



College

**USP Higher Education
Freedom of Speech and
Academic Freedom
Statement**

1. Our Commitment

USP College is committed to fostering an inclusive and intellectually vibrant environment where freedom of speech and academic freedom are actively protected and promoted. These principles are essential to the pursuit of knowledge, the development of critical thinking, and the flourishing of democratic society.

From 1 August 2025, new statutory duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 require all registered higher education providers to take steps to secure lawful free speech and academic freedom. These duties include maintaining a free speech code of practice, protecting lawful expression, and ensuring that staff, students, and visiting speakers can express diverse views without fear of censorship or reprisal.

2. Legal Duties and Institutional Responsibilities

In line with guidance from the Office for Students (OfS), USP College will:

- a. Secure lawful freedom of speech for all members of our academic community.
- b. Protect academic freedom, ensuring educators can teach and communicate ideas; even if controversial or unpopular.
- c. Maintain transparent governance, documenting decisions that may substantially affect free speech.
- d. Avoid policies or actions that punish lawful expression, including criticism of the institution.

We recognise that unlawful speech is not protected, and we will take appropriate steps to address harassment, discrimination, and threats to physical safety. However, the bar for restricting lawful speech is high, and any restrictions must be prescribed by law and proportionate.

3. Academic Freedom in Practice

Academic staff at USP College have the right to:

- a. Teach and discuss lawful ideas, including those that may be uncomfortable or challenging.
- b. Engage in research and public discourse without institutional censorship.
- c. Expose students to a broad range of perspectives to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills.

Curriculum decisions will be guided by the principle that students should not be shielded from ideas solely because they may be offensive or controversial.

4. Student Rights and Responsibilities at USP College

As members of the academic community, USP College students are entitled to the same freedoms of speech, inquiry, and expression as any citizen, and they also bear responsibilities that support a respectful and inclusive learning environment.

5. Student Rights

- a. Freedom of Expression: Students may express their views publicly and privately, including through peaceful protest, publications and digital platforms.
- b. Freedom of Inquiry: Students are encouraged to explore diverse ideas and challenge perspectives in a respectful and constructive manner.
- c. Freedom of Association: Students may form and join organisations that reflect their interests and beliefs, provided they operate within the law and college policies.
- d. Academic Protection: Students have the right to be assessed fairly and to challenge academic decisions through established procedures.
- e. Confidentiality: Personal beliefs, political affiliations and academic opinions shared in confidence must be respected and protected by staff.

6. Student Responsibilities

- a. Respectful Engagement: Students must engage in debate and discussion with civility, respecting the rights of others to hold differing views.
- b. Academic Integrity: Students are expected to meet academic standards and contribute to a learning environment that values honesty and rigour.
- c. Community Conduct: Students must not disrupt the essential operations of the college or infringe on the rights of others through speech or action.
- d. Participation in Governance: Students are encouraged to take part in institutional decision-making through student representation and feedback mechanisms.
- e. USP College will continue to develop policies and procedures that safeguard these rights and responsibilities, ensuring students are empowered to participate fully in academic life while contributing to a respectful and inclusive community.

7. Governance and Accountability

Our governing body will:

- a. Keep records of decisions affecting free speech and academic freedom.
- b. Ensure delegated committees and individuals explicitly consider free speech duties.
- c. Avoid vague or overly broad policies that could suppress lawful expression.

We will also avoid the use of non-disclosure agreements that could silence victims or suppress legitimate academic discourse.

8. Ongoing Engagement and Review

USP College welcomes continued dialogue with the OfS, sector partners, staff, and students to ensure our approach remains compliant, inclusive, and aligned

with our institutional values. We will regularly review our policies and practices to reflect evolving guidance and sector experience.

Signed by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MB', with a horizontal line extending to the left from the start of the signature.

Megan Brophy
Head of HE and Access