

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

December 1, 2025

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
- [Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy](#)
- [Reservation and Use of Space website](#)
- [Expression and Space Utilization FAQs](#)
- [Social Media Acceptable Use Policy](#) for social media account administrators (references, and links to, the First Amendment)
- [Interim 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.
- 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>



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 two complaints:

- L. Douglas Wilder v. Michael Rao and Suzanne Milton filed in the Eastern District of Virginia on August 1, 2025. The case was voluntarily dismissed by the plaintiff on October 7, 2025.
- Jesse D Pellow v. Virginia Commonwealth University, Office of Student Conduct. This case was filed on November 12, 2025, in Richmond City District Court and is pending.

Reviewed and Certified by Jason A. Block, Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer.



Appendix A

Dear Students,

As you get settled into the fall semester, we want to share some information regarding expressive activity on campus. 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 you 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.

VCU advocates for the dignity of all human beings. We understand that while creating an environment that supports civil dialogue, hurtful comments can be made by others. We are committed to creating a supportive culture for all our students while balancing First Amendment rights.

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 Expression and Space Utilization Policy Interim 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. Additionally, here is a link to the Space Utilization Maps.

We also have a team of staff members through the Division of Student Affairs who are available to consult and are often present when expressive activities occur on campus. 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.



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 engage in productive civil discourse with others.

Sincerely,

Division of Student Affairs