

Guidelines for Academic Freedom Discussion in the Classroom

Dear Colleagues,

As the Kansas Board of Regents opens its revised-but-largely-unchanged policy on use of social media for public comment this week only, we invite you to educate your students on the importance of academic freedom and the potential this policy has to affect them, their lives, and their educations. We believe this is an important teaching moment for all the students at our campus.

If you are interested in participating, here are a few guidelines we suggest you follow:

Present a clear explanation of academic freedom. We've drafted a statement, but you should feel free to modify it, if you think it needs modifying:

1. The university is a community of scholars representing many disciplines and transcending political, ethnic/racial, religious, and national boundaries. The purpose of scholarship is to test, critique, and discover new knowledge, create new ideas and innovative technologies. The fact that these ideas and knowledge are new means that they are different from what has come before. Different is often unconventional, or even contentious, and as such may invite opposition. New ideas and knowledge often need a maturation process to improve and become well-articulated or formulated. Moreover, in a highly diverse society such as the U.S., they are sometimes inconsistent with, or even contrary to long-established social values and cultural standards. Thus, they must be vetted through dialogue among scholars, students, and citizens. This process of creation and discovery, developed through open and unfettered dialogue, is the means by which humankind identifies errors, overcomes challenges, and creates a better world.
2. Identify the discipline-specific implications for the class you're teaching. How have unconventional or controversial ideas, research methods, literature, etc. impacted the field your students study with you?
3. Invite students to read the Kansas Board of Regents' policy and the workgroup's recommendation for a new policy. Inform them about the process involved thus far, who the participants are in these current events, as well as the deadline for public commentary, which is Friday, May 2. at 5:00 pm. Invite them to explore further the connection between "real world" current events and the concept of academic freedom as it pertains to the subject they study in your course. Do not require your students to take any specific action. Do not use class time to lobby on the issue: remember that this is a teaching moment and not a form of political activity, in keeping with Kansas State law and Kansas Board of Regents policies. They can read the versions of the policy and access the public comment link below:
http://www.kansasregents.org/recommended_amendments_to_current_social_media_policy

Thanks very much for considering joining us.

Sincerely yours,

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