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→ Academic Freedom Policy

I. Preamble

As an institution dedicated to learning and teaching, Bennington College is committed to the principle of free expression and exploration of ideas in an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility. Like other freedoms, academic freedom requires both the assumption of risk and responsibility. The College recognizes that the free play of ideas, with all its attendant controversies, is indispensable to the act of discovery and to the dissemination of knowledge. However, just as the freedom to act carries with it the responsibility for those actions, the freedom to express ideas carries with it an attendant responsibility and accountability.

In the College, as in society as a whole, freedom of speech and expression cannot be absolute. For example, speech that is libelous, slanderous, incites to riot, or is unlawfully discriminatory or harassing is not constitutionally protected. Subject to these commonly accepted limits, Bennington College endorses the following principles.

II. Principles

A. Faculty and instructors are free to teach and to discuss any aspect of a topic pertinent to the understanding of the subject matter of the course that is being taught. Approaches in the classroom, so long as they are within the stipulations of the law and of other stated College policies, are the professional province and responsibility of the teacher. Controversial materials and the expression of controversial views by teachers should not be discouraged. However, teachers must recognize the responsibility inherent in the perceived authority of their position and make reasonable efforts to approach material from an informed position, avoid knowing misrepresentation, and avoid using their position of authority to manipulate student opinion.

B. Faculty and instructors shall enjoy freedom in artistic creation, in research and in the publication and dissemination of the results of their work, subject to the performance of other faculty duties. The College supports the use of its facilities for professional advancement, but the use of facilities for direct financial gain must be based on a prior written agreement with College officials.

C. Faculty and instructors are free to act and to speak in their capacity as public citizens without institutional censorship or discipline, but must indicate in such instances particularly when speaking as professionals that they are not acting as representatives of the College. As professionals and representatives of their disciplines, faculty members take upon themselves a responsibility for honesty and accuracy in professional statements and activity. As members of the College community, they should exercise appropriate restraint and show respect for the opinions of others.

III. Procedures Concerning the Alleged Violation of Principles of Academic Freedom

A. Complaints regarding any alleged violation of the College's principles of academic freedom brought forward by faculty members during the course of their review process should be made in writing to the Faculty Review Appeals Committee.

B. Complaints regarding any alleged violation of the College's principles of academic freedom outside of the review process by faculty may be made to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs who may refer them to the Faculty Committee on Grievance.

Approved by the Board of Trustees 06/04/99

Revised 01/21/06