

Position Statement on Academic Freedom

Preamble & Purpose of Statement:

This statement outlines the position of Stellenbosch University (SU) in relation to Academic Freedom. Unlike a policy, it does not provide guidelines or recommendations. It does, however, make reference to SU governance documents, such as Code 2040, where relevant.

The AFTT had physical meetings on 10 November 2023 and 8 March 2024. The initial draft of the position statement was presented at Senate by the Chair of AFTT on 6 September 2024. Faculties were requested to discuss the draft at their respective Faculty Board meetings and provide feedback to the Chair. The AFTT had a virtual meeting on 29 October 2024 to consider all inputs from the faculties. The SU Position Statement on Academic Freedom, therefore, represents the combined input of various SU stakeholders.

SU recognises the fact that academic freedom comes with shared responsibilities among its staff and students, as well as research fellows, postdoctoral fellows, researchers, to ensure the following:

- *To pursue and share knowledge without hindrance and fear.*
- *To uphold ethical principles in relation to teaching, research, social impact and others.*
- *To respect the rights of others to hold different views, and to promote the interests of the SU community and partner communities.*

POSITION STATEMENT

Stellenbosch University (SU) is committed to academic freedom, which is understood as the freedom to do academic work, namely teaching, learning, and research in the pursuit of knowledge. It includes the right of academic staff and students, individually and in collaboration, to reason, speak and write in accordance with what they believe to be true, free from undue institutional, political or commercial restraint, and subject to the standards of scholarship and research integrity appropriate to their academic disciplines. This statement has to be read in conjunction with other existing SU Governance documents related to the Code 2040, ethics, values of SU, learning and teaching, research, and social impact.

Academic freedom in research includes the freedom to choose research subjects, to decide how research is conducted, and to seek support for research from any source. Researchers have the freedom to access the information required for their research provided that such access is legal, conforms to research ethics and does not violate any other rights (e.g., to personal or confidential information). Researchers have the right to disseminate their research results within the limits of scholarly standards, including peer-review, but without oversight or alterations by external organisations unless that right has been conferred by law or agreed upon in a contract.

Academic freedom both advances and requires a democratic institutional culture. It is tied to mutual respect, collegiality and tolerance for disagreement, which together foster an environment conducive to robust intellectual inquiry and exchange of ideas.

Academic freedom is connected to but not identical to institutional autonomy: the right of the university to determine its own scholarly affairs. The right to the intellectual and professional freedom to do academic work is thus affirmed separately and together with the principles of institutional autonomy.

In line with its institutional autonomy, Stellenbosch University may refuse institutional collaboration with any institutions, organisations or governments. This does not necessarily restrict the rights of individual researcher to engage in their own academic partnerships.

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