

STATEMENT TO OUR MEMBERS

RESPONSE TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH DIRECTIVE

Review of Context

During the 2018 Provincial Election in which the PC Party of Ontario was elected to a majority government, the party pledged to mandate the universities uphold free speech on campuses and in classrooms. On August 30th, the Ontario government announced that post-secondary institutions in Ontario will be required to develop free speech policies by January 1, 2019. The policies must meet a minimum standard that will be set by the government and will be required to protect free speech on campus, while still ensuring that discrimination, hate speech, and other illegal forms of expression are prohibited from occurring on post-secondary campuses. Following the implementation of these policies, post-secondary institutions will be required to annually report their progress to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Statement of OUSA Values

After the government announcement, OUSA released a preliminary statement including the following:

“OUSA believes that as these policies develop on campus, students should be actively engaged as a primary stakeholder during their creation and implementation. OUSA looks forward to working with Minister Fullerton and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as reporting practices and minimum standards are created. All students are entitled to safety, inclusion, and respect on their campuses, and OUSA believes that the provincial government plays a significant role in setting standards to protect members of post-secondary communities from all forms of discrimination.”

Though OUSA has not historically had any standing policy on the topic of freedom of speech, the organization does have the following values entrenched in policy that has been approved by students.

- All students, regardless of sex, sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression are entitled to safety, inclusion, recognition and respect both inside the classroom and in the broader campus environment; and
- The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should mandate that all faculty, administration, and university-employed staff (e.g. Residence life staff



and security services) complete cultural sensitivity training; advised by local communities and their elders.

Additionally, as with all policies created on campus, OUSA believes that students should be actively consulted with a meaningful voice at the table. Given that the government's announcement specifically cites funding cuts as a potential consequence of not upholding the mandate of free speech, OUSA would like to raise the student concern that university funding should be *increased*:

“OUSA has actively advocated for funding reforms to Ontario’s universities. Since 2010, student fees have accounted for over 50% of universities’ operating budgets, and student contributions have continued to outpace government contributions annually. It is essential that moving forward, the government ensures that any funding tied to this policy does not negatively impact the high quality educational experience students expect of their post-secondary institutions.”

Proposed Scope of Involvement

OUSA only advocates to the government when the organization has a policy stance that has been approved by a General Assembly of our member campuses. General Assembly is the highest governing body of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and represents the interests of students from member schools. They address public policy positions on matters related to academic and funding policy. When policy stances are approved by the General Assembly, it ensures that the stances are representative of the majority of the student body and provides oversight of Steering Committee’s advocacy work. OUSA works to ensure that all stances are carefully considered and well-researched in order to continue to demonstrate the organization as a thought leader in post-secondary education issues. Given that freedom of speech has now become an issue that the provincial government is involved in, and we do not have a current stance, **OUSA’s Steering Committee is committing to consulting with students to determine if OUSA should take a policy stance on freedom of speech, what that stance would be, and if OUSA will actively advocate on this topic.**

OUSA’s Steering Committee also believes that any involvement by this organization into the conversation about freedom of speech on campus should not infringe upon member autonomy, and the relationship they hold with their institution as this policy become developed on each of our campuses. Steering Committee believes OUSA must balance provincial recommendations and policy, with the value of decentralized institutional advocacy so that campuses can determine the path that is best for them.



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

Timeline of Future Consultations

To summarize OUSA's commitment to continuing the conversation on the government's mandate of free speech, this topic will be raised at the Fall General Assembly taking place November 2nd-4th at McMaster University. The scope of that discussion will be outlined by the OUSA Steering Committee over the coming weeks. The opportunity to advocate to Members of Provincial Parliament directly on this issue will take place during OUSA's Student Advocacy Week, being held November 12th-15th.

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