | 227 |
| Holding signs outside of the event | 337 |
| Standing outside of the event | 339 |

3.  <u>Question</u>: A mix of students and faculty are participating in a demonstration on campus that has been approved by the university administration.  Is it appropriate for university community members to do the following? Check all that apply. (334 respondents out of 589 respondents answered this question)
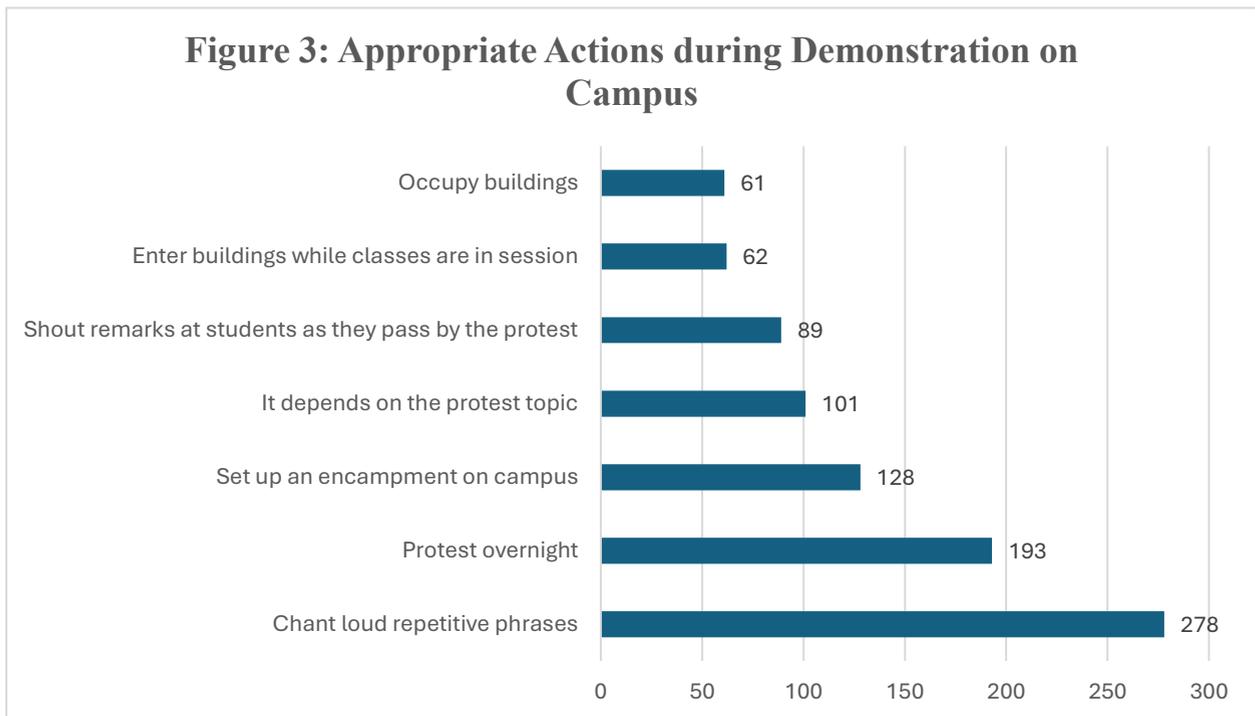
Figure 3 presents the results for this question. Once again, an activity such as chanting is widely viewed as an appropriate response, with over 83% of respondents indicating it is acceptable. In contrast, entering or occupying buildings is considered appropriate by only about 18% of faculty, a small minority.

The pattern is unmistakable. Faculty strongly support protest activity so long as it remains relatively non-disruptive, but approval collapses as actions become more intrusive and less civil. Indeed, roughly two-thirds of respondents reject these uncivil behaviors outright, underscoring that the faculty norm is not permissiveness toward disruption, but a clear preference for orderly, civil expression.

