



Campus Expression and Space Utilization Policy

Interim

Policy Type: Administrative

Responsible Office: Division of Student Affairs, Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

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Policy Statement and Purpose

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) supports and advocates for free expression, understanding the pivotal role open dialogue and the exchange of ideas play in the pursuit of knowledge and innovation. Our commitment to fostering an environment conducive to civil discourse is rooted in the belief that academic excellence and societal progress are linked to the vibrant exercise of protected speech and other forms of expressive activities.

VCU is dedicated to creating a campus culture that embraces the richness of diverse perspectives, encouraging all members of our community — students, faculty, staff, and visitors—to engage in discussions, debates, and expressions that are the hallmark of a dynamic educational institution. We recognize civil discourse — characterized by respect, listening, and thoughtful communication—is fundamental to our mission of educating future leaders, innovators, and citizens. Honoring this campus culture also means acknowledging that it can be uncomfortable and sometimes painful to encounter ideas and perspectives that contradict one's own. Nonetheless, we encourage our community to engage in a respectful and constructive exchange of ideas that reflects our values as an inclusive and supportive community. Expression by individuals or groups as described in this policy is not speech made by, on behalf of, or endorsed by VCU.

The purpose of this policy is to provide requirements for expressive activity on university property in its various forms, including, but not limited to, verbal expression, non-verbal expression, posting materials, chalking, and all displays. The requirements of this policy enable VCU to carry out its academic mission, promote a safe environment, and preserve the functional and aesthetic integrity of the campus.

This policy applies to expression and activity conducted on university property. The restrictions are designed to comply with the Code of Virginia § 23.1-401 and are narrowly tailored to serve the university's interest in maintaining the safe and effective educational and administrative operations of the university without regard to the viewpoint of any speech or expression. In

accordance with VCU's [Space Use Regulation](#), entry upon and use of university property must be in accord with VCU policy. Any person who violates these restrictions may be excluded from university property, subject to criminal penalties for trespassing, or subject to university action under applicable policy, such as suspension or expulsion as explained in the Student Code of Conduct or termination as explained in employee conduct policies. For the purpose of this policy, the term "person" may include an individual, group, or organization based on the context.

VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any student or employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

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Who Should Know This Policy

All university personnel, students, and other parties seeking to use university property are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions.

Definitions

Amplified Sound

Means any sound (e.g., voice, music, or other noise) amplified through the use of equipment, to include, but not limited to speakers, sound systems, stereos, amplifiers for musical instruments, and bullhorns.

Bulletin Board

A bulletin board is a designated space where information, notices, and announcements can be posted for public or targeted viewing. These boards serve as a communication tool to disseminate information relevant to a specific audience or the broader community. The content and use of bulletin boards may vary based on their location and intended purpose.

- **Instructional Bulletin Board** Instructional bulletin boards that may be situated within or outside the classroom and are exclusively designated for instructional purposes as authorized by the respective instructors.
- **Unit/Department Bulletin Board** Unit/Department bulletin boards are designated for specific university units or departments. These boards are often positioned near the physical office of the respective unit or department. Usage of Unit/Department bulletin boards is restricted solely to the assigned unit or department and may not be utilized by others.
- **VCU Community Bulletin Boards** Bulletin boards that are utilized by the VCU Community to display information on various topics including, but not limited to, campus events, job opportunities, research opportunities, political causes, and personal opinions. Approval for posting is not required. Please note: the university does not monitor or control the content posted on these boards and will remove materials on the last business day of each month and at the conclusion of each semester.

Chalking

Drawing or writing on concrete sidewalk with water-soluble chalk (commonly referred to as “sidewalk chalk”)

Employee

Any person (faculty and/or staff) with a direct employment relationship with VCU, including those who work on a part-time, temporary, or adjunct basis. An individual can hold a status as both a student and employee. The provisions of this policy will be applied consistent with the role principally held by such individuals in the relevant context.

Expressive Activity

All forms of expression that occur on University property, which, for the purposes of this policy may include but is not limited to, speaking, silent protest, distributing literature such as leaflets or pamphlets, displaying signs, wearing certain clothing or accessory items, dancing, meetings, performances, demonstrations, rallies, and vigils.

