



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

November 20, 2025

The Honorable Glenn A. Youngkin
Governor
Commonwealth of Virginia
Post Office Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218-1475
glenn.youngkin@governor.virginia.gov

The Honorable Ghazala F. Hashmi
Post Office Box 396
Richmond, VA 23218
senatorhashmi@senate.virginia.gov

The Honorable Sam Rasoul
Post Office Box 13842
Roanoke, VA 24037
DelSRasoul@house.virginia.gov

Dear Governor Youngkin, Senator Hashmi and Delegate Rasoul,

In compliance with §23.1-401.1(D) of the Code of Virginia, William & Mary submits this report documenting satisfaction of the following statutory requirements:

1. Institutional policies regarding speech that is constitutionally protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and the process to report incidents of disruption of such constitutionally protected speech are included in the student handbook, on the university's website, and in student orientation programs;
2. Certification that required employees have been notified of these policies;
3. Provision of a copy of any complaint filed in a court of law since December 1 of the preceding year to initiate a lawsuit against the institution or an employee of the institution in his official capacity for an alleged violation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

William & Mary takes seriously our responsibility to uphold the constitutional freedoms provided under the First Amendment. The university affirms its unequivocal support of free expression and viewpoint diversity.

On behalf of the university, I certify that William & Mary notified all employees who are responsible for discipline or education of enrolled students of the existence of policies and rights

articulated in the Student Handbook. This occurs annually through the Provost's "Essential Matters" communication, most recently distributed by email on November 3, 2025. The communication included resources for guidance on civil discourse and engaging across differences in advance of the state and local elections. The Provost's communication also linked to a form for members of the community, as well as unaffiliated individuals, to report Disruption of Constitutionally Protected Speech on the university's Freedom of Expression website. This form is also hyperlinked to the centralized website (www.wm.edu/report), which is provided to all students in Fall Semester Announcements from Senior Vice President for Student Affairs & Public Safety.

For the second year, William & Mary leadership sponsored a university-wide Professional Development Initiative in August 2025. As national and global events continue to prompt challenging conversations at William & Mary, it remains a priority for the university's learning community that faculty and staff be able to engage substantively, respectfully and compassionately with each other and our students. Many of the university's faculty and staff gathered for professional development specifically devoted to the vital skills of navigating conflict. The two-hour program included a presentation by Law Dean A. Benjamin Spencer on the importance of the free exchange of ideas on campus, and an engaging and informative session presented by Phillip Wagner, Clinical Associate Professor in organizational behavior and Emily Gerst, Director of Conflict Resolution & Education, on conflict styles and navigating conflict.

The Professional Development Committee also shared [*Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*](#) by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen as a common read for those interested in exploring the topic further. Book club programming was offered in the early fall, and all faculty and staff were encouraged to read this book and explore all of the professional development offerings from W&M Libraries.

In January 2025 and August 2025, during new student orientation, incoming freshmen and transfer students participated in "Engaging Across Difference Through Better Arguments". This presentation included the five principles of a better argument including:

- Take winning off the table
- Prioritize relationships and listen passionately
- Pay attention to context
- Embrace vulnerability
- Make room to transform

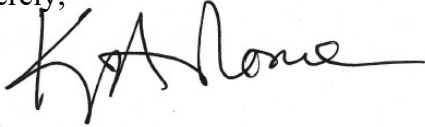
New students also heard from faculty, staff and administrators about how to have an open mind and willingness to respect conflict and its place within the university experience.

In addition, the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs & Public Safety, Dr. Ginger Ambler, specifically addressed students in two campus-wide emails on "Practicing Constructive Civil Discourse" sent August 26, 2025 and "Engaging with Respect and Curiosity" sent October 29, 2025. In the first communication, Dr. Ambler highlighted the elements of the Aspen Institute's Better Arguments principles and provided students with tips and resources for engaging in constructive dialogue. These resources have also been centralized for students and recognized student organizations in a [Guidelines](#) webpage on the Student Affairs site, which webpage includes a reference guide for using campus facilities to sponsor events and engage in expressive activity. The second communication included an [Election Barometer](#) for navigating the upcoming local and state-wide elections in the Commonwealth.

This resource provides students a central site to learn how to positively engage in constructive dialogue, connect to others through civic involvement and manage election-related stress.

