

Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom Ad Hoc Committee

**Final Report with Recommendations
to Faculty Senate**

April 25, 2024



Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom Committee Members, AY2023-2024

- Kathleen Brady, NTID
- Franklin Deese, CAD
- Bob Finnerty, Communications
- Joel Gallegos Greenwich, SOIS
- Jim Habermas, GCCIS
- Sean Hansen, SCB
- Joe Johnston, Ombuds
- Laverne McQuiller, Faculty Affairs
- Mary Lynn Reed, COS, Comm. Chair
- Alexander Roth, KGCOE
- Janice Shirley, CHST
- Lawrence Torcello, CLA
- Scott Wolcott, CET

Charge of our Committee

- **Motion:** The Faculty Senate form an ad hoc committee to make recommendations of policies and procedures protecting faculty against internal and external attacks on academic freedom and freedom of speech and association, and in cases of harassment and retaliation related to these recognized freedoms. Each college shall be invited to send one representative to this committee. In addition, Senate shall appoint one at-large representative, and shall invite the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, the Director of Communications, the University Counsel, or their delegates and a representative from the Ombuds Office. Upon approval by the Faculty Senate, the committee's recommendations will be the foundation of a request to the University Council from the Faculty Senate for the formation of a Working Group of the University Council, which will propose guidelines and procedures regarding the University's Response to Attacks on Freedom of Speech for faculty, staff, and students.
- **Rationale:** It has become increasingly common for faculty to be targeted for exploring controversial topics. Some of this targeting can be politically motivated to suppress freedom of speech and to threaten those who exercise it. Such threats can also be significantly exacerbated and amplified by social media. Other universities have formed policies and guidelines in response to such threats. Doing so makes them better prepared to respond on behalf of targeted members of the academic community in a timely and consistent manner. An examination of policies and procedures protecting faculty will guide the work of an ad hoc Faculty Senate committee to address this topic, with a further recommendation that the University Council form a working group that includes members of its respective constituencies to recommend policies and procedures that protect our university community against internal and external attacks on academic freedom and freedom of speech and association, and in cases of harassment and retaliation related to these recognized freedoms.

Activities of the Committee

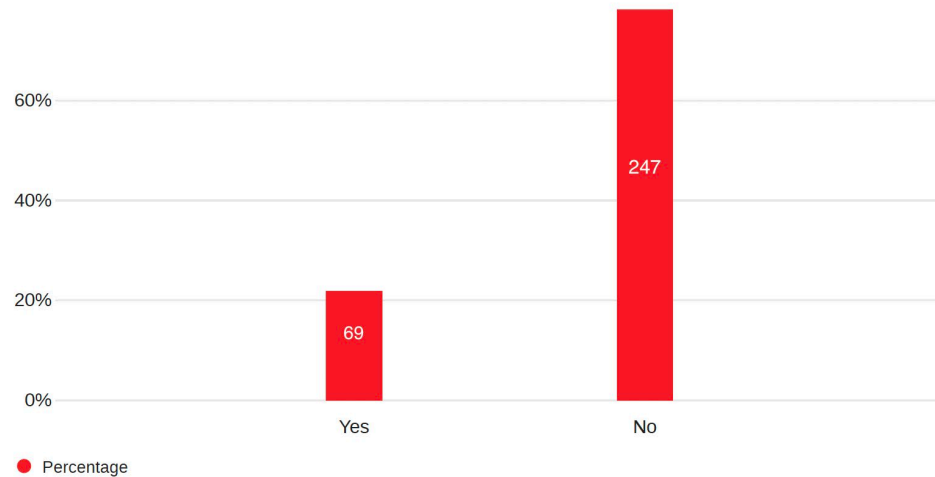
- Reviewed Existing Policies
- Reviewed Previous COACHE Survey results
- Discussed Past Issues and RIT Responses
- Conducted and Reviewed Faculty Survey on Academic Freedom
- Reviewed External Resources (“Chicago Statement”)
- Formulated Recommendations

Faculty Survey Questions

- **In either class instruction or research/scholarship, have you experienced or witnessed instances where academic freedom was challenged or compromised at RIT?**
- **To what extent do you feel that RIT's current policies and practices support, or do not support, academic freedom for faculty members?**
- **Do you believe that RIT adequately prepares and educates faculty, staff, and students on the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech?**

Survey Results

Q1 - In either class instruction or research/scholarship, have you experienced or witnessed instances where academic freedom was challenged or compromised at RIT? For your reference, (per Britannica): Academic freedom [is] the freedom of teachers and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure.



Key Take-Aways:

- **22% of respondents have experienced/witnessed academic freedom issues at RIT**
- **Many RIT faculty would like to see more information & training on academic freedom issues**

Our Recommendations

1. RIT should develop a (mandatory?) training module on academic freedom (as part of new faculty orientation & periodically after)
2. RIT should form a **Working Group (or Standing Committee) on Academic Freedom** whose primary tasks would be educational, informational, and policy-based
3. RIT should adopt the Freedom of Expression resolution based on the Chicago statement (in its entirety)
4. If item 3 is approved, this statement should then be incorporated into the RIT E02.0 Principles of Academic Freedom document.

Recommended Focus/Activities of the Proposed Working Group (or Standing Committee) on Academic Freedom

- Educational/Informational:
 - attend College faculty meetings to inform on academic freedom issues
 - serve as a “sounding board” for faculty who feel their academic freedom has been compromised
- Policy
 - review RIT and College-level policies for consistency with academic freedom
 - strengthen policy language to the level of the Chicago statement (if adopted)
- **NOT** a Grievance Committee

Recommended Adjustment to E02.0

- Details in accompanying word documents
- Adopts the full “Chicago Statement” with RIT-specific articulation
- Some changes to the RIT-specific articulation of the AAUP’s “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with the 1970 Interpretive Comments”