



ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY

Authorised By:	Academic Board	Revision: 2.0
Last Amendment Date:	Revision Date: 27 Apr 2022	
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Related Documents	Our Faith Values Our Learning Community Values Staff Discrimination and Harassment Policy Model Code for the Protection of Freedom of Speech	
Responsible Officer:	Academic Director	
Review:	Scholarship Committee	

Any person who requires assistance in understanding any aspect of this document should contact the Responsible Officer.

1. Overview

In line with Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) (2015) Tabor and its staff are committed to act in a manner consistent with the protection and promotion of academic freedom within the College. The College promotes and protects free intellectual inquiry and expression in its higher education learning, teaching, and research activities. The context for the exercise of Academic Freedom at Tabor is defined by its **Faith Values** and its **Learning Community Values**.

2. Scope and Applications

This policy applies to all staff and students at Tabor who engage in academic activities, whether in teaching and learning, research or other academic engagements.

3. Policy Principles

- 3.1. Academic Freedom involves the expectation that a scholar will pursue their research in a spirit of open enquiry and without prior limits placed upon the outcome of that research. Academic Freedom involves the expectation that a scholar is free to share and promote the findings of their research in appropriate forums. Academic Freedom also involves the expectation that a scholar is permitted to make reasonable comment upon issues within the area of their academic expertise.
- 3.2. For the purposes of this document academic freedom is understood and defined within the spirit of a covenant of mutual obligations and benefits rather than a legal or contractual relationship of competing rights.
- 3.3. Under this covenant:
 - 3.3.1. The College seeks to ensure that academic freedom may be exercised without fear of institutional interference, prejudice, or disadvantage. Academic freedom extends to engagement in:

- 3.3.1.1. Critical and open intellectual inquiry
- 3.3.1.2. Distribution of knowledge through teaching, research, and scholarship
- 3.3.1.3. Public debates about issues and ideas related to, and informed by, the academic and professional expertise of staff members.
- 3.3.1.4. Public debates about higher education issues as they affect both the College and higher education sector generally.
- 3.3.1.5. Consultative and decision-making processes within the College
- 3.3.1.6. Membership of professional associations, unions and interest or advocacy groups
- 3.3.2. Academic staff and students seek to exercise academic freedom in ways which respect the faith values, learning values and governance of the Tabor community.
- 3.3.3. Academic freedom does not give the right to an individual to speak on behalf of the College. Staff members should take care to distinguish publicly between the sharing of their opinions and judgments as a scholar and as a representative of Tabor.
- 3.3.4. While encouraging free enquiry, it is recognised that not all research which is of interest to staff members is necessarily core to the College's business and will automatically be supported with the College's resources.
- 3.4. Academic freedom should not be used:
 - 3.4.1. As a defence against reasonable criticism of poor academic performance or workplace behaviour
 - 3.4.2. To express, whether verbally or in writing, unsubstantiated opinion that is damaging to the College, academic staff or other members of its community.
 - 3.4.3. To vilify or harass other persons or groups whether within or outside the College community.

4. Procedures

- 4.1. A sufficient and necessary defence against the charge of abusing Academic Freedom is that the comment is both within the scholar's academic competence and involves an academically fair assessment of the issue.
- 4.2. A sufficient cause for the College to withhold resourcing support for research is that it is outside the College's scope of business.
- 4.3. The President has the right to advise a staff member that they believe that comment in a public forum (as distinct from an academic forum) will not be appropriate if they reasonably believe the public will not be able to distinguish the staff member's comments from the opinion of the college.
- 4.4. All disputes relating to the appropriate exercise of Academic Freedom should be resolved by a majority vote of the external members of the Academic Board. The circumstances of the dispute should be presented by the Academic Director to the Academic Board and representations by the staff member and by the President should be heard.
- 4.5. The Chair of the Academic Board should report its findings and any recommendations based upon these findings to the Board of Governors.
- 4.6. If the affected staff member wants to dispute the decision of the AB, they should do so via the Staff Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

5. Freedom of Speech

- 5.1. Freedom of speech is a key value of the College.
- 5.2. In accordance with the principles of the [Model Code](#), the College is committed to ensuring the freedom of speech of all members of the College community, subject only to limitations imposed by;
 - defamation law;
 - the reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct necessary to the discharge of the College's teaching and research activities, and to fulfil its duty to foster the wellbeing of students and staff;

- the right and freedom of others to express themselves and to hear and receive information and opinions
- 5.3. A person's lawful speech on the College's land or in connection with a College activity shall not constitute misconduct nor attract any penalty or other adverse action by reference to its content.
- 5.4. In entering into collaborative or contractual arrangements with third parties, the College will take all reasonable steps to minimise any restrictions imposed by such arrangements or conditions on the freedom of speech of staff or students subject to such arrangements or conditions.

6. Definitions

See [Global Definitions](#)

7. Communication and Training

- 7.1. The Scholarship Committee will ensure this policy is provided to staff, and it will be published in the Tabor Policy Repository.