

Overview of Academic Freedom Forums

This fall during Campus Equity Week, the AFT will be releasing a new policy statement on academic freedom in higher education entitled *Academic Freedom in the 21st-Century College and University: Academic Freedom for All Faculty and Instructional Staff*. This new statement was developed because AFT Higher Education leaders believe that the threats to academic freedom currently faced by higher education—e.g., declining tenure rates and increasing reliance on contingent faculty, corporatization of research, and organized political attacks from outside of higher education—are particular to this historical moment, and that a statement reflecting that context is needed.

The release of this statement provides an opportunity for the AFT to talk about the state of academic freedom at our nation's colleges and universities. It also gives local affiliates the opportunity to lead a discussion about the state of academic freedom at their specific institutions. A major focus of the new statement is the growing reliance on contingent faculty and its impact on academic freedom. This analysis can serve as a springboard for full-time tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty to talk *together* about academic freedom and how to ensure it is protected as a guaranteed right for *all* faculty members.

To that end, the AFT is sponsoring Academic Freedom Forums at different institutions around the country to discuss this issue. We will hold these during or near the week of Oct. 29-Nov. 2, to coincide with Campus Equity Week 2007, although we encourage locals to sponsor forums throughout the academic year.

Each event will be put together by an AFT local affiliate, but we recommend that locals follow some basic guidelines. Forums should:

- Be held in a public place on campus and advertised as open for all to attend. This is a good chance to give the union some visibility on a professional issue and we urge locals to promote this event widely through student and community newspapers, posters and advertisements.
- Include a brief discussion of the AFT policy paper and the reasons for its release, as well as its recommendations, which we believe will help focus the discussion.
- Involve both full-time and part-time faculty talking about different aspects of academic freedom.
- Possibly involve students, administrators or legislators, depending on the particular format for the forum on each campus.
- Develop some concrete steps to improve or protect academic freedom on campus, as a means of keeping the discussion going.

We hope you will consider holding your own Academic Freedom Forum to discuss the AFT's statement and the status of academic freedom on your campus. During Campus Equity Week, the AFT will focus on a set of its own targeted events, but we will do whatever we can to help you plan and get your event off the ground. We have developed a poster that can be used on campus to advertise your forum, which you can easily download from our Web site at www.aft.org/higher_ed/cew/index.htm.