



# BOARD OF REGENTS DOCKET ITEM SUMMARY

Board of Regents

March 14, 2025

**AGENDA ITEM:** Resolution Related to Response to President’s Task Force on Institutional Speech Report

Review                       Review + Action                       Action                       Discussion

*This is a report required by Board policy.*

**PRESENTERS:** Regent Janie S. Mayeron  
Regent Douglas A. Huebsch  
Regent Mike O. Kenyanya

### PURPOSE & KEY POINTS

The purpose of this item is to act on a resolution responding to the President’s Task Force on Institutional Speech (task force) report. The resolution recognizes that current Board of Regents policy and related administrative policies do not clearly address the contours of institutional speech, and creates new guiding principles that, if approved, will be implemented by the President.

In response to broad feedback from the University community, including shared governance leaders, and from Regents during review of the resolution at the February 2025 meeting, the following changes have been made to the resolution:

- An additional “whereas” statement to acknowledge the work of the University Senate on this topic and its formal endorsement of the draft policy included in the task force’s report.
- Added content with an additional “whereas” statement from the task force’s report that highlights the potential risks of issuing statements on matters of public concern or public interest.
- In alignment with the task force’s report, noted in a new “whereas” statement that when matters of public concern or public interest are addressed through official University channels, a disclaimer alone is often ineffective in making clear that the statement is not on behalf of the University.
- Added “or using the official University marks” to the first bullet in the “resolved” section.
- Added “including academic and non-academic units” to the second bullet in the “resolved” section.
- Added “unless determined by the President to have an actual or potential impact on the mission and operations of the University” to the third bullet in the “resolved” section.
- Added “on matters of public concern or public interest” to the fourth bullet in the “resolved” section.
- Added a new fifth bullet to the “resolved” section stating that the “University will continue to affirm and defend the rights of individuals to research, publish, teach, speak or write on

matters of public concern or public interest, and to otherwise disseminate their research, scholarship, and creative expression.”

No other changes have been made to the resolution. The resolution continues to reaffirm the Board’s commitment to the free expression of individuals within the University community, including faculty exercising academic freedom or other individuals expressing their views on matters of public concern or public interest, as outlined by Board of Regents Policy: *Academic Freedom and Responsibility* and guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In May 2024, then-Interim President Jeffrey Ettinger and Provost Rachel Croson established a faculty-led task force on institutional speech. It was charged with developing and recommending appropriate policies related to institutional statements on matters of public concern. This was prompted by the fact that some academic departments of the University were posting statements to official websites regarding matters of public interest or public concern following the events of October 7, 2023. In January 2025, [the President’s Task Force on Institutional Speech issued its final report and recommendations](#), which had been previously reviewed by the University Senate at its December 5, 2024 meeting.



## REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

### RESOLUTION RELATED TO

#### Response to President's Task Force on Institutional Speech Report

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Regents (Board) expresses its gratitude to the work of the President's Task Force on Institutional Speech (task force), including the task force's broad systemwide consultation; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board acknowledges the work of the University Senate on this topic, including its endorsement of the draft policy included in the task force's report at its December 5, 2024 meeting; and

**WHEREAS**, as stated previously by the Board and codified in Board of Regents Policy: *Academic Freedom and Responsibility*, the Board reaffirms its commitment to the principles of academic freedom and responsibility, which are essential to achieving the mission of the University; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board has defined academic freedom as "...the freedom, without institutional discipline or restraint, to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression, and to speak or write on matters of public concern as well as on matters related to professional duties and the functioning of the University"; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board has also stated that "[a]cademic responsibility implies the faithful performance of professional duties and obligations, the recognition of the demands of the scholarly enterprise, and the candor to make it clear that when one is speaking on matters of public interest, one is not speaking for the institution."; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board, through Board of Regents Policy: *Code of Conduct*, has created the expectation that members of the University community shall "promote academic freedom, including the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression, and to speak or write as a public citizen without institutional restraint or discipline; and meet academic responsibilities, which means to seek and state the truth; to develop and maintain scholarly competence; to foster and defend intellectual honesty and freedom of inquiry and instruction; to respect those with differing views; to submit knowledge and claims to peer review; to work together to foster education of students; and to acknowledge when an individual is not speaking for the institution"; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board appreciates the distinction made by the task force between statements made by individuals, statements made by the University of Minnesota (University) in relation to its core mission and operations, and statements made by the University or one of the University's units on matters of public concern or public interest, balancing academic freedom with the significant risks attendant to statements on matters of public concern or public interest; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board shares the task force's recognition "that statements on matters of public concern carry risks that could undermine the University's mission and its dedication to an inclusive climate and community. These risks include inhibiting open dialogue and debate; impeding the independent formation of opinions following critical evaluation of evidence; chilling free expression by those who hold minority or dissenting viewpoints; violating the principle of academic freedom; and alienating valued partners and stakeholders in the broader University community"; and

**WHEREAS**, when statements on matters of public concern or public interest are issued through official University channels, disclaimers alone are often ineffective in making clear that when one is speaking on matters of public interest, one is not speaking for the University; and

**WHEREAS**, the task force report and the discussion and debate within the University community and in the public realm all serve to underscore that current Board of Regents policy and related administrative policies do not clearly address the contours of institutional speech, and that it is therefore incumbent upon the Board to address the issue and establish guiding principles.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board adopts and directs the president to implement the following guiding principles related to institutional speech:

- Institutional statements are communications issued by and in the name of the University of Minnesota or its academic and non-academic units, including but not limited to campuses, colleges, schools, departments, centers, and institutes, and that are disseminated through official University channels, including the University's institutional and unit websites, social media accounts, and letterhead, or using the official University marks.
- The president is the primary spokesperson for the University and shall only make or authorize others, including academic and non-academic units, to make institutional statements on matters that have an actual or potential impact on the mission and operations of the University.
- Institutional statements addressing matters of public concern or public interest are not permitted at the University unless determined by the President to have an actual or potential impact on the mission and operations of the University.
- As codified in Board of Regents policy, individuals speaking on matters of public concern or public interest shall make clear that they are not speaking for the University.
- Nothing in these guiding principles is intended to curtail the free expression of individuals within the University community, including faculty exercising academic freedom or other individuals expressing their views on matters of public concern or public interest, as outlined by Board of Regents policy and guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.
- The University will continue to affirm and defend the rights of individuals to research, publish, teach, speak or write on matters of public concern or public interest, and to otherwise disseminate their research, scholarship, and creative expression.