
1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure

with 1970 Interpretive Comments

In 1915 the Committee on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure of the American Association of University Professors formulated the statement now known as the 1915 *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure*, which the Association officially endorsed at its Second Annual Meeting held in Washington, DC, on December 31, 1915, and January 1, 1916.

In 1925 the American Council on Education called a conference of representatives of a number of its constituent members, among them the American Association of University Professors, for the purpose of formulating a shorter statement of principles on academic freedom and tenure. The Association of American Colleges (now the American Association of Colleges and Universities) endorsed the statement formulated at this conference, the 1925 *Conference Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, and the AAUP endorsed it in 1926.

In 1940, following a series of joint conferences begun in 1934, representatives of the AAUP and of the Association of American Colleges (AAC) agreed on a restatement of the principles that had been set forth in the 1925 *Conference Statement*. This restatement is known to the profession as the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*.

Following extensive discussions on the 1940 *Statement* with leading educational associations and with individual faculty members and administrators, a joint committee of the AAUP and the AAC met during 1969 to reevaluate this key policy document. On the basis of the comments received and the discussions that ensued, the joint committee felt the preferable approach was to formulate interpretations of the 1940 *Statement* from the experience gained in implementing and applying it for over thirty years and of adapting it to current needs.

The committee submitted to the two associations for their consideration Interpretive Comments that are included here in the footnotes.¹ The Council of the American Association of University Professors adopted these interpretations in April 1970, and the Fifty-Sixth Annual Meeting, held in June of that year, endorsed them as Association policy.

1. The introduction to the 1970 Interpretive Comments provides the following explanation of their origin: "In the thirty years since their promulgation, the principles of the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* have undergone a substantial amount of refinement. This has evolved through a variety of processes, including customary acceptance, understandings mutually arrived at between institutions and professors or their representatives, investigations and reports by the American Association of University Professors, and formulations of statements by that association either alone or in conjunction with the Association of American Colleges. These comments represent the attempt of the two associations, as the original sponsors of the 1940 *Statement*, to formulate the most important of these refinements. Their incorporation here as Interpretive Comments is based upon the premise that the 1940 *Statement* is not a static code but a fundamental document designed to set a framework of norms to guide adaptations to changing times and circumstances.

The purpose of this statement is to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and agreement upon procedures to ensure them in colleges and universities. Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole.² The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.

Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning. It carries with it duties correlative with rights.³

Tenure is a means to certain ends, specifically (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.

“Also, there have been relevant developments in the law itself reflecting a growing insistence by the courts on due process within the academic community which parallels the essential concepts of the 1940 *Statement*; particularly relevant is the identification by the Supreme Court of academic freedom as a right protected by the First Amendment. As the Supreme Court said in *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 US 589 (1967), ‘Our Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom.’”

2. The word “teacher” as used in this document is understood to include the investigator who is attached to an academic institution without teaching duties.

3. Interpretive Comment 1: “The Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors have long recognized that membership in the academic profession carries with it special responsibilities. Both associations either separately or jointly have consistently affirmed these responsibilities in major policy statements, providing guidance to professors in their utterances as citizens, in the exercise of their responsibilities to the institution and to students, and in their conduct when resigning from their institution or when undertaking government-sponsored research. Of particular relevance is the *Statement on Professional Ethics* [AAUP, *Policy Documents and Reports*, 12th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2025), 167–68], adopted in 1966 as Association policy.”

Academic Freedom

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.
2. Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject.⁴ Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment.⁵
3. College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence, they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.⁶

4. Interpretive Comment 2: “The intent of this statement is not to discourage what is ‘controversial.’ Controversy is at the heart of the free academic inquiry which the entire statement is designed to foster. The passage serves to underscore the need for teachers to avoid persistently intruding material which has no relation to their subject.”

5. Interpretive Comment 3: “Most church-related institutions no longer need or desire the departure from the principle of academic freedom implied in the 1940 *Statement*, and we do not now endorse such a departure.”

6. Interpretive Comment 4: “This paragraph is the subject of an interpretation, which reads as follows, adopted by the sponsors of the 1940 *Statement* immediately following its endorsement:

If the administration of a college or university feels that a teacher has not observed the admonitions of paragraph 3 of the section on Academic Freedom and believes that the extramural utterances of the teacher have been such as to raise grave doubts concerning the teacher’s fitness for his or her position, it may proceed to file charges under paragraph 4 of the section on Academic Tenure. In pressing such charges, the administration should remember that teachers are citizens and should be accorded the freedom of citizens. In such cases the administration must assume full responsibility, and the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges are free to make an investigation.

