BARNARD COLLEGE PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Finalized July 2026 by the Faculty Committee on Freedom of Expression and the Board of Trustees Special Committee on Freedom of Expression

Barnard College has a rich history of challenging accepted wisdom and entrenched orthodoxies. Established to provide women access to higher education at a time when such access was severely restricted, the College's mission requires strong and unwavering fidelity to freedom of expression and academic freedom. It is in this spirit that Barnard shares these principles to inform our work, interpret our policies, and guide our common mission. Freedom of expression and academic freedom are related but distinct concepts, rooted in a principled belief in the importance of open inquiry, intellectual risk-taking, and vigorous debate. In practice, this means that all members of the Barnard community must be willing to critically engage with viewpoints that are unconventional, controversial, or even offensive, recognizing that open dialogue is fundamental to the pursuit of scholarly knowledge.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is the core right of individuals to express ideas and to share information. It protects lawful speech and writing, consistent with First Amendment principles. It also protects the right to lawful assembly and association, as well as the right to participate in modes of collective expression as individuals. As such, freedom of expression cultivates democratic values by ensuring the ability to petition and criticize authority, whether that authority be vested in academic disciplines, government agencies, or the College itself.

Freedom of expression is enjoyed by all members of the Barnard community, including students, staff, faculty, and others appointed to a position at the College. In the classroom, faculty and students have the right to respectfully pose and debate competing ideas, and students have the right to be fairly evaluated on the depth of their research and the rigor of their argumentation. Speakers and guests invited onto campus enjoy freedom of expression as well, and the College commits to supporting their right to speak and be heard, even as community members retain the right to voice disapproval in a manner that does not impede a speaker's presentation. Off campus, all members of the Barnard community enjoy the same freedom to engage in lawful discourse as other members of the public.

As part of its commitment to freedom of expression, the College recognizes the right of its community members to protest and demonstrate in accordance with campus policies. The College has an obligation to ensure that these modes of expression neither impede essential campus activities, such as teaching and learning, nor interfere with the contractual duties of

employees. The College commits to fostering as robust an exchange of ideas as possible so long as community members follow content-neutral time, place, and manner policies.

The College must also protect its community members from discrimination and harassment as defined by federal, state, and city laws. In meeting these legal obligations, the College commits to judiciously seeking balance with its dedication to freedom of expression, prioritizing community-based approaches to conflict resolution grounded in dialogue and education. Members of the Barnard community also retain the right to contest attempts on the part of the College to regulate or sanction their expression, pursuing grievance cases through established institutional mechanisms.

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom protects the right of scholars to conduct research, to design and teach courses, to build scholarly archives and collections, and to disseminate their work in accordance with the professional standards of their respective disciplines. It also protects the right of scholars to speak freely about internal matters of college governance and to engage in external discourse as public-facing intellectuals.

Academic freedom extends to all Barnard scholars with full or part-time appointments (e.g., faculty, research scholars, and administrators and staff who have teaching or research responsibilities). As a protection of the scholarly community to self-govern its intellectual pursuits, academic freedom does not differentiate according to rank, discipline, or seniority. Hired for their expertise, all scholars are firstly responsible for upholding the professional standards and ethics of their chosen disciplines. Hence, research, teaching, and other forms of scholarly practice must be evaluated according to these professional standards through established mechanisms of independent peer review. Artistic, literary, and other creative works must be similarly assessed.

In a scholar's research, academic freedom ensures the ability to pursue any and all questions, subject only to the standards of the discipline within which those questions are posed. In the classroom, academic freedom supports an instructor's responsibility to foster an environment in which relevant content and a range of views can be rigorously considered, including those that some may find objectionable. Courses require departmental and college-wide approval, but instructors have broad latitude to determine the pedagogical goals of their courses and the content that best achieves those goals. In college governance, academic freedom ensures that scholars are empowered to help shape the future of their institution by robustly debating all matters of academic policy and practice without fear of administrative reprisal.

Academic freedom further protects the right of scholars to host presentations by outside individuals and groups whose ideas may be considered controversial. Such campus events do not represent institutional endorsements of the views presented; they represent the College's

firm commitment to open dialogue and debate. Similarly, if scholars comment publicly on unfolding social or political issues, they do so as individuals, rather than in the name of the College.

As members of the academy, scholars have a responsibility to speak in good faith and to uphold professional standards, both on and off campus. When addressing the public as scholarly authorities, they are therefore answerable to their community of disciplinary peers, not to administrators, politicians, or other non-experts who may seek to silence controversial positions. Only when extramural speech directly impinges on campus activities in such a way that it violates college rules or another community member's legal rights is intervention by the College justified. Here too, scholars retain the right to contest efforts on the part of the College to curtail their expressive freedom.

Conclusion

Freedom of expression and academic freedom are the bedrock on which Barnard has emerged as a world-class forum for the exchange of ideas, unconstrained by ideological orthodoxies. Our community members are encouraged to constantly challenge received wisdom, assumptions, and biases. We believe that thoughtful dialogue and mutual respect promote the nuanced understanding of differences that leads to meaningful shifts in perspective and a stronger community. To borrow the words of alumna Grace Lee Boggs, "the only way to survive is by caring for one another." Engaging in discussion and debate that results in real innovation is never easy, but it is the heart of Barnard's mission. Together, we commit to entering into such dialogue boldly, with a desire to learn and listen, to speak and critique, and to pursue the knowledge necessary to build a more just and enlightened society.