

**Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom (SPAF) Committee
Vanderbilt University Senate
Report for Academic Year 2013-14
Chair: Aniruddha S. Gokhale, School of Engineering**

I. Committee Members:

Sandra L. Barnes, (Peabody)
Eric Delpire (Medicine)
Robert Driskill (A&S)
Joseph Gigante (Medicine)
Aniruddha (Andy) S. Gokhale, Chair (Engineering)
John Greer (Medicine)
Joyce Johnson (Medicine)
Salvatore T. March (Owen [Executive Committee Liaison])
Leah S. Marcus (A&S)
Joel Tellinghuisen (A&S)

II. Committee Charges:

The following key charges were discussed and prioritized for the 2013-14 year for the SPAF committee.

1. **Survey of Academic Freedom at Peer Institutions** – Protection of the academic freedom of the faculty was deemed to be an important issue that had not gotten sufficient attention in previous years. During the 2013-14 year, the SPAF committee was charged with surveying the policies on academic freedom and the protection that faculty members receive at peer institutions, and to recommend any changes to the existing statement on academic freedom at Vanderbilt University.
2. **Tracking status updates from the Online Education Task Force** – The SPAF committee in the academic year 2013-14 was charged with assessing the strategic direction for online and distance learning. Continuing the prior year's focus without duplicating the efforts, the committee's charge was to monitor the progress and receive periodic status updates from the Online Education Task Force headed by Prof. Rangarajan Ramanujan (Owen). This was to include updates on the new initiatives and directions of the newly formed Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning (VIDL) headed by Prof. Douglas Fisher (Engineering).

3. **Survey of Faculty Interactions with Board of Trust and Involvement in Administration Decisions at Peer Institutions** – The Vanderbilt faculty strongly supports the need for interactions with the Board of Trust and the need for the administration to involve the faculty in strategic decisions pertaining to the University. To that end, the SPAF committee was also charged to survey our peer institutions and generate a year-end report. A similar report was developed several years ago and the committee was tasked with using it as a starting point.

The following charges were also discussed because they were part of the issues discussed in previous years and the committee felt that, time permitting, it could look into these:

- Status of the privacy policy on offices and labs
- Guidance on international programs (e.g., Abu Dhabi case)
- Impact on the book store in case the parent company (Barnes and Noble) were to close

III. Work Accomplished and Recommendations:

The SPAF committee decided to devote its time to addressing the primary charges 1 and 2 during the academic year 2013-14. Because charge #3 was addressed a few years back and for which a report was made available to the committee, the committee decided not to pursue this issue.

Charge #1 Accomplishments (Survey of Academic Freedom)

The SPAF committee sought to understand whether any changes needed to be made to the current academic freedom statement in Vanderbilt University’s Faculty Manual by surveying the academic freedom statements at multiple peer institutions. The following criteria were used to select peer institutions: (a) universities that are traditionally considered Vanderbilt peers, (b) universities that had both a medical school and a university central, preferably on the same campus, and (c) a good mix of both public and private universities.

The table below summarizes the universities we selected for our survey of academic freedom statements.

Public Institutions	Private Institutions
University of Texas (Austin)	Washington University in St. Louis
University of Maryland (College Park)	Rice University
University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill)	Duke University
University of Virginia	Cornell University
University of Massachusetts (Amherst)	Stanford University

University of Illinois	Johns Hopkins University
Purdue University	Emory University Columbia University University of Chicago

The academic freedom statement from Vanderbilt University (available from <http://vanderbilt.edu/faculty-manual/part-iii-university-principles-and-policies/ch1-a-statement-of-principles/>) is shown below. It is adapted from the principles stated in the “Beach Report on Issues of Conscience and Academic Freedom,” 1960.

Vanderbilt University is a community of men and women devoted to the search for truth. A self-governing institution, it professes freedom from both internal and external interference which hinders accomplishment of that purpose. It is an institution that transcends, as much as it challenges and accepts, the customs and values of society. It has its own standards of excellence and responsibility that do not always conform to those of the persons and groups who support it. The University is also part of the civic community in which it exists. Its members, both faculty and students, are entitled to exercise the rights of citizens and are subject to the responsibilities of citizens. A member of the Vanderbilt community gives thoughtful consideration to the image of the University reflected in his or her public behavior.

