

**SAN JOSÉ STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
ONE WASHINGTON SQUARE  
SAN JOSÉ, CA 95192**

**F24-6, University Policy, Statement of Academic  
Freedom and Establishing the Academic Freedom  
Committee**

**Legislative History:**

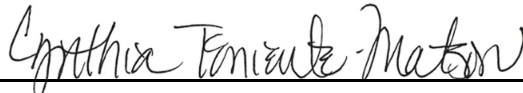
On December 9, 2024, the Academic Senate approved University Policy, Statement of Academic Freedom and Establishing the Academic Freedom Committee, presented by Senator Riley for the Professional Standards Committee.

**Rescind: S99-8**

**Action by University President:**

**Date:** December 18, 2024

**Signed and approved by:**



**Cynthia Teniente-Matson, President,  
San José State University**

**University Policy**

**Statement of Academic Freedom and Establishing the Academic  
Freedom Committee**

**Legislative History:** This proposal would rescind S99-8 Professional Responsibility Statement and replace it with two policy recommendations: AS 1884 Statement on Faculty Professional Responsibility and AS 1883 Statement of Academic Freedom and Establishing the Academic Freedom Committee.

**Rationale:** When Amendment A to S99-8 and S99-9 was approved on August 21, 2023, language about the charge and creation of the Academic Freedom Committee (AFC) was accidentally embedded into S99-8 Professional Responsibility Statement, making information about the AFC difficult to find. This proposed change rescinds S99-8 and separates it into two

distinct policies: “Statement of Faculty Professional Responsibility” and “Statement of Academic Freedom & Establishing the Academic Freedom Committee.” While faculty professional responsibility and academic freedom are deeply interconnected, the policies need to be separated so that they can be clearly identified by their titles. Together with the newly-approved F24-2 Board of Professional Responsibility, these policies provide important contemporary guidance on matters related to faculty professional responsibility and academic freedom; creating two new policies from S99-8 will also update the policy numbers to allow ease of identification and to indicate their currency.

Approved: December 2, 2024  
Vote: 6-0-0  
Present: Chen, Kazemifar, Nwokolo, Raman, Riley (Chair), Smith, Peter (non-voting guest), Lee (non-voting guest)  
Absent: Barrera, Pruthi, Muller, (Dukes, non-voting guest)

Financial Impact: No new costs anticipated beyond some modest travel costs associated with sending members of the Academic Freedom committee to conferences.

Workload Impact: No new workload issues anticipated. On the contrary, being able to find the Statement of Academic Freedom and the charge of the Academic Freedom Committee will save time.

**Preamble:** Academic Freedom is at the heart of the success of the modern university, but in recent years faculty, students, and others have begun to lose touch with an understanding of this critical concept. The classic statements in defense of academic freedom were articulated at the start of the twentieth century by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in response to egregious acts in which faculty appointments, research programs, and curricular content were attacked or manipulated for political reasons. Faculty organized and fought hard to secure tenure and other protections, and by the 1950s they won a key court decision that eloquently summarized the need for academic freedom. “Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise our civilization will stagnate and die.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, however, many faculty and others do not know much about the history of academic freedom, its legal status, or its ultimate purpose. When the term is used it is sometimes perceived incorrectly as an individual privilege rather than as a critically important tool for fulfilling the academy’s scholarly and educational roles. Professional Standards believes it is the responsibility of each new generation of faculty to take on the challenge of renewing the community’s understanding of academic freedom, and has crafted this policy recommendation to fulfill this task.

A generation ago, the Academic Senate combined the Academic Freedom Committee with a new board focused on professional ethics. The motivation was sound—to symbolize the deep interconnection of academic freedom to professional responsibility. We continue to agree with

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<sup>1</sup> *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 34 U.S. 234, 250 (1957)

this principle, but the former Board of Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility (BAFPR) was not a consistently effective committee. Its sweeping responsibilities, extended membership, and restricted qualifications resulted in a committee that was difficult to fill and which was torn between its educational and quasi-judicial functions. As a result, the BAFPR was divided into two bodies: the Board of Professional Responsibility (*see* F24-2 Board of Professional Responsibility) and the Academic Freedom Committee. By creating a smaller committee with a sharper focus, Professional Standards sought to create a vibrant, active committee of experts to engage in the continual education of the University on academic freedom issues and provide useful and timely information to faculty, students, and administration when issues related to academic freedom arise.

## 1. Statement of Academic Freedom<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1. In General

- 1.1.1. The primary mandates of a university—the discovery and dissemination of knowledge and understanding, are absolutely dependent upon academic and intellectual freedom. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Freedom in teaching is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the student in learning and of the faculty<sup>3</sup> in teaching.
- 1.1.2. Political attacks on academic freedom, including government attempts to exert control over curriculum, restrict the freedom to pursue all avenues of scholarly research, and censor the speech of faculty, have many historical precedents. Such attempts to control teaching and research destroy higher education.
- 1.1.3. San José State University has a responsibility to society to defend and to maintain these freedoms, and to ensure that those engaged in academic pursuits can effectively execute their responsibilities. SJSU faculty must remain free of the forces of special interests and political interference if they are to fulfill society's expectations and their educational responsibilities.
- 1.1.4. All members of the university community: students, staff, and all faculty employees, shall have the protections of academic freedom

### 1.2. Academic Freedom as it Relates to Tenure

- 1.2.1. Tenure is one mechanism specifically created to protect academic freedom, and those faculty who hold the protection of tenure have an obligation to protect the academic freedom of all members of the university community.
- 1.2.2. Tenure constitutes an important procedural safeguard of academic freedom and professional responsibility and, as such, is essential for the maintenance of intellectual liberty and high standards in education and in scholarship. It is one means by which university faculty members are protected against personal malice or political coercion, and by which it is ensured that those who, following rigorous

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<sup>2</sup> Derived from the *International Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, 1984. Signatories include the American Association of University Professors, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and similar groups from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and France.

