



Title:

Statement of Academic Freedom

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Approval: Chairperson,
Board of Directors

Signature:

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Background

The basis for Vose College’s commitment to academic freedom is found in a fractious group of English exiles living in Amsterdam in the early 17th century. In confrontational tracts and sermons, the first Baptists were amongst the earliest advocates in England for two foundation principles of modern democracy: freedom of conscience and freedom of association.

Persuaded of human fallibility and highly suspicious of interpretive creeds, Baptists asserted that truth should not be delivered by an authoritative church and enforced by the state, but discovered through personal investigation and embraced according to one’s own conscience. They were strident critics of coercion in religion, arguing that the state’s authority should be limited to worldly matters, fulfilling its God-given mandate to establish and preserve a just and free society.

Baptists were equally committed to defending the rights of individuals and churches to freely associate with one another on the basis of shared beliefs, and to separate from each other if those beliefs diverged. Argumentative and independent, Baptists lived out freedom of association with enthusiasm, planting democratically-governed churches, moving into voluntary associations while retaining local church autonomy, uniting and dividing over confessions, causes and personalities, even as the state continued to harass them as dissenters from orthodoxy.

Baptist experiments in democratic governance and free association became decisive models in the formation of modern democracy and open academic institutions. The Rhode Island colony charter, enshrining political democracy, the separation of church and state and freedom of conscience, was a blueprint for the United States constitution. When England’s ancient universities denied entry to students who did not belong to the Church of England, Baptists formed their own associations and started their own academic institutions. Baptist ministers Isaac Backus and John Leland were influential in establishing freedom of religion during the American Revolution. In the 20th century, the Reverend Martin Luther King’s inspiring oratory and non-violent campaign for civil rights helped bring an end to decades of government policy enforcing black segregation.

Religious liberty, freedom of conscience and freedom of association continue to have immense relevance for the 21st century, and it is in the context of its rich Baptist heritage that Vose College affirms the following five principles of academic freedom:

Baptists & Freedom The First 200 Years

1609 – First Baptist church founded by John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and John Murton in Amsterdam.

1612 – Thomas Helwys publishes “A Short Declaration Of The Mistery Of Iniquity”, the first English treatise to advocate complete religious liberty. He is arrested by James I and dies in prison.

1614 – Leonard Busher publishes “Religious Peace, Or A Plea For Liberty Of Conscience”, the first treatise in English solely devoted to freedom of conscience.

1620 – John Murton smuggles “Persecution For Religion, Judg’d And Condemn’d” out of prison. He dies in prison in 1626.

1630 – Roger Williams leaves England for Massachusetts. On arrival, he campaigns for the separation of church and state, and is later banished from the colony.

1636 – Williams founds Providence, Rhode Island, the first settlement in the Americas to institute the separation of church and state, and complete religious freedom.

1637 – John Clarke joins Williams in Rhode Island, helping to found new settlements at Portsmouth and Newport.

1639 – Williams founds the first Baptist church in the Americas.

1644 – Williams publishes “The Bloody Tenent Of Persecution, For The Cause Of Conscience”. It is ordered burned by the English parliament.

1663 – John Clarke secures a new charter from Charles II for the Rhode Island colony, incorporating democratic government and America’s first legal provision sanctioning complete religious freedom.

1676 – John Bunyan is imprisoned for preaching without license and begins writing “A Pilgrim’s Progress”.

1679 – English Baptists found Bristol College, the world’s first “free church” academic institution.

1752 – English Baptists found Stepney College (now Regent’s Park Hall, Oxford).

1764 – American Baptists found Rhode Island College (now Brown University)

1773 – Isaac Backus publishes “An Appeal To The Public For Religious Liberty, Against The Oppressions Of The Present Day”

1791 – John Leland publishes “The Rights Of Conscience Inalienable”.

