

ACADEMIC RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I. The Academic Community

Virginia Commonwealth University, as a comprehensive, urban institution of higher learning, seeks to promote the common good through the teaching and scholarly endeavors of its faculty and through the education and intellectual development of its student members. So that the faculty may contribute effectively toward this purpose, each member must be endowed with certain traditionally-recognized, intramural rights. Since the overall mission of the University cannot be achieved without a harmonious interaction among the components of the academic community, the faculty members, enjoying extensive freedoms, must reciprocate with equally high standards of academic responsibility.

Membership in the academic community imposes on students, faculty members, administrators and members of the Board of Visitors an obligation to respect each other's dignity; to acknowledge each other's right to express differing opinions; to cultivate and to cherish intellectual honesty; and to promote freedom of inquiry and expression on and off the campus.

An academic community, ideally enjoying a high degree of protection from outside interference in the pursuit of its goals, cannot tolerate disruptive interference within. All elements of the University are committed to open and rational discussion as an instrument for the clarification of issues, the settlement of disputes and the solutions of problems.

In the past, academic institutions have achieved eminence to a large extent because they managed to provide their faculties with a climate blended of academic freedom, economic security, adequate resources and most importantly, goodwill, mutually shared and bestowed among all of their members. Virginia Commonwealth University cannot achieve its goal with less. The academic community, therefore, subscribes to these guidelines for interpersonal relationships among its members recognizing that their purpose is to serve as a guide for promoting goodwill or, alternatively, collegial persuasion.

This document is distinguished from existing documents concerned with substantive and procedural matters.

In the sections that follow, it is not the intent to enumerate explicitly each and every right traditionally bestowed upon members of the academic community, or, similarly, to catalogue each member's every responsibility. Those that are specifically mentioned serve, above all, to illustrate important examples and are not intended to be exhaustive.

II. Collegial Rights and Responsibilities of Faculty and Members of the Administration of the University

1. Academic Freedom

It is the policy of Virginia Commonwealth University to support and foster freedom of inquiry, discourse, teaching, research and publication by any member of the academic staff in his or her sphere of scholarly interest. It is also the policy of the University to protect the academic community against attempts, from within or without the University, that would restrict the exercise of these freedoms. These policies are rooted in the recognition that academic freedom is essential to the search for truth and for the extension of knowledge. They are supported by methods and procedures established to protect the academic freedom of all members.

Subject to the adequate performance of their assigned duties, members of the academic community are entitled to freedom in the selection of topics and problems for research and in the publication of any results and conclusions.

Any member of the academic community is entitled to question the procedures and policies of the University, to propose and to work for changes without fear of censure. However, such actions must not interfere with the rights of others and must be consistent with assigned responsibilities.

Members of the academic community can simultaneously be identified as citizens, as members of a learned profession and as members of an educational institution. As citizens, they have a right to personal opinions, no matter how unpopular they may be, and to state these publicly without censorship and without fear of harassment or reprisal. Their special position, however, imposes special obligations to their profession as well as to their institution. They should recognize that both may be judged by their public statements. Consequently, they should avoid creating the

impression that they speak for the institution, unless they are expressly delegated that responsibility. When exercising these rights as citizens within the University, individuals should be cognizant of, and sensitive to, the fact that these same rights and freedoms are also enjoyed by other members of the University community. Thus, when exercising the rights of freedom enjoyed by all citizens in the State and nation, each individual should take care that he does not infringe on the rights of others nor hamper the performance of assigned University duties by other members of the University community.

Faculty, administrators, students, and members of the Board of Visitors have, as members of society, the rights and obligations of any citizen. They are as free as other citizens to express their views and to participate in the political processes of the community.

2. Matters of Instruction and Curriculum

Within an institution, the faculty through a system of appointed or elected departmental, school, and University committees, shall have the right to develop and recommend – or otherwise, to participate in decisions involving – new degree programs, new course offerings, modifications of existing courses, and degree requirements.

