

Campus Expressive Activities: What Event Planners Need to Know About Protocols and Procedures

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For more information:

https://students.gatech.edu/freedom_of_expression

Implementation is a collaborative effort between Georgia Tech Police Department, Office of General Counsel, and Student Engagement & Well-Being. Consultation with other cabinet areas and departments takes place as needed.



Two of Georgia Tech's Strategic Values

Conflict versus Congruence

We thrive on diversity.

We see diversity of backgrounds and perspectives as essential to learning, discovery, and creation. We strive to remove barriers to access and success, and to build an inclusive community where people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to learn and contribute to our mission.

We safeguard freedom of inquiry and expression.

We protect the freedom of all members of our community to ask questions, seek truth, and express their views. We cherish diversity of ideas as necessary for learning, discovery, scholarship, and creativity.



Student Engagement and Well-Being

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Freedom of Expression



Online Resource:

https://students.gatech.edu/freedom_of_expression

6.5 Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom



- “USG and its institutions shall foster an environment where all members of the USG community are free to share ideas and opinions, even those that some may find offensive. Ideas and opinions should be openly and freely debated and discussed, both inside and outside of the classroom, without fear of suppression or reprisal. The USG community should promote intellectual debates, not close them off, and must uphold the values of civility and mutual respect while doing so... Individual members of the USG community shall not attempt to prevent or otherwise interfere with the free expression of others, no matter how objectionable they may find the expressed ideas or opinions.”

Source: University System of Georgia, Board of Regents Policy Manual, <https://www.usg.edu/policymanual/section6/C2653>.

From Section III.D. of *Georgia Tech Procedures for the Use of Facilities & Spaces*:

Expressive Activity or Expression – means communicative conduct or activity protected by the First Amendment, such as public speeches, demonstrations, marches, protests and picketing, and the distribution of literature, as well as other forms of symbolic expressive activity, including signs and banners; however expressive activity does not include ordinary, day-to-day conversations among members of the campus community or commercial speech/activity.

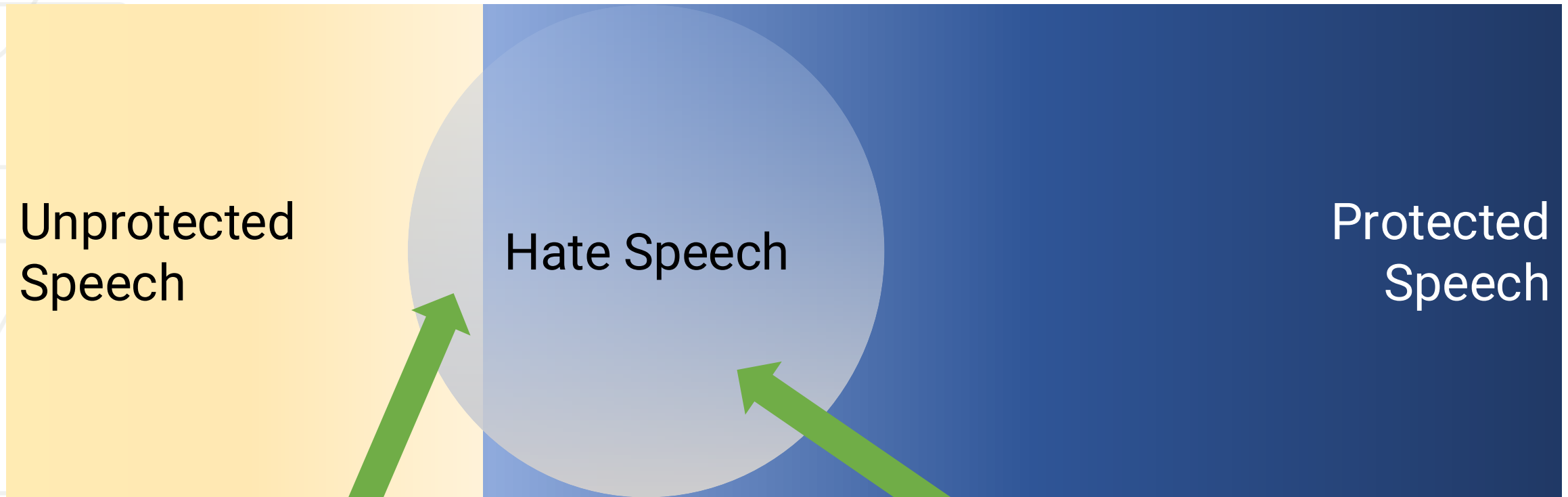


Expressive Activity

Examples of expressive activity:

