

Being a Professor and an Ally During Election Season

During the 2016 election season, hate crimes and threats on college and university campuses drastically increased (Nelson, 2019). These have been directed against African Americans, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community, religious minorities, women, people with disabilities, and others. UCLA is not an environment that will tolerate violence, threats of violence, and harassment on campus.

The following FAQs describe American Association of University Professors (AAUP) policies relating to these issues and give practical advice on how faculty can respond to such threats.

In addition to the information provided here, faculty should consider the laws, rules and regulations, and collective bargaining agreements that apply in their specific circumstances.



1. What can we do if the administration instructs us not to talk about the election in the classroom?

According to the AAUP, “teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject,” adding that they should be careful “not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject.”



2. How can we discuss the election without appearing partisan? How can election-related topics be built into course material without violating professional duties and responsibilities of the faculty?

If a faculty member’s remarks are not simply ruminations on current events but are in fact about relevant political issues—for example, controversies about creationism that the faculty member links to the study of biology—they would be protected by academic freedom.



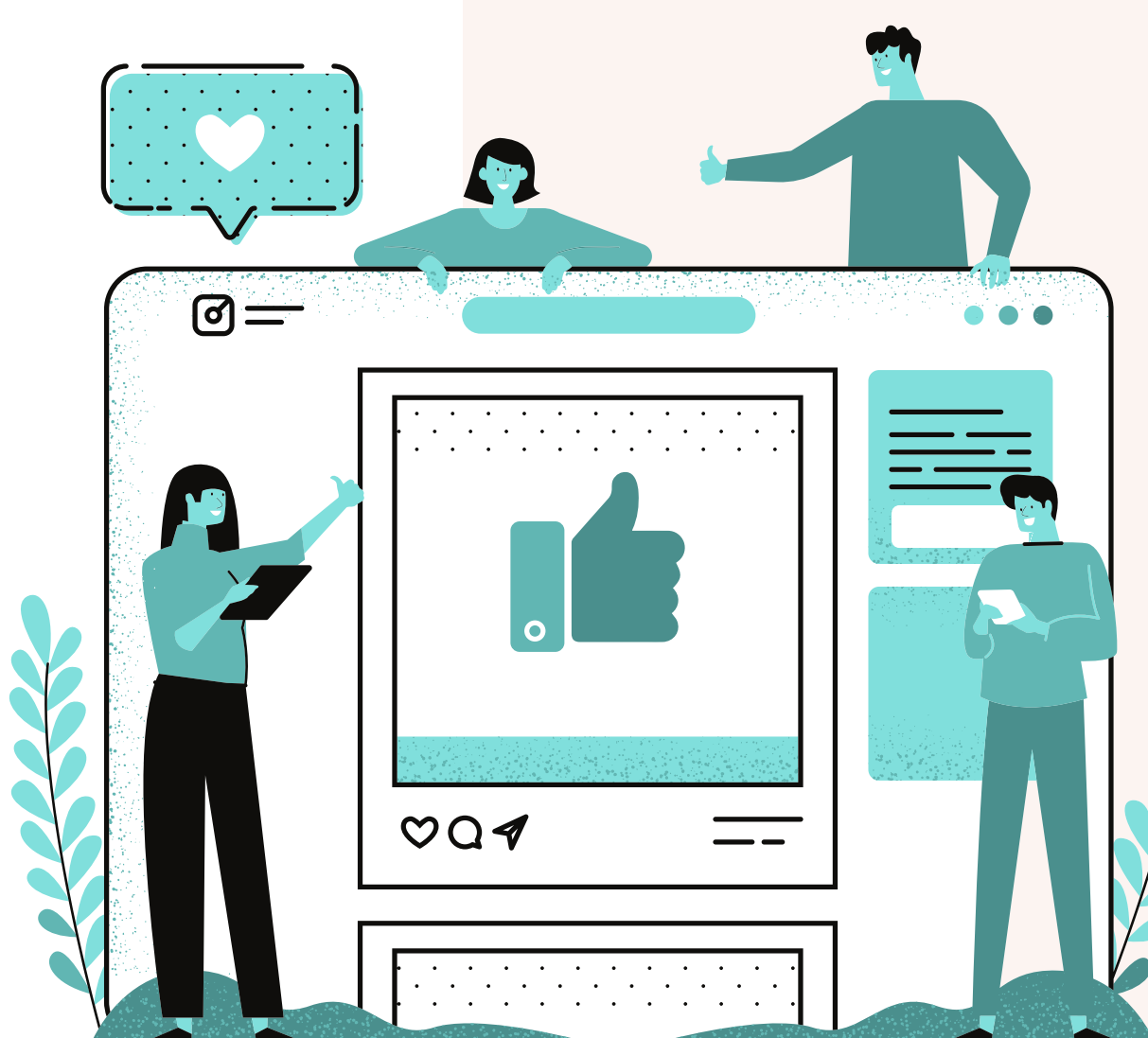
3. How should we respond to students who share racist, xenophobic, homophobic, or misogynist views in the classroom?

According to the AAUP, “On a campus that is free and open, no idea can be banned or forbidden. No viewpoint or message may be deemed so hateful or disturbing that it may not be expressed.” **Faculty members must insist, however, that students respect each other in the academic setting.** If a topic raised by a student is not relevant or germane to the class, the faculty member may ask that discussion on the topic cease. If the student addresses the class in a disruptive manner, such as by yelling, the faculty member may ask the student to cease this conduct. If the conduct does not cease the professor may use the techniques normally available to address a disruptive student.

4. What actions should we take when we are witness to acts of intimidation, threats, or violence on campus?

We should not be silent bystanders in the face of such acts. As noted by AAUP, *“members of the faculty have a major role in dealing with incivility, intolerance, offensive speech, and harassing behavior. They must condemn intolerance, and ensure that their actions set examples for understanding.”* If the threats involve potential violence or damage to persons or property, faculty should immediately report them to the appropriate persons (academic departments, office of student affairs, or the office of diversity).

If the college or university knowingly fails to protect students from unlawful harassment it may violate federal, state, and local statutes and a complaint may be filed with a federal, state, or local office of equal opportunity; there may also be the potential to sue the institution.



5. A colleague tweeted critically about the role of racism in national affairs. The president of their college has admonished them for speaking out publicly on this issue. They have also warned them of possible disciplinary action should they continue to blog and tweet about controversial issues. Does academic freedom protect their extramural speech?

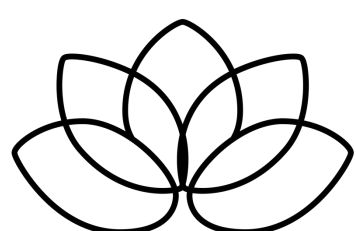
“Members of the academic community—including all faculty, instructional staff and indeed all workers at the institution—are free to join or form associations or organizations; to organize and work with unions; and to state their views on any topic, subject only to the understanding that they do not speak on behalf of their institutions.” The AAUP finds “no basis upon which an institution might properly discipline a faculty member for extramural speech unless that speech implicates professional fitness.”

6. What is the line between protected speech and unprotected threats or conduct?

Conduct that can be restricted includes criminal conduct (such as physical assault on a person or destruction or defacement of property), unlawful discriminatory conduct (such as excluding a student from employment because of race), and threats to commit acts of violence. Under federal, state, or local anti-discrimination statutes, certain “unlawful harassment” can be restricted, but the focus again is on conduct, not speech content.



Source: [American Association of University Professors](#)



RISE Center at UCLA
Heal. Connect. Thrive.

Created by Dayanna Ramirez ('20)

For more resources on wellness during an election season, visit <https://risecenter.ucla.edu>.