



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

August 26, 2015

Academic Freedom: As we begin a new academic year and an active political season amid difficult societal questions, I am reminded of the 1940 [statement on academic freedom](#) of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). To quote from that statement, “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. 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.”

As with all freedoms, academic freedom comes with certain responsibilities. I encourage all of you to note these points in the AAUP report:

“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. 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. 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.”

The last point is an important one. The University must provide a space for diverse opinions, vigorously advocated and debated; however, as a public university, UNM cannot commit, nor be committed, to advocating the particular position of any individual, not without undermining its duty to protect the multiplicity of beliefs and opinions.

Freedom of Expression: For those interested in more on academic freedom, I encourage you to read the short, well-crafted “[Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression](#)” at the University of Chicago, written in 2014. It offers an analysis of the relationship between academic freedom and the function of the university. In short, a university without freedom of expression ceases to be a university. Similar to the AAUP report above, it also acknowledges narrow but important exceptions to the general principle of academic freedom. These exceptions protect individuals from defamation, threat, harassment, and invasions of privacy. It also recognizes the role of the university in restricting expression that violates the law or disrupts the ordinary activities of the university, then concludes: “But these are narrow exceptions to the general principle of freedom of expression, and it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University’s commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.” Finally, we are reminded by the report’s references to occasions during which academic freedom was challenged but protected, and by similar events in our University’s history, of the need to continually uphold freedom of expression in the face of the challenges to come. As I have heard it said, when problems arise with the freedom of expression, the solution is more freedom of expression.

Tiling the Plane: A recent article about [tiling the plane](#) recently caught my attention, and not simply because of the interesting mathematical (and bathroom tiling) implications. Rather it was because in 1975, Marjorie Rice, a San Diego housewife in her 50s, and an amateur mathematician “developed her own notation and method and over the

next few years, discovered four types of pentagon tiles of the plane.” Moreover, the most recent discovery of the fifteenth such tiling is an example of the triumph of using computers in mathematics.

Food at Student Events: The campus food policy was recently revised: “Chartered Student Organizations hosting events or meetings of 25 people or less may provide their own commercially packaged food.” The list of allowed food items is limited. You can find the complete policy and a list of the items [here](#).

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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