

Academic Freedom Policy

Version number2	2
Approved by	Corporate Governance Board
Date of approval	September 30, 2022

Purpose

Core to the overarching purpose of the Sydney Institute of Higher Education (SIHE) is building an environment in which staff and students are free to engage in freedom of speech and academic freedom, academic research, and critical inquiry. SIHE considers this environment to be crucial to maintaining academic integrity and academic standards, as it enables staff and students to express themselves honestly and pursue new knowledge frontiers.

The *Academic Freedom Policy* establishes SIHE’s commitment to promoting and protecting academic freedom, outlines what SIHE considers to be acceptable and protected under this policy, and sets out measures to create a learning and teaching environment in which staff and students enjoy academic freedom.

Scope

This *Academic Freedom Policy* applies to all academic staff and current students of SIHE. It applies to academic speech or expression by SIHE staff and students both on and off the SIHE campus in respect to their employment or studentship respectively.

This policy is not relevant to the private speech of employees or students, or public speech on non-academic matters.

This policy does not offer staff or students protection for any speech or expression that is illegal under Australian federal and state laws. Additionally, this policy does not protect any forms of speech or expression that contravene SIHE’s *Staff Wellbeing Policy*, *Anti-Discrimination Policy*, or *Misconduct Policy*.

Principles

SIHE recognises academic freedom as essential to the purpose of providing education, to maintaining academic integrity, and to contributing to the development of new knowledge. SIHE will thus ensure that the academic freedom of staff and students in teaching, learning and research is promoted and protected.

SIHE recognises it hold a duty to foster the wellbeing and ensure t safety of staff, students and visitors:

1. includes the duty to ensure that no member of staff, no student and no visitor suffers unfair disadvantage or unfair adverse discrimination on any basis recognised by law including race, gender, sexuality, religion, disability and political belief,
2. includes the duty to ensure that no member of staff, no student and no visitor is subject to threatening or intimidating behaviour by another person or persons on account of anything they have said or proposed to say in exercising their freedom of speech,
3. supports reasonable and proportionate measures to prevent any person from using lawful speech which a reasonable person would regard, in the circumstances, as likely to humiliate, intimidate, harass or bully and which is intended to have any of these effects

‘Academic freedom’ is not to be conflated with ‘freedom of speech’ or “freedom to do anything’. Academic freedom is understood by SIHE to be the right to research, discuss, comment on, and disseminate knowledge and ideas with the intent to develop further knowledge, without censure or undue influence from others.

SIHE's duty to foster the wellbeing of all members of the SIHE community does not extend to a duty to protect any person from feeling offended or shocked or insulted by the lawful speech of another.

Academic speech or expression must be based on evidence and critical inquiry, adhering to sound academic practice as per the *Academic and Professional Integrity Policy*.

SIHE staff and students are expected to conduct themselves appropriately at all times, and especially when their conduct will reflect on SIHE’s reputation.

Procedures

Learning and teaching environment

SIHE aspires to create an environment in which the academic freedom of each staff member and student is protected.

SIHE’s commitment to and support for free intellectual inquiry will be embedded in all areas of academic operations, including:

- Development of the *Learning and Teaching Plan*
- Program design and delivery
- Expectations for academic integrity and proper conduct
- Handling of student complaints and appeals
- Assessment strategies.

Rights and Responsibilities

Staff and students have the following rights and responsibilities:

- Staff and students are expected not to interrupt or disrupt the academic activities of others unless those activities contravene an SIHE policy, an SIHE code of conduct, or Australian federal or state law.
- Staff and students have the right to appeal decisions made about their academic speech or

expression through the appropriate appeal pathways.

- Staff members have the right to comment publicly on academic matters within their area of expertise.

SIHE has the following rights and responsibilities:

- SIHE will ensure that the academic freedom of staff and students is not hindered by corporate or business interests.
- To the best of its ability, SIHE will protect staff and students from any negative effects resulting from exercising academic freedom as defined in this policy.
- SIHE will ensure that staff and students are informed about academic freedom and their rights and responsibilities under this policy through orientation, induction, and ongoing development activities.
- SIHE has the right to pass judgement on whether academic activities are consistent with the definition of academic freedom outlined in this policy.

Policy Implementation and Monitoring

Academic freedom is fundamental to SIHE across all aspects of the higher education operation. It is the responsibility of the *Corporate Governance Board* to ensure academic freedom is protected at SIHE under this policy.

The *Corporate Governance Board* delegates oversight of academic matters at SIHE to the *Academic Board*. The *Academic Board* delegates responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of this policy to the Dean.

The *Academic Board* will review all periodic reports from relevant committees and staff members, in accordance with the *Compliance Calendar*.

Additionally, the *Academic Board* will review all relevant student complaints, concerns raised by staff members, potential threats to academic freedom, and instances of alleged student or staff academic misconduct on an ongoing basis.

Definitions

Academic Board: the SIHE governing body responsible for academic oversight, including SIHE learning and teaching environment and practices, program development and approval, workforce planning, research and scholarship, and academic policies and procedures. The *Academic Board* advises the *Corporate Governance Board* on academic matters.

Academic freedom: The right of students and staff to engage in academic freedom and freedom of speech in a manner that upholds academic integrity and academic standards. This includes engaging in reasoned and evidence-based researching, commenting and debating on their areas of expertise.

Academic freedom includes the following:

- (a) the freedom of academic staff to teach, discuss, and research and to disseminate and publish the

results of their research;

(b) the freedom of academic staff and students to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express their opinions and beliefs, and to contribute to public debate, in relation to their subjects of study and research;

(c) the freedom of academic staff and students to express their opinions in relation to the higher education provider in which they work or are enrolled;

(d) the freedom of academic staff to participate in professional or representative academic bodies;

(e) the freedom of students to participate in student societies and associations;

(f) the autonomy of the higher education provider in relation to the choice of academic courses and offerings, the ways in which they are taught and the choices of research activities and the ways in which they are conducted.

Academic integrity: the standards and values that must be embedded in all academic activities, such as accountability, fairness, honesty, and respect.

Corporate Governance Board: The SIHE governing body responsible for the oversight of all SIHE operations, including the direction-setting, quality assurance, monitoring, and improvement of academic and non-academic operations. It delegates responsibility for academic matters to the *Academic Board*.

Critical inquiry: An approach to research and analysis that considers multiple conflicting perspectives, producing balanced and well-reasoned work that challenges existing ideas and uncovers new areas of inquiry.

Review Schedule

This policy will be reviewed by the *Academic Board* every three years.





















Version History				
Version number:	Approved by:	Approval date:	Revision notes:	Next review date:
1	Academic Board	25/10/2017	.	16 / 10 / 2022
2	Corporate Governance Board	30/09/2022	Policy updated to include new requirements following legislative changes covering academic freedom in the <i>Higher Education Support Amendment Act (Freedom of Speech) Act</i> .	30/09/2025

End of document: "Academic Freedom Policy"

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Related documents

		Academic Freedom Policy
		Academic and Professional Integrity Policy
		Misconduct Policy
		Anti-Discrimination Policy
		Assessment Policy
		Program Development and Approval Policy
		Staff Wellbeing Policy
		Learning and Teaching Plan
		Corporate Governance Board - Terms of Reference
		Academic Board - Terms of Reference