



MONTEREY PENINSULA College

GOVERNING BOARD POLICIES

Chapter 4 Academic Affairs

4030

BP 4030 Academic Freedom

Policy Statement

Monterey Peninsula Community College District supports the foundational principle that research, teaching, learning, and the free exchange of ideas feed a necessary human endeavor: the search for truth. Academic freedom fosters education and guarantees the rights and responsibilities of faculty to teach and research freely. MPC is committed to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, and its support for an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom exists for all constituencies, including faculty and students (Standard I.C.7).

Additional Information and Considerations

Since 1940, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has advocated for a definition of academic freedom that includes three key features:

1. Freedom within the classroom to discuss subject matter in the way that the instructor believes is most appropriate;
2. Freedom to research and publish work according to the instructor's own intellectual interest and capacity, so long as other academic responsibilities are adequately performed;
3. Freedom from disciplinary action for speech outside of the instructor's role within the campus or community.²

While this AAUP statement continues to serve as a foundation for the protection of academic freedom today, since its inception, individuals and groups have debated definitions and the lived practice of academic freedom. For example, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) seeks ways to make academic freedom real in the more diverse, culturally responsible academic environment of the twenty-first century.³

Academic Freedom and the Institution

The Organization of American Historians (OAH), cited in the ASCCC report above, has described what academic freedom can look like for faculty, including the following features of academic freedom in the classroom: ability to select materials and course content, free choice of pedagogical approaches, ability to craft assignments, and ability to assess student achievement.



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Additionally, recognizing that academic freedom is an institutional responsibility, OAH provides best practices for ensuring academic freedom college-wide:

- Campus administrators, faculty, staff, and students should endeavor to gain a solid understanding of what academic freedom is and is not.
- Institutions should promote academic freedom policies that guide the actions of administrators, faculty, staff, and students.
- Academic freedom should be treated as a "cornerstone of scholarly inquiry," including the recommendation to develop departmental/divisional academic freedom statements that can be included in syllabus and program websites.
- Individuals should be encouraged to assess their own behavior in light of the protections and responsibilities that accompany academic freedom.
- Instructors should seek the input of colleagues regarding curricular choices, material selection, and teaching practices.
- Individuals should keep a detailed record of any incidents that they believe threaten academic freedom.⁴

Academic Freedom and Faculty

As noted above, academic freedom includes the acknowledgment of certain faculty responsibilities. For example faculty have the responsibility to periodically reflect on pedagogical practices, curricular choices, and the impact of these choices on all students, including racially minoritized, underserved, disproportionately impacted populations, and those with varying life experiences and points of view including, but not limited to, politics, religion, and philosophy. The Accrediting Commission for California Junior and Community Colleges (ACCJC) also acknowledges the responsibility of "Faculty [to] distinguish between personal conviction and professionally accepted views in a discipline...[and to] present data and information fairly and objectively" as means of maintaining institutional integrity (Standard I.C.9).⁵ Finally, some departments or programs will choose to coordinate texts and content, which does constrain the academic freedom of individual faculty, but this practice can work well and preserve the sense of academic freedom for faculty and students if done so responsibly: It is the responsibility of departments to ensure that the process for choosing texts or content is inclusive, disclosed as a condition of accepting a job within the department, and regularly revisited.

Additionally, in understanding the tenets of academic freedom, it is important to note what academic freedom does and does not protect. Faculty have the right to present material which may be perceived by some students to be intellectually challenging, uncomfortable, or offensive, provided that the content is relevant to the lesson and/or course outline of record^{6:7}. Faculty also



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have the right to criticize and contest college regulations and policies they believe are unfair (including, but not limited to, mandated practices, speech, and/or allegiance to a prescribed agenda). Academic freedom does not, however, give faculty or students the right to ignore basic college regulations, nor does it grant faculty an unqualified guarantee of lifetime employment.

The AAUP's 1940 statement on academic freedom clearly links tenure to the ability of faculty to speak, write, and research freely. Long and/or permanent employment contracts are a bulwark against manipulation and intimidation of faculty. However, currently, a substantial majority of faculty on community college campuses will not enjoy the protection of tenure, which therefore requires the College to make explicit that faculty enjoy academic freedom protection regardless of employment status: Full-time tenured, full-time tenure-track, temporary, and part-time faculty all have equal rights to academic freedom.

