

# The Academic Freedom Sessions

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# 1. OVERVIEW

“Although currently under attack from several directions, academic freedom is as important as it has ever been in enabling academics to teach, to carry out research, and to offer disinterested criticism and advice” (Horn 1).



**MOUNT ROYAL'S ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY**

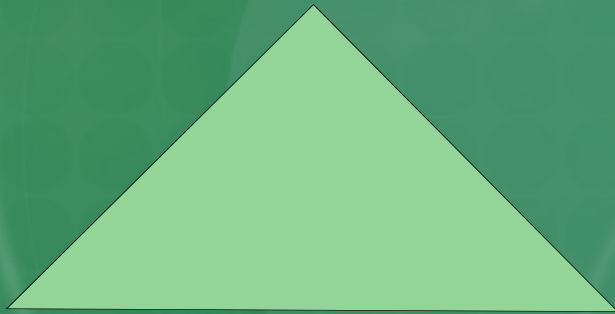
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## 2. BRIEF HISTORY

- Academic freedom as a concept developed in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century German universities as a response to religious pressures on curriculum and inquiry
- Some adaptation to North America degree structures and research focus from 1890 onwards
- Continuously evolving as the circumstances and constraints change (Standler)



Society



Knowledge

Universities



“It is significant that 19th century Germany universities recognized both the freedom of students (Lernfreiheit) and professors (Lehrfreiheit). Lernfreiheit meant the absence of “coercions” in learning situations and the right of students to explore freely within academic disciplines. Lehrfreiheit meant professional freedom to research and present findings through publication and instruction” (Cameron 5).



“The university’s highest obligation was to search for and impart truth. But it could fulfill that function only when it was free to investigate the full range of human thought. [...] Over time, academic freedom has expanded to include a broad range of behavior and a wide range of freedom of speech”  
(Johnson 2).



# 3. Definitions

“One of the primary reasons for the difficulty in protecting academic freedom is that the academic community has agreed upon no single definition of the term” (Poch 4).

## From CAUT's Policy Statement on Academic Freedom

“Academic freedom includes the right, without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion; freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof; freedom in producing and performing creative works; . . . freedom to express freely one's opinion about the institution, its administration, or the system in which one works; freedom from institutional censorship; . . . and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies.”



## Academic Freedom

The American Association of University Professors (1940) recognized three individual academic freedoms (abridged here) for professors:

1. Freedom in research and publication of the results.
2. Freedom in the classroom in discussing their academic subjects.
3. Responsibilities to recognize roles as citizens, professionals and officers of an educational institution, to be accurate, to exercise appropriate restraint, to respect others' opinions, and to indicate in which role they speak.



## Academic Responsibility

AAUP (1966) also outlined academic responsibilities (abridged):

1. Professors have a primary responsibility to seek and to state the truth as they see it.
2. Professors encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students.
3. Professors do not discriminate against or harass colleagues, they respect and defend free inquiry, and they respect the opinions of others.
4. Professors seek above all to be effective teachers and scholars.
5. Professors have the rights and obligations of other citizens, but a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.



## Academic Freedom and Tenure:

1. Tenure offers secure employment not subject to arbitrary dismissal.
2. In non-academic environments, dissent may be seen as insubordination, which may be cause for dismissal.
3. Via academic freedom, tenure is a guarantee of
  - a) free inquiry within an academic discipline;
  - b) free speech bound by constitutional but not institutional constraints;
  - c) the right to dissent on issues relevant to an academic discipline and to the governance of the university



# 4. Pressures

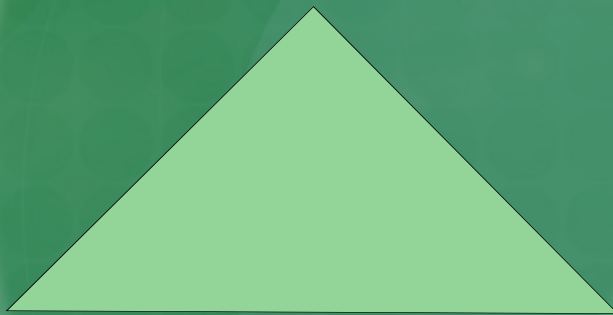


- Faith
- Cultural competence
- Commercialization
- Commodification
- Institutional dependence
- Accessibility
- Balkanization of disciplines or ideologies
- Technology
- Intellectual Property
- Part-time professoriate
- Economies of scale (class size)



“Many persons in academic life do not seem to realize that [a] cultural shift has occurred and still seem to imagine that a major threat to academic freedom is coming from a religious establishment that no longer exists. In fact, the principle threat to academic freedom these days comes not from ministers, or trustees, or university administrators, but from the dominant ideologies among students and faculty” (Jasper 3).

