



November 22, 2021

On Academic Freedom and Transphobia

The statement that follows was prepared in 2018 and approved in 2019 by the Association’s Committee on Gender and Sexuality in the Academic Profession (formerly the Committee on Women in the Academic Profession) and approved by Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure in 2021. It was endorsed by the Association’s Council in 2021.

Academic freedom provides space for conversations and learning about potentially uncomfortable subjects, including histories and experiences of sexuality and gender that do not conform to prevailing social narratives. But academic freedom cannot be understood to support misgendering—referring to someone using a word or pronoun that does not reflect their gender identity—or otherwise serve as an excuse for transphobia or the diminishment of trans, intersex, gender-nonconforming, and nonbinary persons and their lives. As the AAUP-endorsed *Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students* notes, “The freedom to learn depends upon appropriate opportunities and conditions in the classroom, on the campus, and in the larger community.” To these ends, the AAUP’s *Statement on Professional Ethics* requires faculty members to “demonstrate respect for students as individuals” and “avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment” of students and colleagues. In and out of the classroom, we recognize an ethical and political imperative to honor colleagues’ and students’ choice of name and pronoun as an issue that falls well beyond the purview of academic debate. In short, colleagues and students have the freedom to determine how they will be addressed. We find nothing in the principles of academic freedom to suggest otherwise.