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CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

Policy 12.5: Political Activities and Engagement Policy



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Policy 12.5 Political Activities and Engagement Policy

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Clark Atlanta University ("CAU" or "the University") is committed to academic freedom, open inquiry, civic engagement, and the free exchange of ideas. The University encourages participation in the democratic process and supports educational activities that promote civic learning and informed discussion of public issues. However, as a tax-exempt institution under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, CAU must remain institutionally nonpartisan and may not participate or intervene in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for public office.

Consistent with its educational mission and applicable law, the University may permit political expression, candidate or elected official engagement, and other political or civic activities on campus. Permission for such

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activities is not automatic and remains subject to applicable University approval processes and requirements. Accordingly, **members of the University community and external organizations may not independently schedule, sponsor, host, or invite elected officials, candidates, political organizations, or politically related events on campus without complying with applicable University approval processes and requirements.** University resources, facilities, communication channels, and institutional authority may not be used to support or oppose a candidate, elected official, political party, or campaign organization.

Requests involving political activities will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis using viewpoint-neutral criteria. The University reserves the right to approve, deny, condition, modify, postpone, relocate, or terminate activities to ensure compliance with legal, operational, safety, and educational requirements.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the following individuals while on University-controlled property, using University resources, or participating in University-sponsored activities:

- Faculty
- Staff
- Students
- Vendors and Contractors
- Volunteers and Visitors

3. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This policy is guided by and intended to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, as well as relevant professional or technical standards, including but not limited to the following:

- Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3)
- Applicable Internal Revenue Service guidance relating to political campaign intervention, candidate and elected official appearances, voter education activities, and candidate forums.
- Federal and state election laws, as applicable
- Clark Atlanta University policies governing use of facilities, student organizations, communications, and campus events
- Applicable federal and Georgia laws protecting freedom of expression and association
- Applicable federal and Georgia laws governing charitable organizations, elections, and tax-exempt entities

4. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this Policy, the following terms have the meanings set forth below, as derived from and governed by this Policy:

- 4.1 Candidates for Public Office (or “Candidate”):** An individual seeking nomination, election, or appointment to a federal, state, local, or other public office.

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- 4.2 **Elected Official:** An individual publicly elected or appointed to a term of service at the Federal, state or local, or other public office.
- 4.3 **Institutional Endorsement:** Any statement, communication, action, use of University resources, or conduct that a reasonable person could interpret as indicating that Clark Atlanta University supports or opposes a candidate, political party, campaign, political organization, or ballot measure.
- 4.4 **Legitimate Educational Purpose:** A purpose that is reasonably related to the University's educational mission and tax-exempt purposes, promotes learning, scholarly inquiry, civic understanding, or public discourse, serves a public rather than private interest, and complies with applicable law and University policy.
- 4.5 **Lobbying:** Lobbying generally refers to efforts to influence legislation, governmental action, regulatory matters, or public policy. Lobbying is distinct from political campaign activity, which involves supporting or opposing candidates for public office. Certain lobbying, governmental relations, and public policy advocacy activities may be permissible under applicable law and University policies, provided such activities do not constitute political campaign intervention or otherwise jeopardize the University's tax-exempt status.
- 4.6 **Nonpartisan Educational Activity:** An event or activity conducted for educational purposes that neither favors nor opposes any candidate, political party, or campaign.
- 4.7 **Political Campaign Activity:** Any activity that supports, opposes, promotes, or seeks to influence the election or defeat of a candidate for public office.
- 4.8 **Political Expression:** The lawful expression of opinions, beliefs, or viewpoints regarding political issues, public policy matters, candidates, or elections.
- 4.9 **Political Organization:** A political party, campaign committee, candidate committee, political action committee (PAC), ballot initiative committee, or similar organization engaged in political advocacy or electoral activity.
- 4.10 **Political Rally:** A gathering, assembly, speech, march, meeting, demonstration, event, or similar activity intended to advocate for, support, oppose, promote, or generate public support regarding a candidate for office, elected official, political party, ballot initiative, political organization, or political cause.
- 4.11 **University Resources:** University funds, facilities, equipment, information technology systems, communication platforms, logos, trademarks, staff time, and other institutional assets.
- 4.12 **Viewpoint-Neutral Criteria:** Objective standards that are applied without regard to the political affiliation, political ideology, policy position, or viewpoint of a speaker, candidate, elected official, organization, or event sponsor.

5. POLICY REQUIREMENTS

5.1 Permitted Activities

CAU may support and facilitate nonpartisan educational activities that advance the University's educational mission, including:

- Voter education programs conducted in a neutral and nonpartisan manner;
- Voter registration initiatives that do not favor a political party or candidate;
- Educational forums discussing public issues;
- Debates or forums when conducted on a fair and nonpartisan basis and when all legally qualified candidates are provided a reasonable opportunity to participate;
- Academic discussion and research concerning public policy, government, elections, and civic engagement;
- Classroom presentations involving public officials, elected officials, or candidates when participation is related to the educational objectives of the course and not to campaign activity.
- Political expression, peaceful assemblies, candidate appearances, rallies, speeches, and forums may be permitted when approved under this Policy and when conducted in a manner that does not constitute institutional endorsement or prohibited political campaign intervention.

