

University of St. Thomas Policies

POLITICAL SPEAKERS AND USE OF UNIVERSITY FACILITIES FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Policy Number: G.04.03

SCOPE

All staff, faculty, students and external groups who reserve or rent facilities for events.

PURPOSE

Affirming Ex Corde Ecclesiae, the University of St. Thomas is an academic community “animated by a spirit of freedom and charity; it is characterized by mutual respect, sincere dialogue, and protection of the rights of individuals” (21). Committed to the pursuit of truth and called “to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society” (32), the University promotes the free exchange of ideas and encourages the participation of its faculty, staff, and students in the civic affairs of the local, state, and national communities.

The University’s status as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code prohibits it from participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office. In addition, while fostering an ethic of intellectual freedom and respect, the University also has critical, legitimate interests in assuring its integrity as an academic community, maintaining its identity as a Catholic university, and providing for the safety of everyone on campus.

Notwithstanding these necessary limitations, the University recognizes that students, faculty, and staff may wish to participate in the political process and that such participation may, in fact, contain a valuable educational component. The University encourages free inquiry on campus. It has confidence in the ability of its students, faculty, and staff to evaluate ideas critically that may be expressed at the University by speakers from off campus on a wide range of issues.

UST adheres to the principle enunciated by the American Council on Education in 1970 that “[e]very member of the academic community has a right to participate or not, as he [or she] sees fit, in the election process. On the other hand, no member of that community should speak or act in the name of the institution in a political campaign.”

POLICY/PROCEDURE

The following statement of norms and policies regarding the use of University funds and facilities for political speakers and activities provide guidance in adhering to these fundamental principles. For purposes of this document, political speakers are candidates for political office, their representatives (formally designated or not), or those speaking on behalf of propositions that will appear in the electoral process.

It is the policy of University of St. Thomas not to participate in, directly or indirectly, or to intervene in (including by means of the publishing or distributing of statements) any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office (or any proposition) whether the election is local, city, state, or national. The University cannot endorse or appear to

University of St. Thomas Policies

endorse any political candidate or take a stated position in any political campaign. Therefore, the University will not grant official recognition to any group formed exclusively to promote or to oppose the campaign of a candidate for public office (or a proposition). In the absence of official recognition, organizations may not reserve University facilities for any purpose or use any finances collected by the University of St. Thomas.

However, provided that the University's formal neutrality in elections and campaigns is clearly stated, officially recognized student organizations may reserve University facilities to conduct organizational meetings, or to sponsor and publicize the appearance of a candidate (or his or her representative). But no organization or individual may:

1. Use University facilities (for purposes of this policy, individual student rooms in University housing facilities are not considered to be "University facilities") to raise funds through admissions, fees, contributions, donations, or sale of materials or services to benefit a political party, campaign, or candidate.
2. Use University facilities for planning or participating in the operational process of a political campaign. Examples of operational processes include but are not limited to the following:
 - a) Use of a University facility and University-owned equipment to host an organizational meeting of a campaign's staff or for the purpose of planning activities or politicking for the said campaign, or to store campaign materials of any campaign.
 - b) Use of a University facility as a location for a political fundraiser.
 - c) Use of University grounds, property, or structures to display an advertisement, billboard, or sign urging voters to support or oppose a specified political campaign.
3. Use recognized University organization or University funds to pay honoraria or cover transportation, accommodation or meal expenses for candidates for public office or their recognized representatives or provide other financial or symbolic support.
4. Use recognized University organization or University funds to purchase promotional material, pay for campaign ads or contribute in any way to a political campaign.
5. Use University resources, including but not limited to, mail distribution services, the University seal or other identifying marks, stationery and letterhead, or facsimile and duplicating machines, for political purposes such as solicitation of funds for political campaigns or solicitation of endorsement of candidates for public office.

The Internal Revenue Code permits tax-exempt organizations to sponsor political forums or debates provided they are sufficiently non-partisan in nature and are conducted for the purpose of educating voters. Where recognized University organizations sponsor and/or use University facilities to hold political forums or debates, such organizations are expected to follow the following guidelines:

1. The format and ground-rules should be fair and impartial and should be agreed upon by the participants and relevant parties in advance of the event.
2. All of the major candidates and relevant constituencies should be invited to participate.

University of St. Thomas Policies

3. The moderator should state, at the beginning and conclusion of the program, that the views expressed by the participants are their own and not those of the University, and that sponsorship of the forum is not intended as an endorsement of any particular candidate by the University.

When the University as a whole officially invites one candidate to speak on campus, then all major candidates should be invited, although not necessarily at the same time. Defining who is a candidate is not always easy. Normally, candidates from major parties are obvious candidates, as are individuals who amass a certain degree of support. Incumbents are candidates at times during the season of elections, which may be sometimes difficult to judge. When questions arise on matters such as these, it is generally safer to ask the Vice President for Student Affairs or others for guidance.

These policies are normally self-policing. That is, all members of the campus community are expected to comply with their substance and spirit. Allegations of violations of these policies should be brought to the attention of the Vice President for Student Affairs, preferably in advance of any presumably inappropriate activities. The Vice President for Student Affairs will investigate the facts of any allegation. Should the Vice President of Student Affairs believe that there is reason for concern, the Vice President will consult with a specially formed Political Speakers Committee (PSC). The composition of the PSC is normally the Vice President for Student Affairs (Chair), the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Chair of the Political Science Department, the Past Chair of the Faculty Senate, the President of the Student Government Association, the Chair of the Council of Clubs, and two members designated by the President of the University. The Chair will call meetings of this *ad hoc* committee should the need arise.

It may rarely be the case that either the PSC or the University administration determines that due to the controversial nature of an invited political speaker (or speakers), the University may not be able to assure the adequate safety of either the University community or the speaker. Similarly, the University administration may decide that a given speaker or presentation threatens or conspicuously undermines the mission and identity of the University. In such exceptional cases, the University of St. Thomas reserves the right to reschedule, reformat or relocate the presentation or, in rare instances, cancel the event. The PSC is encouraged to suggest such solutions and the administration to consider or propose such compromises as well. In all cases, the decision of the President, to whom any decision may be appealed, is final.

APPROVED: Dr. Robert Ivany

Date of Original Formation: 9/1/2010

Revision Number:

Revision Date:

Effective Date: