

Resolution Opposing the Board of Regents Action Regarding Regent Policy Document on Commitment to Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

Whereas, Article I section 3 of the Constitution of the State of Wisconsin affirms that **“Every person may freely speak, write and publish his sentiments on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of that right, and no laws shall be passed to restrain or abridge the liberty of speech or of the press”**;

Whereas, the University of Wisconsin System has, since a landmark 1894 resolution by the Board of Regents, committed itself to academic freedom and the proposition that **“whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found”**;

Whereas, the University of Wisconsin-Madison mission statement asserts that **“the primary purpose of the University of Wisconsin–Madison is to provide a learning environment in which faculty, staff and students can discover, examine critically, preserve and transmit the knowledge, wisdom and values that will help ensure the survival of this and future generations and improve the quality of life for all”** and that, to fulfill its mission, the university must **“Embody, through its policies and programs, respect for, and commitment to, the ideals of a pluralistic, multiracial, open and democratic society”**;

Whereas, existing laws, policies, and employee and student disciplinary processes address threats or behavior that endangers personal safety or the safety of others, damage to property, and disorderly conduct; and

Whereas, individual and collective consideration of the impact of conduct that challenges or impedes expression by others can transform a disruptive incident into a “teachable experience,” supporting personal learning and growth and reaffirming and strengthening our core institutional values more effectively than the application of prescribed consequences;

Therefore, we find the UW System Board of Regents revised policy on freedom of expression (October 2017), which codifies punishment of students for materially and substantially disrupting the free expression of others, inhibits our ability to maintain the University’s long-standing and exemplary commitment to academic freedom and the freedom of expression and limits our ability to address situations in a way that advances our core mission.

Therefore, the Academic Staff Assembly strongly opposes these revisions made by the Board of Regents to the Freedom of Expression policy and requests that the policy be modified to restore discretion to university administration or rescinded.