

A Resolution Defending Academic Freedom

Date: 3/16/2022

RATIONALE:

WHEREAS state legislative proposals are being introduced across the United States that target academic discussions of racism and related issues in schools, colleges and universities as “divisive” or “uncomfortable” to white majority students.

WHEREAS the state of South Carolina has five such bills in committee, all of which violate academic freedom and create a chilling effect on any discussion of race or important historical topics in the classroom; all of which will further decrease the number of individuals willing to be teachers for fear of surveillance and punishment; several of which will jeopardize the accreditation of public universities in the state by curtailing academic freedom.

WHEREAS the Furman Faculty Handbook affirms the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, trusting experts to teach according to the best standards of their fields, and citing the American Association of University Professors’ [1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#).

WHEREAS faculty have responsibility for the curriculum at their universities, as is reflected in Furman University’s Policy 100.1.C.2.

WHEREAS the term “divisive” is subjective and chills the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics, based on criteria that are inconsistent with the goals of education and the development of essential critical thinking skills.

WHEREAS education on systemic barriers of race, gender, and sexuality that impair democracy should be understood as central to the pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century and in producing engaged and informed citizens.

WHEREAS over seventy organizations, including the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), issued the [Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History](#) (June 16, 2021) stating their “firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities . . . In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning.”

WHEREAS Furman University’s mission and values profess a “steadfast defense of free inquiry” and that in drawing “lessons from thoughtful consideration of our [university’s past](#),” we

“advocate respect for all people and actively welcome perspectives from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs.”

WHEREAS the Furman University administration once again on May 30, 2020, reaffirmed a commitment to building the “beloved community” in response to racial violence nationally and racist incidents on our campus; and on October 28, 2021, reaffirmed its support of LGBTQIA+ communities in response to slurs and discriminatory language on campus.

WHEREAS in a nation that has for centuries struggled against inequity and injustice, many students do not have adequate historical knowledge or the understanding to connect these historical harms with their contemporary legacies.

RESOLUTION:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, as members of the Furman faculty, resolutely reject attempts to ban books, punish instructors, or otherwise restrict university curricula, including on matters related to equity and justice.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we stand with our South Carolina higher education and K-12 colleagues, as well as with future teachers coming from Furman University’s academic program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we encourage all instructors, regardless of institutional position, to host classroom discussions in which, using professional guidelines and standards in their fields, they determine appropriate information for their student audiences as well as the best methods for teaching this material.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we affirm the [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#), authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations, and issued on June 16, 2021.