

A User Guide to U of T Policies on Protest and Use of Campus Spaces (Updated: October 2024)

The University has received a number of questions regarding this User Guide including in relation to its scope and application. This Guide was prepared as an educative resource primarily for students, though it may be helpful for members of our community to be reminded of existing policy. The Guide distills and consolidates the current law and policy framework that applies to protests on campus. It may be updated in the future to reflect changes to law and/or policy. The Guide does not establish new policy. Any corrective action will be taken in accordance with the underlying policies and/or law. Read more about the relevant policies at U of T's [free speech website](#) and the Governing Council [policies page](#). A copy of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice's [court order](#) of July 2, 2024 is also available for review.

U of T supports peaceful protests: Peaceful protests are a form of free expression and have been a force for progressive change at the University of Toronto (U of T) and elsewhere for generations. U of T is guided by a commitment to the right of its community members to express and discuss ideas freely, including the right to criticize the University.

But there are limits: Various laws and long-standing U of T policies and guidelines place limitations on protest and other forms of expression (such as posterage, signage, letter-writing, etc.). Drawing on the Ontario Superior Court of Justice [court order](#) of July 2, 2024, as well as U of T [policies](#), including the [Code of Student Conduct](#), the following guidance will assist community members who wish to participate in protests or other similar events and activities on property (including offices, classrooms, labs, clinics, etc.) that is owned, leased, or occupied by U of T and its affiliates to do so peacefully and without consequence.

Place & Time of Protest – U of T will allow peaceful protests with certain limitations on the place and time where and when they occur:

- **Unauthorized Presence:** Occupying or entering U of T premises without authorization is not permitted. For more information on booking space at U of T, please see the [OVPS site](#).
- **Time of Protests:** No protests or gatherings are permitted from 11pm to 7am. Occupying space or premises overnight for the purposes of a protest is prohibited.
- **Structures:** Constructing tents, encampments, fences, barriers, or other structures is not permitted.

Manner of Protest – U of T allows peaceful protest that does not interrupt University activities – including classes, meetings, or other University business.

More specifically, the following are not permitted:

- **Violence:** U of T will not tolerate any form of violence on its property, including any that might occur during a protest activity.
- **Excessive Noise:** Activities resulting in noise that prevents the speech of invited guests, University members, and others; that obstructs U of T activities from continuing; or that negatively impacts those living in U of T residences are not permitted. This might result from the use of amplifiers, megaphones, microphones, etc. so care should be taken when using such technology.
- **Blocking Access:** Blocking doorways to buildings or roadways into campus, or otherwise interfering with access to U of T is not allowed.
- **Intimidation or Harassment:** Physical and verbal intimidation or harassment; or impeding others' basic rights, including free expression, freedom to assemble, and human rights are prohibited. This includes targeting individuals at their cars, offices, homes, at meetings of University governance, or elsewhere.
- **Certain Posters and Signs:** Affixing signs, posters, or flyers (including the use of chalk, marker, paint, and projections) outside designated areas is prohibited as a form of vandalism.
- **Health and Safety Risks:** Actions that threaten the physical health and safety of others, or that present a threat to security are prohibited.
- **Discrimination:** Using language in chants or recordings, on signs, or otherwise that demeans others based on their age, ancestry or race, ethnicity, place of origin, creed or faith, disability, gender identity or expression, sex, sexual orientation, or other categories in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) is not permitted.
- **Exclusivity:** Restricting entry to event space based on political viewpoint or other criteria is not permitted. (Only events that are booked and advertised or promoted as private gatherings can be restricted to invitees only.)

There are consequences for violating University policies, including the guidance on peaceful protests above: Engaging in these prohibited activities can result in consequences under law and U of T policies, including arrest, suspension, trespass from property, and expulsion. Campus Safety holds responsibility to manage protests in order to ensure that they occur peacefully and within the limits noted above. Any resistance (physical or verbal) may result in Campus Safety action or requesting the assistance of municipal police.

Student Case Studies for Application

The following case studies are presented as examples of student activities which may violate policy. Scenario 1 as described, doesn't violate policy, whereas Scenario 2 does.

Blocking Access

Situation: Dave and a group of fellow students are organizing a protest to raise awareness about climate change. They decide to hold the protest in front of the main entrance of an administrative building at UTM.

Scenario 1: Dave, the other organizers, and a group of students arrive in front of the administrative building at noon. Over the next hour, the organizers give speeches and lead the group in chants referencing the University's President, investments, and use of tuition fees. During this time, staff, students, and visitors with business there can enter and leave the building. The noise, while bothersome, does not impact the lecture scheduled in the academic building next door.

