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Guiding Principles for Civic Advocacy by Medical Students and Prospective Applicants

Group on Student Affairs

Association of
American Medical Colleges

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Washington, D.C.

This document was created by the Group on Student Affairs and is intended to aid both learners and institutions in considering how to engage in and support student advocacy to eliminate police brutality and systemic racism and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. All content reflects the views of the Group on Student Affairs and does not reflect the official position or policy of the Association of American Medical Colleges unless clearly specified.

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Introduction

The following guiding principles and resources were developed by the AAMC Group on Student Affairs (GSA) and were supported by the Organization of Student Representatives (OSR). The goal is to aid both learners and institutions in considering how to engage in and support advocacy to eliminate police brutality and systemic racism and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion for all. This document offers guidance for medical students and prospective applicants as they participate or consider participating in civic advocacy.

Safely Exercising First Amendment Rights

- Follow basic safety guidelines for participating in public protests:
 - Tell someone when and where you are going and let them know when you return.
 - When possible, go with a friend or loved one.
 - Develop the awareness to recognize and remove yourself from a situation before, or as a last resort when, a situation turns violent or puts you at legal risk.
 - If you're with a group of friends or peers, watch out for each other.
 - Practice social distancing, wear a mask, and wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer frequently.

- Several trusted organizations have released free guidelines for safely organizing and/or participating in peaceful protests and exercising your first amendment rights:
 - https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/SafelyDuringProtest_F.pdf
 - <https://www.consumerreports.org/coronavirus/how-to-stay-safe-while-protesting-during-a-pandemic/>
 - <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/06/05/870306050/coronavirus-faqs-how-to-stay-safe-while-protesting-when-to-go-out-after-recovery>
 - <https://wustl.edu/about/compliance-policies/governance/demonstrations-disruption/>

- In addition to the general principles above, follow the standard COVID-19 safety precautions as much as possible and consider both your personal risk and the risk to your family, roommates, cohort, and patients before participating in public protests. For example, if you live with an older parent or a family member or roommate who is immunosuppressed, find other ways to engage. If you participate in public protests, practice social distancing, wear a mask, and wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer frequently.

Understanding Legal and Professional Considerations

- Familiarize yourself with the local and state laws where you are protesting.
- Educate yourself about the variations in requirements for applying to medical schools or residency programs of interest as well as those for applying for licensure. Different states have different licensing requirements, particularly around what is reported and considered in criminal background checks. Contact information for state medical boards is available on the [Federation for State Medical Boards \(FSMB\) website](#). It is important to understand what is and might be asked of you at each of these points both in centralized applications and by the individual institutions or programs.
- Take this opportunity as a student and aspiring healthcare professional to learn about relevant institutional policies and the potential implications, positive and negative, of engaging in different types of protest and advocacy. If you have questions about the policies or need help locating them, contact your student affairs office.
- Consider how your engagement in different forms of activism or advocacy reflects your developing professionalism. Commitment to equity and advocacy, cultural humility, and humanism – these are all important elements of professionalism that you can demonstrate through protesting and other expressions of your first amendment rights. As those in the privileged role of physicians in training, advocacy in this context can lead to impactful and meaningful change on behalf of patients. With this, however, comes increased public scrutiny that reflects not only on the individual, but also the profession as a whole.

To this end, being accountable for your decisions and behavior and watching out for your peers' safety and well-being are also means of demonstrating professionalism. In addition, keep in mind that freedom of speech does not equal freedom from all social or professional consequences for what one says, does, or writes. With the ubiquity of social media, be mindful that actions can have a lasting record that can follow a person's professional career. As a general litmus test, one's behaviors or generalized speech while lawfully protesting should be something they would feel comfortable repeating in front of their dean/student affairs staff.

Balancing Educational Responsibility and Obligations with Advocacy and Activism

- Situate your advocacy and activism - whether at the personal/patient, community, or societal level - in the full context of your educational development and professional identity formation. Advocacy is a key skill and responsibility for a healthcare professional but focusing on advocacy and activism at the cost of learning the other knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to be a capable physician may ultimately be self-defeating. Think about how your advocacy and activism inform and might be informed by other aspects of your education and development.

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- Consider other actions you can take to further your own development and understanding of the historical and current context of social injustices. The AAMC has compiled several [resources](#) to better understand systemic racism, social injustice, and the impact on health and medicine.
- Be mindful about how you're balancing your time between activism and your school responsibilities. If you are called to increase your engagement in activism and advocacy, speak with your student affairs/educational affairs dean about how this might affect your educational progress.

Representing Yourself versus Representing Your School

- As noted above, familiarize yourself with your school's relevant policies. Your student affairs dean can be a resource both for explaining the policies and the implications of engaging in different types of advocacy and activism.
 - If you are planning an activity on school or hospital property or using institutional resources, the student affairs office can help you identify what can and cannot be done, the implications of using school or hospital resources and how to use them appropriately and responsibly, and also help you with any permissions, permits, etc. that you need to obtain.
 - If you are planning an activity independently, know your school's policies and how they might still apply even if the activity is done on your own time and/or with your own resources.
 - Take responsibility for learning the policies of your school and be accountable if you intentionally or unintentionally violate one of those policies or local or state laws. This is also an aspect of professionalism.
- The privilege of wearing the white coat comes with responsibilities. When you wear your white coat, you are representing your school and your profession. Respect the symbolic power of the white coat and its representation of the aspirational virtues associated with medicine – humility, compassion, integrity, accountability, ethics, and humanism.