

Rutgers – A Safe and Welcoming Environment

Background

“The freedom to speak freely is fundamental to our University, our society, and our nation.”
[President Barchi’s statement, February 16, 2016]

Recent events at university campuses across the country have raised concerns regarding a number of serious challenges for the higher education community relating to academic freedom, free speech, safety, confidentiality and privacy, and the position of undocumented students. Here at Rutgers, students have rallied in New Brunswick on November 11 and November 16; in Newark on November 12 and November 16; and in Camden on November 9, November 11, and November 16, to voice their concerns about these issues. Faculty in various units have also been taking opportunities to voice their opinions. President Barchi issued a letter “Supporting Our Students’ Respectful Free Expression and Privacy” to the university community on November 15.

In light of these developments, the Rutgers University Senate wishes to place its views on public record. To this end, the Executive Committee submits for adoption the following resolution.

In preparing this resolution, the Executive Committee has considered, among other matters:

- Some who hold biases based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or political views have been responsible for a significant increase in the number of hate-based acts of intimidation and violence on campuses across the country.
- Threats to repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy are creating insecurity and fear among a significant number of students.
- A new website has been created, called the Professor Watchlist, whose “mission... is to expose and document college professors who discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom.” and to help to “identify, and expose more professors who have demonstrated liberal bias in the classroom.” So far about 160 faculty members, including four from Rutgers, are on this Watchlist. Such lists inevitably have a chilling effect on academic freedom, discourse, and the exchange of ideas.
- There have been calls for Rutgers to declare itself a “sanctuary campus.” In contrast, there is a view that the term itself is loaded and open to misinterpretation, and that what matters most is the reality of what we do, not the labels we adopt. For others, labels too are important.

Rutgers, as one of the most diverse universities in the country must take a leading role in responding to all these and similar challenges.

At the same time, this diversity means that we are not necessarily all agreed, in our academic community at large, in the Rutgers University Senate, or in its Executive Committee, on the perfect balance between protection of free speech and the prevention of harm of various sorts to members of our community, or the most appropriate remedies to be adopted. The Executive Committee’s position in presenting this resolution now is that discussion of many of these matters must and will continue at the Executive Committee and, if deemed appropriate, through charges to other standing committees, but that it will be a useful contribution to the debate and of value within and outside Rutgers if at this time we adopt a resolution summarizing those important points on which we are agreed. In some cases, we have used the same words as the President’s letter; in others, we have extended them.

Resolution

Be It Resolved That the Rutgers University Senate endorses the following principles:

1. Rutgers provides a safe, diverse, inclusive, and welcoming environment for the advancement of research, education, health care, and community outreach.
2. Free expression, privacy, and safety are cherished rights that are afforded to all members of the Rutgers community.
3. Rutgers faculty members, students, alumni, and staff are free to express their viewpoints in public forums as private citizens, including viewpoints that the University itself may not share, with the full expectation that they will be heard and respected.
4. Rutgers celebrates diversity and all members of our community, no matter their viewpoint, political view, ethnicity, religious beliefs, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, or immigration status are owed our respect, our support, and our best efforts to provide safety and security.
5. Rutgers opposes all forms of intolerance, bigotry, and oppression and supports mutual respect for the dignity of all persons.

And Be It Further Resolved that

1. The Rutgers University Senate endorses and supports the efforts of President Barchi to respond to these challenges as expressed in his letter of November 15, 2016.
2. The Rutgers University Senate commends President Barchi and three of our Chancellors for signing the "Statement in Support of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program and our Undocumented Immigrant Students" promulgated by leaders in higher education, and endorses the views expressed therein.
3. The University Senate endorses and supports President Barchi's statements on academic freedom, freedom of expression, student confidentiality, and the respect, support, and protection of all Rutgers students. The rights of free expression protected by the First Amendment lie at the heart of academic debate and intellectual discourse, and the Senate commends all efforts to protect those rights, and to ensure the safety and support of all of our students, whatever their viewpoint, political view, ethnicity, religious beliefs, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, or immigration status.
4. The Rutgers University Senate calls on President Barchi to continue to lead and respond vigorously to acts of hate and bias on campuses, to confront and respond to attacks on academic freedom, and to continue to assure students who are not US citizens that Rutgers will do everything legally possible to protect them.

And Be It Further Resolved that

1. The Rutgers University Senate commits itself to providing all possible assistance and support to the Rutgers administration in responding to the politically inspired challenges we now face.