Major Event

An event requiring advance notice and permission from the university because its size, nature or complexity may disrupt other university functions or activities and increase logistical requirements without proactive management in coordination with university officials. A Major Event is an event, other than an academic course, program, or curriculum approved by the provost, which involves any one of the following factors:

- Expected or actual attendance over 150 persons (but if the space has an approved seated occupancy load greater than 150 persons, such as the Commons Theater, which has a seated occupancy load of 250 persons, then the event is not a Major Event unless it involves at least one of the other factors below);
 - *With reasonable notice to students and employees, VCU may reduce the Major Event attendance threshold during certain periods (such as the week before and during final exams)*
- Setting with safety concerns (including time and location) based on assessment from the VCU Police;
- The event is a dance or concert, regardless of how many attendees;
- Presence of any object or substance requiring review by the Office of Environmental Health and Safety, including but not limited to any animal, open flame, firework, pyrotechnic, or other flammable or hazardous item;
- Installation of any structure, such as a tent, stage, scaffold, bleacher, bounce house, or carnival-style ride;
- Alcohol served; or
- Outdoor amplified sound, including but not limited to bullhorns, Bluetooth speakers, etc.

Members of the Public (Unaffiliated Person or Organization)

Individuals who are not a currently enrolled student or a current employee of the university and includes a visitor, a contractor, a participant in a university program such

as continuing education, an intern, a donor, a prospective student, a friend or family member of a student or employee, a personal attendant for a student with a disability, an employee of the Health System who is not also employed by the university, and any other with an invitation to be on campus for limited purposes and with limited access.

Solicitation

Selling or promoting products, goods or services; using staff and faculty listings for the purpose of selling/promoting goods and/or services; seeking contributions or pledges, including distributing printed materials; and conducting membership drives.

Student

Includes all persons taking credit or non-credit courses through VCU, either full-time or part-time, on-line or in-person, single or dual enrolled, pursuing undergraduate, graduate, or professional studies. "Student" also includes all persons who withdraw after allegedly violating the Student Code of Conduct, persons who are not enrolled officially for a particular term but remain enrolled under the university's continuous enrollment policy, persons who have been notified of their acceptance for admission, and persons living in VCU residence halls regardless of course enrollment to the extent that employee discipline policies do not apply.

University Property

"University property" means any property owned, leased, or controlled by Virginia Commonwealth University. This includes Buildings, grounds, and land that is leased, rented, or otherwise contractually reserved for VCU operations, either permanently or on a temporary basis.

Contacts

The Office of Safety and Risk Management and the Division of Student Affairs are responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by the policy *Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures* through the appropriate governance structures. In addition, the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs officially interprets this policy.

Please direct policy questions to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs.

Policy Specifics and Procedures

I. Instructions for General Use of University Property

University property, including outdoor areas, is designated primarily for use by students, faculty, and staff to advance the educational mission of the university. Any university student, employee, registered student organization, or unit (each an affiliated person or organization) may generally use campus spaces in accordance with university policy. However, any member of the public may use university property for an event (assembly or organized expressive activity) only (1) if sponsored or hosted by an affiliated person with authority under an applicable university policy or (2) by reserving Park Plaza Amphitheater on the Monroe Park Campus or the Patterson Gardens across from Hunton Hall on the MCV Campus under the process in section II.B.5 below.

The university may require any person to pay applicable rental or usage fees and comply with appropriate contractual obligations. In addition to complying with the restrictions set forth in this policy, persons desiring to use certain university spaces must comply with requirements established by the university office responsible for the specific space. Such requirements, including restrictions for reservation, scheduling, insurance, posting, and other use of such space, must be consistent with this policy and other reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions and not based on the content or viewpoint of the expressive activity or the persons involved. If any such restriction conflicts with this policy, this policy governs.

A. General Prohibitions:

The university prohibits any person from interfering with university and authorized functions, activities, and events and from participating in unlawful conduct on university property. As such, no person may do any of the following on university property:

1. Obstruct or impede vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian, or other traffic;
2. Obstruct any entrance or exit to any building, assembly space, driveway, parking lot, vehicular path, stairway, or walkway or impede entry to or exit from any such area;
3. Obstruct, disrupt, or attempt by physical force to cancel or discontinue speech by any speaker, or the observation of speech by any person intending to see or hear a speaker;
4. Disrupt, disturb, or interfere with educational or administrative activities, events, or operations inside or outside any building;
5. Enter into any building or facility or occupy any university property without appropriate authorization;
6. Fail to comply with any reasonable instruction by university police or any university official acting in the performance of their duty;

