



## POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND IDEALS

**Type:** University

**Category:** Ethics, Integrity, and Legal Compliance

**Administrator:** Vice President for Human Resources and University Counsel

**Manager:** Vice President for Human Resources and University Counsel

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### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to guide the respectful and lawful engagement in political activities at Viterbo University, balancing the institution's Catholic Franciscan values with its commitment to free expression, civic discourse, and compliance with tax-exempt regulations.

### Scope

This policy applies to all students, employees, and guests of Viterbo University.

### Policy

#### PREAMBLE: THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

As an institution of higher learning, Viterbo University is committed to the free expression of political views by members of the Viterbo community and the value of discourse and debate as an essential underpinning of a liberal education. An academic environment is an excellent place to examine critically ideas, to confront conflict and to make informed decisions. Viterbo, a Catholic, Franciscan institution, offers its students, staff, and the greater community, a supportive faith, values-based environment that is also dedicated to the importance of critical thinking and reasoning.

The exploration of ideas within the political environment shares some philosophical underpinnings with the freedom and responsibilities implied in artistic expression. In the Viterbo University Conservatory for the Performing Arts, the following pertinent passage is included within the mission:

*We will create an interdisciplinary, intercultural, Catholic and ecumenical community that fosters creativity, collaboration and open discussion, and that encourages the exploration of the values of human dignity and respect for the world through the arts.*

Still, extending hospitality within the context of a political environment, while staying within the legal, ethical, and civil boundaries, is not an easily definable task.



## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

In his Catholic Universities: Ex Corde Ecclesiae, the late Pope John Paul II wrote:

*By means of a kind of universal humanism, a Catholic University is completely dedicated to the research of all aspects of truth, in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God. It does this without fear but rather with enthusiasm, dedicating itself to every path of knowledge, aware of being preceded by him who is 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life'...*

Pope Benedict XVI shares a broader perspective for members of the Church who seek to promote Catholic Social Teaching:

*The Church...cannot and should not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.*

Benedict XVI (*Encyclical letter Deus Caritas Est*. #26, 2006)

Likewise, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference has published guidelines which equally calls for discourse. Regarding the teachings of the Church and the responsibilities of its members are encouraged to:

- Analyze issues for their moral and social dimensions;
- Measure policies against the values of the Gospel;
- Participate with other citizens in the debate over public policies; and,
- Speak out with courage, skill, and concern on issues involving human rights, social justice, and the life of the Church in society.

## VITERBO GUIDELINES FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The following guidelines and statement of philosophy are intended to provide direction, rather than absolutes, in dealing with political activities on campus.

Viterbo University as a tax-exempt institution is not permitted to sponsor campaign events for candidates for public office on campus or elsewhere. A "campaign event" is any event at which individuals are solicited to support a candidate for public office. Viterbo University is committed to activities that promote voter education and this institution not only permits but welcomes non-partisan voter registration activities on campus.



Depending on certain facts and circumstances, candidates may appear at Viterbo without jeopardizing the institution's 501(c)(3) tax exempt status if the University:

- Provides an equal opportunity to other political candidates seeking the same office.
- Has appropriately designated facility space, which is available at the designated time and date. Established rental fees will be assessed; any waiver will require approval of the University president.
- Does not indicate any support of or opposition to any candidate.
- Does not permit political fundraising to occur in conjunction with the speech.
- Strongly encourages appearances will be open to the general University community.
- Verbally or in written form, discloses the following: "The views expressed here today are solely those of the speaker and not of Viterbo University. The use of Viterbo facilities does not constitute an endorsement of any candidate for public office or of the views expressed. No fundraising is permitted at this event."

All political candidates, their supporters, and members of the campus community are asked to conduct themselves and their activities with a civility, respect, and hospitality consistent with the mission Viterbo promotes throughout the year in all the activities that take place on the Viterbo campus.

Examples of other permitted activities could include:

1. Preparing and distributed a compilation of voting records/guides.
2. Circulating unbiased questionnaires to all candidates.
3. Conducting a public opinion poll with respect to issues rather than candidates.
4. Participating in non-partisan voter registration activities.
5. Conducting institution-sponsored public forums.
6. Inviting candidates to appear in non-candidate capacity.
7. Conducting genuine curricular activities aimed at educating students.
8. Allowing established student groups to use institutional facilities.

Examples of prohibited activities include:

1. Endorsements—expressed or implied.
2. Commenting on specific actions, statements or positions taken by candidates.
3. Coordinating voter registration activities with campaign events.
4. Sponsoring events to advance the candidacy of an individual.