



October 24, 2025

Dr. Wisdom Tetley
President and Vice-Chancellor
Carleton University

Re. Institutional Impartiality Policy

Dear President Tetley,

On October 17, 2025, Carleton University issued a draft “[Institutional Impartiality Policy](#)” and asked for input from the “campus community.” As the union representing over 900 full-time Faculty and Professional Librarians at Carleton University, CUASA has serious concerns that the policy, as drafted, will infringe the rights of its members and lead to an environment where academics at Carleton are deterred from collaborative actions that might later be deemed “political or partisan”. Where researchers and educators feel pressure to quiet their voices or tailor their work to avoid censure, the institution risks its foundational mission of driving critical intellectual debate and social progress. The imposition of a requirement of impartiality or neutrality on CUASA members, either individually or collectively, violates academic freedom.

The academic freedom of CUASA members is not limited to the matters of “intellectual inquiry, perspectives, and knowledge dissemination” listed in the draft policy. CUASA members have the freedom to:

- discuss topics of public interest or concern provided they do not speak on behalf of the university unless specifically authorized to do so.
- discuss topics related to their expertise in the classroom and to determine what is pedagogically relevant to the course.
- advance their research without institutional censorship or outside influence or pressure.
- comment on internal Carleton policies without interference.

These rights are listed in the [Collective Agreement](#) under Article 4, Article 10.1, and Article 14.6 (of the 2024-2027 collective agreement). They are also included in Carleton University’s [Human Rights Policies and Procedures](#) section 4.1 and 4.2.

While Carleton attempts to distinguish impartiality from neutrality in the preamble of the Policy, there is no practical difference from definitions of neutrality at other Canadian institutions. **As the policy stands, the requirement of impartiality can be interpreted too broadly.** In the absence of reference, legal or common definition of “institutional impartiality,” the policy is open to the arbitrary interpretations of “responsible departments.” The absence of definition of “core values” and the failure to state the “mission” the draft policy claims to defend, other than the four “objects and purposes” of the University Act, also make the policy subject to arbitrary interpretation. The draft policy presents an expansive range of the “views that may be

reasonably seen to be acting on behalf of the University,” as well as “partisan statements ostensibly on behalf of the University...” that it forbids. By listing examples and making exclusions without clear limits this too leaves the meaning of the prohibitions open to arbitrary interpretations. CUASA agrees with the statement in the policy that the university cannot be neutral when it comes to core values such as academic freedom and human rights – but neither can it be impartial about these matters. On the contrary, **the university has a positive obligation to protect and promote academic freedom.**

The scope of the communications covered by draft the policy is too broad and contravenes well establish standard practices. The draft policy’s proscription against “partisan statements ostensibly on behalf of a Department with respect to matters of public, political or academic debate” is in direct opposition to standards of academic freedom which in practice are meant to protect “freedom of association” and “the right to support collective departmental statements espousing beliefs about political or social issues.” (CUASA’s affiliate, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), [Policy Statement on Academic Freedom](#) and [Policy Statement on Departmental statements and academic freedom](#)). CUASA asserts that any Impartiality or Neutrality Policy should only, and at most, cover official communications of the senior administration, and certainly not the individual or collaborative expressions of academics.

The proposed means by which the policy will be implement are too vague. The Board of Governors will approve; the President and Vice-Chancellor will be responsible; the General Counsel will provide the information. The draft policy opens the way for unspecified “responsible departments” to limit the existing freedoms of all individual and groups of the university community:

- Which body of the University will decide between competing ideas of the “core values”?
- Who would determine what can be “reasonably” or “ostensibly” seen to be said on behalf of the University, and how?
- Which group would ensure that the policy is applied consistently?
- How and by whom would those who contravene the policy be found, investigated and disciplined?

As written the policy fails to uphold a standard of transparency that would allow for it to be fairly applied.

Finally, the brevity and secrecy of the processes of drafting the policy and the lateness and limited time allotted to seeking “Community Input” is a worrying sign of the potential for this initiative to be used in a discretionary fashion, and to restrict the very academic freedom it claims to foster.

CUASA calls on Carleton University to withdraw the “Policy of Institutional Impartiality” and to explicitly reaffirm its commitment to intellectual freedom as the foundation of teaching, research, and public engagement. Carleton must explicitly recognize that academics have the right to express their individual and collective views. The duty of the

university is not to manage and constrain free thought and dissent, but to nurture and safeguard an open exchange of ideas.

Sincerely,

dominique marshall

Dominique Marshall

President

Carleton University Academic Staff Association

CC: Jaye Horton, Executive Director, CUASA