

Campus Voices Need More Than Conversation

Student groups at DePauw exist—but many say activism lacks consistency and visibility

By Abigail Marin May 1, 2026

At DePauw University, student life is often described as vibrant, diverse and full of opportunity. From comedy clubs to academic organizations, campus groups offer spaces for connection and expression. But when it comes to visible, sustained social activism, some students say that energy feels inconsistent—and at times, absent.

That raises a broader question: Is DePauw truly active on social issues, or are students mistaking presence for impact?

Student organizations centered on identity and advocacy do exist. Groups such as Concerns for Latinx Communities (CLC) and the African American Association for Students (AAAS) create important spaces for dialogue and representation. But some members say discussion does not always translate into action.

“I wish our school was more active with events,” said Riley Giles, a freshman and AAAS member. Giles added that the organization is “not so much about issues that Black students face.”

Similarly, CLC member Jackie Gervarcios said she values the community the group provides but feels something is missing. “I enjoy CLC—it’s a very fun organization,”

Gervarcios said, adding that the group does not always engage with current events or broader social issues.

For many students, that gap between conversation and action is where the problem lies. Having organizations on paper is not the same as building a culture of activism. Without consistent programming, demonstrations or engagement with real-world issues, these groups risk becoming symbolic rather than impactful. Some students argue the issue is not a lack of interest, but structural barriers. Nathaly Martinez, a senior in Omega Phi Beta Sorority Inc., said her organization—whose philanthropy focuses on domestic violence awareness—has not held a march since 2023.

“It’s been hard to do something like this on campus and also have the guts to do it,” Martinez said.

Her comment points to a broader challenge: organizing activism often requires navigating approvals, logistics and institutional limitations. For student leaders, especially when addressing sensitive or political topics, that process can feel discouraging.



Internal challenges also play a role. Gabe Egan, a junior who leads the LGBTQ+ organization House of Opulence and previously helped run a Democratic Socialist student group, said leadership disagreements made sustaining the organization difficult.

“Many people had conflicts on what to do next or how to run things,” Egan said. “So it made it difficult to continue.”

These perspectives suggest that activism is not absent because students do not care. Instead, it is often limited by time constraints, organizational challenges and institutional processes.

Still, some students believe those explanations do not fully address the issue.

At other universities of similar size, student activism is more visible and consistent. Campuses such as the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign regularly see student-led demonstrations tied to national and global issues. While those actions sometimes bring tension with administration, they also reflect a willingness to organize and speak out.

At DePauw, that level of visibility remains rare.

The issue is not just about the number of organizations, but their consistency. Groups such as BASED and Feminista exist, yet some students say they are not consistently organizing around current events. When activism becomes occasional rather than ongoing, it can lose momentum—and with it, its influence.

Some students argue that more structured, action-oriented organizations could help address that gap. Groups grounded in collective action or community organizing, they say, may provide clearer direction and sustained engagement beyond one-time events.

Others caution that increasing explicitly political activism could create division. A liberal arts environment, they argue, should prioritize open dialogue rather than advocacy tied to a specific ideology.

Those concerns are valid. A campus should remain a space for diverse perspectives, and activism should not silence opposing viewpoints. However, avoiding activism in the name of neutrality can also lead to disengagement.

Social activism, when done thoughtfully, does not eliminate dialogue—it strengthens it. It encourages students to think critically, organize responsibly and engage with issues beyond the classroom.

DePauw appears to be at a crossroads. The foundation for activism exists, but many students say it lacks the consistency and support needed to grow. Organizations are present, and student interest is there. What remains uncertain is whether that interest will translate into sustained, visible action.

If the university aims to foster engaged learning, students say it must create an environment where activism is not only allowed but supported. That could include simplifying event approval processes, encouraging collaboration between organizations or providing clearer institutional backing for student-led initiatives.

“On our campus, we protest a lot,” said Emily Amezcua, a sophomore at the University of Illinois and a member of La Casa. She said the group organizes “know your rights” workshops and encourages students to exercise free speech.

Her experience raises a final question for DePauw: What would it take to build that same culture of engagement? Because without action, even the most meaningful conversations risk fading into silence.