

To: Jennifer Martin
Faculty Senate President
Salisbury University

From: Asif Shakur
Chair of the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee

In light of the recent classroom incidents regarding the use of explicit language contained in source documents in the context of teaching, the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee endorses the attached AAUP-Salisbury Chapter's statement on academic freedom.

Salisbury University AAUP Chapter Statement on Academic Freedom

It has come to the attention of our chapter that faculty members at Salisbury University are under severe criticism from students for their use of assigned reading materials which contain the n-word, f-word, and ableist language, and for use of these words during classroom instructional time. The classroom incidents were reported by students to the Student Government Association, and several students have called on administration for certain professors to be terminated. A public forum between students and faculty will be held on March 13th, 2023 from 2:30-5:30pm in the Wicomico Room to address these issues.

The Salisbury University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors support our faculty colleagues, and recognize that speech in the classroom is protected under academic freedom. Academic freedom was enshrined in 1915 in the “Declaration of Principles on Academic and Freedom and Academic Tenure.” This was reaffirmed in 1940, 1970, and specifically in the 2007 document “Freedom in the Classroom” and the 2013 “The Freedom to Teach” statement.

In accordance with AAUP’s Academic Freedom policies, the freedom to teach includes, but is not limited to, both the right of the faculty to select the materials and to determine the best pedagogical approach to the subject. Faculty members are entitled to decide how to best approach teaching and discussing relevant topics in the classroom. Teachers are not expected to avoid all controversial materials, and the SU AAUP Chapter recognizes the classroom as one of the few spaces in which students can engage with controversial materials. In 2019, the national AAUP submitted a letter in support of a law professor at Emory who, while teaching a legal case from 1967, used the n-word. See below for links to this case and AAUP documents on academic freedom.

Lastly, faculty in a range of disciplines are committed to teaching all aspects of the human experience based on source evidence. The use of historical or current sources—whether audiovisual, textual or oral—in a classroom setting is common and one of the best tools to make the human experience come alive. Inevitably, historical and at times current sources contain language, assumptions, idioms, or imagery so far removed from current socially acceptable sensibilities as to cause discomfort. Given this context, the reaction to the use of sources should not be to silence, and certainly not to impugn the reputation of the faculty member in question.

1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments

<https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf>

Freedom in the Classroom

<https://www.aaup.org/file/ACASO07FreedomClassrmRpt.pdf>

Statement on the Freedom to Teach

<https://www.aaup.org/article/freedom-teach-statement#.ZA82DbTMLaq>

Use of N-word at Emory Was Protected Speech

<https://www.aaup.org/news/use-n-word-emory-was-protected-speech#.ZA82TLTMLao>

Academic Freedom Case at Emory Law School Resolved

<https://www.aaup.org/news/academic-freedom-case-emory-law-school-resolved#.ZA6b5rTMLJ8>