

“Texas A&M University is dedicated to the discovery, development, communication, and application of knowledge in a wide range of academic and professional fields.”<sup>1</sup>

Texas A&M originated as a land grant institution, intended to democratize higher education and benefit the public with the results of its teaching and research,<sup>2</sup> and can only accomplish its mission when academic freedom protects the kind of free inquiry and robust debate that leads to discoveries that will positively affect people’s lives for the better, strengthen democratic engagement, and promote understanding of our similarities and differences.

Academic freedom protects faculty members, librarians, researchers, instructors, students and the institution itself. Academic freedom is the freedom of teachers and researchers in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in their academic fields, and to teach or publish findings without interference from political figures, boards of trustees, donors, or other entities; to speak freely when participating in institutional governance, as well as to speak freely as a citizen.<sup>3</sup> Academic freedom protects librarians as teachers and as curators of library collections to meet the education and research needs of their college or university community. Academic freedom also encompasses the students’ freedom to learn, explore, and challenge ideas while forming and sharing their own opinions. The institution itself has the freedom to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.<sup>4</sup>

Academic freedom is coupled with academic responsibility. For faculty members, this responsibility rests on their role as experts and professionals. Teachers have the responsibility to foster scholarly values in students, engage in professional behavior in the classroom and in academic relationships with students, and ensure that material covered as part of class relates to the classroom subject and/or facilitates student learning. Researchers have responsibility for professional competency and meeting the standards for ethical scholarship and sharing work in their field. Faculty members also have responsibility for demonstrating professional integrity in their interactions within the university, within the academic community, and with the public. For students, academic responsibility rests on their role as learners within the institution. Students have a responsibility to learn course material and to demonstrate that knowledge on assessments within their course of study. Students also have a responsibility to respect the rights of others’ academic freedom, which includes the free expression of ideas and civil discourse.

## **Academic Freedom for Faculty**

Texas A&M University will not penalize or discipline members of the faculty because of their exercise of academic freedom. The four pillars of academic freedom for faculty<sup>5</sup> are:

- 1. The protection of freedom of expression in the classroom.**

*Faculty are free to discuss and profess their opinions on all relevant matters regarding the subject content of the courses they teach, and to determine, within professional norms, the subject content of the courses they teach. Teachers have a responsibility for professional behavior in the classroom and to cover material related to the classroom subject and facilitate student learning.*

- 2. The protection of freedom to conduct scholarly and creative activities.**

*Faculty are free to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression and to publish or perform the results of such work without fear of retribution, punishment, retaliation or censorship. Researchers have a responsibility to meet ethical standards for scholarship and sharing of work in their field.*

**3. The protection against censorship of intramural speech.**

*In order to ensure active participation in faculty governance, faculty are free from institutional censorship or discipline when speaking or writing as participants in the governance of an educational institution. As professionals and experts, faculty members have a responsibility to demonstrate professional integrity.*

**4. The protection against censorship of extramural speech.**

*Faculty are free from institutional censorship or discipline when engaging in free speech outside of their role or position in the university by speaking or writing as members of the larger community. As professionals and experts, as well as citizens, faculty members have a responsibility to demonstrate professional integrity in their interactions.*

## **Academic Freedom for Librarians**

University librarians must have the academic freedom to develop and curate library collections in all formats and provide access, services, and instruction that dispassionately meet the education and research needs of their college or university community. It is essential that library collections represent a variety of perspectives including materials on subjects that may be considered controversial. Library users should have an expectation of privacy in their use of a library's collection.<sup>6</sup>

## **Academic Freedom for Students**

Academic freedom is not confined to teachers; the academic freedom to teach is entwined with students' right to learn, and encompasses the following protections:<sup>7</sup>

**1. The protection of freedom to learn.**

*Critical thinking is a core component of learning, and learners should expect to be challenged, and to explore, challenge, and even disagree with ideas, all while building and sharing their own viewpoints. It is not the proper role of the university or any outside agency to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Engaging with new ideas and perspectives helps students grow intellectually and is part of the educational process.*

**2. The protection of classroom expression.**

*Students are free to take reasoned exception to concepts and theories presented in their classes and to disagree with opinions they hear from their instructors and other students, even as they continue to be responsible for learning assigned course content. Students are safeguarded from biased or arbitrary academic evaluations.*

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“At Texas A&M, we embrace academic freedom. I will defend our faculty's right to present information in the classroom they reasonably believe to be necessary and effective for student learning and success. I will also defend their right to select research topics and conduct research in a way that allows them to best inform, educate and inspire others. We must foster an academic community that engages in meaningful, respectful dialogue around controversial issues and competing ideas.”<sup>8</sup>

General (Ret.) Mark A. Welsh III  
Interim President  
Texas A&M University  
August 2, 2023

<sup>1</sup> [Texas A&M Mission Statement](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Texas A&M Proud to be a Part of Land-Grant Tradition](#).

<sup>3</sup> [AAUP Definition of Academic Freedom](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Sweezy v. New Hampshire](#), 354 U.S. 234, 263 (1957) (Frankfurter, J., concurring).

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from [AAUP FAQs on Academic Freedom](#).

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from the [ALA Statement on Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries](#).

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from [Students' Guide to Academic Freedom in the Classroom](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Our Commitment to Academic Freedom](#).