



Resolution on Freedom of Speech

In light of the controversy over the use by McMaster student groups of the phrase “Israeli apartheid”, the Executive of the McMaster University Faculty Association expresses its concern about apparently excessive restrictions in the Student Code of Conduct of expression of opinion by McMaster students and about lack of transparency concerning the process by which student groups are restricted from expressing their views.

Specifically, the Executive is concerned that, in Appendix C, the current version of the Student Code of Conduct lists as a minor offence under the code:

engaging in any kind of communication towards another individual or group which may be considered harassing, intimidating or offensive,

and in Appendix D as a major offence under the code:

engaging in verbal or non-verbal behaviour or communication toward an individual or group directly or indirectly, which is considered intimidating, offensive and/or threatening.

The Executive notes an apparent conflict between forbidding students to engage in any kind of communication that may be or is considered offensive (even if it may not be and is not considered harassing, intimidating or threatening) and the Senate statement on academic freedom, according to which:

McMaster University is dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. Its members enjoy certain rights and privileges essential to these twin objectives. Central among these rights and privileges is the freedom, within the law, to pursue what seem to them fruitful avenues of inquiry; to teach and to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints; and to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion. This freedom extends not only to members of the University but to all who are invited to participate in its forum. All members of the University must recognize this fundamental principle and must share responsibility for supporting, safeguarding and preserving this central freedom. Behaviour which obstructs free and full discussion, not only of ideas which are safe and accepted but of those which may be unpopular or even abhorrent, vitally threatens the integrity of the University, and cannot be tolerated.

The MUFA Executive notes that the full discussion of unpopular or abhorrent ideas may be, and typically is, considered by some people to be offensive to some people. The MUFA Executive urges the Senate to resolve the apparent conflict between the two Senate policies, in favour of the protection of academic freedom, and to do so expeditiously. It also urges the Senate to seek clarification from the senior administration of the process by which student groups are restricted in what, and how, they communicate about events that they sponsor.

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