

**New York University Guidelines Regarding  
Protest and Dissent**  
(Approved by the University Senate May 2, 1991.)

**Dissent/Protest**

**1. General Principles**

The right to dissent is the complement of the right to speak, but these rights need not occupy the same forum at the same time. The speaker is entitled to communicate her or his message to the audience during her or his allotted time, and the audience is entitled to hear the message and see the speaker during that time. The dissenter must not substantially interfere with the speaker's ability to communicate or the audience's ability to hear and see the speaker. When a meeting is closed, dissent by non-attendees is limited to activity outside the meeting that does not impede access to the meeting or substantially interfere with the communication inside. When a meeting is open, the acceptable form of dissent will depend on whether the dissenter is inside or outside the meeting, and on whether the dissenter is acting before or after the meeting or during the meeting.

**2. Some Examples of Dissent**

The following guidelines, which are neither comprehensive nor absolute, suggest the limits of acceptable dissent:

**a. Picketing; literature.**

Picketing in an orderly way or distributing literature outside the meeting is acceptable so long as it does not impede access to the meeting. Distributing literature inside an open meeting is acceptable before the meeting is called to order and after the meeting is adjourned.

**b. Silent or symbolic protest.**

Protesting noiselessly, such as by displaying a sign, wearing clothing, gesturing, or standing, is acceptable so long as the protest does not interfere with the audience's view, or prevent the audience from paying attention to the speaker. Any use of signs, prolonged standing, or other activity likely to block the view of anyone in the audience should be confined to the back of the room.

**c. Noise.**

Responding vocally to the speaker, spontaneously and temporarily, is generally acceptable, especially if reaction against the speaker is similar in kind and degree to reaction in his or her favor. Chanting or making other sustained or repeated noise in a manner which substantially interferes with the speaker's communication is not permitted, whether inside or outside the meeting.

**d. Force or violence.**

Using or threatening force or violence, such as defacing a sign or assaulting a speaker or a member of the audience, is never permitted. Any interference with freedom of movement, or with freedom from personal force and violence, is a serious violation of personal rights.

### **3. The Audience's Responsibility**

The audience, like the host and the speaker, must respect the right to dissent. A member of the audience or the host organization who substantially interferes with acceptable dissent is violating these guidelines in the same way as a dissenter who violates the rights of the speaker or audience.

### **4. Question and Answer Period in Open Meetings**

In any open meeting the sponsoring organization is strongly encouraged to arrange with the speaker to assure a reasonable opportunity for a question and answer period.

## **Sanctions**

Violation of the free speech rights of any person, as protected in these guidelines, will be treated seriously. Violators will be subject to the following sanctions:

- 1. Expulsion from the meeting or event.**
- 2. Arrest or other legal action.**
- 3. As to members of the University community, disciplinary procedures before the appropriate tribunal, which may impose any of the following sanctions:**
  - a. Warning**
  - b. Written reprimand**
  - c. Suspension**
  - d. Expulsion**

Pursuant to existing procedures, these sanctions may be noted on a student's transcript or employee's personnel file and later reported to appropriate external officials.

**Inquiries concerning the application of these Guidelines  
or the use of a moderator/ facilitator should be addressed to:**  
Director of Community Standards, Compliance, and Planning  
Office of the VP for Student Affairs & Services  
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