



FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY

CIVIL DISCOURSE PLAN

SEPTEMBER 30, 2022



Preface

Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) values and respects all of our faculty and staff's individual right to free expression. Our commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression is delineated clearly in our university's guiding principles and affirmed through our recently created Statement of Free Expression. We are, unequivocally, committed to the State University System of Florida and the Florida Board of Governor's (BOG) Civil Discourse Final Report published in 2022. This plan provides an overview of how FGCU will implement the specific recommendations identified in the Data Request dated May 5, 2022, along with the best practices identified within the Civil Discourse Final Report: https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SPC_09_Civil-Discourse_Final_CE.pdf.

Florida Gulf Coast University Statement of Free Expression

Florida Gulf Coast University vigorously protects freedom of inquiry and expression and categorically expects civility and mutual respect to be practiced by faculty, students and staff in all deliberations on its campus. As such, the FGCU Community as well as the Florida Gulf Coast University Board of Trustees shares the commitment of the State University System of Florida and the Florida Board of Governors to civil discourse and endorses their commitment with this Statement of Free Expression: https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SPC_09_Civil-Discourse_Final_CE.pdf.

Civil Discourse Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Leadership at each university will operationalize the Board's commitment to open-minded 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.

At the founding of FGCU, eight Guiding Principles were put forth as fundamental values (see page 5 of FGCU's 2017 Strategic Plan). One of these principles embraces civility, which reads "Informed and engaged citizens are essential to the creation of a civil and sustainable society". More recently, and prior to the creation of the BOG Report on Civil Discourse, FGCU initiated a Civility Project in October 2021 aimed at addressing special issues and concerns as a result of an increase in formal complaints and investigations at FGCU. An external consultant was utilized in an effort to improve the civility among faculty and staff during the course of the 2021-2022 academic year. Additional meetings across campus have also been conducted regarding civility

where measures have been taken in an effort to decrease the number of complaints made about individuals not demonstrating civility.

Florida Gulf Coast University created its Statement of Free Expression on May 11, 2022 which endorsed the Board of Governors' statement. The formal statement established by FGCU emanated from our existing guiding principles that states in part: "Academic freedom is the foundation for the transmission and advancement of knowledge. The University vigorously protects freedom of inquiry and expression and categorically expects civility and mutual respect to be practiced in all deliberations." The leadership at Florida Gulf Coast University has shared this statement within our respective Divisions where our faculty, staff and students have begun to engage in substantive and meaningful dialogue regarding its purpose, meaning, and application. Both the FGCU Statement and the BOG Statement of Free Expression will be discussed across each of our respective Divisions at the beginning of each academic year either at formal retreats or unity meetings.

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.

At the start of each academic year, leadership of each of these groups will engage their respective constituencies on meaningful and substantive dialogue regarding the Board of Governor's Statement of Free Expression as well as Florida Gulf Coast University's statement. This will entail reviewing the Board of Governors' statement, as well as Florida Gulf Coast University's statement and discussing them at their respective meetings at the start of the new academic year. For the FGCU Board of Trustees, this will be accomplished as a presentation of an information item at their September meeting each year. With respect to the Faculty Senate, the Executive Vice President & Provost will work with the Faculty Senate President to review and discuss the Board of Governors' Statement as well as Florida Gulf Coast University's Statement as an agenda item at a meeting Faculty Senate meeting in August or September. Similarly, the Student Government President and the Staff Advisory Council (SAC) President will work with their respective leadership teams to review and discuss the Board of Governors' Statement as well as Florida Gulf Coast University's Statement of Free Expression in August or September. If during these meetings, recommendations are made to update FGCU's current Statement of Free Expression, the specific content of the recommendation(s) will be forwarded to the Executive Vice President & Provost for review and shared with the President's Cabinet for further review and consideration. If the recommendation(s) is/are accepted, FGCU's current Statement of Free Expression will be revised accordingly and shared with campus, and presented to the FGCU Board of Trustees as an information item.

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.

Each Divisional Vice President will review their respective documents and the student orientation program to ensure they are consistent with the Board of Governors Statement of Free Expression and the FGCU Statement of Free Expression. The weblink for each applicable document will be provided to the Board of Trustees so they can review these same documents and programming to ensure they align with the BOG and FGCU Statements of Free Expression. This review will occur in September of each Academic year.

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 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. NOTE: This recommendation may be included in the plans to implement Recommendation 4 above.

