

Bargaining Bulletin #4

‘Academic Freedom’

February 4, 2019



The Douglas College statement on Core Purpose, Vision and Values states: *“We believe in fostering a dynamic, accessible and supportive teaching and learning environment that prizes excellence and innovation. We value creative and critical thinking and the will to challenge and be challenged.”*

This core values statement, in particular, “the will to challenge and be challenged” forms a fundamental element of academic freedom. The fact that this principle is recognized by the Douglas College Board reflects public expectations of the vitally important role that post-secondary academic institutions play in a constitutional parliamentary democracy and the trust that is bestowed on the Board to govern itself accordingly.

The Douglas College Faculty Association (DCFA) bargaining position will be that the Douglas College Academic Freedom policy is insufficient, is inadequately administered, and has not become part of the management culture. For these, and other reasons articulated in this document, including academic freedom language in the collective agreement is part of the proposal package that was approved by our membership on November 26.

All public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia use a bicameral system of governance whose purpose is to support and protect academic independence and freedom. Section 24 of the College and Institute Act clearly articulates the independent “power and duty” of Educational Council to set academic standards and curriculum and to develop educational policies to exercise its mandate under this section. The legislated composition of Education Council reflects the vital importance of the principle of faculty governance. This principle is also well articulated in the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Statement of Government¹ which includes the rationale that faculty governance deserves the greatest weight in relation to the governing board and its’ administration due to faculty’s subject matter expertise and direct role in teaching and research.

The AAUP’s statement on the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom² notes the importance of transparency, “...of institutional matters the grounds for thinking an institutional policy desirable or undesirable must be heard and assessed if the community is to have confidence that its policies are appropriate.” From the same statement, “...the protection of the academic freedom of faculty members in addressing concerns of institutional governance is a prerequisite for the practice of governance unhampered by fear of retribution.” **On this point the Douglas College policy receives a failing grade.** There is no protection for faculty who express their opinions on matters beyond their own teaching and curricular responsibilities.

¹ AAUP, Policy Documents and Reports, 11th edition, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

² <https://www.aaup.org/report/relationship-faculty-governance-academic-freedom>

Under the Douglas College policy, faculty are free to engage in service to the institution and community, but there is no expression that faculty are free to exercise the rights of free speech accorded to all citizens in the delivery of that service, or otherwise.

The DCFA bargaining position that the Douglas College Academic Freedom policy is insufficient, is inadequately administered, and has not become part of the management culture, is based on evidence provided by DCFA members.

Fully considered collective agreement language will ensure that academic freedom becomes a recognizable feature of the Douglas College culture and in doing so, faculty will be enabled to fulfill their teaching, research, and governance responsibilities. It will enhance the College's ability to meet its' obligations as a reputable and respected post-secondary academic institution. Now is the time to join the majority of colleges and teaching universities in British Columbia that have academic freedom language in their faculty collective agreement.³

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³ Capilano University, Thompson Rivers University, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, College of the Rockies, University of the Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island University, Okanagan College, Camosun College, Langara College, Vancouver Community College, North Island College, BCIT, Northwest Community College