Finally, I certify that since December 1, 2024, no complaints were filed against William & Mary to initiate a lawsuit against the institution or any employee of the institution in his/her official capacity for an alleged violation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Thus, no such complaints have been included in this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. A. Rowe", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katherine A. Rowe
President

Attachments

- A. William & Mary Policies Regarding Constitutionally Protected Speech
- B. William & Mary Freedom of Expression on Campus Webpage Content
- C. 8/26/2025 email “Practicing Constructive Civil Discourse” sent to students, faculty and staff
- D. 10/29/2025 email “Active Citizens at W&M: Engaging with Respect and Curiosity” and Free Speech on Campus Guidance and Resources attachment
- E. 11/3/2025 email “Top Five Things to Know” from the Office of the Provost

Attachment A: William & Mary Policies Regarding Constitutionally Protected Speech

In compliance with §23.1-401.1(B) of the Code of Virginia, William & Mary includes (1) in the Student Handbook, (2) on the website, and (3) in student orientation programs policies regarding speech that is constitutionally protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and the process to report incidents of disruption of such constitutionally protected speech.

1. W&M Student Handbook

The Student Handbook section of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Section II. outlines students' basic rights of freedom of expression and belief, freedom of association and peaceful assembly. All new students are informed of these policies, rights and processes in the orientation session prior to the beginning of the fall and spring semester. All students receive an annual "Fall Semester Announcements" email communication from the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs & Public Safety that states:

FREE SPEECH & USE OF CAMPUS FACILITIES

William & Mary is committed to creating an environment in which all members of the community and invited guests are encouraged to speak freely and express themselves on university property. Such a commitment to free expression is essential to fostering open discourse and exploration of ideas. More information about university policies concerning free speech can be found in the Use of Facilities policy, along with relevant links to the Student Handbook and the policies that apply to the scheduling and conduct of campus events and activities (e.g. meetings and other group activities of student organizations; speeches, performances, and other events by outside groups invited by student organizations). The Use of Facilities policy applies to individual students who wish to participate in expressive activity. This policy also shares information about the distribution of literature (pamphleting, etc.) and access to campus facilities by external/unaffiliated groups as well as Recognized Student Organizations. A vibrant campus often has advertising in the form of flyers, chalking, etc. Information regarding these activities can be found in the Posting & Chalking On Campus policy. For assistance in scheduling and planning your activities, please contact Student Unions & Engagement in the Sadler Center.

Attachment B: William & Mary Freedom of Expression on Campus Webpage Content

- Policies & Regulations Relevant to Free Speech
 - [Use of Campus Facilities and Property by Recognized Student Organizations and Individuals](#)
 - [Posting and Chalking on Campus Policy](#)

- Materials Relevant to Protected Rights & Responsibilities

- [Faculty Handbook](#)

Section III.A. Academic Freedom and Professional Ethics safeguards a faculty member's ability to "encourage free discussion, inquiry, and expression" in the course of teaching and learning. Additionally, "(F)aculty members are also entitled to their political rights and should be free from institution censorship or discipline for exercising them".

- [Student Handbook – Rights and Responsibilities](#)

Section II. Rights, Privileges and Immunities states in part that the members of the university community, as individuals, shall enjoy all rights, privileges, and immunities guaranteed every citizen of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia, including:

A. Basic Rights: Among the basic rights are freedom of expression and belief, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and freedom from personal force and violence, threats of violence and personal abuse.

C. Right to Organize: Each member of the university community has the right to organize their own personal life and behavior insofar as it does not violate local, State, or Federal law, university regulations, or agreements voluntarily entered into, and does not interfere with the rights of others. The following specific rights apply:

1. The right to associate with any legally established group or to create such groups, professional or other, as serve legitimate interests.
 - a. The membership, policies, and actions of an organization shall be determined by vote of those who hold membership in that organization
 - b. Affiliation with an extramural organization shall not disqualify an organization from institutional recognition.
 - c. An organization shall be officially recognized after its constitution and bylaws have been approved by the appropriate body as designated by the President, or the President's delegated representative, and when consistent with the Bylaws of the Board of Visitors. A current list of officers, but not a membership list, may be required as a condition of recognition.
 - d. Officially recognized organizations, including those affiliated with an extramural organization, shall be open to all on a non-discriminatory basis with regard to race, religion, creed, national origin, gender, or political belief, provided however that, to the extent permitted by law, membership in social organizations may be restricted to members of the

same gender, and membership in organizations whose primary purpose is political or religious may be restricted to those members of the university community who have similar beliefs.