Academic Tenure

After the expiration of a probationary period, teachers or investigators should have permanent or continuous tenure, and their service should be terminated only for adequate cause, except in the case of retirement for age or under extraordinary circumstances because of financial exigencies.

In the interpretation of this principle, it is understood that the following represents acceptable academic practice:

1. The precise terms and conditions of every appointment should be stated in writing and be in the possession of both institution and teacher before the appointment is consummated.
2. Beginning with appointment to the rank of full-time instructor or a higher rank,⁷ the probationary period should not exceed seven years, including within this period full-time service in all institutions of higher education;

"Paragraph 3 of the section on Academic Freedom in the 1940 *Statement* should also be interpreted in keeping with the 1964 *Committee A Statement on Extramural Utterances* [Policy Documents and Reports, 34], which states inter alia: 'The controlling principle is that a faculty member's expression of opinion as a citizen cannot constitute grounds for dismissal unless it clearly demonstrates the faculty member's unfitness to serve. Extramural utterances rarely bear upon the faculty member's fitness for continuing service. Moreover, a final decision should take into account the faculty member's entire record as a teacher and scholar.'

"Paragraph 5 of the *Statement on Professional Ethics* also addresses the nature of the 'special obligations' of the teacher:

As members of their community, professors have the rights and obligations of other citizens. Professors measure the urgency of these obligations in the light of their responsibilities to their subject, to their students, to their profession, and to their institution. When they speak or act as private persons, they avoid creating the impression of speaking or acting for their college or university. As citizens engaged in a profession that depends upon freedom for its health and integrity, professors have a particular obligation to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom.

"Both the protection of academic freedom and the requirements of academic responsibility apply not only to the full-time probationary and the tenured teacher, but also to all others, such as part-time faculty and teaching assistants, who exercise teaching responsibilities."

7. Interpretive Comment 5: "The concept of 'rank of full-time instructor or a higher rank' is intended to include any person who teaches a full-time load regardless of the teacher's specific title." For a discussion of this question, see the "Report of the Special Committee on Academic Personnel Ineligible for Tenure," *AAUP Bulletin* 52 (September 1966): 280–82.

but subject to the proviso that when, after a term of probationary service of more than three years in one or more institutions, a teacher is called to another institution, it may be agreed in writing that the new appointment is for a probationary period of not more than four years, even though thereby the person's total probationary period in the academic profession is extended beyond the normal maximum of seven years.⁸ Notice should be given at least one year prior to the expiration of the probationary period if the teacher is not to be continued in service after the expiration of that period.⁹

8. Interpretive Comment 6: "In calling for an agreement 'in writing' on the amount of credit given for a faculty member's prior service at other institutions, the *Statement* furthers the general policy of full understanding by the professor of the terms and conditions of the appointment. It does not necessarily follow that a professor's tenure rights have been violated because of the absence of a written agreement on this matter. Nonetheless, especially because of the variation in permissible institutional practices, a written understanding concerning these matters at the time of appointment is particularly appropriate and advantageous to both the individual and the institution." For a more detailed statement on this question, see "On Crediting Prior Service Elsewhere as Part of the Probationary Period," *AAUP Bulletin* 64 (September 1978): 274–75.

9. Interpretive Comment 7: "The effect of this subparagraph is that a decision on tenure, favorable or unfavorable, must be made at least twelve months prior to the completion of the probationary period. If the decision is negative, the appointment for the following year becomes a terminal one. If the decision is affirmative, the provisions in the 1940 *Statement* with respect to the termination of service of teachers or investigators after the expiration of a probationary period should apply from the date when the favorable decision is made.

"The general principle of notice contained in this paragraph is developed with greater specificity in the *Standards for Notice of Nonreappointment* [Policy Documents and Reports, 93] endorsed by the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the American Association of University Professors (1964). These standards are:

Notice of nonreappointment, or of intention not to recommend reappointment to the governing board, should be given in writing in accordance with the following standards:

1. *Not later than March 1 of the first academic year of service*, if the appointment expires at the end of that year; or, if a one-year appointment terminates during an academic year, at least three months in advance of its termination.
2. *Not later than December 15 of the second academic year of service*, if the appointment expires at the end of that year; or, if an initial two-year appointment terminates during an academic year, at least six months in advance of its termination.

