

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE VALLEY (UTRGV) FACULTY SENATE (FS)
RESOLUTION TO DEFEND AGAINST EFFORTS TO SUPPRESS ACADEMIC FREEDOM

WHEREAS teaching about all kinds of systemized barriers to democracy, including those barriers based on race or gender, should be understood as central to the pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century to form active and informed citizens and community members;

WHEREAS legislative proposals are being introduced and enacted by legislators and executives in Texas and across the United States of America that target educators who have to engage with academic discussions of issues such as race, gender, and systemic inequality in public elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities;

WHEREAS these legislative proposals vary, but all seek to prohibit or restrict the teaching and affirmation of diverse identities and viewpoints based on what the proposals often misleadingly call ‘divisive concepts’ or ‘critical race theory;’

WHEREAS, excising such knowledge from any curriculum, research or creative activities on the basis of disagreements outside the purview of academic peer review is incompatible with the knowledge and truth driven mission of any university worthy of good stature in higher education and limits the knowledge, critical awareness, preparation, and competitiveness of students to continue their education, professional ambitions, and to flourish in their respective communities as informed citizens and community members;

WHEREAS the term ‘divisive’, along with others used in the same way, is intentionally indeterminate and is being employed to suppresses the informed judgments of scholars to explore a wide variety of topics by imposing subjective criteria that are inapposite for the goals of higher education and the development of essential critical thinking skills;

WHEREAS, academic freedom, which is historically proven to be a key pillar of any democratic, free, and thriving society, is defined by the American Association of University Professors as “the freedom of a teacher or researcher in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in his or her academic field, and to teach or publish findings without interference from political figures, boards of trustees, donors, or other entities”;

WHEREAS, the academic freedom of teachers and researchers in higher education is grounded in the authority of the various processes of review by academic peers that evaluate the faculty members’ educational credentials, mastery, and production of knowledge in the field, and the processes of evaluation of all UTRGV faculty take place yearly and are conducted by faculty members within the university including faculty with higher rank appointments;

WHEREAS the historic role and duty of the academy in higher education is to discover, protect, and disseminate verifiable knowledge and to resist all efforts to promote ignorance and deceit;

WHEREAS UTRGV has a stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and to mitigating inequities related to diverse populations;

WHEREAS UTRGV’s mission statement charges to provide an “accessible educational environment that promotes student success, research, creative works, health and well-being, [and] community engagement”;

WHEREAS the UTRGV FS affirms the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, citing the American Association of University Professors’ 1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure;

WHEREAS over seventy organizations, including the American Association of University professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), issued the Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History (June 16, 2021) stating their “firm opposition to a spate of legislative proposals being introduced across the country that target academic lessons, presentations, and discussions of racism and related issues in American history in schools, colleges and universities . . . In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning;”

WHEREAS in a nation that has for centuries struggled with issues of inequity and injustice, UTRGV has a responsibility and opportunity to help build equity and social justice;

WHEREAS education about systemic, historical forms of oppressive violence and power relations is inseparable from the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge and is a basic pedagogical responsibility to students and multiple communities and the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on a rigorous approach to social and historical knowledge and the development of essential critical thinking skills must not be undermined;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the UTRGV FS rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate tenure and promotion, or university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority;

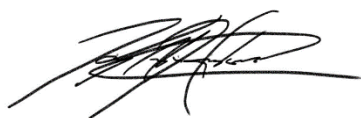
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTRGV FS opposes any attempts to encroach upon faculty authority to conduct or dictate periodic evaluation of faculty academic competence, tenure and promotion;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTRGV FS opposes any and all attempts of interference by external bodies, entities, or legislation that is inimical to the fostering of critical thought and the knowledge required to be a free self-governing people;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTRGV FS stands with our P-12 colleagues in Texas and throughout the country who may be affected by suppressive legislation;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UTRGV FS stands with our colleagues at faculty senate and councils at other UT systems schools and affirms the Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism, authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations and issued on June 16, 2021.

Adopted and approved on November 15, 2022.



Kip Austin Hinton, Ph.D.
Faculty Senate President, UTRGV



Attest: Jonathan Guist, D.M.A.
Faculty Senate Secretary, UTRGV