Members of the University community remain free to support candidates, political parties, or causes in their personal capacities, provided they do not imply University endorsement.

The University may permit candidates, elected officials, government representatives, advocacy organizations, and political organizations to utilize University facilities or participate in University events when doing so is consistent with the University's educational mission, operational requirements, and legal obligations.

5.2 Disclaimers

The University may require disclaimers in connection with political events, candidate appearances, rallies, speeches, educational programs, promotional materials, advertisements, websites, social media communications, and other communications where clarification of the University's neutral role is appropriate.

When there is a reasonable possibility that an individual's political comments may be associated with the University, the individual should clearly communicate that their opinions are personal and do not represent the views of Clark Atlanta University.

5.3 Facilities, Services and Fees

- 5.3.1 *Equal Access*: Candidates, elected officials, campaigns, political parties, political organizations, and sponsors of politically related events must comply with the same facility-

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use requirements, approval processes, and fee schedules applicable to other individuals and organizations seeking to use University facilities or resources for similar purposes.

5.3.2 *Fees and Charges*: All applicable fees, facility-use charges, security costs, staffing expenses, equipment charges, and other event-related costs will be assessed in accordance with the University's standard policies and practices. Fees may not be waived, reduced, subsidized, or otherwise adjusted for a political event unless the same exception is available to similarly situated individuals or organizations under applicable University policies.

5.3.3 *Use of University Resources*: No University employee, department, unit, student organization, or affiliated entity may commit University resources or authorize free or discounted use of University facilities or services for a politically related activity without the approvals required by this Policy.

5.4 Senior and Executive University Officials

Senior and executive University officials (i.e., Director, AVP, VP, SVP, EVP, President) acting in their personal capacities must exercise particular care to avoid creating the appearance that political views or activities are endorsed by the University.

5.5 Institutional Neutrality

CAU's approval of a facility reservation, campus event, speaking engagement, rally, candidate or elected official appearance, advertisement, or other activity shall not constitute an endorsement, sponsorship, support, or opposition by the University.

The University retains authority to take reasonable measures necessary to ensure that approved activities are presented in a manner consistent with institutional neutrality and applicable law.

6. PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

To protect the University's institutional neutrality and tax-exempt status, the following activities are prohibited unless otherwise expressly authorized by applicable law and approved through University processes:

- Endorsing or opposing a candidate, elected official, political party, or campaign on behalf of the University;
- Using University funds, personnel, equipment, facilities, or resources to support or oppose a political campaign;
- Publishing or distributing institutional communications that advocate for or against candidates for public office;
- Campaign fundraising conducted by or through the University;
- Political advertising in official University communications, publications, websites, or institutional social media accounts;
- Using University information technology systems to conduct campaign activities;

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- Displaying campaign materials in official University administrative offices, institutional spaces, or areas used to convey official University communications;
- Door-to-door campaign activity in residence halls or other University facilities;
- Creating or operating University-sponsored organizations whose primary purpose is to elect or defeat a political candidate;
- Any activity that could reasonably be interpreted as institutional endorsement of a candidate or political party.
- Using official University social media accounts or other institutional digital platforms to endorse, oppose, promote, or criticize candidates for public office or political parties;

7. POLITICAL RALLIES

Clark Atlanta University recognizes that political expression may include rallies, speeches, campaign events, educational forums, and candidate or elected official appearances. Such activities are not automatically prohibited and shall be reviewed individually under the standards established by this Policy.

Requests involving political rallies, candidate or elected official appearances, campaign events, political organizations, political parties, ballot issue campaigns, or similar politically oriented activities shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Approval of a request shall not constitute University endorsement, sponsorship, support, or opposition regarding any candidate, elected official, political party, political organization, campaign, ballot measure, or political viewpoint.

The University may approve, deny, condition, modify, relocate, postpone, or terminate events based upon viewpoint-neutral considerations, including, but not limited to:

- Compliance with federal, state, and local law;
- Compliance with Section 501(c)(3) requirements;
- Avoidance of actual or perceived institutional endorsement;
- Campus safety and security considerations;
- Availability of facilities, personnel, and resources;
- Potential disruption to University operations or academic activities;
- Operational and logistical considerations;
- Event management needs;
- Compliance with other University policies and procedures; and
- Whether adequate safeguards can be implemented to protect institutional neutrality.

The University may impose reasonable conditions on approved events, including disclaimer requirements, security measures, cost-recovery requirements, time, place, and manner restrictions, attendance controls, facility restrictions, operational requirements, and other conditions deemed necessary to ensure legal compliance and institutional neutrality.

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8. CANDIDATE OR ELECTED OFFICIAL APPEARANCES/REQUESTS

CAU recognizes that candidates for public office, elected officials, former public officials, government representatives, and political leaders may possess expertise relevant to academic, educational, civic, cultural, or public policy discussions.

