



A RESOLUTION ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM (24/9)

- WHEREAS,** The academic freedom of students and faculty is essential to the spirit of inquiry, debate, and tolerance characteristic of university communities and is necessary for their educational missions;
- WHEREAS** The George Washington University is extraordinarily proud of its ability to attract large numbers of talented students who come to the university specifically to study politics and live at the heart of the capital, and academic freedom is essential to providing opportunities for them to flourish;
- WHEREAS,** The Faculty Senate of The George Washington University has consistently underlined the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, as described in the American Association of University Professors’ [1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#):¹
- WHEREAS,** The George Washington University has existing, robust guidelines on Academic Freedom (Appendix A) for all members of its community affirmed by the Senate by unanimous consent in Resolution 17/4 and unanimously reaffirmed in Resolution 18/5;
- WHEREAS,** The establishment of these academic freedom guidelines was completed through a collaborative partnership between the faculty and administration;
- WHEREAS,** in Resolution 18/5 the Senate declared that it must be involved in changes related to the Guidelines on Academic Freedom;
- WHEREAS,** The Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom Committee of the Faculty Senate is tasked with providing input and advice on matters pertaining to Academic Freedom and traditionally has worked in collaboration with university leadership in developing these guidelines, their interpretation and associated policies;
- WHEREAS,** The Educational Policies and Technology Committee of the Faculty Senate is tasked with developing and approving guidelines related to the educational mission of the university including the student code of conduct and policies through which the university implements the code;
- WHEREAS,** the Faculty Code specifies the faculty role in encouraging freedom of inquiry for students;
- WHEREAS,** The Faculty Senate, has affirmed the faculty code and principles of academic freedom by “resolutely rejecting any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter...”²

¹ Recently, Senate Resolution [22/11](#) affirmed the AAUP 1940 statement.

² Senate Resolution [22/11](#).

WHEREAS, President Granberg has asserted that various regulations across the university are not harmonized with the student code of conduct, and has said that there may be “revisions to the code to provide more clarity around its very strong free speech provisions”³; and

WHEREAS, In the recently unveiled university plan on “Strengthening the Community in Challenging Times,”⁴ its section on “Reviewing Policy & Procedures” notes that, “In an effort to harmonize, streamline, and clarify university guidelines, we have begun a review of university policies that pertain to speech, conduct, and reporting concerns”⁵;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE FACULTY SENATE OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

1. Reaffirms the significance of academic freedom and freedom of speech of students and faculty as central to the mission of the university;
2. Affirms that all university communication and policies about freedom of speech and academic freedom should be a product of collaborative effort and all should explicitly reference the guidelines on academic freedom to fully inform the university community of our commitment to liberal educational values
3. Recommends whoever designed the “Strengthening the Community in Challenging Times” initiative explicitly reference the guidelines on academic freedom to fully inform the university community of our commitment to liberal educational values;
4. Recommends that university leadership follows the established practice by working with the Educational Policy and Technology and the Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom Committees of the Faculty Senate on the development, interpretation, or implementation of all policies that impact academic freedom and freedom of speech at the George Washington University for all members of its community, including but not limited to policies on protests, speech, and other forms of expression; and
5. Recommends that when the university leadership or university security learns there may be a protest at a specific time and place, faculty in the possibly affected classes should be notified of the time and place of the expected protest.

Educational Policy & Technology Committee
February 16, 2024

³ [Faculty Senate minutes January 2024, p. 3](#)

⁴ <https://ourcommitment.gwu.edu/>.

⁵ <https://ourcommitment.gwu.edu/reviewing-policy-and-procedures>.

Appendix A

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY GUIDELINES FOR EXERCISING AND DEFENDING ACADEMIC FREEDOM⁶

1. As recognized in Article II of the University's *Faculty Code*, the University is committed to the principles of academic freedom, including free inquiry, free expression, and the vigorous discussion and debate on which the advancement of the University's educational mission depends. Consistent with these Guidelines and University policies referred to below, faculty members and other members of the University community enjoy the broadest possible latitude to inquire, speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn, except insofar as viewpoint-neutral and content-neutral limitations on that freedom are demonstrably necessary to permit the University to perform its academic and educational functions (including, for example, the holding of classes and the conduct of authorized research activities without interference or disruption by individuals or groups inside or outside the University community) and to fulfill its administrative responsibilities.

2. The ideas of different faculty members and of various other members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals within or outside the University from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community should show mutual respect (as recognized in Article II.C of the *Faculty Code*), concerns about civility and mutual respect cannot justify closing off the discussion of ideas protected by academic freedom and freedom of expression and inquiry, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some persons within or outside the University community. Indeed, fostering the ability of faculty members and other members of the University community to exercise their rights to engage in free inquiry, expression, debate, and deliberation is an essential part of the University's educational mission. Where there appears to be a conflict between the rights of free expression and free inquiry, on one hand, and concerns about potentially offensive statements, on the other, the University's educational mission requires it to give priority to the rights of free expression and free inquiry.

3. The freedom to debate and discuss the merits of competing ideas does not, of course, mean that faculty members and other members of the University community may say whatever they wish, whenever and wherever they wish, while carrying out their duties and fulfilling their respective roles within the University. In carrying out such duties and fulfilling such roles, faculty members and other members of the University community do not have the right to engage in expression that (1) violates clearly established law (for example, by making criminal or tortious threats or by engaging in tortious defamation or prohibited sexual harassment as defined by University policy), (2) constitutes a genuine threat to the safety of members of the University community or other persons, or (3) violates University policies that are viewpoint-neutral and content-neutral and are demonstrably necessary (A) to enable the University to maintain the integrity of scholarly standards of teaching and research, or (B) to regulate the time, place, and manner of expression in order to prevent disruptions of the University's academic and educational functions, or (C) to enable the University to comply with applicable federal and local laws and otherwise fulfill its administrative responsibilities.

4. Article II.A of the *Faculty Code* provides that "[i]n speaking and writing outside the University, a faculty member shall not attribute his or her personal views to the University." To comply with Internal Revenue Service restrictions, the University's Policy on Political Activity provides that University employees "may not speak for or on behalf of the university when expressing support for or opposition to a candidate for public Office."

⁶ [Office of the Provost website](#)

5. Faculty members and other members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest the views of speakers who have been invited to express their views on campus. However, faculty members and other members of the University community may not obstruct or interfere with the rights of others on campus to express their views (for example, by blocking access to a University-sanctioned forum or by attempting to silence or shout down a speaker at such a forum). Appropriate disciplinary action may be taken under applicable University policies against members of the University community who intentionally obstruct or interfere with the exercise of academic freedom and freedom of expression and inquiry that are protected under these Guidelines as well as the University's Policies on Demonstrations and Disruptions of University Functions.

6. If faculty members believe that their right to exercise academic freedom under Article II of the *Faculty Code* and these Guidelines has been restricted or impaired by actions or threats from persons within or outside the University, those faculty members may contact the Chair of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the Chair of the Faculty Senate Committee on Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom, or the Office of the Provost to obtain assistance. The University will take reasonable, customary, and lawful measures it deems appropriate under these Guidelines to protect faculty members against non-trivial impairments of their right to exercise academic freedom, including threats from persons within or outside the University community.

7. Nothing in these Guidelines shall be construed to modify or interfere with the University's administrative employment relationships with University administrators and staff.