



**Wisconsin Conference of the
American Association of University Professors**

Statement on Proposed Revisions to Chapter UWS 17

August 13, 2019

In October 2017, the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents adopted [Regent Policy Document 4-21](#), which prohibits “misconduct that materially and substantially disrupt[s] the free expression of others” and “[p]rotests and demonstrations that materially and substantially disrupt the rights of others to engage in or listen to expressive activity.” RPD 4-21 specifies a mandatory punishment regime for students found to be in violation of those prohibitions—a one-semester suspension for a second violation, expulsion for a third—and the Board of Regents now seeks to bring the Wisconsin Administrative Code into line with its own policy by [amending Chapter UWS 17](#).

AAUP Wisconsin opposes the mandatory student punishment measures found in RPD 4-21 and urges that the proposed modifications to Chapter UWS 17 be rejected. Far from ensuring safe spaces for free expression, the policy institutes a targeted speech suppression regime aimed at curbing student protest. The policy’s broad wording virtually ensures highly selective enforcement. The net effect will be a chilling of free expression on campus, precisely the opposite of the policy’s ostensible goal.

The policy’s history points to its highly partisan and political nature. In June 2017 the Wisconsin Assembly passed [AB 299](#), a bill based on [model legislation](#) from the conservative Goldwater Institute that sought to regulate student protest under the guise of protecting free expression on campus. The bill died in committee in the Wisconsin Senate. The Regents nonetheless chose to enact much of AB 299’s content as Regent policy in the form of RPD 4-21. The proposed amendments to Chapter UWS 17 thus must be understood as part of a nationwide partisan policy agenda, one that ill serves our public universities.

In the interest of preserving free expression for students throughout the UW System, we urge the rejection of the proposed changes to Chapter UWS 17 and the rescission of RPD 4-21.