
UNIVERSITY OF ONTARIO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
FACULTY ASSOCIATION

On August 30, 2018, the Office of the Premier put out a press release mandating that colleges and universities develop, implement, and comply with a free speech policy by January 1, 2019. The policy must apply to faculty, students, staff, management, and campus guests; and must follow the University of Chicago Statement on Principles of Free Expression. Postsecondary institutions must report annually to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and noncompliance with implemented policy may result in reductions to operating grant funding.

The Ontario Government's imposed January 1 deadline is too soon for UOIT to undertake meaningful and democratic policy development. Policy with such far reach requires deliberation at academic council and consultation with faculty, staff, and students. Further, policy development will require consultation with the UOITFA to ensure alignment with faculty members' collective agreements, which protect academic freedom and protect faculty from discrimination and harassment.

It is particularly troubling that policy must comply with the University of Chicago Statement on Principles of Free Expression. The Statement's narrow exceptions to freedom of expression are not in line with Canadian legal tradition. Further, the Statement calls for penalizing university members who organize in protest of views expressed on campus and guests brought to campus.

The Ontario Government's expectation that UOIT adopt the Statement's principles, and in effect discipline our community members for protesting discriminatory speech, actually risks chilling free expression and political dissent.

Statements and events that signal discrimination on the basis of sex, race, creed, sexuality, gender identity or expression, or disability render campus space unsafe for our minoritized community members. These types of hateful statements and events have no place on a university campus and the fact that protecting these types of events is a top priority for the Ontario Government is alarming.

By threatening financial penalty for institutional noncompliance and requiring that postsecondary institutions police member noncompliance, the Ontario Government is advancing an interpretation of free expression that subverts the principle, which is the freedom to speak or act without state reprisal.

The UOITFA will not support the development, implementation, and enforcement of a policy that risks harming members of our campus community and corroding progressive political action.

FA Statement drafted by Jen Rinaldi (Assistant Professor, Legal Studies)