**Figure 3: Appropriate Actions during Demonstration on Campus**

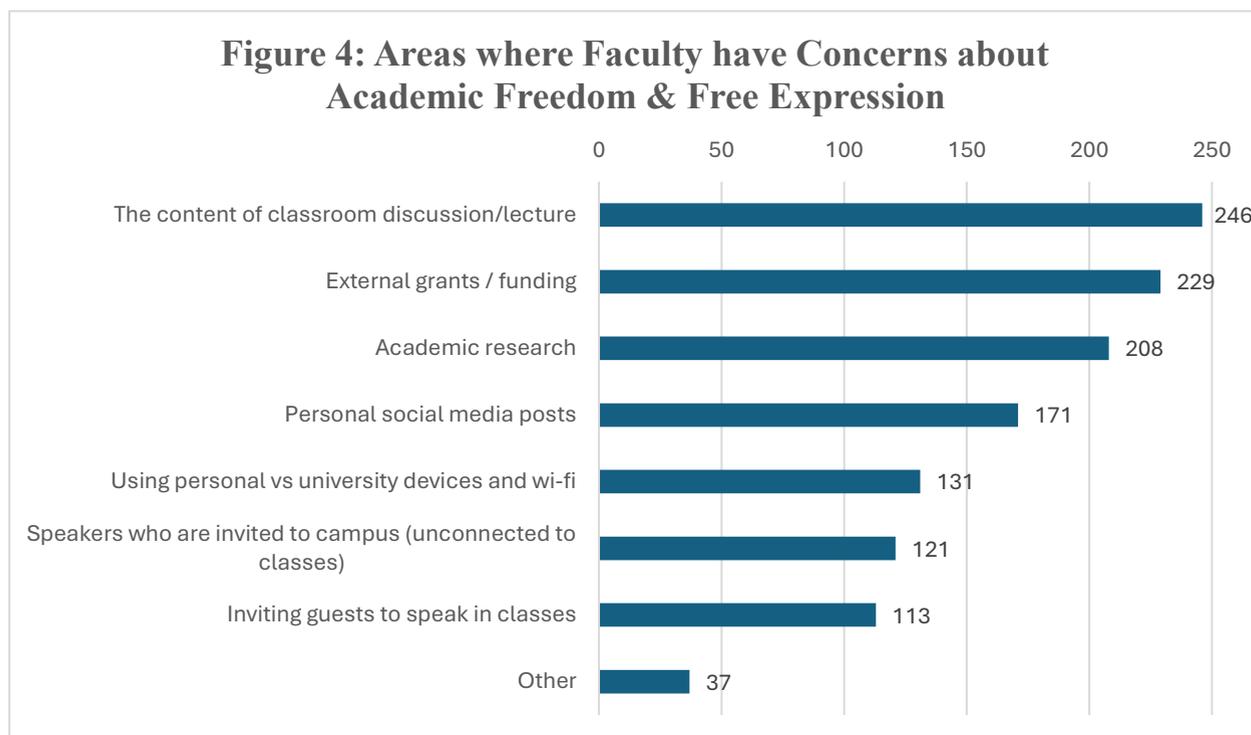| Action | Count |
|---|---|
| Occupy buildings | 61 |
| Enter buildings while classes are in session | 62 |
| Shout remarks at students as they pass by the protest | 89 |
| It depends on the protest topic | 101 |
| Set up an encampment on campus | 128 |
| Protest overnight | 193 |
| Chant loud repetitive phrases | 278 |

4. <u>Question</u> Please consider the academic freedom and free expression concerns listed below. Which of the following do you worry about personally? Select all that apply. (389 respondents out of 589 respondents answered this question)

The last question dealt with understanding the *contexts* in which faculty express concern about academic freedom and free expression Figure 4 presents the results. Faculty concern about academic freedom revolves around teaching, research, and funding, settings that are typically governed by professional norms of collegiality, peer review, and civil discourse. In other words, the contexts in which academic freedom matters most to faculty are not ones characterized by disruption or incivility.

Conversely, in contexts where civility is most likely to be contested, such as external speakers for campus events, faculty are comparatively less likely to view academic freedom as a pressing issue. This suggests that faculty do not primarily conceptualize academic freedom as a license for disruptive or uncivil conduct surrounding speakers. Rather, they understand academic freedom as protection for scholarship, pedagogical autonomy, and research independence within fundamentally civil institutional environments.

