

---

# Report of Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, 2023–24

## Introduction

In a time of pronounced anti-intellectualism and incensed, politically motivated attacks on the mission and legitimacy of higher education, the work of Committee A has altered to become more responsive to current crises and membership needs without sacrificing the careful deliberation and adherence to Association principles and processes for which the committee is known. To that end, Committee A has welcomed veteran AAUP experts—Christopher Newfield, Henry Reichman, and Joan Scott—as consultants on several of its subcommittees to facilitate the timely production of high-quality statements and reports. The committee’s approach to scheduling meetings has also changed. Committee A held two in-person meetings during the past academic year—on October 27–28, 2023, and on May 31–June 1, 2024—but members agreed to holding additional online meetings as needed. As a result, Committee A met online on February 27.

At its meetings, Committee A received updates on investigations and cases related to violations of academic freedom and tracked developments at censured institutions. Committee A also revised multiple statements for the forthcoming twelfth edition of the AAUP’s *Policy Documents and Reports* (the “Redbook”); generated several new policy documents; and approved for publication a major investigative report, *Political Interference and Academic Freedom in Florida’s Public Higher Education System*, prepared by a special committee consisting of Afshan Jafar (cochair), Henry Reichman (cochair), Davarian Baldwin, Emily M. S. Houh, Anil Kalhan, Charles Toombs, and Brian Turner. The Florida report provides a window into issues the academic profession now routinely faces not only in the South but also across the nation: coordinated political intrusion into higher education that often begins, but does not end, with attempts to restrict teaching and research

about “divisive topics” (including race, gender, gender identity, and sexuality) or to undermine the concept of diversity itself. Committee A has also attended to how since October 7, 2024, speech and expression about Israel and Palestine—and pro-Palestinian speech and expression in particular—have been increasingly subject to sanction and discipline. In sum, Committee A has monitored how race, gender, and related areas of legitimate academic inquiry have become part of efforts to delegitimize the project of higher education and justify control over it, and committee members discussed the relationship between those efforts and ongoing problems of contingency, austerity, and administrative and legislative overreach.

## Judicial Business

The Association’s June 2016 annual meeting voted to censure the administration of the College of Saint Rose after it terminated the appointments of twenty-three tenured and tenure track faculty members without having afforded them any academic due process, thus violating AAUP-supported principles of academic freedom and tenure. However, on May 11, 2024, after 103 years of operation, the college held its final commencement and ceased further academic instruction. As a result, the College of Saint Rose has been removed from the Association’s list of censured administrations.

## Legislative Business

Committee A produced multiple statements about how race and gender figure in ongoing political efforts to control what can be taught, researched, and thought on our campuses. The *Report of a Special Committee: Political Interference and Academic Freedom in Florida’s Public Higher Education System* explores coordinated, politically motivated attacks on public higher education in Florida under Governor

Ron DeSantis, including efforts to “ban the teaching of ‘critical race theory’ in public schools and prohibit discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in classrooms.” Additionally, a joint subcommittee of Committee A, the Committee on Historically Black Institutions and Scholars of Color, and the Committee on Gender and Sexuality in the Academic Profession—consisting of Risa L. Lieberwitz (chair), Marcus Alfred, Emily M. S. Houh, Mark S. James, Henry Reichman, Saranna Thornton, and Charles Toombs—produced the statement *On Eliminating Discrimination and Achieving Equality in Higher Education*, which expanded and elaborated the principles of racial and gender equity detailed in the AAUP’s 1973 report *Affirmative Action in Higher Education*. Both documents were approved at the October meeting.

Also at the October meeting, the committee approved revisions to four Redbook documents. The first, *On Academic Freedom and Outside Speakers*, reaffirms that respecting faculty and student choices of invited outside speakers is consistent with academic freedom principles and is a best practice that restrains politically zealous or overly cautious college and university administrators. Committee A also recognizes that “to understand the university as ‘open’ only if any invited speaker is permitted to speak is to miss the conditions under which ‘freedom to hear’ and the ‘right to examine issues and seek truth’ can be used as pretexts for imposing coordinated political agendas that seek to destroy academic freedom and shared governance.” A broad interpretation of the “right to hear” is necessary to secure academic freedom, including faculty rights based on disciplinary competence to guide the educational missions of institutions through participation in shared governance. The second revised document, *Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession*, assesses the effects of contingency on academic freedom. A third document, *Protecting an Independent Faculty Voice: Academic Freedom after “Garcetti v. Ceballos,”* emphasizes “the need to reinforce academic freedom, not as a matter of law, but as a principle vital to the effective functioning of institutions of higher learning.” Finally, the committee approved revisions to a fourth document, *Verification and Trust: Background Investigations Preceding Faculty Appointments*.

At its spring meeting, Committee A approved the statement *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Criteria for Faculty Evaluation*, which affirms that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) criteria are not a fundamental violation of academic freedom. The statement

notes that criticisms of DEI criteria “often conflate social and institutional values with imposed orthodoxies,” yet “recruiting and retaining a diverse student population and a diverse faculty to teach them are legitimate educational goals.” The statement concludes that institutions can legitimately require faculty members to demonstrate the professional competencies necessary for realizing diversity goals and may also legitimately develop strategies to recruit, hire, and retain a diverse faculty.

### Conclusion

Thank you to the members of Committee A for their dedication to the academic profession and to the AAUP. Thank you as well to the national staff and to our members for their commitment to higher education that is truly in the service of the public. ■

**RANA JALEEL** (Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies and Asian American Studies), *chair*  
University of California, Davis