

From: [Office of the MSU Provost](#)
Subject: Reminder about our responsibilities as a public employee
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MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost

Dear Faculty and Course Instructors,

As we approach the November election, I am writing to provide you a reminder to be mindful about our roles and responsibilities as public employees and our responsibility to our students as scholars and teachers. This issue is articulated in the Montana Board of Regents' policy regarding academic freedom and is repeated in the MSU Faculty Handbook. As described in [Board of Regent's Policy 302](#): *"Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject."*

Specifically, for faculty instructors at Montana State University this means that if contemporary politics have not clearly been part of the course curriculum throughout the semester, then it is inappropriate for political discussions to suddenly become "relevant" to the course in the days surrounding the election. Expression or demonstration of political bias diminishes the ability of an instructor to do their job and to effectively advance the university mission, which makes no differentiation among students on the basis of political persuasion. Instructors should stay within the bounds of their curriculum and course learning outcomes. At MSU, we value creating a civil, supportive and respectful environment where difference and diversity are sources of strength.

The Board of Regents policy is augmented by the [Montana Commissioner of Higher Education's directive on political activity of public employees](#), which highlights Montana state law, MCA 2-2-121(3), and its specific prohibitions: *"Public officers and employees may not use public time, facilities, equipment, supplies, personnel, or funds to solicit support for or opposition to any political committee, the nomination or election of any person to public office, or passage of a ballot issue."* The Montana University System is open to, and funded by, citizens of every conceivable political leaning. Our employees should conduct themselves while on the job with the understanding it is their obligation to treat all political persuasions equally.

We recognize the intersection of the First Amendment with academic freedom is complex. To learn more about how these issues impact our work and to participate in a discussion with your peers, I invite you to attend the Center for Faculty Excellence faculty forum: [Freedom of Speech, Academic Freedom and First Amendment Rights of](#)

[Public Employees](#) – Oct. 22, 9:00-10:00am.

This forum will be led by myself as well as Tracy Ellig, Vice President of University Communications and Kellie Peterson, MSU Legal Counsel. You can register for the event and submit questions beforehand at this [link](#).

Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob".

Dr. Robert L. Mokwa | Executive Vice President and Provost
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