

1.03.02.70 Institutional Neutrality



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Policy/Guideline Area

Governance, Organization, and General Policies

Applicable Division

TCATs, Community Colleges, System Office, Board of Regents

Purpose

To set forth the role of TBR colleges, the System Office, and the Board of Regents with respect to political and social issues.

Policy/Guideline

- I. The proper role of TBR colleges, the System Office, and the Board of Regents, with respect to political and social issues is as follows.
 - A. A college has a great and unique role to play in fostering the development of social and political values in a society. The role is defined by the distinctive mission of the college and defined by the distinctive characteristics of the college as a community. It is a role for the long term.
 - B. The mission of the college is the discovery, improvement, and dissemination of knowledge. Its domain of inquiry and scrutiny includes all aspects and all values of a society. A college faithful to its mission will provide enduring challenges to social values, policies, practices, and institutions. By design and by effect, it is the institution which creates discontent with the existing social arrangements and proposes new ones. In brief, a good college, like Socrates, will be upsetting.

- C. The instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The college is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic. It is, to go back once again to the classic phrase, a community of scholars. To perform its mission in the society, a college must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures. A college, if it is to be true to its faith in intellectual inquiry, must embrace, be hospitable to, and encourage the widest diversity of views within its own community. It is a community but only for the limited, albeit great, purposes of teaching and research. It is not a club, it is not a trade association, it is not a lobby.
- D. Since the college is a community only for these limited and distinctive purposes, it is a community which cannot take collective action on the issues of the day without endangering the conditions of its existence and effectiveness. There is no mechanism by which it can reach a collective position without inhibiting that full freedom of dissent on which it thrives. It cannot insist that all of its members favor a given view of social policy; if it takes collective action, therefore, it does so at the price of censuring any minority who do not agree with the view adopted. In brief, it is a community which cannot resort to majority vote to reach positions on public issues.
- E. The neutrality of the college as an institution arises then not from a lack of courage nor out of indifference and insensitivity. It arises out of respect for free inquiry and the obligation to cherish a diversity of viewpoints. And this neutrality as an institution has its complement in the fullest freedom for its faculty and students as individuals to participate in political action and social protest. It finds its complement, too, in the obligation of the college to provide a forum for the most searching and candid discussion of public issues.
- F. Moreover, the sources of power of a great college should not be misconceived. Its prestige and influence are based on integrity and intellectual competence; they are not based on the circumstance that it may be wealthy, may have political contacts, and may have influential friends.

- G. From time to time instances will arise in which the society, or segments of it, threaten the very mission of the college and its values of free inquiry. In such a crisis, it becomes the obligation of the college as an institution to oppose such measures and actively to defend its interests and its values. There is another context in which questions as to the appropriate role of the college may possibly arise, situations involving college ownership of property, its receipt of funds, its awarding of honors, its membership in other organizations. Here, of necessity, the college, however it acts, must act as an institution in its corporate capacity. In the exceptional instance, these corporate activities of the college may appear so incompatible with paramount social values as to require careful assessment of the consequences.
- H. These extraordinary instances apart, there emerges a heavy presumption against the college taking collective action or expressing opinions on the political and social issues of the day, or modifying its corporate activities to foster social or political values, however compelling and appealing they may be.
- I. These are admittedly matters of large principle, and the application of principle to an individual case will not be easy.
- J. It must always be appropriate, therefore, for faculty or students or administration to question, through existing channels, whether in light of these principles the college in particular circumstances is playing its proper role.
- II. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to conflict with the rights of Board members, students, faculty, and staff guaranteed by the First Amendment, Tennessee law, or TBR policies regarding such rights, including, but not limited to [1.03.02.60 Freedom of Speech and Expression](#).
- III. A college website must either link to this policy or restate this policy in a college policy.

Exhibits

For Exhibits, click the Attachments button at the top right of the page.



Sources

Authority

T.C.A. §§ 49-8-203; Public Chapters 761 and 831 (2026); The University of Chicago's 1967 Report on the University's Role in Political and Social Action (the Kalven Report).

History

New policy approved June 11 and 12, 2026 (effective July 1, 2026).

Related Polices

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