Candidates and elected officials may be invited to participate in educational programs only when all of the following conditions exist:

- The event serves a legitimate educational purpose;
- The event is conducted in a nonpartisan manner;
- The University does not endorse the candidate;
- No campaign fundraising occurs;
- Appropriate steps are implemented to avoid actual or perceived institutional endorsement of the candidate, campaign, party, or political organization;
- The appearance is consistent with the University's educational mission and tax-exempt obligations.
- The appearance is consistent with applicable legal requirements and University policies;
- Appropriate institutional approvals have been obtained.

All requests involving candidates for public office or elected officials must be reviewed by the Office of the President, in consultation with the Office of Governmental Affairs and Community Relations, Office of the General Counsel, and other appropriate University offices.

Candidate appearances shall not be denied solely because an individual is seeking public office, is affiliated with a particular political party, or holds a particular political viewpoint. The University may nevertheless deny or condition a request when necessary to address legal, operational, educational, safety, scheduling, or institutional concerns.

9. FORUMS AND DEBATES

When the University sponsors, organizes, or hosts a forum, debate, panel discussion, or similar election-related educational activity, the event shall be conducted in a fair and nonpartisan manner consistent with applicable law.

The University, acting through the Office of Governmental Affairs and Community Relations, may establish reasonable participation criteria for such events based upon objective factors, including ballot status, office sought, event format, educational objectives, practical limitations, and applicable legal requirements.

10. STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

University-recognized student organizations may engage in political expression and political activities consistent with applicable law and University policies. Student organizations may also invite candidates, elected officials, political organizations, and advocacy groups to campus and may express support for

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candidates or causes in their own names, provided such organizations have obtained prior written approval from the Office of Governmental Affairs and Community Relations and such activities do not imply University sponsorship, endorsement, or support.

University-recognized student organizations engaging in partisan political activities must comply with applicable facility-use requirements, funding restrictions, and event approval procedures established by the University.

11. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

- **Review and Approval.** The University senior official directly responsible for leadership and oversight of governmental affairs and community relations, or designee, shall serve as the University's approval authority for requests governed by this Policy. Requests presenting significant legal, reputational, operational, or institutional concerns may be referred to the President for final determination. The University may consult with the Office of General Counsel, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Campus Safety, University Communications, and other appropriate offices before issuing a determination. No covered event may be promoted, advertised, scheduled, or conducted without any required University approvals.
- **Request Submission.** Requests involving candidates, elected officials, campaign representatives, political parties, PACs, rallies, or other partisan political activities must be submitted to the Office of Governmental Affairs and Community Relations as far in advance of the proposed event as reasonably practicable. The University may deny requests that do not allow sufficient time for review, planning, or compliance with applicable requirements.
- **Review Period.** The University will make reasonable efforts to review requests in a timely manner. The time required for review may vary depending on the nature, complexity, timing, and circumstances of the request.
- **Conditions.** The University may impose conditions necessary to ensure compliance with applicable law, the University's tax-exempt obligations, campus safety requirements, and University policies.
- **Approval Documentation.** Any approval issued under this Policy must be documented in writing by the University's approval authority or designee. Written approval may be communicated by letter, memorandum, email, or another University-approved method and may include conditions applicable to the approved activity.
- **Enforcement.** The University may deny, condition, modify, postpone, relocate, or terminate any event that violates this Policy, University policy, applicable law, or the conditions of approval.
- **Questions.** Questions regarding this Policy should be directed to the Office of Governmental Affairs and Community Relations.

12. RESERVATION OF AUTHORITY

Nothing in this Policy shall be interpreted to require the University to approve every request involving political expression, political activity, candidate or elected official engagement, or facility use.

The University retains discretion to determine whether a proposed activity is consistent with its educational mission, operational requirements, campus environment, legal obligations, and tax-exempt status, provided such discretion is exercised in a viewpoint-neutral manner.

13. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

13.1 Office of the President

- Provides final institutional oversight regarding candidate- and elected official-related requests.
- Ensures consistency with the University's mission and legal obligations.

13.2 Governmental Affairs and Community Relations

- Ensures institutional communications remain nonpartisan.
- Reviews public messaging related to candidate and elected official appearances as necessary.

13.3 Office of General Counsel

- Provides legal guidance regarding political activities and compliance with federal law.
- Reviews issues relating to Section 501(c)(3) requirements.

13.4 Student Affairs

- Oversees student organization compliance with applicable University requirements.
- Supports nonpartisan civic engagement activities.

13.5 Academic Affairs

- Supports academic freedom, scholarly inquiry, and educational programming consistent with the University's mission.
- Provides guidance regarding candidate and elected official appearances, classroom activities, debates, forums, and other academically sponsored events.
- Assists in evaluating whether proposed activities serve a legitimate educational purpose and comply with this Policy.

13.6 Faculty, Staff, and Students

- Exercise political rights in their personal capacities.
- Comply with University policies and applicable laws.
- Avoid creating the appearance of institutional endorsement.

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14. RELATED RESOURCES

- Internal Revenue Code §501(c)(3)
- Clark Atlanta University Facilities Use Policies
- Clark Atlanta University Student Organization Policies
- Clark Atlanta University Communications Policies
- Clark Atlanta University Code of Conduct

15. POLICY HISTORY

Version	Action	Date
1.0	Adopted as New Policy	October 7, 2026
