

Academic Freedom Working Group

Working group approved by CTAF:

- Provost
- 3 former chairs of CTAF
- Current chairs of COG, CTAF

Defending the Principle: Formalizing a Process to Resolve Allegations of Academic Freedom Violations

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Introduction

- Reorganization of Faculty Handbook completed, yet work remains
- Academic Freedom, without retaliation, is guaranteed for all faculty

“CTAF has the responsibility of reviewing problems involving the academic freedom of both tenured and non-tenured faculty, whether part-time or full-time. In these cases, the Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom shall endeavor to verify the facts of the academic freedom case.”

- But Faculty Handbook has few details regarding procedures

Academic Freedom

- A. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in research** and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be in accordance with established WPI policy.

- B. Faculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom** in discussing their subjects and evaluating their students, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subjects.

- C. College and university faculty members are citizens, members of learned professions, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline**, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As persons of learning and as educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and 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 institutional spokespersons.

<https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>

Academic Freedom

D. All members of the WPI Faculty, whether they are tenured, are on the tenure track during their probationary period, or hold secured or short-term nontenure-track appointments, have academic freedom as defined in this Constitution. As members of the WPI Faculty, they are **guaranteed non-retaliation** with respect to appointment decisions and other conditions of employment for exercising the full range of academic freedom in all their contributions to the University including participation in its governance. Their right to express their views without reprisal is secured by access to all procedures described in this Faculty Handbook.

What We Did Last Summer

- Listening sessions
 - Academic deans
 - Department heads
 - General counsel
 - Faculty governance
 - Faculty groups – probationary, tenured, secure contract, and open

Timeline

- Summer 2023 – listening sessions

What We Are Doing A Term

- Listening sessions
 - Academic deans
 - Department heads
 - General counsel
 - Faculty governance
 - Faculty groups – probationary, tenured, secure contract, and open
- Creating draft
 - Flow chart
 - Faculty Handbook content

Timeline

- Summer 2023 – listening sessions
- **A-term** – update faculty (and trustees) with progress

What We Plan To Do B Term

- Listening sessions
 - Academic deans
 - Department heads
 - General counsel
 - Faculty governance
 - Faculty groups – probationary, tenured, secure contract, and open
- Creating draft
 - Flow chart
 - Faculty Handbook content
- Finalize details with COG and CTAF
- Motion to faculty

Timeline

- Summer 2023 – listening sessions
- A-term – update faculty (and trustees) with progress
- **B-term, week 1** – draft of motion for faculty review
- **November 8th** – motion to discuss at Faculty meeting
- **December 6th** – motion and vote at Faculty meeting

Guiding Principles for CTAF Cases Alleging Violation of Academic Freedom

Defined in May 2023: Affirmed by CTAF, Administration, and OGC

Violations are based on definition of AF in Faculty Handbook
Before formal proceeding, possible informal resolutions
Before deciding violation, seek input from all relevant parties
Guaranteed nonretaliation in all respects
Remedies appropriate for individual case
Confidentiality must be protected

Procedure for Complaints of Academic Freedom Violation

Aim to strike a balance:

- Avoid a procedure that deters complainants from coming forward
- Ensure all evidence is confirmed
- Applicable to all faculty members

Initial
Investigation
Decision
Resolution

Consultation;
informal resolution

Conduct Interviews;
review evidence

Vote on violation;
confirm facts

Recommendations;
management plan

CONFIDENTIAL PROCESS

Academic Freedom Working Group

Please provide
feedback and questions!

The ability to navigate, and to learn from, difficult situations is critical to the continued health of our community.

Timeline

- ✓ Summer 2023 – listening sessions
- ✓ A-term – update faculty (and trustees) with progress
- next B-term, week 1 – draft of motion for faculty review
- November 8th – motion to discuss at Faculty meeting
- December 6th – motion and vote at Faculty meeting

Extra Material

Guiding Principles

1. Before a formal proceeding is initiated, with the permission of the complaining faculty member, CTAF should work with the Provost to encourage and assist the parties to reach informal, mutually agreeable resolutions of disputes involving alleged violations of academic freedom.
(Initial and Information Phase)
2. Before deciding whether there has been a violation of academic freedom, CTAF is encouraged to seek input and evidence from persons CTAF believes may have information relevant to the alleged violation.
(Investigation Phase)
3. An allegation of a violation of academic freedom shall be based on the definition of academic freedom in the Faculty Handbook.
(Initial and Information Phase)
4. A faculty member alleging a violation of academic freedom is guaranteed nonretaliation in all respects. Any individual who engages in retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.
(Resolution Phase)
5. In cases where there has been a finding of a violation of academic freedom, CTAF should consider recommending remedies appropriate for the individual case (e.g., for probationary faculty, tenured faculty, faculty working on a secured contract, and adjunct faculty).
(Resolution Phase)
6. Throughout the process, confidentiality of all parties must be protected, and information must be shared only on a need-to-know basis.