Society

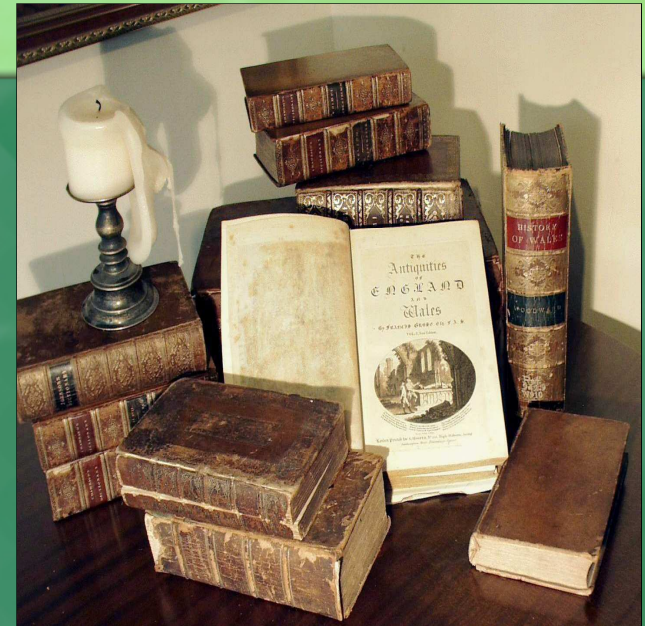


Diversity

Opportunity



Universities





## Fracture Lines:

- ❖ Gender / equity
- ❖ Diversity / equity
- ❖ Merit vs access
- ❖ Geopolitics
- ❖ Domestic politics and security
- ❖ Speech Restrictions
- ❖ Political diversity
- ❖ 'Tied' research
- ❖ Curriculum and Intellectual Property Ownership
- ❖ Students' Freedom
- ❖ Risk and liability mitigation
- ❖ Discipline silos

# 5. Case Studies

## A. SPEECH RESTRICTIONS

- After complaints from students, a university President orders the removal from campus of satirical posters advertising a student play and depicting Jesus in a sexual situation.
- A large national faculty organization passes a unanimous motion censuring a local association for threatening a lawsuit over a series of false and defamatory remarks made by another local association, on the grounds that the legal threat infringes on free speech.



## **B. TIED RESEARCH**

A faculty member on an external research grant is asked to sign a contract giving final editorial approval to a representative of the funding organization. The funds come from

- A. A pharmaceutical company.
- B. A community mental health agency.



## **C. CURRICULUM OWNERSHIP**

A UBC professor developing an online course is asked to sign a contract giving ownership of all content to the university, with an unrestricted right to alter and repackage the course and use it in perpetuity (Canadian Association of University Teachers, *Mary Bryson*).



#### **D. DISCIPLINE SILOS**

- A human anatomist from Idaho State U, faces calls for dismissal from department colleagues (Canadian Press); an investigator and anthropologist from Washington State U, faced similar attacks (Schmeltzer). The reason: both have investigated and published on the sasquatch.
- A department opposes a sabbatical application because the research proposal belongs, by common agreement, to a different but arguably cognate discipline.



### **E. GENDER / EQUITY**

A largely male History Department at a Canadian university is seeking a medieval historian to replace a retiree who had taught medieval political and military history. In the ad, the department calls for a specialty in social history of marriage and the family in the Middle Ages, and particularly encourages women to apply.



### **F. POLITICAL DIVERSITY**

While a search committee has short-listed an individual based on impressive credentials, the candidate is dropped from consideration when the majority of the committee determines that there would be a poor collegial fit after a sharp exchange of views about research methodology.



## **G. STUDENT FREEDOM**

- A Canadian student association explicitly excludes student societies affiliated with political parties from its clubs and societies bylaws, effectively banning advertising, recruiting and all events or functions from student-run facilities.
- While assessing the Ethical Reasoning outcome, an instructor consciously gives lower grades to students who take a conservative view of the causes of poverty.

