

<b>Policy Title:</b>	<b>Academic Freedom Policy</b>
<b>Policy Number:</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>Sponsor:</b>	<b>President</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	<b>Vice President - Academic</b>
<b>Approved by:</b>	<b>UNF Board of Governors</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>February 26, 2024</b>
<b>Next Review Date:</b>	<b>February 26, 2027</b>

### 1. Policy Statement

University of Niagara Falls Canada (UNF) supports freedom of inquiry and institutional autonomy in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. Freedom of inquiry comes with the responsibility to ensure that scholarship and teaching are conducted ethically and in accordance with the laws of society and the accepted principles and methods of research inquiry and teaching. The University adopts the definition of academic freedom approved by the Universities Canada<sup>1</sup>.

### 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to uphold the principles of academic freedom in the conduct of research, teaching, and learning so that University members are able to pursue inquiry, make independent judgments and to express views or publish without fear of censorship, retribution, or pressures to unduly influence their work. The policy ensures that UNF is able to fulfill its mandate as a university under provincial legislation. The policy also ensures that there is a process for addressing concerns about academic freedom openly and fairly.

### 3. Scope

Academic freedom applies to all University members who are conducting scholarly research, teaching, or who are engaged in learning. The right to academic freedom is balanced by the professional standards of the research discipline and by the obligations of the university to organize and manage institutional resources in achievement of the mission and mandate of the University.

If a faculty member or student has a concern that the policy on academic freedom has not been upheld, that concern should be discussed with the Associate Dean, or academic program head. The Associate Dean will respond to that concern in writing normally within 14 working days. If the faculty member or student is not satisfied with the response of the Associate Dean, that member may appeal to the Vice President, Academic (VPA) in writing within 14 working days, outlining why the member is unsatisfied with the response of the Associate Dean or academic program head and what remedy is being recommended. The VPA will normally respond to the member in writing within 14 working days.

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<sup>1</sup>Statement on Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (<https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/statement-on-academic-freedom/>).

If the faculty member or student is not satisfied with the decision of the VPA, a written appeal may be sent to the Chair of Academic Council within 14 working days of the date of that decision.

Within 7 working days of receiving the appeal, the Chair of Academic Council will form an ad hoc Academic Freedom Appeal Committee to determine if there has been a breach of the policy and what remedy should be taken. The Academic Freedom Appeal Committee Chair will communicate the decision in writing to the appellant and to the Chair of Academic Council, a decision normally within 14 working days of the constitution of the Committee. The decision of the Academic Freedom Appeal Committee is final.

#### 4. Definitions

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy

Word/Term	Definition
Academic Freedom	<p>“Academic freedom is the freedom to teach and conduct research in an academic environment. Academic freedom is fundamental to the mandate of universities to pursue truth, educate students and disseminate knowledge and understanding. In teaching, academic freedom is fundamental to the protection of the rights of the teacher to teach and of the student to learn. In research and scholarship, it is critical to advancing knowledge. Academic freedom includes the right to freely communicate knowledge and the results of research and scholarship. Unlike the broader concept of freedom of speech, academic freedom must be based on institutional integrity, rigorous standards for enquiry and institutional autonomy, which allows universities to set their research and educational priorities.”</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/statement-on-academic-freedom/">https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/statement-on-academic-freedom/</a>)</p>
Institutional Autonomy	<p>Institutional autonomy includes the institution’s responsibility to select and appoint faculty and staff, to admit and discipline students, to establish and control curriculum, to make organizational arrangements for the conduct of academic work, to certify completion of a program and to grant degrees where authorized to do so.</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/statement-on-academic-freedom/">https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/statement-on-academic-freedom/</a>)</p>

## **5. Principles and Policy**

Research Ethics Policy.

## **6. Responsibilities**

Academic Council, the President, the Vice President Academic (VPA) and the Associate Deans have responsibility for ensuring that the principles of academic freedom, and the processes for addressing concerns about academic freedom, are upheld.

The Associate Dean is responsible for addressing complaints about academic freedom at the first level. The VPA is responsible for deciding to accept or deny appeals on decisions made by the Associate Dean.

Academic Council is responsible for approving the policy on academic freedom and for constituting the Academic Freedom Appeal committee to address appeals brought forward by university members regarding infringement on academic freedom.

The Academic Appeal Committee is responsible for decisions to deny or uphold appeals brought forward to the Academic Council.

Faculty members have a responsibility for ensuring the principles of academic freedom are upheld for their students and that they adhere to accepted principles, ethics, and standards for teaching and research in their profession and disciplines.

The Academic Council, senior administrators, and faculty ensure that human rights are respected and that the right to academic freedom is reasonable and balanced with the responsibilities outlined in the policy.

A faculty member or student writes to the Associate Dean or academic program head outlining a concern about infringement upon academic freedom including a recommended remedy. The Associate Dean or academic program head will respond in writing, normally within 14 working days, either rejecting the claim and outlining the reasons for the rejection or accepting the claim and outlining a reasonable remedy.

A faculty member or student who is unsatisfied with the decision of the Associate Dean or academic program head, may appeal to the VPA within 30 days, outlining the reasons for appeal. The VPA will respond in writing, normally within 14 working days, outlining the reasons for rejecting or supporting the appeal.

A faculty member or student who is not satisfied with the decision of the VPA writes a letter of appeal to the Chair of Academic Council explaining why the decision of the VPA is not acceptable. Within 7 working days of receiving the appeal, the Chair of the Academic Council will appoint an Academic Appeal Committee. The Committee will meet and reach a decision, normally within 14 working days. Once the decision has been made, the Chair of the Academic Appeal Committee will provide written notification to the appellant and the Chair of Academic Council of the

decision to uphold or deny the appeal. The decision of the Academic Appeals Committee is final.

All records of the Academic Appeal Committee will be kept by the VPA and submitted to the Chair of the Academic Council along with the written notification of the decision of the Committee.