

**Oberlin College - Student Bill of Rights**

*Updated 11/20/2024 by General Faculty*

*Approval*

**A. Philosophy**

It is understood that Oberlin students are adults. Therefore, Oberlin College does not act in loco parentis. The college provides students with the freedom and encouragement to make decisions and requires them to assume responsibility for and accept the consequences of their behavior. With self-governance comes an obligation to participate in a system of regulations conducive to teaching and learning, which protects the rights, safety, and property of others, and which ensures the orderly functioning of the college. It is our aim to construct and implement these regulations in an educational, developmental, and community based framework.

**B. Preamble**

Oberlin College exists as an educational community in which free inquiry and free expression are indispensable. Any assertion of rights and freedoms implies a willingness to assume responsibilities. The college community, in moving to protect individual liberty, expects the following from each of its members: recognition of the primarily academic purposes of the institution, concern for the rights and freedoms of others, and commitment to the rule of reason in settling disputes. The purpose of the delineation of rights, freedoms, and responsibilities that follows is to foster learning and the free exchange of ideas within a cooperative academic community.

**C. Freedom of Expression and Scholarship**

*1. PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS* - Learning and scholarship are simultaneously individual and collective activities. We as a community encourage and protect free inquiry and the open exchange of facts, ideas, and opinions. Students are free to take exception to views offered in courses of study and to reserve judgment about debatable issues.

*2. RESPECT FOR THE COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS* - The collaborative nature of scholarship demands that individuals recognize and acknowledge the authorship and priority of ideas and information used in their own work. In addition, individuals should be tolerant of differences in opinion, respect the convictions of others, and protect the rights of all to pursue diverse lines of inquiry. Finally, students should respect the rights of others as they navigate their scholarly journey.

*3. ACADEMIC EVALUATION*- Students are responsible for understanding the policies and grading procedures of classes in which they are enrolled. Students who believe that they have been subject to unfair or discriminatory academic evaluation by faculty members are encouraged to discuss the matter fully with their instructors. Faculty should be prepared to explain the rationale for their grading. When a resolution is not possible through such informal discussion,

students may take the matter to the chair of the relevant department or, if they are not satisfied, to the appropriate dean of the college or conservatory.

#### **D. Expression and Inquiry in Campus Activities**

1. *EXPRESSION BY INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS* - Students and student organizations are free to examine and discuss questions of interest to them and to express their opinions both publicly and privately. Members of the college are expected to take responsibility for their expressions; anonymous expressions are inimical to the free and open exchange of ideas.

2. *GUEST SPEAKER POLICY*- Students and student organizations are welcome to bring guest speakers, in compliance with campus policies, including but not limited to those overseen by Student Affairs, and the Office of Institutional Equity, such as the “Nondiscrimination and Antiharassment Policy”, and “Guidelines for Protest, Demonstrations, and Meetings Involving Speakers, Films, and Other Forms of Artistic Expression Policy”. Sponsors of speakers should clearly state in their publicity the name of the sponsoring organization. Sponsorship of a guest speaker does not necessarily imply endorsement by the sponsoring group or the college.

3. *STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS*- Students may participate in any demonstrations that does not violate campus policy, for example by endangering the safety of individuals or destroy property. In any public demonstration, students are understood to speak only for themselves or for the student organizations they represent.

##### *4. STUDENT MEDIA*

a. The student media—such as student-produced radio, newspapers, literary or opinion magazines or journals, video, and film—shall remain free of censorship and prior view of copy. Editor(s) and manager(s) are free to develop editorial policies for each specific publication.

b. Editors and managers of student media are protected from arbitrary suspension and removal from office because of student, faculty, administrative, or public disapproval of editorial policy or content.

c. All student media must explicitly state that the opinions therein expressed are not necessarily those of the college community.

d. The freedom accorded student editors and managers recognizes adherence to the canons of responsible journalism and reporting, e.g., the avoidance of libel, undocumented allegations, attacks on personal integrity, harassment, and slanderous innuendo. Student media and editors must follow campus policy and local, state, and federal laws.

#### **E. Confidentiality of Records**

The college guarantees the confidentiality of student records consistent with the regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). For more information, please reference the [policies](#) set forth by the Registrar.

#### **F. Associations and Organizations**

1. The college guarantees students the freedom to organize and join associations within certain limitations relating to secret societies. Student organizations are chartered according to the established procedures of the Office of Student Leadership and Involvement and the Division of Student Affairs.

2. Student organizations are chartered according to the established procedures of the Student Senate and the General Faculty.

3. Although organizations may set membership criteria, these should have a basis in the functioning of the organization and should not be discriminatory, as specified in the college’s nondiscriminatory policy.

4. Organizations are required to submit officer lists to the Office of Student Leadership and

Involvement. Generally, the office also requests but does not require membership lists.

5. Affiliation with a non-college organization will not of itself disqualify a student organization from institutional recognition.

## **G. Access to Information**

*1. INFORMATION REGARDING COLLEGE REGULATIONS* - Students have the right to access college policies and regulations, which shall be published and readily available. Students have the obligation to familiarize themselves with these regulations.

## **H. Participation in Institutional Governance**

Students, as well as faculty, staff, and all other officers of the college, must play a major role in campus governance if the college is to thrive as a community of scholars. Participation in institutional governance includes the following:

1. The freedom to express views on institutional policy.
2. The right of students to be appropriately informed of decisions that may affect student life and the right to offer opinions of such decisions.
3. The right of students to propose a defined and formal means by which they may participate in the formulation, application, and review of institutional policy.
4. The ability to access descriptions of existing decision-making bodies within the formal structure of campus governance.

## **I. Civil Rights and Fair Process**

No part of these regulations are intended to abrogate the civil rights of students, either as members of the College or as members of the greater college community.

### *1. CIVIL RIGHTS*

- a. Oberlin students are members of both the college and the greater public communities. The college supports students in the exercise of their civil rights and the free exchange of ideas.
- b. Students have the right to be free from harassment (as defined under the Student Conduct Policy) and harm for reasons of their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, ethnic identification, age, political affiliation, ideology, or physical or mental disability. (as defined under the Office of Institutional Equity).
- c. Students have the right to enjoy a reasonable degree of privacy, within the constraints imposed by living together in close quarters.

*2. FAIR PROCESS* - Students at Oberlin College will be treated equally and fairly under the terms of the student conduct system. Basic rights include:

- a. A written statement of charges.
- b. A meeting with a student conduct hearing officer to clarify one's rights and to understand the disciplinary process.
- c. A formal hearing.
- d. The right to a formal review of the outcome.

*3. FREEDOM FROM UNWARRANTED SEARCH* - Oberlin respects students' right to privacy. The college and its officials abide by set procedures pursuant to entering or searching college property leased by or assigned to students with the understanding that this procedure in no way limits bona fide law enforcement for warranted searches. (See Residence Life Policy)

### *4. RESPONSIBILITY AND THE LAW*

- a. Oberlin students shall accept full responsibility for their own actions under federal, state, and local laws. While reserving the right to criticize government policy and even, in the name of conscience, to resist government decree, they shall recognize the rule of law and expect no special immunity on account of their student status. Within the college community, students must acknowledge the duly constituted role of trustees, and the

organized entities of the administration, faculty and students in the political processes of the college. Students shall abide by college regulations and the decisions of the college's disciplinary bodies.

b. When students incur penalties prescribed by civil authorities, they may also be subject to further discipline by the college disciplinary systems if there is distinct and clear college community interests involved. The Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards in the Dean of Students Office will rule as to its jurisdiction in the case.

c. When students of the college are charged with a violation of federal, state, or local law, the college has no obligation to assist them