- Public lectures and performances
- Peaceful assemblies, boycotts, marches, picketing, protests or rallies
- Leafleting or handing out flyers
- Carrying placards or posters
- Circulating petitions
- Expressive conduct (i.e., symbolic speech), defined as nonverbal activities that communicate ideas:
 - Armbands
 - Clothing
 - Burning the US flag

Hate Speech



Violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibits discrimination, including harassment, based on race, color, national origin, or shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics) – *again, there is quite a high bar to support a finding of discrimination*

(refer to <https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/employment/equal-opportunity-nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy>)

Guaranteed by US Constitution 1st Amendment, 14th Amendment and by Georgia State FORUM Act (HB1)

Additional Considerations

- Students have broad rights with regard to freedom of association and freedom of expression
 - So do Registered Student Organizations (RSO's)
- Colleges and cabinet areas, as well as departmentally-sponsored student organizations, must engage in expressive activity consistent with parameters established by the Institute and by the University System of Georgia
- While faculty have academic freedom rights related to their teaching and research (which has boundaries), Georgia Tech may restrict expressive activities employees made on behalf of the Institute and in the course of fulfilling their roles/responsibilities
 - Faculty and staff have free speech rights when acting as individuals, e.g., social media
 - Legal rights may not be the same managing optics, role modeling Institute strategic values, etc.



Initiatives & Strategies

- Promote awareness regarding policies & procedures via FASET, VPSEWB Newsletter, and other communication pathways:
 - Released *Interim Campus Use Procedures for Unrestricted Outdoor Areas* on June 1, 2023
 - Updates made April 30, 2024: banners prohibited; camping disallowed
 - *Georgia Tech Procedures for the Use of Facilities & Spaces* published and promulgated August 1, 2024
- Conduct training for event planners (initial session June 2024; ongoing by request)
- Freedom of Expression Committee (formerly ad hoc work group) appointed October 2023
 - 1.0 FTE staff person designated July 1, 2025
- Prepared and disseminated optional modules for inclusion in GT 1000/2000/6000 course sections
- Coordinate a team of **volunteer observers** to support expressive activity at indoor and outdoor events:
 - Volunteer observers will be on-site (by request for indoor events) to provide relevant support and consult with OGC and/or GTPD as needed
 - GT Police Department will have officers nearby (in either uniform or plain clothes) to be available as warranted but will be less visible otherwise
- Partnership with **Constructive Dialogue Institute**:
(<https://constructivedialogue.org/higher-ed/campus-wide>)
 - Asynchronous, online course *Perspectives* is required of all new/incoming students as of Fall 2025
 - Synchronous workshops for students hosted by Belonging & Student Support



Minimizing Disruption at Educational Events

- Identify your target audience and develop an invitation, communication and outreach strategy that aligns accordingly.
 - Minimize extending invitations broadly to the public unless that is a core purpose of the event.
- Require registration prior to the event and check ticketing at the door prior to entry.
 - Recommend that the registration request the following information: (a) name; (b) affiliation, e.g., GT student/faculty/staff, alum, guest; (c) GT ID, if applicable; and (d) email.
 - Additional questions could include: (e) how did you hear about this event; and (f) what do you hope to learn from this event.
- Ensure all event support staff have training on applicable GT policies regarding freedom of expression, the student code of conduct, etc.
- Secure coverage by a plain-clothes officer from GTPD or local law enforcement as appropriate.
 - Develop a plan for how event support staff can quickly contact the officer, who should be in close proximity to timely respond to disruption if needed.
- As appropriate and/or as needed, request coverage ASAP by one or more professional staff observers through the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement & Well-being

