

## The Academic Freedom of Teachers and Institutions

**Academic freedom** is the belief that the freedom of inquiry by students and faculty members is essential to the mission of the academy, and that scholars should have freedom to educate or convey ideas or facts (as well as those that are not convenient to external political groups or to authorities) without being targeted for repression, job loss, or imprisonment.

The legal concept of educational independence originated in Germany around 1850, and is known as *Lehrfreiheit* – the right of faculty to teach on any topic. In Germany, there were no required classes for university students, and just one examination to obtain the *Diploma / degree*. In the USA, curriculum is strictly managed by faculty, and students must attend all of the required classes and a minimum number of "elective" classes, to qualify for a degree.

In 1915, the newly formed American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued their first report on academic freedom. There are two distinctly different kinds of academic freedom:

1. *Individual academic freedom* protects an individual professor's.
2. *Institutional academic freedom* protects universities from interference by government, a right that applies to the community of scholars, *not* to individual faculty.

A general expression of **individual academic freedom** is included in the "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). All major colleges and universities have adopted this Statement, or a variation of this Statement, which is contained in the faculty policy manual of each college or university, and is incorporated by reference in the employment contract between the university and each individual faculty member. The AAUP and university policy manuals plainly *say* concepts of academic freedom apply equally to *all* professors, both permanent and temporary.

The management of a university gives minimal supervision to teaching and research faculty, except when problems occur, or when a faculty member is being evaluated for promotion, tenure, or salary increases. The faculty is trusted to do their job competently and professionally. In return, the creative intellectuals on the faculty flourish in this atmosphere of minimal supervision. Freedom from detailed supervision is *not* a license to relax. Faculty chooses their own textbooks. The syllabus for required courses is set by a departmental curriculum committee, composed only of professors. Faculties are active participants in setting all academic rules and regulations, as well as in selecting new faculty members, granting tenure, etc.

The academic ideal is that there is tolerance, if not genuine respect, by both the administration and faculty for differences of opinion, methods, style, and personality among the faculty.

**Institutional academic freedom** means that the university has the right to select the faculty and students, as well as to develop the curriculum and syllabus in each class, and award qualifications to the eligible candidates. Institutional academic freedom does *not* protect individual professors from dismissal by the university administration, although institutional academic freedom does protect professors from dismissal by legislators or politicians.

It is clear from the experience of the developed countries that academic freedom is essential for forward progression of the teaching profession in university education.



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