



Free Expression and Assembly

1. Policy Statement

A. Purpose and Overview of Policy

As stated in the *Blazer Creed*, Valdosta State University (VSU) is a learning environment based on trust and mutual respect in which open dialogue, vigorous debate, and the free exchange of ideas are welcome. The University is equally dedicated to the core values of community, including a commitment to practice civility, integrity, and citizenship. VSU is committed to protecting the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition, religion, and peaceful assembly as guaranteed by the First Amendment in the U. S. Constitution and set forth in Board of Regents' [Policy 6.5](#).

While VSU may enact policies to ensure campus safety, to protect and preserve university property, and to promote the proper functioning of the academic environment, these policies will not unduly burden the free expression rights of students, faculty and staff ("members of the University Community"). This policy in no way prohibits members of the University Community from engaging in expression in open outdoor areas of campus between the hours of 8:30am and 10:00pm, Monday through Sunday, and does not apply to University-sponsored activity or classroom instruction or participation, but rather establishes a designated Public Forum Venue at VSU and sets forth requirements for forum reservations in the following limited circumstances: (1) members of the University Community who plan an event or expression with 30 or more persons; and, (2) individuals or groups who are not members of the University Community but wish to express themselves on VSU's campus. Any content-neutral time, place, and manner parameters on expression implemented by VSU will be enforced in accordance with applicable law. By placing reasonable limitations on the time, place, and manner of expression, VSU does not take a position on the content or viewpoint of the expression, but rather allows for a diversity of viewpoints to be expressed in an academic setting.

All free expression and assembly on the VSU campus shall be conducted in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. No activity will be permitted that:
 - a) blocks access to university buildings, streets, sidewalks, or parking facilities;
 - b) defaces or damages University property;
 - c) endangers the safety of persons or property;
 - d) unreasonably interferes with regular or authorized University activities or functions;
 - e) disrupts the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic;
 - f) incites others to engage in violence or commit illegal acts;
 - g) violates federal, state, or local law, or Board of Regents', USG, or VSU policy or regulations.
2. Private business or commercial solicitations, campus sales, or campus fund-raising activities that are not sponsored by or authorized by the University are not permitted. A facility reservation request should be made for this type of activity.
3. The sponsoring individual, organization or department must assume the costs of any security, clean-up or other special services needed for the expressive activity necessitated by the representative's speaker or group, not including costs associated with the activities of others not associated with the sponsor.



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5. Sound amplification, including but not limited to microphones or bullhorns, is not permitted.
6. Any party distributing written materials is responsible for cleaning up any discarded paper and restoring the area to its previous condition, but is not responsible for clean-up associated with the activities of others who are not associated with the party.
7. Use of campus land or property is on a temporary basis for the time reserved.

B. Designation of Public Forum Venues

To better facilitate the free exchange of ideas, VSU has designated the following highly visible area as the public forum on the VSU campus: Palms Quadrangle and Stage, (the “Public Forum Venue”). The Public Forum Venue is generally available for expressive activities from 8:30am until 5:00pm Monday through Thursday and 8:30am until 2:30 pm on Friday provided that the area has not been previously reserved. This policy does not apply to the reservation of indoor facilities, which is governed by procedures set forth at:

[Facilities Rental and Use](#)

C. Guidelines for Use of Public Forum Venues

I. Provisions for University Community

- **Planned Large Group Expression:** Members of the University Community who plan to engage in expressive activity on campus in a group that is expected to consist of 30 or more persons, not including those who may gather to protest the expressive activity, must reserve the Public Forum Venue.
- **Spontaneous Large Group Expression:** If an individual or small group within the University Community spontaneously attracts a group of 30 or more people (not including those who may gather to protest the expression) while engaging in expressive activity on VSU’s campus, a representative from the group should provide as much notice as reasonably possible to the Dean of Students or designee. VSU reserves the right to redirect University Community groups of 30 or more to the Public Forum Venue or another location on campus in order to ensure the safety of the campus, provide crowd control, and prevent interruption of University classes and activities. When relocating expression, the VSU official must not consider the content or viewpoint of the expression.

II. Provisions for Non-Campus Members

Individuals or groups of people who are not enrolled at or employed by VSU may only engage in the expressive activity on VSU’s campus in the Public Forum Venue and only after submitting a completed Reservation Request Form to VSU’s Dean of Students or designee at least four university business days prior to the scheduled activity and obtaining approval for such use in writing. Organizers are strongly encouraged to submit their requests as early in the planning stages of the event as possible.



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III. Distribution of Written Materials

Members of the VSU community, students, faculty, and staff, are free to distribute pamphlets, handbills, circulars, newspapers, magazines, and other written materials that are protected by the First Amendment, on a person-to-person basis in open outdoor areas of campus. An individual or group who is not a member of the University Community may only distribute written materials within the Public Forum Venue and only during the time in which the individual or group has been granted a reservation to use the Public Forum Venue. The University maintains a position of neutrality as to the content of any written material distributed on the campus under this policy.

Written materials may not be placed on cars or posted on any walls, windows, doors, sidewalks, trees, light poles, or on any other university property.

D. Reservation Request and Standard of Review

The Public Forum Venue will be reserved on a first-come first-served basis. However, if a member of the public or a non-university group has three (3) or more reservations confirmed within a calendar month, the individual or group may not submit an additional reservation request for that calendar month until four (4) University business days prior to the requested reservation date. If, at that time, the additional reservation request conflicts with that of another individual or group (i.e., seeks to reserve the same location at the same time) that does not already have three (3) or more reservations confirmed within that calendar month, the reservation request of the other individual or group shall have priority. A reservation cannot exceed one university business day. Each university business day requires its own separate reservation.

