

Free speech and a respectful environment

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During the last several weeks, I have heard from members of our University community about situations in which they felt hurt or uncomfortable because of an individual's words or the actions of a few. I want to take this opportunity to remind all of us — students, faculty and staff — about the interconnected values of free speech and civility that our campus supports.

N.C. State is a learning community that values diversity — of people and ideas — that drives rigorous intellectual discussion as well as personal and professional growth. We welcome individuals of varied backgrounds, races, religions, opinions and interests, recognizing the strengths that each person adds to our campus, and we support free expression and debate. This open exchange of ideas must be guided by our commitment to the ideals of tolerance, respect and civility.

Achieving this environment of openness and inclusiveness requires the active cooperation and participation by every member of our NCSU community. As an academic institution we value and uphold the free speech rights that are so central to our nation. In fact, the Supreme Court has identified a university as a "marketplace of ideas," where speech is afforded greater protection than in general society. I encourage you to listen to speakers and view expressions of opinion with thoughtfulness and respect. If you find a topic or manner of speech disturbing, you always have the right to respectfully disagree and walk away.

While our community values free speech, NCSU will not tolerate any form of unlawful harassment, discrimination, violence or intimidation. Our University does not condone offensive or abrasive speech, and sanctions are possible for individuals or groups who go beyond the boundaries protected by free speech. Today — and every day — we reaffirm our commitment to building a diverse, respectful and open community. I challenge all faculty, staff and students to join me in creating a welcoming environment, where everyone can feel respected even as different values and viewpoints are presented.

James L. Oblinger, chancellor