

Board of Trustees
Full Board Meeting
August 14, 2025**Institutional Neutrality Statement**

Recommended Action:

Informational

Background Information:

Institutional Neutrality is the principle that colleges and universities should not take official positions on social or political issues unless those issues directly threaten the institution's core mission and its value of free inquiry. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression recommends that such discussions should be left to students and faculty (taken from FIRE's website). Many universities have adopted the University of Chicago's Kalven Committee Report or created similar statements. UWF is considering adopting its own statement on institutional neutrality.

Implementation Plan:

Discussion is scheduled for the August 14 meeting, with potential adoption of the statement at the following Board of Trustees meeting.

Fiscal Implications:

None

Relevant Authority:

BOG 1.001, University Board of Trustees Powers and Duties

Supports Strategic Direction(s):

Strategic Direction 7: Culture of Respect and Civility

Supporting Documents:

1. Institutional Neutrality Document

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Presenter:

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To help the Board of Trustees understand the concept and implications of adopting a position of neutrality, we have compiled several key resources. We have also provided an example statement for UWF.

For information concerning institutional neutrality (what it is, should we consider it, etc), please see the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) fast facts at <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/fast-facts-adopting-institutional-neutrality>.

For adopting a statement of institutional neutrality, please see FIRE's statement at <https://www.thefire.org/defending-your-rights/reforming-college-policies/adopting-institutional-neutrality>. You'll also find a link to a list of institutions with an official position of institutional neutrality.

One of the most influential and widely cited statements on institutional neutrality is the University of Chicago's Kalven Committee Report. You'll find the report here: https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/KalvenRprt_0.pdf

An example of a statement of neutrality, specific to UWF, can be found below. It is only an example, and it draws upon some language used by the Kalven Committee report.

The [mission](#) of the University of West Florida requires institutional neutrality. Universities play a unique social and cultural role by cultivating, hosting, and teaching both established wisdom and leading thought. In this role, UWF facilitates freedom of academic inquiry and of expression on any subject, which may challenge prevailing social norms, public policies, and institutional practices; however, as an institution devoted to the intellectual pursuit and communication of truth, the university itself takes no official position on public controversies outside its regular activities so as not to undermine the freedom of thought and expression necessary for that endeavor.

Alongside this commitment to free expression and viewpoint diversity, UWF adheres strictly to the free speech and academic freedom requirements of the state and federal constitutions. UWF also reaffirms the right of individual faculty, staff, and students to engage in political discourse and social action as private citizens.

At UWF, dissent and critique belong to the individual faculty member or the individual student. While the university and its academic and administrative units are the settings in which these critiques can flourish, neither the university nor any of its component parts speaks with a single voice or requires one on public controversies. Our common academic purpose is to foster teaching, research, and expression in an environment of open dialogue, free inquiry, individual rights, individual prerogatives, and respect for each individual.

As a public university, UWF may advocate toward the public and toward government bodies and officials on issues related to its stated mission and the means to achieve that mission. Otherwise, only in rare cases, such as when a controversy

threatens the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry, should the institution actively defend its interests and its values.