

Academic Freedom and Non-attribution

Functional Lead: Provost

Division: Academic Support Division

Responsible Office: Academic Policies

Reference: (a) Standard 6.4 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation 2024 Edition
(b) Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation Fourth Edition Published 2024
(c) DOD Instruction 5230.29
(d) DOD Directive 5230.09
(e) MCO 1700.23G
(f) EDCOMO 5230.1

1. Purpose. This section provides the Marine Corps University (MCU) philosophy and policy on academic freedom and non-attribution.

2. Background

a. Academic freedom is the ability of faculty, students, and staff within the University to pursue knowledge, speak, write, publish, and otherwise explore complex, often controversial, concepts and subjects without interference or fear of reprisal. Academic freedom is a key tenet at MCU and is fundamental and essential to the health of the institution. MCU leaders, faculty, staff, and students, have a responsibility to be aware of and actively protect academic freedom.

b. No statement, comment, or remark to participants (faculty, staff, students, or guest speakers) engaging in academic discourse will be attributed by name in public media or forums or knowingly transmitted to persons who will enter statements into the public arena, unless specifically authorized to do so. Open expression requires trust that those thoughts and opinions are treated as privileged information not to be shared in other forums nor attributed to a specific individual, unless permission from that individual is obtained. Statements where individuals admit to illegal activity or claim to have personal knowledge or evidence of illegal activities by others are not protected by this policy and the responsible director or designated individual must report these to the proper authority.

c. The relationship between academic freedom and freedom of speech is complex, but there are distinctions. Freedom of speech refers to the Constitutionally protected ability to voice any idea or opinion without government interference regardless of the basis or merits of the ideas and opinions. Nevertheless, as federal employees or military personnel, MCU's personnel have some restrictions on their freedom of speech in certain contexts and regarding certain topics. For example, MCU's faculty, staff, and students may not freely discuss or disseminate classified information or controlled unclassified information per reference (f), such as material that is for official use only or that is personally identifiable information. Reference (c) describes procedures for the release of information officially endorsed by an academic institution, as well as those for an individual acting in a private capacity and not connected with his or her official duties.

d. Freedom of speech does have some limited constraints within academic institutions. For example, it is considered inappropriate for a faculty member to discuss purely personal opinions, rather than scholarly perspectives, in the classroom unless doing so is necessary to achieve the goals of the class.

e. Academic freedom is focused on protecting the development and production, dissemination (in the classroom, in presentations and publications, and in public venues), and peer review or critique of academic knowledge from interference. The concept arose in part because academic research plays a key role in how societies develop knowledge and the public must, to the greatest degree possible, perceive as trustworthy. Likewise, students should trust that that faculty choose what they teach in a classroom for scholarly or practical reasons. Without the protections academic freedom policies afford, there is a risk that official government positions on issues, institutional concerns about reputation and funding, personal opinions and preferences of University officials, and fear of reprisals for raising controversial or unpopular opinions could unduly influence research, publications, and curricula.

f. The scholarship and perspectives of faculty and academic staff are assessed by others in their academic discipline as part of formal and informal peer review and critique processes. Student remarks and writing are assessed by their peers and faculty, and grades are assigned within each program. The actions of University leaders must at all times orient on protecting academic activities from interference.

g. Academic freedom carries profound individual responsibilities. These responsibilities include the following:

(1) to distinguish between personal opinions and scholarly perspectives to the maximum extent possible,

(2) to distinguish between personal opinions, scholarly perspectives, and official institutional or governmental positions when presenting or publishing in scholarly and public venues,

(3) to pursue accuracy and rigor in all academic activities,

(4) to receive and provide scholarly peer review and critique in a professional manner,

(5) and to refrain from making unreasonably offensive or irresponsible statements either verbally or in writing while operating in one's academic role.

3. Policy

a. Those in leadership positions within the institution shall act at all times in ways that protect academic freedom and respond actively and promptly to reports of interference or reprisal.

b. MCU encourages faculty, staff, and students to actively engage in free discussion and inquiry, expressing their professional views in lectures or in seminar discussion groups without fear of attribution. At the beginning of each academic year or course of instruction, educational

program directors are responsible for informing faculty, staff, and students of the MCU policy to maintain an atmosphere of free and open discussion while also adhering to the principles of non-attribution.

c. Within MCU, academic freedom contributes to the institutional integrity of the University and includes the following principal elements each of which can be pursued without interference or fear of reprisal:

(1) Freedom to teach and discuss in a learning venue any material or ideas relevant to the course, to include controversial, unusual, or unpopular topics.

(2) Freedom to conduct research and disseminate findings in scholarly, public, and other venues.

(3) Freedom to engage in scholarly peer review and critique.

(4) Freedom to seek changes in academic and institutional policies.

d. Notwithstanding the above, although academic freedom is broadly applicable within MCU, faculty teaching in courses with defined curricula and outcomes are expected to retain the specified assignments, timelines, and outcomes.

e. Examples of statements that are not protected by the University policy on academic freedom include the denigration of any person's race, color, ethnic group, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or gender. This is not meant to restrict discussions of controversial subjects. Good judgment and discretion, however, must be a guiding standard.

f. Neither MCU nor its individual components shall make any policy or establish any guidelines or SOPs restricting academic freedom beyond the limited constraints described in these regulations.

g. Military faculty and students are limited in the manner in which they may publicly criticize senior officials. Nevertheless, as an academic institution, MCU recognizes and encourages full and open discussion and debate of any policies within the classroom and under the umbrella of non-attribution, so long as such criticism and debate are done in a professional manner.

h. Faculty and staff members may not be separated for exhibiting academic freedom and candor in written, oral, and other products, provided the provisions of references (c) and (d) are followed.

i. Contract support is an integral part of MCU's instructional, research, and curriculum development capacity. The applicability of academic freedom and non-attribution policies to contractors supporting MCU is dependent on the details of each contract. To the extent possible under regulations, contracts should be written to reference this policy with regard to contractors supporting instructional, research, or curriculum development services.

4. Procedures

a. All MCU personnel are encouraged to report academic freedom and non-attribution concerns to their supervisors. Civilian faculty and staff may make formal complaints via the grievance procedures established for MCU Civilian Personnel. Military faculty, staff, and all students may also make use of the request mast process (see reference (e)) to report academic freedom and non-attribution complaints. Finally, all students may report complaints related to academic freedom and non-attribution via the student complaint process.

b. Authors shall ensure appropriate disclaimers accompany all works produced for publication, presentation, or other release. An example of an appropriate disclaimer is as follows:

“The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of any U.S. Government organization.”

c. Personnel who prepare manuscripts for publication on a subject in which they have had access to classified material should refer to references (c), (d), and (f) for guidance prior to publication.

d. Guest speaker presentations at MCU will not be recorded by attendees, by any means, without express written permission in advance from the guest speaker and the education program director or authorized representative. Those wishing to request permission should use the Guest Speaker Release Form. To facilitate candid expression and learning, the non-attribution policy applies to all MCU programs, sessions, and distributed materials in which guest speakers participate. To the maximum extent possible, those organizing such events should clarify for the audience whether a speaker is presenting in an official capacity, as an academic, or as a private citizen, as well as the attribution conditions of both the talk and any subsequent discussion sessions.

Related Policies and Forms:

Guest Speaker Release Form

Social Media Policy

Student Complaint Process

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