SUBJECT | ACADEMIC FREEDOM – RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

BACKGROUND

This policy defines the rights, obligations and limitations related to academic freedom when applied to research* and scholarly activities** conducted by Northern College faculty members in the course of their academic appointment and by those researchers and persons who are similarly authorized in writing by the College for the purposes of research and scholarly activities.

The rights and benefits associated with the Policy for Academic Freedom do not apply to nor are they intended to be generally applicable to all employees or persons under the control of Northern College.

Scholarship***, research, and scholarly activities are integral elements and essential functions at Northern College. Faculty members and others engaged in research activities that are authorized by the College are encouraged to engage in scholarship in order to generate new knowledge, to evaluate, apply and extend knowledge, and to express new ideas through integrity in research and scholarly activities.

“Academic Freedom” generally refers to the ability of a faculty member to engage freely and openly in scholarship, research and scholarly activities. It includes the right to question and challenge traditional norms, and the freedom to define research questions, to pursue answers to those questions by way of unrestricted but proper investigative techniques and to disseminate the knowledge gained to students, academic colleagues and society as a whole. Academic freedom does not require neutrality on the part of the individual; rather, the expectation for academic freedom is to make intellectual scholarship, discourse and critique possible without reprisal or repression by the institution, the government or any other person or entity.

Academic Freedom, however, is not an absolute freedom. Individual members of institutions are limited by the degree of autonomy available to the institution, and are subject to legal parameters, professional requirements and peer review. The autonomy of an Ontario college is limited by statute, the Colleges’ charter, policies established by the Government of Ontario, ethical review boards, Boards of Governors, and oversight committees.

Academic freedom as appropriate to an individual’s college appointment implies protection of the individual by the college from pressure intended to censure or restrict such individual from otherwise pursuing scholarly activities and research interests and communicating the results to students, academic colleagues and the community at large. In this context, individuals are entitled to freedom in research and inquiry and in the publication or dissemination of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties and adherence to College policies and procedures.
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Academic Freedom at Northern College also has corresponding obligations which include a high degree of respect for evidence; integrity in the research in accordance with the conventions of the discipline; impartial reasoning; and honesty in reporting both the underlying assumptions and the results of the inquiry.

Definitions

* **Research**: an undertaking designed to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation. It is the advancement of knowledge through scholarly, scientific and creative activity.

** **Research and Scholarly Activities**: Any internally or externally funded research or scholarly activities that the College, and the academic community in general, consider to be research and scholarly activities including:
  - Seeking solutions to practical problems through the application of knowledge and innovation;
  - Experimental discovery;
  - Activities leading to the publication of books, monographs, and contributions in edited books;
  - Preparation of papers for submission to refereed and non-refereed journals, and those delivered at professional meetings;
  - Consulting and contract work under the auspices of the College and other professional activities involving research;
  - Participation on panels;
  - Unpublished research including works in progress;
  - Editorial and refereeing duties; and
  - Creative works and performances

***Scholarship**: encompasses a range of intellectual and creative activities that include the generation, validation, and synthesis to advance research. It is associated with achievement of excellence, rigorous inquiries, reflective thought, and openness to peer review. It includes inquiries that build a scientific body of discipline knowledge.

POLICY

Academic Freedom at Northern College is the right to enquire about, to investigate without restriction, and to pursue controversial issues and speak freely about scholarship and research activities without fear of impairment to position or other reprisal; however the policy is subject to the following elaborations.
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Policy Elaborations

- Within its means, Northern College seeks to provide the opportunities, infrastructure, facilities and academic freedom necessary to support and maintain a high level of scholarship and research.

- All research and scholarship must be conducted ethically and in ways that fully respect human rights as defined in law. Individuals are expected to use their right to academic freedom responsibly, with respect for the rights of others, and in a manner that is appropriate to and consistent with the individual’s college appointment.

- College faculty members and those researchers as appointed by the College are members of an educational institution whose special position in the community imposes unique obligations, and as such, as a group, must be cognizant of their position as institutional representatives. When such persons exercise their rights for academic freedom or through individual rights as independent citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but must nonetheless recognize that the public may judge not only their personal credibility but also their profession and their institution by statements, publications or public pronouncements. Hence, faculty and researchers shall be accurate; shall exercise appropriate respect for the opinions of others; and shall clearly indicate whether they are presenting personal rather than institutional views, as the former opinions clearly fall outside the purview of rights associated with academic freedom.

- Academic freedom does not confer legal immunity from either criminal prosecution or from a civil action, whether from a claim in damages by a third party or seeking of indemnification and recovery by the College, nor does it prevent peer evaluation as conducted or approved by the College or by other academic, research or professional bodies in the researcher’s field, whether within or outside the College.

- All members of the Northern College community who are engaged in research in the course of their academic appointment, or who are otherwise authorized in writing by the College for purposes of research and scholarly activities as governed by this policy are individually accountable to comply with this policy, and these elaborations.

- The College will take appropriate action for breaching this policy. An example of such a breach could include but would not be limited to:
  - When individuals do not exercise appropriate respect for the opinions of others.
  - When individuals represent personal rather than institutional views as the former clearly falls outside of the purview of the rights associated with academic freedom.
  - When individuals, do not adhere to college policies and procedures.
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**REFERENCES**
Criminal Code of Canada
Ontario Human Rights Code
Northern College Applied Research Policies, Terms of Reference and Procedures
Northern College Discipline Procedure Policy
Northern College Human Resource Services Respectful Organizational Culture Policy
Northern College Student Code of Conduct, published in the Northern College Student Handbook

**APPROVED BY VICE PRESIDENT**

[Signature]

October 28, 2013

Peter MacLean

Date

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