

GUIDELINES REGARDING POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

→ [PROVOST.UIOWA.EDU/POLITICAL-ACTIVITY-GUIDELINES](https://provost.uiowa.edu/political-activity-guidelines)

The University of Iowa fully supports the constitutional right of faculty members to express their personal opinions regarding political candidates and issues. “Because academic freedom has traditionally included the faculty member’s full freedom as a citizen, most faculty members face no insoluble conflicts between the claims of politics, social action, and conscience, on the one hand, and the claims and expectations of their students, colleagues, and institutions on the other.” Responsibilities to the Community ([OM III-15.6](#)).

As employees of a public institution, however, faculty have a responsibility when exercising these rights to make it clear that their opinions are their own and that they do not speak for the university. Faculty must also take care to adhere to policies regarding use of university resources.

The purpose of this document is to ensure that UI faculty members know their rights and responsibilities under applicable policies as they engage in discourse about political matters.

Expression of Political Views Outside the Employment Context

The UI policy on Professional Ethics and Academic Responsibility ([OM III-15](#)) states that every faculty member has “the rights and obligations of any citizen . . . [including] the right to organize and join political or other associations, convene and conduct public meetings and publicize his or her opinion on political and social issues.” Faculty members should feel free, for example, to: campaign for political candidates on their own time; erect yard signs at their homes in support of candidates, bills, or referenda; use their personal telephone or email account to campaign for candidates or issues; or comment on social media using their personal computer or other personal device.

Obligation not to Represent University’s Position on Legislative, Political, or Other Matters

The Professional Ethics and Academic Responsibilities policy ([OM III-15.5](#)) states: “When a faculty member acts or speaks as a private person, he or she should make clear that his or her actions and utterances are entirely his or her own and not those of the University.” While faculty members are free to comment on legislative issues in their personal capacity, the university’s position on legislative issues is set by the Board of Regents, State of Iowa, after consultation with university administration. It is important, therefore, that university faculty not make broad statements such as “the university supports” a particular position, when the university has taken no such position. Even where the university has taken that position, it is not appropriate for faculty speaking outside their university employment responsibilities to represent the university’s position on any issue.

Use of Faculty Member's University Title when Expressing Opinions to Elected Officials, the Press, Social Media, or Others

According to the policy on Use of University Name ([OM II-33](#)), faculty members may use their university title for identification purposes so long as use of the title does not imply the individual is speaking or acting on behalf of the university. For example, a UI faculty member may sign a petition and add the identifier "Professor, College of Pharmacy, University of Iowa." Where use of the university title would imply that the faculty member is expressing the university's viewpoint or position – for instance, where the faculty member has an administrative role – use of the title is not appropriate unless the university has adopted such a position and the faculty member is representing that position in an official capacity.

Use of University Name or Letterhead when Expressing Opinions to Elected Officials, the Press, Social Media, or Others

The Use of University Name policy ([OM II-33](#)) states that "[t]he use of the University name for any purpose in any non-University endeavor not previously sanctioned by the [Office of Strategic Communication](#) is prohibited." Specifically, this policy prohibits the use of university letterhead for non-university correspondence to elected officials or others, explaining, "The use of University letterhead for that purpose is potentially confusing to elected officials because it implies that the writer is speaking on behalf of the University."

Obligation not to Use uiowa.edu Email Account or Other University Resources to Engage in Personal Political Activities or to Lobby Public Officials

The policy on Use of University Resources ([OM II-32.7](#)) states that, "University resources, including the University's electronic address (email, web) shall not be used for 1) personal political activities, including directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective office, or for 2) lobbying of public officials. For purposes of this policy, 'lobbying' does not include individual faculty or staff sharing or providing information or opinions with public officials on matters of policy within their areas of expertise."

Use of the university's email system to lobby public officials is prohibited even if the faculty member makes clear that the email expresses solely that individual's personal views. The Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources ([OM II-19](#)).