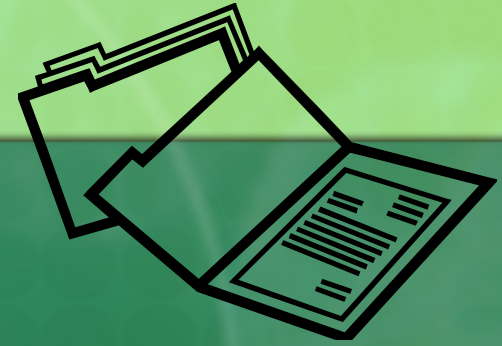


## **H. RISK / LIABILITY MITIGATION**

A Canadian university introduces a policy banning disparaging statements about any country or state, apparently as a preemptive measure to prevent an escalation of conflict between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel groups (Seligman).

## **I. GEOPOLITICS**

The US Treasury Department includes the editing of academic journals under its Trading with the Enemy embargo, requiring that some editorial boards exclude nationals from identified countries; a Canadian member of the board is on tenure-track.



## **J. DOMESTIC POLITICS**

To the embarrassment of administration, university faculty oppose the participation in a colloquium of a politician hostile to unions and indifferent to higher education; they later boycott a convocation when the same individual receives an honorary degree.





### **K. DIVERSITY / EQUITY**

A Dean investigates after receiving a petition from students complaining that their professor is teaching a contemporary social issues course with an exclusive and aggressive emphasis on race and racism. Previous student evaluations in the same course have been low.

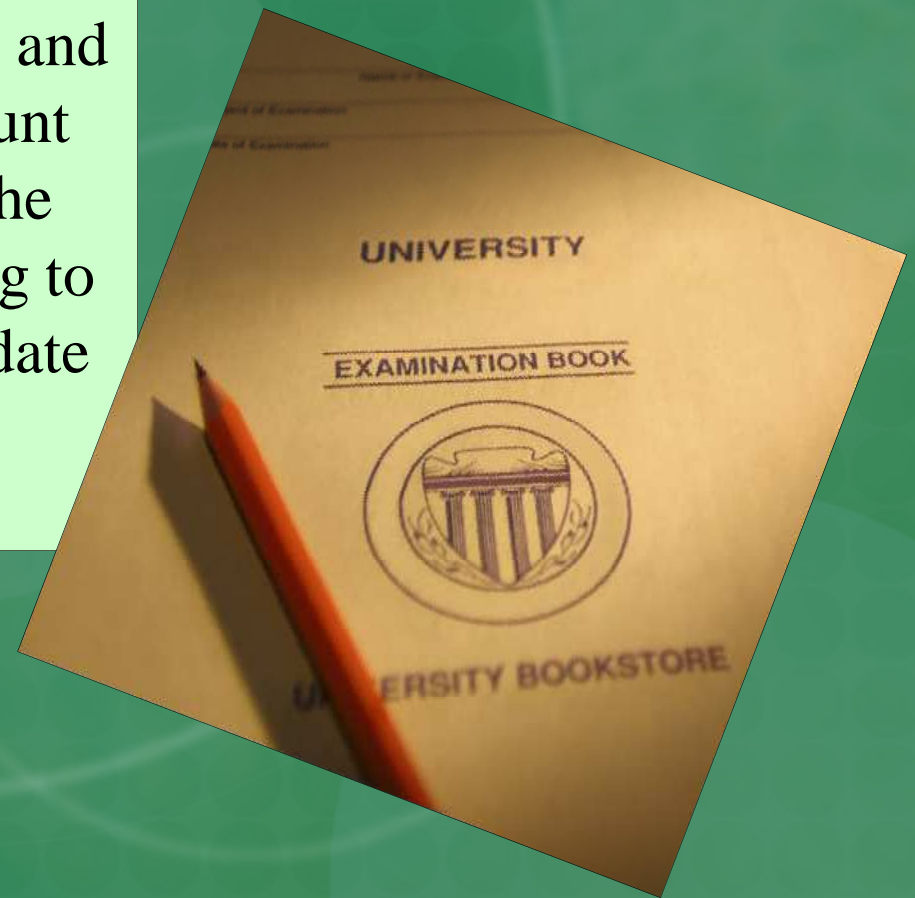


### **L. MERIT / ACCESS**

Mount Royal formally introduces a 30% admission quota for aboriginal students in a program which is typically oversubscribed.

# 6. CONCLUSION

“Freedom of expression is the lifeblood of debate at universities, and without such freedom the paramount mission of the university to seek the truth is harmed. It is self-defeating to censor critical speech or to intimidate individuals into avoiding timely discussions ” (Seligman).



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