

Year End Report for the Academic Freedom Committee 2016-2017

The Academic Freedom Committee for this year consisted of Peter Bratsis (Social Sciences), Erik Freas (Social Sciences), Shane McConnell (Academic Literacy), Erica Seidel (Student Life), and Hao Tang (Computer Information Systems). The bulk of the efforts for the year were directed toward increasing awareness among faculty as to what academic freedom entails as well as the actual existence of the Committee and its mission. Toward that end we requested that our updated Academic Freedom Handbook be made available on the BMCC website, we drafted a brief handout (attached) that summarized what academic freedom involves as well the mission and procedures of the Committee, and distributed the flyer through visits to departmental meetings as well as leaving copies in faculty members' mailboxes.

Given that there have been no formal complaints regarding academic freedom for some years now, it is advised that future committees (in addition to continuing to increase awareness about the Committee and the importance of academic freedom) explore the possible ways that academic freedom could be curtailed that are not as obvious or visible as someone being formally reprimanded. For example, it may be possible that there are pressures regarding teaching methods or grading practices that few, if any, faculty members actively resist out of fear regarding the security of their appointment, even though these teaching practices may be counter to their professional judgment (this is especially true for part-time faculty with tenuous job security). Similarly, it may be the case that some faculty members are hesitant to voice any opinions regarding College policies and governance that are critical out of fear or an excess of caution. The Committee should do all it can to make sure that faculty governance is as strong as it can be, actively monitor how teaching performance is evaluated to make sure that it does not impinge on academic freedom in the classroom, and the Committee should do all it can to give confidence to faculty members that their professional judgments are respected and welcome in all occasions and they need not censor themselves when it comes to their participation in debates and discussions within the College and University.