



The Road to STATE'S REAFFIRMATION 2015



Academic Freedom at WVSU

As we learn more about the reaffirmation of accreditation each week in *The Road to State's Reaffirmation 2015*, we will examine how select elements of West Virginia State University (WVSU) campus life and culture interact with the Self-Study Report. It is essential that the University is committed to freedom of expression and pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. Therefore, let us briefly examine academic freedom at West Virginia State University.

WVSU is committed to the freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. This commitment applies equally to faculty, staff and students and is accomplished by the unfettered articulation of ideas and through exposure to thought-provoking and provocative speakers and programs. This commitment to academic freedom is illustrated on a daily basis through robust discussion both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, faculty members are encouraged to express themselves in all areas of the University, in their interactions with students, and with fellow faculty and academic staff in their departments, colleges and Faculty Senate meetings. Additionally, WVSU strongly encourages freedom of expression in the weekly Faculty Lecture Series and with a variety of guest speakers and presentations that are brought to campus via the efforts of the Cultural Activities Committee.

The University's official stance on academic freedom is stated in the WVSU Faculty Handbook (pp. 10-11). Members of the academic community are encouraged to pursue research interests in their particular fields of study and to present their research through publications, lectures and classroom teaching (p. 10). The handbook also notes that with freedom of expression comes responsibility, and thus reminds faculty members of their obligation to defend and to promote individual academic freedom for everyone in the University community (p. 11). The University's stance on academic freedom also fully recognizes the fluid nature of academia and how this dynamism can influence the relationship between faculty and other members of the University community over time. The handbook thus reminds faculty of the importance of evolving with their fields of study and encourages faculty to pursue academic interests that will keep them current and relevant in their disciplines, thereby enriching the entire University community (p. 11). These three major points made in the handbook are also reinforced in section two HEPC Series 9 "Academic Freedom, Professional Responsibility, Promotion and Tenure."

In addition to the fact that the University has had no claims of violated academic freedom, perhaps the clearest evidence and most vibrant example of faculty academic freedom can be found in the Faculty Lecture Series. As described in the Faculty Development Handbook (p. 14), the Series organizes weekly lectures on Thursdays from 12:30 until 1:30 p.m. usually starting in the second or third week of each new semester and continuing until the last week of the term. Lectures are usually held in Davis Fine Arts Building, Room 103, a lecture-style classroom that seats approximately 80 people. The coordinators solicit topics from faculty during the semester breaks and prepare a schedule for the entire semester. Although an occasional slot is reserved for a noted outside speaker, most of the faculty lectures are offered by in-house faculty who share their research, creative work and academic interests with fellow colleagues and students.



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Any recipient of a faculty research grant is required to disseminate her or his research, which is frequently done in a faculty lecture during the following academic year (Faculty Development Handbook, p. 5). Many professors also encourage or require their students to attend faculty lectures relevant to course work in progress.

Beyond the Faculty Lecture Series, faculty members are encouraged to pursue their academic research interests and to present their research through publication and conference attendance. The University's policy on Faculty Travel Grants (p. 3) modestly supports conference attendance. Faculty who have not attended a conference in the past two years are given priority, and because the University has limited funding, generally only one national or regional conference per year for each faculty member is approved. In addition, faculty are not fully reimbursed for their expenses. Given multi-year declining federal support via Title III and the continual decline of funding support from the State of West Virginia, the University needs to continue to find new funding sources to provide for more faculty to attend conferences and to encourage conference attendance by covering all costs.

Another area where academic freedom is demonstrated is in the classroom. For any new non-General Education courses, faculty members write their own syllabi, and departments have the autonomy to approve its faculty's syllabi. A new course proposal goes through an approval process under the auspices of the Faculty Senate's Educational Policies Committee, who verifies new or revised course proposals for accuracy and completeness and for compliance with University and West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission standards. The intellectual content, course books used, and methods of assessment remain the responsibility of the faculty member teaching the course. For General Education courses, an additional approval step by the General Education Committee is required for new courses and course revisions, but faculty still have the freedom to teach those courses as they deem best.

For more information about The Road to State's Reaffirmation 2015, please click [here](#) to discover in-depth information about the process, read the University's Self-Study Report, and more!