

MEMORANDUM

TO: UC San Diego Academic Senate Members

FROM: UC San Diego Academic Senate Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF)

DATE: February 16, 2018

RE: Reaffirming Principles of Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is not the same as free speech. Academic freedom pertains specifically to teachers and researchers in universities and colleges, whereas free speech is the First-Amendment right of all US citizens. The basic document is the 1940 “Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure,” drafted by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges. The full document, with later commentary, is available on the AAUP website, under “issues.” Here are the basic points, in quotation marks, followed by CAF’s comments.

1. “Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and publication of the results....”
2. “Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject.”

This means that teachers are free to introduce controversial material that *does* relate to their subject. As the 1970 commentary explicates: “The intent of this statement is not to discourage what is ‘controversial.’ Controversy is at the heart of free academic inquiry....” But “Teachers [should] avoid persistently intruding material which has no relation to their subject.”

3. “College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, 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 scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances.”

The university may not censor faculty members’ speech inside or outside of the classroom, research environment, or university public sphere, nor may it punish teachers for what they say as citizens. UC faculty members are also permitted to criticize the University. At the same time, teachers should, as a matter of professional obligations, voluntarily take care as they offer extra-mural political speech, setting an example of how to carry out productive debate in a democratic society: For instance, not lying; avoiding ad hominem remarks; listening to the other side; providing evidence for their positions; and being willing to change their minds. Or, as the AAUP commentary goes on to explain: “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.” As a recent UCAF statement emphasizes, faculty members should show respect for others, even when one cannot possibly respect their *opinions*. This is, surely, the mode of debate we strive to teach our

students. As the AAUP commentary notes, “As citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry....”

Sincerely,

Professor Dana Kay Nelkin
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Adam Aron
Member, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Hoang Nguyen
Member, Committee on Academic Freedom