

POLICY 1.38 – Rights and Responsibilities of Academic Freedom

Policy Category: General

Effective Date: March 2, 1989

Supersedes: (NEW)

PREAMBLE

The principle of academic freedom is not new; it has been in force in all universities in North America for several decades. Academic freedom provides a university community with the protection that must accompany independent research and the publication of its results. Academics frequently express ideas that are at odds with other views within the university, and sometimes with the views of society or government. Academic freedom ensures that such ideas can be expressed without fear of interference or repression from university administrators, politicians, or others.

It is the essence of a university that independent research should be undertaken; this frequently involves highly controversial issues and sometimes highly controversial results and interpretations. It is a matter of historical record that members of the academic community, faculty and students alike, evaluate such results and interpretations. Conclusions are either sustained or refuted. The basis of this process is that the university must remain the centre of such free intellectual inquiry and interchange.

Questions occasionally arise concerning the relationship between the conclusions reached by individual researchers and the views of this University. The question can be addressed directly and succinctly: there is no relationship between such conclusions and any position which the University itself might take on the issues involved. In other words, in their capacity as researchers and scholars, individual researchers do not represent the views of The University of Western Ontario.

Members of the academic community have responsibilities as well as rights and they are individually accountable, in both the moral and social sense, for their findings and statements. In protecting academic freedom, the University is not assuming that responsibility which is properly the responsibility of the individual concerned.

Academic checks and balances also apply to teaching. As in research, so in the classroom, there are freedoms and responsibilities. Faculty members have the responsibility to make a balanced presentation of controversial issues. They have the further responsibility to teach their students to evaluate what is presented to them in a critical way. Finally, students are expected, particularly in their senior years, to critically appraise material, to draw their own conclusions, and to argue rationally in their defense. Faculty members may not use their classrooms as a forum for advancing their personal opinions beyond the bounds of these responsibilities.

RESOLUTION

The University of Western Ontario reaffirms the principle of academic freedom with its attendant rights and responsibilities.