

Faculty Senate Discussion
Academic Freedom and Free Expression Forum
January 29, 2024

Background: In Fall 2023, the Faculty Senate had some conversations about free expression on campus, prompted at the time by the Israel-Gaza conflict. We have a responsibility to engage on the broader issues of academic freedom and free expression on Western's campus, although we want to do so in a way that is not merely a response to external events as they arise. Indeed, the Faculty Handbook and the CBA include several statements about these issues as summarized below. While we considered having additional conversations in a regular Senate meeting, this issue is more appropriately dealt with in a separate forum that includes the full campus. As we plan for this forum, it is important to take the time to discuss this at Senate, so I hope you will give some thought to the Questions/Discussions at the end of this document.

Current Policy Language About Academic Freedom:

- [Faculty Handbook](#), Section 3B: "All faculty are guaranteed academic freedom as set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments (see Appendix 4), formulated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association of University Professors, as expressed in the Faculty Contract. Academic tenure follows the Faculty Contract."
- [Appendix 4 of the Faculty Handbook](#) is the AAUP Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure
- Code of Faculty Ethics ([Appendix 5 of the Faculty Handbook](#)) includes the following: "Membership in the academic community and in the faculty of Western Washington University imposes upon faculty a range of obligations beyond that currently accepted by the members of the wider society. These obligations, which ensue from the faculty member's commitment to learning and to the role of teacher, including obligations to respect the dignity of others; to acknowledge the right of others to express differing opinions; to foster learning; **to defend intellectual honesty, freedom of inquiry, learning and teaching; and to support freedom of expression on and off the campus.**"
- The [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) includes the following:

CBA 2.1 The University and the Union agree that academic freedom is essential to the mission of the University and that providing an environment of free and honest inquiry is essential to its functioning.

CBA 2.2 Academic freedom as it pertains to this contract is defined as the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research and creative expression, and to speak or write as a public citizen without institutional discipline or restraint on matters of public concern, as well as on issues related to professional duties and the functioning of the University. All efforts should be made to be accurate and to show respect for the opinions of others and to make clear they are not speaking on behalf of the institution unless specifically designated to do so. Academic responsibility implies the faithful performance of academic duties and obligations and the recognition of the demands of the scholarly enterprise

Steps Taken to Date:

- Following Faculty Senate discussions of some of these issues in fall quarter, there was a planning meeting during the December break with the following attendees:

Brandon Dupont (Senate)
Michael Slouber (Senate)
Brad Johnson (Provost)
Jacqueline Hughes (Chief Diversity Officer)
Jack Herring (Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs)
Daniel Records-Galbraith (Director & Title IX/ADA Coordinator)

- Discussion at Senate Exec
- Discussion with OIE about possible campus climate survey
- And we have inquired about speakers from law school faculty at UW, Gonzaga and Seattle U, the [Campus Free Expression Project \(at BPC\)](#), and [FIRE](#).

Primary Goals in Organizing the Forum:

- To build a culture of free expression/academic freedom that helps us implement the policy statements. This requires more than a one-off response to external events.
- To provide a venue for a reaffirmation of principles of academic freedom/free expression from the university's senior administration.
- To help faculty navigate difficult classroom conversations.
- To shape possible revisions of the Faculty Handbook language on academic freedom.

Questions/Discussions for Senate Consideration:

- Format/structure could be either a single speaker or a panel, although it is proving hard enough to find one outside speaker! We could consider pairing an outside speaker with one or two WWU contributors for a panel structure.
- Topics/prompts for the speaker(s) – some possibilities: striking the right balance on free expression and offensive speech in the classroom (and in non-classroom public space on campus); institutional neutrality; the differences between academic freedom and freedom of speech; note that we could also [draw on work like this](#) to develop additional possible topics/prompts.
- Since we don't want this to be a one-time event, how do we keep whatever momentum we might generate? How do we connect this forum to subsequent campus-wide events like this?