

December 12, 2024

TO: Chancellors, Academic Deans, and Vice Provosts  
FROM: John Gipson, Chief of Staff to the Provost and  
Associate Vice President for Academic Operations  
RE: Guidelines on Interactions with Government Officials

The 2025 Indiana General Assembly and 119th United States Congress will begin meeting in January, so it is timely to renew our awareness of guidelines regarding legislative communications at the federal and state levels.

As the state's land-grant institution whose finances and operations are affected by federal and state legislative and regulatory actions, it is important that the University system speak with one voice when communicating Purdue's official *institutional* position on a given matter. This reflects long-standing policy that dates many decades, and it is true for individual faculty and staff members as well as for academic units. This memo will address each of these categories in turn.

### **Individual Faculty and Staff Members**

It is important for faculty and staff to be clear, when asked to provide their expert views on a given policy proposal, that such views are their own and do not represent those of the University. It is similarly important for faculty and staff to make the University aware when they interact directly with policymakers. This approach was recognized in a resolution approved by the University Senate as far back as November 1965, which clarified that "positions taken by individual faculty members are clearly their own and do not represent the official position of the University."

Consistent with this principle, the Office of Legal Counsel's guidelines on "[Providing Public, Expert or Fact Witness Testimony](#)" provide the following:

**2. Public Testimony on Behalf of the University.** *Faculty and staff members who are asked to provide public testimony on behalf of the University, their College or Department will be carefully prepared to do so and will have their testimony reviewed by the appropriate offices at the University. These offices may include the Office of their Dean, the Office of Government Relations, and the Office of Legal Counsel. If you plan to testify in a public forum, please contact the Office of Legal Counsel at [legalcounsel@purdue.edu](mailto:legalcounsel@purdue.edu) prior to your scheduled testimony.*

**3. Public Testimony in Individual Capacity.** *Unless specifically approved by the University to provide public testimony on its behalf, faculty and staff should take care to avoid any appearance that the testimony is given in their official capacity as an employee of the University. Any faculty or staff member providing public testimony in an individual capacity must clearly state that: (a) they are testifying in an individual capacity, (b) they are expressing their own personal views; and (c) they are not representing the views of Purdue University, their College or their Department. If you plan to testify in a public forum, please contact the Office of Legal Counsel at [legalcounsel@purdue.edu](mailto:legalcounsel@purdue.edu) prior to your scheduled testimony.*

Please note that “public testimony” includes not only attendance and speaking at committee hearings and other legislative session activities but also providing written communication to legislators and regulatory agencies. Although faculty and staff may describe their professional qualifications and positions at Purdue when communicating with federal and state policymakers, they should not provide their individual views on University stationery, and they should refrain from sending such communications using their *purdue.edu*, *pnw.edu*, or *pfw.edu* email account lest it lead to the confusion that the above guideline is intended to avoid. In no case should a faculty or staff member submit a communication to the legislature that expressly or implicitly (e.g., via a “Purdue University” signature block) indicates it is being submitted in the name of or on behalf of Purdue West Lafayette, Purdue Fort Wayne, or Purdue Northwest.

Individuals reporting through academic colleges or vice provost areas on the West Lafayette campus should also inform the appropriate dean or vice provost, copying [provost@purdue.edu](mailto:provost@purdue.edu), whenever public testimony on behalf the University is requested. Individuals employed at Purdue Fort Wayne or Purdue Northwest should inform the appropriate dean or vice chancellor whenever public testimony on behalf of the University is requested.

Please reach out to [legalcounsel@purdue.edu](mailto:legalcounsel@purdue.edu) if you have any questions about interactions with government officials.

### **Academic Colleges and Departments**

It is important to note that any statement purporting to reflect an official institutional position of Purdue on a social or political issue being debated in the public arena must be carefully considered in light of our [Policy on Institutional Neutrality](#). This policy, which was formally adopted by the Board of Trustees in June 2024 in accordance with the requirements of SEA 202 enacted by the Indiana General Assembly last spring, reflects longstanding Purdue practice going back many decades.

The importance of adhering to a policy of institutional neutrality is equally important when it comes to the leadership and groups within the academic and administrative units of the University. Toward this end, unit-level guidance on this topic will be forthcoming early in the Spring 2025 semester. In the meantime, I repeat below the caution and the directive provided by Provost Wolfe in the summer of 2023:

“Sometimes colleagues can forget that a statement coming from a head, dean, or other Purdue area leader risks giving the impression of an institutional statement.

“As an institution Purdue is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters and ‘guarantees all members of our University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn.’ Fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of our University’s educational mission. Faculty members, individually and collectively, can and should express their views on all manner of issues using non-institutional platforms and channels.

“However, statements issued on behalf of an academic department, college, or university as a whole may implicitly impair the academic and expressive freedom of those who might dissent from such statements. Accordingly, such statements should be made

sparingly if ever, and then only with the explicit advance approval of the Office of the Provost. Further, as you know, academic departments and administrative units should not issue statements about or take positions on pending [or enacted] legislation or pending litigation.”

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Subject to the guidelines articulated above on providing public testimony and related written communications with policymakers, nothing in this memo is intended to limit the ability of University community members to express their views as individuals; in fact, quite the opposite. We are rightly proud of our fulsome and robust defense of free speech, open inquiry, and academic freedom at Purdue and all the crucial ways in which it advances our educational mission.

We have an experienced team of government relations professionals at the state and federal level to support your efforts and those of the university. In addition to General Counsel, you may reach our Government Relations team members as follows with any questions or concerns.

State Government Relations:

Anne Hazlett ([achazlett@purdue.edu](mailto:achazlett@purdue.edu))

Federal Government Relations:

Deborah Hohlt ([debbie@indianagr.com](mailto:debbie@indianagr.com))