

# **Rice University Policy No. 807**

## **Partisan Political Activities**

### **I. Policy Statement**

Rice University's status as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code prohibits the University from participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office. The law prohibits the University from endorsing candidates for political office or contributing any money, goods, or services to candidates.

It is Rice's policy not to participate in (directly or indirectly) or to intervene in any political campaign to promote or oppose a candidate for public office (including the publication or distribution of any campaign materials) and not to have any University funds or other resources used for such purposes.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the University recognizes that students, faculty, and staff may wish to participate in the political process as individuals. While members of the Rice community are free to express their political opinions and engage in political activities, it is important that they do so only in their individual capacities and avoid the appearance that they are speaking or acting for Rice in political matters, an especially important consideration for those who the public may perceive as speaking for the University (e.g., officers, officials and deans).

### **II. Roles and Responsibilities**

The Vice President for Public Affairs, in consultation with the Office of General Counsel, is responsible for the interpretation and application of this policy. Questions on whether planned activities are consistent with Rice's policy should be directed to the Vice President for Public Affairs.

### **III. Permissible Political Activities**

1. Consistent with its educational and research mission, Rice University does not restrict the discussion of political issues or the teaching of political techniques. Academic endeavors that address public policy issues are not affected by this policy. Classes, discussions, presentations or academic research relating to political issues, public policy or political techniques, if germane and appropriate to a department's course or curriculum or part of a faculty member's field of study, are part of the University's educational mission.
2. Though federal tax law limits the partisan political activities in which Rice may participate, it does not inhibit the expression of personal political views by any individual in the University community except as indicated below. Nor do these laws forbid faculty, students or staff from supporting candidates for public office or furthering political causes, as long as such activity could not reasonably be imputed to Rice. Individuals participating in partisan political activity should clearly indicate that such activity is personal and is not being taken on behalf of Rice. In partisan political materials, the Rice title of a faculty or staff member or other person may be used only for individual identification and not as a representative of Rice. Any such partisan political activity by Rice employees may only be performed (a) outside of normal work hours, (b) during a leave of absence without pay taken with the University's approval, or (c) during benefit time if the absence is arranged with a supervisor in advance.
3. Student publications may run editorials expressing the editors' views on candidates for public office, provided that the publication's editorial policy is free of editorial control by Rice administrators or faculty advisors. A statement on the editorial page must indicate that the views expressed are those of the student editors and not those of the University.
4. Federal law allows tax-exempt organizations to sponsor political forums or debates provided they are sufficiently non-partisan in nature and are conducted for the purpose of educating voters.

Specific guidelines related to political forums and debates in University facilities are provided by Public Affairs at the link in Section VIII below.

5. Because Rice encourages freedom of expression, political activities that do not reasonably imply University involvement or endorsement may be undertaken so long as they are consistent with this policy and the guidelines for use of Rice facilities and resources. For example, it is generally acceptable to have a small sign, button, or bumper sticker in a personal office, cubicle or automobile. However, it would not be appropriate to display or post signs, buttons or bumper stickers in common areas or workspaces, on windows or roadways, or on University-owned vehicles.

#### **IV. Restricted or Prohibited Political Activities**

1. No person may, on behalf of Rice, engage in any political activity in support of or in opposition to any candidate for public office, including giving or receiving funds or endorsements. Nor may Rice resources be used for such purposes.
2. No person may, on behalf of Rice, lobby (or use University resources to lobby) any federal, state, or local legislative or administrative official or staff member unless specifically authorized to do so by the Vice President for Public Affairs or the President, and any such lobbying activity must be conducted in compliance with applicable laws. Funding from local, state or federal government grants or contracts may not be used for any such lobbying activities.
3. No individual, group or organization may use Rice facilities to raise funds to benefit a political party, campaign, or candidate, whether through contributions, donations, admissions, fees, or sale of materials or services.
4. Recognized student organizations may reserve Rice facilities to conduct meetings, or to host and/or publicize the appearance of a candidate on campus (consistent with this policy and with policies regarding facility use by student groups). However, no recognized student organization or individual may use Rice funds to purchase campaign material, pay for campaign ads, contribute in any way to a political campaign, or pay honoraria, transportation, support services, accommodation or meal expenses, for candidates for public office.
5. In general, for non-University related groups or individuals, Rice discourages the use of its facilities for partisan political activities and reserves the right to deny use of its facilities for such purposes. However, to the extent that a non-University organization or individual is granted permission to use Rice facilities for such purposes, the organization or individual may not use Rice facilities to raise funds to benefit a political party, campaign, or candidate, whether through contributions, donations, admissions, fees, or sale of materials or services.
6. Any University or non-University related organization or individual wishing to use Rice facilities in connection with the appearance of a candidate must first make a written request to the Office of the President or the Vice President for Public Affairs. The request must include copies of any publicity that will be used in association with the event and information about the desired time and location for the proposed event.
7. The University may choose to make its facilities available for a variety of candidates to appear if such appearances constitute speeches, question-and-answer sessions, or similar communications in an academic setting and are not conducted as campaign rallies or events. The format of any such presentations must make clear that Rice neither supports nor opposes the candidate.
8. Websites of recognized student organizations that reside on the University's network or are linked to the University's website may not be used to express bias in favor of or against any

candidate for public office, political party or political action committee, unless a disclaimer is posted on the organization's website stating that the opinions expressed are those of the organization and not those of the University.

**V. Cross References to Related Policies**

Policy [820-75](#), Picketing, Demonstrations, and Non-University Sponsored Meetings

**VI. Responsible Official:** Vice President for Public Affairs

**VII. Key Offices to Contact Regarding the Policy and its Implementation:**

Public Affairs

**VIII. Links to Procedures or Forms**

Additional guidance may be found on the Public Affairs website, at <http://staff.rice.edu/staff/Policies.asp>

*Signed David W. Leebron*  
President

Policy History

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