Minimizing Disruption at Educational Events

- Limit/restrict use of recording devices at the event
 - Minimizes exposure on social media
 - Oftentimes is a condition of many VIP speakers before they will appear on campus
- Provide a statement on the event program that indicates expectations for behavior.
 - *Sample Language: One of [Georgia Tech's strategic values](#) states, "We safeguard freedom of inquiry and expression." Attendees should be aware that impeding another individual's rights to free speech – including those serving as speakers at this event – is not protected expressive activity. Please note that individuals who disrupt this educational event may be subject to removal. Students who disrupt this event may also be referred for disciplinary action under the [Georgia Tech Student Code of Conduct](#). Please help us promote a learning environment based on civility and mutual respect. Attendance at this event constitutes an agreement to the sponsoring department's use and distribution of the attendee's image and/or voice. No recording is permitted at the event.*
 - This can also be conveyed verbally at the start of the event before the program begins, as well as included in the registration confirmation page or email.
- Develop and visibly post signage around and at the entrance to, as well as in the venue, reminding participants of their rights and responsibilities.



Resources for Support

Where to Seek Assistance

- **Students** who need a psychologically safe space to process their reactions and feelings can:
 - Email vp_sewb@gatech.edu;
 - Stop by the Dean of Students Office in Room 210, Smithgall Student Services Building (Flag Building) during regular business hours or call (404) 894-2565;
 - Contact the [Center for Mental Health Care & Resources](#) (After-Hours: call 404-894-2575 and select the option to speak to the after-hours counselor); or
 - Visit Belonging & Student Support in SSB 1st floor: <https://belonging.gatech.edu/>
- **Faculty and staff** can contact the [Employee Assistance Program](#):
 - Call 24/7 by dialing 1-844-243-4440 or
 - Visit [Acentra's website](#) (use *Company Code USGCares*)

****If you believe your physical safety is in imminent danger, please call 911 immediately.****

Where to Report a Concern

If you believe freedom of expression is being violated:

- **Faculty:** Contact Kyla Ross, Assistant Vice Provost for Advocacy and Conflict Resolution, at kyla.ross@gatech.edu
 - [Conflict Resolution and Advocacy](#)
- **Staff:** Contact GTHR's Employee Relations office at employee-relations@ohr.gatech.edu, email your college/divisional Human Resources Representative
 - [Employee Relations](#)
 - [Office of the Ombuds](#) (<https://www.gatech.edu/ombuds>)
- **Students:** Contact the Dean of Students Office at vp_sewb@gatech.edu
 - [Dean of Students Help Request](#)

The University System of Georgia also offers an [Ethics & Compliance Reporting Hotline](#) (Ethics Line) for use by any members of the USG community.

Role of the Volunteer Observer



To attend an activity/event and observe from a distance without participating

To alert GTPD to any situation that may become disruptive, violent, or otherwise a threat to the safety and welfare of GT community members

To serve as a potential educational resource for students, staff, and faculty who are present and may be experiencing distress during the event

