

Faculty Senate Steering Committee Statement on Civility

The presence on campus of diverse political, social, and religious points of view and the free exchange and robust critique of ideas is a bedrock foundation of good education. Learning is a natural byproduct of civil engagement with students, staff, and faculty who differ from oneself in beliefs, values, and lifestyles. We typically learn most from those who are least like us. We develop an understanding of what is weak, what warranted in our thinking by subjecting our thoughts to the critique of others who think differently than we do. In this sense, the libertarian educates the communitarian, the Republican the Democrat, and vice versa. These productive exchanges between people who differ in their deeply held political, social, and religious beliefs are most likely to occur when interlocutors engage each other civilly, in a spirit of mutual respect and forbearance. Attending or working at a public institution as we do, the students, staff, and faculty of James Madison University are fortunate to be governed by the First Amendment drafted by James Madison, whose name the University bears. That amendment protects even uncivil speech. We are grateful to have that broad protection. And yet, we affirm civility, mutual respect, and forbearance as important cultural and educational values of this institution.