

Political Activities on the University of Vermont Campus

Frequently Asked Questions

The following FAQs have been prepared by the Office of Federal, State and Community Relations to assist in interpreting the University's policy on [Political Activities: Tax Exempt Organization Restrictions](#). Members of the University community who have questions about the policy should contact the Office of Federal, State, and Community Relations (656-2992) or E-mail them to Wendy.Koenig@uvm.edu.

Q. May political candidates or political organizations use outdoor, public venues on the UVM campus for political campaign activities?

Q. May political candidates or political organizations post campaign materials on UVM bulletin boards?

Q. May candidates distribute campaign materials to employees or students through campus mail?

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Q. Does the prohibition on political fundraising apply to the sale of political souvenirs?

Q. How can political candidates and political organizations recruit students to work on political campaigns?



Q. May political candidates or political organizations use outdoor, public venues on the UVM campus for political campaign activities?

A. The University allows the following outdoor public venues to be used, without prior reservation or approval, for political organizing, canvassing, or campaigning, provided the space has not already been reserved. To reserve any of these spaces for exclusive use, a request must be made to the Director of Conference and Events Services at www.uvm.edu/requestspace or by calling (802) 656-5665. All activities in these outdoor public venues are subject to restrictions designed to protect public safety and maintain University operations in accordance with the University's [Facilities and Grounds Use Policy](#). In addition, a political candidate or political organization using any University venue or facility may not state or imply that the University

endorses the candidate, organization, or any of their positions. **No political fundraising may be conducted at outdoor public venues.**

Outdoor Public Venues

- Royall Tyler Theater plaza
- Davis Center oval
- Davis Center outdoor stage area
- Bailey-Howe quad area
- University green area, south of the Ira Allen statue
- Waterman main (east) entrance plaza
- Waterman College Street (south) entrance plaza

Q. May political candidates or political organizations post campaign materials on UVM bulletin boards?

A. A number of bulletin boards on campus are considered public spaces and are available for the posting of notices, including campaign literature, by members of the public. Others, however, are for the exclusive use of University academic or administrative units, and campaign literature will be removed if posted on these bulletin boards. All public University bulletin boards are cleared regularly to prevent the accumulation of outdated material. The most commonly used public bulletin boards are on the first three floors of the Davis Center, beside the walkway between Morrill Hall and Bailey Howe Library, and behind Cook Commons.

Q. May candidates distribute campaign materials to employees or students through campus mail?

A. Only University administrative and academic units and University recognized organizations may use the University's non-USPS campus mail service in accordance with the University's [Use of Campus Mail and Letterboxes Policy](#). All campus mail must comply with requirements for size, weight, address placement, etc. established by the Print and Mail Center. University units and recognized organizations may send notices of authorized campus political events through campus mail. University recognized student organizations may send other political material through campus mail if it is accompanied by a disclaimer that the communication does not represent an endorsement by the University (Sample disclaimer: *"The University of Vermont does not endorse any political candidate or political organization, and the views expressed in this communication do not constitute an endorsement by the University."*) Individual employees or students must use the United States Postal Service to send political mailings to individuals on campus.

Q. May students, faculty or staff use UVM e-mail accounts to send or receive information about political candidates?

A. The general rule is that the University's E-mail system may not be used to support or endorse a political candidate or political organization. Although limited personal use of the University's E-mail system is permitted under the [Computer, Communication and Network Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), a user must distinguish personal views from those of the University, its programs, activities or operations with a disclaimer. (Sample disclaimer: *"The University of Vermont*

does not endorse any political candidate or political organization, and the views expressed in this communication do not constitute an endorsement by the University.”)

Examples of **prohibited** E-mail activities:

- A person using a logo, title, signature, or tag line that identifies a University unit (school, college, department, center, institute) may not use his/her University E-mail to distribute political campaign materials.
- A person may not use a University list-serve or mailing list to distribute E-mail endorsing a political candidate or organization.

Examples of **permitted** E-mail activities:

- A person using his/her University E-mail for personal use may send or forward information or personal views about a political candidate or organization if (1) there is no University logo, title, signature or tag line; (2) there is a disclaimer that the information or views do not represent an endorsement by the University (see sample disclaimer above); and (3) the use otherwise complies with the University's Computer, Communication and Network Technology Acceptable Use Policy.
- A University recognized organization, or a person acting on its behalf, may use University E-mail to send a communication announcing that a political event is taking place (e.g., time, place, format, speaker's name, sponsor's name, etc.) but may not use the communication to endorse a political candidate or organization. A disclaimer that the University does not endorse any political candidate or organization should appear prominently in the E-mail.
- A person may receive incoming political E-mail for personal use only if he/she complies with the University's Computer, Communication and Network Technology Acceptable Use Policy. That policy states that University computer resources may be used "for occasional and incidental non-University matters, except as otherwise prohibited by this or other University policy or when the use unreasonably interferes with academic uses, job performance, or system performance or operations." Wherever possible, a student or faculty or staff member should use a non-University E-mail account to receive and send information on political candidates or organizations.