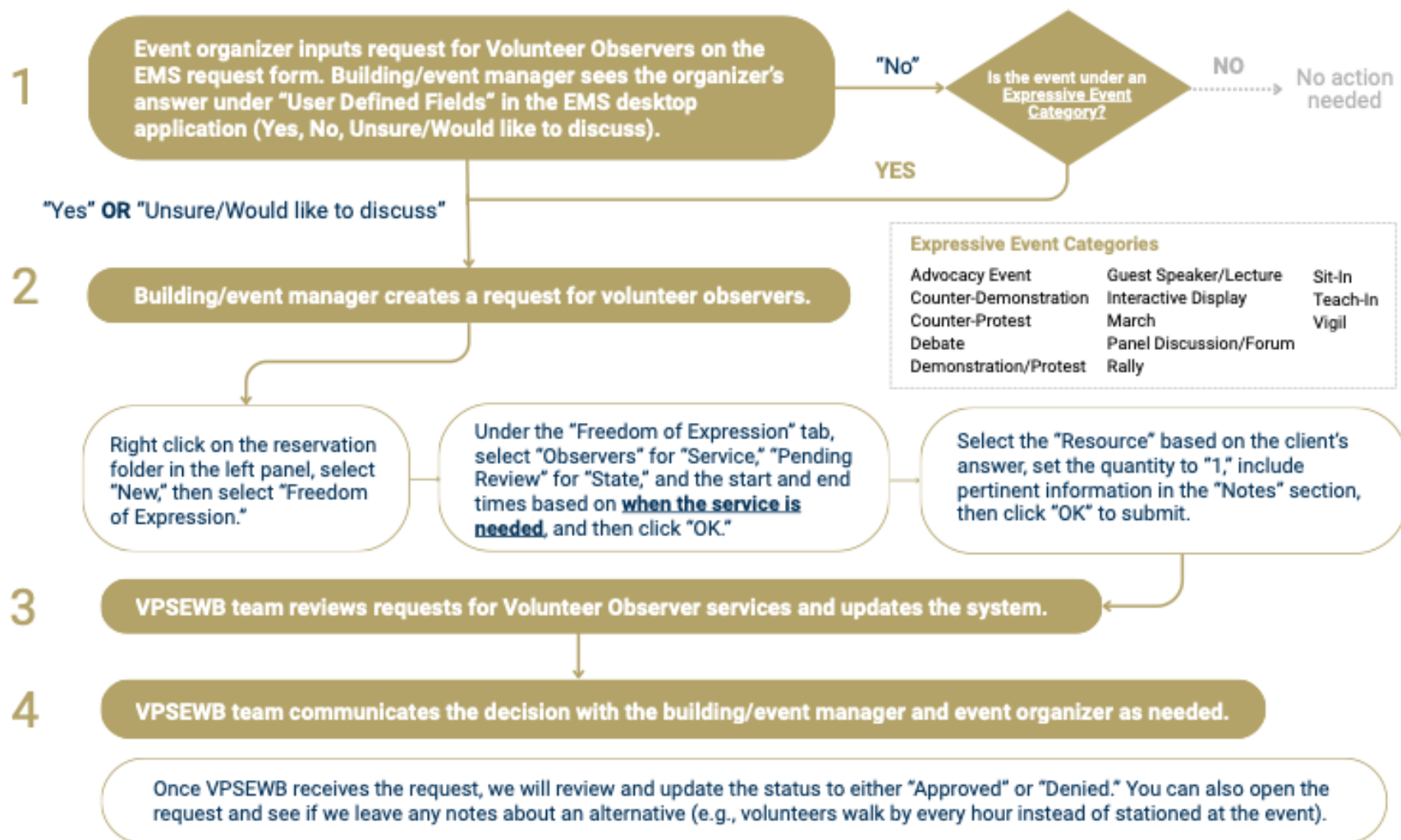
To provide referrals to students, staff, and faculty as needed

To document expressive activities, in the event of an inquiry or investigation in response to a complaint or concern

Freedom of Expression Volunteer Observer Request Process

Step-by-Step Guide for EMS ("GT Events")

