ACADEMIC FREEDOM

According to the bylaws of the university, the “...functions of the University Faculty shall be to consider questions of educational policy which concern more than one college, school or separate academic unit, or are general in nature...”

Responsibility of: Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Status. The Committee considers matters relating to academic freedom and responsibility; freedom of teaching and learning; professional status of the faculty, including policies and procedures relevant to faculty appointments, promotion, retirement, separation, and tenure; and receives and reviews written complaints brought by or against a faculty member when other specific procedures have not been designated for hearing those grievances.

Below is an extract from the Faculty Handbook, 2002 edition, pp. 71-72:

The following statement on academic freedom and responsibility was adopted by the University Faculty on May 11, 1960:

Principles of Academic Freedom and Responsibility

Academic Freedom for the Faculty of Cornell University means:

Freedom: of expression in the classroom on matters relevant to the subject and the purpose of the course and of choice of methods in classroom teaching; from direction and restraint in scholarship, research, and creative expression and in the discussion and publication of the results thereof; to speak and write as a citizen without institutional censorship or discipline;

and

Responsibility: to perform faithfully the duties of the position; to observe the special obligations of a member of a learned profession and an officer of an educational institution to seek and respect the truth; to make it clear that utterances made on one's own responsibility are not those of an institutional spokesman.

Academic freedom is valued very highly at Cornell, and the University Faculty defends it tenaciously; nevertheless, the same University Faculty is disinclined to
see the concept abused. Academic freedom does not imply immunity from prosecution for illegal acts of wrongdoing, nor does it provide license for faculty members to do whatever they choose.

Many departments, particularly in the contract units, have commitments to provide services to the people of New York State or to perform studies in areas judged important to the general welfare. Other departments have commitments to maintain broad research programs in certain areas. All departments have obligations to provide advising and balanced programs of instruction for students. Performing the duties of one's position faithfully entails bearing a suitable share in these departmental responsibilities. The initial expectations held of faculty members are usually made clear in the letter of appointment. As time goes on, the faculty member consults with the department chairperson about shifts that may be needed or desired in these duties. It is understood that normally the determination of the precise assignments should not be entirely unilateral but rather by agreement. In case such agreement cannot be reached, the chairperson has the responsibility to exercise his or her authority and decide the matter. If the decision is perceived as unfair, the faculty member can resort to the college-level academic grievance procedures described in this section.

The principles of academic freedom assure wide discretion to the faculty member in determining the thrust of research and scholarship, provided the work continues to fulfill departmental obligation. The presumption is always of self-direction and freedom accompanied by responsibility.