Q. When may students, faculty or staff endorse a political candidate or political organization?

A. Generally, University officials, administrators, employees, or agents, may not endorse political candidates or political organizations when acting in their **official** capacity. Expressions of individual **personal** endorsement and support are permitted, but individuals should take steps to ensure there is no confusion about the circumstances of their endorsement. Students and University recognized student organizations may endorse political candidates or organizations under certain circumstances.

Examples of **prohibited** endorsement activities:

- University officials, administrators, employees or agents may not be identified by title or University affiliation as endorsing a political candidate or organization.
- University officials, administrators, employees or agents may not endorse or oppose political candidates or organizations in official institutional publications or at official functions.

Examples of **permitted** endorsement activities:

- University officials, administrators, employees or agents may endorse or support political candidates or organizations as long as they do so only in their personal capacities.
- The student newspaper may publish editorial endorsements of political candidates or organizations, provided there is a published disclaimer that the endorsement does not constitute an endorsement by the University.
- Student organizations that have official University functions and responsibilities (known as student governance organizations) may not endorse political candidates or organizations. Student governance organizations include the Student Government Association, Graduate Student Senate, Inter-Residence Association, Inter-Fraternity Council, and Pan-Hellenic Council.
- Recognized student organizations that are not student governance organizations may endorse political candidates or organizations if the endorsement is accompanied by a disclaimer that the endorsement is that of the student organization and does not constitute an endorsement by the University. The name and affiliation of a member of such a student organization may appear on a list of supporters of a political candidate.

Q. May a University recognized student organization conduct voter registration activities in connection with campaign activities?

A. In order to preserve the University’s tax exempt status, only non-partisan voter registration activities may be conducted at political events sponsored by the University, a student governance organization, or a third-party, which is held in University facilities. By definition non-partisan activities are those that do not link voter education or registration activities with campaign events in support of a particular candidate, party, or viewpoint.

However, there are times and places on campus where recognized student organizations that endorse political candidates, such as the Campus Progressives, College Democrats, and College Republicans, may conduct voter registration in connection with partisan campaign activities, provided it is made clear that these activities are not sponsored by and do not constitute an endorsement of the University. For example, reserved tables and public spaces may be used to distribute campaign literature in support of a particular candidate, party, or viewpoint, in conjunction with the conduct of voter registration.

Q. What political activities are permitted by University recognized organizations at reserved tables on campus?

A. Reservation of a table by a recognized student organization for the purpose of publicizing the election process or a political candidate, organization, issue, or event is not normally considered

a “political event” under the policy. **However, no political fundraising may be conducted at reserved tables.**

Examples of **permitted** campaign activities at reserved tables:

- Opportunities to sign letters-to-the-editor supporting individual political candidates or organizations.
- Distribution of candidate literature, signs, bumper stickers, souvenirs, and other campaign materials.
- Opportunities to contact public officials’ or candidates’ offices to express views on public issues as long as University computers or telephones are not used.
- Appearances of candidates in the vicinity of a table, as long as the candidate speaks only to individual students, faculty, or staff and does not attempt to make a speech to a larger audience. Use of a microphone, bull-horn, or other amplification devices by a candidate will indicate an intent to make a political speech and therefore constitute a “political event” under the policy and not just a tabling activity.
- Voter registration activities.

To reserve a table, a request must be made to the Director of Conference and Events Services at www.uvm.edu/requestspace or by calling (802) 656-5665. All activities conducted at a reserved table are subject to restrictions designed to protect public safety and maintain University operations in accordance with the University’s [Facilities and Grounds Use Policy](#).

Q. What constitutes “political fundraising”? Can University recognized organizations engage in political fundraising?

A. Political fundraising is the solicitation or collection of money or pledges of money for a political candidate or political organization. University units and University recognized organizations may not engage in political fundraising and may not contribute any of their University-derived funding to a political candidate or political organization.

Q. Does the prohibition on political fundraising apply to the sale of political souvenirs?

A. Books, t-shirts, and other campaign souvenirs or merchandise may be sold in connection with a political event or at a properly reserved table on campus only if the price charged for the merchandise does not exceed its retail value and the proceeds are not contributed to a political candidate or campaign.

Q. How can political candidates and political organizations recruit students to work on political campaigns?

A. The University encourages its students to learn about the political process in many ways, including first-hand experience on political campaigns. Political candidates and campaigns can recruit students for campaign activities a number of ways, including contacting students individually or through politically active student organizations (e.g., Campus Progressives,

College Democrats, College Republicans, etc.), posting notices on public bulletin boards on campus, or using University internship or volunteer clearinghouse resources.

When a University unit distributes a notice for a position on a political campaign, such as by e-mail or posting on a unit bulletin board or newsletter, the University must include a prominent disclaimer similar to the following: ***"The University of Vermont does not endorse any political candidate or political organization, and the distribution of this notice does not constitute an endorsement of this or any other political candidate or organization by the University."*** This posting should also make clear that the notice has been provided by the recruiting organization and all replies should go directly to the organization. Finally, the University unit must afford other political candidates or organizations the same opportunity for distribution of their recruiting notices, if requested.

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