



Adopting the Chicago Statement

“Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. ... [I]t is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

—Excerpt from the Chicago Statement

WHAT IS THE CHICAGO STATEMENT?

The “Chicago Statement” refers to the free speech policy statement produced by [the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago](#). In July of 2014, University of Chicago President Robert J. Zimmer and Provost Eric D. Isaacs tasked the Committee with “articulating the University’s overarching commitment to free, robust, and uninhibited debate and deliberation among all members of the University’s community.” The Committee, which was chaired by esteemed University of Chicago Law School professor Geoffrey Stone, released the statement in January of 2015.

This Statement is part of a long tradition of reports emphasizing the importance of freedom of speech at institutions of higher learning, including the American Association of University Professors’ famous 1915 “[Declaration of Principles](#)” and 1940 “[Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#),” Yale University’s “[Woodward Report](#),” and the University of Chicago’s [Kalven Report](#).

FIRE quickly [endorsed the Chicago Statement](#) because it embodies the principles that FIRE defends every day. The statement is also an important reflection of how the principles of free speech are essential to the very purpose of a university. Since its release, FIRE has been working with colleges and universities across the country to adopt their own version of the Chicago Statement, in order to combat censorship on campus, protect academic freedom, and the free speech rights of students and professors.

WHO HAS ADOPTED THE STATEMENT?

Faculty governing bodies or administrations have officially endorsed the Chicago Statement at [over a dozen institutions](#) including [Princeton University](#), [Purdue University](#), Johns Hopkins University, American University, Chapman University, Winston-Salem State University, the [University of Wisconsin System](#) (which includes 26 campuses), the University of Virginia’s College at Wise, [Columbia University](#), [Louisiana State University](#) and the [City University of New York](#), among others.

WHY IS ADOPTING THE CHICAGO STATEMENT IMPORTANT?

When your school adopts the Chicago Statement, it shows that your institution values free expression for all students and faculty. Free speech rights benefit everyone on campus. Whether your goal is to campaign, protest, research, or simply learn in an environment that promotes open inquiry and the free exchange of ideas, the Chicago Statement will help to hold your institution accountable for protecting the free expression rights of its students and faculty.



After an institution **passes a resolution affirming the Chicago Statement**, you can then identify allies to help put pressure on administrators to revise preexisting speech codes that are inconsistent with the Statement. A coalition of faculty and students can provide the necessary spark to show administrators that the campus community is serious about speech code reform.

BRINGING THE CHICAGO STATEMENT TO YOUR CAMPUS

Here are several tips for ensuring that your university will be the next institution to stand in solidarity with the Chicago Statement's principles:

- Work to pass a student government resolution calling on the university to adopt its **own version of the Chicago Statement**.
- Reach out to faculty members and work with faculty senates and similar bodies on campus.
- Build a broad **coalition** of students and groups, across the ideological spectrum, to support the Chicago Statement and raise awareness on campus.
- Publish **articles** and **op-eds** in your student newspaper and other outlets.
- Host **events** on campus, such as debates, speakers, or panels to discuss the principles supported by the Chicago Statement.
- Communicate and collaborate with members of your university's **administration**.
- Host an event asking students to sign a **petition**, pledging their support for the Chicago Statement's principles, that will go to the administration.
- Encourage students to sign a template endorsement letter or the Chicago Statement.

MY SCHOOL MAINTAINS “RED LIGHT” OR “YELLOW LIGHT” SPEECH CODES. CAN WE STILL ADOPT THE CHICAGO STATEMENT?

Yes. Even for schools that maintain speech-restrictive policies, the adoption of the Chicago Statement can be an important step toward securing student and faculty free speech rights and achieving FIRE's highest, “green light” rating. When a faculty senate, university-wide committee, or student government endorses the Statement, it sends a strong message to university leadership that students and faculty want their speech to be fully protected. When the Committee on Freedom of Expression issued the Statement, the University of Chicago had six overbroad and ambiguous “yellow light” speech codes. However, FIRE was subsequently able to work with committee chair Professor Geoffrey Stone and the University of Chicago administration to revise those policies, **earning the school FIRE's highest, green light rating**.

MY UNIVERSITY EARNED A GREEN LIGHT RATING FROM FIRE. DO WE STILL NEED TO ADOPT THE CHICAGO PRINCIPLES?

The green light rating is given to colleges and universities whose policies nominally protect freedom of speech. Even if your school has received FIRE's green light rating, it is still important to adopt the Chicago Statement. Threats to free speech and academic freedom are coming from all sides, including from **politicians** and **legislatures**, so it is important to protect your campus by every means available.



FIRE'S CHICAGO STATEMENT RESOURCES

- [Model Freedom of Expression Resolution Based on the Chicago Principles](#)
- [Form Letter to Alma Mater](#)
- [Form Letter to Campus Administrators](#)
- [Washington Post op-ed by FIRE's Will Creeley and University of Chicago Law Professor Geoffrey Stone](#)
- [FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff in *The Huffington Post*: "Every University in the Country Should Adopt the University of Chicago's Academic Freedom Statement"](#)
- [Pledge Your Support for the Chicago Statement on Free Expression](#)