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Academic Freedom

As we learn more about the reaffirmation of accreditation each week in *The Road to State's Reaffirmation 2025*, we will examine how select elements of West Virginia State University campus life and culture interact with the Assurance Argument. This week's topic will focus on academic freedom. Therefore, let us briefly review just a few of the ways in which West Virginia State University (WVSU) demonstrates academic freedom both inside and outside of the classroom.

WVSU is committed to academic freedom, freedom of expression, and the pursuit of knowledge in teaching, learning, and research. Institutions committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth uphold the fundamental principles that form the bedrock of education and intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom allows educators and students alike to explore ideas, theories, and perspectives without fear of censorship or reprisal. This freedom fosters intellectual growth by encouraging critical thinking, challenging existing paradigms, and promoting innovation. The University's commitment to this is illustrated in a wide variety of speakers and programs offered through student and University organizations, and daily through robust discussions inside and outside of the classroom.

WVSU embraces academic freedom in teaching a wide spectrum of diverse course offerings. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of perspectives and their own ideologies through critical inquiry as noted in the General Education Curriculum and General Education course offerings. Additionally, the institution is guaranteed academic freedom under the jurisdiction of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC) to ensure all members of the academic community have the right to study, discuss, investigate, teach, conduct research, and publish freely.

Embracing freedom of expression ensures that diverse voices are heard within the academic community regarding learning. This includes perspectives that may be unconventional or controversial but contribute to a richer understanding of complex issues. By creating a marketplace of ideas, institutions create an environment where intellectual diversity thrives. WVSU

recognizes that “America is at its best when individuals demonstrate integrity, scholarship, and freedom of expression” (Student Handbook, pp. 33-35). The University clearly outlines policies on academic freedom and freedom of expression for students in the WVSU Student Handbook. These policies encourage the free exchange of ideas and expression for students and faculty. This also includes the Cultural and Educational Assemblies Committee (CAEA), which is a collaboration between students, faculty, and staff to bring speakers and activities from a wide variety of voices and positions. In the last academic year, the CAEA brought in West Virginia House of Delegates Minority Leader Sean Hornbuckle as a speaker for the Black History Month Convocation and sponsored a panel discussion for Women’s History Month – “The Evolving Roles of Females in Appalachia.”

WVSU also supports academic freedom and freedom of expression through frequent interactions between faculty and students in several venues outside of the classroom, including a wide variety of student groups and cultural, social, and recreational events for the student body. The Office of Student Life and Engagement sponsors many of these events with the express goal of encouraging student expression and thought as well as encouraging exploration into diverse voices and ideas. The Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs recognizes 69 student groups, supported by more than 40 faculty.

In the pursuit of truth, it is essential to engage in rigorous inquiry and debate. Academic freedom allows scholars to question assumptions, test hypotheses, and subject findings to peer review through research. This process not only advances knowledge but also strengthens the integrity of academic research and teaching. WVSU recognizes the importance of academic freedom for faculty, outlining its policies in the Faculty Handbook, supported by the WVHEPC Title 133- Series 9. Scholarly examples of academic inquiry for students are found throughout the curriculum, including in scientific reasoning courses required by all students as part of their General Education.

Academic freedom acts as a safeguard against external pressures that may seek to influence or control the direction of research and teaching. By protecting the autonomy of scholars and educators, institutions uphold their integrity and reputation as bastions of intellectual independence. WVSU faculty are free to pursue, study, discuss, investigate, and publish research tempered only by their own experience and expertise. In this vein, WVSU offers PEER Grants for faculty, providing financial means for academic research and investigation. The Faculty Senate also provides and encourages the free exchange of that research through the Cultural and Educational Assemblies Committee and the Faculty Lecture Series. In the 2024/2025 academic year, the Faculty Lecture Series included presentations on the writing of Carter Woodson, Organic Synthesis and Drug Discovery, and Cybersecurity Hygiene. This freedom also extends to the classroom, where faculty are free to deliver subject content and modalities that best fit their disciplines.

In conclusion, a commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression

is not just a lofty ideal but a practical necessity for institutions dedicated to the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. It's the foundation upon which intellectual inquiry thrives, ensuring that education remains vibrant, relevant, and responsive to the ever-evolving quest for knowledge. WVSU's commitment to academic freedom ensures that we stay true to Academic Excellence, Research, and Innovation (Pillar II of Future State).

For more information about *The Road to State's Reaffirmation 2025*, please click [here](#) to discover in-depth information about the process and more!

For questions or comments regarding the University's reaffirmation of accreditation process, please send all inquiries and information to academicaffairs@wvstateu.edu or call (304) 766-3189.

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