

## University of North Florida's Civil Discourse Initiative Plan – Interim Update – July 2022

The Florida Board of Governors (BOG) issued its Civil Discourse Final Report outlining recommended best practices for the State University System institutions regarding their continued commitment to promoting open-minded, tolerant, and respectful discourse on campus. The following pages outline UNF's new and ongoing efforts to promote the ideals outlined in the BOG Statement of Free Expression and implement the BOG's Civil Discourse Final Report recommendations.

**Recommendation 1: Leadership at each university will operationalize the Board's commitment to openminded and tolerant civil discourse by promoting, supporting, and regularly evaluating adherence to the principles set forth in the Board's Statement of Free Expression and cultivating a culture of civil discourse in all campus interactions, including academic, administrative, extracurricular, and social dealings.**

The University of North Florida has a rich tradition of promoting and encouraging civil discourse amongst our diverse community. UNF was “proud to join the SUS presidents [in endorsing the State University System's commitment to freedom of expression] to preserve these fundamental rights. Open dialogue and debate are at the core of a university's mission to provide a vigorous environment for learning, and university campuses should be a place where freedom of expression is not only protected but encouraged and expected.”<sup>1</sup>

In response to the BOG's Civil Discourse Final Report, UNF leadership formed a workgroup to ensure our campus's ongoing commitment to civil discourse and meeting the BOG recommendations. The workgroup includes leadership and representatives from across the UNF campus, including:

Associate Vice President and Chief Compliance Officer; Associate General Counsel; Dean of Students; Director of Inclusive Excellence; Director of Faculty Excellence; Executive Director of OneJax; Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services; Associate Vice President for Student Engagement and International Affairs; Student Government President; Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Florida Blue Center for Ethics; Associate Director of New Student Orientation; Director of Osprey Life and Productions; Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer; Faculty Association President; Faculty Fellow for Intellectual Diversity and Academic Freedom; Associate Vice President of Faculty Excellence and Academic Engagement; Associate Director of Employee and Labor Relations; Student Government Manager; Director of Professional Development and Training; Student Government Director; Student Government Assistant Director; Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs; Associate Provost for Faculty and Research; Program Assistant for Academic and Student Affairs; Assistant Director of Resolution and Engagement; Interim Vice President of Marketing and Communications; Faculty Fellow of Civil Discourse.

The workgroup was tasked with evaluating UNF's climate of civil discourse, operationalizing the BOG's recommendations and developing additional student, faculty, and staff opportunities to learn about and participate in a campus culture of open and free expression. The workgroup met multiple times starting in Spring 2022 and will continue meeting to ensure UNF is implementing both the BOG recommendations and fulfilling its own commitment to the principles of open and free expression.

**Recommendation 3: Leadership of each university board of trustees, faculty senate, and student government annually review and endorse the Board's Statement of Free Expression and commit to the principles of civil discourse. NOTE: The first review should be completed during the 2022-2023 academic year.**

The Board of Governor's (BOG) Statement of Free Expression was reviewed and unanimously endorsed by the University of North Florida Board of Trustees (BOT) at the BOT's April 27, 2022, quarterly meeting. The BOT will annually review and endorse the BOG's Statement of Free Expression.

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<sup>1</sup> Osprey Update, Special Edition, Message from President Szymanski, April 15, 2019.

UNF's Faculty Association<sup>2</sup> plans to review and endorse the BOG's Statement of Free Expression at the first Faculty Association meeting of the Fall 2022 semester which will take place in September 2022. The Faculty Association plans to annually review and endorse the BOG's Statement of Free Expression at subsequent Fall Faculty Association meetings.

UNF's student government (SG) plans to review and endorse the BOG's Statement of Free Expression at the beginning of the Fall 2022 semester and at the start of each successive Fall semester. UNF SG will develop a Joint Resolution developed by all 3 branches of SG to demonstrate a unified approach to endorsing the BOG Statement of Free Expression. The joint resolution will be approved at an SG senate meeting, the first of which will take place on September 9, 2022. UNF's newly confirmed president, Dr. Moez Limayem, will be attending the SG senate meeting.

**Recommendation 4: Each board of trustees conducts a thorough review of current student orientation programs, student codes of conduct, and employee policies and procedures to ensure consistency with the Board of Governors Statement of Free Expression, the principles of free speech and civil discourse, and compliance with section 1004.097, Florida Statutes.**

A workgroup sub-group met to review student orientation programs, employee and faculty orientation programs, student code of conduct, and all relevant UNF policies, regulations, and procedures. Reviewing members included the Associate Vice President and Chief Compliance and Ethics Officer, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources, Senior Associate General Counsel, Associate General Counsel, and Dean of Students.

In response to the BOG recommendations and the workgroup's review of student orientation programs, the Dean of Students, in conjunction with UNF enrollment services professionals, has reserved a portion of her student orientation session for "Intro to Civil Discourse." The Dean of Students' session was designed to encourage and promote UNF's commitment to and expectation of civil discourse, provide foundational knowledge of the topic, and provide opportunities for student engagement at UNF. Excerpts from the BOG's Statement of Free Expression are included in our student orientation program along with interactive portions of the presentation to encourage new student engagement.

