

Harvard Graduate School of Design's Statement of Mutual Respect and Public Discourse

The Graduate School of Design educates leaders in design, research, and scholarship to make a resilient, just, and beautiful world. Our students, faculty, and staff come to the GSD from every corner of the globe; our graduates can be found in every country. Here at the GSD, we work in shared quarters—Gund Hall and the “houses”—and we do so collaboratively, within and across our many programs. The GSD's diverse population, shared spaces, and collaborative approach to learning can only succeed if we all foster a milieu of mutual respect.

The commitment to listen and learn from diverse perspectives is integral to our educational mission and is codified in [Harvard's University-Wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities \(USRR\)](#). The USRR emphasizes the importance of maintaining an academic environment that promotes the free exchange of ideas while safeguarding each individual's right to express their opinions within the confines of reasoned dissent. More specifically, the USRR recognizes the rights of all University members to engage in respectful demonstrations and to advocate and publicize their views through written and oral means, even if their speech may sometimes be considered distasteful or offensive by others.

But such rights are not unlimited. These rights do not protect harassment, discrimination, or bullying. Violation of GSD and [University policies](#) prohibiting such conduct will lead to disciplinary action by the GSD. Our commitment to freedom of expression holds that the GSD will not prevent or punish speech that some community members may find offensive or harmful, but such protected expression does not include harassment, true threats, obscenity, or any incitement to violence.

We also recognize that while the spirit of this statement is to sustain an atmosphere of mutual respect and public discourse, the actual work of cultivating it is a community-wide effort and depends on our individual empathy, judgment, discretion, good faith, and trust in each other. Important ideas, reflections, and conversations can be painful for some to hear, even if they are valuable and necessary to express, and we urge members of the community to bear this in mind when engaging their colleagues at the School. Everyone at the GSD has a role to play in establishing a baseline of mutual respect and constructive dialogue for our community.

Aimed at fostering an environment of open and civil discussion, the following guidelines frame the GSD's expectations for members of its community during events, meetings, and other gatherings apart from class sessions, including without limitation peaceful protests or demonstrations, when speakers present their views—both at the GSD and elsewhere at Harvard University (collectively, “*Events*”). In class sessions, the expectations for conduct set forth in the GSD student handbook apply; any form of protest that disrupts a Harvard class would violate the USRR's prohibition against interference with the performance of the “normal duties and activities” of the University.

DISSENT

The right to dissent is the complement to the right to speak, but these rights need not occupy the same forum at the same time. Speakers at *Events* are entitled to communicate their message to an audience during the allotted time, and all members of the audience are entitled to hear the message and see the speaker during that time; therefore, dissenters must not interfere with a speaker's ability to communicate or an audience's ability to see and hear the speaker.

Dissenters are entitled to express their objections in other ways. When an *Event* is closed,¹ dissent by non-attendees is limited to activity outside the *Event* that does not impede access to the event or substantially interfere with communication inside. When an *Event* is open, appropriate means of dissent depend on location and timing. The policies below offer more specific guidance.

PROTESTING AND DISTRIBUTING LITERATURE

The Gund Backyard is the designated area for protest activities at the GSD. Protesting or distributing literature is permitted in this area, provided it respects and does not interfere with the normal teaching, work, and function of the GSD, CGIS, or our Cambridge resident neighbors.

For GSD events, protesting or distributing literature is allowed as long as it does not block access to or exit from the event or interfere with the event. Distributing literature inside an open event is permitted before the event begins and after it has ended, but not during the speaking, listening, discussion, and mingling portions.

SILENT OR SYMBOLIC PROTEST

Displaying a sign, wearing symbolic clothing, gesturing, standing, or otherwise protesting noiselessly inside an *Event* is acceptable, unless such forms of protest interfere with an audience member's view or prevent a speaker from effectively conveying their message. Therefore, persons displaying signs, standing for a prolonged period, or otherwise engaging in protest activities must take care not to obstruct the view of a speaker from the audience, including by confining these activities to the back of the *Event* venue.

NOISE

Responding vocally to a speaker, spontaneously and temporarily, is generally acceptable. However, chanting or making other sustained or repeated noise or interruptions in a manner that substantially interferes with the speaker's communication is not permitted, whether inside or outside an *Event*.

FORCE OR VIOLENCE

Threatening or using force or violence—such as damaging or defacing a sign, assaulting or intimidating a speaker or any other person at an *Event*—is never permitted.

¹ "Closed" Events include those requiring an invitation or registration to attend, as well as Events not advertised on a public calendar. For closed Events, the unauthorized sharing, swapping, stealing, or other misuse of registration information, Zoom details, name tags, and the like is a violation of this policy.

RESPONSIBILITY OF AN AUDIENCE AND HOST

An audience and a host (including a host organization) must respect peoples' right to dissent. For example, audience members and hosts should not attempt to remove signs that are not blocking the view of a speaker or shout down a questioner before a question has been finished. Anyone who substantially interferes with acceptable dissent is violating these guidelines as much as a dissenter who violates the rights of a speaker or an audience member.

APPROVAL REQUIRED

All GSD events must go through an approval process and must follow Harvard and GSD events policies. This includes all events affiliated with GSD student organizations, including in-person and hybrid events, fully virtual events, and student organization events taking place away from the Harvard campus.

Student-led events at the GSD must be affiliated with and sponsored by a currently active registered and recognized GSD Student Organization. Both event proposals and budget requests for student organizations take place through [Engage](#), our student activities platform. As part of the approval process, event organizers will be required to identify the organizers; the nature of the *Event*; the date, time, and location (including whether the *Event* will be at a single location or take place in multiple locations); and the expected attendance size. Additional details on the event planning process for students can be found at the [GSD Student Resource center](#).

Approval of an event will never be denied based on content, subject matter, or viewpoint.

ADVANCE DISCUSSION FOR REGISTERED EVENTS OR DEMONSTRATIONS

Once an *Event* is approved, GSD Student Life will contact the organizers to discuss its specific parameters. This will include identifying the onsite persons who will be in charge at the *Event* on behalf of the organizers, the methods for advertising the *Event*, the need for security to protect the safety of participants and passersby, the need for modifications to the planned *Event* (depending for example on time of day, time of the academic year, and anticipated noise level), and the need for other support and resources.

VIOLATIONS OF POLICIES ON PROTEST AND DISSENT

Violations of this policy, the USRR, the Campus Use Policy and/or any other applicable School or University policy will be subject to review and may result in disciplinary action or other sanctions.