Where a faculty member is permitted to use the uiowa.edu email account – for instance, where the faculty member is using the account to share or provide information within the faculty member's area of expertise as described above – appropriate steps nevertheless should be taken to avoid any inference that the communication connotes official university authorization or endorsement of the message ([OM II-19](#)). A statement such as the following is not required, but could be used for clarification: "Unless explicitly stated otherwise, the views expressed herein are not the views of the university or any college or other unit thereof. Rather, they are the personal views of the sender of this email. Any use of the title of the sender's position at the University of Iowa is for identification purposes only."

Right to Contact Legislators about Bills Involving Topics on which the Faculty Member is a Content Expert

As noted above, the Use of University Resources policy ([OM III-32.7](#)) clarifies as follows the distinction between “lobbying” and other communication with public officials regarding policy matters: “University resources, including the University’s electronic address (email, web) shall not be used for... lobbying of public officials. For purposes of this policy, ‘lobbying’ does not include individual faculty sharing or providing information or opinions with public officials on matters of policy within their areas of expertise.”

There are times when the UI is directly involved in the legislative process and may have taken a formal position on a particular bill. Faculty are encouraged to contact the [UI Office of Governmental Affairs](#) for information before contacting members of the legislature about legislative issues.

Expression of Political Views in the Classroom and in Other Instructional Contexts

The policy on Responsibilities to the Community ([OM III-15.6](#)) states that a “faculty member does not use the classroom to solicit support for personal views and opinions.” Controversial political topics may certainly be introduced into classroom discussions and in other instructional contexts— and should be—but with appropriate regard to context. The Board of Regents, State of Iowa policy on [Academic Freedom](#) states, “University teachers shall be entitled to academic freedom in the classroom in discussing the teachers’ course subject, but shall not introduce into the teaching controversial matters that have no relation to the subject.” University policy further provides that “[o]n controversial issues within the scope of the course a reasonable range of opinion should be presented. When the faculty member presents his or her own views on such issues, they should always be identified as such.” Responsibilities to the Student ([OM III-15.2](#)). Moreover, “[e]very student is entitled to the same intellectual freedom which the faculty member enjoys. The faculty member must respect that freedom. Restraints must not be imposed upon the student’s search for or consideration of diverse or contrary opinion.... The classroom must remain a place where free and open discussion of all content and issues relevant to a course can take place.” Responsibilities to the Student ([OM III-15.2](#)).

Teaching and mentoring occur outside the classroom as well as within it. When interacting with students, faculty should not purport to speak for the university and should take care to clarify when their comments represent their own personal views. Professional Ethics and Academic Responsibilities ([OM III-15.5](#)). Similarly, faculty should refrain from displaying or communicating political messages in places or in ways that might imply university support for the message. For instance, displaying political messages may ordinarily be permissible in private workspaces. However, if such political messages would be immediately visible to the public or to public areas – for example, if posted on a faculty member’s outward-facing window or on the outside of an office door facing a public space – the faculty member should consider whether those materials might suggest university support for the message. In addition, faculty members are encouraged to consider whether communicating, displaying, or wearing a particular political message may adversely affect their ability to show respect for and elicit “diverse or contrary opinion” in the classroom. Responsibilities to the Student ([OM III-15.2](#)).

The foregoing policies apply to all faculty, including adjunct faculty. For more information about faculty rights and responsibilities, please contact Lois Geist, Associate Provost for Faculty at 467-4674 or faculty@uiowa.edu.

Policies and guidelines that inform this document include:

- Professional Ethics and Academic Responsibilities policy ([OM III-15](#)),
- Use of University Name policy ([OM II-33](#)),
- Use of University Resources policy ([OM II-32.7](#)),
- Acceptable Use of Information Technology Resources policy ([OM II-19](#)), and
- Academic Freedom policy, Operations Manual of the Board of Regents, State of Iowa ([Board Policy Manual 3.9](#)).

An electronic version of this document is available on the Office of the Provost website at the following link: https://provost.uiowa.edu/sites/provost.uiowa.edu/files/2020-12/Guidelines_regarding_political_activity_by_faculty.pdf.