

In honor of Constitution Day, a three part NDSU Citizenship Series is launching out of the Dean of Students Office today. Being a citizen of a place, community, state, and country all come with different expectations, privileges, and responsibilities. As a student, we hope that you will choose to find ways to actively engage in your citizenship of the NDSU community. In order to engage in citizenship, you need information about your role, the environment, and the rules and opportunities within your role and the environment. Today's message will focus on *Freedom of Speech*.

It's inevitable when living in a community and interacting with others, that people will encounter differences of opinion. This is a normal part of being human! Everyone has different backgrounds, experiences, and ways of looking at the world and the issues within it. The ability to freely discuss and debate ideas is a foundational piece of University life. This can be uncomfortable at times, because of the level of disagreement you may have with others, or how hurtful or harmful you feel that their ideas and expression may be. When this occurs, a first instinct may be to look to NDSU (or others in authority) to intervene or to silence the expression taking place. It's important to know in most circumstances, not only is it illegal for NDSU to do, it is also often just not the best way to respond.

By law, as a public state-supported institution, NDSU cannot punish students or employees for [protected speech](#). Almost all speech is considered "protected speech", including speech and expression that many may find offensive, unacceptable, hateful, or harmful. This can be challenging to understand, as protected speech can be directly contradictory to [NDSU's values of collegiality, community, and inclusion](#). However, NDSU is required to remain content neutral to protected speech. It is important to know that NDSU will respond appropriately to reports of [unprotected speech](#) (things like serious expressions of intent to harm, discriminatory harassment, and other definitions related to law). NDSU also can restrict the [time, place, and manner of protected speech](#), expression, and events in ways that protect physical safety and effective operations of the University (e.g. speech/events can't interrupt a class in session or violate policy regarding fire code/facility operations). This means if you have a specific event, rally, or speaker you wish to have on campus, you'll likely want to [learn more on our website about how to plan an event that is in alignment with NDSU policy](#).

NDSU works hard to both protect the right to engage in protected speech while also providing an educational environment in which all members can learn. This means that even as others have the right to engage in speech you find objectionable, you have the right to express your ideas about that speech. Rather than censor or inhibit individuals from engaging in protected speech, more free speech and open discussion is the way to allow yourself and others to learn from each other and either deepen or question your beliefs and ideas! Our office has recently enhanced our website with [resources for community members with questions](#) about engaging in speech, including suggestions on how to navigate those situations when they arise. Freedom of speech means that you have the freedom to choose to engage in protected speech when confronted with these opportunities, or to choose not to participate by removing yourself from the situation.

Finally, although everyone has a right to expression, we encourage you to consider how one chooses to communicate often influences how your message is heard and received. A great lesson in citizenship is that people can disagree and still build positive relationships with one another. And, we can learn more about ourselves and others when we allow our beliefs and ideals to be compared with others through respectful dialogue.

As you progress through this year and your time at NDSU, we encourage you to engage in this community in a multitude of ways. Please reach out if you have questions or concerns along the way!

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We collectively acknowledge that we gather at NDSU, a land grant institution, on the traditional lands of the Oceti Sakowin (Dakota, Lakota, Nakoda) and Anishinaabe Peoples in addition to many diverse Indigenous Peoples still connected to these lands. We honor with gratitude Mother Earth and the Indigenous Peoples who have walked with her throughout generations. We will continue to learn how to live in unity with Mother Earth and build strong, mutually beneficial, trusting relationships with Indigenous Peoples of our region.

