

Iowa State University Statement on the First Amendment in Light of Recent Syllabus
Controversy
August 22, 2020

As a public institution, Iowa State University fully embraces its role as a First Amendment campus and is deeply committed to constitutional protections of free expression. The protections afforded by the First Amendment and similar provisions in the Iowa Constitution are core values of the university and are foundational to the university's mission to create, share, and apply knowledge to make Iowa and the world a better place. Constitutional free speech provisions are designed to establish and protect the "free marketplace of ideas" that is a fundamental characteristic of university life.

Iowa State University does not punish individuals for their constitutionally protected rights to expression, nor do we have policies or practices that prohibit expression based on the content of the expression or the viewpoint of the speaker.

Recently a fourth-year instructor in an English class issued a syllabus that contained instructions contrary to university policy and suggested that students would not be allowed to exercise their Constitutional First Amendment rights in that class. The syllabus statement as originally written violated university policy, and has since been corrected to be in compliance. University legal counsel met with the instructor to provide specific guidance about the First Amendment rights of students on our campus and in class. The instructor acknowledged the mistake, changed the syllabus later that day, and agreed to foster a classroom atmosphere that respects the First Amendment rights of all students. Moreover, the students in her class have been provided with the following safeguards:

1. The opportunity to transfer to another section of the same course that is taught by a different instructor.
2. An administrative contact they can reach out to if they feel they are being treated unfairly because of the content of their speech or their viewpoint regarding issues being discussed in class.

Grading in the class will also be monitored by an experienced senior faculty member, so that students can have confidence that they are being treated fairly.

All Iowa State University instructors are prohibited from using teaching or grading methods that prevent students from full participation, including expressing their beliefs and viewpoints in assignments or class discussion that are germane to the subject matters being discussed. Our campus has been and will continue to be a place where a diversity of ideas and thoughts will be expressed and debated, as outlined in the university's [Principles of Community](#). Iowa State University takes seriously its obligation to support and uphold the First Amendment and to create a campus where all individuals and ideas are welcome.