

Topic Page: [Academic freedom](#)

Definition: **academic freedom** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1.

freedom of a teacher to discuss social, economic, or political problems without interference from university or public officials.

Plural: academic freedoms



Image from:

[Enlightenment, The in Chambers Dictionary of World History](#)

Summary Article: **academic freedom**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

right of scholars to pursue research, to teach, and to publish without control or restraint from the institutions that employ them. It is a civil right that is enjoyed, at least in statute, by all citizens of democratic countries. In the case of scholars, whose occupation is directly involved with that right, the concept of academic freedom generally includes the property right of tenure of office (see tenure, in education). Essential to the acceptance of the concept of academic freedom is the notion that truth is best discovered through the open investigation of all data. A less clearly developed corollary of academic freedom is the obligation of all those who enjoy it to pursue the line of open and thorough inquiry regardless of personal considerations.

Historically, academic freedom developed during the Enlightenment. Early cultures, which viewed education as a system of absorbing a well-defined subject matter, offered little opportunity for speculation. The medieval universities also operated within a field of definite scope, primarily theological, and any teacher or scholar who extended inquiry beyond the approved limits was subject to the charge of heresy. The scientific method of analyzing data and establishing hypotheses, a vital concomitant of academic freedom, was initiated during the Enlightenment, mainly by scholars outside university life such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Voltaire.

It was in the Prussia of Frederick the Great that the new freedom first flourished within the university itself. In England, it was laymen like Jeremy Bentham, David Ricardo, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, and Thomas Huxley who demonstrated the value of free investigation. Before the concept of academic freedom could gain general acceptance, however, it was necessary that education become secularized. It was not until 1826 that the first nonsectarian university was established in London. In the United States the early colleges were also religiously controlled, and there are still some denominational schools that define areas of inquiry. The American Association of University Professors has been active in establishing standards of academic freedom and has investigated cases in which the right was alleged to have been jeopardized.

Bibliography

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