

## Outside Speaker Policy for Providence College

**Title:** Outside Speaker Policy

**Applicability:** College-wide - faculty, students, staff, and administrators

**Purpose:** To establish a general policy of how outside speakers and events are hosted by Providence College and to establish a process to handle those rare cases when a speaker or event is in tension with the Catholic and Dominican character of the College.

**Effective Date:** March 17, 2015

### **Rationale for the Speaker Policy**

*“Our centers of study are schools of hope. When we gather together to study, our community is a ‘holy preaching’. In a world which has lost confidence in the value of reason, it witnesses to the possibility of a common search for the truth. This may be in a university seminar arguing over a case of bio-medical ethics, or a group of pastoral agents studying the Bible together in Latin America. Here we should learn confidence in each other as partners in the dialogue, companions in the adventure.”<sup>1</sup>*

The former Master of the Order of Preachers, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., once wrote that “when we argue and reason we honour our Creator and Redeemer who gave us minds with which to think and to draw near to him. We can never do theology well unless we have the humility and the courage to listen to the arguments of those with whom we disagree and take them seriously... We have to lose those certainties that banish uncomfortable truths, see both sides of the argument, ask the questions that may frighten us. St. Thomas was the man of questions, who learnt to take every question seriously, however foolish it might appear.”<sup>2</sup> While Fr. Radcliffe was speaking specifically about how Dominican communities might enter into the study of theology, his words have meaning for all of the various academic disciplines at Providence College.

As a community dedicated to the pursuit of truth wherever and however it may be found, Providence College is committed to the free exchange of ideas in and out of the classroom. As a Catholic college animated and guided by the Dominican tradition, it seeks to illuminate the complementary bond of faith and reason in a serious and relevant way; it has no fear that the results of rational inquiry will ultimately conflict with the convictions of faith. Accordingly, it is crucial to the academic mission of Providence and to its Catholic identity to welcome academic speakers from a variety of viewpoints and to provide them platforms from which to express their views in an unconstrained manner. This will mean, from time to time, that speakers will challenge orthodoxies, ecclesial as well as cultural. However, when this is done in a thoughtful and civil manner, such moments can only strengthen the

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, O.P. "The Wellspring of Hope: Study and the Annunciation of the Good News" in *Sing a New Song: The Christian Vocation*, (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1999), 61-62.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

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college community. Again, Radcliffe's words ring true: "Teaching should liberate us from the narrow confines of our experience and our prejudices and open up the wide open spaces of a truth which no one can master ... Doctrine should not indoctrinate but liberate us to continue on the journey."<sup>3</sup> When outside speakers are present, our faculty and students are encouraged to explore the assertions that are made and even to contest them openly. Our willingness to engage in the free disputations of controversial issues is evidence of our confidence in the power of the use of right reason to discern truth from falsity, well-founded judgment from mere opinion.

This willingness to engage in free disputations also demands a spirit of collaboration within our college community, always remembering that we are "companions on a journey." Our discourse must be framed by responsible minds and hearts that use words well and charitably in the midst of that discourse. The freedom of an academic community to engage in debate also presupposes that we responsibly engage such dialogue not for the fanciful flight of the day nor for the mere testing of social, political, or even ecclesial standards, but for the determined and deliberate pursuit of truth.

"In dulcedine societatis quaerere veritatem."  
(To seek the truth in the sweetness of community)

From *De Modo Studendi*, by St. Albert the Great, O.P.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 60.

## General Principles

Providence College encourages free and vigorous academic discussion and even argument in ways in keeping with the values of a Catholic and Dominican College. As an academic institution, the College has an obligation to promote the free discussion of serious issues that may be controversial in nature. The College wholeheartedly supports academic and artistic presentations that engage and challenge us through authentic intellectual, aesthetic and theological dialogue and debate, including those that may be provocative in nature.

Presentations that are gratuitously offensive or overtly and insistently contemptuous of the values and sensibilities of the Providence College community are not. Given the Dominican legacy of the Disputed Question, the College encourages sponsors of patently controversial presentations to consider formats that will provide opportunities for dialogue. The primary purpose of this policy is to assist members of the community in planning and organizing events that are educational and enlivened by the free-exchange of ideas appropriate to an academic community. To this end, the following guidelines should be observed when various constituencies of the College invite outside speakers<sup>4</sup>:

### Outside Speakers Hosted by Faculty of the College:

1. Speakers invited by the faculty of the College and sponsored by faculty through their departments, programs, or as part of a class, and presenting in an academic space (that is, classrooms and lecture halls), enjoy the benefits of academic freedom as long as the intended audience is the College community. Reservations must be submitted to Enrollment Services, via 25 Live, two weeks prior to the event to ensure space and appropriate logistical support. The name, topic, and sponsoring entity (or entities) are submitted at that time.
2. When a non-academic space is requested for a speaker sponsored by faculty, or when the public is explicitly invited, the event will be considered ‘public.’ Given the nature of these events, organizers are encouraged to consider the most appropriate format for each speaker and topic. When the presentation deals with particularly controversial material, the Dominican legacy of the Disputed Question can be a helpful resource to ensure that opposing sides are heard and considered. The Office of Mission and Ministry as well as the Office of Institutional Diversity are also good resources toward the planning and execution of a successful event.

