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1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure

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In 1915 the Committee on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure of the American Association of University Professors formulated a statement of principles on academic freedom and academic tenure known as the 1915 Declaration of Principles, which was officially endorsed by the Association at its Second Annual Meeting held in Washington, D.C., December 31, 1915, and January 1, 1916.

In 1925 the American Council on Education called a conference of representatives of a number of its constituent members, among them the American Association of University Professors, for the purpose of formulating a shorter statement of principles on academic freedom and tenure. The statement formulated at this conference, known as the 1925 Conference Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure, was endorsed by the Association of American Colleges (now the Association of American Colleges and Universities) in 1925 and by the American Association of University Professors in 1926.

In 1940, following a series of joint conferences begun in 1934, representatives of the American Association of University Professors and of the Association of American Colleges (now the Association of American Colleges and Universities) agreed upon a restatement of principles set forth in the 1925 Conference Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure. This restatement is known to the profession as the 1940 [Statement](#) of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

Following extensive discussions on the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with leading educational associations and with individual faculty members and administrators, a joint committee of the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges met during 1969 to reevaluate this key policy statement. On the basis of the comments received, and the discussions that ensued, the joint committee felt the preferable approach was to formulate interpretations of the 1940 Statement from the experience gained in implementing and applying it for over thirty years and of adapting it to current needs.

The committee submitted to the two associations for their consideration Interpretive Comments that are included below as footnotes to the 1940 Statement.¹ These interpretations were adopted by the Council of the American Association of University Professors in April 1970 and endorsed by the Fifty-Sixth Annual Meeting as Association Policy.

The purpose of this statement is to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and [agreement](#) upon [procedures](#) to ensure them in colleges and universities. Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole.² The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.

Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the

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student to freedom in learning. It carries with it duties correlative with rights.³

Tenure is a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic [security](#) to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.

Academic Freedom

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.⁴ 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.⁵
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.⁶

Academic Tenure

After the expiration of a probationary period, teachers or investigators should have permanent or continuous tenure, and their service should be terminated only for adequate cause, except in the case of retirement for age, or under extraordinary circumstances because of financial exigencies.

In the interpretation of this principle it is understood that the following represents acceptable academic practice:

1. The precise terms and conditions of every appointment should be stated in writing and be in the possession of both institution and teacher before the appointment is consummated.
2. Beginning with appointment to the rank of full-time instructor or a higher rank,⁷ the probationary period should not exceed seven years, including within this period full-time service in all institutions of higher education; but subject to the proviso that when, after a term of probationary service of more than three years in one or more institutions, a teacher is called to another institution, it may be agreed in writing that the new appointment is for a probationary period of not more than four years, even though thereby the person's total probationary period in the academic profession is extended beyond the normal maximum of seven years.⁸ Notice should be given at least one year prior to the expiration of the probationary period if the teacher is not to be continued in service after the expiration of that period.⁹
3. During the probationary period a teacher should have the academic freedom that all other members of the faculty have.¹⁰
4. Termination for cause of a continuous appointment, or the dismissal for cause of a teacher previous to the expiration of a term appointment, should, if possible, be considered by both a faculty committee and the governing board of the institution. In all cases where the facts are in dispute, the accused teacher should be informed before the hearing in writing of the charges and should have the opportunity to be heard in his or her own defense by all bodies that pass judgment upon the case. The teacher should be permitted to be accompanied by an advisor of his or her own choosing who may act as counsel. There should be a full stenographic record of the hearing available to the parties concerned. In the hearing of charges of incompetence the testimony should include that of teachers and other scholars, either from the teacher's own or from other institutions. Teachers on continuous appointment who are dismissed for reasons not involving moral turpitude should receive their salaries for at least a year from the date of notification of dismissal whether or not they are continued in their duties at the institution.¹¹



5. Termination of a continuous appointment because of financial exigency should be demonstrably bona fide.

Endorsers

The 1940 Statement of Principles has been endorsed by [more than 250 scholarly and education groups](#).

