



Office of the University Counsel

Guidelines for Political Campaign Activities

Dear Colleagues:

Seattle University, as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, is prohibited from participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office. Political intervention includes not only making financial contributions but also the publication or distribution of written or oral statements on behalf of or in opposition to a particular candidate or ballot initiative. There are no exceptions to this prohibition. Even an insubstantial violation may lead to monetary fines and exposes the University to the possibility of revocation of its tax-exempt status.

Nevertheless, Seattle University encourages its members to engage in civic activity, including participation in the political process. To permit the most robust discourse during partisan political campaigns, while at the same time ensuring Seattle University's compliance with the restrictions placed on the University as a tax-exempt organization, the University offers the following guidelines. A member of the University community should observe the following with respect to his or her participation in national, state or local partisan political campaign activities:

Prohibited Political Activities. Faculty, staff, trustees and volunteers are prohibited from using University resources to engage in political activities in support of, or in opposition to, a political candidate or ballot initiative. Although not an exhaustive list, the following are examples of prohibited political activities:

- Using a University-provided e-mail address to campaign for or against a ballot initiative or candidate running for elected office.
- Using University letterhead, logos or postage to send mail supporting or opposing a ballot initiative or candidate running for elected office.
- Using a University copy machine to copy materials supporting or opposing a ballot initiative or candidate. However, use of pay-per-use services, such as SuperCopy may be used as long as University funds are not used.
- Conducting a political campaign from a University office or other University facility, or otherwise using University resources, such as a University-provided telephone, computer or e-mail address to conduct such a political campaign.

- Using a University employment title or position to support or oppose a political candidate or ballot initiative – such information should only be used for identification and not as a sign of University endorsement.

Permitted Political Activities. Faculty and staff may engage in political activities during their own personal time and with their own personal resources. Members of the University community are free to become involved in the election process as they choose, so long as they do so in a way that does not, in either an overt or implied manner, involve the University or its resources. Those engaging in political campaigns in their individual capacity must clearly and unambiguously indicate that their actions and statements are their own and not those of the University.

On-Campus Appearances by Political Candidates. As part of its educational mission, the University welcomes political candidates to campus to represent a diverse range of views. On-campus political forums or debates are permitted as part of the University's educational mission, provided that all the registered candidates are invited to participate in the event and the event does not favor or endorse any particular candidate. No campaign rallies, campaign banners, campaign literature or button distribution or fund-raising are allowed.

- A disclaimer must be included in all written materials and advertising and announced at the beginning of the event: "Seattle University does not support or oppose any political candidates. The views expressed are those of [the candidate or other partisan political speaker] only. The [Seattle University-related group] is sponsoring this event."

In addition, political candidates are permitted to appear on-campus in a non-campaign capacity as long as the event is sponsored by a University department or an officially recognized organization. The event must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The political candidate is invited to speak for reasons other than his/her candidacy for public office.
- The political candidate speaks in a non-candidate capacity.
- The event maintains a non-partisan atmosphere and prohibits campaigning or fundraising.
- The University department or organization takes care to avoid the appearance of institutional endorsement for a particular candidate.
- The event is open to the entire University community, regardless of political affiliation.
- The event is not organized or run by the candidate, his or her representatives or any outside organization.

Members of the University community who wish to invite a political candidate to campus should first contact the Office of the Executive Vice President at (206) 296-6160.

Student Publications. Student publications may run editorials expressing the editor's views on candidates for public office, provided that the publication's editorial policy is free of editorial control by University administrators or faculty advisors. A statement on the editorial page must indicate that the views expressed are those of the student editors and not those of the University.

Advertising in University Publications. University publications may accept paid political advertising as long as it is accepted on the same basis as other non-political advertising and not attributed to the University's own views. The publication should identify the advertisement as paid political advertising and state the University does not endorse the candidate. The University must make advertising space available to all candidates on an equal basis.

Questions? Please keep in mind that these guidelines do not address every situation. If you have any questions about permitted and prohibited political activities, please contact the Office of the University Counsel at (206) 296-2043. Your cooperation is both necessary and appreciated.