

**Report of Lehman College Committee on Academic Freedom****To the Lehman College Senate**

15 November 2017

The Lehman College Committee on Academic Freedom (chaired by Prof. David Manier) has voted unanimously to approve the following Statement (subject to minor changes and/or friendly amendments), which we would like to be posted on the Lehman College website in a place where it can easily be accessed, and to submit as a resolution for approval by the Lehman College Senate the following: *Resolved*, to adopt this statement as the official Lehman College Statement on Academic Freedom.

**Lehman College Statement on Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is the foundation of the modern university, as has been acknowledged and advocated for over a century, in clear and compelling terms, by the American Association of University of Professors, the [AAUP](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Lehman College endorses, promotes, and celebrates academic freedom, which guarantees and protects the rights of all members of the college community to teach, learn, speak, listen, read, write, and undertake research. The liberty guaranteed by these rights has broad latitude, and must not be abridged or limited, except where there is substantial legal justification.

Only through free exercise of these rights can we expect to achieve the central [goals of Lehman College](#), which are to “work for the betterment of lives, the advancement of scientific knowledge, the engagement of our peoples through the arts and humanities, and the improvement of educational attainment.”<sup>[2]</sup> For these reasons, based on a unanimous vote, the [Lehman College Senate](#) supports the [University of Chicago Report on Free Expression](#), which entails an unwavering “commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas.”<sup>[3]</sup>

As announced in its [Mission Statement](#), Lehman College proudly embraces its diversity, and seeks to engage students’ active participation in their own “academic, personal, and professional development.”<sup>[4]</sup> This encompasses a commitment to securing inclusion, opportunity, and equal justice for all. Lehman College adheres to the regulations and policies of the [City University of New York](#) (CUNY), affirming that efforts “to promote diversity and to combat bigotry are an inextricable part of the educational mission of the University. Diversity among the University’s many members strengthens the institution, promotes the exchange of new ideas, and enriches campus life.”<sup>[5]</sup>

The concept of academic freedom simultaneously embraces both these ideals, that is, both liberty *and* justice. Therefore, academic freedom must not be construed as implying the liberty to violate the law. Further, as members of the Lehman community, we value and encourage discourse conducted with civility and mutual respect, on the part of both speakers and listeners. Yet, as stated in the [University of Chicago Report on Free Expression](#), “concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community. ... [Our] fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of [our] community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed.”[6]

It is not the responsibility of instructors or researchers to censor, suppress, sanitize, or in other ways alter the contents of their teaching and research, simply from concern that someone might find them provocative, or even offensive. To the contrary, it is their duty - and the duty of their students - to pursue truth, inquiry, and knowledge, even if this culminates in discomfort or controversy. Collectively, we encourage faculty and students to seek understanding, enlightenment, and the unexpurgated truth, fully expecting and welcoming that at times this will be challenging, and even appear dangerous. When an individual expresses views that others find controversial or unacceptable, the appropriate response may be to respectfully disagree, but under no circumstances should a member of our community be subjected to any form of bullying (including cyberbullying) or administrative retaliation as a consequence of expressing controversial views.

Therefore, we support the statement of principles of free inquiry espoused by [faculty at Middlebury College](#), which includes the following: “All our students possess the strength, in head and in heart, to consider and evaluate challenging opinions from every quarter.”[7] This should not be interpreted as encouraging incivility or disrespect, but neither can it be interpreted as limiting the free speech rights of any member of our community.

In conclusion, it is only through upholding and promoting the values of academic freedom that Lehman College will be able to fulfill its [overarching goal](#) of “providing the highest quality education in a caring and supportive environment where respect, integrity, inquiry, creativity, and diversity contribute to individual achievement and the transformation of lives and communities.”[8] Whenever tradition enslaves us to falsehood and bias, the purpose of free inquiry is to liberate us from the shackles of ignorance and prejudice.

**Footnotes**

- [1] *Statement of principles on academic freedom and tenure*, AAUP, 1940/1970. Retrieved from <https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf>
- [2] *State of the College*, March 27, 2017, José Luis Cruz, President, Lehman College. Retrieved from <http://lehman.edu/president/documents/State-of-the-College-Lehman-College-March-27-2017.pdf>
- [3] *Minutes of The Lehman College Senate Meeting*, Wednesday, March 8, 2017. Retrieved from [http://www.lehman.edu/college-senate/documents/SenateMinutes\\_Mar282017\\_Attachments.pdf](http://www.lehman.edu/college-senate/documents/SenateMinutes_Mar282017_Attachments.pdf) See also the *University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression*, January, 2015. Retrieved from <https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>
- [4] *The mission of Lehman*, October 13, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/about/mission.php>
- [5] *Policies and procedures on non-discrimination and sexual harassment*, CUNY, July 2010. Retrieved from [https://gc.cuny.edu/CUNY\\_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Policies/Affirmative%20Action/NEW-POLICIES-AND-PROCEDURES-ON-NON-DISCRIMINATION-AND-SEXUAL-HARASSMENT--JULY-2010\\_1.pdf](https://gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Policies/Affirmative%20Action/NEW-POLICIES-AND-PROCEDURES-ON-NON-DISCRIMINATION-AND-SEXUAL-HARASSMENT--JULY-2010_1.pdf) , p. 3.
- [6] *University of Chicago Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression*, January, 2015. Retrieved from <https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>
- [7] *Middlebury's statement of principle*, Jay Parini and Keegan Callanan, March 6, 2017. Retrieved from <https://freeinquiryblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/free-inquiry-on-campus-a-statement-of-principles-by-a-number-of-middlebury-college-professors/>
- [8] *The mission of Lehman*, October 13, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/about/mission.php>