

**WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: President Sabah Randhawa on behalf of Provost and Executive Vice President
Brad Johnson

DATE: April 11, 2024

SUBJECT: **Approval of Board of Trustees Statement on Academic Freedom**

PURPOSE: Action Item

Purpose of Submittal:

To obtain approval from the Board for a statement on academic freedom.

Proposed Motion:

MOVED, that the Board of Trustees of Western Washington University, upon recommendation of the President, approve the Western Washington University Board of Trustees Statement on Academic Freedom.

Points to Consider:

- In the year 6 accreditation review, NWCCU site evaluators identified that Western's policies related to academic freedom "need improvement". They specifically cited the lack of protection for the academic freedom of students as a deficiency.

DRAFT, Western Washington University Board of Trustees Statement on Academic Freedom 3/22/24

Introduction:

Academic freedom is essential for promoting open inquiry, intellectual exploration, and the pursuit of knowledge in the university environment. As a vital aspect of higher education, it is imperative to uphold academic freedom for all members of the university community, fostering an environment that encourages critical thinking, free expression, and respectful discourse. It is the aim of Western Washington University to uphold academic freedom and all other forms of free expression while maintaining the integrity and values of the university community. The broader rights to freedom of assembly and expression in which academic freedom is embedded are protected by the U.S. Constitution, federal and state laws. The University may reasonably regulate the time, place and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the University's activities or the legal rights of others.

1. Definition of Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is the fundamental principle that empowers educators and students to engage in free and open inquiry, research, and teaching without fear of censorship, interference, or reprisal. It encompasses the rights to pursue knowledge, express ideas, and challenge conventional wisdom, fostering a vibrant intellectual environment that benefits faculty, students and society by promoting critical thinking, innovation, and the pursuit of truth.

2. Protection of Academic Freedom

a. The right of faculty to academic freedom is codified in the Faculty Handbook, as approved by the Board of Trustees, which states "all faculty are guaranteed academic freedom as set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments ... formulated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association of University Professors..." The CBA with the UFWW further emphasizes the importance of academic freedom and states:

Academic freedom as it pertains to this contract is defined as the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research and creative expression, and to speak or write as a public citizen without institutional discipline or restraint on matters of public concern, as well as on issues related to professional duties and the functioning of the University. (CBA 2.2)

b. A student's right to academic freedom pertains to the evaluation of their academic work in the context of a course or academic program they are engaged in, including class participation, written work or formal examinations. If a student believes that they've received a grade or other evaluation as a result of an arbitrary and capricious decision unrelated to the quality of their academic work, they may seek resolution through established grievance procedures specified in the WWU Catalog (Appendix F).

3. Limitations of Academic Freedom:

While academic freedom is valued, it must be exercised within the bounds of the law, ethical standards, and the university's policies and codes of conduct. The university reserves the right to intervene when academic freedom conflicts with the safety, security, or well-being of individuals or the university community.