



WCCA Board of Governors' Policy

Title:	Academic Freedom
Category:	General Institutional
Reference:	First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution Article I-5 of the Nebraska State Constitution Nebraska Revised Statute §85-1511 Widmar v. Vincent, 454 U.S. 263 (1981) <i>Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure</i> from the American Association of University Professors, 1940 <i>Freedom and Responsibility</i> from the American Association of University Professors, April 1990 <i>Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students</i> from the American Association of University Professors, June 1967 <i>Statement of Professional Ethics</i> from the American Association of University Professors, 1987 and 2009 <i>The Freedom to Teach</i> from the American Association of University Professors, November 2013 <i>FAQs on Academic Freedom</i> from the American Association of University Professors <i>Statement of Government of Colleges and Universities</i> from the American Association of University Professors, 1966 Board Policy 726 (Institutional Standards of Conduct)
Number:	BP-221
Date of Approval:	September 16, 2026
Approval:	John P. Stinner, Chair, WCCA Board of Governors

Purpose

Western Nebraska Community College recognizes the vital role of academic freedom in a democratic society and is committed to a learning environment where the freedom to learn and the freedom to teach are honored and protected.

Scope

This policy shall apply to all members of the WNCC community including the Board of Governors, administrators, faculty, staff, students, volunteers, and visitors at all WNCC locations.

Definitions

Freedom to learn – the ability and opportunity for individuals to pursue knowledge and skills without unnecessary restrictions or limitations.

Freedom to teach – the right of faculty members to select materials, determine teaching methods, make assignments, and assess academic performance in teaching activities for which they are individually responsible without undue interference.

Policy

Academic freedom is the principal freedom of expression for scholars engaged in discipline-related teaching, learning, research, publication, and service. It is the right of the College community to pursue scholarly, creative, and research activities without fear of censorship, coercion, undue interference, or retribution from government, institutional authorities, or external groups. This forms the foundation of intellectual discovery and higher education's ability to advance knowledge, challenge established theories, and engage in rigorous inquiry, even when it involves controversial topics.

Academic freedom strengthens educational excellence and ensures that diverse perspectives are valued in the pursuit of knowledge and practical application. It is the expectation of the WCCA Board of Governors that all members of the WNCC community should seek to foster and defend intellectual honesty and freedom of inquiry.

Academic freedom is a shared responsibility, and any credible threat to academic freedom impacts institutional autonomy and scholarly inquiry.

Board Policy 726 establishes the Board's expectations for tolerance, respect, and civility in all matters of discourse.

I. Rights and Responsibilities

A. Institution

The Supreme Court of the United States has declared "that academic freedom means a [college] can determine for itself on academic grounds: 1) who may teach, 2) what may be taught, 3) how it should be taught, and 4) who may be admitted to study."

Nebraska statute gives the Board of Governors authority for the “general supervision, control, and operation...” of the College, including, but not limited to, prescribing programs of study and establishing policy.

B. Faculty, Staff, and Students

The freedom to teach and the freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The ideals of academic freedom as established in the *American Association of University Professors 1940 Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure* and the *American Association of University Professors 1967 Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students*, afford faculty, students, and those staff engaged in teaching and applied research specific rights and responsibilities to safeguard them in their roles as educators and learners.

1. Faculty

Academic freedom affords faculty the right to:

- Determine the courses and curricula necessary to meet the needs of the College’s approved programs of study, provided that they are relevant to the subject and comply with WNCC’s established learning outcomes and accreditation standards.
- Select discipline-related course materials, content, and pedagogy and make assignments and assess student performance in teaching activities for which they are individually responsible.
- Conduct research and draw conclusions rooted in evidence.
- Bring relevant expertise to “the larger community with regard to any matter of social, political, economic, or other interest.”
- Participate meaningfully in the shared governance of the College, including the development of policy and strategic, budget, and facility planning, as well as raising questions and expressing concerns about the above without fear of reprisal.

A faculty member’s academic freedom is subject to:

- **The collective:** The faculty responsible for a particular course of study may share responsibility with other faculty for determining curricula, course sequencing, or texts to be assigned to students.
- **Professional ethics:** A faculty member must act ethically in their teaching and research; for example, by following regulations on human subject research.
- **Professional competence:** To produce and disseminate the highest quality of knowledge in a given field, academics are regulated by other academics who are in a position to judge the work of their peers. A faculty member is not entitled to teach something that their academic peers judge is invalid.

- **The academic community:** “Membership in the academic community imposes on students, faculty members, administrators, and trustees an obligation to respect the dignity of others, to acknowledge their right to express differing opinions, and to foster and defend intellectual honesty, freedom of inquiry and instruction, and free expression on and off the campus.” When speaking or writing as a private citizen, faculty should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, while being mindful of their role within the college community.

As broad sweeping as are the rights for faculty, academic freedom does not protect faculty from failing to meet high expectations of performance; guarantee lifetime employment; give protection from violating federal, state, or local laws; give the right to ignore College policies, procedures, or its general welfare; or protect faculty from disciplinary action. It does provide a review by a panel of faculty when pending discipline or termination to ensure such actions were taken for appropriate reasons and do not violate principles of academic freedom.

2. Students

In the classroom, students are afforded three specific protections:

- The protection of freedom of expression in the classroom:** Students are free to take “reasoned exception” to concepts and theories presented in their classes and to disagree with opinions they hear from their instructors, even as they continue to be responsible for learning assigned course content.
- The protection against improper academic evaluation:** Students are shielded from “prejudiced or capricious” evaluation of their academic performance by instructors.
- The protection against improper disclosure:** A student’s “views, beliefs, and political opinions” shared with an instructor during professional interactions should be kept confidential and should not be shared by the instructor with others.

Outside of the classroom, students have the right to:

- Institutional policy defining the information that should be part of a student’s permanent educational record and the conditions of its disclosure. Academic and disciplinary records should be separate and the conditions of access to each established in policy.
- Organize and join associations to promote their common interests.
- Participate in shared governance and be free, individually and collectively, to express their views on issues of institutional policy and on matters of general interest to the student body.

- d. Participate in the freedom of inquiry and expression allowing them to examine and discuss all questions of interest to them and express opinions publicly and privately.
- e. The publication of the standards of conduct expected of students, as well as the procedural standards in disciplinary proceedings.

It is anticipated that students will, in all forms, express themselves with a spirit of integrity and respect. Students are expected to abide by federal, state, or local laws, as well as all College policies and procedures. If not, they are subject to established disciplinary action.

Procedures

The College President shall promulgate such procedures as may be necessary for the implementation of this policy.

Revising this Policy

This Board Policy supersedes any prior WNCC policy, procedure, guideline, or handbook on this subject matter.

If statutory provisions, regulatory guidance, or court interpretations change or conflict with this Board Policy, the Board retains the right to revise accordingly and for the changes to take effect immediately.

Original Adoption Date (and Board of Governor's Minutes Item Number): 1979

Revision Date (and Board of Governors' Minutes Item Number):

September 16, 2026 (Item H.5.a.)

Prior Policy Number:

425.3000.79

Schedule for Review:

Divisions/Department Responsible for Review and Update: President's Office

Sponsoring Division/Department: President's Office

Repeal Date:

Cross Reference:

Procedure(s) for Policy:

AP 221.01 (Academic Freedom – Grievance Review)