

Freedom of Speech Annual Report – University of Ottawa (2024)

As indicated in the December 14, 2018 and September 12, 2018 memos from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, each of Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges and universities is to prepare an annual report on the implementation of a free speech policy. Please use this template; you may append additional documents or institution-specific information as you see fit.

The institutional Freedom of Speech Annual Report will be a public document and should respect privacy obligations. Please report on events or incidents that took place between **August 1, 2023** and **July 31, 2024**.

The reports are to be posted on the institution’s website and submitted to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) by **September 3, 2024**.

Please submit your institution’s annual report and the link to its location on your website to submissions@heqco.ca. Please reach out to HEQCO at the same address with any questions.

Section A: Institutional Policy

You may append additional documentation or institution-specific information as you see fit.

Has your institution amended its free speech policy (or policy framework) since the time of your 2023 report? If so, please explain the reason for the change and provide the link to its location on your institutional website.

No, there has been no changes to Policy 121 – Statement on Free Expression since the 2023 report. There has been no changes to Policy 28 - Temporary Use of University Space.

Where are members of the institutional community (or guests) directed when there is a free-speech-related question or complaint about an institutional event? Please provide contact information.

They are directed to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs:

Contact information:

550, Cumberland Street, Room 217
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
provost@uottawa.ca

What is your institution's policy on holding events where there are security concerns? To your knowledge, were there any instances where a non-curricular event did not proceed due to security concerns or their related costs?

All events are reviewed and approved through a central University of Ottawa team. Security concerns and/or potential issues are reviewed and addressed with the event organizer. Should additional security be required based on the University's assessment of the risk, the event is not permitted to be hosted on uOttawa grounds.

There were no events that did not take place due to security or cost concerns. All policies related to holding events on campus can be found on the website:

Policy 121

Policy 28

Section B: Complaints

You may append additional documentation or institution-specific information as you see fit.

Between **August 1, 2023** and **July 31, 2024**, did any member of the institutional community (or guests) make an official complaint about free speech? If yes, please provide a general description that protects the privacy of complainants.

Between August 1, 2023, and July 31, 2024, we received two official complaints related to free speech. The first complaint concerned an exhibit organized by a student group. The content and messages of the exhibit were reported to be offensive to some members of the institutional community, including other student groups.

The second complaint was brought up by a professor who reported an incident to an alleged breach of his academic freedom.

If there has been an official complaint (or more than one):

What were the issues under consideration? Please identify any points of contention (e.g., security costs, safety, student unions and/or groups, operational requirements, etc.).

The complaint raised issues relating to safety on campus, discrimination, academic freedom and freedom of expression. It also referred to student groups which fall under the purview of the University of Ottawa Student Union (UOSU). The UOSU operates independently from the University of Ottawa. As such, we encouraged the complainants to engage directly with the UOSU to formally discuss their points of contention.

For the second one, the teaching staff complained about a statement made by their union, suggesting that this statement violated their academic freedom and freedom of expression.

How did the institution manage the free speech complaint(s)? Was the complaint addressed using the procedures set out in the policy? How were issues resolved?

We managed the complaint by having it reviewed by our Senate Committee on Academic Freedom. This committee does not have the mandate to deal with specific complaints however, we asked committee members to study the issues of principle raised in the complaint and to make recommendations and suggest guidance for potential future incidents of this nature. We also requested that some of the art displayed at the exhibition be removed.

For the second one, the university concluded that this is an issue between the Union and one of their members and that the University could not get involved.

Section C: Summary Data

Please provide the following summary data for free-speech-related official complaints received by the institution:

Number of official complaints received under the free speech policy relating to curricular and non-curricular events.	2
Number of official complaints reviewed that did not proceed.	1
Number of official complaints where the institution determined that the free speech policy was not followed appropriately.	0
Number of official complaints under the free speech policy that resulted in the institution applying disciplinary or other institutional measures.	0
To your knowledge, were any free speech complaints forwarded to the Ontario Ombudsman?	0

To the best of your ability, please provide an estimate of the number of **non-curricular events** held at the institution either online or in person between **August 1, 2023 and July 31, 2024**. Non-curricular events include, for example, invited speakers, sporting events, rallies, student life/student affairs events, conferences, etc., as opposed to regular events held as part of an academic program or course.

The University of Ottawa hosted around 36,000 non-curricular events on campus during this period.

Institutional Comments (if any)

We also received many comments on the encampment that took place on our campus from April to July 2024. We managed this situation by having constant open communication with the organizers as well as uOttawa Protection Service to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of our community.