

Celebrating free speech at Arizona's public universities

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Arizona public universities have a rich history protecting and promoting free speech and expression on campus. In keeping with that tradition, the Arizona Board of Regents is proud to announce the inaugural **Regents' Cup** – a university-wide debate competition designed to encourage and enrich democratic engagement among university students.

During the day-long event in November 2019, students from ASU, NAU and UA will compete in rigorous debate anchored by mutual respect and civil discourse. This will truly be a celebration of the First Amendment and free expression.

Perhaps never has it been more needed on campus than now.

We've all seen the headlines cataloging a First Amendment under siege on too many university campuses across the country. Guest speakers booed off the stage (or physically prevented from taking the stage at all). Free speech constrained and corralled into special "zones."

The Arizona Board of Regents and university presidents firmly believe our campuses should be a marketplace of ideas, and that college should be a time of intellectual exploration. We believe students must be exposed to all manner of arguments and human thought (as uncomfortable as they may be) so that they can develop as critical thinkers.

We must provide our students a proper foundation for activity, participation, engagement and civil discourse, a foundation rooted in fundamental civic and constitutional knowledge about our liberal-democratic republic and its founding principles, history and legacy of debate. All three public universities have been awarded the highest rating for their free-speech policies by the **Foundation for Individual Rights in Education**, a non-partisan group devoted to protecting freedom of expression on campus.

The Regents' Cup is a living embodiment of each of these same ideals. Through this competition, students will sharpen their arguments, be exposed to different viewpoints and walk away better informed and prepared for life outside the classroom. The winning team will take home the Regents' Cup trophy, a proud symbol of free speech in the spirit of the Territorial Cup. Victors will also be awarded a scholarship toward their university education, and the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute will recognize the winning student team at its Legacy Luncheon event.

“The spirit of the Regents’ Cup is reflective of Justice O’Connor’s career – one that was epitomized by respect and civil discourse,” said O’Connor Institute Chief Executive Officer Sarah Suggs. “There is no better place to showcase the art of civil discourse than our nation’s college campuses, incubators for leaders of the future – in Arizona and throughout the world.”

I agree! Let us all gather for the Regents’ Cup – and may the best argument win!