

3.7.4

Faculty: Academic freedom

The institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom.

Judgment

Compliance Partial Compliance Non-Compliance Not Applicable

Narrative

Tennessee Technological University (TTU) safeguards and protects academic freedom. The principle is a guiding doctrine for both faculty and administration, as evidenced by easily accessible policy statements.

Implications of Academic Freedom at TTU

TTU defines academic freedom as “the free search for an exposition of truth” and stresses the importance of academic freedom in teaching, research, and service, describing the principle as “essential to fulfill the ultimate objectives of an educational institution.” As stated in “Academic Freedom and Responsibility” in the Faculty Handbook, those objectives include learning, the advancement of truth, and “the advancement of this University, the profession, and the community” [1]. Further, the Student Handbook notes that “the preparation, scope, security, and administration of examinations” is the purview of faculty, “in accordance with accepted norms of academic freedom and responsibility” [2].

The University recognizes the relationship of academic freedom and tenure as stated by the AAUP, as reflected in its tenure policy. “Academic freedom and academic responsibility are interdependent, and academic tenure is adopted as a means to protect the former while promoting the latter,” with tenure described as “essential” for the protection of academic freedom [3].

Since the University’s most recent Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) compliance certification, the following addition has been made to its official policy on academic freedom: “While academic tenure is essential for the protection of academic freedom, the full benefits and responsibilities of academic freedom extend to all individuals teaching at TTU, whether or not they are eligible for tenure” [4]. This amendment was made in anticipation of issues that might arise in the future, not in response to existing or previous issues, and was approved by the University faculty on April 28, 2010.

TTU faculty and administration recently demonstrated their commitment to the guiding principles of academic freedom, when the Fall 2014 recommended “Common Book” for incoming freshmen -- Eboo Patel’s *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, The Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* - made the University the subject of controversy when bloggers and political activists alleged that the author had connections to criminals and terrorists. TTU President Dr. Phil Oldham defended the choice, saying, “Exposure to a variety of ideas and opinions is a significant component in an advanced education It is not our purpose to tell students what to think, but we are here to help them learn and to think critically for themselves” [4]. The principle of academic freedom is further supported in the University’s policy on Freedom of Expression, adopted in 2008 to cover a wide range of campus events and to affirm that free expression is “essential to the enterprise of higher education, and therefore is protected and encouraged at Tennessee Technological University” [5]. The TTU policy on academic freedom is based on, and fully compatible with, the governing Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) system policy “Academic Freedom and Responsibility” for its constituent universities and community colleges [6].

Conclusion

TTU has clear policies and demonstrated practices that guide and support the principle of academic freedom for its faculty. Therefore, TTU is in compliance with Comprehensive Standard 3.7.4.

Sources

-  [1] Academic Freedom and Responsibility
-  [2] Academic Regulations
-  [3] Academic Freedom and Responsibility_Policy 202
-  [4] Herald Citizen Article
-  [5] Freedom_of_Expression
-  [6] TBR Academic Freedom and Responsibility Policy