



Policy Number: II.22
Policy Level: Operating Policy
Originally Issued: May 20, 2019
Reviewed: August 17, 2021
Revised: October 14, 2024
Policy Owner: President
Policy Implementation: Provost/VP for Academic Affairs and Student Services
SACSCOC Standard: 6.4

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

I. Policy Statement and Purpose

Athens State University seeks to provide and sustain an environment conducive to collaboration, mutual respect and trust, critical examination of knowledge and values, furthering the search for knowledge, and successfully working towards the common purpose of achieving the University's mission. A collaborative environment requires that all employees be responsible in the performance of their duties within their respective areas of competence, and educate or assist students and colleagues using appropriate standards of conduct that support openness, collegiality, and academic freedom. In particular, the faculty's privileges and protections rest on the relationships between the faculty's professional competence and expertise, academic freedom, and the programs and services of the University. ([Employee Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities](#))

The University considers academic freedom to encompass both the individual and institutional right to maintain academic standards. The University supports the belief that institutions of higher learning are conducted for the common good and is convinced that the common good depends upon the free search for truth and its expression.

This policy establishes that academic freedom is a right in both teaching and research and that no member of the University community may, in the exercise of academic freedom, deny the corresponding right of any other member of the University community, nor interfere with the legal and proper function of the University.

II. Description of Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is the freedom to teach, inquire, create, debate, and dissent without fear of penalty and is crucial to the mission and goals of the University and the advancement of knowledge. ([Continuation of Appointments \(Tenure\)](#)) Both faculty members and students can engage in intellectual debate without fear of censorship or retaliation.

Freedom of research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom gives both students and faculty the right to study and do research on topics they choose and to draw what conclusions they find consistent with their research. ([Intellectual Property: Ownership of Created Works](#))



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The University is committed to protecting, encouraging, and recognizing faculty in performance of their duties related to teaching, learning, professional development, scholarly work/research, and community service. ([Statement on Shared Governance](#)) The University further recognizes that academic freedom in teaching is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the faculty in teaching and the student learning. Academic freedom in teaching means that both faculty members and students can make comparisons and contrasts between subjects taught in a course and any field of human knowledge or period of history. It also gives the right to challenge one another's views without fear of being penalized.

Academic freedom allows both students and faculty the right to express their views in speech, writing, and through electronic communication, both on and off campus without fear of sanction, unless the manner of expression substantially impairs the rights of others. When expressing their views, individuals should make clear they are not speaking for the University.

III. Reporting Violations/Grievance

Faculty members or students should address all concerns regarding academic freedom violations to the Provost/VP for Academic Affairs and Student Services.

IV. Responsibility for this Operating Policy

Policy Owner

As part of the initial approval of this policy by the President and subsequent to the original dissemination of the policy, the Provost/VP for Academic Affairs and Student Services will be the policy owner for the ongoing evaluation, review, and approval of this policy. Subsequent reviews and revisions to this policy must be in accordance with approved operating policy procedures and processes.

This policy will be reviewed every two years or more frequently as needed by the Policy Owner. Revisions will be reviewed/affirmed by the Faculty Senate and the Cabinet and approved by the University President. This policy will be updated/published in the University's Policy Library.

Responsibility for Policy Implementation

The President has assigned the responsibility of implementing this policy to the Provost/VP for Academic Affairs and Student Services.