If it is clear that a speaker intends to advocate the rejection of a clear teaching of the Catholic Church, the College enjoys the right to ask that the format of the presentation include a respondent supportive of the Catholic position. This determination is made by the Vice President for Mission and Ministry [VPMM], in consultation with the Speaker Advisory Group [SAG.] Chaired by the Vice President of Mission and Ministry, this group is comprised of two faculty selected by the Faculty Senate, a faculty member

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<sup>4</sup> The term “speaker” refers primarily to a person invited to give a talk expressing his or her own position on an issue of academic interest. It can also include other forms of presentations that put forward a particular point of view, e.g., plays, films, panels, performance artists, and so on.

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selected by the VPMM, a student selected by Student Congress, and the Dean of Students from Student Affairs (or his or her delegate). The VPMM will work with this committee as well as the faculty organizers for how best to handle those rare cases in which the clear intention of a particular talk is in tension with the Catholic and Dominican identity of Providence College. The final decision concerning the conditions required for a proposed event to go forward will be made by the VPMM. For those instances when a respondent is needed, the Office of Academic Affairs will be consulted to provide appropriate funding.

The fact that the College reserves this right does not mean it will always exercise it. Other ways of ensuring that both sides are heard are possible and, in some instances, more in keeping with the College's academic goals. In each case, the rights of the faculty will be respected and will include opportunities for dialogue with SAG and the VPMM. The goal will be for the event to go forward in a manner appropriate to Providence College's commitment to the harmony of faith and reason. Faculty hosts who anticipate a potential conflict are encouraged to consult with the VPMM at the beginning stages of planning to permit sufficient time for a thoughtful discussion of the speaker's position or proposed topics. This approach sets a standard for respectful dialogue among campus partners with the common goal of delivering an intellectually stimulating educational event that is sensitive to the mission of the College.

If the VPMM, in consultation with SAG, makes a request for the presence of the Catholic perspective and the faculty host chooses not to comply, the College reserves the right to postpone the event until an agreed upon format can be found.

Events of this kind must be submitted to Enrollment Services, via 25 Live, at least one month prior to the event to ensure space, appropriate logistical support, and sufficient oversight, as described above. The name, topic, sponsoring entity (or entities), and any intention to invite the public is submitted at that time.

### **Outside Speakers Hosted by Staff and Administrators of the College**

College staff and administrators who wish to invite speakers to campus or sponsor on-campus events will inform and receive written approval from his or her divisional vice president of the intended speaker, topic, date, time and audience prior to reserving the event in the central reservations system. If the event is open to the public, it is the responsibility of the administrator host to inform his or her vice president of whether the speaker or event intends to advocate for a position contrary to a clear teaching of the Catholic Church. If this is the intention, the divisional vice president will consult with the VPMM and SAG to determine if a respondent who is supportive of the Catholic Church's position is needed. If the VPMM, in consultation with SAG, makes a request for the presence of the Catholic perspective and the staff host chooses not to provide one, the College reserves the right to postpone the event until an agreed upon format can be found.

Reservations for events hosted by staff and administrators must be submitted via 25 Live

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at least one month prior to the event to ensure space, appropriate logistical support, and sufficient oversight, as described above. The name, topic, sponsoring entity (or entities), and any intention to invite the public is submitted at that time.

Speakers with staff-hosts are approved and processed through the Office of College Events once the original request is submitted through 25 Live. This office reviews the entire event to ensure compliance with the College's due diligence procedures (e.g., proof of insurance, logistics), determines fee structure, and ascertains appropriate level of support services that are needed in accordance with the College's facilities and event usage policies.

### **Speakers and Events Hosted by Student Clubs and Organizations of the College**

Student clubs and organizations must submit program proposals in accordance with the guidelines included in the Successful Event Planning Guidebook produced by the Office of Student Activities. This office reviews the entire event to ensure compliance with the College's due diligence procedures (e.g., proof of insurance, logistics), determines fee structure, and ascertains appropriate level of support services that are needed in accordance with the College's facilities and event usage policies.

It is the responsibility of the Director of Student Activities to work with the Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA), especially when a speaker or event may be considered contrary to the College's Catholic identity and mission, to seek guidance and work collaboratively with students to seek thoughtful solutions. In those cases in which student organizations and the Director of Student Activities are unable to achieve consensus about a mutually agreeable approach, the VPMM will bring the event proposal to SAG. It is the responsibility of the VPMM, in consultation with SAG, to suggest a path by which the event can go forward in a manner appropriate to the College's Catholic and Dominican identity. This process will be handled in a way that gives students the ability to make their case before SAG. If the final decision of the VPMM is not accepted, the event will be postponed until an agreed upon format can be found, if possible. The Office of Student Affairs will provide reasonable funds for required changes to the program.

### **Policies Regarding Invited Dignitaries**

In advance of an event for which a declared candidate for public office will be invited to campus, please contact the College's Office of General Counsel for guidance and assistance.