

Election Season FAQ's 2026

Because of its status as a constitutional, nonprofit, state agency, the University cannot endorse or be seen as endorsing, or as taking a position on, partisan matters. Here are some commonly asked questions surrounding this topic.

May University faculty/staff endorse political candidates in their individual capacities?

Yes, however, the faculty/staff member must not give the impression that their endorsement is the University's endorsement, e.g., by using their title in a way that indirectly suggests official University endorsement, by using University letterhead, by using the University email system with their official title and signature block to solicit someone's vote. See BOR Policy Endorsement Prohibited and Internal Revenue Code rulings regarding partisan activities by not-for-profit entities. The University will be engaging in prohibited activity contrary to its tax-exempt status if it publicizes or distributes written or oral statements on behalf of or in opposition to a political candidate. An example of such prohibited activity would include the President of the University sending a letter on University letterhead recommending that individuals vote for a particular candidate.

May a University employee use their OU email account to discuss political candidates and positions?

Yes, OU email accounts may be used in a minimal amount, i.e., de minimis, to express personal political views and personal thoughts on political candidates in an unofficial manner or as part of the University employee's employment function, e.g., scholarly work. However, if the OU email account is being utilized to run a political campaign, fundraiser for a candidate or political committee, or give the impression that the University officially supports the candidate or political position, this is prohibited activity under University policy and could jeopardize the University's tax-exempt status. See Oklahoma Ethics Rules 2.4, 2.14, 2.15, 2.16, BOR Policy Advertising and Promotion Policy and Acceptable Use Policy and the Internal Revenue Code prohibitions on partisan activities by not-for-profit entities.

May a faculty/staff member use University property or time to solicit, or to receive, or to accept funds for a candidate, political party, political action committee, state question campaign, or to influence the results of a campaign?

No. There are very limited exceptions regarding a matter directly related to the University's mission, academic freedom, or freedom of speech. See Oklahoma Ethics Rules 2.3, 2.4, 2.14, 2.15, 2.16, and BOR Policy Academic Freedom and Responsibility Policy.

Why can University officials use University resources and their positions to articulate support for or opposition to certain pieces of legislation?

University administrators are prohibited from soliciting a person's vote or fundraising for a candidate; however, legislative liaisons and other University officials have responsibility for evaluating the effects of certain proposed or existing legislation and communicating with governmental officials on the University's behalf. When a piece of legislation would positively or negatively impact the University, University officials may articulate an official University position. However, those empowered to do so on behalf of the University are limited to its executive officers, governmental relations personnel, and Regents.

May University faculty/staff use University resources to fundraise for a political candidate? No. See Oklahoma Ethics Rules 2.4, 2.14, 2.15, 2.16, and University's Fundraising Policy, and BOR Individual Conflicts of Interest Policy and University's Political Meetings Policy prohibiting the use of University resources to fundraise for political candidates, as doing so could jeopardize the University's tax exempt status and violate the Oklahoma constitutional provision against the extension of the credit of the state.

May a University employee run for political office?

Yes, however, they cannot utilize University resources to promote their election campaigns. See Oklahoma Ethics Rules 2.4, 2.14, 2.15, 2.16, BOR Candidates for Political Office Policy. However, those running for a county, state, or federal elected office must either (1) resign, or (2) must receive approval from the Candidacy Review Committee and the President/Board of Regents and take an unpaid leave of absence from the University during their candidacy. If the employee is elected to such office, they must resign from the University before taking office unless an exemption is granted, e.g., the position furthers the University's interests and can be managed to avoid conflicts of time and resources. BOR Individual Conflicts of Interest and Candidates for Political Office policies. Although these rules do not apply to those running for nonpartisan municipal office, candidates for municipal office likewise must not use University time or resources to run their campaign or fundraise using University resources or ask their subordinates to contribute to or assist with their campaigns. See Oklahoma Ethics Rules 2.4, 2.5, 2.14, and BOR Individual Conflicts of Interest and Candidates for Political Office policies.

May political candidates distribute written materials on campus?