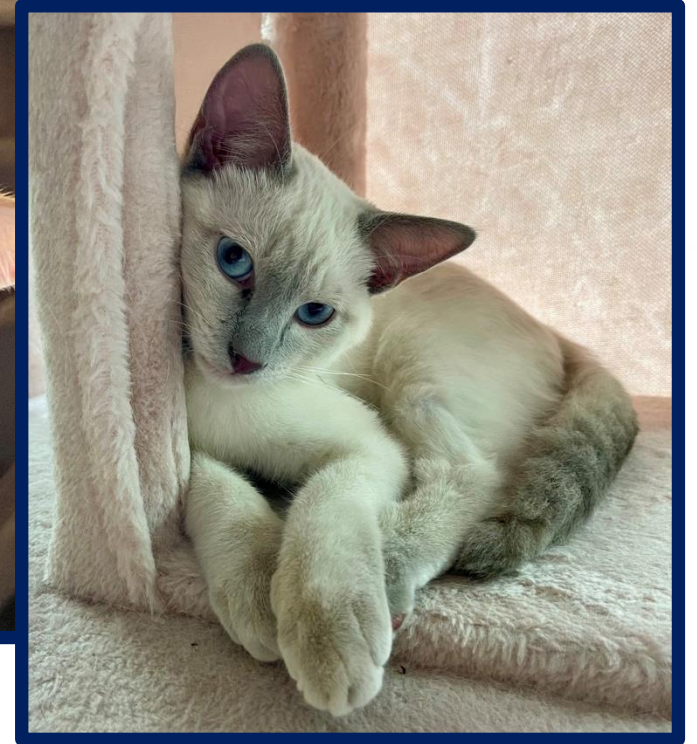
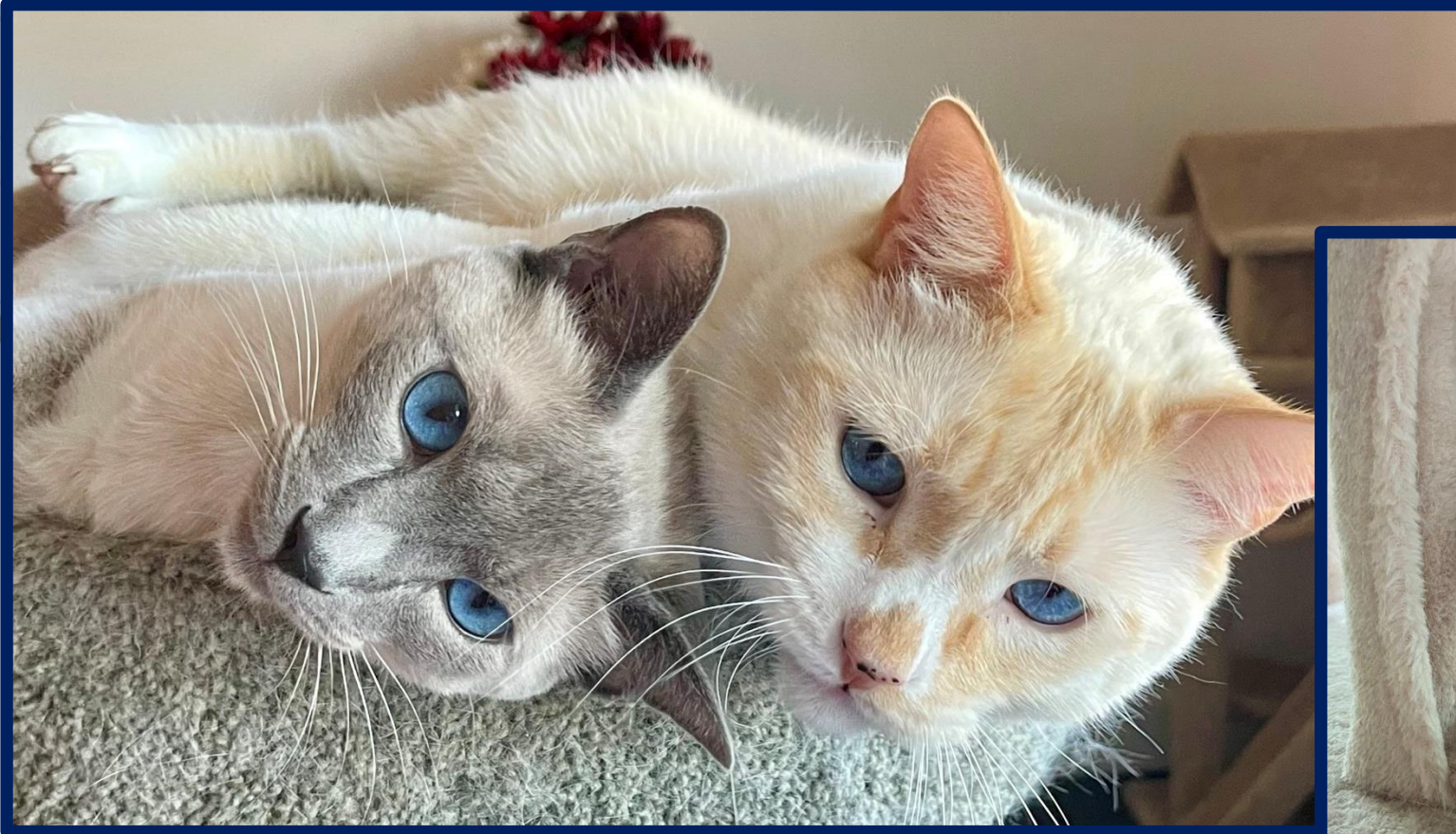
Updated on 4.10.2026



Questions? Email vp_sewb@gatech.edu.



Student Engagement
and Well-Being



Questions??

For a copy of this slide deck, please email
vp_sewb@gatech.edu.