

Affirmation of Academic Freedom

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In the current political climate, shaped by divisive misogynist, racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, homophobic, transphobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-scientific rhetoric, even at our highest levels of government, the Department of Philosophy at the College of Charleston wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the intellectual freedom of all human beings.

As practitioners of one of the oldest disciplines in the humanities, we are committed to engaging in principled argumentation, careful consideration of evidence and fact, and sustained, reflective engagement with a diversity of opinions. A prerequisite for those practices is respect for each person as a free and equal participant in intellectual inquiry.

It is for this reason that both the American Association of University Professors and the United States Supreme Court have held that the First Amendment right of free speech applies to the speech of classroom teachers. In 2002, the Court denied an appeal of the 6th Circuit's ruling that "speech, when it is germane to the classroom subject matter and advances an academic message, is protected by the First Amendment." This is no less true when course subject matter is politically or socially controversial, as is often the case in humanities courses. Students and teachers alike must be left free to pursue academic inquiry in open classroom discourse.

Philosophy, and a liberal arts education more generally, challenge us to critically and systematically reflect on even our most deeply held beliefs. This examination is difficult and sometimes uncomfortable. To avoid discomfort would be to avoid asking the very questions that are most important to us -- it would be to avoid education altogether.