Members of the Vanderbilt community share a due regard and respect for law. In the event that one of its members is in jeopardy before the law, either for the sake of conscience or for the purpose of testing the validity of particular provisions of law through deliberate violation, the University will not seek to protect him or her from due process of law. Regardless of the action of the courts, however, the University reserves the right to determine whether a faculty member is fit to retain membership in the academic community, and maintains its own procedures for taking action upon, hearing, and deciding complaints against one of its members.

The table below provides a sampling of summaries of academic freedom statements and observations (in no particular order) derived from the surveys of different schools. These summaries reveal a significant commonality across the spectrum of Universities surveyed. A few universities, such as Emory University, had extensive descriptions of academic freedom. The academic freedom statement at the University of Illinois is also sufficiently detailed. In contrast, the Johns Hopkins’ statement was quite terse, and the University is currently in the process of appointing a Provost-level committee to develop a statement on academic freedom.

University	Summary/Observation/Notes
Duke University	Focused primarily on tenure and protection to do research without censorship
University of North Carolina	Broader in scope and describes freedom for research, teaching, internal criticism and participation in public debate. They cite books on

	academic freedom: (a) "For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom," by Finkin and Post, and (b) "Academic Freedom in the Wired World: Political Extremism, Corporate Power, and the University," by Robert O'Neil.
Rice University	Quotes the Supreme Court Justice William Brennan in the Keyishian versus the Board of Regents case of 1967 to highlight the importance of academic freedom. They also refer to AAUP's "1940 Statement of Principles" focusing on three facets of academic freedom: freedom of inquiry, teaching and extramural utterances, however, calling for restraint on each.
University of Texas	Provides full freedom in research and classroom subject to some constraints. For example, controversial material not related to the subject matter cannot be used in classroom. Faculty members speaking or writing as a citizen are free from institutional censorship, however, the faculty member must make it explicit that they are not an institutional spokesperson
Stanford University	The statement of academic freedom are based solely on the principles of providing an environment in which freedom of inquiry, thought, expression, publication, and assembly (which is free of violence) are given the fullest protection. The academic freedom supports expression of the widest range of viewpoints that is not constrained by institutional pressures and interferences.
Cornell University	The statement on academic freedom involves freedom of expression in the classroom on matters relevant to the subject and the purpose of the course and of choice of methods in classroom teaching; freedom from direction and restraint in scholarship, research, and creative expression and freedom in the discussion and publication of the results to speak and write as a citizen without institutional censorship or discipline. While academic freedom is highly valued at Cornell, it does not imply immunity from prosecution for illegal acts, nor does it provide a license to faculty to do whatever they choose to do.
Washington University in St. Louis	The academic freedom statement describes the freedom available to scholars, teachers, and students within the University to pursue knowledge, speak, write, and follow the life of the mind without unreasonable restriction. The statement further states that although a faculty member may pursue subsidiary interests, these should not hamper or compromise their scholarly pursuits and teaching responsibilities. Moreover, although the academic freedom includes faculty member's full freedom as a citizen, if these result in acute conflicts, e.g., engaging in political activities, faculty may request leave of absence for the duration.
Purdue University	A faculty member is accorded full freedom as a researcher, scholar or

	<p>artist. This freedom includes freedom to communicate the work, to advocate solutions to human problems and to criticize existing institutions. While freedom is accorded in the classroom, a faculty member cannot introduce irrelevant subject matter. The academic freedom also accords the right to speak or write in the capacity as a citizen. In doing so, however, a faculty member should not become a spokesperson for the university.</p>
Columbia University	<p>The university is fully committed to protecting and upholding academic freedom in research and teaching, and freedom of expression. The university does not penalize faculty for statements made in public debate. The statement indicates that such freedom is not unlimited, e.g., a faculty cannot threaten or intimidate students for expressing their viewpoints or faculty cannot use the classroom as a means of political indoctrination.</p>
University of Chicago	<p>Their academic freedom statement appears as the Statement on Principles of Free Expression. The university supports the culture of inquiry and informed argument. The university aims to nurture an environment that fosters and protects rational discourse that includes both rigorous challenge of ideas and tolerance for the expression of multiple viewpoints. In summary, the university supports the rights to free expression. This statement did not delve into the details of freedom in academic research and teaching. However, their Board of Trustees Statute 18.1 refers to the complete freedom of research and unrestricted dissemination of information. Several other published articles also refer to the academic freedom for research and teaching.</p>

