

AAUP President Defends Faculty Political Speech Rights  
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This month the University of Illinois Ethics Office informed faculty and staff that it is unethical to attend campus rallies for candidates running for public office, to wear buttons endorsing political candidates or political parties on campus, or to place comparable bumper stickers on cars to be parked in university-owned lots. Faculty are understandably concerned about the administration's critique of such forms of free speech and political expression as they have exercised without controversy for years. Although these rules are not at present being enforced, the AAUP deplors their chilling effect on speech, their interference with the educational process, and their implicit castigation of normal practice during political campaigns. A prohibition on political bumper stickers can well cross a line and infringe on extramural political speech.

While we are unhappy with how the university has interpreted the state's ethics rules, we also have other fundamental concerns. The Ethics Office has failed to recognize and accurately define both the special context of a university and the role of its faculty members. Campus education requires that faculty and students have comparable freedom of expression on political subjects. This applies not only to obvious contexts like courses on politics and public policy in a variety of departments but also to the less formal settings in which faculty and students interact. Political speech embraces not only buttons and bumper stickers but also the whole range of advocacy and debate that intensifies during political campaigns. As the rules stand, students can exercise their constitutional rights and attend rallies and wear buttons advocating candidates, but faculty cannot. National elections provide wonderful educational opportunities across a wide range of disciplines. Thus students might attend campus rallies and later analyze them in a classroom. Are faculty members to have no experience of the rallies themselves? Finally, it is inappropriate to suggest that faculty members function as employees whenever they are on campus. Faculty often move back and forth between employee responsibilities and personal acts within the same time frame.

Cary Nelson  
AAUP President