

A Resolution Reiterating a Defense of Academic Freedom

The Faculty Senate of The University of Alabama does not speak for The University of Alabama system but seeks to aid the System and University in making judgments on questions of policy, development, and operations and provides input on matters of general faculty concern. The Senate recognizes a legal obligation to follow federal, state, and local laws, including those which are the subject of disagreement. However, recent enactments at both the state and federal levels have impinged upon both academic freedom and the institutional autonomy required for its protection. The Senate has a responsibility to defend academic freedom specifically and the purposes of universities and higher education generally.

Given this and

WHEREAS, the state of Alabama historically has been at the center of civil rights movements and efforts to address and combat bigotry, divisiveness, and social injustice; and,

WHEREAS, the University has a public duty to promote free inquiry, engage with a variety of viewpoints, and, as stated in its mission, “advance the intellectual and social condition of the people of the state, the nation and the world through creation, translation and dissemination of knowledge...” in the areas of teaching, research and service; and

WHEREAS, the core values of the University state the purpose of a university education is to produce “socially-conscious, ethical and well-rounded leaders” and promote “a campus life that embodies collaboration, collegiality and respect” and the University identifies strategic goals to “offer a global perspective” and “enrich our working environment by attracting, welcoming, and supporting all faculty, staff and students;” and

WHEREAS, the University and the entire campus community have been and continue to be the beneficiaries of the courageous acts of former students and alumni such as Dr. Autherine Lucy Foster, Mrs. Vivian Malone Jones, and Mr. James A. Hood, to stand for justice and against bigotry and divisiveness; and

WHEREAS, affinity groups of historically marginalized students, such as the Black Student Union and LGBTQ+ Center Safe Zone which serve not only students in particular identifiable groups but all members of the university population, have lost access to centrally located offices despite the fact that membership in these groups and attendance in their offices or at their events is open to all; and,

WHEREAS, the safety and constitutional rights – including the right to assemble, the right to free speech, the right to free expression, and the right to peaceful protest – of all students, including international students, must be protected and not abridged at a public university; and,

WHEREAS, recent federal enactments, state legislation, and the broad enforcement of them have had a chilling effect on the academic project of teaching about and engaging with social, political, and historical issues in intellectually honest ways; and,

WHEREAS, the enforcement and broad interpretation of not only state legislation but also what counts as “political activity” has also had the effect of instilling fear in faculty to act in

accordance with their academic freedom, especially in light of unwarranted threats of dismissal, and instilling fear in students to assert their freedom of speech, thus undermining the freedom to teach and learn; and,

WHEREAS, this has led to faculty being reported and, subsequently, being investigated and warned of potential disciplinary action, even when not in contravention of state or federal enactments; and,

WHEREAS, faculty and agents of the University have a professional responsibility to defend academic freedom on behalf of students and colleagues; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate of The University of Alabama reiterates and reaffirms its previous Resolutions in defense of academic freedom dated February 17, 2004, and December 14, 2021; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate will continue to defend academic freedom, the freedom to teach, research, write, and learn, as well as the well-being of faculty and students; and

BE IT RECOGNIZED that The University has a commitment to shared faculty governance and, as Senators, our responsibility is to represent all faculty, advise University faculty and administration, protect our core mission and values, and support any faculty and students who have been or will be adversely affected by efforts to limit academic freedom or abridge constitutionally protected civil liberties on campus. As such, the Senate asks that University and System leaders declare their ongoing support for academic freedom and the First Amendment rights of all members of the University community and affirm that they will respond to enactments, state or otherwise, in ways that do not undermine or contradict these cornerstone values.

Faculty Senate of The University of Alabama