Recommendation: After surveying other University statements on academic freedom and comparing them with Vanderbilt’s statement on academic freedom, the general consensus among the SPAF members was that although Vanderbilt University’s statement on academic freedom is appropriate in general, it could be enhanced by including more details on freedom of inquiry and freedom of pedagogy. Moreover, considering that Vanderbilt students will be expected to negotiate an increasingly heterogeneous society, the committee also recommends that future iterations of the academic freedom statement include verbiage about the importance of faculty intentionality and latitude to instruct and provide professional development such that students become more cognizant and comfortable as global citizens. Part of this charge would facilitate helping students become more aware of cultural diversity and social justice issues, broadly defined. These issues could form the basis of the charges for the 2014-15 SPAF committee.

Charge #2 Accomplishments (Monitoring Progress of the Online Education Task Force and Related Activities)

As part of this charge, the first activity scheduled by the SPAF committee was to invite Prof. Douglas Schmidt, Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, School of Engineering, Vanderbilt University to make a presentation on experiences teaching a Coursera MOOC, the amount of effort needed in its preparation, and long-term prospects of this disruptive technology. The presentation was followed by substantial amount of time devoted to Q/A during which the committee members discussed multiple issues arising in the context of MOOCs, academic freedom, and intellectual property.

Prof. Rangaraj Ramanujam, Chair of the Vanderbilt Faculty Senate's Online Education Task Force (OETF) provided periodic updates on the progress made by the OETF to the SPAF committee chair. The OETF will be presenting a final report. The OETF focused on two key issues during the academic year 2013-14. First, they discussed issues related to conflict of commitment, and will be proposing language that modifies/extends the Vanderbilt Faculty Manual on Conflict of Commitment related to extramural online education. The second issue the OETF focused on was related to intellectual property rights and revenue sharing. Because the OETF has a number of additional issues to discuss, they will be seeking a one year extension to continue with their charge. Additional details will be available in their final report.

The Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning (VIDL) was formed in the calendar year 2013-14. Its staffing has been complete, and its web site (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/vidl/>) has been up and operational since November 2013. VIDL has started many activities including a very innovative program of supporting faculty who want to make MOOCs and other digital learning a key aspect of their education plans in research proposals to NSF, NIH and other sponsors. VIDL organizes seminars and maintains an active blog featuring articles from faculty within Vanderbilt University.

IV. Recommendations for the 2014-15 Year SPAF Committee Charges:

The current SPAF committee discussed the potential charges for the 2014-15 SPAF committee. The general consensus was to align the committee's charges with Vanderbilt's year-long efforts on the four key areas of the Strategic Planning effort and following up on the recommendations of the current SPAF committee on extensions to the current academic freedom statement. One possible charge is to understand the challenges and implementation steps to realize the concept of Trans Institutional Programs (TIPs) that is a key focus area of the University's strategic planning. Within this area, the following questions can be investigated as part of the charge.

- How do faculty members from different schools/departments connect with the appropriate set of people? Will there be a special liaison office that will foster these multidisciplinary collaborations?
- What incentives exist for faculty to collaborate in a trans institutional program?
- What investment will be made in training researchers so they can collaborate on topics outside of their traditional scholarly and teaching work?
- What modifications will be required to existing graduate catalogs, and rules and procedures for fulfilling degree requirements (e.g., prelims, qualifying exams, course requirements, committee formation rules, etc)?
- What role can TIPs play in addressing other pillars of the strategic plan, e.g., solving various challenges in healthcare?

Additionally, if the OETF gets an extension for one year, we recommend that the new SPAF committee continue to monitor the findings of OETF. The SPAF committee could also revisit some of the issues from previous years that could not be explored during the current academic year.