These rights, in turn, invest each faculty member with high standards of academic responsibility. This implies that faculty strive for excellence in instruction, research, scholarship and community service within their respective disciplines.

3. Admission, Retention and Graduation of Students

The faculty acting collectively, or through their representatives, shall actively participate in setting standards for admission, retention and graduation of students. The faculty of each School also shall determine which students are eligible for graduation. The Dean of each School shall recommend designated students to the President and the Board of Visitors for the appropriate degree or certificate.

4. University Governance

The ultimate authority in University government is vested in the Board of Visitors which, with advice from the faculty, administration, classified employees and students, selects a President to whom it delegates the responsibility for managing the

University. A vigorous university develops through the active participation of the faculty in the formal and informal decision-making processes concerned with educational functions and policies at various administrative levels. It is in the interest of the University to provide avenues of communication through which the faculty can provide counsel and advice on other matters of mutual interest.

Every faculty member shares a continuing responsibility for shaping the direction of his department, of his School, and for serving on University-wide councils, committees and offices. Since participation of the faculty in academic matters is vital to the proper governance of the University community, it is incumbent upon the University to provide ample opportunities for faculty participation.

5. Matters of Faculty Status

A university atmosphere conducive to the development of academic excellence cannot be achieved without the active participation of faculty in processes relating to faculty appointments, reappointments, promotions and tenure. Since these processes may be conducted through ad hoc committees, every attempt should be made to appoint faculty members who will be impartial.

The prime requisites to membership and advancement in one of the University's faculties include: Appropriate academic preparation; professional experience; demonstrated competence in both the effective communication and the discovery of knowledge; service at all levels of the academic community, to the local community and to professional organizations; and inspiring ethical personal qualities.

6. Selection of Administrators

Although the final responsibility for the appointment of academic administrators rests with the President of the University and the Board of Visitors, the best interests of the University are promoted when representative faculty participate in the selection process.

7. Evaluation of Performance

All members of the academic community have the right to a periodic evaluation of his or her performance by the appropriate academic administrator. In turn, each member is expected to

provide information that is adequate in scope and effectively organized to facilitate this process.

7. Academic Tenure

Virginia Commonwealth University subscribes to the widely adopted concept of academic tenure as an important means of assuring freedom in teaching and in research, thereby making an academic career attractive to individuals of ability.

8. Termination of Service and Resignation

Each member of the academic community has rights and responsibilities when he or she desires to discontinue an existing association with the University. The initiator then has an obligation to abide by the principle of “due notice” in keeping with published guidelines.

III. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Teaching and Students

“As a teacher the professor encourages the free pursuit of learning in his or her students. He or she holds before them the best scholarly standards of his or her discipline. He or she demonstrates respect for the students as individuals, and adheres to his or her proper role as intellectual guide and counselor. He or she makes every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to assure that his or her evaluation of students reflects their true merit. He or she respects the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student. He or she avoids any exploitation of students for his or her private advantage and acknowledges significant assistance from them. He or she protects their academic freedom.” (AAUP Statement, 1966).

Additionally in the role of a teacher, a faculty member is obligated to adhere to the rules and guidelines established by the faculty of which he or she is a member or to other established standards commonly used in his or her discipline.

2. The University

As a member of his institution, the professor seeks above all to be an effective teacher and scholar. Although he or she observes the regulations of the University and the Commonwealth of Virginia, he or she maintains his or her right to criticize and seek revision.

The faculty member has a responsibility to perform his or her assignments faithfully, and is mindful of his or her duty to participate in the functions of the University. He or she should not use University resources for private gain.

3. Colleagues

“As a colleague, the professor has obligations that derive from common membership in the community of scholars. He or she respects and defends the free inquiry of his or her associates. In the exchange of criticism and ideas he or she shows due respect for the opinions of others. He or she acknowledges his or her academic debts and strives to be objective in his or her professional judgment of colleagues. He or she accepts his or her share of faculty responsibilities for the governance of his or her institution.” (AAUP Statement, 1966).

Approved by the Board of Visitors, November 18, 1976.