

Statement on Academic Freedom and Integrity

Developed by a Sub-Committee from Instructional Council, Fall 2016

Reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee, Fall 2016

Presented to the Full Faculty for Review, Spring 2017

Recommended to HCC President, Spring 2017

Presented to HCC Board of Trustees, Spring 2017

Definition of Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is the particular freedom of scholars, faculty members, and students to pursue knowledge, speak, write, and learn without unreasonable restriction. This freedom should be judged, when such judgment is necessary, on the basis of legitimate intellectual and professional criteria, and not on personal beliefs, feelings, political views, religious affiliation, or other individual preferences.

Why Academic Freedom is Important

The primary rationale behind Academic Freedom is the understanding and appreciation of the necessity of diverse perspectives and opinions in higher education. Acknowledgement of the essentiality of diversity allows individuals to think critically about their own positions and engage in various points of view, without fear of reprisal. The fundamental purpose of higher education is to advance the common good, and not to further the interests of an individual scholar, faculty member, student, institution, corporate entity, or governmental body. The progression toward the common good, which benefits all individuals, can only be achieved through the free pursuit of truth which, in turn, requires freedom in research, teaching, and speech. Academic freedom is essential in institutions of higher education if they are to fulfill their purpose in enriching lives and knowledge, and through doing so, make their proper contribution to the common good. Achieving this goal depends on the free search for truth and open, honest discussion. Although academic freedom grants certain rights, these rights are also accompanied by corresponding responsibilities.

What Academic Freedom Includes

Membership in the academic community imposes on scholars, faculty members, students, administrators, and trustees an obligation to respect the dignity of others, to acknowledge the right to express differing opinions, and to foster and defend intellectual honesty, freedom of inquiry and instruction, and free expression of ideas, both on and off the campus.

Members of the academic community should endeavor to be both scholars and instructors. Academic community members' positions are based on their mastery of subject and their own scholarship, which entitles the member to freedom in the presentation of their subject. Members of the academic community are at complete liberty to research and publish without limitations imposed by other members, institutional administrators, corporate entities, or governmental bodies, as long as permission has been granted for research/publishing by the Highland Community College Institutional Review Board, where appropriate and deemed necessary. While members are entitled to absolute autonomy in the classroom in discussing their subject as they see fit, they should be careful not to introduce contentious themes that have no relationship to the subject being taught. This should not be narrowly construed as a

restriction on the free presentation of their subject, but as a reminder to ascertain that controversial material is in relation to the subject being taught. This is not to say that the discussion of controversial themes is prohibited. The fundamental aim of higher education is to challenge knowledge for the sake of creating new knowledge.

Members of the academic community are entitled to freedom of speech as specified by the *First Amendment* of the *Bill of Rights* in the *United States Constitution*. This freedom encompasses not only actual speech, but also written word, including electronic correspondences. While members of the academic community have freedom to speak and write as they wish, they should be aware that they are uniquely positioned in the scholarly, college, and local communities. As a result, they should demonstrate self-control, show respect for the views of others, and make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.

In support of Academic Freedom and Integrity, members of the academic community at Highland Community College are further entitled to due process when charges of misconduct are levied, as detailed in each individual's contractual agreement with the college and/or as specified by federal/state law. Serious charges against a member of the academic community will be heard before a committee of their peers, with the burden of proof resting with the accuser. During the hearing, academic community members have the right to present counter evidence and challenge the accuser(s). They may also be assisted by an attorney, if they so choose.