

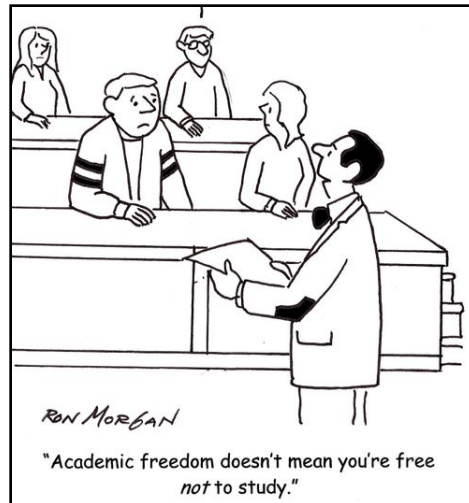
SMC ETHICS

Continuing a Dialogue on What We Do and How We Do It

Course Outlines of Record

Given the teaching focus of our institution, the aspect of academic freedom that focuses on freedom of pedagogy is particularly salient. But our freedom to teach as we see fit is not endless. Indeed, we are hemmed in by the requirements set forth in the course outlines of record (CORs) for the classes we teach.

While some parts of CORs may be flexible, such as the “Methods of Evaluation” section, many are not. For example, we are supposed to cover all material listed in the “Course Content” section of the COR unless it is explicitly labeled as optional. We are also supposed to design our courses’ lessons and assessments so that students who earn passing grades in our classes have demonstrated their ability to meet these objectives and outcomes by the end of the course. Proper fulfillment of these requirements is important for many reasons, from articulation and transfer agreements to evaluations



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Our Academic Freedom

We currently live in polarized times. Too often, the slightest disagreements can lead to accusations and demoralizing clashes. From politics to social issues to cultural preferences, we are all confronted with a steep learning curve as we attempt to maneuver through our contemporary social landscape. Our campus community is, of course, not exempt from confronting these challenges, whether in the discussions we have with our students or our interactions with our teaching colleagues, the administration, or other college constituencies.

Despite our differences of opinion, more than ever it is necessary we reaffirm our strong defense of academic freedom to make sure faculty are empowered to be the best possible teachers and scholars. In its foundational document on academic freedom, the American Association of University

of job performance.

While so much is riding on a COR, many of us might not be familiar with the CORs for the courses we teach or have not revisited them for a while. Even if we have up-to-date CORs for the courses we teach and regularly review them to make sure our courses align with them, we still might have trouble meeting their requirements for several reasons. For example, we may be faced with an overly rigid COR that does not allow for the flexibility and adaptability necessary for a variety of people with different pedagogical approaches to teach the course in a way that meets the needs of today's students. In short, poorly designed CORs might unnecessarily limit our academic freedom and impede student success.

Luckily, there is a solution. If we encounter a COR that is lacking, the department often can revise it, though there may be transfer, articulation, and other regulations that still must be adhered to. Ideally, a COR is flexible enough to allow for multiple pedagogical approaches, styles of teaching, and varieties of content. It provides clear guidance, but is not overly prescriptive or so demanding that students and teachers can't reasonably meet its demands.

For more on designing CORs, see the ASCCC's "[The Course Outline of Record: A Curriculum Reference Guide Revisited](#)"

Professors (AAUP) robustly defined academic freedom as A) freedom of research, B) freedom of pedagogy, and C) freedom of speech, as long as such speech is clearly demarcated from representing the views of the educational institution. This framework continues to be the model for policies of academic freedom around the nation.

Even though we might not always be in accord about our disciplines, our teaching practices, and even our public words (not to mention social media posts), we should do our best to work through, and even welcome, such differences while rigorously supporting each other's academic freedoms. It is especially important to persist in not giving into the threats to limit these freedoms that are currently coming from many directions.

Having thrown our support behind academic freedom, it nonetheless remains important to consider the purpose of such academic freedom. Particularly at a community college, at the forefront of any answer should be student success. Such success requires more than just helping students master the course content, but also necessitates engaging their minds, creating a feeling of inclusion, and eliminating unnecessary obstacles, all of which academic freedom can enable since it allows each instructor, within the confines of the course outline of record (COR) and professional duties, to find the best correlation of their teaching abilities and student needs. As PERC's Fall 2021 newsletter discussed, recent efforts to reduce equity gaps have demonstrated these benefits of academic freedom as faculty have been daringly innovative in all aspects of their pedagogy and campus activities to better center our most marginalized students.

All this to say that, while we must be vigilant to defend academic freedom in every context, we also have an ethical duty to be careful that our use of academic freedom does not start to run counter to student success. Academic freedom means there may be nothing or no one to force us to change our practices and policies in such situations, so the responsibility ultimately falls on each one of us to reflect on if we are using our academic power wisely.

Ultimately, we must balance the strongest possible defense of

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If you have any ideas or issues you would like to submit to the Professional Ethics and Responsibilities Committee for future consideration, get in touch with us through the links below.

PERC website

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all our academic freedoms with the ethical and professional aim of student success.

Relevant Reading:

[American Association of University Professors \(AAUP\) Statement on Academic Freedom](#)