

# Poster Policy Recommendations from CAFCE

As part of our charge, CAFCE has been asked to review MIT policies where they about free speech. To assess the poster policy, we examined photos of posters from around the Institute and attempted to apply the policy. This exercise resulted in the recommendations below; these recommendations apply to the working and teaching spaces on campus, not the dorms. We suggest that the administration charge the names or offices in **red** to implement these recommendations.

## Local control

In attempting to apply the policy to various examples, there was a lot of confusion around who owns what space and what are the local rules. As one member put it “I don’t have a clear understanding of what type of expression airspace I’m in at any given point on campus.” In addition, it was unclear what kinds of rules DLC’s are allowed to implement.

**Recommendation [OGC]:** Clarify what is meant by “not inconsistent with” for locally controlled spaces. The committee felt that there are cases where DLC’s should be able to loosen the rules in keeping with the spirit of the policy e.g. DLCs may wish to:

- Permit posters about outside conferences in areas related to their disciplines.
- Take an expansive view on contact information (e.g. a poster in CSAIL posted by CSAIL probably doesn’t need a phone number or an email address).
- Present DLC statements, values, or decorations

Note that this list is meant to be illustrative of the types of reasonable posters that DLC’s may wish to allow and it is not intended to be comprehensive.

**Recommendation [Comms in collaboration with facilities]:** Information needs to be provided about which rules apply where. This should include:

- A publicly available online map, linked to the poster policy, that indicates which areas are locally controlled by which DLC’s and what are the local rules in each area. The map should also clearly indicate what is “publicly accessible space.”
- Labels on poster boards to indicate who operates them and which rules apply.
- Local DLC policies should all be posted online centrally (i.e. at a single location) and linked to the poster policy.

## Office doors

**Recommendation [OGC]:** Include a carve out for office doors (i.e. people may post on their own doors). In addition to personal offices, this should include offices like the UG Offices, HQs, UROP Offices, etc. Content on office doors are subject to local-control rules. For shared offices,

anything on the door should be agreed upon by everyone in the office. Rules for doors do not apply to the residence halls which are governed by the Residence Hall Policy.

## Instructional signs

**Recommendation [OGC]:** Amend the policy to allow for “instructional” or “direction” posters (e.g. “Go this way for X” or “Leave packages at Y” or “No food or drink in the lab”). Instructional posters should follow the appropriate local or institute rules including contact information and posting date, depending on their location.

## Flags and banners

Some care must be taken with banners and flags because “large” formats in prominent places run the risk of signaling that MIT advocates or promotes particular views.

**Recommendation [OGC]:** Change “... large banners and flags ...” to “... large banners and large flags ...” In addition, we may wish to define “large” in the policy (e.g. greater than approximately 11 x 17 inches).

**Recommendation [senior admin]:** Clarify who gives permission for large displays in commonly use areas (e.g. lobby 10, lobby 7, Killian Court, etc.); these approvers may be different people/offices for different spaces (e.g. tabling in lobby 10 may be controlled by a different group than those approving banners on outdoor facades). This information should be posted online and linked to the poster policy.

An additional complication around granting permission for large displays is that if the community sees a large display, they have no way of knowing whether MIT granted permission or whether it is a rogue display. (Perhaps the online map could indicate special permissions/exceptions.)

## Enforcement

In general we prefer policies to be based on principles, but in practice this can be challenging. Although the poster policy is not based on principles, we appreciate that it empowers facilities to easily and objectively identify what violates the rules; in practice, facilities can remove most prohibited posters without relying on an adjudicating body. For the few cases that require adjudication, the Rapid Response Team (or something similar) seems to be appropriate. The committee hopes that “enforcement” does not become an enormous task where committees are adjudicating what stays up and what comes down.

**Recommendation [???]:** Create a (possibly centralized) resource for reporting violations (e.g. have an option to include in the report a photo, location, and type of violation). The creation of this new resource should include knowledge and potential integration of existing resources.

**Recommendation [CAFCE]:** Develop a strategy for communicating, both to the person who put up the poster and to the community, *why* something was removed. It is important for the community to know that often it is not the content that is in violation of our policies; rather the violation may be around “time, place, manner.” In developing this strategy CAFCE should carefully weigh the trade-offs between the practicality of implementation, the culture of our campus, and the importance of providing accurate information to the community.

## General comments

A number of people commented that there seems to be a wide gap between the aspirations of the policy and what campus actually looks like. It may be worth thinking about what kind of campus we would like to have. Many people said that they like the “controlled chaos” of the MIT environment and would like a little more leeway than the current policy provides; others said that they prefer the tidier look that emerged after the poster policy was put in place.

It was also noted that the first sentence of the policy suggests that the policy is about publicly accessible spaces in the main block: “... this policy sets forth rules for the use of bulletin boards and similar posting/display spaces in centralized locations on the MIT campus that are accessible to the public, ...” However, the policy actually describes a much more expansive set of rules for every kind of non-permanent display all over campus. This may be confusing and we suggest that the scope of the policy be clarified upfront and remain consistent throughout.

**Recommendation [OGC]:** Include a philosophical preamble to explain that this policy is intended to articulate appropriate time/place/manner constraints for posting; the policy is designed to be easy to implement and is meant to guide every-day posting. For issues regarding content there are other resources that should be brought to bear such as the [Harassment Policy](#), [Personal Conduct and Responsibility](#), and the [MIT Values Statement](#).

## CAFCE endorsement

These recommendations are endorsed by the following members of the CAFCE committee:

- Peko Hosoi
- Mike Sipser
- John Jones
- Suzy Nelson
- David Randall
- Ezra Zuckerman Sivan
- Jay Wilcoxson
- Lily Tsai
- Armando Solar-Lezama
- Gabrielle Girard
- AJ Miller
- Angie Jo

Dissenting opinions:

- None

Abstentions:

- Paula Hammond
- Karl Reid