

MANAGING CONTROVERSIAL SPEAKERS & PROTESTERS ON CAMPUS

The open exchange of ideas is a fundamental part of life on a college or university campus, and there is no constitutional right to prevent speakers from speaking. Campus administrators have an obligation to ensure that their campus community is safe, as well as to take measures to ensure that invited speakers may speak. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) offers trainings on managing controversial speakers and Protesters on campus. For more information about this and other ADL programs for your campus, please contact your local ADL office or CampusDirector@adl.org.

For further information visit

[**adl.org/hateuncycled**](https://adl.org/hateuncycled)

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The following checklist highlights things to keep in mind when a controversial speaker is coming to your campus.

I. General Protocols

- Develop and regularly review policies in consultation with the school's counsel. Make sure the policies offer clear and specific guidance, and apply policies in a consistent, neutral manner.
- Make sure the policies offer clear and specific guidance, and apply policies in a consistent, neutral manner
- Be clear and specific about consequences that may arise from failure to comply with policies.
- Provide training on relevant topics, including the policies related to controversial events.

II. Anticipating a Controversial Event

- Ensure that event sponsors follow policy requirements in advance—permits, room reservations, etc.
- Be clear about who will be the point person from the sponsoring group and who will liaise with campus security and administrators.
- Communicate information about a potentially controversial event to appropriate campus leadership and other stakeholders, including but not limited to, student affairs, campus police, faculty advisors, student leaders, communications people, etc.
- Be familiar with underlying issues, stakeholders, and their objectives.
- Assign student affairs monitors to staff events.
- Use available resources, including engaging respected organizations who have expertise and background information.
- Find out where the speaker has appeared before and what transpired. Contemplate the contingencies—play out possible scenarios and responses.
- Coordinate with event sponsors.
- Meet separately, in advance, with student leadership on each side of an issue and ensure that everyone knows and understands relevant policies, procedures, and consequences of noncompliance.
- Make sure student leaders are equipped to contact appropriate personnel, including police/security.
- Have a plan for how to safely remove a speaker if they are threatened.

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III. During a Controversial Event

- Reduce opportunities for clashes. Defer to police on the need to use barriers to keep sides apart.
- Have university staff members attend the event, including appropriate administrators and campus safety officers.
- Remember that even hateful speech is protected by the First Amendment. A university's ability to limit a speaker based on the content of the speaker's message is extremely limited.
- Response should be proportional—less is more, and it is easier to escalate than to de-escalate.
- Responding vocally to a speaker, spontaneously or temporarily, is generally acceptable.
- Preventing the speaker from speaking, through repeated noise or other disruptions, is generally not acceptable.
- Protesters who interfere with the speaker should be warned, and if they continue, they should be asked to leave.
- Use or threat of force or violence is never permitted. Anyone who assaults a speaker should be removed from the venue. The university should follow its existing policies on how to respond to these situations.

IV. After a Controversial Event

- Publicly commend those who engage respectfully, following policies and guidelines.
- Condemn speakers' ugly and hateful rhetoric, quickly, directly, and clearly.
- Follow up with all parties involved.
- Address lingering campus climate challenges, engaging and empowering students and other campus stakeholders to participate meaningfully in this process.