

Academic Freedom

What Is It?

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Many definitions of academic freedom



The PHI BETA KAPPA *Society*





*Academic freedom is the principle of freedom of expression for **scholars** engaged in **discipline-related** teaching, learning, research, publication and service.*





*[A]cademic freedom is the right of **faculty members**, acting both as **individuals** and as a **collective**, to determine without outside interference: (1) the college curriculum; (2) course content; (3) teaching; (4) student evaluation; and (5) the conduct of scholarly inquiry.”*





The Freedom
to Write

*Academic freedom . . . refers to the rights of professors **and students** to exercise full freedom in their research, publications, and teaching, as well as the right to free expression of ideas in extramural contexts.*





*1915: Academic freedom [for faculty] comprises three elements: freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and **freedom of extramural utterance and action.***



Accreditor Standards

- Protecting the institution from **outsiders**
- Preventing meddling **inside** the institution
- Affirming free inquiry



Protecting from outsiders

- Five of the seven former regional accreditors have a related standard (examples follow).
- Of the other 33 other accreditor standards reviewed, I saw none.



Protecting from outsiders - example 1

*The governing board. . . protects the institution from **undue influence** by external persons or bodies.*



Protecting from outsiders - example 2

*The institution operates with **appropriate autonomy** governed by an **independent** board or similar authority. . .*



Preventing insider pressures

- Requiring faculty *leadership* on academic matters.
- Requiring *consultation* with faculty.



Affirming free inquiry

Some mention of academic freedom or free inquiry is included in the standards of:

- . All of the former regional accreditors.
- . Five of the six medical accreditors.
- . Three of the five religion-based accreditors.
- . None of the other 22 agencies.



Affirming free inquiry - example 1

The institution maintains, publishes, and adheres to policies on academic freedom.



Affirming free inquiry - example 2

The institution protects and fosters academic freedom for all faculty regardless of rank or term of appointment.

The institution is committed to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. It assures faculty and students the freedom to teach and study, to examine all pertinent data, to question assumptions, and to be guided by the evidence of scholarly research.



Affirming free inquiry - example 3

*A published statement of academic freedom and adherence to its principles **within the context of the institutional mission.***

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ABA 2024 policy

- **Protect** academic freedom for all faculty, library staff, etc.
- Research, publishing, school governance, teaching, etc.
- Process for reviewing claims of violation.
- Campus speech provisions also.



“A culture of free and vigorous inquiry”

Universities should be expected to provide the conditions within which hard thought, and therefore strong disagreement, independent judgment, and the questioning of stubborn assumptions, can flourish in an environment of the greatest freedom.



Discussion

- What is your definition of academic freedom?
- What confuses you about academic freedom claims?
- What, if anything, should the accreditor role be?
- Where have you seen “academic freedom” invoked in controversies, and what is your perspective?

