

Announcements - Campus



**Free Speech, Respect, and Civil Discourse**

Reaffirming our shared values

Dear UMBC Community,

As the crisis in Israel and Gaza deepens, reports of antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the rise, including on college campuses in the U.S. These incidents are deeply troubling, and we know that they add to the anxiety and concern that our own community members are feeling.

College campuses have long been epicenters of activism, including protest against military action and government policy here and abroad. In recent years, campuses also have become targets in American culture wars, in part because of the very values we espouse as institutions of higher learning. Among those core values are the free exchange of ideas and information and a respect for diverse perspectives. These, along with [academic freedom](#), are key to our mission to advance knowledge and understanding.

We write to you today to reaffirm our commitment to these values and to provide practical guidance on what it means to live these values, especially in times of conflict. We know that recent events on campus and posts on social media have raised concerns. Individuals have reported feeling unsafe in response to language they have seen or heard, and some have expressed fear of speaking out for fear of reprisals of various kinds, including doxxing. We want to be clear: We are hearing these concerns from students, faculty, and staff who represent all sides of the issues. We hear calls simultaneously to curtail speech and calls to protect it.

Ensuring freedom of expression, especially at a public institution, means protecting speech with which we may disagree or even find offensive or objectionable. The right to free speech comes with responsibility, as our collective belonging in this extraordinary UMBC community comes with the responsibility to respect and care for one another, even when--perhaps especially when--we

disagree. Free speech does not extend to harassment or true threats. [Learn more](#) about speech that is protected under the First Amendment, as well as types of speech that are unprotected.

We urge all recognized campus groups and members of our community to provide constructive outlets for dissenting views when addressing controversial or divisive issues. We encourage you to avail yourselves of information and resources for knowing how to express your voice effectively and in ways that are consistent with legal guidelines, university policies and practices, and our institutional values. Guidance on how to have challenging discourse productively, how to organize peaceful protest, how to distribute information on campus, and more can be found on the [Using Your Voice page](#) provided by the Center for Democracy and Civil Life. More resources are listed below for your reference.

We ask that you continue to show kindness, grace, and flexibility to one another, knowing that students, faculty, and staff may be struggling. Let us work together, every day, to support UMBC as a community that embraces vibrant dialogue and mutual respect.

Sincerely,

*President Valerie Sheares Ashby*

*Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs David P. Dauwalder*

*Vice President for Institutional Equity and Chief Diversity Officer Tanyka M. Barber*

*Vice President for Student Affairs Renique T. Kersh*