Put differently, when faculty say they are concerned about academic freedom, they are overwhelmingly referring to the freedom to teach, research, and pursue funding without interference; not to the freedom to tolerate incivility or disruption in the name of expression. This distinction is critical for interpreting faculty attitudes and for evaluating claims that elevating civility undermines academic freedom.



Figure 4: Areas where Faculty have Concerns about Academic Freedom & Free Expression

| Area | Count |
|---|---|
| The content of classroom discussion/lecture | 246 |
| External grants / funding | 229 |
| Academic research | 208 |
| Personal social media posts | 171 |
| Using personal vs university devices and wi-fi | 131 |
| Speakers who are invited to campus (unconnected to classes) | 121 |
| Inviting guests to speak in classes | 113 |
| Other | 37 |

In summary, the Faculty Survey results clearly show that a majority of faculty prioritize civility over free expression, and subsequent questions reinforce this pattern: while actions such as standing outside an event or holding signs are widely viewed as appropriate, more disruptive and therefore less civil behaviors, such as shouting down a speaker or occupying buildings, are deemed appropriate by only a small fraction of faculty. Northeastern faculty thus do not understand academic freedom as a value that supersedes civility; instead, they rank civility as the primary institutional value, strongly reject disruptive and uncivil forms of protest, and express their greatest academic freedom concerns in settings such as classrooms, research, and external funding, where civil, professional norms already prevail.

In advocating for adoption of the Chicago Principles, the Academic Freedom Committee is therefore moving *against* the stated preferences and values of the faculty. Faculty have made clear that they want a campus culture grounded in civility and respectful dialogue.

## 3. Why civility is important: it protects discourse and promotes learning

Universities have long been centers of protest and political organizing, and they will remain so in the future. Inevitably, some protests will become less civil, meaning universities will continue to confront instances of uncivil behavior. But it is unrealistic to expect institutions to allow uncivil conduct to proceed without limitation because civility is the parameter that separates discourse from harassment and intimidation.

Without this parameter, free expression can easily devolve into harassment. In the absence of basic expectations of mutual respect and civility, the incentive structure rewards the loudest, most aggressive, and most extreme behavior, such as those willing to disrupt events, shout down opposing views, or intimidate others. The result is not an exchange of ideas, but a contest of intimidation in which power shifts to whoever can create the most fear or disruption and thus gain the most influence on campus. In that environment, what prevails is not open debate but mob rule.

Moreover, incivility acts to reduce free expression *in practice*, as those with unpopular or minority views self-censor. While in theory the lack of parameters promises more speech, in practice due to self-censorship, it produces less speech. The result is that the campus becomes less intellectually diverse, not more. Civility parameters protect the exchange of ideas on campus; they do not hinder it.

In addition, the role of a university is to promote discourse and teach the next generation how to disagree, debate and deliberate without resorting to intimidation and disruption, both of which are characteristics of incivility. Universities educate and prepare leaders for the future. Without civility, campuses do not teach students to persuade, instead they teach them to shout, disrupt, and dominate. In that sense, civility is not a constraint on the mission of higher education; it is a core part of it.

Finally, once campus behavior becomes uncivil, then harassment, intimidation or even potential violence can quickly follow. At that point, the university is exposed to significant institutional risk. Failure to respond appropriately can trigger a cascade of lawsuits, complaints and heightened scrutiny from lawmakers, alumni and funders. For this reason, it is not surprising that universities act to curb uncivil behavior regardless of their positions on the Chicago Principles.

In short, privileging civility is not a retreat from free expression, instead it is how universities ensure free expression remains educative rather than destructive.

## 4. Why the Chicago Principles are unnecessary for faculty coverage

It is important to clarify a recurring claim: that Northeastern's Statement on Free Expression applies only to full-time faculty because it appears in the Faculty Handbook. If the committee's concern is to ensure clearer inclusion of part-time or international faculty, adopting the Chicago Principles is neither the only, nor the most direct way to accomplish that goal.

