

**Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom (SPAF) Committee**

**Vanderbilt University Faculty Senate**

**Report for Academic Year 2016-2017**

**Chair: Xenofon Koutsoukos (School of Engineering) (2017)**

**1. Committee members**

Robert Carnahan, Medicine (2019)

Sam Chang, Medicine (2018)

Charlene M. Dewey, Medicine (2017) [Executive Committee Liaison]

Jennifer Green, Medicine (2018)

Sal March, Owen (2019)

Holly McCammon, A&S (2017)

Michael Miga, Engineering (2018)

Sean Seymore, Law (2017)

Tedra Walden, Peabody (2019)

Christopher Wright, Medicine (2019)

**2. Committee Charges**

***Charge #1: Is there now a need for appropriate groups to reconsider student and staff freedom of expression on campus?***

*The academic freedom statement was presented to BOT on April 21, 2016; primary concern of students was student-on-student issues—the students were less concerned about faculty-student issues. SPAF reviewed the statement contemplating whether any additional text is necessary to clarify certain aspects of the statement as it becomes more of a “living” document. Review the Vanderbilt’s academic freedom of expression statement for areas requiring revision.*

***Outcomes and Recommendations***

The SPAF committee worked with VSG to help with the revision of the Student Academic Freedom of Expression Statement (as part of the Student Handbook and the Student Statement of Principles.) The VSG did extensive work and prepared specific recommendations based on focus groups and discussions with student organizations. The committee reviewed the proposed revisions and provided suggestions. A joint FS/VSG meeting was planned to discuss the proposed revisions but the event was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.

The committee also discussed staff freedom of expression. The committee concluded that there are not any suitable actions related to this charge because the interpretation of staff freedom of expression is not an appropriate objective for the SPAF committee.

Our recommendation is to continue working with the VSG during the next academic year and provide assistance for revising the student academic freedom of expression.

***Charge #2: Identify the role of Vanderbilt's new Chief Diversity Officer/Office in circumstances involving allegations of violations of faculty academic freedom of expression.***

***Outcomes and Recommendations***

The committee reviewed the current process for resolving allegations of violation of faculty academic freedom of expression which involves the Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Services (EAD.) We also met with Vice Chancellor Dr. Hill and Assistant Vice Chancellor Dr. Barnes about the role of the Chief Diversity Officer/Office in circumstances involving allegations of violation of faculty academic freedom of expression. Based on these discussions, there is agreement that the current process is robust and there is no need for a change.

In addition, we discussed the option of establishing a “bias reporting system” independent of the EAD-based process for reporting bias incidents related to academic freedom as well as diversity and inclusion. The committee reviewed reporting systems in peer institutions and discussed the potential benefits of creating such a system at Vanderbilt. The committee members expressed mostly positive comments but there are important issues that need to be addressed:

- Establishing well-defined goals for the provided services that may include reporting, support, referral to appropriate resources, and education of the Vanderbilt community.
- Creating a clear framework for data collection, data and report handling and usage, and possible actions.
- Creating multiple levels of services that can include, for example, anonymous reporting and confidential consultation.
- Implementation and required resources.

Our recommendation for the next academic year is to consider the creation of a “bias reporting system” that is independent of the EAD-based process.

***Charge #3: Identify and outline any circumstances which limit a Vanderbilt faculty member from utilizing her/his Vanderbilt affiliation in public speech.***

***Outcomes and Recommendations***

The committee reviewed the academic freedom of expression statement and discussed any circumstances which limit a Vanderbilt faculty member from utilizing her/his Vanderbilt affiliation in public speech.

- The academic freedom of expression statement recognizes that academic freedom extends from the university campus to outside its boundaries, and therefore, in public speech.
- Faculty can use the Vanderbilt affiliation in public speech but express solely their opinions and do not speak on behalf of the university.
- The statement also provides principles for considering allegations of violations of the faculty academic freedom of expression that are applicable.

***Charge #4: The General Counsel's office expressed a desire to hear from Faculty Senate on whether there would ever be a circumstance in which Vanderbilt would disinvite an outside speaker from visiting campus to give a talk. Identify current procedure and policies related to this issue.***

#### ***Outcomes and Recommendations***

The SPAF committee met with Vice Chancellor Audrey Anderson to discuss this issue. There is general consensus that the university is fully committed to the promotion and protection of the free expression and exchange of ideas, and only in rare exceptions should the university endeavor to limit freedom of expression. The following issues were discussed:

- The main difficulty arises due to the interpretation of "hate speech" (speech that intentionally promotes hate of individuals or groups is not protected at Vanderbilt.)
- Safety and security are the highest priority.
- Collaboration between multiple Vanderbilt offices could ensure protection of academic freedom of expression while the university activities are not disrupted.
- Current policies and procedures related to faculty academic freedom of expression are applicable when an outside speaker is invited by faculty.

***Charge #5: SPAF recommends meeting with the Faculty Senate's leadership to discuss steps that have been taken to increase communications between Faculty Senate and the Board of Trust.***

#### ***Outcomes and Recommendations***

Charlene Dewey updated the committee regarding the current status of the communications between Faculty Senate and Board of Trust, and emphasized that the communication is unparalleled due to steps taken by the past and current Executive Committee leadership. Details about the meetings between the EC and the Board of Trust were also reported at the Faculty Senate meetings. The committee highly commended the increased communication with the Board of Trust and the value of such meetings.

The committee also discussed possible steps for improving the communications between the Faculty Senate and the faculty (especially in the Medical School.) Although the Engage newsletter and the Faculty Senate website provide useful and updated information, the committee discussed possible ways to improve in-person communication between senators and faculty. Suggestions included updates by senators in department meetings and establishing talking points about the FS activities.

Our recommendation for the next academic year is to consider ways to increase in-person communication between the Faculty Senate and the faculty.

***Charge #6: SPAF recommends that next year's SPAF committee consider whether faculty have concerns about TIPS funding and if concerns exist take appropriate steps to consider these concerns.***

#### ***Outcomes and Recommendations***

The main issue discussed was the eligibility of non-tenure track faculty to apply for TIPS funding. Charlene Dewey informed the committee that the lead organizer of a proposal can be a non-tenure track faculty member if an exception is granted by the academic deans of the schools involved.