

Academic Freedom at CUNY: The Latest Challenge

A Response to EVC Alvero's Statement on Academic Freedom by the CUNY Alliance to Defend Higher Education

October 16, 2025

Academic freedom at the City University of New York (CUNY) is again under pressure. A recent [statement](#) on academic freedom by Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Alicia Alvero on September 26 (p. 7 of the statement) states that “Academic freedom is not absolute. In this context, faculty are expected to have classroom discussions that are both relevant to the course subject matter **and do not have the effect of being discriminatory or creating a hostile environment for students**” (emphasis added).

[The CUNY Alliance to Defend Higher Education](#) (CADHE) views EVC Alvero's statement as a dangerous challenge to academic freedom, in that it places an emphasis on the response to academic instruction versus the right of academics to teach their discipline. It distorts the very meaning of academic freedom, as defined by the [AAUP](#) and CUNY's own [Manual of General Policy](#), by recasting academic freedom as negotiable whenever a student, colleague, political actor, or community member feels offended or upset by legitimate course content as defined by its discipline.

EVC Alvero's statement on academic freedom further stands in direct opposition to the rights and protections of faculty as established by court cases involving constitutional law, such as [Keyishian v. Board of Regents](#), 385 U.S. 589 (1967) and [Sweezy v. New Hampshire](#), 354 U.S. 234 (1957). These cases established “the four essential freedoms” of a university: to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.

We are further concerned with another aspect of EVC Alvero's statement: its emphasis that “**academic freedom is not absolute**” (emphasis added).

[Project 2025](#), a conservative playbook for the remaking of American society, also calls for school policies to “recognize that academic freedom is not absolute.” And, as the New York Times [reports](#), advisors to the federal government on higher education are now “the backbone of a potentially far-reaching administration effort to tie campus policies to Mr. Trump's agenda and the federal government's financial might.” The resulting “[Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education](#)” makes the offer of substantial federal grants to higher education institutions in return for, among other things, adopting policies recognizing that “academic freedom is not absolute.”

With the recent statement by EVC Alvero on academic freedom, we fear that CUNY is capitulating in advance to the conservative attack on higher education.

Other statements refuting EVC Alvero's statement on academic freedom have also been released by the [Professional Staff Congress of CUNY](#) and [Borough of Manhattan Community College](#) academic freedom committees. We strongly endorse these responses.

Given the current political climate, representatives of the faculty must resist the politicization and curbing of academic freedom. Academic freedom is at risk around the [world](#), and we call on CUNY to respect and actively protect these freedoms, not curtail them.

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