

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND DISCLAIMING PUBLIC STATEMENTS

The following provides guidance to faculty on when public statements should include a disclaimer indicating that the speaker or writer is not intending to express any views on behalf of St. Olaf College. The College's Academic Freedom Policy, derived directly from the AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure states:

College teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and members of a particular educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As a member of a learned profession and a particular college, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the college.

The obligations imposed under the Academic Freedom Policy are a logical corollary of your right to express your opinions free of the College's oversight. Whenever faculty speak "as citizens" it is imperative that your audience understands that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the College. The College's policy requires faculty to "at all times... make every effort" to ensure that readers or listeners understand that St. Olaf has not authorized you to speak on its behalf. Whenever a possibility of confusion exists, the onus is on you to affirmatively dispel any notion of the College's endorsement of your opinions.

This policy applies to both oral and written speech. Because it can be easy to identify your relationship with the College with only your name and bits of other personally identifiable information, it is important to disclaim St. Olaf's endorsement of your speech even when your position as a member of the St. Olaf faculty is not explicitly identified.

An effective disclaimer is one similar to the following which makes clear that the College has not reviewed the content of your remarks and may or may not subscribe to them:

The opinions expressed here are strictly those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of St. Olaf College.

Because the College cannot anticipate all circumstances when a faculty member might "speak or write as a citizen" it is not possible to provide exhaustive guidance on when a disclaimer accompanying the faculty member's remarks is necessary. The following are instances where it would be appropriate for you to provide a disclaimer in order to make clear that your views are not necessarily those of the College: (1) when advocating views relative to a social or political issue; (2) when commenting publicly on a proposed or implemented College action or policy;

and/or (3) when commenting to the media or in another public forum where your association with the College is identified. Notwithstanding the foregoing, such a disclaimer would not be necessary where a faculty member provides scholarly analysis (which does not advocate a particular social or political viewpoint) and where the analysis falls within the faculty member's field of study. For example, a political science professor could be interviewed by the media about an election for a political office. As long as the professor's remarks related to a scholarly aspect of the election, and did not advocate in favor or against any particular candidates, a disclaimer would not be necessary.

At times a member of the faculty may be authorized to speak on behalf of the College. Such authorization will be provided in advance in writing by the President or Provost and Dean of the College. In such circumstances, a disclaimer would not be necessary when the faculty member speaks consistent with the authority given them by the College.

If you have any questions regarding St. Olaf's Academic Freedom Policy or this guidance, please contact the Provost and Dean of the College.

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