

Academic Freedom and the Assessment of Student Learning

Academic freedom principles grant crucial rights to our faculty for teaching and research, and we play a role in upholding these rights. Although not explicit, assessment is included in academic freedom. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), a collaborator on the revisions of the 1940 *Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure*:

Faculty are responsible for establishing goals for student learning, for designing and implementing programs of general education and specialized study that intentionally cultivate the intended learning, and for assessing students' achievement. In these matters, faculty must work collaboratively with their colleagues in their departments, schools, and institutions as well as with relevant administrators. Academic freedom is necessary not just so faculty members can conduct their individual research and teach their own courses, but so they can enable students—through whole college programs of study—to acquire the learning they need to contribute to society. (AAC&U, 2006, para 3)

Outcomes Assessment Academic Freedom Checklist			
Consider the following questions. "Yes" responses ensure academic freedom is upheld.*			
1. Are assessment efforts driven by faculty?	Y	N	N/A
2. Do assessment experts educate, guide and coordinate those efforts?	Y	N	N/A
3. Are faculty free to contribute to plans, to analyze measures, and discuss uses and voice their opinions?	Y	N	N/A
4. Did faculty identify learning outcomes and create plans to ensure that students are meeting them?	Y	N	N/A
5. Does the campus's requirements associated with assessment provide flexibility for disciplinary differences?	Y	N	N/A
6. Do the learning outcomes or the assessment of learning help the faculty accurately represent the methods, aims, and subject matter of their scholarly community?	Y	N	N/A
7. Do the models or approaches generate faculty discussion that inform pedagogy and curricular revision?	Y	N	N/A
8. Is the institution's definition of academic freedom being followed?	Y	N	N/A

* N/A (not applicable) may apply, for example, when a campus does not have an assessment expert(s) on campus, a scholarly professional organization has established learning outcomes necessary for licensure, a campus has only one discipline (e.g., a law school).

An Overview of Academic Freedom and Related Considerations

American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges (AACU)

1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure:

- Institutions are conducted for the common good (the search for truth and ideas) and not for an individual faculty or an institution.
- Academic freedom applies to teaching and research which advance the truth based on freedom, rigor and accountability (AACU 1940) (Byrne, 2006)
- Protection is tenure: terms and conditions of every appointment should be stated in writing and be in the possession of both the institution and teacher before the appointment is finalized.
 - AAUP has consistently stated that all faculty (included untenured) should be afforded the rights and responsibilities of academic freedom.

Academic freedom includes the following rights and duties

- 1) Faculty members have the right to pursue chosen research topics and to present their professional views without the imposition or threat of institutional penalty for the political, religious, or ideological tendencies of their scholarship, but are subject to fair professional evaluation by peers and appropriate institutional officers.
- 2) Faculty members have the right to teach without the imposition or threat of institutional penalty for the political, religious, or ideological tendencies of their work, subject to their duties to satisfy reasonable education objectives and to respect the dignity of their students.
- 3) Faculty members may exercise the rights of citizens to speak on matters of public concern and to organize with others for political ends without the imposition or threat of institutional penalty, subject to their academic duty to clarify the distinction between advocacy and scholarship.
- 4) Faculty members have the right to express views on the educational policies and institutional priorities of their schools without the imposition or threat of institutional penalty, subject to duties to respect colleagues and to protect the school from external misunderstandings. (Byrne, 2001, pg. 584-586)

1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities jointly formulated by the American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). Key points:

- Identified key internal stakeholders in governance; noted that governance is a joint effort to manage institutions and that trustees are the final legal right.
- Policy on general education should be developed in collaboration with internal stakeholders and once it is established “it becomes the responsibility primarily of the faculty to determine the appropriate curriculum and procedures of student instructions” (AAUP, 2006c, p. 136).
- Faculty have “control over assessment activities through their primary responsibility for determining and enacting the curriculum, although not necessarily full control over whether learning outcomes assessment will take place” (p. 8, Cain, 2014).

The role of accreditation: “How academic freedom is to be defined and protected is properly left in substantial part to each institution” (O’Neil, 2008).

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