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CAUT statement on the right to freedom of expression and peaceful protest on campus

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(Ottawa – April 30, 2024) Universities and colleges serve the common good of society through searching for and disseminating knowledge and fostering independent thinking and expression in academic staff and students. Robust democracies require no less. These ends cannot be achieved in an environment where free expression and academic freedom are curtailed.

The expression and debate of differing and even deeply contested points of view are essential to learning and the advancement of knowledge. This includes the political expression and peaceful protest of students, academic staff, and all members of the campus community.

University and college administrations fail in their duty to uphold the foundational purposes of our institutions when they limit or pre-empt peaceful protests and counter-protests. When administrators threaten or authorize the discipline or arrest of peaceful protesters on campus, they are silencing expression and censoring speech. Academic freedom cannot thrive when freedom of expression is constrained.

Restrictions on freedom of expression and protest can only be justified with clear, objective and demonstrable evidence of danger to persons, serious violations of the law, and major disruptions to the essential operations of a university or college. By their very nature, protests cause disturbance and inconvenience and should not on that basis alone be prohibited.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers calls on institutional leaders to respect and uphold the essential right of students and staff to engage in peaceful protest and counter-protest, and to follow due process and natural justice when pursuing any justifiable disciplinary actions.

Source: <https://www.caut.ca/latest/2024/04/caut-statement-right-freedom-expressi...>

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