Endnotes:

1. The Introduction to the Interpretive Comments notes: In the thirty years since their promulgation, the principles of the 1940 "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" have undergone a substantial amount of refinement. This has evolved through a variety of processes, including customary acceptance, understandings mutually arrived at between institutions and professors or their representatives, investigations and reports by the American Association of University Professors, and formulations of statements by that association either alone or in conjunction with the Association of American Colleges. These comments represent the attempt of the two associations, as the original sponsors of the 1940 "Statement," to formulate the most important of these refinements. Their incorporation here as Interpretive Comments is based upon the premise that the 1940 "Statement" is not a static code but a fundamental document designed to set a framework of norms to guide adaptations to changing times and circumstances.

Also, there have been relevant developments in the law itself reflecting a growing insistence by the courts on due process within the academic community which parallels the essential concepts of the 1940 "Statement"; particularly relevant is the identification by the Supreme Court of academic freedom as a right protected by the First Amendment. As the Supreme Court said in *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 US 589 (1967), "Our Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom." [Back to text](#).

2. The word "teacher" as used in this document is understood to include the investigator who is attached to an academic institution without teaching duties. [Back to text](#).

3. First 1970 comment: The Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors have long recognized that membership in the academic profession carries with it special responsibilities. Both associations either separately or jointly have consistently affirmed these responsibilities in major policy statements, providing guidance to professors in their utterances as citizens, in the exercise of their responsibilities to the institution and to students, and in their conduct when resigning from their institution or when undertaking government-sponsored research. Of particular relevance is the "[Statement on Professional Ethics](#)" adopted in 1966 as Association policy (AAUP, *Policy Documents and Reports*, 11th ed. [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015], 145–46). [Back to text](#).

4. Second 1970 comment: The intent of this statement is not to discourage what is "controversial." Controversy is at the heart of the free academic inquiry which the entire statement is designed to foster. The passage serves to underscore the need for teachers to avoid persistently intruding material which has no relation to their subject. [Back to text](#).

5. Third 1970 comment: Most church-related institutions no longer need or desire the departure from the principle of academic freedom implied in the 1940 "Statement," and we do not now endorse such a departure. [Back to text](#).

6. Fourth 1970 comment: This paragraph is the subject of an interpretation adopted by the sponsors of the 1940 "Statement" immediately following its endorsement:

If the administration of a college or university feels that a teacher has not observed the admonitions of paragraph 3 of the section on Academic Freedom and believes that the extramural utterances of the teacher have been such as to raise grave doubts concerning the teacher's fitness for his or her position, it may proceed to file charges under paragraph 4 of the section on Academic Tenure. In pressing such charges, the administration should remember that teachers are citizens and should be accorded the freedom of citizens. In such cases the administration must assume full responsibility, and the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges are free to make an

investigation.

Paragraph 3 of the section on Academic Freedom in the 1940 "Statement" should also be interpreted in keeping with the 1964 "Committee A Statement on Extramural Utterances," Policy Documents and Reports, 31, which states inter alia: "The controlling principle is that a faculty member's expression of opinion as a citizen cannot constitute grounds for dismissal unless it clearly demonstrates the faculty member's unfitness for his or her position. Extramural utterances rarely bear upon the faculty member's fitness for the position. Moreover, a final decision should take into account the faculty member's entire record as a teacher and scholar."

Paragraph 5 of the "Statement on Professional Ethics," Policy Documents and Reports, 146, also addresses the nature of the "special obligations" of the teacher:

As members of their community, professors have the rights and obligations of other citizens. Professors measure the urgency of these obligations in the light of their responsibilities to their subject, to their students, to their profession, and to their institution. When they speak or act as private persons, they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their college or university. As citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.

