

Faculty Senate Statement on Academic Freedom and Expression (Approved by Unanimous Consent, 7 June 2024)

Academic freedom and freedom of expression are currently imperiled on American campuses. Politicians, donors, traditionalists, cultural crusaders, and other actors who lack knowledge of academic disciplines and the role of the university in a democratic society are actively inserting themselves into campus educational affairs. University administrators are under external and internal pressure to account for when and how they use their voices to address current events. In some instances, leaders have used institutional power to violate the free speech, assembly, and due process rights of students and faculty. Faculty, staff, and students have expressed fears for their safety in exercising classroom, workplace, and extramural speech about the pressing issues of the day.

Twenty years ago, the DU Faculty Senate issued a position statement on 'Academic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities' (Attachment A). This was done in response to a particular historical circumstance that put Colorado colleges and universities at the center of a national debate about academic freedom for teachers and students. In 2024 the debate is much wider, deeper, and more consequential.

This new statement reaffirms Faculty Senate support for the statement on academic values, rights, and responsibilities articulated 20 years ago. In light of current events it also emphasizes the following:

- Rights of academic freedom and freedom of expression, as defined in DU's [APT](#) and [Freedom of Expression](#) policies, are bedrock principles of the university. They are indispensable to the spirit of open inquiry, discussion, and debate that energizes and sustains an academic community.
- Individual members of the university community have the broadest possible latitude to exercise academic and free speech rights without fear of internal and external surveillance, interference, censorship, coercion, threats, and retaliation.
- Faculty in individual departments, schools, colleges, and other academic units are free to collectively voice their opinions and beliefs about contemporary issues and events as warranted by resident scholarly expertise. However, they should be mindful that such statements may have adverse effects, both inside and outside the unit, by signaling viewpoint orthodoxy.
- Rights of free assembly and protest on campus are sacrosanct, subject to conditions established by DU's Freedom of Expression policy, Demonstrations policy, and other relevant governing documents.
- Faculty, students, and staff accused of violating academic freedom and/or free expression policies, or who are otherwise called to account for their speech, are guaranteed full due process protections. Their cases must be reviewed and settled in keeping with all established university procedures and precedents.
- Any new university policies governing academic life should arise from established mechanisms of shared governance, be informed by relevant academic expertise, and have review and input from all appropriate consultative bodies on campus.

DU's Faculty Senate, as the governing body representing all DU faculty, has a vital role to play in articulating and upholding principles, practices, and protections around academic freedom, free expression, and due process. The Senate's role is complementary to those of the Administration and the Board of Trustees in the system of shared responsibility and joint effort that allows higher education to work for the common good.

Attachment A

POSITION STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC VALUES, RIGHTS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

University of Denver Faculty Senate
Approved 13 February 2004

CONTEXT

Colorado's colleges and universities are currently in the eye of a national storm concerning the state of academic freedom on American campuses. Faculties have been accused of harboring a pervasive liberal political bias, discriminating against conservative viewpoints in the classroom, and using their power to indoctrinate, rather than educate, students. Efforts are afoot in the Colorado state legislature and by private organizations to watchdog the behavior of professors within our institutions of higher learning. This has serious implications for academic freedom on both sides of the teacher student relationship, and for the university as a site of critical, creative, and ethical inquiry.

The University of Denver—the oldest private university in the Rocky Mountain West—values and promotes independent thought, critical and creative inquiry, ethical behavior, and an education that serves the public good. Accordingly, the Faculty of the University of Denver reaffirm their longstanding commitment to:

(1) defending the principles of academic freedom, open debate, and civil discourse;

(2) exposing students to the full range of paradigms, theories, and methods at play in a field of inquiry;

(3) learning from the accumulated body of human wisdom, which has established that:

(a) knowledge is provisional and open to reinterpretation;

(b) the university—an institution that is part of and interactive with wider political, economic, and cultural forces—is a repository of knowledge, site of critical inquiry, and agent of social change;

(c) critical, creative, and ethical inquiry is best served when teachers and students are free to express and examine the societal commitments and biases that influence the production, dissemination, and application of knowledge.

(4) respecting the ability of students and teachers to jointly contextualize, critique, and compare different approaches and contributions to human knowledge;

(5) evaluating students solely on the basis of their academic performance, and our peers solely on the basis of their contributions to scholarly and creative activity, teaching, university service, and the wider public good;

(6) and, finally, inspiring and communicating the joy and excitement of intellectual endeavors.