

## Statement of Principles on Freedom of Inquiry and Expression

[1] Colby is a residential liberal arts college dedicated to learning and committed to the growth and well-being of all its members. Because the freedoms to conduct research, to discuss openly a diversity of ideas, and to communicate the results of scholarly work are necessary to teaching and learning, Colby College will vigorously protect the rights of all its members to freedom of inquiry and expression. Abridgement of these rights interferes with the fundamental aims of the College.

[2] Excellence in undergraduate education is the College's central mission. Students expect the opportunity to thrive and grow at Colby in an atmosphere of rigorous intellectual pursuit. Critical reasoning abilities are honed by questions, challenges, and discussions. Because diversity, inclusion, and equity are necessary elements of a rich living and learning environment, the College strives to bring to campus students, employees, and guests who come from many different backgrounds and who espouse a wide range of beliefs.

[3] As an association of scholars who aim individually and collectively to advance the frontiers of knowledge, Colby has a particular responsibility to affirm the values of freedom of inquiry and freedom of expression. To gain knowledge and understanding, inquirers must be free to conduct and publish research into whatever questions or problems engage their curiosity and to explore competing ideas, theories, and interpretations. The academic enterprise is based on the hopeful confidence that, over time, reasoned inquiries conducted in an atmosphere of freedom will deepen understanding and enhance human knowledge. For all faculty and staff engaged in teaching and scholarship as a part of their duties, the College affirms the principles of academic freedom embodied in the American Association of University Professors' 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom, which was adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1971 and is incorporated into the Bylaws of the College.

[4] Because Colby is a residential college, we expect that community members will cultivate the virtues of civility, integrity, and respect for others and strive to build a community that practices these virtues. As the Colby Affirmation states, genuine inclusivity requires active, honest, and compassionate engagement with the perspectives of others. In striving to create such a climate, we commit to creating and sustaining a campus culture in which all members feel a sense of belonging, and in which all members stand in responsible relationship to one another. We recognize that, as a community aspiring to full inclusion, each of us shares responsibility for the welfare of all. To that end, Colby strives to empower students with the confidence and skills to take part in intellectually productive dialogue with people who differ from themselves.

[5] We recognize further the important fact that not everyone feels equally free to speak in every context. Racial inequalities, gender normativities, and economic disparities continue to structure our society and our campus. As speakers and as listeners, we must be attentive to the ways in which such inequalities of status and power may constrain and affect communication. All should realize that expressions can carry different weights depending on both who speaks and who hears, resulting in potentially disparate effects on different members of our community. Persons holding positions of leadership and responsibility should pay particular attention to the public nature of their roles within the community and are expected to live up to the trust placed in them.

[6] We hope that, when expression does cause injury or offense, our entire community will strive to repair the campus climate in a spirit of mutual forbearance and reconciliation, and — where appropriate — in a spirit of apology and forgiveness. As part of its obligation to maintain an equitable and inclusive learning environment, the College will provide strong leadership and institutional support in response to such incidents.

[7] When community members share their thoughts in the public sphere, including through social media, it should be presumed that their comments represent their own views, and not those of the College. In order to protect the freedom of its members to pursue inquiry on matters of social and political controversy, the

College will not normally take positions on such matters, although it retains the right to speak out in defense of its mission and values. Accordingly the College will not ordinarily comment, whether in support or opposition, on the personally expressed opinions of members of the college community, but it will consistently affirm their rights to free expression.

[8] We affirm the liberating power of protest. It is an essential tool in the hands of those seeking to dismantle injustices and transform institutions. The College supports the rights of all in the community to organize and to join political associations, convene and conduct public meetings, publicly demonstrate and picket, advocate and publicize opinion by print, sign, and voice. However, the right to express oneself does not include a right to silence others, or to prevent other members of the college community from exercising their rights to speak, listen, conduct public meetings, demonstrate, and to advocate and publicize their opinions.

[9] Because the freedoms of inquiry and expression are justified by reference to the educational mission of the College, those freedoms are not unlimited. The College will not protect expression that: violates the law, falsely defames a specific individual, constitutes a genuine threat of imminent violence, unjustifiably interferes with substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or constitutes harassment; expression rises to the point of harassment when it targets any individual or any group of persons, who are protected by federal or state law, in a manner that promotes or incites hatred or contempt such that it constitutes a threatening or hostile environment for that individual or group. Finally, the College may also enforce content-neutral rules concerning how, when, and where expression occurs to ensure that it does not significantly disrupt the educational, community, or residential experience of students, staff, or faculty. However, these are narrow exceptions to the general principles of freedom of expression and inquiry, and it is crucial that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with Colby's commitment to the free and open discussion of ideas necessary to its educational and scholarly mission.

[10] Freedom of expression and freedom of inquiry have a broader significance as well, beyond the work of students and scholars. As self-reflective and expressive beings, it is through communication that we discover and define our personal identities, come to understand others, and establish just and enduring communities. For these reasons the College encourages members of its community to express themselves freely, thoughtfully, and responsibly, and thus to value free expression not merely as an abstract principle, but as a foundational component of what it means to be human and alive in a world of difficult choices and formidable challenges, and of our unyielding hope that we may yet overcome these.