# **Student Perceptions of Campus Free Speech Survey**

**Project Overview**

UW-Stout’s Menard Center for the Study of Institutions and Innovation (MCSII), which focuses on free speech and other civil liberties, is funding a survey this spring semester to be conducted by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS), a unit of the University of Wisconsin System. WIPPS will collect and analyze survey responses from undergraduate students at the thirteen UW campuses.

This is a critical and timely project because the campus free speech climate is increasingly debated with an eye toward policy change or legislative action. In recent years the debate has reached new heights as it diverges across political lines. UW Regent Policy 4-21 “Commitment to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression,” which was adopted at a meeting on the UW-Stout campus in 2017 amid a student silent protest, emphasized the importance of freedom of expression and academic freedom. However, it has been subject to partisan disagreement also. To this point, views on all sides of the debate have been based largely on personal experiences and anecdotes, and to a lesser extent selected national surveys, rather than in-depth, UW-specific data. This project aims to begin filling that gap.

The survey will include items that address the following questions. What do students know about First Amendment free speech rights? How much do they value these rights? How much do students value viewpoint diversity? Do they perceive problems in viewpoint diversity at their campus? Do students self-censor? If so, is for fairly innocuous reasons (we all engage in some self-censorship) or do they stay silent out of legitimate fear of formal punishment? Have students witnessed or experienced formal sanctions or punishment for constitutionally protected expression? To what extent do student perceptions vary with demographic factors such as their political party affiliation, gender, and race/ethnicity?

A research team of free speech experts and survey design experts will compose the survey items, which also will be vetted by other state and national experts. A bi-partisan Advisory Board will review the survey and survey final report prior to their releases and assist in promoting survey participation.

The project will proceed in five stages. Stage One (February) will encompass project organization, literature research, and discovery. Stage Two (February and March) will include survey design and testing. Stage Three (April and May) will focus on marketing and distribution of the survey. Stage Four (May and June) will center on analyzing and interpreting trends in the data. Stage Five (June) will involve creating and disseminating an executive summary and detailed report of the findings.

The goal of the project is to provide previously unavailable, highly relevant information to interested parties to better inform discussions about potential changes to policy or law.