Election Year Reminders & Best Practices

August 2026

As we begin both the Fall 2026 semester and enter another federal, state, and local election season, please review the following important reminders regarding our commitments and obligations as a public institution of higher education.

1. Academic Freedom

The College is committed to academic freedom. As a public institution of higher education, the College encourages open and diverse discussion and exchange of ideas within the classroom. Suffolk County is a diverse community with a broad spectrum of opinions on issues of public concern, and that diversity is a benefit to those who teach and learn here in the form of exposure to new perspectives that challenge us to think in new ways. Academic freedom is a principle that carries both rights and responsibilities. These include:

- Teaching (freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom): Faculty are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subjects but should be careful not to introduce into teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject in the course they are teaching. Academic freedom in teaching protects not just the rights of the faculty member in teaching but also the student to freedom in learning. Faculty should be mindful at all times of the connection between classroom discussion, examples used and course learning outcomes, as well as the need to foster a learning environment that allows for robust, respectful discussion on relevant course topics. Through the shared governance process, curricular and departmental policies and standards have been developed—for example, on courses to be offered, textbooks to be used, competencies, integrity and accuracy—and these must still be met.

- Research: Freedom in exploration of scholarship and research and in the publication of results is fundamental to the advancement of truth. However, we must all comply with the policies and procedures established by the College for ethical conduct, professionalism, integrity, and the protection of human subjects.

- Freedom of Expression within the bounds of the law, which distinguishes expression as a private citizen from expression as part of one's job and official duties as a public employee. As outlined in the AAUP's Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure (1940), which was adopted through our collective bargaining agreement with the Faculty Association, "The college or university teacher is a citizen, a member of a learned profession, and an officer of an educational institution. When [they speak or write] as a citizen, [they] should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but [their] special position in the community imposes special obligations. As a [person] of learning and an educational officer, [they] should remember that the public may judge [their] profession and [their] institution by [their] utterances. Hence [they] should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinion of others, and should make every effort to indicate that [they are] not an institutional spokesman."[1]

[1] Edited to replace references to "he" for gender inclusiveness.

2. Political Activity on Campus

To assist members of the college community with meeting our ethical obligations and avoiding activity prohibited by law or college policy in connection with this election cycle, please observe the following:

Do's	Don'ts
We recognize the benefit of curricular activities aimed at educating our students with respect to the political process and how they may exercise their right to vote. Feel free to direct students to the College's voter education webpage developed in accordance with the NYS Election Law.	Do not, in the classroom setting, exhort students to vote for/against or support/oppose any particular candidate or partisan political purpose.
Employees may lawfully participate in the political campaign process on their own time in their personal capacity (as private citizens).	Political activity cannot take place during work time or using College resources. Do not use College letterhead, computers, email, phones, printers, copiers, paper, etc. for partisan political purposes. Do not engage in electioneering on College time.
Promote responsible civic engagement, as well as respectful debate and discussion in the classroom and in other areas where learning and exchanges of ideas are taking place. Seek guidance from appropriate leadership and attend the professional development opportunities taking place this semester to support you in doing so.	Do not offer a benefit or reward for voting—for example, do not provide course credit or extra credit to students who show proof of voting (or impose a penalty for not voting).

3. Academic Freedom and Discussion of Controversial Topics vs. Civil Rights

As we have seen from publicized controversies and events across college campuses this year, balancing an institution's obligations to prevent unlawful discrimination and harassment on the basis of a protected characteristic (gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, shared ancestry, religion, etc.) with the obligation to respect campus community members' exercise of academic freedom and freedom of expression rights can be difficult at times. All members of the College community should be mindful of our obligations to respond to complaints of discrimination, harassment, or creation of a hostile environment and promptly refer any reports or complaints to one of the College's Civil Rights Compliance Officers. The Respect All Sharks flyer is an accessible resource that can be used by faculty and provided to students to remind them of our shared commitment to respecting the rights of others while we express differing viewpoints and engage in academic exchange. Please know that the College remains committed to upholding individuals' rights while also ensuring our campuses remain a safe learning and working environment.

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) collaborates with classroom faculty as they prepare their course content, assignments, and assessments. They are invited to reach out to CTL to discuss ways to support civil discourse in the classroom. They are ready to meet with faculty to talk through approaches and provide feedback or resources to help faculty make continuous improvements in their teaching practice. Email: CTL@sunysuffolk.edu.