CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU OJUKWU UNIVERSITY

POLICY ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF SCHOLARLY EXPRESSION

---

1. Preamble

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) recognises academic freedom as a fundamental condition for the advancement of knowledge, research, innovation, teaching, learning and public engagement.

The University is committed to creating an institutional environment in which members of its academic community can pursue legitimate scholarly activities independently, responsibly and without improper interference, intimidation, discrimination or retaliation.

This Policy establishes the University's institutional commitment to academic freedom in research, teaching, publication and scholarly expression and applies to academic staff irrespective of academic rank or career stage.

The Policy is intended to operate consistently with the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the University's enabling legislation, statutes, regulations, conditions of service, ethical requirements and other applicable University policies.

---

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to:

1. protect legitimate academic freedom within the University;
2. provide academic staff with appropriate freedom to determine and pursue areas of scholarly research;
3. protect freedom to teach, discuss and critically examine legitimate scholarly perspectives;
4. protect freedom to publish and disseminate legitimate scholarly findings;
5. ensure that academic freedom applies to both senior and junior academics;
6. establish safeguards against improper interference, intimidation, discrimination or retaliation arising from legitimate academic activities;
7. promote a culture of intellectual independence, critical inquiry, scholarly debate and evidence-based knowledge creation; and
8. provide an institutional framework for balancing academic freedom with professional, ethical and legal responsibilities.

---

3. Scope

This Policy applies across the University and covers:

- professors and associate professors;
- senior lecturers and lecturers;
- assistant lecturers and other early-career academic staff;
- research staff and academic researchers;
- academic staff engaged in teaching, research, publication, consultancy and public scholarly engagement; and
- other members of the University community where their legitimate academic activities are concerned.

Nothing in this Policy shall be interpreted as authorising unlawful conduct, academic misconduct, plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of research data, breach of research ethics, defamation, harassment, discrimination, incitement to violence, breach of confidentiality, or violation of applicable law or University regulations.

---

4. PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

4.1 Freedom of Research

Academic staff shall have the freedom, within their professional competence and subject to applicable ethical, legal and funding requirements, to:

a. identify and select legitimate areas of research;

b. formulate research questions and hypotheses;

c. select appropriate research methodologies and analytical approaches;

d. pursue scholarly investigations and generate independent findings;

e. collaborate with other researchers and institutions;

f. submit research proposals for external or internal funding;

g. publish and disseminate legitimate research findings; and

h. express scholarly interpretations and conclusions supported by appropriate evidence.

The University shall not improperly prescribe the research conclusions that an academic is expected to reach.

4.2 Research Freedom of Senior Academics

Senior academic staff, including professors, associate professors, senior lecturers and academics occupying equivalent senior research positions, shall enjoy academic freedom in determining legitimate areas of research, methodologies, scholarly collaborations, publication and dissemination of research findings.

Academic seniority shall not diminish the responsibility to comply with research ethics, professional standards and applicable law.

4.3 Research Freedom of Junior and Early-Career Academics

The University recognises that academic freedom applies equally to junior and early-career academics.

Assistant lecturers, lecturers, research assistants and other early-career researchers shall have the right to:

a. propose and pursue legitimate research questions;

b. participate in independent scholarly research;

c. select appropriate research methodologies under appropriate supervision where required;

d. present and publish legitimate research findings;

e. participate in scholarly conferences, seminars and professional activities; and

f. express evidence-based scholarly views without improper retaliation because of their academic rank.

Supervision, mentoring, research ethics review and quality assurance shall not be interpreted as improper interference with legitimate academic freedom.

---

5. FREEDOM IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

5.1 Teaching Freedom

Academic staff shall have appropriate freedom to determine and deliver scholarly content within approved programmes, curricula and courses assigned to them.

Subject to University-approved curricula and professional/accreditation requirements, academic staff may:

a. determine appropriate teaching methods;

b. introduce relevant scholarly literature and evidence;

c. explain competing theories and perspectives;

d. encourage critical thinking and intellectual debate;

e. discuss legitimate areas of scholarly disagreement; and

f. communicate evidence-based academic conclusions.

Academic staff shall not be required to present a particular scholarly conclusion where legitimate scholarly disagreement exists, provided that teaching remains consistent with approved curricula, professional standards and applicable law.

5.2 Teaching Freedom of Senior Academics

Senior academics shall have appropriate academic freedom to determine and present scholarly material within their approved courses and areas of expertise.

They may introduce relevant contemporary research, alternative scholarly perspectives and legitimate areas of academic debate.

5.3 Teaching Freedom of Junior and Early-Career Academics

The University recognises that junior and early-career academics also require appropriate protection for legitimate academic teaching.

Subject to curriculum requirements, departmental coordination, mentoring and quality assurance arrangements, junior academic staff shall be able to:

a. teach approved course content using appropriate scholarly approaches;

b. introduce relevant academic literature;

c. explain competing scholarly perspectives;

d. facilitate legitimate academic discussion and critical inquiry; and

e. express evidence-based scholarly interpretations.

Academic supervision and quality assurance shall not be used as mechanisms for suppressing legitimate scholarly discussion.

