

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Meridian Technology Center respects and values student activism. The technology center takes pride in our students' interactions with social and political issues, viewing it as a desirable, if not essential, component of civic engagement and, therefore, adopts the following policy.

### Policy

The outdoor areas of any campus of the Meridian Technology Center are deemed public forums for the campus community, and the Meridian will not create "free speech zones" or other designated areas of campus outside of which expressive activities are prohibited. The technology center may maintain and enforce reasonable time, place and manner restrictions narrowly tailored in service of a significant institutional interest when the restrictions employ clear, published, content- and viewpoint-neutral criteria and provide for ample alternative means of expression. Any such restrictions shall allow for members of the campus community to spontaneously and contemporaneously assemble and distribute literature. Nothing in this paragraph shall be interpreted as applying to student expression taking place elsewhere on campus.

Any person who wishes to engage in noncommercial expressive activity on campus shall be permitted to do so freely, as long as the person's conduct is not unlawful and does not materially and substantially disrupt the functioning of the technology center.

Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted as preventing the technology center from prohibiting, limiting or restricting expression that the First Amendment does not protect or prohibiting harassment as defined in this policy.

Nothing in this policy shall enable individuals to engage in conduct that intentionally, materially and substantially disrupts another person's expressive activity if that activity is occurring in a campus space reserved for that activity under the exclusive use or control of a particular group.

Nothing in this policy shall prohibit the technology center from maintaining and enforcing reasonable time, place and manner restrictions that are narrowly tailored to serve a significant institutional interest only when such restrictions employ clear, published, content- and viewpoint-neutral criteria. Any such restrictions shall allow for members of the campus community to spontaneously and contemporaneously assemble, speak and distribute literature.

Meridian will make public in its Student Handbook, on its websites and through its orientation programs for students the policies, regulations and expectations of students regarding free expression on campus consistent with this policy.

Meridian will develop materials, programs and procedures to ensure that those persons who have responsibility for discipline or education of students, including but not limited to administrators, campus police officers, and instructors, understand the policies, regulations and duties of the technology center regarding free expression on campus.

### **Reporting Requirement**

By December 31st each year, Meridian will publicly post on its website and submit to the Governor and Legislature a report that details the course of action implemented to comply with the requirements of Okla. Stat. tit. 70, § 2120. A report shall also be submitted in the instance of any changes or updates to the chosen course of action. The report provided on the website shall be:

- a. Accessible from the technology center's website home page by use of not more than three links;
- b. Searchable by key words and phrases; and
- c. Accessible to the public without requiring registration or use of a user name, password or another user identification.

The technology center's report will include the following information:

- a. a description of any barriers to or incidents of disruption of free expression occurring on campus, including but not limited to attempts to block or prohibit speakers and investigations into students or student organizations for their speech. The description shall include the nature of each barrier or incident, as well as what disciplinary action, if any, was taken against members of the campus community determined to be responsible for those specific barriers or incidents involving students without revealing those students' personally identifiable information, and
- b. any other information the technology center deems valuable for the public to evaluate whether free expression rights for all members of the campus community have been equally protected and enforced.

In the event the technology center is sued for an alleged violation of First Amendment rights, a supplementary report, with a copy of the complaint or amended complaint, will be submitted to the Governor and the Legislature within thirty (30) days.

### **Definitions**

"Campus community" means students, administrators, faculty and staff at the technology center and their invited guests;

"Expressive activities" include, but are not limited to, any lawful verbal, written, audio-visual or electronic means by which individuals may communicate ideas to one another, including all forms of peaceful assembly, protests, speeches and guest speakers, distribution of literature, carrying signs and circulating petitions.

"Harassment" means only that expression that is unwelcome, so severe, pervasive and subjectively and objectively offensive that a student is effectively denied equal access to educational opportunities or benefits provided by the technology center.

"Materially and substantially disrupts" means when a person, with the intent to or with knowledge of doing so, significantly hinders another person's or group's expressive activity, prevents the communication of the message or prevents the transaction of the business of a lawful meeting, gathering or procession by:

- a. engaging in fighting, violent or other unlawful behavior, or
- b. physically blocking or using threats of violence to prevent any person from attending, listening to, viewing or otherwise participating in an expressive activity. Conduct that "materially disrupts" shall not include conduct that is protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or Section 22 of Article 2 of the Oklahoma Constitution. Such protected conduct includes but is not limited to lawful protests in the outdoor areas of campus generally accessible to the members of the public, except during times when those areas have been reserved in advance for other events, or minor, brief or fleeting nonviolent disruptions of events that are isolated and short in duration;

"Outdoor areas of campus" means the generally accessible outside areas of campus where members of the campus community are commonly allowed, such as grassy areas, walkways or other similar common areas and does not include outdoor areas where access is restricted from a majority of the campus community.

"Student organization" means an officially recognized group at the technology center, or a group seeking official recognition, comprised of admitted students that receive or are seeking to receive benefits at the technology center.

Reference: Okla. Stat. tit. 70, § 2120