**Saint Louis University**

**Statement on Speech, Expression and Civility**

**I. The Jesuit Tradition of Education at Saint Louis University**

In 1818, at the behest of Reverend Louis William DuBourg, Bishop of Louisiana, Saint Louis University became the first institution of higher learning west of the Mississippi River. In 1827, The Society of Jesus assumed responsibility of the fledging University. Throughout its long history, SLU has borne witness to rapid social change, shifting mores, and the recasting of cultural values. Yet, despite these changes, it has remained committed to the Judeo-Christian conviction that all Creation, including human rationality, is fundamentally good and to the Catholic insistence on the harmony of faith and reason. These convictions are what prompted Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas to regard Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle as vital sources of knowledge with profound insights into the human condition. The founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola, had confidence that the discerning mind could find God in all things. The Jesuit order has a history of learning from those beyond the boundaries of Christianity. Matteo Ricci, S.J. studied with Chinese mandarins in the 16th century and many Jesuits, building on Arabic and Greek foundations, achieved great renown as astronomers, physicists, and mathematicians in the 16th and 17th centuries. Because of this tradition, Saint Louis University fully embraces the pursuit of truth for the glory of God and the service of humanity.

**II. Freedom of Speech and the Jesuit Tradition**

The free and vigorous exchange of ideas, debate, discussion, and disputation are fundamental to the life of a university. In accordance with our Jesuit-Catholic heritage, we are committed to freedom of speech and expression for all members of our community and we welcome a diversity of views to campus. As a University community, we encourage speech that is: intelligent, articulate, and elevating; speech that strives to be respectful of all peoples regardless of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation (or lack thereof), gender, gender expression or sexual orientation; speech that is not needlessly and intentionally contemptuous toward the Jesuit-Catholic identity and mission of our institution. Yet, our heritage commits us to welcome the open exchange of ideas that might be critical of our Jesuit-Catholic mission and identity or offensive to some members of the community. Our commitment to seek the truth wherever it may be found impels us to tolerate even speech that produces offense. However, an invitation to speak on our campus does not express the University’s endorsement or approval of a speaker’s or performer’s ideas or values.

**III. Saint Louis University’s Commitment to All Members of Its Community**

The University affirms its commitment to its members, no matter their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender expression or sexual orientation, and it seeks to create an environment in which all members are treated with dignity and encouraged to participate fully in the life of the University. Consistent with the U.S. Constitution, the University prohibits any expressions deliberately intended to incite violence against any group, to threaten imminently the safety of any of its members, or to promote the violation of law. Our internal documents, such as the *Student Handbook* and the *University’s Harassment Policy*, prohibit harassment or expressions of bias or hate that “intimidate, mock, degrade, or threaten” members of our community, but the best defense against hate is not to censor, rather it is to shine the bright light of speech on why we should reject hateful rhetoric. This is often achieved with more open speech, not less.

**IV. Concern for the Marginalized and Free Speech**

In accordance with Catholic social teaching, our university affirms its particular concern for those who are poor, vulnerable, or marginalized. We recognize that many members of our community identify with groups whose very existence has, at times, been imperiled. We affirm our commitment and responsibility as an institution to be cognizant of current climate and politics as they relate to marginalized groups. We do not believe that restricting speech is the only way to protect marginalized groups, because efforts to curtail speech that might be seen as offensive may well endanger the very groups those efforts intend to protect. Our desire is to defend against offensive speech by creating a vigorous commitment to welcome a broad diversity of views, accompanied by measures to allow protest and provide support, especially for marginalized groups. The founders of our country recognized that a free people must be able to speak freely, without fear of retribution from their government. From such a simple assurance comes the ability for citizenry to unite to identify and decry abuses of power and wrongdoing by individuals in position of authority. Free speech is the sine qua non of a democratic republic. The importance of free speech is magnified on a university campus. The University community values its Catholic intellectual, religious, and moral heritage, and it is that very tradition that impels it to embrace and protect freedom of expression.

**V. Ignatian Guidelines for Civil Conversation**

In 1546, St. Ignatius of Loyola offered guidelines for civility in difficult conversations. He had in mind Jesuit advisors attending the Council of Trent. We believe these precepts are as important today as they were then, and adopt his guidelines below as a model for the kind of civil discourse we hope to encourage at Saint Louis University:

1. Be considerate and kind, especially when it comes to deciding on matters under discussion.
2. Be slow to speak, and only after having first listened quietly, so that you may understand the meaning, leanings, and wishes of those who do speak.
3. Consider the reasons on both sides without showing any attachment to your own opinion, and try to avoid bringing dissatisfaction to anyone.
4. Deal with everyone on an equal basis.
5. Give your opinion with the greatest possible humility and sincerity, and always end with the wordssalvo meliori iudicio—with due respect for a better opinion.
6. Take the time necessary for a full conversation, even if it is inconvenient.

SLU strives to be a community that is animated by commitments to the pursuit of truth and the service of humanity. It is because of these commitments that we embrace freedom of thought, expression, and speech grounded in a mutual commitment to civil discourse.