

1.0 Preamble

SKG supports the principles of academic freedom that are foundational to the mission and proper functioning of universities.

SKG believes the common good of society is supported by the search for truth and its free exposition. The fundamental purpose of a university and its unique contribution are the search for knowledge and the free dissemination of what is known. Academic freedom is essential to these endeavours, both in teaching and research, and in scholarly and creative work.

2.0 Definitions

“Academic Advisory Circle” means the group of individuals appointed by SKG’s board to provide guidance and advice to the board concerning SKG’s academic mission and its services and supports to students.

"Board" means SKG's board of governors.

“Instructor” means an employee of SKG who is responsible for teaching, evaluation, academic supervision, and/or related activities for credit and non-credit courses, and/or responsible for evaluation of students in any other activity that is part of SKG’s academic mission. It includes all such employees, whether faculty members or contract employees.

3.0 Policy

All instructors and students of SKG are able, within the law, to pursue all avenues of inquiry; to teach and to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints; and to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion without fear of reprisal by SKG or any third party. This freedom extends not only to faculty and students of SKG but to all who are invited to participate in its forum.

SKG affirms and commits to implementation of the following statement of policy concerning academic freedom, adapted from the statement of Universities Canada.

3.1 The meaning of academic freedom

Academic freedom is the freedom to teach and conduct research in an academic environment. Academic freedom is fundamental to the mandate of SKG to pursue truth, educate students and disseminate knowledge and understanding.

In teaching, academic freedom is fundamental to the protection of the rights of the teacher to teach and of the student to learn. In research and scholarship, it is critical to advancing knowledge. Academic freedom includes the right to freely communicate knowledge and the results of research and scholarship.

Academic freedom must be based on institutional integrity, rigorous standards for enquiry, and institutional autonomy that allows SKG to set its research and educational priorities.

Academic freedom does not exist for its own sake, but rather for important social purposes. Academic freedom is essential to the role of SKG. SKG is committed to the pursuit of truth and its communication to others, including students and the broader community. To do this, instructors must be free to take intellectual risks and tackle controversial subjects in their teaching, research, and scholarship.

For SKG's community, it is important to know that views expressed by instructors are based on solid research, data, and evidence, and that SKG is an autonomous and responsible institution committed to the principles of integrity.

3.2 Responsibilities of academic freedom

Evidence and truth are the guiding principles for SKG and the community of scholars that make up its instructors and students. Thus, academic freedom must be based on reasoned discourse, rigorous extensive research and scholarship, and peer review.

Academic freedom is constrained by the professional standards of the relevant discipline. The insistence on professional standards speaks to the rigor of the enquiry and not to its outcome.

Academic freedom must also be exercised within the responsibility of SKG to organize its academic mission. The constraint of institutional requirements recognizes simply that the academic mission, like other work, has to be organized according to institutional needs. This includes SKG's responsibility to select and appoint instructors and staff, to admit and discipline students, to establish and control curriculum, to make organizational arrangements for the conduct of academic work, to certify completion of a program, and to grant degrees, certificates and other credentials.

Academic freedom does not include the right to deny equality to or harass individuals on grounds protected by the Human Rights Code and this policy, and SKG's policies concerning sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination, safe and healthy workplace, and other policies as applicable.

4.0 Roles and responsibilities

4.1 SKG's governing bodies and leaders

It is a major responsibility of SKG's governing bodies—its board and its academic advisory circle—and SKG's senior administrators to protect and promote academic freedom. This includes ensuring that funding and other partnerships do not interfere with autonomy in deciding what is studied and how.

To ensure and protect academic freedom, SKG must be autonomous, with its governing bodies committed to integrity and free to act in SKG's best interests.

SKG must also ensure that the rights and freedoms of others are respected, and that academic freedom is exercised in a reasonable and responsible manner.

4.2 Instructors

Instructors must be committed to the highest ethical standards in their teaching and research. They must be free to examine data, question assumptions, and be guided by evidence.

Instructors have an equal responsibility to submit their knowledge and claims to rigorous and public review by peers who are experts in the subject matter under consideration and to ground their arguments in the best available evidence.

Instructors and SKG's leaders have an obligation to ensure that students' human rights are respected and that they are encouraged to pursue their education according to the principles of academic freedom.

Instructors also share with SKG's leadership the responsibility of ensuring that pressures from funding and other types of partnerships do not unduly influence the academic work of SKG.

As members of a learned profession and as employees of SKG, instructors may choose or be invited to speak publicly in an area of expertise. In these cases, SKG shall not impose supervision or other restraints; nor will it assume responsibility for what is said or written by an instructor acting as a private citizen. However, as a person of learning, each instructor shall exercise good judgment and shall make it clear that he/she is not acting as a spokesperson for SKG.

5.0 Related Policies, Procedures & Documents

SKG's policies and procedures may be found on its website.

6.0 Responsible Officer

President

7.0 Version history

Board's approval pending recommendation of Academic Advisory Circle: December 2023

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SKG gratefully acknowledges that this policy is patterned on Universities Canada's statement on academic freedom (October, 2011) and the policy of Algoma University.