



May 1, 2024

Dear President Daniels and Trustees of Johns Hopkins University:

We write to remind you of Johns Hopkins University's [Statement on Academic Freedom](#), adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2015, by which our university committed itself to protect the right "to speak and create, to question and dissent, to participate in debate on and off campus, and to invite others to do the same, all without fear of restraint or penalty."

Academic Freedom at Johns Hopkins "is designed to afford members of the community the broadest possible scope for unencumbered expression, investigation, analysis, and discourse." Any limits to these principles "should be seen as narrow exceptions to the presumption of open and vigorous expression." Consistent with First Amendment traditions, our university therefore prohibits speech acts that "defame or threaten, to deface or harass, or to incite violence or infringe on privacy."

At times like the present, when our community is divided over the content and limits of permissible speech, such statements serve as a lodestar to guide our actions. The peaceful protest currently underway at Johns Hopkins does not defame, threaten, deface, or harass. Even the Baltimore Police Department, in declining to intervene, [has stated](#) that it poses no "credible threat of violence." For that reason, we are alarmed by recent administration [statements](#) that still threaten disciplinary and even police action against students who are allegedly "trespassing" on their own campus.

Johns Hopkins has a rich tradition of campus protest. Five years ago, the university [tolerated](#) a month-long sit-in in Garland Hall, calling in the police only after the participants [chained](#) the doors shut. Two decades earlier, Johns Hopkins students [constructed](#) a wooden shanty in front of MSE library, which they occupied for more than a week before staging a 17-day sit-in in Garland Hall. Earlier still, students [constructed](#) shanties and staged a 9-day sit-in in Garland Hall in opposition to South African apartheid.

Those peaceful actions required no police action of any kind.

The American Civil Liberties Union [makes clear that](#) "if a university has routinely tolerated violations of its rules, and suddenly enforces them harshly in a specific context," it is no longer protecting the right of free speech but is "singling out particular views for punishment."

We urge you to abide by our university's [Statement on Academic Freedom](#) and follow university precedent by tolerating peaceful protest on campus at any time, and allowing an encampment that does not interrupt the functioning of the university – and to do so without threats of discipline or police action.

As our Statement on Academic Freedom notes, "Johns Hopkins was home to the early development of the concept of academic freedom in this country. The torch of free inquiry is a critical part of our heritage and our mission. Each of us, in our time as members of this community of scholars, bears a responsibility for nurturing its flame, and passing it on to those who will follow."

Sincerely yours,

Johns Hopkins University AAUP Chapter