

# Statement of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

Smith College is “committed to creating an inclusive, equitable and accessible educational community founded on the free and open exchange of ideas.”<sup>1</sup> Among the central purposes of such a community are the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, cultivation of the creative and critical faculties of the human intellect, expression of ideas and emotions through the arts, and the development of aesthetic sensitivity and appreciation. Academic freedom is of paramount value in such a community. As stated by the AAUP, “[i]nstitutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research.”<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the faculty of Smith College may pursue freely any subject of intellectual or artistic inquiry and shall not be subject to censorship, discipline or intimidation. Faculty are entitled to full freedom in creative work and research, and in sharing the results through publication, performance and exhibition. In the classroom, faculty are similarly free to determine the relevant content and manner of learning for the subject matter of their expertise, consistent with professional standards. “Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning. It carries with it duties correlative with rights.”<sup>3</sup> The academic freedom of teachers carries with it “special responsibilities”<sup>4</sup> to observe professional ethics, as noted in the AAUP’s 1966 Statement on Professional Ethics. Faculty are also entitled to speak out on matters of institutional governance.

When members of the faculty speak or act as individuals and not as representatives of Smith College, they may write and speak on any matter and be free from punitive action by the College. Faculty members should be aware, however, “that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence, they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.”<sup>5</sup>

Academic freedom pertains to students as well as faculty. AAUP policy defines students’ freedom to learn as “depend[ing] upon appropriate opportunities and conditions in the classroom, on the campus, and in the larger community.” Like faculty, “students should exercise their freedom with responsibility.”<sup>6</sup>

Allied to the concept of academic freedom, Smith College endorses freedom of thought and expression in accordance with the laws and Constitution of the United States. In the College, as in society as a whole, freedom of speech and expression is not absolute: speech that is libelous, slanderous, incites to riot or is unlawfully harassing is not

protected. In addition, speech directed at persons with intent to cause substantial injury is not protected by academic freedom. Further, in accordance with applicable law and Smith College values, members of the Smith community are expected to maintain an environment that ensures equal opportunity to pursue learning for all its members. For the School for Social Work, freedom of speech and expression is informed additionally by the accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education and by the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Work.

Freedom of speech and expression extends to invited guests of the College. Once members of the Smith community extend an invitation, others may not abridge the speaker's freedom of expression. Opponents of a speaker, in the same light, may make their views known in various ways consistent with the College's standards of conduct, so long as they do not interfere with a speaker's ability to make their views known, or with the rights of others to listen and learn.

In affirming the principles of academic freedom and free expression described above, the College recognizes that its faculty and students are subject to applicable state and federal laws. In addition, faculty and staff are obliged to follow Smith employee policies, which shall be consistent with this statement and the principles expressed herein.

*Approved by the Board of Trustees, February 24, 2018.*

1. [Smith College Values, Mission Statement](#), retrieved 2017.11.14, and Course Catalogue 2017-18, p.6.
2. [AAUP Policy on Academic Freedom](#), 1940, as amended 1970, retrieved 2017.11.14.
3. Id.
4. Id.
5. Id.
6. [AAUP Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students](#), accessed 2018.1.26.

<https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/offices/student-affairs/student-handbook/statement-academic-freedom-and-freedom-expression>