---

6. FREEDOM OF SCHOLARLY EXPRESSION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The University recognises the right of academics to communicate legitimate scholarly knowledge and opinions through:

- academic publications;
- conferences and seminars;
- lectures and public academic events;
- professional associations;
- scholarly media engagement;
- interviews and other public communication; and
- other legitimate academic platforms.

When engaging publicly, academics are encouraged to distinguish personal scholarly opinions from official statements made on behalf of the University.

Nothing in this section permits an individual to represent a personal statement as an official University position without appropriate authorisation.

---

7. FREEDOM TO PUBLISH RESEARCH

The University supports the right of researchers to publish legitimate research findings, subject to:

- research ethics requirements;
- intellectual property obligations;
- confidentiality requirements;
- contractual obligations;
- applicable funding conditions;
- protection of research participants;
- applicable law; and
- accepted standards of academic integrity.

Where research findings are scientifically or academically critical of an institution, policy, practice or established position, legitimate criticism shall not in itself constitute grounds for suppression or retaliation.

---

8. PROTECTION FROM IMPROPER INTERFERENCE AND RETALIATION

No member of academic staff shall be subjected to improper discrimination, intimidation, harassment, disciplinary action, denial of legitimate professional opportunities or other adverse treatment solely because the individual has exercised legitimate academic freedom in:

- research;
- teaching;
- publication;
- scholarly debate;
- conference participation;
- academic collaboration; or
- public scholarly communication.

This protection does not extend to academic misconduct, unlawful conduct, research misconduct, harassment, discrimination, threats, defamation or other conduct prohibited by law or University regulations.

---

9. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND RESEARCH ETHICS

Academic freedom carries corresponding responsibilities.

All research undertaken under the auspices of the University shall comply with applicable:

- research ethics requirements;
- institutional review procedures;
- professional standards;
- data protection and confidentiality requirements;
- laboratory and research safety requirements;
- intellectual property requirements; and
- standards of academic integrity.

Ethical review shall protect research participants and research integrity and shall not be used to suppress legitimate research solely because its subject matter or anticipated findings are controversial.

---

10. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Academic freedom shall operate within the University's legitimate governance structures.

The University may establish reasonable requirements concerning:

- curriculum approval;
- academic quality assurance;
- research ethics;
- financial accountability;
- professional accreditation;
- health and safety;
- protection of confidential information;
- research integrity;
- intellectual property; and
- compliance with applicable law.

Such requirements shall, as far as reasonably practicable, be applied in a manner that protects legitimate academic freedom.

---

11. RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMIC STAFF

Members of the academic community exercising academic freedom shall:

a. act honestly and professionally;

b. maintain academic integrity;

c. distinguish evidence from personal opinion;

d. respect legitimate scholarly disagreement;

e. respect the dignity and rights of others;

f. comply with research ethics requirements;

g. comply with applicable laws and University regulations; and

h. accept appropriate scholarly accountability for their work.

Academic freedom does not exempt an academic from normal professional accountability.

---

12. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY

The University shall:

a. communicate its commitment to academic freedom;

b. ensure that relevant University policies are consistent with this Policy;

c. provide appropriate mechanisms for reporting alleged violations of academic freedom;

d. ensure that legitimate complaints are considered through appropriate institutional procedures;

e. promote an environment of intellectual inquiry and scholarly debate;

f. ensure that academic staff are informed of their rights and responsibilities under this Policy; and

g. periodically review the effectiveness of this Policy.

---

13. REPORTING AND REDRESS

An academic who believes that their legitimate academic freedom has been improperly restricted or that they have suffered retaliation because of legitimate academic activity may use the University's established grievance, complaint or other appropriate institutional procedures.

Complaints shall be considered through fair and established procedures, with due regard for confidentiality, natural justice and the rights of all parties.

Where an allegation concerns a senior officer or another person who would ordinarily be responsible for handling the complaint, the University shall, where practicable, provide an appropriate alternative reporting route.

---

14. ACADEMIC FREEDOM COMMITTEE / OVERSIGHT

The University may designate an appropriate existing committee or establish an Academic Freedom and Scholarly Expression Committee to:

a. monitor implementation of this Policy;

b. promote awareness of academic freedom;

c. review institutional concerns relating to academic freedom;

d. recommend improvements to relevant policies and procedures; and

e. submit periodic reports to the appropriate University authority.

The Committee shall not replace existing disciplinary, grievance, research ethics or statutory procedures.

15. PUBLICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

This Policy shall be made publicly accessible through the official University website and shall be communicated to relevant members of the University community.

The University shall maintain an official version of the Policy showing:

- approval authority;
- approval date;
- effective date;
- review date;
- responsible office; and
- current policy version.

16. REVIEW AND REVISION

This Policy shall be reviewed at least once every three years or earlier where required by changes in law, University governance, academic practice or international standards.

Each review shall be formally documented.

The University shall retain evidence of:

- the review process;
- proposed amendments;
- approval of amendments;
- date of approval; and
- publication of the revised Policy.

Signature:  Date: 24/10/2026

Prof. Kate Azuka Omenugha, Fnipr
Vice Chancellor