aaup Penn
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

November 15, 2026

Statement on the October 2026 Draft Open Expression Guidelines

Open expression, including the right to assemble, speak, and protest, is fundamental to education and to democracy itself, and Penn is at a critical juncture in a long fight between expression and repression. The next stage of that fight is unfolding now, and it is essential for us all to join it. The defeat of the open expression guidelines proposed by the administration in the spring was a victory for organizing on campus: as we noted at the time, those proposed guidelines would have represented a significant erosion of academic freedom and shared governance on campus.

As a result of campus-wide protest and mobilization, the proposed guidelines were scrapped, and the authority to draft new guidelines was returned to the Committee on Open Expression (COE). A coalition of campus groups, including graduate student research and teaching employees (GETUP-UAW), postdocs and research associates (RAPUP-UAW), librarians and library workers (AFSCME DC47 Local 590), cultural workers (AFSCME DC47 Local 397), and medical interns and residents (CIR/SEIU Local 1957), united to draft four principles that are necessary to ensure robust protection of genuine open expression at Penn.

There is broad and strong agreement among the members of AAUP-Penn that the new draft guidelines, written by COE, fall short of the principles broadly endorsed by members of the University community. We also note that, despite this draft having been produced by COE rather than the Provost's office, the process by which these proposed policies were produced remains tilted towards the predetermined outcome of restricting speech on campus. COE is not a broadly representative or democratically-elected body; the committee's work was inherently influenced by pressure to produce a document acceptable to the administration; and even under these conditions the administration reserves the right to unilaterally weaken this draft before it becomes policy. **It is now essential that the entire university community makes its voice heard in shaping the future of open expression at Penn**. The publication of the draft guidelines by COE is not an end but a starting point; we encourage all stakeholders across campus to read the draft guidelines along with their history, and to speak out about the importance of protecting open expression.