Statement of Academic Freedom	Version 2.00
Filename: VC Statement of Academic Freedom 1.00	Page 2 of 6

Principles of Academic Freedom

1. **Truth** – All truth is God’s truth, and God has made it possible for humankind to discover his truth through biblical revelation and human investigation of the natural world. Faculty are free to pursue truth and knowledge within their disciplines in the classrooms, in their research and writings, and in other public statements in their field of professional competence. Faculty should exemplify intellectual honesty by striving for accuracy and making appropriate use of evidence, by carefully examining ideas, and subjecting their work to critical scrutiny, and by questioning orthodoxy when new evidence emerges.
2. **Voluntary Association** – Vose College affirms the right of scholars in a democratic state to freely associate and cooperate around a shared set of core principles. The College will sustain an academic community in which faculty are free to engage in rigorous scholarly inquiry and expression within an intellectual tradition shaped by the evangelical Christian worldview. The College asserts that scholarly activity within the context of an evangelical identity, (as reflected in the Vose College Confession of Faith), will extend knowledge and enrich academic disciplines, benefiting the local, national and international communities.
3. **Humility** – While affirming the truth of the Bible and the natural world, the College recognises that people are fallible and may interpret the Bible, ideas and data imperfectly. Since no individual or institution can possess a complete knowledge of truth, college representatives will maintain a humble stance towards the existing body of knowledge and retain a lifelong commitment to and engagement in further discovery. Faculty should respect each other’s opinions and the opinions of those outside the university and defend the rights of others to hold different views. Faculty will not impute or imply beliefs to others that are not supported by evidence or claimed by the other person or organisation.
4. **Hospitality** – Vose College welcomes students and visitors of all faiths and none into its community. In contrast to “tolerance” which entertains the presence of competing worldviews but denies the validity of ultimate claims to truth, the Christian virtue of “hospitality” acknowledges that real differences between worldviews exist, and in doing so creates a space for genuine dialogue and engagement to take place. Hospitality builds trust, leading strangers into friendship, and requires that neither the host nor the guest forsake their worldview while instructing and learning from the other around a shared table.
5. **Responsibility** – Academic freedom is not an end in itself but is to be exercised responsibly with due regard for the mission and values of Vose College. Representatives of the College should also be conscious that their public statements may lead to others forming perceptions of their faith, their profession and their institution.

In the context of the above principles, faculty have the right and responsibility to exercise their professional and personal judgment in teaching and research. They are encouraged to disseminate the results of that research without undue interference from the College administration and outside institutions or individuals. The College administration shall protect faculty from any request to retract or modify their research, publication, or teaching because a complaint has been received. Only complaints alleging faculty violations of professional standards of the discipline or of advocating positions incompatible with the central commitments of Vose College as a Christian higher education institution shall be considered, and then only when the evidence supporting the allegation is more substantial than rumour, inference or hearsay. Faculty members believing their academic freedom has been unduly restricted may pursue resolution of this issue through the existing staff grievance procedure, as described in the Staff Policy Handbook.

Statement of Academic Freedom	Version 2.00
Filename: VC Statement of Academic Freedom 1.00	Page 3 of 6

Sources

In the formation of this Statement of Academic Freedom, Vose College sourced ideas and phrasing from several academic institutions and a variety of articles and publication listed below:

Statements of Academic Freedom

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Statement of Academic Freedom	Version 2.00
Filename: VC Statement of Academic Freedom 1.00	Page 4 of 6

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Appendix: Document History and Version Control Record

Document Title: Statement of Academic Freedom

Source Documents: Sheridan College Statement of Academic Freedom
Reference List above

Associated Internal Documents: Vose College Governance Manual

Associated External Documents

Authorised Officer: Chairperson, Board of Directors

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0.01	10 Feb 2011	N/A	First draft prepared by Mr Darren Smith
0.02	15 Feb 2011	N/A	Draft reviewed by Dr Brian Harris, Dr Richard Moore, Mr Ryan Verge, Mr John Smith, Mr Michael Smith: Minor changes
1.00	30 May 2011	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Submission to DES for Vose College NSAI Application: Attachment 2.3a-iii