<sup>3</sup> The faculty of the university include all those who engage in scholarly activities and/or those who directly or indirectly participate in instructional activity. Thus faculty members include professors, lecturers, teaching assistants, research assistants, coaches, counselors, librarians, and all those faculty employees under Unit 3.

evaluation, secure continuing employment, can be dismissed only on professional grounds according to due process.

1.2.3. Historically, the indispensability of academic tenure to academic freedom in universities throughout the world has been proven by events in situations where tenure has not existed. We must not forget the lessons of the past but must work to ensure that SJSU continues to fulfill the educational needs of a free society.

1.3. Academic Freedom as it Relates to Professional Responsibility

1.3.1. According to the AAUP, Academic freedom “is a professional right extended to members of the profession and is subject to certain limitations. Academic freedom means that faculty are free to engage in the professionally competent forms of inquiry and teaching that are necessary for the purposes of the university. It does not mean that individual faculty members are free to teach or publish whatever they want without repercussions.” AAUP makes clear that the academic freedom of an individual faculty member is subject to matters of professional responsibility, including those related to 1) the collective; 2) professional ethics; and 3) professional competence. AAUP says more about each category below:

**“The Collective:** The faculty who are responsible for a particular course of study may share responsibility for determining courses to be offered or texts to be assigned to students. The shared academic freedom to make this decision trumps the freedom of an individual faculty member to assign a textbook that he or she alone prefers.”

**“Professional Ethics:** A faculty member must act ethically in their teaching and research; for example, by following regulations on human subject research.”

**“Professional Competence:** In order to produce and disseminate the highest quality of knowledge in a given field, academics are regulated by other academics who are in a position to judge the work of their peers. A faculty member is not entitled to teach something that their academic peers judge is invalid--for example, teaching that  $2+2=5$  would not be protected; neither would teaching intelligent design in an evolutionary biology class.<sup>4</sup>

Professional responsibility is thus the natural complement of the academic freedom essential to the university's mission. Through their responsible professional conduct, faculty members promote and protect academic freedom. Because faculty members belong to a profession with the rights of self-government, they also have the obligation to establish standards of professional conduct and procedures to enforce them. These standards are set in the SJSU Statement of Professional Responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

1.3.2. Academic freedom is a privilege granted to faculty in return for their obligation to serve the public good, which they do through the advancement of scholarship, the search for truth, and the higher education of our communities. We agree with the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aaup.org/programs/academic-freedom/faqs-academic-freedom>

<sup>5</sup> S99-8 at the time of this policy recommendation

AAUP 1915 Declaration that “not only that the profession will earnestly guard those liberties without which it cannot rightly render its distinctive and indispensable service to society, but also that it will with equal earnestness seek to maintain such standards of professional character, and of scientific integrity and competency, as shall make it a fit instrument for that service.”<sup>6</sup>

2. The Academic Freedom Committee is established as a Special Agency.
  - 2.1. Charge of the Academic Freedom Committee (AFC):
    - 2.1.1. AFC shall monitor the state of academic freedom both at San Jose State and in the broader academic environment. In addition, it shall safeguard and promote academic freedom at SJSU, and shall serve as an advisory body on issues arising from the application of academic freedom on our campus.
    - 2.1.2. AFC shall educate and advise on the meaning and scope of academic freedom and its application. To do so, AFC shall familiarize itself with policies, laws, court decisions, and current events concerning academic freedom. As part of this function it shall maintain contact (and membership if possible) with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and familiarize itself with relevant AAUP publications. Members of AFC should attend AAUP conferences on academic freedom when possible.
    - 2.1.3. AFC shall work in concert with the Center for Faculty Development to educate and orient new faculty on academic freedom issues, by attending and presenting at events such as faculty orientations.
    - 2.1.4. AFC shall educate all constituencies of the San Jose State Community on our own policies on academic freedom. It shall host at least one academic freedom forum each year, on a topic related to academic freedom and designed to stimulate interest in academic freedom.
3. Organization of the AFC
  - 3.1. Membership
    - 3.1.1. Four faculty members, three of whom must be (or have previously been) tenured, chosen university-wide for their expertise and/or interest in academic freedom issues. One of the four faculty may be from among our emeriti faculty. One of the four faculty may be a lecturer or a probationary faculty member. These faculty will serve 2 years terms and may be renewed twice (for a total of six years) before rotating off the committee for a minimum of one term.
    - 3.1.2. One student.
    - 3.1.3. One administrator.
    - 3.1.4. One Staff member (Non-MPP)
  - 3.2. Chair. Each year the AFC shall choose its own Chair from among the tenured (or previously tenured) faculty members of the committee.
  - 3.3. Reporting.

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<sup>6</sup> American Association of University Professors, *1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*.

- 3.3.1. If the AFC has suggestions for policy changes it shall report them to the Professional Standards Committee of the Academic Senate.
- 3.3.2. The Chair of the AFC shall be permitted to address the Professional Standards Committee and the Academic Senate to report on issues relating to academic freedom.

3.4. Selection.

- 3.4.1. All candidates for membership shall submit statements discussing their expertise and/or interest in academic freedom issues, and (if faculty) a curriculum vitae.
- 3.4.2. Faculty candidates for membership shall be screened by the Executive Committee and approved by the Senate.
- 3.4.3. The Administrative representative shall be designated by the President after consultation with the Executive Committee.
- 3.4.4. The student representative shall be designated by Associated Students after consultation with the Executive Committee.
- 3.4.5. Meetings. The AFC should meet at least once every month during the academic year.