



### **Guidelines for Expression in Response to Prompted Engagement at VCU Libraries**

**Policy Type:** Local Policy

**Responsible Office:** VCU Libraries

**Initial Policy Approved:** 07/23/2025

**Current Revision Approved:** 07/23/2025

#### **Policy Statement and Purpose**

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This policy establishes parameters for response to prompted engagement tools such as whiteboards, sticky note boards, and other similar formats when used by VCU Libraries for engagement with students and library visitors. VCU Libraries supports the right of individuals to express their on-topic responses to prompts generated by library staff via written commentary or artistic renderings, or other specifically invited forms of expression on designated whiteboards, sticky note boards, or other media.

VCU Libraries affirms the importance of free speech as noted in the “Policy Statement and Purpose” of the *Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy (Interim)*: “Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) supports and advocates for free expression, understanding the pivotal role open dialogue and the exchange of ideas play in the pursuit of knowledge and innovation.” VCU Libraries also affirms the importance of VCU’s ability to “carry out its academic mission, promote a safe environment, and preserve the functional and aesthetic integrity of the campus” while supporting expressive activity, as stated in the same policy.

#### **Contacts**

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VCU Libraries officially interprets this policy. Please direct policy questions to the Associate Dean for Research and Learning.

#### **Definitions**

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##### **Unprotected expression**

As noted in section I.B of VCU’s *Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy (Interim)*: “The U.S. Constitution, its First Amendment, and the Code of Virginia do not protect expression described by certain legal terms: defamation, incitement to unlawful conduct, imminent threats of actual violence or harm, obscenity, fighting words, copyright or trademark violation, criminal or civil harassment, sexual harassment, trespass, and false advertising. VCU prohibits expression that is not protected by law. Determining whether any specific expression falls into a category of unprotected speech requires careful analysis of applicable legal precedent as interpreted by relevant Virginia and federal courts.”

## Policy Specifics

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VCU Libraries posts questions or prompts on a whiteboard or sticky note board in library buildings to encourage student/library visitor engagement, interaction, and discourse related to the topic of the prompt. VCU Libraries-hosted engagement boards are not a public forum; they are a nonpublic forum where patrons are invited to express their views on certain topics. VCU Libraries may restrict the contents of expression on the VCU Libraries-hosted engagement boards, as long as the restriction is reasonable and the restriction does not discriminate based on viewpoint.

VCU Libraries-hosted engagement boards are available for on-topic written comments, artistic renderings, or other specifically invited forms of expression by VCU students and library visitors. VCU Libraries-hosted engagement boards are typically available for one day, after which they are removed and cleared. Comments, renderings, and other forms of expression that would be considered on-topic by any reasonable person are welcome regardless of their viewpoint.

Whiteboards are reviewed several times throughout the day by VCU Libraries employees. VCU Libraries will remove comments or renderings that are not consistent with the guidelines set forth in this policy, including, but not limited to: comments or renderings that would be considered off-topic by any reasonable person; advertisements and personally identifiable information of individuals such as social media handles; phone numbers; and personal names (unless solicited by the prompt). VCU Libraries employees should consult with the Office of University Counsel before selectively removing any invited forms of expression other than those types stated in this policy. Removal of invited forms of expression by individuals other than the posting party or university personnel acting within their duties is prohibited. If individuals feel they have witnessed discriminatory expression, they should file a report with Equity and Access Services in accordance with VCU's *Preventing and Responding to Discrimination* policy.

VCU Libraries reserves the right to remove engagement boards in their entirety if they are not fulfilling the goal of encouraging student and library visitor engagement, interaction, and discourse related to the prompt.

Postings or unauthorized removal of postings that fail to comply with these guidelines, the *VCU Code of Conduct*, *VCU Student Code of Conduct*, *Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy - Interim*, *Preventing and Responding to Discrimination* policy, or other applicable university policies may be removed and result in disciplinary action under the applicable policy.

## Related Documents

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1. [Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy \(Interim\)](#)
2. Code of Virginia § 23.1-401.1. [Constitutionally protected speech: policies, materials, and reports; report](#)
3. [Interim Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy FAQ](#)
4. [VCU Code of Conduct](#)

5. [VCU Equity and Access Services](#)
6. [VCU Free Speech](#)
7. [VCU Preventing and Responding to Discrimination Policy](#)
8. [VCU Student Code of Conduct](#)