

University Council approved the Guidelines on Open Expression in 1969. They have been revised five times, the last in 1993. Their purpose was, and is, to guarantee the right of all members of the University community to assemble, express their ideas, demonstrate or picket on behalf of them, or to engage in any other form of individual or collective expression while at the same time refraining from preventing others from exercising their own rights. The Guidelines embody a set of principles which protect and foster full and free expression of ideas in a manner consistent with the necessary respect required for the rights of all. The Guidelines are thus an attempt to define for this University community principles consistent with those of all societies that regard the free expression of thought and opinion as a fundamental right of all people.

The Committee on Open Expression (COE) (<https://secretary.upenn.edu/univ-council/committees/open-expression>) was established as an independent committee of the University Council to ensure openness and effectiveness of channels of communication among members of the University community on questions of common interest. The major responsibilities of the Committee on Open Expression include participating in the resolution of conflicts that may arise from incidents or disturbances implicating these Guidelines; mediating among the parties to prevent conflicts and violations of these Guidelines; interpreting these Guidelines; advising administrative officers when appropriate; and recommending policies and procedures for the improvement of all levels of communication. In addition, the COE may recommend to the University Council proposals to amend or repeal the Guidelines.

The COE followed the recent encampment on College Green closely. Members of COE worked hard to interpret the Guidelines and to apply them (when asked) to a difficult and evolving situation. The COE chair and two other members were included in discussions with the interim president, provost, senior leadership, and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. We also reached out to protesting students and their faculty advisors. The COE believes the principles of open expression as set forth in the Guidelines are worth defending. We also believe the infrastructure of open expression at Penn needs strengthening consistent with the law. We are committed to working with the Faculty Senate and University Council to review the Guidelines on Open Expression.