2. The right to hold public meetings, to invite speakers of their own choosing to campus, to post notices, to engage in peaceful, orderly demonstrations within reasonably and impartially applied rules designed by the President or the President's delegated representative, to reflect the educational purposes of the university, and to protect the safety of members of the university and community and others. The university may establish rules, therefore, regulating time, place, and manner of such activities and allocating the use of facilities, but these regulations shall not be used as a means of censorship. In the event that there is a clear and present danger, as reasonably determined by the appropriate university authority designated by the President, to the health or safety of the members of the university community or to the educational process, such meeting or demonstration may be prohibited. Sponsorship of guest speakers does not necessarily imply approval or endorsement of the views expressed either by the sponsoring group or the institution.
3. The right, when charged or convicted of violation of general law, to be free of university discipline for the same conduct, unless such discipline by the university community is determined to be for the protection of other members of the university community or the safeguarding of the educational process. Such determination shall be made by the appropriate university authority designated by the President.

Section III. A. Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship articulates in part that students have the right to:

3. "discuss freely, inquire and express opinions inside the classroom"
6. "hear and study unpopular and controversial views on intellectual and public issues"
7. "expect that information about his/her views, beliefs and political associations which an instructor acquires in the course of his/her work as a teacher, advisor or counselor of the student be held in confidence."

➤ **Process for Reporting Disruption of Constitutionally Protected Speech**

Online [Report Form](#) for community members or invited guests

Attachment C: Practicing Constructive Civil Discourse



CAMPUS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Practicing Constructive Civil Discourse

A message from Student Affairs reminding students of the tools and resources available on campus to support the use and practice of civil discourse.

admin Published August 26, 2025

The following message was sent to the campus community from Ginger Ambler, senior vice president for student affairs and public safety, on Aug. 26, 2025 – Ed.

Dear William & Mary Students,

One of the great benefits of being a member of a university community is the ability to engage intellectually and critically with new ideas and to expand awareness of our role in promoting democracy. Learning how to express our viewpoints, engage counter-arguments constructively, and move toward effective action is core to the William & Mary student experience. This is particularly important as we head into another election season and at a time of ongoing international conflict.

While engaging across difference can be uncomfortable, there are tools and guiding principles to help when we encounter speech that unsettles us. The [Aspen Institute's Better Arguments](#) framework highlights such principles, noting, "American civic life doesn't need fewer arguments, it needs better arguments." At W&M, we have chosen to embrace the principles of a better argument to give us a common language and healthy strategies for responding to conflict and disagreement:

- **Take winning off the table.**
Lead with a desire to understand and learn.
- **Prioritize relationships & listen passionately.**
Focus on building honest connections.
- **Pay attention to context.**
Acknowledge the many factors that may influence beliefs.
- **Embrace vulnerability.**
Consider the benefits of opening up.
- **Make room to transform.**
Be open to new and varied perspectives.

Responses to speech with which we disagree can include engaging in constructive dialogue with those holding oppositional views, organizing counter-programming that publicly presents a different perspective, or simply ignoring speech that we find objectionable. Civic dialogue and engagement are learned skills, ones you will explore in your classrooms, student organizations, living environments and service commitments.

W&M's policies help ensure that community members are free to express their opinions while safety is maintained and the university's core activities of teaching, learning and research continue. Two years ago, students told us it would be helpful if we pulled together all policies relevant to expressive activities in one place. We took that request to heart

and created a [resources website](#) to do just that — it is also the first link included below.

We offer a wealth of other resources and opportunities to learn how to become more effectively engaged, and be able to confront ideas, not people:

- [Guidelines for Facilities Use](#) (collected policies for events, programs, and expressive activities)
- [Freedom of Expression](#)
- [Civic & Community Engagement](#)
- [Community Values & Connection](#)
- [Student Unions and Engagement](#)
- [Student Leadership Development](#)
- [Self-Governance in Residence Halls](#)
- [W&M Democracy Initiative](#)

I hope you'll make use of these resources. Skills in democratic engagement that you develop at William & Mary will strengthen your relationships with each other, distinguish you as a candidate for internships and employment, and amplify your impact in the world for years to come.