Each appropriate Divisional Vice President will review their respective documents as well as the student orientation program to ensure they are consistent with the Board of Governors Statement of Free Expression and the FGCU Statement of Free Expression. The weblink for each applicable document will be provided to the Board of Trustees so they can review these same documents and programming to ensure they align with the BOG and FGCU Statements of Free Expression. This review began in Summer 2022 and will continue throughout the Fall 2022 term until completion. Documents will be revised accordingly – if necessary. At the start of each Academic Year, these reviews will occur in September.

Recommendation 7: Implementing the best practices outlined on pages 6 and 7 of the attached report based on the Board's review of university programs and initiatives that effectively promote and support civil discourse. For each best practice implemented, or to be implemented, include a timeline.

- **Instill the importance of civil discourse, academic freedom, and free speech, from day one**, utilizing student and employee orientation sessions, public assemblies, and official university documents and communications.

The FGCU Statement of Free Expression along with the weblink to the BOG Statement of Free Expression and Civil Discourse Final Report 2022 will be placed in various on-boarding programs for faculty, staff, and students (e.g. Canvas announcement /dashboard, Workday dashboard, Evaluation Documents / System (e.g. Workday), key Regulations and Policies, key Student Government documents, and the University webpage. Additionally, the explicit

evaluation of civility in the workplace as part of the annual evaluation process of employees will be explored with potential implementation.

- **Schedule and host ongoing, campus-wide forums, dialogues, and debates** on various issues and perspectives to promote open discussion, understanding, and learning opportunities.

FGCU will host an annual Summit featuring University Senior Leadership, Faculty Senate Leadership, UFF-FGCU Leadership, BOT Leadership, SAC Leadership, Student Government Leadership in the early Fall term to discuss the importance of civility in the workplace and classroom, and re-affirming the FGCU BOT and BOG Statement of Free Expression; forums held by various constituent groups (e.g. Student Government, Faculty Senate, etc.) on specific issues / topics related to civility will be organized throughout the Fall and Spring terms.

- **Foster intellectual diversity** by encouraging university leadership to: (1) promote viewpoint diversity and open-minded discussion and debate, and (2) highlight and enforce policies that prohibit programming that excludes participation based on race or ethnicity.

Florida Gulf Coast University Regulation 1.003 affirms its institutional commitment to ensure that each member of the University community shall be permitted to work, study, and participate in educational programs, including those receiving federal funding, services, and activities, or conduct business in an environment free from any form of discrimination, based upon race, color, religion, age, disability, sex, national origin, marital status, genetic predisposition, sexual orientation, gender identity/gender expression, and veteran status, except as otherwise permitted by law. Moreover, FGCU strives to foster a community in which diversity and inclusion are valued and opportunity is realized through open dialogue and free speech. FGCU Policy 1.006 also outlines the procedure for investigating allegations. FGCU's Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance is dedicated and responsible for investigating complaints brought forth by faculty, staff, students, and various external third parties.

- **Avoid disinvitations** by developing clear, viewpoint-neutral policies and procedures governing the invitation and accommodation of campus speakers.

FGCU Regulation 9.004 provides some time, place and behavioral parameters regarding how persons can engage in protected free speech. Moreover, during the 2022-2023 Academic Year Florida Gulf Coast University will develop an Academic Freedom Policy that clearly contains a neutral viewpoint

governing the invitation of outside speakers to come to campus to speak to our students, faculty, and staff.

- **Provide targeted educational and professional development opportunities** for university administrative employees to reinforce free expression and open-minded debate norms.

Throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, Human Resources and the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance will oversee the identification, development and implementation of targeted educational and professional development opportunities for university administrative employees. Moreover, the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance will work with Human Resources to ensure the principles of civil discourse and free expression are included in all applicable staff training programs.

- **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.**

The Office of the Executive Vice President & Provost will work with academic and faculty leadership to ensure that FGCU's Statement of Free Expression and weblink to BOG Statement of Free Expression are included in syllabus guidelines throughout the 2022-2023 academic year. Each subsequent year, Academic Affairs leadership will ensure the weblink containing this information is current, up to date and located on each course syllabus. The Lucas Center for Faculty Development will also be used to support faculty in helping them lead dialogue regarding the importance of civil discourse and embracing diverse viewpoints with their classes each term. Moreover, the Lucas Center will host multi-topic workshops containing content involving free expression, civil discourse, and other related issues.



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10501 FGCU Boulevard South
Fort Myers, Florida 33965-6565