Welcome from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to the 2016 new faculty orientation.

What is academic freedom in American universities? How does it relate to your role as a faculty member at Iowa State University? These are questions that you need to consider as you begin your faculty career. Faculty at American universities have a unique position in society, with specific rights and freedoms. Tenure is a social as well as a legal contract, whose purpose is to protect academic freedom by granting faculty the security to speak freely on matters of importance. We have a responsibility not to abuse it, and a responsibility to use it.

Academic Freedom

The quest for the right to speak freely is a very old one in western society (as witnessed, for example, by the defense offered by the Greek philosopher Socrates when he was on trial in Athens in 399 B.C.E.), but the academic freedom of university professors to say what is on their minds, conduct research, and teach freely in American universities is relatively new. The first American colleges were founded by religious denominations to train clergy. These early institutions of higher education had no concept of faculty members having personal academic freedom. The concept of academic freedom developed in response to three influences.

The first was the rise of German research universities, which developed the concept that individual faculty members must be free to follow their research wherever it led, to publish their results, and to lecture on their discoveries. Before 1860 colleges in the U.S. did not grant Ph.D. degrees, so American scholars traveled to Europe to complete their education. Many educational leaders in the U.S. were exposed to European systems of personal academic freedom that were different from the more rigid American religious-based institutions of the time.

The second major influence was the creation of land grant universities in the U.S. The Morrill Act of 1862 created secular institutions whose boards of trustees, while conservative, did not adhere to a particular religious doctrine. As most academic leaders of these institutions had experienced the liberating atmosphere of European academic institutions, many land grant institutions founded graduate schools modeled after German research institutions. This European experience served to spread the idea of academic freedom throughout American higher education.

The third major factor was the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species. Darwin’s theory of evolution sparked a firestorm in American academic institutions and in society more broadly. Faculty attempting to teach evolution, conduct evolutionary research, and speak out on evolutionary subjects came into conflict with conservative boards of overseers. This struggle sparked a call from professors for individual academic freedom and for job security to prevent the dismissal of any faculty member for his or her research, publications, or teaching.

This struggle led to the foundation in 1915 of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). In 1900, when noted economist Edward Ross lost his job at Stanford University because Mrs. Leland Stanford didn’t like his views on immigrant labor and railroad monopolies, the incident stuck in the mind of Arthur O. Lovejoy, a philosopher at Johns Hopkins University. The AAUP was born when he and Columbia University psychologist John Dewey organized a meeting in 1915 to form an organization to ensure academic freedom for faculty members. “Academic freedom” was a new idea then. AAUP’s committee on academic freedom and tenure (Committee A) issued reports in 1915 and 1940 calling for academic freedom to do research, publish, and teach, and for a system of tenure to protect these rights without which academic freedom could not exist. A long struggle ensued as faculty at institution after institution sought and eventually gained these rights.
Unfortunately, there also were numerous instances of failure. During the 1950s professors were dismissed during the McCarthy period for alleged communist activities. In the 1960s and 1970s there were clashes over faculty speaking out in opposition to the war in Vietnam. In the 1980s and 1990s concerns arose that speech codes designed to protect against hateful or sexist expressions could be used to repress speech that was simply unpopular or controversial. Conflicts continue today over topics such as the role of organized religion and private businesses in state academic institutions, and the struggle over evolution persists.

The struggle to protect academic freedom and tenure continues today. Examples and discussion of the current situation can be found on the AAUP national website (http://www.aaup.org). At ISU, concerns are being raised about implications of the increasing numbers of nontenure track faculty for all faculty members’ ability to do research, teach, and speak freely (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~aaup/). There are questions about increasing pressures for faculty to raise research funding externally: Are standards of quality scholarship being replaced by fundraising ability as the basis for hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions? Are faculty efforts in teaching and service to the people of Iowa being recognized as valuable activities in promotion and tenure decisions, or is funded research the only measure of a faculty member’s worth? Is increasing reliance on corporate funding compromising faculty members’ ability to do research, teach, and speak on subjects that displease corporate donors or political leaders?

As a faculty member you must deal with these and other problems. We did not create the tenure-track system that protects us today; faculty before us created it by years of struggle. We have a responsibility to ourselves and our colleagues, and to pass it on to faculty who come after us.

**Tenure at ISU**

At ISU each faculty member’s performance is judged with expectations weighted by the proportion of effort indicated in the PRS (Position Responsibility Statement). This is a negotiated agreement that records the joint expectations of the university and of the faculty member. ISU is a research university and expects that all faculty members will be scholars whose work is respected in their fields. Thus all PRS documents contain the expectation of original research and/or creative endeavors. Do not underestimate the importance of this component of your work.

Granting tenure is a gamble by the university that you will remain a creative and productive scholar for many years to come. In monetary terms, ISU is investing in your career and wants to see solid evidence of your potential as a scholar and teacher. You should keep the tenure evaluation in mind and be preparing for it from the start. Keep good records of your activities and accomplishments. Study the format of the tenure file and think about how you want to present your case. Examples of well-organized files are available for you to study in the Provost’s office.

Be aware of the standards and procedures of the tenure review. There are important differences between departments and colleges. Do not be afraid to seek advice from your mentor or senior faculty (who sit on tenure review committees). Finally, remember that you are not alone, that you are a member of a supportive group of faculty, and that you can always get advice and assistance if you have a problem.

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