Scenario 2: During the protest, Dave, the other organizers, and most of the students participating are giving speeches and chanting in front of the administrative building. A small group of students break off and decide to station themselves in front of the doors to the academic building next door. This prevents students from exiting their lecture without aggressive confrontation.

Issue: As per the [*Policy on the Disruption of Meetings*](#), the [*Code of Student Conduct*](#), and the [*Policy on the Temporary Use of Space at the University of Toronto*](#), occupants and visitors of university spaces should be able to freely enter and exit during protests.

Excessive Noise

Situation: Priya and a group of students are organizing a protest march at UTSC about the lack of abortion services in the local area. They plan to walk around campus using megaphones to chant slogans and ensure that their message can be heard. They do not contact UTSC Conference and Events Services because they will be outdoors.

Scenario 1: Priya and the group did not coordinate with UTSC Conference and Events Services. As a result, their route takes them past several academic buildings where midterm exams are in session. Priya decides to use the megaphone on a lower volume while organizing everyone and limits the groups chanting and calls to action only when they are in open areas. The disruption to nearby midterms is minimal.

Scenario 2: Priya decides to use the megaphone at its highest volume to organize everyone in front of the building. They did not coordinate with UTSC Conference and Events Services to book outdoor space. Had they reviewed the route, UTSC Conference and Events Services would have been able to suggest an alternate route, away from buildings where midterms are scheduled. The noise from the megaphones disrupts these midterm exams, causing distress for students and instructors. Exams have to be rescheduled for many students.

Issue: As per the [Health and Safety Policy](#), the [Code of Student Conduct](#), and the [Statement of Institutional Purpose](#), the students and instructors in academic spaces should be able to freely engage in learning, research, and assessments without disruption from excessive noise.

Use of Chalk

Situation: Anna and a group of fellow students decide to use chalk messages around campus to promote a campaign for lowering tuition fees.

Scenario 1: Anna and the group use sidewalk chalk to write messages and draw images in various locations on the sidewalks on campus to attract the attention of students, staff, faculty, and community members. The chalk is colourful and easily washable and designed to create eye-catching messages that are large and easy to read.

Scenario 2: Anna and the group use spray-chalk to write messages and draw images on the front walls of University buildings to appear in tourists' photos and, hopefully, then in local news media. Caretaking staff spend hours trying to remove the spray-chalk and must engage heritage specialists for some of the stone.

Issues: Spray-chalk is difficult to remove from any surface and may permanently damage delicate surfaces, such as the walls of heritage buildings, and may cause the University to incur costs for removal. As per [Code of Student Conduct](#), damage by students to University property may be considered vandalism. Potential charges under criminal law could apply (related to mischief, for example).

Postering on Campus

Situation: Yung decides to create posters to raise awareness about global conflict. The posters contain controversial messages and imagery designed to provoke strong reactions and draw attention to the issue.

Scenario 1: Yung and a few friends start putting these posters up in various locations around the St. George campus, including bulletin boards designated for community use.

Some community members who see the posters share concerns that the imagery invokes racist tropes.

Scenario 2: Yung decides that the best way for people to see the posters is to put them up at eye-level on the doors of several academic buildings on the St. George campus. Many of the posters are covering way-finding signage and the adhesive used is difficult to remove from some surfaces.

Issue: As per the [Procedure on distribution of publications, posters, and banners](#), posters in unauthorized locations or that cause property damage may end up being removed. Individuals or organizations that persistently post flyers improperly in non-designated spaces may be charged for labour and/or material costs related to removal.

Intimidation and Harassment

Situation: William organizes a student protest of an event hosted by an academic department featuring an external speaker on law and policy related to gender identity.

Scenario 1: William leads the students in shouting for a few minutes after the speaker is introduced. After the first warning by the moderator, William and the other students stand in the back of the room silently with posters, allowing the event to continue.

Scenario 2: William and a few of the protestors persist in shouting down the speaker despite warnings from the moderator, preventing the event from continuing. They then pursue the speaker and moderator to the University parking garage and off University property, shouting obscenities at them.

Issue: As per U of T's [Statement on Freedom of Speech](#), members of the University cannot use speech as a direct attack that has the effect of preventing the lawful exercise of speech by members or invited guests. According to the [Policy on the Disruption of Meetings](#), every member of the University is obligated to uphold freedom of speech and the freedom of individuals and groups from physical intimidation and harassment. It is an offence under the [Code of Student Conduct](#) to engage in behaviour that may cause another person to fear for their safety.