

Academic Freedom

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References:	Title 5 Section 51023; ACCJC Accreditation Eligibility Requirements 13 and 20; ACCJC Accreditation Standard 4.1

DEFINITION

Academic Freedom is the freedom and duty of professionally qualified persons to inquire or investigate, to discuss, publish or teach the truth as they see it in line with the tools of their discipline, subject to no religious or political control or authority, except the control of standards of professional ethics or the authority of the rational methods by which truths and conclusions are established in the disciplines involved. Both the protection of academic freedom and the requirements of academic responsibility mentioned in this Board Policy apply not only to the full-time probationary and the tenured teacher but also to all others, such as part-time teachers and teaching assistants who exercise teaching responsibilities.

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Sierra College supports the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, both the rights and duties specified therein. The philosophy statement that follows reiterates the principles specified in the AAUP Statement.

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 common good depends upon the free speech for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. 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.

a) The teacher is entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.

b) The teacher is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter that has no relation to their subject. The intent of this statement is not to discourage what is “controversial.” Controversy is at the heart of free academic inquiry. Indeed, there would be no need for an Academic Freedom policy to protect teaching of the uncontroversial. This passage serves to underscore the need for teachers to avoid persistently intruding material that has no relation to their subject and hence cannot be in line with the tools of their discipline.

c) The college teacher is a citizen, a member of a learned profession, and an officer of an educational institution. When they speak or write as a citizen, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As a person of learning and an educational officer, they should remember that the public might judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence an individual should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not an institutional spokesperson.

Other duties correlative with the rights of Academic Freedom include the following:

a) While the teacher has the duty to design assessments to measure a student’s mastery of course content, they must recognize and respect the distinction between the student’s mastery of course content and the student’s freedom of belief. Teachers assess student learning for mastery of course content. Decisions as to course content and quality of scholarship are to be made by reference to the standards of the academic profession, as interpreted and applied by the community of scholars who are qualified by expertise and training to establish such standards. A student’s freedom of belief references an individual student’s subjective decision to agree or disagree with the curricular content of a particular course within a broader academic discipline. Instructors have a duty to enhance student learning by assessing mastery of course content but have no authority to compel student belief.

b) The College has a duty to adopt a student grievance policy for instances where a student believes their rights to have been violated. Sierra College has adopted a student grievance policy and this policy is readily available to all students in the “Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.” College employees have a responsibility to educate students about the grievance policy and to facilitate the student grievance process.