Yes, political candidates may distribute leaflets on campus in outdoor open public spaces with limited restrictions on game days and other special events and may not do so in violation of other University policy, e.g., by creating a discriminatory hostile environment. See Political Campaigning and Other NonUniversity Events on Game Days or Major Event

Days

https://www.ou.edu/content/dam/AdminFinance/documents/game_day_campaign_policy_2018.pdf

and

<https://www.ou.edu/scheduling/policies>

Additionally, candidates may purchase advertising space in University-related marketing materials/locations at standard market rate. See BOR Advertising and Promotion and Purchasing and Advertising policies.

Political candidates may not place or attach political signs on structures or on landscaped property, or over other existing signs, and may not chalk on University property. See Oklahoma Ethics Rule 2.7 and BOR Advertising and Promotion and Purchasing and Advertising policies.

and Expressive Activity Policy:

<https://oupolicy.policystat.com/policy/20439583/latest/>

Political candidates may rent University space to host events, e.g., engage in debate or activities, but may not fundraise in University facilities. See Oklahoma Ethics Rule 2.8. For additional information, please see: <https://www.ou.edu/resources/expressive-activity-on-campus>

May student organizations host events at the University to fundraise for political candidates on campus?

No. Any form of fundraising for political candidates is prohibited whether sponsored by a University faculty/staff member or by a student/student organization utilizing University property. See Facility Use Policy for University Departments, Registered Student Organizations and Individual OU Students:

<https://www.ou.edu/content/dam/scheduling/docs/Univ.%20Facility%20Use%20Policy.pdf>.

However, as noted below, student organizations may invite candidates as guest speakers.

May a Registered Student Organization host a political candidate as a guest speaker?

Yes, political RSOs may be provided facilities on the same terms as other (nonpolitical) RSOs for campus-related (nonpolitical) activities. See Facility Use Policy for University Departments, Registered Student Organizations and Individual OU Students:
<https://www.ou.edu/content/dam/scheduling/docs/Univ.%20Facility%20Use%20Policy.pdf>

May faculty, staff, or students deface, remove, kick, or tamper with political signs or messaging on University property?

No. Only those individuals with University authority (e.g. Facilities Management, Student Affairs, or those directed by personnel or policy to remove their own materials) may manage the placement or removal of signs and messaging. Any tampering would be considered violations of the University's Faculty and Staff Handbooks, Student Rights and Responsibilities Code, and the Expressive Activities Policy, resulting in potential discipline up to and including termination and dismissal.

May faculty (or staff) require students (or employees) to register to vote, vote in a certain manner, support a certain candidate, or cause, or obtain preferential treatment (including but not limited to extra credit) for attending political/free speech events, voting, etc.?

No. See OK HB3700 (2026); BOR Academic Appeals and the NonDiscrimination policies and the First Amendment which include the right to vote and/or not to vote and no requirement that one reveals how they voted or participated in political or free speech activities.

Faculty may (to the extent it relates to their syllabi and approved curriculum) require coursework about elections, registration, or the civic process as academic content. However, grades must be based solely on academic criteria and not based on the student's or speaker's/event's expressed viewpoint. For example, offering extra credit for students in a class related to the political electoral process to attend any one of a number of political events would be permissible. It would be impermissible to deny extra credit (or diminish the amount of credit) based on the political event attended (e.g. an extra 10 points to attend one political party's event vs. another party; or, granting an excused absence to attend a protest but deny an excused absence to those not wishing to attend or to those who wish to counterprotest).

May faculty (or staff) take an adverse action against a student (or employee) solely based on that person's political viewpoint and that is unrelated to any academic or other performance issues?

No. See OK HB3700 (2026); BOR Academic Appeals and the NonDiscrimination policies and the First Amendment which include a person's right to vote and/or not to vote and no requirement that one reveals how they voted or participated in political or free speech activities. However, where an employee or student disrupts University classroom delivery or University operations because of their behavior (not based on their protected expressive activity), they may be appropriately disciplined (e.g. reprimanded, removed from the classroom, referred to Student Conduct, etc.). For example, if a student in a Math course disrupts class-time by talking over the professor about their political views, the professor may ask the student to stop and/or leave the classroom.