



# Student Group Political Activity on Campus Policy

**Document Number:** STNV-0004

**Date Published(sys):** 8/23/2024

---

## *General Description*

### **Policy Summary:**

This policy establishes the conditions necessary for and the restrictions on Trinity University student organizations when sponsoring events involving partisan and non-partisan political activities.

### **Purpose:**

This policy prevents improper political activity by student groups at Trinity University while maintaining the rights and responsibilities granted students in the University's Statement on Rights and Responsibilities.

### **Scope:**

This policy applies to student groups.

### **Exceptions:**

None.

---

## *Policy Content*

**As a non-profit, private institution of higher education, Trinity University's activities are regulated in part by Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code ("IRS"). As a tax-exempt institution, this prohibits the University from participating in political campaigns for candidates or ballot initiatives. The University is further prohibited from conducting lobbying activities. A violation of IRS regulations by the University could result in serious consequences, including but not limited to the loss of our tax-exempt status. Therefore, the University does not directly or indirectly engage in partisan**

**political activity, including the endorsement of any political candidate or ballot initiative, nor does the University solicit funds for any candidate or ballot initiative. However, the University recognizes students and student organizations may independently engage in partisan political activity. The University uses the American Council on Education (ACE) Memorandum regarding political and campaign-related activities of and at colleges and universities as a guide for event review. Per the statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities, Trinity University encourages and supports free speech, expression, and the open exchange of ideas and opinions.**

## **1. Student Organization Sponsored Events Involving Political Activity**

In addition to following the guidelines presented here, student organizations hosting political activities must also comply with all other relevant policies related to student organization activities.

Due to the nature of their close relationship with the institution, University Sponsored Organizations (USOs) may not host or co-sponsor partisan political events. (USOs share the institution's tax-exempt status and are advised by a full-time employee whose job description includes obligations to provide oversight of and support to the organization.)

### **I. Permitted political activity by student groups includes:**

#### A. Candidate for public office:

- a. may attend events hosted by registered student organizations on behalf of their candidacy, as long as the registered student organization makes a good-faith effort to invite all candidates for that office to the event.
- b. may attend events hosted by registered student organizations without the inclusion of all other candidates for that office if the candidate makes no reference to the election or their candidacy and is invited to speak on a topic of interest to the registered student organization or related to issue-specific advocacy.

#### B. Incumbent public officials who are currently running for office:

- a. may attend events hosted by registered student organizations on behalf of their current role as public officials. The public official may not comment on the election or their candidacy during this event.

- C. Incumbent public officials who are not currently running for office:
  - a. may attend events hosted by registered student organizations on behalf of their current role as public officials. The public official should not comment on current or future elections and may not endorse candidates for office at this event.
- D. Registered student organizations may use University facilities for political activity in the same way and under the same conditions as they do for non-political activity. Registered student organizations do not pay rental fees for use of University facilities. In some circumstances, and dependent on the proposed event, additional fees may be considered, including but not limited to, security, audio-visual support, janitorial services, etc.
- E. Candidate appearances may constitute speeches, question-and-answer sessions, or similar communications in an effort to foster a marketplace of ideas in a collegiate setting. Campaign rallies are not permitted at Trinity University
- F. The registered student organization and/or speaker may distribute informational or educational materials that are relevant to the topic of interest to the registered student organization or related to issue-specific advocacy.

## **II. Prohibited political activity by student groups includes:**

- A. The following University resources may not be used for political activity on campus:
  - a. University funds, including student activity fee money, to purchase campaign material, solicit donations, pay for campaign ads, contribute in any way to a political campaign or pay honoraria, transportation, support services, accommodation or meal expenses in support of any candidate or political party;
  - b. University's tax-exempt ID;
  - c. Campus mail, official Trinity University social media platforms, and/or Student Engagement & Development banner printing service
- B. Fundraising for political parties and/or candidates for office is prohibited. This includes the distribution of materials soliciting financial support on campus. Furthermore, registered student organizations may not charge admission fees to said event.

## **III. All approved events for student group political activity on campus will:**

- A. Have all marketing pre-approved by Strategic Communications and Marketing before distribution. All marketing materials must include the following language: "Trinity University affirms freedom of expression. Views expressed by speakers and participants before, during, and after speaking engagements do not represent or reflect the views of the University."

- B. Review, agree to, and sign the Trinity University Student Organization Acknowledgement Statement for Political Events with the University that identifies the responsibilities of the registered student organization with regard to holding the event on Trinity University’s campus. In addition, the registered student organization leader will be required to get the signature of the student organization adviser and the third party to facilitate the sharing of these requirements with the person/persons/organization being hosted.
- C. Have a representative from the registered student organization read the following at the beginning of the event: “Trinity University affirms freedom of expression. Views expressed by speakers and participants before, during, and after speaking engagements do not represent or reflect the views of the University.”

## **2. Student Organization Sponsored Events Involving Voter Education and Voter Registration**

In addition to these guidelines, student organizations hosting Involving voter education and voter registration activities must also comply with all other relevant policies related to student organization activities. Voter education and voter registration activities should not include the presence of a candidate for office.

I. Voter education and voter registration activity by student groups include:

- A. Registered student organizations may conduct non-partisan training programs designed to increase public understanding of the electoral process or to encourage citizens to become involved in the process.
- B. Registered student organizations may circulate questionnaires or conduct public opinion polls. Such activities should not be skewed to the advantage or disadvantage of individual candidates, political parties, or ballot issues.
- C. Registered student organizations may organize or participate in voter registration activities. Voter registration activities may include non-partisan educational material

The University uses the [American Council on Education \(ACE\) Memorandum](#) regarding political and campaign-related activities of and at colleges and universities as a guide for partisan and non-partisan events on campus.

Relevant IRS resources can be found [here](#).

## ***Attachments***

[ACE Issue Brief: Political Campaign-Related Activities of and at Colleges and Universities](#)

## Related Documents

### Related Documents:

| Document Type: | Document Name:                                   | Document Number: |
|----------------|--|------------------|
| Policy         | Statement on Student Rights and Responsibilities | STUD-0001        |

---

## Revision Management

### Revision History Log:

| Revision #: | Date:             | Recorded By:     |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------|
| v1.0        | 7/31/2019 8:33 PM | Katharine Martin |

---

### Vice President Approval:

| Name:        | Title:                             |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Andrew Wells | Vice President for Student Affairs |