7. Cause any threat to the health or safety of any passerby or member of the university community;
8. Damage university property, including structures, grass, shrubs, trees, or other landscaping;
9. Mark university property, including any vertical or horizontal surface, other than in accordance with written requirements, such as rules for authorized chalking;
10. Affix flyers, signs, posters, banners, swings, flags, or any other items to trees, garbage cans, windows, doors, chairs, benches, light poles, monuments, buildings, or any other university property without prior authorization;
11. Use of amplified sound that is audible indoors except as approved in advance under applicable policy and within sound limits that will not disrupt university operations;
12. Organize or lead any Major Event, as described in section II(B)(1) of this policy without written authorization, which can be obtained following approved registration procedures;
13. Leave any items, objects, or belongings unattended;
14. Violate any applicable federal, state, or local law, rule, or ordinance.

Prohibition of Encampment: Constructing, occupying, or sleeping in tents or camping on university-owned or operated properties is prohibited unless approved in advance by the University. Tents shall include any structure, enclosure, or shelter with or without sidewalls or drops that is constructed of canvas or pliable material supported in any manner except by the contents it protects. Camping shall include: (a) the use of any item to create a shelter; (b) the outdoor use of heating devices, generators, or the use of portable toilets; (c) sleeping outdoors with or without a tent between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.

B. Unprotected Expression:

The U.S. Constitution, its First Amendment, and the Code of Virginia do not protect expression described by certain legal terms: defamation, incitement to unlawful conduct, imminent threats of actual violence or harm, obscenity, fighting words, copyright or trademark violation, criminal or civil harassment, sexual harassment, trespass, and false advertising. VCU prohibits expression that is not protected by law. Determining whether any specific expression falls into a category of unprotected speech requires careful analysis of applicable legal precedent as interpreted by relevant Virginia and federal courts.

II. Instructions for Specific Uses of University Property

A. Non-University Commercial Use:

Any commercial use of university space must be authorized in writing by the vice president with oversight of the administrative unit managing the space or designee authorized by that vice president. Commercial door-to-door activities and commercial solicitations are prohibited. The university does not permit the solicitation, distribution, or selling of products or services of any kind at any time on university property by university employees other than as a required job function.

B. Required Reservations and Authorizations

All events must have a university sponsor. The sponsor must be an officially listed student organization, a university department, or a university governance entity . Non-university groups or organizations must have a university sponsor to hold an event. A contractual agreement for hosting an event (between a university entity and an external individual, group or organization) is considered a form of sponsorship for the purpose of this Policy. The University Sponsor will have a representative onsite or immediately available via telephone/internet conferencing throughout the event.

Any person organizing an event must comply with this policy regardless of any expressive purpose of the event and whether the event is planned in advance. Advance notice and written authorization are required only for Major Events and Event Reservations, as described below. However, VCU Police encourages persons organizing events to provide notice prior to commencement of any event or activity to promote the safety and security of all persons on campus. University officials will coordinate with the primary organizer or responsible person regarding appropriate logistical issues related to safety, time, and location.

Advance notification must include the day, time, anticipated attendance, items or equipment associated with the event, the planned location(s), and the full name and detailed contact information for the primary organizer and/or person responsible for the activity. University officials will also consider factors such as required accommodations, traffic, noise, time, relationship to nearby areas and activities, security needs, and other relevant viewpoint-neutral facts and circumstances to determine to what extent (a) a suitable location exists and (b) special precautions or arrangements are necessary.

A request may be denied and the university reserves the right to cancel or postpone any reservation or reserved use of its spaces, on one or more of the following grounds:

- Conflict with a pre-existing reservation or planned use of the location that would unreasonably interfere with either event;
- Conflict with reasonable restrictions on signage, display, erection of structures, sound amplification, or other aspects of the event that would unreasonably interfere with the health or safety of persons, protection of property, access, traffic, or the peaceful, orderly operations of the campus; or
- Inadequate notice for purposes of providing security, facilities support, resources or other preparations necessary for the protection of persons or property.

1. Major Events:

An event requiring advance notice and permission from the university because its size, nature or complexity may disrupt other university functions or activities and increase logistical requirements without proactive management in coordination with university officials:

To request authorization for a Major Event, students and employees may contact Event Services at uscaevent@vcu.edu or visit their [website](#).

2. Event reservations by student organization and university departments:

Through authorized representatives, student organizations and university departments may reserve certain campus facilities or areas by submitting requests to the administrator responsible for the area with sufficient notice to allow for logistical support and to otherwise comply with the applicable facility requirements, including the requirements of any facility use agreement. The Division of Student Affairs provides information regarding reservations on its website.

