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Communicating Across Difference: Free and Responsible Speech

Attacks on the speech of students, faculty, and visitors on college campuses have a long history. Not only are such attacks continuing, but social media has generated a climate in which campaigns of intimidation can be organized quickly and easily and the current political climate seems to have released the reins of restraint. Particularly troubling has been the disproportionate number of targets of intimidation campaigns who are scholars from historically marginalized populations, including people of color and members of the LGBTQ community.

The American Sociological Association takes public positions on issues that affect the intellectual and professional lives of sociologists and the production of sociological knowledge. Attacks on speech and speakers fundamentally jeopardize the intellectual heart of sociology and, in several cases, the wellbeing of sociologists. Therefore, ASA affirms the critical value of speech rights, irrespective of whether some might object to the content of the speech. ASA condemns, in the strongest possible terms, efforts intended to threaten, harass, and silence those exercising their speech rights.

Freedom to speak is reflected in the first amendment to our constitution and remains one of our core American values. Such freedom is particularly salient in the academic context. The very nature of the educational work we do on campuses—generating and disseminating knowledge—is predicated upon the assurance that our institutions of higher education serve as strong and safe forums for the free exchange of ideas. Importantly, we recognize that speech rights come with responsibilities. Pursuit of understanding and truth cannot happen without responsible debate, deliberation, and dialogue.