VI.COMMUNITY STANDARDS AND POLICIES: F. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom

(Proposal #16-122, adopted 7 April 2016)

Denison University actively promotes the free expression and exchange of ideas. Academic freedom is essential to the aims of higher education and to the University's goals of fostering critical thinking, moral discernment, and active citizenship among its members. It is the responsibility of the faculty and the administration to protect academic freedom. Furthermore, because Denison is a residential, liberal arts college, academic freedom must be extended to all members of the university community in the broadest of contexts. Indeed, academic freedom is a core value of liberal education and is essential to the transformative power of that education promised in our mission statement.

Academic freedom is the right of all members of the University to exercise the broadest possible latitude in speaking, writing, listening, challenging, and learning. It applies to opinions and inquiry regarding political, cultural, religious, scientific, and social matters, as well as to those regarding the University itself and its policies. Academic freedom is especially critical in the classroom, in research and publication, and in all educational activities.

Academic freedom applies to views and ideas that most members of the University may consider mistaken, dangerous, and even despicable. The ideas of different members of the University community will often conflict, but it is not the proper role of the University to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive. Although the University values civility, and although all members of the University community share the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for limiting discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of the community.

Academic freedom does not, of course, mean that individuals may say whatever they wish, whenever they wish. The University may prohibit expression that violates the law, defames specific individuals, constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, or unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests. These limitations, however, are narrow exceptions; it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a free expression of ideas.

Members of the University community must act in conformity with the principle of academic freedom. Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views of others, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it. Such an open exchange of ideas is essential to liberal education.

(Portions of the above statement are from the University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression.)