

Annual Report – Academic Year 2024–2025

1. Purpose of the Academic Freedom Council

The Academic Freedom Council (AFC) is a faculty-elected body dedicated to promoting academic freedom at Texas A&M University. The Council reviews cases in which concerns about academic freedom are raised, advises university leadership on relevant issues, and serves as an independent voice in matters affecting academic freedom.

The Council operates under TAMU SAP 12.01.99.M1 – *Academic Freedom, Responsibility, and Tenure*. At its meeting on December 4, 2024, the AFC adopted its first set of procedural guidelines, which include the requirement to publish an annual report. The annual report is intended as a transparent record for faculty, staff, administration, and the broader Texas A&M community. It reflects the Council’s efforts to advocate for conditions that allow research and teaching at Texas A&M to flourish.

2. AFC Memo on GA-48

In January 2025, the Academic Freedom Council (AFC) sent a memo to the Provost outlining concerns about the potential impact of Governor Abbott’s Executive Order GA-48 (which limits collaboration with researchers in China, Iran, and other “countries of concern”) on faculty research, collaboration, and personal freedoms at Texas A&M University.

The AFC noted that overly broad interpretation and excessive compliance with GA-48 could undermine academic freedom, hinder competitive and innovative research, reduce funding opportunities, and damage both the university’s research mission and the U.S.’s ability to monitor developments in other countries. The Council emphasized the need for a clear, thoughtful interpretation of the order that balances compliance with the principles of academic freedom set out in the *Statement on Academic Freedom, Responsibility, and Tenure*. The AFC noted that:

1. The prohibition on accepting gifts or traveling to “countries of concern” could affect faculty with ongoing affiliations, fellowships, or conference participation abroad, harming ongoing research and the university’s international standing.

2. GA-48's requirement to report personal travel to countries of concern, even when unrelated to professional duties, raises privacy and personal freedom concerns.
3. University Rule 15.05.04.M1 lacks clear criteria for identifying risky collaborations. The AFC stressed that many existing partnerships in non-strategic disciplines involve data flowing into, not out of, the U.S., and that understanding research developments abroad can be strategically important.

The Provost responded on February 18, 2025, acknowledging the importance of the AFC's feedback and describing steps taken to gather and share faculty perspectives on the issue. The Provost's office developed a two-question feedback tool, distributed in early January to faculty, staff, and graduate students. This tool generated over 250 comments. The Provost noted that the AFC's memo overlapped significantly with concerns raised in the broader feedback, but also provided valuable additional detail and context.

3. Meeting with the Provost in April 2025

The Academic Freedom Council met with the Provost on April 17, 2025, to discuss academic freedom concerns affecting Texas A&M faculty and students. The discussion addressed both current challenges and possible steps the university could take to strengthen its commitment to academic freedom. The following concerns were raised:

1. Abrupt cancellations of federally funded projects undermine the right to pursue scholarship without undue restriction. Faculty expressed concern that current bridge-funding levels (often <10% of lost funds) are insufficient, and that canceled grants should still count toward tenure and promotion.
2. Visa revocations—possibly triggered by expressions of political opinions—disrupt teaching, research, and recruitment. AFC proposed expanded legal and advisory support, such as partnering with the Law School's legal clinics and communicating available resources more clearly.
3. Some faculty have been advised that research outside their home discipline may not count for evaluation or promotion. The AFC recommended clear, objective evaluation criteria, a transparent appeals process, and an explicit reaffirmation of the university's commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship.
4. Although university policy affirms equal academic-freedom rights, the AFC noted a perception gap and encouraged clearer communication of everyone's equal AF rights.

5. Applying laws and executive orders more broadly than required can lead to self-censorship. While it is of course important to comply with all laws and regulations, the AFC recommends against overcompliance.

6. While collegiality is valuable, using collegiality as a subjective criterion in annual evaluations measures can stifle unconventional thinkers. The AFC recommended that such criteria be grounded in objective, measurable indicators.

7. Faculty should retain discretion over emphasis in their official profiles, provided content is factual, relevant, and not misleading.

The Provost expressed appreciation for the input and a willingness to explore several of these recommendations further.

4. AFC Case 25-01: No Other Land

In April 2025, a scheduled campus screening of the award-winning documentary *No Other Land* at Texas A&M University was canceled by senior administration a few days before the screening. The event, organized by faculty and supported by multiple academic units, was intended to be followed by a panel discussion featuring a range of perspectives on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Safety concerns were cited as the reason for the cancellation, but no specific threats were identified, and the faculty organizers were not provided any opportunity to assess or mitigate potential risks. The film was ultimately shown off campus by a local organization.

Following the cancellation, departmental permission to advertise the off-campus screening was denied. This decision, along with the cancellation itself, prompted concerns from the complainant and others about the boundaries of academic freedom and freedom of expression at the university.

The Academic Freedom Council reviewed the documentation submitted by the complainant. The review was based solely on those materials. The complainant retired before the matter could be further examined, so no final determination was reached.

Forward-Looking Recommendations

While the AFC did not reach any conclusion in this case, it recommends that the university adopt clear and transparent procedures to address similar situations in the future. More specifically, the AFC recommends that:

1. Any safety concerns should be based on identified, credible threats, with clear documentation.
2. Faculty organizers of academic events should be consulted promptly when concerns are raised about their events, and they should be given an opportunity to address those concerns.
3. Decisions to alter or cancel events should be communicated directly to those involved, with reasons stated in writing.
4. Restrictions on advertising or hosting events should be based on published policies applied consistently across viewpoints.
5. Administrative actions should be guided by the university's stated commitments to open inquiry and the free exchange of ideas.

By implementing these suggestions, the university can help ensure that legitimate academic events proceed with due regard for both safety and academic freedom.

5. Organizational Structure of the AFC

The Academic Freedom Council serves as an advisory body tasked with evaluating complaints and grievances related to academic freedom, as well as providing counsel to the Provost and President on broader policy issues.

The Council consists of two elected representatives from each college/school and from the libraries. From among its members, the Council annually elects a Chair and Vice-Chair, each serving staggered terms to maintain continuity

The current members of the council are listed on the AFC's webpage: [Academic Freedom Council | Faculty Affairs](#)

When a grievance or complaint implicates academic freedom, the Chair or Vice-Chair convenes a Review Committee—consisting of at least three AFC members, with a quorum of two required—within five business days of referral by the Office of Faculty Affairs facultyaffairs.tamu.edu.

This Review Committee produces a written evaluation on the academic-freedom issues, which becomes part of the evidentiary basis in the grievance process facultyaffairs.tamu.edu.

Appeals to the Committee on Academic Freedom, Responsibility, and Tenure (CAFRT) lie outside the AFC's remit and are handled separately facultyaffairs.tamu.edu.

All Council members receive annual mandatory training on academic freedom and responsibility issues.