



FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY

Approved	Council
Approval Date(s)	7/12/2023; 11/3/2020, 17/2/2020, 10/2/2017, 12/9/2012, 27/4/2011, 14/3/2011
Approved	Council
Date for Review	September 2028
Responsible Officer	Dean
Related Documents	SCD Communications Policy; SCD Admissions Policy
Higher Education Standards (2021)	Part A 6.1.4, Part B 1.1.1 and 1.2.1
National Code (2018)	

The Ecclesial Context of SCD

The Teaching Bodies of the SCD operate within a variety of ecclesial contexts, with stakeholders who have a vital interest in the nature and quality of the theological education provided. In exactly the same way as a professional body can be regarded as being an integral part of the educational discipline that prepares for that profession, far from being external, such ecclesial contexts are an internal and integral part of the theological education of the SCD. The principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom are appropriately embedded within our various disciplines in harmony with a self-understanding of theological education as properly integrated within its ecclesial contexts.

SCOPE

As part of the overall SCD policy framework, this policy applies to the governing body of the SCD, its officers and employees and its decision-making organs, including those involved in academic governance, to its accredited faculty, and to students enrolled in SCD awards. It aims to ensure that the exercise of freedom of lawful speech and academic freedom for SCD staff, students, and visitors, is not unnecessarily burdened by restrictions other than those imposed by law, or by the principles of this policy.

POLICY

1. The SCD supports the implementation of the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom in teaching, research and scholarship, and delivery of all its awards, whether coursework or research awards. All SCD staff are required to embrace and enact these principles as paramount and defining values and to encourage their students to do likewise.
2. The principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom are entirely compatible with the mission of the SCD to advance learning about, research into, and appreciation of Christian tenets and values, and to promote the integrity of faith and reason within the theological disciplines in pursuit of God's truth and wholeness of life.
3. The intentionally ecumenical ethos of the SCD assumes and expresses the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom, as does the desire for respectful dialogue with those who do not have a Christian heritage.
4. The SCD will through staff induction and professional development ensure that the staff employed by the SCD and by Member Institutions for the purpose of delivery of SCD awards understand this policy and are equipped to supportively implement it and encourage their students to do likewise.
5. The autonomy of the Member Institutions in relation to the choice of academic courses and offerings, the style in which they are taught and the choices of research activities and the ways in which they are conducted, are subject only to the Governance framework and Policies of the SCD.
6. Every member of staff and every student at the SCD enjoys freedom of speech exercised on the facilities of SCD or its Member Institutions or in connection with the SCD subject only to restraints or burdens imposed by:
 - a. the laws of Australia and the state in which the teaching occurs (i.e. contractual obligations,

- duties of confidentiality, and proper regard for intellectual property rights etc);
 - b. the reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct necessary to the discharge of the teaching and research activities of the SCD or its Member Institutions;
 - c. the right and freedom of others to express themselves and to hear and receive information and opinions;
 - d. the reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct to enable the SCD and its Member Institutions to fulfil its duty to foster the safety and wellbeing of students and staff;
 - e. the reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct necessary to enable the SCD to give effect to its legal duties including its duties to visitors to the SCD.
7. Academic freedom for faculty and students comprises the freedom to teach, discuss, and research and to disseminate and publish the results of their research; to participate in professional or representative academic bodies; and to make lawful public comment on issues that lie within their personal capacity, with the normal disclaimer that their expressed views are not necessarily those of the SCD or their Teaching Body.
 8. The authority to speak officially on behalf of the SCD is delegated solely to the Dean (as per the SCD *Communications Policy*).
 9. Admission of students to SCD award programs is open and dependent on academic preparedness as detailed the SCD Admissions Policy and each Degree Regulation. However, each MI, by virtue of the purpose of their mission objectives, may select candidates on the basis of the goal of their student cohort (i.e. priesthood, ministry preparation, international missions training etc). Enrolment in the SCD entails a willingness to understand and contribute positively to its Christian and ecumenical ethos.
 11. Students in SCD award programs may pursue patterns of study required by their MI as long as they operate within the policies and regulations of SCD. However, all student learning and completion of assessment tasks will be carried out with due regard for the principle of freedom of speech and academic freedom in pursuit of academic excellence, and they will not be penalised for expressing particular opinions.
 12. Subject to the above limitations, a person's expression of lawful speech or exercise of academic freedom at the facilities of the SCD or its Member Institutions or in connection with a SCD activity shall not constitute misconduct nor attract any penalty, or other adverse action, or damage the reputation of SCD.
 13. In entering into affiliation, collaborative or contractual arrangements with third parties and in accepting donations from third parties subject to conditions, the SCD and its Member Institutions shall take all reasonable steps to minimise the restrictions or burdens imposed by such arrangements or conditions on the freedom of speech or academic freedom of any member of the academic staff or students carrying on research or study under such arrangements or subject to such conditions.
 14. The SCD and its Member Institutions have the right and responsibility to determine the terms and conditions upon which external visitors and invited visitors shall be permitted to speak at and use its facilities and in so doing may:
 - a. require the person or persons organising the event to comply with the usual booking procedures and to provide information relevant to the conduct of any event, and any public safety and security issues;
 - b. distinguish between invited visitors and external visitors in framing any such requirements and conditions;
 - c. refuse permission to any invited visitor or external visitor to speak at its facilities where the content of the speech is or is likely to:
 - (i) be unlawful;
 - (ii) prejudice the fulfilment by the SCD and its Member Institutions of its duty to foster the wellbeing of staff and students;
 - (iii) involve the advancement of theories or propositions which purport to be based on scholarship or research but which fall below scholarly standards to such an extent as to be detrimental to the SCD's character as an institution of higher learning;
 - b. require a person or persons seeking permission for the use of the facilities of the SCD and its Member Institutions for any visiting speaker to contribute in whole or in part to the cost of providing security and other measures in the interests of public safety and order in connection with the event at which the visitor is to speak.
 15. The SCD and its Member Institutions may take reasonable and proportionate steps to ensure that all prospective students in any of its courses have an opportunity to be fully informed of the content of those courses. Academic staff must comply with any policies and rules supportive of the SCD's duty to foster the wellbeing of staff and students. However, they are not precluded from including content or utilising accepted pedagogical methods solely on the ground that it may offend or shock any student or class of students.