Best regards,
Ginger Ambler

Virginia M. Ambler '88, Ph.D. '06

Senior Vice President for Student Affairs & Public Safety

William & Mary

757-221-1236

Tags: [Student Affairs](#)

Attachment D: Engaging with Respect and Curiosity

From: faculty-request@lists.wm.edu on behalf of Ambler, Ginger <vmambl@wm.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2025 4:32 PM
To: faculty; staff
Subject: [faculty_send] Active Citizens at W&M: Engaging with Respect and Curiosity
Attachments: Guidelines and Resources_Free Speech on Campus.pdf

Some people who received this message don't often get email from vmambl@wm.edu. [Learn why this is important](#)

Colleagues,

FYI – I sent the following pre-election message to all students earlier this afternoon.

Ginger

Virginia M. Ambler '88, Ph.D. '06

Senior Vice President for Student Affairs & Public Safety
William & Mary
757-221-1236

From: W&M Student Affairs
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2025 1:19 PM
To: students@wm.edu
Cc: William & Mary President's Office <president@wm.edu>
Subject: Active Citizens at W&M: Engaging with Respect and Curiosity

Dear Students,

In just under a week, the Commonwealth will be conducting state and local elections in which many of you will participate.

Election seasons are inherently uncertain. To help navigate this, I invite you to connect with our university's many resources. To signal your interest and engage at your own pace, you may find our [Election Barometer](#) helpful.

We can be proud of William & Mary's rich history of civic engagement, our willingness to engage one another's ideas with curiosity, and our strong sense of community. The university is among just 47 campuses nationwide that has earned the Platinum Seal from the nonprofit ALL IN, recognition for reaching an 82.4% voting rate on campus.

Equally important to this participation is how we engage with one another. Earlier this semester, I shared ways to [practice civil discourse](#), including resources William & Mary offers to help our community engage across differences. Those remain important.

Additionally, our community has broadly embraced the principles of [Better Arguments](#). I trust those core principles will be helpful as you engage in respectful discussions both inside and outside the classroom.

Each year questions arise about free speech on campus. The attached PDF addresses frequently asked questions and provides links to additional guidance and campus resources.

William & Mary has played a pivotal role in the shaping of democracy since the founding of the United States. Together we will continue to lead essential efforts to practice and promote democratic ideals in the pursuit of a more perfect union, relying on our laws, our history, and our strong sense of community to guide us.

Sincerely,
Ginger Ambler

Virginia M. Ambler '88, Ph.D. '06

Senior Vice President for Student Affairs & Public Safety

William & Mary

757-221-1236



SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS & PUBLIC SAFETY

Guidance & Resources: Free Speech on Campus

What is and is not considered protected speech under the Constitution?

The First Amendment of the Constitution states that Congress shall make no law that abridges the freedom of speech. This has been interpreted to mean that all but the most egregious speech is protected by law. In addition, Virginia law (Va. Code Sec. 23.1-401.1) states that no public institution of higher education may abridge the constitutional freedom of any individual to speak on campus.

What is considered speech under the First Amendment?

Most written and verbal communication is “speech.” Verbal statements, written slogans on posters and shirts, online writing, and even lyrics in music are considered speech.

What speech is not protected under the First Amendment?

There are a few limited exceptions to our constitutional Free Speech protections:

- Harassment: Speech that creates both a severe and pervasive hostile environment and is also objectively offensive to the average William & Mary student would be deemed illegal harassment and not protected. This is a very high legal threshold.
- True Threats: Speech that would cause the listener to believe that an immediate act of violence is about to occur against identifiable persons. Words alone are not enough. The speaker must intend for the listener to believe violence will occur. This is also a very high threshold.
- Fighting Words: In-person (not on social media) speech that would make the average William & Mary student feel propelled to violence simply by hearing it. It is not enough to find language disturbing. No court has ever found this exception to be applicable, mostly because we all have self-determination, a choice, and an opportunity to walk away and exercise self-control.
- Defamation: Speech about a specific individual that is both untrue and causes injury to reputation.

What about hate speech?

