

# Portland State University Faculty Senate Resolution

## Academic Freedom

### Background

Our country recently witnessed a chilling attack on the United States Capitol. Citizens used their rights of free expression, association, and assembly, and then abused them. They crossed a bright line where political expression turned into an attack on our democratic institutions that included mob intimidation and reckless endangerment of human life. The mob was primed over many years, summoned and incited to action through the use – and then abuse – of social media. Democratic rights, we learn, can be used to undermine democracy.

The attack on the U.S. Capitol is also troubling for the precedent it sets for similar actions to be replicated at other institutions, including universities.

Academic freedom is to the university what the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are to democracy. As with the abuse of democratic rights, carelessness in the exercise of academic freedom can undermine, stifle, and annihilate academic freedom itself.

While we all have the right to express our opinions in accordance with The First Amendment of the United States Constitution, there are limitations to free speech when it violates our laws and when it results in a true threat for an individual or a group of individuals or incites actions that will harm others. It is crucial to ensure that the members of our academic community can learn and work in an environment that is free of hate and hostility.

### Whereas

When faculty become active in, or even endorse or tacitly support, public campaigns calling for the intimidation of individual colleagues they disagree with, or with an entire faculty they disagree with, they are undermining academic freedom. Intimidation and explicit or implied threats to physical integrity are not accepted as academic methods.

### Whereas

Academic freedom is fundamental to a free society, and academics have organized to protect this freedom for over a century through the American Association of University Professors. Academic freedom, as defined by the AAUP, is also enshrined in several PSU policies:

- Board of Trustees Policy on the [Roles of the Board, President and Faculty, Shared Governance and Academic Freedom](#)
- [PSU-PSUAAUP Memorandum of Understanding](#) on “PSU Board of Trustees Policy on the Roles of the Board, President and Faculty, Shared Governance and Academic Freedom” (June 7, 2017)
- PSU Standard 580-022-0005, “Academic Freedom”

### Whereas

University policies that spell out the commitment to academic freedom also recognize responsibilities that come with it. At Portland State University, duties attendant to academic freedom are spelled out in a variety of policies that define our responsibilities as professionals, academics, and members of the university enterprise. These policies distinguish between the responsible use of academic freedom and the abuse of academic freedom. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

- [Interim Revised Prohibited Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#)
- [PSU Standard 580-015-0015](#), on Prohibited Discrimination
- PSU [Professional Standards of Conduct Policy](#)
- [PSU Standard 577-041-0005](#), “Faculty Conduct Code”
- PSU [Copyright Ownership Policy](#), section 2.5, defining the obligation of faculty towards one another in relation to course materials.
- Refrain from inciting PSU students to violate the [Student Conduct and Responsibility Policy](#)

Beyond PSU, there is an extensive body of AAUP policy, [constitutional theory, and case law](#) on the scope, limits, and obligations attendant to academic freedom.

### Be it Resolved

As Faculty, we must be thoughtful in our exercise of academic freedom and guard against its cynical abuse that can take the form of bullying and intimidation. This kind of abuse of academic freedom destroys academic freedom by eroding the trust that makes possible open dialogue, which is a central tenet in university intellectual life as well as in the practice of participatory democracy more broadly.