Part-time faculty are already explicitly covered under existing institutional agreements, and at least some international campuses operate under formal policies that explicitly address academic freedom within their governing legal frameworks. The Committee did not undertake a systematic review of these existing mechanisms before asserting that adopting the Chicago Principles would newly extend academic freedom protections to faculty who supposedly lack them.

For part-time faculty, the collective bargaining agreement[1] between Northeastern University and Service Employees International Union Local 509 (entered August 17, 2023) includes Article 5, "Academic Freedom and Teaching Expectations," which states at the beginning of Section 1:

> *Faculty members shall be entitled to academic freedom on the same basis as all other faculty members involved in teaching or scholarship at the University.*

In other words, part-time faculty already have the same academic freedom protections as full-time faculty. There is no need to adopt the Chicago Principles to extend academic freedom to part-time faculty as this is already in place.

Northeastern University London has a Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech[2], as required by English law, which applies to faculty on that campus and explicitly addresses the issue of academic freedom, stating:

> 8. *Freedom of speech and academic freedom are fundamental to the University's mission of experiential education, high-impact research, and global reach. By promoting and protecting freedom of speech within the law, we empower our students, faculty, alumni, partners, visiting speakers, and wider community to*

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[1] Collective bargaining agreement was accessed on February 10, 2026: https://provost.northeastern.edu/wp-content/uploads/CBA-Part-Time-Faculty-Boston-2023-20261.pdf

[2] The Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech can be found in its entirety here: https://www.nulondon.ac.uk/academic-handbook/policies-and-procedures/general/operations/code-of-practice-on-freedom-of-speech/ (accessed on February 11, 2026)

*challenge conventional thinking, explore diverse viewpoints, and engage in the robust intellectual discourse necessary to solve complex global problems and pursue meaningful impact.*

9. *As a diverse academic community, we embrace the expression of conflicting opinions and ideas. Engaging with those who hold fundamentally different viewpoints may expose community members to ideas they find offensive, contentious, or objectionable. The University is dedicated to fostering open and respectful intellectual debate whilst protecting the rights of all community members to lawfully test assumptions, challenge viewpoints, and express principled disagreement, recognising that academic excellence flourishes through the respectful exchange of diverse perspectives. We encourage every member of our community to speak up and listen well.*

10. *Free speech enjoys robust protection under English law, and the University is committed to promoting and protecting free speech within legal boundaries and with due regard to the rights and safety of others.*

Once again, faculty at the London campus already operate under a policy that aligns with the legal and institutional standards of the United Kingdom, and this framework has been in place for many years. The Committee did not examine how that policy differs from the Chicago Principles.

Another alternative is that Northeastern could adopt a university-wide statement on rights and responsibilities that sits outside the Faculty Handbook altogether and applies institution-wide. Other institutions have taken this approach. Such a solution would directly address concerns about scope and applicability without adopting a different framework. Indeed, adopting the Chicago Principles would, in effect, move Northeastern's free expression framework outside the Faculty Handbook anyway, raising the question of why this outcome requires the Chicago Principles specifically.

To re-iterate, the committee did not examine Northeastern's existing policies for part-time and international faculty – policies that already explicitly address academic freedom and clearly extend their protections to these faculty groups. Nor did it meaningfully explore alternative policy mechanisms.

## Conclusion

In closing, Northeastern does not face a gap in its commitment to free expression; it faces a choice about what kind of university environment it wishes to sustain. The university already possesses a framework that affirms free expression while anchoring it in civility, a framework that aligns with faculty values, protects the conditions necessary for learning, and reflects how academic freedom is actually practiced in teaching, research, and scholarship. Adopting the Chicago Principles would weaken this carefully balanced approach, elevate a model of expression that tolerates disruption and intimidation, and do so without necessity or clear institutional benefit. For these reasons, I urge the Faculty Senate to reaffirm Northeastern's existing Statement on Free Expression and reject adoption of the Chicago Principles.