To reserve the Public Forum Venue, submit a completed Forum Reservation Request Form online at <https://www.valdosta.edu/administration/student-affairs/public-forum-venue.php> so that VSU may minimize scheduling conflicts, accommodate all interested users, and provide appropriate security for the speaker and the audience, if applicable. Reservations will only be processed on days that VSU's Administrative Offices are open for business ("university business days").

A four-university-business day notice is required for all reservations.

The Dean of Students (located in the Division of Student Affairs Suite 3109, on the 3rd Floor of the Student Union) or designee will respond to all reservation requests as soon as possible, but in no event more than two university business days after receipt of the reservation request, by either authorizing the reservation, authorizing and noting any special instructions, or setting forth the reason for denial of the reservation. The reservation request may only be denied for one or more of the following reasons:

1. The [Public Forum Reservation Request Form](#) is not fully completed;
2. The Public Forum Reservation Request Form contains a material falsehood or misrepresentation;
3. The Public Forum Venue has been previously reserved;



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4. The use or activity intended by the applicant would conflict with or disturb previously planned programs organized and conducted by the University;
5. The Public Forum Venue is not large enough to accommodate the expected or actual number of persons engaging in large group expression, in which case the University must provide a reservation for the applicant at an alternate location that can safely accommodate the expression provided that the applicant is a member of the University Community and that such a location exists on the University campus;
6. The use or activity intended by the applicant would present a danger to the health or safety of the applicant, other members of the University community, or the public; or
7. The use or activity intended by the applicant is prohibited by law, VSU policy, or Board of Regents' policy.

When assessing a reservation request, the Dean of Students or designee must not consider or impose restrictions on the expression based on the content or viewpoint of the expression. Any denial of a reservation request may be appealed to the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) in writing setting forth the reasons why the appeal should be granted. The VPSA or his or her designee must respond to the appeal in writing within two university business days. The decision of the VPSA or his or her designee is final.

F. Violations and Non-Compliance

Violations of this policy by a student are subject to the Student Code of Conduct. Violations by faculty or staff are subject to applicable Human Resources misconduct policies in the Employee Handbook. Violations of this policy by Non-Campus Members could result in the termination of the current reservation, as well as any future reservations.

G. Review

The Dean of Students or his or her designee is responsible for the review of this operating policy every two years or as needed.

2. Affected Stakeholders

Indicate all entities and persons within the university affected by this policy:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alumni | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Students | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Students |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student Employees |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visitors | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vendors/Contractors | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

3. Exclusions or Exceptions

While VSU may enact policies to ensure campus safety, to protect and preserve university property, and to promote the proper functioning of the academic environment, these policies will not unduly burden



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the free expression rights of students, faculty and staff (“members of the University Community”). This policy in no way prohibits members of the University Community from engaging in expression in open outdoor areas of campus between the hours of 8:30am and 10:00pm, Monday through Sunday, and does not apply to University-sponsored activity or classroom instruction or participation, but rather establishes a designated Public Forum Venue at VSU and sets forth requirements for forum reservations in the following limited circumstances: (1) members of the University Community who plan an event or expression with 30 or more persons; and, (2) individuals or groups who are not members of the University Community but wish to express themselves on VSU’s campus.

4. Definitions and Acronyms

5. Process and Procedures

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1. The Public Forum Reservation Request Form is not fully completed;
2. The Public Forum Reservation Request Form contains a material falsehood or misrepresentation;
3. The Public Forum Venue has been previously reserved;
4. The use or activity intended by the applicant would conflict with or disturb previously planned programs organized and conducted by the University;



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5. The Public Forum Venue is not large enough to accommodate the expected or actual number of persons engaging in large group expression, in which case the University must provide a reservation for the applicant at an alternate location that can safely accommodate the expression provided that the applicant is a member of the University Community and that such a location exists on the University campus;
6. The use or activity intended by the applicant would present a danger to the health or safety of the applicant, other members of the University community, or the public; or
7. The use or activity intended by the applicant is prohibited by law, VSU policy, or Board of Regents' policy.

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6. References, Associated Policy(ies), and Supporting Documents

Kennesaw State University Freedom of Expression Policy, October, 2018

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Freedom of Expression Policy. July 2017.

Georgia Southern University, Free Expression Policy. August 2016.

L. E. Bird, M. B. Mackin, & S. K. Schuster, 2006. *The First Amendment on Campus: A Handbook for College and University Administrators*. National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). USA: NASPA Publications.

Mississippi State University, Student Affairs OP 91.304: Free Speech and Assembly Policy. April 2009.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Policy on Free Speech, Public Assembly, Petitioning and Amplified Sound. May 2017.

University of Missouri, Joint Committee on Protests, Public Spaces, Free Speech and the Press. March 2016.

University System of Georgia, Board of Regents Policy 6.5 Freedom of Expression.

University of West Florida, UWF/REG-3.014, Public Expression, Assembly, and Distribution of Written Materials at the University of West Florida. December 2013.



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7. Policy Attributes

<i>Responsible Office(s)</i>	Student Affairs, Student Union, 3rd Floor, Suite 3106, 229-333-5941, studentaffairs@valdosta.edu
<i>Approving Officer or Body</i>	University Council
<i>Date Approved</i>	10/09/2019
<i>Next Review Date</i>	10/09/2021