



## Academic Freedom at Southwest Baptist University

Because all truth belongs to God, freedom of inquiry and expression is vital to human flourishing. The American Association of Colleges and Universities likewise states “the common good depends on the free search for truth and its free expression” (1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*). For this reason, colleges and universities have a duty to protect the free exchange of ideas. Freedom of inquiry has always been an important pillar of the Christian tradition and has been a core confessional commitment of Baptist tradition in the United States for over a century.

Nevertheless, “freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute” (BFM2000, XII.2). Despite the AACU’s commitment to “full [academic] freedom,” it also recognizes that every university, whether religious or secular, puts boundaries on the free expression of ideas by members of its community (see SBU’s *Faculty Handbook*, 2.11.1.A.2).

Boundaries surrounding academic freedom are a natural outgrowth of an institution’s identity and values. As a confessional institution, Southwest Baptist University protects the freedom of its faculty in teaching and research, subject to professional standards of competence, relevance, and respect and in light of the Christian worldview articulated in the university’s confessional statement.

In so doing, SBU strives to strike the “proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility” (BFM2000, XII.2). While the breadth of human knowledge is the legitimate scope for inquiry (Colossians 3:15-17), “the freedom of a teacher in a Christian [university] is limited by the preeminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the [university] exists” (BFM2000, XII.2).

Therefore, faculty are entitled to “full freedom in research and in the publication of the results.” Faculty are also free to “discuss their subject in the classroom,” including controversial aspects and implications, provided they refrain from promulgating, advocating for, or personally promoting convictions that stand in opposition to a Christian worldview as expressed in the institution’s confession of faith (*Faculty Handbook*, 2.11.1.A.2).

Failure to observe these boundaries may impact a faculty member’s eligibility for promotion (*Faculty Handbook*, 2.8.3.A.4) or tenure (*Faculty Handbook*, 2.9.1.A; 2.9.3.A.4) or result in sanctions (*Faculty Handbook*, 2.10.6), non-reappointment (*Faculty Handbook*, 2.10.3), or dismissal for cause (*Faculty Handbook*, 2.10.5).

Finally, SBU’s administration and its trustees will give faculty members appropriate support against unfair and/or unwarranted attacks, as befitting an institution committed to the well-being of its community of scholars.



## **Appendix: Basis for Academic Freedom at SBU**

The Higher Learning Commission specifically requires a commitment to academic freedom in those colleges and universities which it accredits (Criterion 2.D).

### *HLC Criteria of Accreditation, Criterion 2.D*

“The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.”

The parameters for academic freedom (and the related concepts of academic integrity and academic responsibility) at SBU are based in the principles expressed in the *Board of Trustees Policies Manual*, the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, the *Faculty Handbook*, and the *Faculty Guidelines*.

### *Board of Trustees Policies Manual, Section 1.1*

The rationale for adoption includes: having all on-going board related policies in one document; to provide the ability to orient new Board members to current policies; eliminate redundant and/or conflicting policies over time; provide an accessible document to lend in the ease of reviewing current policy when considering new policies; provide clear and proactive policies to guide the President [of the University] and staff; provide support and respect for effective shared governance focused on open communication, a commitment to accountability, and alignment of institutional priorities. In addition, adoption of this Board Policy Manual represents Board Member commitment to “Best Practices” within Higher Education Governance and serves to reiterate the importance of certain “pillars” of Christian higher education (e.g., support for academic freedom and shared governance).”

### *Board of Trustees Policies Manual, Section 13.8*

The University supports academic freedom in a manner faithful to the institutional vision and Statement of Faith and consistent with expectations of the Higher Learning Commission. The Board likewise recognizes that all wisdom and knowledge find its source in the Triune God, and the churches of the MBC recognize that Christian education is important for our society. Academic freedom at Southwest Baptist University is shaped and informed by a commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all things, the inspiration of the Holy Scripture and SBU’s distinctive vision, mission, core values, and Statement of Faith.”

### *Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Section XII*

“In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.”

### *Faculty Handbook, Section 2.11.1*

“The University has adopted the academic freedom portion of the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure jointly prepared by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges and



Universities (revised in January 1990), but reserves the right to make its own interpretations of these principles.

A. 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure [1994]

“The purpose of this statement is to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and agreement upon procedures to assure them in colleges and universities. Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.

Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning. It carries with it duties correlative with rights.

Tenure is a means to certain ends, specifically: (1) Freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.

Academic Freedom

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.
2. Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject. Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment.
3. College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.”

*Faculty Guidelines, Section 3.4*

“Faculty members are encouraged to participate in political activity - in endorsing candidates, promoting social concerns, and running for local office. As citizens living in a democratic society and as concerned Christians, faculty should be positive change agents in the community.



# Southwest Baptist UNIVERSITY

While the University affirms the right and duty of the individual faculty member, faculty must remember they also represent the University. Clearly, faculty opinions are their own; however, many in the community do not make this distinction. Hence, caution and discretion are necessary. For example, a letter to the local newspaper editor should probably be signed with only a personal name and not the title of the SBU employee. Faculty involvement should not cause the University to be identified with any particular political party or political issue.

A faculty member should carefully weigh any personal involvement in politics. Maintaining good job performance at the University is almost impossible with the time constraints demanded by some political activities. For example, running for state or congressional office would warrant a leave of absence without pay, but holding local office might not.

Telephone equipment, secretarial services, and inner office mail are resources for conducting business and activities for the benefit of SBU. As such, these resources must not be used for political purposes.

With regard to academic freedom, classroom lectures may debate social issues and evaluate political institutions and processes, but the endorsement and promotion of specific candidates are discouraged.”