

Mandate for Task Force on Academic Freedom

Johns Hopkins has a special kinship to academic freedom, one that stretches to our founding.

The modern research university that we introduced to the United States drew heavily on the then prevailing German model, where freedom of research and teaching were seen as defining traits. Our first president Daniel Coit Gilman underscored that our then new university would distinguish itself through the ‘great freedom’ it would afford faculty and students. And, early in the 20th century, the iconoclastic professor of philosophy Arthur Lovejoy came to Hopkins after after resigning in protest from Stanford over the termination of a faculty member due to a disagreement with a trustee about economic theory. Once here, he would co-found the American Association of University Professors, and launch their first investigation into violations of academic freedom.

Academic freedom lies at the heart of so much that we do here at Hopkins. Only in a culture of free inquiry and expression will there be scope for the debate, the experimentation, the discovery that is the signature of Johns Hopkins. And yet, it is striking that the university has no official set of principles on academic freedom, no formal statement of the value that the liberty of inquiry and thought should play in our work and our community. Such a document would not only give expression to the important role this value plays in our university, but would also serve as a polestar for the university when it faces the next set of difficult questions that implicate these principles.

For these reasons, we are convening this Task Force on Academic Freedom.

We do not necessarily expect the Task Force to produce an exhaustive report on the history or contours of academic freedom, but rather to focus your efforts on a forward-looking articulation of principles that will help to guide the university through these questions in the decades to come. We invite you to consider the issue broadly, looking not only at the role that freedoms of inquiry and expression should play in the classroom, but also how those principles extend to the full breadth of experiences in university life. We encourage you to consult the broader university community in your deliberations, and to look to the many statements of other colleges and universities for inspiration as you deem appropriate.

We have asked Professor of Political Science Emeritus and Academy Professor Joel Grossman to chair the Task Force. Vice President for Strategic Initiatives Phillip Spector will support its work. We request that you to complete your deliberations and send us your recommendation by May 9, 2014.

On behalf of the university, allow us to express our appreciation to each of you for taking on this important responsibility. We very much look forward to seeing the results of your work.

President Ronald J. Daniels

Provost Robert C. Lieberman