

Statement of Academic Freedom of Expression

Feedback sought, respond by March 26

The Senate's Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom Committee (SPAF) seeks your feedback on its proposed statement on academic freedom of expression for faculty, to replace the *Faculty Manual's* current academic freedom statement. The proposed statement is [here](#); please provide feedback through the survey link below by March 26:

http://owen.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_b3ogldSv2YSaTRz

Background

The current *Faculty Manual* statement was drawn in part from the 1960 Beach Report, a document drafted by a university task force that sought to justify the expulsion of James Lawson for his activities related to the civil rights movement. The SPAF committee is troubled by this history as well as by some current *Faculty Manual* statements which seem outdated. A link to the existing Academic Freedom and Responsibility statement can be found here:

<https://vanderbilt.edu/faculty-manual/part-iii-university-principles-and-policies/ch1-a-statement-of-principles/>

As part of its deliberations, the SPAF Committee invited presentations and discussion from three campus experts on the topic of academic freedom and workplace free speech to help guide its deliberations. The committee met with Professors Bruce Barry, Jim Blumstein, and Lenn Goodman. In addition, it considered a wide range of previously collected university statements and policies, and it specifically invited comment by the campus experts related to their views on the AAUP Model Statement, a Yale University report, and a statement recently adopted by the University of Chicago on freedom of expression. SPAF committee members ultimately concluded that something similar to the University of Chicago statement, adapted to the context of Vanderbilt University, would be the best approach. In addition, the SPAF Committee reached out to several faculty and administrative leaders in campus diversity and inclusion initiatives and invited student leaders with divergent political views to learn about their issues and concerns related to faculty speech.

In undertaking to draft a new statement on academic freedom, the Committee was sensitive to the fact that it would be housed in the *Faculty Manual*, a fact that influenced both the scope and format of the statement. First, although the proposed statement provides some general principles regarding the aspirations of the University, it is aimed at issues of *faculty* expression rather than student or staff expression. Second, the statement is focused on faculty expression that is *protected from sanctions or other adverse actions* by the University.

Finally, the Committee sought to formulate a very general statement of principles rather than address any number of specific matters involving speech and other activities on campus. SPAF's avoidance of specific circumstances was motivated by two concerns:

1. The current *Faculty Manual* statement is very general, and SPAF interpreted its committee charge as one that asked it to consider a replacement that was similar in overall generality.
2. The current statement has so far lasted more than 50 years, and if a replacement would also last for decades, SPAF thought that the replacement should avoid discussing circumstances (e.g., specific technologies and forums) that might change over time.

Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom Faculty Senate Standing Committee

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