



VCU

VCU Annual Report pursuant to § 23.1-401.1. Constitutionally protected speech; policies, materials, and reports; report

December 1, 2023

Overview

Virginia Commonwealth University is committed to creating an environment that fosters the exercise of protected speech and other expressive activity on university property while maintaining an atmosphere free of disruption to the mission of the university. It recognizes that the free expression of ideas and open inquiry are essential in fulfilling its academic mission by embracing rigorous open discourse, argumentation, speaking, listening, learning and the exploration of ideas. In support of maintaining such an environment, VCU incorporates and employs several policies and practices that protect free speech and support expressive activity in compliance with Va. Code § 23.1-401.1.

Institutional Policies

These policies and related materials include the following:

- [Free Speech](#) at VCU
- [Reservation and Use of Space Policy](#)
- [Reservation and Use of Space website](#)
- [Reservation and Use of Space FAQs](#)
- [Division of Student Affairs blog post](#)
- [Social Media Guidelines](#) for social media account administrators (references, and links to, the First Amendment)
- [Student Code of Conduct](#)

Reporting Concerns

The university community is able to report concerns through two primary channels:

- Information on reporting concerns is referenced and linked on the [Free Speech](#) website. This information can also be found at: <https://acs.vcu.edu/integrity-and-compliance-office/ethics-and-compliance-program/reporting-concerns/>
- For concerns regarding students, reports can be made through [the VCU Helpline](#) [www.vcuhelpline.com] or direct to the Division of Student Affairs: <https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?VirginiaCommonwealthUniv>



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Certification

This certifies that the institution has developed and communicated the materials outlined herein, and [communication to the students has occurred](#). Additional messaging regarding expressive activity for this reporting period occurred to employees responsible for disciplining students, and this messaging is attached as Appendix A. Communication to all employees regarding expectations related to expressive activity exists through new hire onboarding, annual training, and in formal, university-wide, policies readily available and accessible at <https://vcu.public.doctract.com>.

Complaints:

Please find enclosed the Complaint in the case of *Thien-An-Quang Ta, vs. John Venuti* filed in the Circuit Court for the City of Richmond. The case was ordered to mediation.

Reviewed and Certified by the Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer, Suzanne Milton.



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Appendix A

Dear Division of Student Affairs Staff,

As we get into the fall semester, we wanted to share some important information with you that we shared with students last week. You may have noticed that update in the DSA PSA's last week.

VCU is a very diverse community with a host of differing viewpoints reflecting each of our personal lenses through which we see, and experience, the world. This diversity of viewpoint and opinion is a tremendous asset to our community. Our hope is that our students engage in conversations with others who share similar and dissimilar perspectives. In that regard, the university is committed to fostering a climate that encourages civil and spirited discourse. Each of us has a responsibility to support our students as they strive to engage one another with respect and understanding.

Towards these goals, the Division of Student Affairs sends an email each semester to all students titled "Expressive Activity at VCU," which discusses creating a supportive culture for all our students while balancing First Amendment rights. The email for the fall 2023 semester can be viewed on the [Division of Student Affairs Blog](#).

Below are some important details included in that email:

- VCU is obligated, as a public university, to ensure a strong commitment to the First Amendment and Virginia law. The First Amendment prohibits prior restraint on speech and taking adverse action against individuals or groups, whether affiliated with the university or not, based on the viewpoints of their speech. This freedom of speech also encompasses the rights of those who present differing viewpoints.
- The [Reservation and Use of Space policy](#) clarifies how expressive activities may occur at VCU. A list of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) can assist with inquiries that have been made previously, including but not limited to those pertaining to time, place, manner, costs, and major events.
- With more conversations and interactions happening in the digital environment, the university has received reports of harassment, trolling and doxing on social media. The Dean of Student Advocacy Office can provide guidance about the application of student conduct policies to online activity and resources designed to support students who experience concerning discourse online.
- The Dean of Student Advocacy office is available throughout the year to meet with students who have specific questions or concerns and can be reached at vcudean@vcu.edu or 804-828-8940.



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As a public university, we will uphold the constitutional rights of our community, and hold tight to our core values of decency, respect, diversity, and inclusion. We will foster an environment where all members of our community feel welcome, safe, supported, and able to succeed in the context of our mission.

Thank you for your support of expressive activity on our campus and your willingness to support ourselves and our students in engaging in productive civil discourse with others.

Sincerely,

Division of Student Affairs