3. Event reservations by Faculty

Faculty may reserve certain campus rooms or areas for academic, research or scholarly purposes by submitting requests to the individual/office responsible for that area, with adequate notice to ensure logistical support and also comply with applicable facility requirements, including the requirements of any facility use agreement. All reservations must adhere to established protocols that are governed by Faculty Affairs.

4. Certain Areas Not Available for Events (the Compass)

When not in use for scheduled classes or rehearsals, academic buildings are available for use by the University Community for meetings, study and conferences or other gatherings. Priority in scheduling shall be given to scholarly and academic activities. Some academic spaces are not available based on the nature of the space.

During fall and spring academic semesters, residence halls are available only for the sole use of resident students and staff and their social, academic and administrative activities.

Administrative and operational buildings and space shall only be used for their intended purposes.

The Compass is one of the most distinguished and vital areas on the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) campus. This center of VCU's educational enclave is designed as a pivotal crossroads where students, faculty and staff journey daily to access scholarly resources at Cabell Library, attend class, dine at Shafer Dining Hall, and where prospective students and their families are introduced to the campus during tours. Student Organizations may reserve a designated location near the edge of the Compass for tabling consistent with the Commons requirements for tabling, including a limit of two members of the Student Organization present at the table.

5. Limited Reservations for Members of the Public

The university has designated certain locations on campus for reservation on a first-come, first-served basis, by any person, including members of the general public. These locations include Park Plaza Amphitheater on the Monroe Park campus and the Patterson Gardens across from Hunton Hall on the MCV campus. Any Major Event request must go through the Major Event reservation process.

General Guidelines for use of Park Plaza Amphitheater and Patterson Gardens:

- The individual or organizational representative that reserves the area must cooperate with appropriate staff and law enforcement with respect to any security arrangements that are required to support the event/activity.
- A student organization, university unit, and member of the public may not reserve the space for up to three consecutive days.
- Any Major Event request must go through the Major Event reservation process.
- Members of the Public may reserve these spaces by utilizing the [Park Plaza/Patterson Gardens Reservation Form](#).
- Students, Registered Student Organizations, faculty, and staff may reserve these spaces through EMS.

6. Event Fees and Charges:

All persons and event organizers are responsible for costs of damage, repair, and clean up arising from their use of university facilities. Examples of such costs related to event reservations include the cost of providing tents, platforms, special fixtures and equipment, or the assignment of maintenance or security personnel. The university will determine any fee for security based on viewpoint-neutral standards used to assess risk, such as the number of expected attendees as determined by the university, the location of the event, the time of day, and presence of alcohol or special equipment. Consistent with the lawful protection of expressive activity, VCU will not charge security-related fees based on the content of the expressive activity, the likelihood of disruption caused by others other than event attendees, or the actions of those who may protest the expressive activity.

7. Other Usage Rules

All events must have an institution-affiliated sponsor. Sponsor must have someone onsite or immediately available throughout the event.

Certain locations are altogether prohibited from usage for events, including residence halls, administrative buildings, and academic buildings during class time.

An advance reservation process is required for identified locations and such reservation includes an agreement to follow University facility use rules and to not violate state law. Reserving person acknowledges these obligations and agrees to comply.

Groups and individuals participating in the activities, whether sponsored or not, are accountable for compliance with the provisions of this policy. Violations of this policy may be grounds for disciplinary action.

Individuals or groups who invite non-University participants may be held accountable for such participants' compliance with this policy.

No illegal activity permitted at events.

User cannot obstruct vehicular or pedestrian traffic and cannot block ingress or egress to facilities.

C. Posted Materials

The University and individual schools/units have designated adequate indoor and outdoor spaces for the posting of materials, with the authority to regulate general time, place, and manner restrictions. VCU designates specific indoor and outdoor VCU Community Bulletin Boards across campus for the display of material by current students, faculty and staff. In addition, other bulletin boards are designated for limited use related to the university unit, department or classroom; posting on Unit/Department Bulletin Boards or Classroom Bulletin Boards is strictly prohibited without authorization from the unit/department or instructor, respectively.

Posting in areas other than designated bulletin boards is strictly prohibited. Such prohibited areas include, but are not limited to, interior and exterior walls, doors, chairs, tables, utility poles, bus stops, newspaper distribution boxes, vehicle windshields, trash cans, trees, benches, monuments, or any other university property and surfaces not explicitly designated for posting.

