



Academic Freedom Policy

Owner:	General Counsel
Effective date:	October 26, 2020
Last reviewed date:	November 25, 2020
Summary:	This policy outlines the University's values, objective, and commitment to fostering a learning environment in which faculty and students alike are free to express their diverse viewpoints, while ensuring that civility and respect are maintained in the classroom.

I. DEFINITION

Academic freedom refers to the freedom of a university to set its intellectual priorities without undue interference from outside authorities and the freedom of students, course instructors, deans, faculty, and all other subject matter experts to promote wide-ranging discussion of intellectual, academic, and moral concerns by teaching, studying, writing, speaking, and pursuing knowledge, inquiry and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure. UoPeople affirms the freedom of course instructors to inquire into any subject that evokes their intellectual concern; to critique or advocate for change of social, academic and institutional norms and received wisdom; to present their findings to their students, colleagues, and others; to publish their data and conclusions without control or censorship; and to teach in the manner they consider professionally appropriate. It affirms the right of students to study subjects that concern them, form their own conclusions, and express their own opinions.

Academic freedom, free study and ordered discussion in the classroom are promoted by the obligation to teach and study the stated curriculum in a professional manner. Academic freedom is not a license for instructors to ignore the teaching priorities of the institution, the degree requirements UoPeople imposes, or the ordinary standards of academic discourse in their field. In class, students and instructors are responsible for staying relevant to the course curriculum, respectful of time limitations, and respectful of other university participants. Similarly, academic freedom is furthered by UoPeople's requirements that instructors and students follow norms of orderly debate, civility and mutual respect and it is not a justification for students or instructors to abuse others.

II. PURPOSE

UoPeople was founded upon the belief that education is a basic right. Academic freedom lies at the very heart of UoPeople's purpose. The right to education, teaching, and research can only



be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere that fosters open communication of findings, hypotheses, and opinions.

Through the spread of existing knowledge, the support and critique of existing norms, the creation of new knowledge, maintaining the intellectual bases of political self-rule and ecological and economic success, innovation, political, economic, social, and technological progress, academic freedom enhances the learning environment and serves the common good.

III. APPLICATION

University of the People values academic freedom of speech and expression, and encourages diverse viewpoints in an environment where every individual is treated with civility and respect. Academic freedom thrives in a class environment in which students and faculty alike can engage in a respectful exchange of ideas, even when they passionately disagree.

In the classroom, instructors and students alike are free to share a wide range of viewpoints in accord with standards of scholarly inquiry and relevance to the topic at hand. UoPeople protects the rights of all members of its community to challenge the views of another, engage in scholarly debate, and express their own views without fear of punishment, censorship, or retaliation.

Please note that violations of the University Code of Conduct are separate and distinct from academic freedom. Conduct that violates the University Code of Conduct is not protected by academic freedom and shall be addressed according to university policies and procedures as set forth in the UoPeople Catalog.

Course instructors, deans, faculty, and all other subject matter experts have the major responsibility to establish conditions that protect and encourage all students in their learning, teaching, and research activities. Such conditions include, for example: free inquiry and exchange of ideas; the right to critically examine, present, and discuss controversial material relevant to a course of instruction; the opportunity and obligation to encounter and critically consider challenging ideas or understandings of relevant course material; enjoyment of freedom of expression; and the right to be judged by faculty in accordance with fair procedures solely on the basis of the students' academic performance and conduct.

IV. FOUNDATIONS OF INQUIRY

The University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters and provides all members of the UoPeople community the broadest possible freedom to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. All members of the UoPeople community are free to express their ideas and viewpoints and engage in scholarly debate. Because the University is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the University, UoPeople fully respects and



supports the freedom of all members of the University community “to discuss any problem that presents itself.”

However, academic freedom is not a license to ignore the norms that make freedom of inquiry possible, including a learning environment that is free of racial, ethnic and similar discrimination, harassment, or retaliation.

All members of the UoPeople community are expected to participate in an inclusive academic environment that is built on civil discourse and fosters mutual respect, promotes equality, and celebrates diversity. Students, course instructors, and faculty shall be accountable for their words and actions, and shall not engage in discriminatory, harassing, intimidating, or retaliatory behavior of any kind. Any speech that subjects another to harassment, intimidation, a hostile work or learning environment, discrimination, or retaliation based upon one's membership of a protected class is a violation of UoPeople's Code of Conduct, is strictly prohibited, and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension and/or expulsion from the university.

Course instructors are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and treat all members of the University community with civility and respect. Speech that is not germane to the subject of the course of instruction; that violates the rights of others, such as libel, slander, harassment, or threats; that infringes on legally-protected privacy or confidentiality interests; that directly impedes university activities in a severe and/or pervasive manner; or that intentionally promotes hate of individuals or groups is not permitted at University of the People.

Course instructors, deans, faculty, and all other subject matter experts are free to express their views in any form of communication both on and off campus without fear of sanction unless the speech (1) substantially impairs the rights of others, or (2) demonstrates that they are ignorant, incompetent, or dishonest in their fields of discipline or expertise. Academic freedom does not give students, course instructors, deans, faculty, nor any other subject matter expert the right to ignore University regulations.

Furthermore, speech and expressions made by course instructors, deans, faculty, and all other subject matter experts that presents falsehoods to students as a fundamental truth, whether in or outside of the classroom, are not protected under this policy.

V. AAUP/AAC STATEMENT

UoPeople endorses the *1940 Statement of Principles Defining Academic Freedom*¹ which were formulated by representatives of the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges:

1. "Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution."



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. Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment."
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. 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 speaking for the institution."