



USF IMPLEMENTATION:
Florida Board of Governors
Civil Discourse Recommendations
October 3, 2022





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the January 2022 Board of Governors meeting, the Board approved recommendations from the Strategic Planning Committee relative to civil discourse. The Board's recommendations are designed to ensure a climate of free expression and civil discourse on each university campus according to the principles outlined in the State University System Free Expression Statement and the Board of Governors' Civil Discourse Final Report. The following report includes how the University of South Florida (USF) has implemented the Board's recommendations and identifies the key groups/individuals involved, critical milestones, and expected timelines for future actions as we continue to advance our commitment to free expression and civil discourse.

The University of South Florida affirms our commitment to free expression and civil discourse. This commitment aligns with our purpose, to be a community of scholars united in the pursuit of knowledge in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. As we continue to strengthen our commitment to foster a climate of free expression, our university actions will focus on the following core principles as indicated in our approved strategic plan:

- Commitment to our core values of inquiry, innovation, integrity, and inclusion through collegiately, collaboration, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity;
- Institutional commitment to rigorous debate and open exchange of ideas, diligent opinions, and philosophies, grounded in the principles of civil discourse and professional responsibility;
- Reinforce the academic environment as a 'marketplace of ideas';
- Provide objective evidence grounded in research, scholarship, and inquiry;
- Clearly articulate expectations of a college learning environment through orientation, onboarding, syllabi, and university activities; and
- Continue to promote a culture of civil discourse through the actions of university leadership, faculty, staff, and students.

Recommendations outlined in this report represent actions taken up to this point and those slated to be implemented in the coming academic year. As an institution of higher education, we recognize that a culture of civil discourse is an ongoing iterative process and will continue to explore best practices and innovative ideas for the years to come.

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.

The following recommendations are actions the university will take to affirm the Board of Governors’ commitment to open-minded and tolerant civil discourse and the principles outlined in the State University System Free Expression Statement.

| Key groups/Individuals Involved | Strategies | Timelines |
|--|---|---|
| Rhea Law, President and CEO | Formed a university-wide workgroup to implement the Board of Governors’ civil discourse recommendations. | Charged 5/18/22. |
| A workgroup comprised of Faculty, Staff, Students, and University Leadership | Reviewed Board of Governors’ recommendations and best practices to provide President and University Leadership with guidance and strategies to operationalize and further promote civil discourse at USF. | Submit a full status report to President Law on 8/5/22. |
| Eric Eisenberg, Interim Provost & Executive Vice President | Provided an update to the USF Board of Trustees to review and approve university recommendations. | Academics and Campus Environment Committee will meet and review recommendations on 8/23/22. |
| Rhea Law, President and CEO | Present full report and recommendations for approval by the USF Board of Trustees. | USF Board of Trustees will meet and review recommendations on 9/6/22. |



RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Board of Governors recommends that each university's Accountability Plan and Strategic Plan include a specific endorsement of the Board's Statement of Free Expression, as well as a clear expectation for open-minded and tolerant civil discourse throughout the campus community. The Board of Governors will include similar statements and principles in its Strategic Plan for the State University System.

Action completed.



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.

| Key groups/Individuals Involved | Strategies | Timelines |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| USF Board of Trustees | Statement Endorsed | The USF Board of Trustees met and endorsed the statement at the meeting on 3/8/22. |
| USF Student Government | USF Student Government will review a resolution to endorse the Board’s Statement of Free Expression. | The USF Student Government meets on 9/9/22 and will consider a resolution to endorse the Board’s Statement of Free Expression. |
| USF Faculty Senate | A faculty senate-designated workgroup is currently reviewing the statement and will make a recommendation to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Faculty Senate for action. | The faculty senate workgroup will bring forward a recommendation in September 2022. |

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.

The Board of Trustees Academics and Campus Environment Committee met on May 31, 2022, and reviewed 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.

| Key groups/Individuals Involved | Strategies | Timelines |
|---|---|---|
| New Student Orientation Dean of Students Dean of Graduate Studies | <p>Student Orientation Program Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented a new civil discourse orientation module for all new students. Expanded audience to include graduate student orientation. Incorporated the Board’s Statement of Free Expression into parent orientation. | Completed May 2022 and implemented in summer 2022. We will continue to revise and refine orientation programs as needed based on feedback and assessment. |
| Dean of Students General Counsel Student Conduct office Students Housing Staff Facilities Staff Board of Trustees | <p>Reviewed relevant policies and regulations related to students and events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed all relevant policies across the university (i.e., USF Policy 6-028, USF Regulation 3.025, Student Code of Conduct, Housing policy). Reviewed Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) ratings for the university as recommended by the Board of Governors. | Review completed May 2022. Additional changes and edits will be submitted to the USF Board of Trustees for approval as needed to be implemented during the coming year. |
| Human Resources | <p>Employee Policies and Procedures Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added a link to the Board’s Statement of Free Expression as an important employee resource. <p>Employee Orientation Revisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes a module on “USF Culture” with the Board’s Statement of Free Expression. | Completed and implemented May 2022. |



