



# Statement of Academic Freedom

Policy Area: Governance

Approval: Chairperson, Board of Directors

Signature:

Date:

## STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

### BACKGROUND

The basis for Sheridan’s commitment to academic freedom is found in a fractious group of English exiles living in Amsterdam in the early 17<sup>th</sup> 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 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 were influential 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 medieval 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 advocates for freedom of religion during the American Revolution. In the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is in the context of its rich Baptist heritage that Sheridan 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”.

## PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

1. **Truth** – All truth is God’s truth, and God has enabled human beings to discover his truth through biblical revelation and investigation of the natural world. Faculty are free to seek out truth within their fields of professional competence in lecture theatres, in research and publications and in their public statements. 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 established knowledge when new evidence emerges.
2. **Voluntary Association** – Sheridan affirms that scholars in a democratic state are free to associate and cooperate around a shared set of core principles. Sheridan will sustain an intellectual community where faculty may engage freely in rigorous academic inquiry within a scholarly tradition shaped by orthodox Christianity, as reflected in the Sheridan Confession of Faith. Sheridan asserts that scholarly activity undertaken within an orthodox Christian identity will advance 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, Sheridan 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, Sheridan 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 Sheridan 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** – Sheridan welcomes students and visitors of all faiths and none into its community. The Christian virtue of “hospitality” creates a welcoming space for evaluating the validity of claims to ultimate truth through genuine dialogue and engagement between competing worldviews. Hospitality builds trust, leads 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 (see Hagstrom, 2006).
5. **Responsibility** – Sheridan scholars are encouraged to offer conscientious public comment in their area of expertise. Academic freedom is not an end in itself but is to be exercised responsibly with due regard for Sheridan mission and values. Sheridan representatives should be conscious that their public statements may lead others to form impressions of Sheridan and its employees, the academic profession or the Christian faith.

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 Sheridan administration or from outside institutions and individuals. Should a complaint be made to Sheridan, the administration shall protect faculty from any request to retract or modify their research, publication, or teaching. If any member of the faculty believes that their academic freedom has been unreasonably constrained, they may pursue resolution through the Sheridan *Staff Grievance Policy*.

## SOURCES

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

### *Statements of Academic Freedom*

1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, with 1970 Interpretive Comments. *AAUP Policy Tenth ed.* 2. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/EBB1B330-33D3-4A51-B534-CEE0C7A90DAB/0/1940StatementofPrinciplesonAcademicFreedomandTenure.pdf>

Azusa Pacific Statement of Academic Freedom. *Azusa Pacific University 2009-10 Undergraduate Catalog*. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from [http://www.apu.edu/provost/pdfs/UG\\_Catalog\\_09-10.pdf](http://www.apu.edu/provost/pdfs/UG_Catalog_09-10.pdf).

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Tabor College Statement on Academic Freedom. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from <http://www.tabor.vic.edu.au/policy/academic-freedom>.

University of Notre Dame Academic Freedom Policy Statement. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from <http://www.nd.edu.au/downloads/university/Academic%20Freedom%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>.

### *Other Sources*

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Kurtz, P. (1996) In Defense of Freedom of Conscience: A Collaborative Baptist/Secular Humanist Declaration. *Free Inquiry Magazine*, 16:1. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from [http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/kurtz\\_16\\_1.1.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/kurtz_16_1.1.html).

Marsden, G.M. (1997). *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Notre Dame: A Catholic University. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from <http://www.nd.edu.au/university/Notre%20Dame%20-%20A%20Catholic%20ouniversity.pdf>.

Ormerod, N. (2004). Academic Freedom in a Theological Context: Occasional Paper No.4. Retrieved 3 December 2010 from <http://www.actheology.edu.au/general%20files/Occasional%20paper%204.pdf>.

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- Report of the Independent Review of Freedom of Speech in Australian Higher Education Providers, March 2019. Retrieved 31 August 2020 from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/report\\_of\\_the\\_independent\\_review\\_of\\_freedom\\_of\\_speech\\_in\\_australian\\_higher\\_education\\_providers\\_march\\_2019.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/report_of_the_independent_review_of_freedom_of_speech_in_australian_higher_education_providers_march_2019.pdf)
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**APPENDIX: DOCUMENT HISTORY AND VERSION CONTROL RECORD****Document Title:** Statement of Academic Freedom**Source Documents:** See reference list above**Associated Internal Documents:** Governance Manual  
Academic Integrity Policy  
Staff Grievance Policy**Associated External Documents****Authorised Officer:** Chairperson, Board of Directors**Approved by:** Board of Directors**Date of Approval:****Assigned Review Period:** 3 years**Date of Next Review:** Before Dec 2023

<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Version Date</b>	<b>Authorised Officer</b>	<b>Amendment Details</b>
0.01	10 Feb 2011	N/A	First draft prepared for Sheridan College
0.02	15 Feb 2011	N/A	Draft reviewed by representatives from Sheridan College and Vose Seminary.
0.03	05 Feb 2013	N/A	Revised for Sheridan College Board of Directors
1.00	28 Feb 2013	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Submitted to TEQSA for Sheridan College HEP registration: Attachment 6.3.3 Statement of Academic Freedom
1.01	27 Aug 2014	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Removal of clause in final summary paragraph to meet TEQSA condition for registration
1.02	16 Dec 2014	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Change to version control box in footer
1.03	17 Sep 2015	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Minor grammatical edits to text
1.04	18 Apr 2019	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Minor grammatical edits to text
1.05	23 Apr 2019	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Modification of language in the "Principles of Academic Freedom" section - including language changes to the bullet points for Truth, Voluntary Association, Responsibility and the closing paragraph.

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2.00	31 Aug 2020	Chairperson, Board of Directors	Review and update – logo/name; language changes to bullet points for Hospitality; consideration of the French review.
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