

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

Since October 7th, we have successfully hosted dozens of rallies, protests and educational dialogues concerning highly controversial and deeply personal opinions regarding the events in the Middle East. Today there was a protest in Dunn Meadow that required us to balance our commitment to free speech activities with the need to ensure safety and security for our campus community.

As an institution that vigorously upholds free speech, we actively protect the free and civil exchange of ideas, including peaceful protest, as many participated in today.

Yesterday we became aware that a student group had announced a planned rally in Dunn Meadow with internal and external groups seeking to occupy the university space indefinitely through erection of tents and stockpiling of provisions for multiple days. In reviewing guidance from a 1969 Board of Trustees policy, there was a provision that stated that tents would need to be removed at 11 pm in compliance with university policy that prohibits overnight campus ground occupation. This same policy includes a clear provision that the provost can pull together an ad hoc committee at any time to address specific changes that may be needed to the policy. Last night, the provost charged this committee to make recommendations that would best enable us to balance free speech and safety in the context of similar protests occurring nationally. The committee affirmed the right of peaceful protest, with the additional recommendation that temporary or permanent installation of structures in Dunn Meadow (including, but not limited to posters, tents, etc.) at any time must be approved in advance by the university and, if approved, adhere to the guidelines provided by the university.

The change was posted online and at Dunn Meadow this morning, and participants were told repeatedly that they were free to stay and protest, but that any tent would need to be dismantled. Given the expectation of a high number of external participants, Indiana State Police was brought in as a law enforcement partner. Once prohibited structures were removed, the protests continued peacefully and, in fact, are continuing at the time of this writing.

As we watched similar events unfold on numerous campuses around the country and prepared for today's rally, we thoughtfully considered the best course of action for IU with the safety of our community being foundational to our decision. We know that not all will agree with the course of action, but this was made through careful deliberation. Our university must create space for meaningful dialogue, while ensuring that our campus is safe and welcoming to all, and that peaceful protest, as many experienced today, symbolizes our steadfastness to the free expression of ideas.

Sincerely,

Pamela Whitten, President of Indiana University
Rahul Shrivastav, Executive Vice President and Provost, IU Bloomington