Additionally, the newly designated Faculty Fellow for Civil Discourse will provide a presentation to incoming first year students on the importance of civil discourse. This faculty presentation will take place at UNF's "Flight School," a first-year student onboarding program.

In response to BOG recommendations and the workgroup's review of employee orientation programs, the Office of Human Resources modified the New Employee Orientation (NEO) program to include a section highlighting the University's commitment and expectations related to the BOG's Statement of Free Expression and explore the principles of civil discourse. NEO is a full-day program held bi-weekly for all incoming staff. Academic and Student Affairs' New Faculty Orientation, held each August, has also added a section in the program related to civil discourse and free expression principles. Employee orientation changes will take effect immediately.

The workgroup's review of UNF's Student Code of Conduct and other relevant student/employee policies, regulations and procedures confirmed the relevant items were consistent with the BOG's Statement of Free Expression, 1004.097, Florida Statutes, and civil discourse principles generally. Minor changes were identified in certain materials to ensure unambiguous support of the principles of civil discourse and free expression.

Identified changes to policies and regulations will be made during Fall 2022, approved through UNF's policy and regulation process, and presented to the UNF BOT. Additionally, the appropriate civil discourse workgroup members will update the UNF BOT on changes to new student and employee orientation programs. The BOT's review of orientation programs as well as relevant policies and regulations will take place at a Fall 2022 BOT meeting, date to be determined.

**Recommendation 6: University academic, student affairs, and administrative leaders review student orientation programming, student codes of conduct, and employee personnel policies and procedures to ensure that they contain**

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<sup>2</sup> UNF's Faculty Association is our version of a Faculty Senate.

**clear and unambiguous support for the Board's Statement of Free Expression, and the principles of free speech and civil discourse, and that they are in compliance with section 1004.097, Florida Statutes.**

See recommendation 4 above.

**Recommendation 7: Implement best practices that effectively promote and support civil discourse.**

- **Best Practice 1 - Instill the importance of civil discourse, academic freedom, and free speech from day one:**
  - o Effective immediately UNF new student, employee, and faculty orientation sessions will include highlighting the importance of civil discourse and our commitment to open and free expression.
  - o New students will be encouraged to attend UNF's "Flight School."
  - o Starting Fall 2022, ENC 1101, a freshman-level writing course, will incorporate a civil discourse model and readings.
- **Best Practice 2 - Schedule and host ongoing, campus-wide forums, dialogues, and debates:**
  - o UNF hosts ongoing discussion series, "Difficult Conversations." Topics include "Challenges of Free Speech and Academic Freedom in the Classroom" to "Teaching in a Politically Divisive Climate." A "Difficult Conversations" is scheduled for Fall 2022. "Difficult Conversations" seminars are open to all members of the UNF community.
  - o UNF will continue to annually host Constitution Week in the Fall semester with event topics such as free speech, protest, and privacy. Events include an intellectually diverse slate of speakers/panelists and opportunity for student comments and Q&A.
  - o UNF's Thomas G. Carpenter Library and Department of Political Science and Public Administration will continue to host their monthly "Popcorn & Politics" series which includes political debate watch parties, oxford-style debates, and speakers' series with judges, politicians, scholars, and advocacy groups.
  - o UNF hosts "Let's Talk About..." a conversation series to openly discuss subjects surrounding systemic issues and/or national incidents directly impacting the UNF community. Past topics include "Party Allegiance and Voting", "Immigration in America", and "Free Speech vs. Hate Speech." Two sessions are generally scheduled for Fall and Spring. Events are open to all members of the UNF community.
- **Best Practice 3 - Foster intellectual diversity:**
  - o UNF Regulations 1.0040R, Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Diversity Regulation, and 5.0010R, Student Conduct Code clearly state UNF's commitment to an educational and work environment free from discrimination, including based on race or ethnicity.
  - o Registered student organizations and employee groups are open to all persons without regard to race or ethnicity.
- **Best Practice 4 - Avoid disinventions:**
  - o UNF is committed to providing an environment where divergent viewpoints can be heard. Our facilities use agreement and policies are clear that UNF facilities are open to all on a first-come-first-serve basis without consideration of a speaker's viewpoint. Additionally, the Office of the General Counsel webpage hosts FAQ's highlighting the First Amendment, Use of UNF facilities, and Political Activity on Campus.
- **Best Practice 5 - Provide targeted educational and professional development opportunities:**
  - o In addition to employee orientation sessions, UNF's Center for Professional Development and Training is currently reviewing the offerings in our employee LMS for professional development opportunities related to free expression and open-minded debate.
- **Best Practice 6 - Encourage faculty to establish and maintain a learning environment in their classrooms and offices that supports open dialogue and the free expression of all viewpoints and create processes to evaluate the strength of such environments:**
  - o The Office of Faculty Excellence (OFE) seeks to support the professional growth of faculty and to build a welcoming campus community that inspires leadership, excellence in teaching and scholarship, and a healthy work life balance. OFE's initiatives include instructional design, syllabi assistance, course review and evaluation, mentoring programs, and a new faculty academy. Additionally, OFE hosts a Faculty

Fellows program. Recent fellows include the Faculty Fellow for Intellectual Diversity and Academic Freedom and Faculty Fellow of Civil Discourse.