3. During the probationary period a teacher should have the academic freedom that all other members of the faculty have.¹⁰
4. Termination for cause of a continuous appointment, or the dismissal for cause of a teacher previous to the expiration of a term appointment, should, if possible, be considered by both a faculty committee and the governing board of the institution. In all cases where the facts are in dispute, the accused teacher should be informed before the hearing in writing of the charges and should have the opportunity to be heard in his or her own defense by all bodies that pass judgment upon the case. The teacher should be permitted to be accompanied by an advisor of his or her own choosing who may act as counsel. There should be a full stenographic record of the hearing available to the parties concerned. In the hearing of charges of incompetence, the testimony should include that of teachers and other scholars, either from the teacher's own or from other institutions. Teachers on continuous appointment who are dismissed for reasons not involving moral turpitude should receive their salaries for at least a year from the date of notification of dismissal whether or not they are continued in their duties at the institution.¹¹

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3. At least twelve months before the expiration of an appointment after two or more years in the institution.

"Other obligations, both of institutions and of individuals are described in the *Statement on Recruitment and Resignation of Faculty Members* [Policy Documents and Reports, 177–78], as endorsed by the Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors in 1961."

10. Interpretive Comment 8: "The freedom of probationary teachers is enhanced by the establishment of a regular procedure for the periodic evaluation and assessment of the teacher's academic performance during probationary status. Provision should be made for regularized procedures for the consideration of complaints by probationary teachers that their academic freedom has been violated. One suggested procedure to serve these purposes is contained in [Regulation 10 of] the *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* [Policy Documents and Reports, 74–84], prepared by the American Association of University Professors."

11. Interpretive Comment 9: "A further specification of the academic due process to which the teacher is entitled under this paragraph is contained in the *Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings* [Policy Documents and Reports, 85–87], jointly approved by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges in 1958. This interpretive document deals with the issue of suspension, about which the 1940 *Statement* is silent.

5. Termination of a continuous appointment because of financial exigency should be demonstrably bona fide.

Endorsers

Note: Groups that changed names subsequent to endorsing the statement are listed under their current names. A regularly updated list of endorsers in alphabetical order is posted at <https://www.aaup.org/endorsers-1940-statement>.

American Association of Colleges and Universities.....	1941
American Association of University Professors.....	1941
American Library Association (adapted for librarians).....	1946
Association of American Law Schools	1946
American Political Science Association	1947
American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation.....	1950
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.....	1950
Eastern Psychological Association	1950
Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology	1953
American Historical Association.....	1961
American Psychological Association	1961
Agricultural and Applied Economic Association.....	1962
American Economic Association.....	1962
Modern Language Association.....	1962
American Council of Learned Societies.....	1963
American Sociological Association	1963
American Studies Association.....	1963
Association of American Geographers	1963
Midwest Sociological Society	1963
Organization of American Historians	1963

"The *Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings* provides: 'Suspension of the faculty member during the proceedings is justified only if immediate harm to the faculty member or others is threatened by the faculty member's continuance. Unless legal considerations forbid, any such suspension should be with pay.' A suspension which is not followed by either reinstatement or the opportunity for a hearing is in effect a summary dismissal in violation of academic due process.

"The concept of 'moral turpitude' identifies the exceptional case in which the professor may be denied a year's teaching or pay in whole or in part. The statement applies to that kind of behavior which goes beyond simply warranting discharge and is so utterly blameworthy as to make it inappropriate to require the offering of a year's teaching or pay. The standard is not that the moral sensibilities of persons in the particular community have been affronted. The standard is behavior that would evoke condemnation by the academic community generally."

