

Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Faculty Rights Annual Report 2017-2018

The SCAFFR committee met four times during the 2017-2018 academic year to investigate and address issues of academic freedom and faculty rights. Three areas received the focus of the committee's work this year:

1. Review of University of Utah speech policy as it relates to free expression
2. Monitoring the national debate on campus free express and inclusivity
3. Accessibility and communication of policy related to speech and academic freedom

Each will be summarized, with resources and recommendations.

Review of University of Utah speech policy as it relates to free expression

Early in the 2017-2018 academic year, the Academic Senate Executive Committee requested that SCAFFR review and discuss the Chicago Statement. Meetings included invited stakeholders including faculty, staff, and administration representing various university communities. Committee members reviewed existing university policy as it relates to campus speech and free expression. After reviewing policies and talking with stakeholders, the committee determined that current university policies thoroughly protect free speech on campus. The committee recommends that the university not become a signatory of the Chicago Statement.

The Chicago Statement was drafted by a University of Chicago committee convened by the university president in 2014 "in light of recent national events that have tested institutional commitments to free and open discourse." The statement does not identify or define the context of the national events that lead to its creation. The [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education \(FIRE\)](#), has initiated a campaign for college campuses to become signatories to the Chicago Statement, including direct requests to members of the SCAFFAR committee. The goals and motivations of the FIRE organization are difficult to discern. A [2012 op-ed](#) written by Greg Lukianoff, an employee of FIRE discusses attempts by campus administrators to ensure civility and inclusiveness that ultimately had led to restrictive speech codes. SCAFFR committee member Allyson Mower connects this back to the University of Utah's speech policy, finding that our policy, "designates free speech facilities as schedulable spaces, but also denotes that such facilities do not limit the right of free speech in other areas of campus."

Monitoring the national debate on campus free express and inclusivity

Free speech and free expression in higher education continue to receive significant attention and have resulted in national debates on the rights and responsibilities of institutions of higher education. Many of these debates hinge on whether a campus should be inclusive or protect free expression, framing each as mutually exclusive. The committee does not interpret our speech policies as violating free expression or suppressing inclusiveness

The committee has identified several resources on campus free expression that can provide context to this debate. These are linked below to provide an overview of the issue but are not intended to represent every possible perspective.

The Chronicle: Focus on Free Speech -

https://www.chronicle.com/items/biz/resource/ChronFocus_FreeSpeech_2018_i.pdf

HigherEd Today: Free Speech and Campus Inclusion, A Survey of College Presidents -

<https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/04/09/free-speech-campus-inclusion-survey-college-presidents/>

Newseum Institute: An Overview of Free Speech on Public College Campuses -

<http://www.newseuminstitute.org/first-amendment-center/topics/freedom-of-speech-2/free-speech-on-public-college-campuses-overview/>

The 2018 Session of the Utah Legislature included several bills introduced and passed that have the potential to affect free speech at institutions of higher education in the state. Bob Flores, JD provided the committee with legislative updates and the committee intends to continue working with Mr. Flores to review the legislative intent and implementation in the coming academic year.

Accessibility and communication of policy related to speech and academic freedom

The committee identified a need for improved campus communication of the policy and procedures surrounding free expression and academic freedom. We propose the creation of a centralized resource for this information. We recommend and request the resources to create and maintain a website, to be housed within the Academic Senate SCAFFR page. This site would provide links to all university policy relevant to free speech and academic freedom, with an explanation of the processes and procedures for each. The committee also requests permission to amend the following statement for use as an introduction to this resource page:

We, the members of the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate at the University of Utah, [affirm the importance of the free exchange of ideas, free expression, and academic freedom](#). We also deeply value an inclusive community and support the continued efforts to make our university a diverse, safe place in which we treat one another with respect and dignity.

These principles are rooted in all facets of our institution and are core to our educational endeavors. They are also of special importance to us. For over 100 years, the Academic Senate has provided a forum for diverse voices and viewpoints to be heard and to take action as part of shared governance at the University of Utah.

— *Executive Committee of the Academic Senate*