Political and Religious Activity at AUA
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As an institution committed to helping build Armenia's future, AUA encourages its students, faculty, and staff to be active citizens. Moreover, the academic study of political processes is an important part of the University's scholarly mission and is protected by academic freedom. At the same time, AUA must avoid partisan political activities that would suggest the University endorses or condemns a particular political party or candidate for office; nor can the University endorse or condemn the holders of public office; nor can the University devote a substantial portion of its resources to lobbying in either Armenia or the United States of America. As a tax-exempt organization, AUA cannot participate in, or engage in any political campaign (including the publishing or distributing of statements) on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

Faculty and staff may not engage in partisan political activity during University functions, through official University channels, in University publications (including AUA Press and University websites), or in the classroom. No member of the AUA community should feel pressured by colleagues to contribute to, or perform tasks in support of a political campaign.

If a faculty or staff member is a candidate for political office, campaign activities must not be conducted on University property in order to avoid the appearance of institutional endorsement.

AUA maintains that when its faculty, staff, or students make public comments—even on personal social media pages that mention their AUA affiliation—it should be understood by the public that such statements represent their own views, not those of the University, unless expressly stated otherwise.

Employees should keep in mind that all public interactions carried out by AUA employees reflect on the University. The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure contains the following provision:

College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence, they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.

Consistent with the above provision, faculty and staff expressing personal political views must make clear that these views are their own and not representative of AUA. A disclaimer such as the following should be used in interviews, speeches, and social media when appropriate:

"The views expressed here are my personal views and in no way reflect the views of the American University of Armenia".

For social media, a more effective approach is to put this disclaimer at the top of the page, where the AUA affiliation is listed, making it clear that the disclaimer applies to all material on the page.

Faculty, staff and students should note that the United States Internal Revenue Service denies non-profit tax-exempt status to any institution that supports a candidate for public office, and that non-profit status can be revoked if a significant fraction of the institution's activities is dedicated to political activity. Moreover, the United States Federal Corrupt Practices Act defines support broadly to include the donation of services such as facilities and equipment.

Similar caution should be exercised for religious activities. AUA respects and does not interfere with religious beliefs and practices. While the academic study of religion is valid scholarship that is protected by academic freedom, AUA must avoid activities that might indicate that the University endorses a particular system of religious belief or that the University allocates extensive time to religious practice.

In light of the above considerations, activities that have political or religious content or overtones require special care to assure academic and scholarly suitability for a university environment. If AUA community members have the slightest doubt about whether an activity is appropriate, they should consult with the University administration before engaging or organizing such an activity.

By working together, we can protect the Academic freedom and the integrity of AUA while respecting the law, political rights, and civil liberties, and best academic traditions of both the United States and Armenia.