Hateful speech, even speech that is focused on hurtful, pejorative, racialized themes, or which invokes stereotypes and tropes, is still protected speech unless it meets the criteria outlined above. Without a doubt, hateful speech often pains and harms others. It can be scary and deeply upsetting. By definition, it is antithetical to our mission and values – and yet it is constitutionally protected speech.

When does protected speech cross the line into something actionable?

The university has established content-neutral restrictions on the time, place and manner where speech can occur. For example, speech that disrupts class schedules or the operation of campus events and activities is prohibited. In addition, speech outside of buildings is treated differently than such speech inside buildings.

Details on applicable restrictions can be found in the following policies: [Use of Campus Facilities](#) and [Posting/Chalking](#). Likewise, speech directed toward particular individuals, especially speech attempting to compel certain outcomes, can quickly escalate from an expressive activity into an interpersonal conflict. Speech that includes conduct which violates university policies will be addressed accordingly.

What can we do?

There are many things we can do to respond to protected speech that we find hateful or offensive:

Report: If you feel you have experienced or witnessed illegal harassment or threats, please report this to reportconcern@wm.edu. You matter. The university will respond vigorously to conduct and policy violations – investigating them swiftly in line with due process.

Respond: Use your voice! The best way to combat speech is with speech — civil, educated, passionate, factual speech. Meet bad facts with better ones, meet silence with sound, meet ignorance with education, meet positionality with dialogue. Find ways to confront ideas, not the speakers themselves. When you hear bias, name what you hear, in a way that others can also hear: say, “I find that phrase X, and here’s why.”

There are offices across campus that can help you reserve spaces for speech, hone your speech skills, and offer you many opportunities to learn how to become more effectively engaged:

1. [Civic & Community Engagement](#)
2. [Student Unions & Engagement](#)
3. [Student Leadership Development](#)
4. [W&M Democracy Initiative](#)
5. [Self-Governance in Residence Halls](#)

Recover: Most importantly, experiencing hateful speech can be deeply painful. If you are hurting or feeling injured or alone, we have many campus resources to help. We care about you.

1. [Counseling Center](#) – when one-to-one or group therapy is needed
2. [Timely Care](#) – online 24/7 counseling support
3. [Campus Recreation](#) – spend time in nature, try a fitness class, spend time with friends



Top Five Things to Know
4:18 PM

Mon 11/3/2025

From the Office of Provost Peggy Agouris

OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

WEEKLY MESSAGE ARCHIVE

Dear colleagues,

Earlier today, William & Mary announced that it will host one of just three centers in the world to support submarine production through the Australia, United Kingdom and United States security alliance. Led by the Whole of Government Center of Excellence, the effort reflects W&M's leadership in harnessing the power of higher education to shape the world around us. Read the full [W&M News article](#) to learn more about what this means for W&M and the Hampton Roads region.

Here are the top "5 Things to Know" this week:

1. This Wednesday, November 5, take some time to [Connect on the Patio](#). Enjoy this opportunity for refreshments and community with your fellow faculty and staff educators.
2. Tomorrow, the Commonwealth will conduct its state and local elections. Please make use of available resources, including the [Election Barometer](#), to support students in navigating this process. For guidance on civil discourse and engaging across differences, I encourage you to revisit the university's [Better Arguments](#) framework and related materials. More information about W&M policies concerning free speech can be found on our Freedom of Expression

[website](#). For additional information on university policies and other key topics, please

continue to refer to [Essential Matters](#).

3. Award-winning journalist and author David E. Sanger has been selected as [W&M's Hunter B. Andrews Fellow](#). He will visit campus next week and participate in a public conversation moderated by George and Mary Hylton Professor of International Relations and Director of the Global Research Institute, Mike Tierney, next Monday, November 10. Please [RSVP](#) if you would like to attend.
4. The Charles Center is now accepting applications for research grants. Undergraduate students can submit a proposal for faculty-mentored research by February 16, 2026. Please encourage any students who might be interested to [register for an information session](#).
5. This week's shoutout goes to our fantastic W&M basketball program as they gear up for a new season after making history in 2024. W&M men's basketball opens the 2025-26 season at home [tonight](#), and W&M [women's basketball](#) will play their first game of the season on Thursday. Go Tribe!

Peggy



WILLIAM & MARY
OFFICE OF THE PROVOST