- Posting materials, such as flyers, brochures, posters, handbills, and similar items is subject to the following requirements:
 - Materials may be affixed only using tacks or push pins. Poster putty, tape, or staples must not be used to avoid damage to University property, facilities, equipment, furnishings, and landscaping.
 - Materials posted on the bulletin boards must be two-dimensional and no larger than 11 in. X 8.5 in.
 - Posting duplicates of the same materials on the same bulletin board is prohibited.
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 - Removal of material by individuals other than the posting party or university personnel acting within their duties is strictly prohibited.
 - Postings on Community Bulletin Boards will be removed on the last business day of each month and on the last business day of each semester. Other bulletin boards may be cleared according to other schedules.
 - Postings must not obstruct or cover other materials already posted on the bulletin board.
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- Banners or large signs are prohibited on University property without proper authorization
- Park Plaza Amphitheater (Monroe Park Campus) and Patterson Gardens across from Hunton Hall on the MCV campus may be reserved by student organizations for temporary display purposes (vigils, memorials). No display in these locations may remain overnight (midnight to 6:00 a.m.) or exceed one day in duration.
- No item may be left unattended.

If an individual believes a posting violates the posting procedures, they may report the posting to the listed building manager or the Dean of Student Advocacy (vcudean@vcu.edu). Any person who violates these restrictions may be excluded from university property, subject to criminal penalties for trespass, or subject to university action under applicable policy, such as the Student Code of Conduct or employee conduct policies.

University officials should consult with the Office of University Counsel before removing any posting other than according to a posted schedule or protocol

D. Chalking on Campus

Chalking on campus sidewalks is permitted subject to the restrictions detailed in this section of the policy.

General Guidelines:

- Chalking is limited to the use of water-soluble chalk (sidewalk chalk). Markers, paints, oil-based products, non-soluble products, and spray chalks are not allowed.
- Chalking is allowed on exterior sidewalks or walkways, made of concrete or asphalt, which are exposed so that rain can wash the chalk away naturally (not below roofs or other overhangs).
- Chalking is not allowed on non-sidewalk surfaces including brick sidewalks, both inside and outside, including benches, buildings, bus stops, bridges, columns, fountains, monuments, newsstands, overhangs, planters, poles, roads, rocks, signs, statues, stairs/steps, trash receptacles, trees, walls, and windows, or other structures of any kind.
- Chalking is not allowed on any portion of the Compass.
- Chalking that violates this policy can be removed without notice.

Chalking is only permitted in the following locations:

Monroe Park Campus

- Concrete sidewalk surrounding Harris Hall
- Concrete sidewalk in Park Plaza Amphitheater

MCV Campus

- Sidewalk parallel to the entrance of Hunton Student Center (See Map and Photos)
- Sidewalk parallel to the entrance of Larrick Gymnasium (See Map and Photos)
- Nonbrick on mini Compass

Obstruction of Chalking

- Overwriting, erasing, defacing, or altering existing chalking is prohibited by anyone other than the person or organization who did the chalking, except that university facility and grounds personnel will clean and wash sidewalks, plazas, and other outdoor areas in the course of their usual and ordinary campus maintenance activities.

Facilities Maintenance

- Facilities and grounds personnel will remove authorized chalking regularly, regardless of content, in the course of their usual and ordinary campus maintenance activities. Cleaning and washing may typically be performed daily.

This policy does not pertain to sidewalks near VCU property that are the property of the City of Richmond.

IV. Board of Visitors (BOV) Meetings

Seating room capacity at BOV meetings cannot be exceeded; generally overflow space is provided. Standing is permitted for BOV members and university officials seeking a temporary break from sitting. Prolonged standing by members of the public as well as any additional conduct that is distracting or disruptive (such as yelling, chanting, playing music, dancing, and any other activity that may infringe on the ability of audience members to fully focus on the meeting) is prohibited. No signs larger than 8 ½ in. x 11 in. are allowed. Banners and flags are strictly prohibited, as well as any other objects, sounds, and activities that are distracting or disruptive. No item may be left unattended.

V. Compliance

Compliance with this policy:

- Students and registered student organizations who violate this policy may be charged the cost of removal, will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity, and/or reported to VCU PD
- Employees who violate this policy may be subject to applicable policies within the Employee Handbook

Forms

There are no forms associated with this policy.

Related Documents

There are no related documents associated with this policy.

Revision History

New Policy

FAQ

There are no FAQ associated with this policy.