

McMaster University 2019 Annual Report on Free Speech Policies
Reporting Period: January – August 2019

Institutional Culture and Policies

McMaster University defines freedom of speech as the right of all members of our community to exercise freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression. As an academic institution we uphold a fundamental commitment to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Throughout the history of our University, we have advanced the boundaries of knowledge and learning through critical enquiry, discussion and debate, and this freedom to question, research and explore is fundamental to the discovery, communication and preservation of knowledge that is at the heart of our mission.

McMaster has a variety of policies, statements and other documents in place that outline the University's longstanding commitment to free speech and the expectations for members of our community when exercising this freedom. Prior to the government announcing the requirement for an institutional free speech policy, McMaster had already been engaged in a review of the relevant policy framework and, as part of this work, prepared draft guidelines for event organizers. After reviewing the feedback and comments received from members of the campus community, the University finalized this document, titled *Freedom of Expression, Protest and Dissent: Guidance for Event Organizers and Participants*. Following the government's announcement, McMaster prepared a summary document outlining the policy framework already in place, and also launched a dedicated [Freedom of Expression website](#). The website gathers together the University's policies and statements on freedom of expression and related matters, and seeks to provide context and information about this critically important issue.

Aside from the development of the *Guidance for Event Organizers*, discussions have been underway on our campus for some time with regard to freedom of speech. As recent examples, in November 2018, the University worked in partnership with the McMaster Students Union (MSU) to hold a dedicated Town Hall on Freedom of Expression, which enabled students to ask questions and discuss issues directly with the University President, the MSU President and the Associate Vice-President (Equity and Inclusion). In March 2019, the University's Socrates Project also held an event dedicated to Freedom of Expression, entitled *Resisting Hate with Free Speech*, which was attended by students, faculty, staff and members of the local community.

The University has a long history of organizing, hosting and supporting a diverse range of events on our campus and this continued during 2019. Although there are no immediate plans to amend the current policy framework, McMaster is committed to monitoring the implementation and impact of the policies and processes currently in place and to making appropriate adjustments as needed to address any issues that arise.

Events

Non-curricular events, ranging from panel discussions, seminars, lectures, to art installations, musical performances, information sessions, film screenings, public announcements, recognition events and more, take place on our campus on a daily basis. Since events are organized and promoted by Faculties, Departments, individuals and groups across the campus, there is no accurate way of estimating the number that have taken place since January 1, 2019. As an illustrative example, our Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services office, which has responsibility for reviewing and approving student events, approved approximately 1,500 events during the period January 1 to May 31, 2019. This figure does not take account of non-curricular events held by Faculties, Departments or other units, groups or individuals within the University, so is only a fraction of the many hundreds of events that took place during this period.

Enquiries about particular events are typically directed to the event organizer in the first instance and referred to other offices, as appropriate, where additional information or support is needed. Offices that might be engaged to respond to enquiries include the Equity and Inclusion Office, Student Affairs, and Communications and Public Affairs, with other units and individuals being brought in as needed. Where safety concerns with regard to an event have been identified, McMaster's Security Services is engaged to support safety planning and work with event organizers to ensure that planned events are able to proceed wherever possible. The University is not aware of any events that were unable to proceed due to cost and/or safety concerns. In the event that complaints are received, these would typically be referred to the University's Equity and Inclusion Office for review in the first instance.

Complaints

McMaster has complaint mechanisms and support services in place to address any issues or concerns with behaviour that may violate University policies or codes of conduct. Although the University receives enquiries or expressions of concern from time to time about events taking place on our campus, we are not aware of any official complaints made under our internal policies or codes during the reporting period. Similarly, the University is not aware that any matters relating to freedom of speech have been referred to the Ontario Ombudsman for review.

Further Information

McMaster's [Freedom of Expression website](#) draws together the relevant policies and statements on this issue and provides further context and information.

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