

**The University Senate of Michigan Technological
University
Proposal 24-24**

**Proposal to Amend Senate Procedure 106.1.1:
Academic Freedom**

(Voting Units: Academic Only)

Submitted by: Timothy Scarlett on behalf of the Department of Social Sciences

I. Introduction

Michigan Technological University faculty research and teach about diverse topics within their area of expertise. Amid increasing politicization of intellectual communities at colleges and universities in the United States, the University remains committed to academic freedom. The suggested revision clarifies the nature of “controversial matters” in academic freedom in university policy.

II. Rationale

Michigan Tech has an established policy on academic freedom based upon the American Association of University Professors’ 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and the subsequent 1970 Interpretive Comments. Our existing policy recognizes the unique and special rights and responsibilities of professors and instructors when working with students in the classroom. The policy was updated by the University senate in 1995 and approved in 1998.

<https://www.mtu.edu/senate/policies-procedures/list-policies/106.1.1/>

The University’s policy has long recognized that the teaching of controversial material is crucial to education in many disciplines. During the 2023-2024 academic year, events demonstrated some confusion about whether or not the faculty are representatives of the university when they are exercising their free speech as citizens, as members of their academic discipline, and as leaders in the classroom. This change clarifies this issue, reinforces that controversial material should be related to pedagogical goals, and reinforces the University’s support of faculty in their pursuits.

III. Proposal

University Senate Policy 106.1.1.b currently states:

“Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject [2].”

The original footnote refers to this passage:

“2. The intent of this statement is not to discourage what is "controversial." Controversy is at the heart of the free academic inquiry which the entire statement is designed to foster. The passage serves to underscore the need for teachers to avoid persistently intruding material which has no relation to their subject.”

Proposed revision, replacing the existing paragraph with:

“Instructors are entitled to teach in their classrooms in ways that emerge from their professional credentials and expertise. They speak in their classrooms as representatives of their disciplines and individual expertise, not as representatives of the university. They are free to introduce controversial subject matter into their classroom that is relevant to their academic discipline and course subject, while being careful not to introduce unrelated controversial matters. They should expect the full support of the university in discussing controversial issues related to their discipline or course subject.”