

Free speech: a reminder of our rights and responsibilities

Dear Members of the York Community:

The first week of March has become a time where issues and events in the Middle East are discussed and debated at university campuses around the country. As we head into this period of increased – and sometimes impassioned – discourse, I want to take this opportunity to remind the entire York community of our rights and responsibilities when it comes to free speech and free inquiry:

- The University's priority is that discourse on the Middle East and other contentious issues be freely conducted without infringing on the rights of others and without disrupting the academic functioning of the University.
- It is the right of any community member to express his or her view within the law and without fear of intimidation or harassment. By the same token, members of the community must respect the rights of others to express views that differ from their own. Freedom of speech is for everyone, or it is for no one.
- Political activism is no excuse for racism, intimidation or hatred of any kind.
- The University is firmly committed to protecting the safety and security of all members of the community.
- Universities exist for the free exchange of ideas, and sometimes this can feel uncomfortable. But ideas can only flourish in an atmosphere free of intolerance, hatred and harassment.

It is the responsibility of those with strong views on either side of this debate to conduct themselves in a way that does not demonize others, nor create an atmosphere where intolerance is the inevitable outcome. Equally we will not tolerate members of our community engaging in speech or actions which may be or be perceived to be threatening. Nor is it acceptable to attempt to disrupt or interfere with events on campus, even if some may find them distasteful. This includes actions by groups from outside the University, who have been warned that we will not tolerate attempts to silence students expressing themselves.

It is up to each member of the York community to play his or her part in ensuring that we contribute to a climate where ideas can flourish freely. Let us renew our commitment to civil discourse, to the free and open exchange of ideas and to each other; let us build a York University free from discrimination in all its forms.

Mamdouh Shoukri,
President & Vice-Chancellor

