

RESOLUTION CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Preamble

The founders of our country took freedom, like liberty, to be a self-evident first principle. We take the meaning of “freedom” from the Declaration of Independence, a foundational document created by a five-person committee that included Robert Livingston of King’s College, which today we know as Columbia. With that in mind, we, the Columbia University Senate, do intend with this resolution to reaffirm and clarify a set of principles surrounding Academic Freedom, which apply to all members of our community, be they faculty, staff, students, or administrators.

Resolution

1) Whereas — Academic freedom has no formal definition in the Faculty Handbook of Columbia University but rather is loosely described by implication in Appendix B of that document:

“Academic freedom implies that all officers of instruction are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subjects; that they are entitled to freedom in research and in the publication of its results; and that they may not be penalized by the University for expressions of opinion or associations in their private or civic capacity; but they should bear in mind the special obligations arising from their position in the academic community”; and,

2) Whereas — Faculty and students both have the responsibility, when engaging in contentious and emotionally charged discussions, to respond critically to each other’s reasoning and challenge each other to reexamine their own beliefs, and to do so in a civil, tolerant manner with respect to the right for a person to hold ideas that differ from one’s own; and,

3) Whereas — The right to protest on campus is governed exclusively through the Rules of University Conduct and the University Senate’s Rules Committee and, therefore, not by this resolution; and,

4) Whereas — We, the Columbia University Senate, believe the principles of Academic Freedom should be reaffirmed and respected in endeavors pursuant to the university’s mission to conduct teaching, learning, and research at the highest level; and,

5) Whereas — We, the Columbia University Senate, believe a clear understanding of these principles is essential given that:

- An environment of honest advocacy, openness and mutual respect is precisely what makes the essential work of education and true academic inquiry possible; and;
- All members of the Columbia community — faculty, administrators, staff and students at all levels — have the freedom to disagree with conventional wisdom, with one another and with official policies whether institutional, local, national or global; and
- It is this freedom that empowers each of us to continue to question, experiment, explore and even be wrong — undertakings that support and perhaps even define the academic mission of Columbia University;

6) Therefore, be it resolved that the Columbia University Senate henceforth acknowledges and respects the following principles of Academic Freedom:

— Members of the Columbia community must strive to continue to create an environment in which they are free to respectfully disagree with one another; and

— The freedom to disagree must not be taken as a freedom to be disrespectful to, or to abuse, the person with whom we are disagreeing; and

— Faculty are free to hold and express their own ideas and values, including but not limited to those which may or may not agree with those of their colleagues and students; and

— Students are likewise free to hold and express their own ideas and values, including but not limited to those which may or may not agree with their peers and faculty.

Proponents:

Faculty Affairs Committee

Student Affairs Committee