

C-8. ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY

The Board of Trustees has adopted this policy in order to establish and clarify the rights and responsibilities of the faculty and students with respect to academic freedom, a concept which the American Association of University Professors (the “AAUP”) describes in the following manner: “Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning. It carries with it duties correlative with rights.”

Academic freedom is central to the University’s core mission which includes providing “quality and diverse educational opportunities” by fostering and supporting “an environment conducive to teaching, research, scholarship, and collaboration.” Since endorsement of the 1915 Declaration of Principles by the AAUP, academic freedom has generally been viewed with an emphasis on two core components: the freedom of the teacher to teach and the freedom of the student to learn. Consistent with the Board of Trustees’ statutory mandate as well as the AAUP’s stated position that “institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole,” the University’s policies concerning academic freedom are designed, implemented, and enforced in a manner that benefits the common good through the furtherance of the University’s mission.

The University shall maintain an environment of instruction and learning that is independent from political fashions, passions, and pressures. In order to foster and support an environment that is conducive to teaching, research, scholarship and collaboration, students and faculty must be allowed to freely converse about matters relevant to their personal and professional acumen, and the freedom of speech guaranteed to all under the United States Constitution must be preserved and respected. At the institutional level, the University should be operated in a manner that is respectful of opposing viewpoints as they may relate to the academic mission of the institution. The University will not create, condone, or tolerate any environment where student learning is administered in a manner that is hateful, threatening, demeaning, dehumanizing, indecent, discriminatory, or intolerant of, or that incites violence or any other illegal action against, any person or group of persons.

Each faculty member is entitled to full freedom in research and in the truthful publication of the results of such research, subject to the satisfactory performance of the faculty member’s other academic duties and compliance with all applicable laws, University policies, and academic and professional ethics including the duty to ensure that research and its results are not misleading. Each faculty member is also entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing subject matter relevant to the subject being taught, but faculty members should be careful not to introduce controversial matters that are not reasonably related to the subject being taught, and matters in which such faculty member has no special competence or training and in which, therefore, such faculty member’s views cannot claim the authority accorded statements such faculty member makes about subjects within areas of the faculty member’s field of competence; *provided, however*, that in no event will adverse employment action be taken for any classroom speech that is protected by the United States Constitution or any other applicable law.

As members of a learned profession responsible for shaping the knowledge and lives of their students, faculty members inherently hold a special position and level of influence within their communities – both when acting in their official capacities with the University as well as when acting as private citizens. Faculty members shall be free from institutional censorship or discipline when speaking or writing in their capacities as private citizens; *provided, however*, that faculty members must make every effort to indicate that they are speaking or writing as private citizens when doing so in such capacity, and

faculty members should at all times strive for accuracy, exercise appropriate restraint, and show respect for the opinions of others.

Along with its commitment to ensuring the academic freedom of the University faculty, the institution is equally committed to ensuring the academic of freedom of students in learning. Students must be allowed to take reasoned exception to the data or views of others, including those of faculty and other students, and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, in each case without threat of censorship or discipline by the institution or its faculty. Like faculty, students should exercise their freedom with responsibility and with an understanding that neither their rights to academic freedom nor the exercise of such rights will excuse the student's responsibility for learning the content or completing the work required with respect to any course in which the student is enrolled. While each student is responsible for satisfying the applicable standards of academic performance established for each course in which he or she is enrolled, the University will ensure that orderly procedures designed to protect students against, and to investigate alleged instances of, prejudiced or capricious academic evaluation are available to students at all times.

Consistent with the commitments to academic freedom expressed in this policy, the Board of Trustees also hereby affirms its commitment to freedom of thought and freedom of expression to the fullest extent protected and guaranteed under the United States Constitution and other applicable law. Notwithstanding this commitment, within both the University community as well as within society as a whole, these rights are not absolute: speech that is libelous, slanderous, unlawfully harassing or that incites rioting is neither protected by the United States Constitution nor other law and will not be protected or tolerated at the University. Further, in accordance with applicable law and the University values, as expressed in the Auburn Creed and otherwise, all members of the University community are expected to support and maintain an environment that ensures equal opportunity to pursue learning for all members and participants of the University.

ADOPTED: April 16, 2021