

Missouri Western State University
Academic Freedom and Tenure
Academic Policies
Effective: 04/01/2008

The Missouri Western State University Board of Governors has endorsed the following statements on academic freedom and responsibility and academic tenure, as adopted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

A. DEFINITIONS

The purpose of these statements is to clarify and to promote understanding and support of academic freedom and responsibility, and academic tenure.

Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not for the special interests of individuals. The common good depends upon the free search for the exposition of truth and understanding wherever and whenever they may be found.

The freedoms granted by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States are indispensable to a democratic society. Within the academic community, the vigorous exercise of these freedoms by its members – to participate in the democratic process of government as citizens, to learn and to teach what scholarship suggests is the truth, to question even what is believed to have been settled, to publish without fear of reprisal what scholarship has discovered – gives vitality to democracy and is the essence of academic freedom. Without these freedoms, academe cannot fulfill its duty to society and may, indeed, become an instrument for the suppression of freedom. These truths, long accepted and reaffirmed when tested, need continuous defense and recommitment.

Academic freedom is not absolute. It is recognized and protected only in order that members of the academic community can perform a vital function, not to create a privileged class. For academic freedom to endure, academic responsibility must be exercised. The academic community which asks protection from outside interference in order to perform its mission must not tolerate sabotage of that mission by its own members.

Governing boards are responsible for establishing overall policy and interpreting the institution to the public and the public to the institution. Faculty, as the professional staff, whether their roles are instructional or administrative, must preserve freedom for all in the academic community, as well as interpret it to the public.

Those who teach and those who administer must be faithful to the canons of their calling, utilizing the best their disciplines have yielded, in order that their commitment may be respected by others. Each must play his or her role under self imposed constraints, which preserve the fabric of civilized life. All must protect the right of dissent, including dissent from dissent. However, no one can be accorded the privilege, under any pretext, of exercising his or her self-defined rights, which by common consent and usage belong to all.

Academic freedom and responsibility are inseparable, and must be considered simultaneously; they are shared by all members of the academic community. Tenure is a specific provision of employment in most institutions, which is accorded to those members of the academic community who qualify for it. Therefore, academic tenure should not be considered separately from academic freedom and responsibility.

These statements are concerned primarily with the faculty members (teachers, researchers, and administrators) of the academic community. However, it is recognized that students also must enjoy academic freedom, and must realize that this freedom carries concomitant responsibilities.

B. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

Academic freedom is the right of members of the academic community freely to study, discuss, investigate, teach, conduct research, publish, or administer as appropriate to their respective roles and responsibilities. It is the responsibility of administrators to protect and assure these rights within the governing framework of the institution. The teacher is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing his or her subject, but he or she should be careful to present the various scholarly views related to his or her subject and to avoid introducing into his or her teaching controversial or other matter which has no relation to his or her subject. The teacher is entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results there from, subject to the adequate performance of his or her other academic duties.

However, academic freedom should be distinguished clearly from constitutional freedom, which all citizens enjoy equally under the law. Academic freedom is an additional assurance to those who teach and pursue knowledge, and this properly should be restricted to rights of expression pertaining to teaching and research within their areas of recognized professional competencies. Beyond this, expressions by members within their areas of recognized community should carry no more weight or protection than that accorded any other citizen under the guarantee of constitutional rights: that is, outside one's professional field, one must accept the same responsibility which all other individuals bear for their acts and utterances. In these cases, there is and should be no guaranteed immunity from possible criticism under the guise of academic freedom; however, when a member of the academic community speaks or writes as a citizen, he or she should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but as a person learning he or she should remember that the public may judge his or her profession and his or her institution by his or her utterances so he or she should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should indicate that he or she is not an institutional spokesperson.

The concept of academic freedom must be accompanied by an equally demanding concept of academic responsibility. The concern of the institution and its members for academic freedom safeguards must extend equally to requiring responsible service, consistent with the objectives of the institution.

Institutions of higher education are committed to open and rational discussion as a principal means for the clarification of issues and the solution of problems. In the solution of certain difficult problems, all members of academic community must take note of their responsibility to society, to the institution, and to each other and must recognize that at times the interest of each may vary and will have to be reconciled. The use of physical force, psychological harassment, or other disruptive acts which interfere with institutional activities, freedom of movement on the campus, or freedom of all members of the academic community to pursue their rightful goals is the antithesis of academic freedom and responsibility. So also are acts, which in effect, deny freedom to speak, to be heard, to study, to teach, to administer, and to pursue research. It is incumbent upon each member of the academic community to be acquainted with his or her individual responsibilities, as delineated by appropriate institutional statements.

The universal responsibility of the teaching faculty member is effective teaching. A proper academic climate can be maintained only when members of the academic community meet their fundamental responsibilities regularly, such as preparing for and meeting their assignments, conferring with and advising students, evaluating fairly and reporting promptly student achievement, and participating in group deliberations which contribute to the growth and development of students and the institution. All members of the academic community also have the

responsibility to accept those reasonable duties assigned to them within their fields of competency, whether curricular, co-curricular, or extracurricular. Additionally, the concept of “institutional loyalty” still has a proper place within the academic community and imposes the further responsibility on all members of the academic community to attempt, honestly and in good faith, to preserve and defend the institution and the goals it espouses, without restricting the right to advocate change.

Administrators must protect, defend, and promote academic freedom, must assure that members of the academic community fulfill their responsibilities, and in addition, must recognize that they have special responsibilities for which they are held accountable – namely, the marshaling of human, physical, and financial resources in order to realize institutional goals.

C. ACADEMIC TENURE

The traditional protection afforded by tenure against unwarranted dismissal of teachers has its validity today as in the past. Tenure is not nor should be intended as, however, a shield for mediocrity, incompetence, or academic irresponsibility, and faculties at each institution should clearly and explicitly establish minimum levels of expected professional performance and responsibility and should enforce them impartially.

Those institutions which provide for academic tenure should have clear statements in their regulations as to the conditions, including due process, that must be met for tenure to be awarded and continued, and for appointments to be terminated.

Academic tenure is not a prerequisite to academic freedom, for academic freedom is the right of all members of the academic community as is responsibility the obligation of all. Rather, tenure, where recognized, is a specific provision of employment which is accorded to those members of the academic community who qualify for it, as means of making the teaching profession attractive to persons of ability, and constitutes one important protection for academic freedom. Thus, it contributes to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.

The preceding statements were endorsed by Missouri Western State College Board of Regents, June 28, 1978.