Both the protection of academic freedom and the requirements of academic responsibility apply not only to the full-time probationary and the tenured teacher, but also to all others, such as part-time faculty and teaching assistants, who exercise teaching responsibilities. [Back to text.](#)

7. Fifth 1970 comment: The concept of "rank of full-time instructor or a higher rank" is intended to include any person who teaches a full-time load regardless of the teacher's specific title. [For a discussion of this question, see the "Report of the Special Committee on Academic Personnel Ineligible for Tenure," *AAUP Bulletin* 52 (September 1966): 280–82.] [Back to text.](#)

8. Sixth 1970 comment: In calling for an agreement "in writing" on the amount of credit given for a faculty member's prior service at other institutions, the "Statement" furthers the general policy of full understanding by the professor of the terms and conditions of the appointment. It does not necessarily follow that a professor's tenure rights have been violated because of the absence of a written agreement on this matter. Nonetheless, especially because of the variation in permissible institutional practices, a written understanding concerning these matters at the time of appointment is particularly appropriate and advantageous to both the individual and the institution. [For a more detailed statement on this question, see "On Crediting Prior Service Elsewhere as Part of the Probationary Period," *Policy Documents and Reports*, 167–68.] [Back to text.](#)

9. Seventh 1970 comment: The effect of this subparagraph is that a decision on tenure, favorable or unfavorable, must be made at least twelve months prior to the completion of the probationary period. If the decision is negative, the appointment for the following year becomes a terminal one. If the decision is affirmative, the provisions in the 1940 "Statement" with respect to the termination of service of teachers or investigators after the expiration of a probationary period should apply from the date when the favorable decision is made.

The general principle of notice contained in this paragraph is developed with greater specificity in the "Standards for Notice of Nonreappointment," endorsed by the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the American Association of University Professors (1964) (*Policy Documents and Reports*, 99). These standards are:

Notice of nonreappointment, or of intention not to recommend reappointment to the governing board, should be given in writing in accordance with the following standards:

1. Not later than March 1 of the first academic year of service, if the appointment expires at the end of that year; or, if a one-year appointment terminates during an academic year, at least three months in advance of its termination.

2. Not later than December 15 of the second academic year of service, if the appointment expires at the end of that year; or, if an initial two-year appointment terminates during an academic year, at least six months in advance of its termination.

3. At least twelve months before the expiration of an appointment after two or more years in

9. At least twelve months before the expiration of an appointment after two or more years in the institution.

Other obligations, both of institutions and of individuals, are described in the "[Statement on Recruitment and Resignation of Faculty Members](#)," *Policy Documents and Reports*, 153–54, as endorsed by the Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors in 1961. [Back to text.](#)

10. Eighth 1970 comment: The freedom of probationary teachers is enhanced by the establishment of a regular procedure for the periodic evaluation and assessment of the teacher's academic performance during probationary status. Provision should be made for regularized procedures for the consideration of complaints by probationary teachers that their academic freedom has been violated. One suggested procedure to serve these purposes is contained in the "[Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#)," *Policy Documents and Reports*, 79–90, prepared by the American Association of University Professors. [Back to text.](#)

11. Ninth 1970 comment: A further specification of the academic due process to which the teacher is entitled under this paragraph is contained in the "[Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings](#)," *Policy Documents and Reports*, 91–93, jointly approved by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges in 1958. This interpretive document deals with the issue of suspension, about which the 1940 "Statement" is silent.

The "Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings" provides: "Suspension of the faculty member during the proceedings is justified only if immediate harm to the faculty member or others is threatened by the faculty member's continuance. Unless legal considerations forbid, any such suspension should be with pay." A suspension which is not followed by either reinstatement or the opportunity for a hearing is in effect a summary dismissal in violation of academic due process.

The concept of "moral turpitude" identifies the exceptional case in which the professor may be denied a year's teaching or pay in whole or in part. The statement applies to that kind of behavior which goes beyond simply warranting discharge and is so utterly blameworthy as to make it inappropriate to require the offering of a year's teaching or pay. The standard is not that the moral sensibilities of persons in the particular community have been affronted. The standard is behavior that would evoke condemnation by the academic community generally. [Back to text.](#)

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