RECOMMENDATION 5:

Beginning in the 2022 presidential evaluation and contract renewal cycle, as a part of a president's evaluation, the Chair of the Board of Governors will consult with the board of trustees chair to review the university's campus free speech climate, including adherence to the principles outlined in the Board's Statement of Free Expression, the occurrence and the resolution of any issues related to the university's compliance with substantiated violations of section 1004.097, Florida Statutes, and the implementation of best practices promoting civil discourse.

Action completed.



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 comply with section 1004.097, Florida Statutes. NOTE: This recommendation may be included in the plans to implement Recommendation 4 above.

An internal review of the items mentioned in this recommendation has been conducted and is included under 'Recommendation 4'. This progress has been communicated to the Board of Trustees Academics and Campus Environment Committee and will be included in the presentation to the USF Board of Trustees for approval.

Program reviews referenced in Recommendation 4 were initial milestones, a commitment to freedom of expression and civil discourse is central to higher education and additional reviews will be conducted annually to meet the needs of the campus community and to ensure compliance with Section 1004.097, Florida Statutes.

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.

| Key groups/ Individuals Involved | Best Practices | Strategies | Timelines |
|---|--|---|---|
| Orientation Dean of Graduate Studies Dean of Students Human Resources | 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. | Implemented a civil discourse orientation module for students, graduate students, and parents and families. | The module was completed in May 2022 and implemented in summer 2022. We will continue to revise and refine orientation programs as needed based on feedback and assessment. |
| Students Faculty First Amendment Forum (student organization) | Schedule and host ongoing, campus-wide forums, dialogues, and debates on various issues and perspectives to promote open discussion, understanding, and learning opportunities | <p>First Amendment Forum (student organization) holds civil discussions, events, and workshops.</p> <p>The Event Support Team supports the success of events and free expression on all USF campuses. Members of the team are often seen at on-campus protests, vigils, demonstrations, and programs with speakers with controversial material or other risk factors.</p> <p>Constitution Day is an annual on-campus event, themes for fall 2022 are still being discussed, and past events have emphasized principles of the U.S. Constitution, values-based civic leadership, common purpose, and action as conscientious and engaged citizens.</p> | Initial launch in August 2022 and will continue in alignment with fall and spring semester activities. |
| University Leadership Students USF Event Support Team Dean of Students | 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. | University Leadership members are available to present at faculty, staff, and student meetings to strengthen academic commitment and practices related to civil discourse and dialogue facilitation. | Initial launch in August 2022 and will continue in alignment with fall and spring semester activities. |

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| <p>University Leadership Dean of Students General Counsel</p> | <p>Avoid disinvitations by developing clear, viewpoint-neutral policies and procedures governing the invitation and accommodation of campus speakers.</p> | <p>Human Resources materials, USF policies, and USF regulations have been reviewed and revised to articulate the university's commitment to free speech and academic freedom.</p> | <p>The initial procedure review was completed in May 2022, and we anticipate an annual review to gather feedback and incorporate additional revisions.</p> |
| <p>University Leadership Human Resources</p> | <p>Provide targeted educational and professional development opportunities for university administrative employees to reinforce free expression and open-minded debate norms.</p> | <p>Preliminary changes supporting free expression have been made and Human Resources will continue to explore enhancements to employee orientation and further address civil discourse consistent with the Board's statement.</p> | <p>Initial launch in May 2022 and will continue in alignment with fall and spring semester professional development activities.</p> |
| <p>Faculty Faculty Senate University Leadership</p> | <p>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.</p> | <p>Faculty resources for these topics are also available through the Faculty Success website and Faculty Focus Newsletter.</p> <p>New Faculty Orientation will include resources and discussion around facilitating open discussion and free expression in their courses and learning experiences with students. These strategies are also part of ongoing faculty development programs that include workshops and learning resources centered on inclusive teaching practices.</p> <p>The university developed guidance to summarize key points of Florida House Bill 7 (the "Individual Freedom Act") to strengthen best practices related to open dialogue and free expression.</p> | <p>Initial launch in August 2022 and will continue in alignment with fall and spring semester faculty activities.</p> |

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SOUTH FLORIDA