Society for Classical Studies	1963	Society of Christian Ethics	1968
Southern Economic Association	1963	University Film and Video Association.....	1968
Southern Historical Association	1963	American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.....	1969
Archaeological Institute of America	1964	American Musicological Society.....	1969
Classical Association of the Middle West and South	1964	American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association.....	1969
South Central Modern Language Association.....	1964	History of Education Society.....	1969
Southern Management Association.....	1964	American Anthropological Association.....	1970
Southwestern Philosophical Society	1964	Association of Theological Schools	1970
Southwestern Social Science Association	1964	College Art Association	1970
Academy of Management	1965	Society of Professors of Education	1970
American Risk and Insurance Association.....	1965	Texas Community College Teachers Association.....	1970
Arizona-Nevada Academy of Science.....	1965	Academy of Legal Studies in Business.....	1971
Council of Independent Colleges.....	1965	Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication.....	1971
Mathematical Association of America.....	1965	Americans for the Arts	1972
American Catholic Historical Association.....	1966	New York State Mathematics Association of Two-Year Colleges	1972
American Catholic Philosophical Association.....	1966	College Language Association.....	1973
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.....	1966	Pennsylvania Historical Association.....	1973
Mountain-Plains Philosophical Conference	1966	American Classical League	1974
Society of American Archivists	1966	American Comparative Literature Association.....	1974
Southeastern Psychological Association.....	1966	American Philosophical Association.....	1974
Southern States Communication Association.....	1966	Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association.....	1974
Western History Association	1966	African Studies Association	1975
American Academy of Religion	1967	American Folklore Society	1975
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy	1967	American Institute of Biological Sciences	1975
American Finance Association	1967	American Statistical Association.....	1975
American Mathematical Society.....	1967	Association for Asian Studies.....	1975
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.....	1967	Linguistic Society of America	1975
Association for Social Economics	1967	North American Conference on British Studies	1975
Association for the Sociology of Religion	1967	Sixteenth-Century Society and Conference	1975
College Theology Society	1967	Society of Architectural Historians.....	1975
Council on Social Work Education.....	1967	Association for Jewish Studies	1976
John Dewey Society	1967	Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies	1976
South Atlantic Modern Language Association.....	1967	Texas Association of College Teachers	1976
American Association for Chinese Studies.....	1968	Western States Communication Association.....	1976
American Association of Teachers of French	1968	American Chemical Society	1977
American Dialect Society	1968	American Society for Legal History	1977
American Society of Plant Biologists.....	1968	Metaphysical Society of America.....	1977
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.....	1968	Texas Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.....	1977
Association of Social and Behavioral Scientists	1968	Texas Library Association.....	1977
College English Association.....	1968	American Physical Therapy Association	1979
Eastern Finance Association	1968	Dante Society of America	1980
Phi Beta Kappa Society	1968	North Central Sociological Association.....	1980

Association for Communication Administration.....	1981	American Association of Teachers of Japanese	1994
National Communication Association.....	1981	American Council of Teachers of Russian.....	1994
American Association of Physics Teachers.....	1982	Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies	1994
Middle East Studies Association	1982	Council of Teachers of Southeast Asian Languages	1994
American Association of Teachers of German	1985	Academic Senate for California Community Colleges	1996
American Association of Teachers of Italian	1985	Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders.....	1996
American Institute of Chemists	1985	National Council for the Social Studies.....	1996
National Education Association.....	1985	Association for Women in Mathematics	1997
American Association for Applied Linguistics.....	1986	Philosophy of Time Society.....	1998
American Association for Cancer Education.....	1986	American Conference for Irish Studies	1999
American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages	1986	Association for Canadian Studies in the United States	1999
American Society of Church History.....	1986	Association for Ethnic Studies.....	1999
History of Science Society	1987	Association for Theatre in Higher Education.....	1999
Oral History Association.....	1987	Association of Ancient Historians	1999
Society for French Historical Studies	1987	Eastern Communication Association.....	1999
American Association for Clinical Chemistry	1988	Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World.....	1999
American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists	1988	World Communication Association	1999
Association for the Study of Higher Education.....	1988	American Association for the History of Medicine	2000
Council for Chemical Research	1988	Association for Symbolic Logic	2000
Association for Psychological Science.....	1989	American Jewish Historical Society	2001
National Science Teaching Association.....	1989	American Society of Criminology.....	2001
Renaissance Society of America.....	1989	Chinese Historians in the United States	2001
Society for Neuroscience	1989	Eastern Sociological Society	2001
Society of Biblical Literature	1989	New England Historical Association	2001
American Association of Physicists in Medicine.....	1990	Society for German-American Studies	2001
American Society for Theatre Research	1990	Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era	2001
American Society of Agronomy	1990	Society for the Scientific Study of Religion	2001
Animal Behavior Society.....	1990	Community College Humanities Association.....	2002
Crop Science Society of America	1990	Immigration and Ethnic History Society.....	2002
Illinois Community College Faculty Association.....	1990	Academic Senate of the California State University.....	2004
International Society of Protistologists.....	1990	Agricultural History Society	2004
Medieval Academy of America	1990	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.....	2005
Society for Ethnomusicology	1990	Association of Black Sociologists.....	2005
Soil Science Society of America	1990	Dictionary Society of North America	2005
National Council of Teachers of English.....	1991	Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.....	2005
American Society for Aesthetics.....	1992	Society for the Study of Social Problems	2005
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.....	1992	American Physiological Society	2006
Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences.....	1992	American Society of Plant Taxonomists.....	2006
Latin American Studies Association.....	1992		
Society for Cinema and Media Studies.....	1992		
American Association of Teachers of Arabic	1994		

Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers.....	2006	Paleontological Society	2014
College Forum of the National Council of Teachers of English	2006	Population Association of America	2014
German Studies Association.....	2006	Society for Italian Historical Studies.....	2014
Law and Society Association.....	2006	Society for Mathematical Psychology	2014
National Coalition for History	2006	Society for Psychophysiological Research	2014
National Council on Public History.....	2006	Society for Romanian Studies	2014
National Women's Studies Association	2006	Society for Textual Scholarship.....	2014
Society for Applied Anthropology.....	2006	Society for the History of Children and Youth.....	2014
Society for Armenian Studies	2006	Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.....	2014
Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations.....	2006	Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States.....	2014
Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics	2006	Society of Civil War Historians	2014
Society for Military History	2006	Sociologists for Women in Society	2014
Society for Music Theory	2006	Urban History Association	2014
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study	2006	World History Association	2014
Society for the History of Technology	2006	Acoustical Society of America.....	2015
American Educational Studies Association.....	2007	American Association of Philosophy Teachers.....	2015
Association of College and Research Libraries	2007	Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History	2015
Czechoslovak Studies Association.....	2007	Economic History Association.....	2015
Pacific Sociological Association	2009	Nineteenth-Century Studies Association	2017
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies South.....	2009	National Collegiate Honors Council	2021
American Academy for Jewish Research.....	2014	American Society of Comparative Law	2022
American Association for Italian Studies.....	2014	American Oriental Society.....	2023
American Association for Ukrainian Studies.....	2014	American Journalism Historians Association.....	2024
American Educational Research Association.....	2014	American Literature Association	2024
American Theatre and Drama Society	2014	American Society for Engineering Education.....	2024
Central European History Society.....	2014	American Society for Environmental History	2024
Central States Communication Association.....	2014	American Society for Nutrition	2024
Chinese Language Teachers A ssociation.....	2014	Ancient Philosophy Society for the Study of Ancient Greek and Roman Thought.....	2024
Coordinating Council for Women in History.....	2014	Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology.....	2024
Ecological Society of America	2014	Association for Behavior Analysis International.....	2024
Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought.....	2014	Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.....	2024
Italian American Studies Association.....	2014	Association for Science Teacher Education.....	2024
Labor and Working-Class History Association.....	2014	Association for the Study of African American Life and History.....	2024
Midwestern Psychological Association.....	2014	Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present	2024
Modern Greek Studies Association.....	2014	Austrian Studies Association	2024
Modernist Studies Association.....	2014	Children's Literature Association.....	2024
National Association of Professors of Hebrew.....	2014	Circle for Asian American Literary Studies.....	2024
National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages	2014	Digital Americanists Society.....	2024

Hagiography Society.....	2024	Society for Ancient Mediterranean Religions	2024
International Society for Developmental Psychobiology.....	2024	Society for Research in Child Development.....	2024
Midwest Modern Language Association	2024	Society for Seventeenth-Century Music.....	2024
Mormon History Association.....	2024	Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality	2024
National Association for Research in Science Teaching	2024	Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and Gender	2024
National Council on Family Relations.....	2024	Society of American Historians.....	2024
National Latinx Psychological Association	2024	Society of Historians of East European, Eurasian, and Russian Art and Architecture.....	2024
North American Association for the Study of Religion	2024	Society of Vertebrate Paleontology.....	2024
Polish American Historical Association	2024	Southwest Academy of Management	2024
Rocky Mountain Psychological Association.....	2024	Western Society for French History	2024
Shakespeare Association of America	2024		
Slovak Studies Association	2024		
Social Welfare History Group.....	2024		