POLICY ON POLITICAL ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS

This Statement, originally entitled "Policy on Political Activities on Campus by Members of the University Community", was approved by the College Council on October 12, 1972, and by the President provisionally on October 24, 1972, and finally on November 10, 1972. Amendments were approved by University Council on February 21, 2019 and by the President on March 8, 2019.

As an institution of higher education, rooted in the Jesuit tradition, Saint Joseph’s University encourages open and free discussion of political ideas by members of the University community. To accomplish this academic end and also to preserve its status as a tax-exempt organization under Title 26, Section 501(c)(3), of the U.S. Code, the University is required in all instances to maintain a position of strict neutrality concerning political activities. The following principles therefore follow:

1. All members of the academic community are free to engage in political activities so long as these activities do not interfere with their obligations as teachers, administrators, or students; infringe upon the rights of other members of the University community; or violate this policy or any other policy in the Student Handbook, Faculty Handbook, or Administrator/Staff Handbook.

2. Although all members have a right to participate in the political process, they may do so only as individuals or through organizations recognized by the University, but never as representatives of the University. No contributions may be solicited in the name of or collected by the University for political purposes. Campus-based organizations seeking such contributions must include in their solicitations a statement to the effect that these donations are not for the use of the University and are not tax-deductible as gifts to the University. In addition, the seal or logo of the University may not be used on any literature or advertisements used for political purposes. The name of the University may be used only for purposes of identification of members of the University community.

3. All members of the community are free to support candidates or take positions on issues and to invite speakers to the campus for these purposes. Any procedures required by the University before such speakers are invited shall be designed only to ensure that facilities are properly scheduled and adequately prepared, and that these events are conducted in a manner appropriate to the academic setting. Institutional control of campus facilities shall not be used as a device of censorship. In the event of disagreement, the University Judicial Board shall have jurisdiction (Source: SJU Faculty Handbook). Students should review the Student Sponsorship of Speakers and Performers on Campus for information regarding inviting speakers.

Under the Internal Revenue Code, all section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office. Contributions to political campaign funds or public statements of position (verbal or written) made on behalf of the organization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign activity. Violating this prohibition may result in denial or revocation of tax-exempt status and the imposition of certain excise taxes.

Certain activities or expenditures may not be prohibited depending on the facts and circumstances. For example, certain voter education activities (including presenting public forums and publishing voter education guides) conducted in a non-partisan manner do not constitute prohibited political campaign activity. In addition, other activities intended to encourage people to participate in the electoral process, such as voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, would not be prohibited political campaign activity if conducted in a non-partisan manner.

On the other hand, voter education or registration activities with evidence of bias that (a) would favor one candidate over another; (b) oppose a candidate in some manner; or (c) have the effect of favoring a candidate or group of candidates, will constitute prohibited participation or intervention.
4. Students are entitled to an atmosphere conducive to learning and to evenhanded treatment in all aspects of the teacher-student relationship. Faculty members may not refuse to enroll or to teach students on the grounds of the students' beliefs or of the possible uses to which they may put the knowledge to be gained in a course. Students should not be forced by the authority inherent in the instructional role to make particular personal choices about political action or their own part in society. Classroom evaluation of students and the award of credit must be based on professionally judged academic performance alone and not on matters, such as political activism or personal beliefs, irrelevant to that performance.

5. The University, as an institution, cannot authorize the use of its facilities, funds, or property for any activities involving political figures or issues other than those required to provide a forum for discussion of political ideas on campus. No candidates for public office or their representatives are to receive any funds belonging to the University, nor shall any member of the University community use for political purposes the University's mailing lists, bulk mailing privilege, interoffice mail system, or printing facilities. Use of lecture rooms shall be at the regular rate.

6. The University cannot provide office facilities to any political organization whose primary purpose is either the election of candidates to public office or the influencing of public opinion beyond the limits of the campus. Office space may be granted only to those political organizations composed entirely of members of the University community.

7. Any admission fees charged for political speakers in excess of the cost of University facilities must be turned over in their entirety to the University.

8. The University shall promulgate guidance regarding these principles to further support the University’s goals of encouraging discussion of political ideas and preserving its status as a tax-exempt organization.