



RTC Academic Freedom Policy

February 2016

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1. Introduction

Academic Freedom is an essential prerequisite in the pursuit of the RTC's goal to equip the next generation of leaders for the advance of the Gospel. In the context of the RTC this freedom has to be exercised with due recognition of the fact that the College is based on firm confessional commitments. The purpose of this document is to spell out how Academic Freedom is understood and applied in the explicitly Christian and Reformed environment of the RTC.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all staff of the RTC, and in particular to teaching staff, including part-time and guest lecturers as well as full-time Faculty.

3. Basic Principles

a. Confessional Commitments: As a Christian institution we acknowledge that God himself is the source of all knowledge, that his Word is the ultimate expression of truth and that Christ is Lord over all things. These convictions are reflected in our confessional commitments (hereafter "the Confessional Standards") which are summarised as follows in the RTC Constitution (Articles 2 and 3):

- The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in their original languages are accepted as the infallible Word of God and are of binding authority
- The Reformed Confessions commonly known as the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith are accepted as setting forth the system of doctrine contained in Holy Scripture.

It is expected that members of the College community will always act and teach in ways that display a loyalty to, and respect for, the Confessional Standards. Faculty must act in ways consistent with their subscription to the Standards.

b. A place of free enquiry and learning. The Confessional Standards do not mean that everyone at the RTC is required to think in exactly the same way. Members of the College community are still expected to strive towards the highest ideals of Christian liberty and academic freedom. Faculty and students are, therefore, encouraged to pursue truth and knowledge in ways that are honest, accurate and open to review and challenge by peers. Thoughtful reflection that is welcoming to new ideas and comfortable with differences of opinion provides the ideal environment in which academic freedom can flourish. In such an environment lecturers and students alike should be free from unreasonable restraints on what they say, write and publish.

c. Responsible Exercise of Academic Freedom. Academic freedom is best exercised in settings where it is recognised that a community of learning provides the most fruitful context for the exercise of this freedom. It is therefore not merely a freedom 'to do your own thing'. Within the community of learning that we seek to create at the RTC opinions should be freely exchanged and tested against the views of others and the teachings of Scripture. Members of the College community should also realise that responsible use of academic freedom extends to due regard for the basic values of the College. They should furthermore be very conscious of the fact that any public statement they make may lead to the public forming certain perceptions about the College.

4. Practical Implications

a. As teachers in a community of learning, RTC academic staff are encouraged to engage freely in curriculum development, teaching, publishing and scholarly interaction (e.g. conference presentations and debates).

b. They are to do so exercising professional, spiritual and personal judgement in their teaching and writing, in the expectation that they are free to do so with minimal interference from College authorities as long as the Confessional Standards are respected. They must be free to do so without fear of harassment, intimidation or unfair treatment by the College community, even if they present opinions that are unpopular or controversial.

c. In all academic endeavours, RTC staff are to act in a professional and ethical manner, in accordance with the principles of intellectual rigour, and will not harass, vilify, intimidate or defame others.

d. Academic staff are expected to honour the boundaries provided by the Confessional Standards. Should they come to conclusions that challenge or contradict clearly articulated or commonly accepted positions regarding the Confessional Standards, or that are likely to be controversial in our supporting churches and/or the wider evangelical Christian community, they will in the first instance discuss these conclusions with the Principal and the Faculty before incorporating them into teaching and publishing activities. The Principal shall then determine whether the matter should be referred to the Board.

e. Faculty members who come to the conclusion that they fundamentally disagree on substantive issues with the Confessional Standards will make this known to the Principal, who shall then inform the Faculty and refer the matter to the Board.

e. Members of the College community should recognise that there can be substantial differences of opinion on certain matters that will still fall within the parameters of Christian and Reformed orthodoxy. Where such differences exist among academic staff they must be dealt with in a spirit of collegiality and dialogue without attempts being made to restrict the freedom of others to hold to differing opinions.

f. College authorities will seek to protect Faculty members from requests to retract or modify their teaching, research or publications simply because those making the request dislike what is being said. Formal complaints against Faculty will only be investigated by the Board where it can be shown that they have violated professional standards or where they are advocating positions that are incompatible with the Confessional Standards. Complaints of this nature will have to be substantiated with supporting evidence.

g. Whenever members of the College community feel that their academic freedom is being restricted they are free to pursue a mutually acceptable resolution of this issue through making use of the standard RTC Grievance Resolution Policy.

h. RTC staff should not discourage students from freely airing their views in class or in written material. This should, however, always be done in a spirit of respect for others.

i. Student progress will be measured solely on academic merit and not by the extent to which their opinions conform to the RTC's confessional commitments or the lecturer's personal opinions.

Adopted by the Board

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