Furthermore, the tenets of academic freedom apply equally in all service areas and modalities, including but not limited to classroom teaching, online teaching, librarianship, counseling, coordinating, coaching, and all faculty-student interactions. Academic Freedom has specific implications for library faculty, who have the responsibility of building library collections and providing access to information. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) notes, "Academic freedom is indispensable to librarians in their roles as teachers and researchers. Critically, they are trustees of knowledge with the responsibility of ensuring the intellectual freedom of the academic community through the availability of information and ideas, no matter how controversial, so that teachers may freely teach and students may freely learn."⁸

Academic Freedom and Students

Students are also governed by the tenets of academic freedom and shall have the freedom to express and defend their views and to question or differ from the instructor without repercussion, repression, or penalty. Students have the same responsibilities as instructors to seek and weigh evidence, express supportable conclusions, identify bias, contribute to a climate of openness and mutual respect, and evaluate opinions held by others while acknowledging the right of their own free expression. Academic freedom for students does not deny faculty members the right to require students to master course material and the fundamentals of the disciplines that faculty teach. Therefore, academic freedom protects a faculty member's authority to assign grades to students, so long as the grades are not inconsistently applied or unjustly punitive.⁹



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Resources Cited

1. Accrediting Commission for California Junior and Community Colleges (ACCJC) [Accreditation Standards](#) (adopted June 2014)
2. American Association of University Professors (AAUP): [1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#)
3. Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC): [Protecting the Future of Academic Freedom during a Time of Significant Change](#) (2020)
4. Organization of American Historians (OAH): [Academic Freedom Guidelines and Best Practices](#) (Prepared by the OAH Committee on Academic Freedom, n.d.)
5. Accrediting Commission for California Junior and Community Colleges (ACCJC) [Accreditation Standards](#) (adopted June 2014)
6. American Association of University Professors (AAUP): [Faculty Rights in the Classroom](#) (Nisenson, September-October, 2017)
7. American Association of University Professors (AAUP): [On Freedom of Expression and Campus Speech Codes](#) (adopted November 1994)
8. Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) [Statement on Academic Freedom](#)
9. *Inside Higher Ed.* "[Defining Academic Freedom](#)" (Nelson, 21 Dec. 2010)

Additional Resources Consulted

- American Association of University Professors (AAUP): [Freedom in the Classroom](#) (adopted June 2007)
- American Association of University Professors (AAUP): [Academic Freedom of Students and Professors, and Political Discrimination](#) (n.d.)

A note about freedom of speech/expression and academic freedom: The ASCCC has sought to distinguish academic freedom from free speech, as the two concepts are frequently confused with one another. While all persons in the United States of America are protected by the 1st Amendment's protection of a right to free speech, academic freedom is a narrower concept that is designed to protect professional educators as they engage in teaching, writing, research, or other scholarship. In its ASCCC academic freedom position paper, this point is made explicitly: "Academic freedom is different and in many ways more restrictive. It is a right held by 'educators in pursuit of their discipline,' 'addresses rights within the education contexts of teaching, learning,



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and research both in and outside the classroom for individuals at private as well as public institutions,' and is 'based in the pursuit of truth' (OAH Committee on Academic Freedom, n.d.)."

See also Board Policy and Administrative Procedure 3430 - Prohibition of Harassment; Board Policy and Administrative Procedure 3433 - Prohibition of Harassment under Title IX; Administrative Procedure 3434 - Responding to Harassment Based on Sex Under Title IX; Administrative Procedure 3435 - Discrimination and Harassment Complaints and Investigations; Board Policy 3900 - Speech: Time, Place, Manner; Board Policy and Administrative Procedure 7360 - Discipline and Dismissal - Academic Employees; [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#); and [Student Complaint & Grievance Procedures](#); and the agreement between Monterey Peninsula Community College District and Monterey Peninsula College Teachers Association (MPCTA)/CTA/NEA

References: *Title 5, Section 51023;*
ACCJC Accreditation Eligibility Requirement 20 and ACCJC Accreditation
Standard I.C.7

Formerly Governing Board Policy 3.15, Governing Board Policy 3120

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