

Free Speech at UTA – Quick Reference Sheet

The university has updated its policies on speech, expression and assembly in accordance with Senate Bill 18 of the 86th Texas Legislature. The most notable effect of these changes is that some of the outdoor areas of campus are now available to general public for expressive activities.

Forums for Speech

- **Traditional Public Forum** - the University's public streets, sidewalks, malls, quads, parks, and similar common outdoor Areas. These areas are generally available, subject to the University's time, place and manner restrictions, for expressive activity by members of the public at any time without the need for reservation or prior approval when the area is not reserved and promoted in advance for an event.
- **Limited Public Forum** - include the University buildings including their outside surfaces, surfaces associated with or connected to a University building, or a University structure. Limited public forums are open only to the expressive activities of faculty, staff, and students as set forth in policy. They are not open to the general public.
- **Non-public Forum** - Examples include, but are not limited to, classrooms, residence hall rooms, faculty and staff offices, academic buildings, administration buildings, medical treatment facilities, libraries, and research and computer laboratories. These spaces are restricted to use for their intended purpose and are not available for public expressive activity.

Time, Place and Manner Restrictions

- **Reservations** – Reservations are not necessarily required to use a space. This is especially true for the public outdoor areas, as spontaneous assemblies may occur. However, once an area is reserved for an event or activity, it shall only be available for the designated use for the duration of the reservation. Reservations for the public outdoor spaces are handled by the Office of Student Organizations. Call or contact our office for reservation information.
- **Distance from doorways and structures** – Expressive activities may not occur within 25 feet of the entrance to a building nor within 10 feet of the perimeter of a building
- **Information Tables** – Tables may be set up by university departments and registered student organizations (not general public). Advance permission is not required provided that the space is available for use and not reserved for other purposes.
- **Amplified Sound** – Use of any means of outdoor sound amplification requires advance permission from the Student Organizations Office. This is available to the general public, but it must be requested in advance.
- **Exhibits** – Symbolic structures may be erected and displayed by student organizations and university departments (not general public) in the public outdoor spaces but require advance approval from the Office of Student Organizations.

Distributing Literature, Signage and Solicitation

- **Signage** - Individuals may carry handheld signs or affixed to their person but may not post signs to the ground nor on buildings, walls or structures, nor may they write in chalk or other material

on the pavement. The bulletin boards and other sign posting locations are limited to use by university departments and registered student organizations.

- **Literature** - Individuals may distribute literature (of a non-commercial nature) hand-to-hand without permission in public spaces, however, they must collect all discarded materials and may not leave literature unattended on any surface, rack or bulletin board belonging to the university.
- **Solicitation** - Advertising for business, commercial or private gain is prohibited unless expressly permitted by the university. Also, the sales of goods or services, donation collections, or the offer for sale of merchandise, goods or services except as expressly permitted by the university is not allowed.

What is not allowed

- **Masks or face coverings** – designed to conceal the identity of the speaker, or to intimidate or hinder law enforcement or university administrators from their duties. Coverings worn for religious or health reasons are exempted.
- **Weapons or facsimile weapons** - Body-armor, stakes, poles (including for signs), clubs, swords, firearms (displayed), facsimile firearms, ammunition, explosives, or other items that could be reasonably construed as weaponry or body-armor.
- **Open flames** – must be approved in advance by Environmental Health & Safety.

Offensive or “hateful” speech

Freedom of speech means that all views have a place for expression—even those that others may find offensive, unpleasant, hurtful or wrong. UTA community members who hear words they don’t like are free to offer their own words in response, but they must always respect the rights of all speakers to share their views.

Threatening or “Fighting” words

Words of intimidation, epithets, ridicule or personal attacks with the intent to produce fear of bodily harm or death in the victim. Fighting words are insults which, “by their very utterance, inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace.” The institution must intervene to protect from fear of physical harm, but not emotional injury. **If someone feels unsafe or physically threatened, they should call 911 and/or engage with UTA PD immediately.**

For more information and resources on free speech at UTA, visit uta.edu/freespeech or contact us at freespeech@uta.edu or 817-272-2293.