

# Academic Freedom and Common Course Instruction: Interpretation

The following excerpts from the Academic Staff Handbook lead me (DL Jones) to conclude that although an instructor must teach to the syllabus, a department cannot insist that faculty team-teach any course or utilize common exams. Following are the potentially relevant excerpts that I found, my interpretations, and my summary conclusions.

## Excerpt from [Chapter 3 of the Academic Staff Handbook](#)

"Academic freedom is essential to the functioning of a university. It applies to its teaching, research, and public service and involves both faculty and students. Faculty members are responsible for providing students with the same kind of freedom that they claim for themselves, namely, the freedom to consider conflicting views and to make their own evaluation of data, evidence, and doctrines. Furthermore, faculty members have a responsibility to maintain an atmosphere conducive to intellectual inquiry and rational discussion. Faculty members are expected to instruct their assigned courses in a manner consistent with the scheduled time, course content, and course credit as approved by the faculty. Within these constraints, they are entitled to freedom in the classroom in developing and discussing according to their areas of competence the subjects that they are assigned. Faculty members who are unable to meet their classes have the obligation to offer alternate instruction to meet the course requirements. If they are unable or unwilling to do so, their department or college must assume this responsibility. Since University policy calls for the comparison of a student's performance with that of other students in the University for the several purposes that grades serve, faculty members have the responsibility to provide the University with an evaluation of the work of each student in their classes."

## Jones interpretation

I understand this to say that faculty have both the right and the obligation to teach their assigned class, covering the course content as approved by the [College, in our case] faculty, as they believe best within the scope of their professional competence. I also read it as saying that the [individual] faculty member has a responsibility to evaluate the work of each student in their [own] class.

## Excerpts regarding appeals process for violations of academic freedom

"Each faculty member has the right to criticize and seek alteration of regulations and policies by appropriate means. Among means deemed inappropriate are committing or inciting acts of physical violence against or coercion of individuals; acts that interfere with academic freedom, freedom of speech, or freedom of movement; and acts of destruction of property."

"Alleged abuse of the proper role of the faculty with regard to academic freedom and faculty responsibility should be identified and adjudicated by appropriate faculty bodies already in existence in the University community in accordance with established principles and procedures of due process. The University Statutes (<http://www.uillinois.edu/trustees/statutes.cfm>) indicate that these evaluations are initially made by departmental administrators with the counsel of faculty bodies; subsequent evaluation is made by academic deans, campus- and University-level administrators, and the Board of Trustees with adequate counsel of faculty bodies. At the campus level, the Faculty Advisory Committee and the Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure are charged with a responsibility in both the judicial and review processes."

## "Other Grievance Procedures

Besides the procedures outlined above, numerous others have also been established, some by statutory provision, to deal with special kinds of grievances. For instance, when a grievance relates to academic freedom and tenure, the academic staff member may request a hearing before the Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure."

### **Jones interpretation**

I read this as saying that each faculty member has a right to seek change to or appeal regulations and policies, including internal department customs and procedures. I interpret this as saying that any faculty member has the right to appeal a restriction on instructional academic freedom, and that any appeal should begin with the department administrators (Cangellaris or Bishop), who are expected to consult with relevant faculty bodies (presumably the Curriculum Committee on matters of courses and curriculum, or the Advisory Committee on issues of more general departmental policy and procedure); subsequent appeal to the Dean; at the campus level, the relevant Senate committees serve the faculty counsel role.

It also Seems that in matters obtaining to how one teaches one's course, assesses one's students, and what one teaches, in addition to all of the other procedures, we faculty may always request a hearing before the Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

### **Jones summary interpretation**

Although it may be customary for multiple sections of our required courses to be taught with a common text, schedule, homeworks and exams, I read the University Statutes regarding Academic Freedom as saying that faculty always have the right to teach and evaluate their section independently if they so choose. I suspect that in the usually less intellectually controversial area of engineering, these issues of academic freedom rarely arise, so many of us may not be aware of that right. I believe that we faculty have the OPTION to teach in a common format, if in our best professional judgment we believe that team teaching and combined exams better or equally well serve our students in a given course, but we ALWAYS have the right not to do so, and I read the Handbook to say that we have the responsibility NOT to if we believe that doing so fails to "maintain an atmosphere conducive to intellectual inquiry and rational discussion" or if we don't feel that it's consistent with our "responsibility to provide the University with an evaluation of the work of each student in their classes."