

September 9, 2004

Hey Jane!

"I'm not sure if I should put up a poster about a political rally on my office door. Should I?"

Jane says:

Fabulous question! As with any question, it depends on your institution, rank, and departmental culture. These are some things you may want to think about.

* Who would care what you put on your door? Who will notice? Colleagues? Students? Administrators?

* Of those who notice, are they likely to say anything? In some contexts, others might not even notice. In other contexts, it could be a big deal that everyone notices and comments on and could really thrust you into the limelight. This could be positive (you totally rock!) or negative (you pinko commie!). If it is about a particularly thorny issue, those who disagree, such as students, might feel you are creating a hostile environment.

* How would you respond to a negative comment? One response is that professors do not check their rights as citizens when they come into work. (The key here is that it is on a faculty door, not in a departmental sponsored bulletin board.) Think about if you are willing to take a stand for this particular view against those who may disagree.

* What is the "door culture" in your department/on your campus? Do others hang such items on their doors? If so, then you might feel free to do the same. If political views are not expressed, then don't do it.

For example, at a research intensive school, doing this as a junior faculty may be a politically unwise move. Juniors are supposed to be doing research and publishing, that's it. If you have time for a political rally, then you are not "working hard enough"! Faculty might put up political posters if they somehow relate to sociology as a profession or academic freedom. Senior faculty could get away with it if they were studying social movements.

A second example – if you are in a Women's Studies department or politically active Sociology department, you might be encouraged to post political posters. You might be expected to keep abreast of various political causes affecting your population of interest (e.g., children, women, GLBT, workers) and you can demonstrate this by hanging posters.

Caveat to all professional advice: always check with your department/chair/dean to find out what the norms are in your institution

I hope this helps! Stay tuned next month for Question 2!

-- Jane

