

Welcome to the first episode of the CETLS podcast made for faculty by faculty. I'm Antoinette De Luca, your host for this episode and member of the CETLS advisory board. I'm here with fellow faculty member, Hollis Glaser, professor of speech communications and theater arts. She teaches public speaking, small group decision making, and introduction to communication studies. In 2006, Professor Glaser moved to New York City to teach at BMCC, and she has been proud to call BMCC her academic home for 18 years.

To learn more about Professor Glaser, we'll provide a link to her full bio with this podcast. Professor Glaser, thank you so much for joining us. Thank you. I know you wish to speak on the topic of academic freedom. Could you start off with a little background on this topic?

Sure. Thanks. I also want to say that I'm co-coordinator of Gender Women's Studies, and I also teach that intro course.

The concept of academic freedom began with the American Association of University Professors, the AAUP. That's an organization I want to make sure our faculty know about because it's been around for over 100 years.

It's operated consensually and also in league with other big organizations, including some administrative organizations and board of governors. So, in 1940, they came up with the principles on academic freedom and tenure. Some of that came about from some problems at CUNY where some faculty, Bertrand Russell for one, got fired or didn't get hired because they were too politically controversial. So AAUP stepped in, and they basically said that teachers are entitled to full freedom of research, to freedom in teaching in the classroom. As citizens, we're also able to speak in public, especially according to our expertise.

It's different from the first amendment or freedom of expression and as defined by the constitution, which is more of an individual right. This is a collective right by faculty. We cannot say anything we want to say. I mean, if we're biology, if we're teaching biology, it does not allow us to teach creationism, for instance. We have to abide by the standards of our discipline.

I want to link that to shared governance because the AAUP says, and they're right, we cannot have academic freedom without solid shared governance. We can't have shared governance without academic freedom. So, the AAUP, in conjunction with American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, came up with a document of shared governance that kind of explained what everybody does: the president, the board, the faculty, and so forth. And they're very clear that the faculty's primary responsibility is over curriculum, subject matter, methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. So those are those are the things that we're always guarding against, and it's academic freedom that protects faculty from overreach by administration, by politicians, by governing boards, and they say, look, we have the right to teach, we have the right to do our research.

Honestly, truthfully, our primary responsibilities are these things, and you do not have any business in that. To be clear, it does not protect us from other faculty who, for instance, if we're in a department where we elected a committee to come up with a textbook and we don't like that textbook, that is not a violation of academic freedom. That's too bad. You know, it's because they were elected and because they're peers.

So that's the bottom line of academic freedom. I mean, that's the kind of nut of it. There's a lot of gray areas when it plays out. I'm chair of the Academic Freedom Committee also for Academic Senate. So, we are the ones who are really making sure that we have solid shared governance and that you know, we fight against the overreach, which has been happening a lot lately, by the way. So that's my quick intro.

Basically, what we are, what our charge is is to field any problems or questions that faculty have about their academic freedom. So, people come to us, say, hey, I think this violates my academic freedom, and then we're obligated to look into it and say something about it. For example, we've had, and this has come up a few times where faculty do not want students to record in the classroom, and they feel like that does violate their academic freedom in the sense that it might impede their teaching. We took that problem very seriously, and the bottom line on that is that faculty can say I mean, as long as it's not an accessibility issue. Faculty can decide that there is no recording in the classroom. It needs to be in the syllabus and that kind of thing.

Lately this year it's been we've mostly been reacting to a lot of what CUNY Central is doing. The latest is this LMS issue, the Learning Management System. They're trying to require Brightspace, that everybody use Brightspace, and we are clear, and University Faculty Senate is clear, that is a violation of academic freedom. The learning management system is a pedagogical tool 100%, and there are many good reasons why a faculty member might not want to use it.

Maybe if they want to require it for grades or for posting the syllabus that's a little bit more administrative and that makes sense, but anything beyond that, it's not their business, it's our business. So that's what we're always looking out for. And then also what's happening politically around the country. So that's what we do. So, they should contact us if they do have a concern.

They can also contact the PSC. The central PSC, Tony Alessandri, I think, is the chair of their Academic Freedom Committee because, really, if there I mean, if there is a problem and it's actionable, it's going to be the PSC that does it, not Senate. We will say something about it and we will help them, but if it's if it's going to go to another level where they really have to lodge a complaint, it's going to be the PSC that'll do that. It been really just the last 8 or 10 years that I've keyed into this issue. I've been Academic Senate chair, and I can tell you humbly that even while I was Academic Senate chair, I really didn't understand what shared governance was. I was doing it, but I really didn't have a good conceptual knowledge of it.

So I can say that, and I've worked at other universities, and I can say that CUNY is just such a top heavy, burdensome bureaucracy, and they're always trying to centralize. And so that seems to keep going. BMCC administration, I get it. They want to control things, but they don't get to control what we teach. They don't get to control our research. You know, they don't get to control curriculum or

any of that. We're always watching out for that. I don't know how much there's been a difference over the last 20 years, but PSC is a member of the AAUP. We're official members, and we pay them dues.

There's also a New York State AAUP. So, the main thing is I do want people to know that the AAUP is out there and that they are the ones who are protecting us, and especially now when we've got this huge right wing swing in this country, it's AAUP that is standing up for academic freedom and shared governance. Let me just say one thing that's a little pitch to our faculty. It would be great if people got more involved in Academic Senate. I know, especially when you're younger and you're really working on your research and you got, you know, young family and all that, I get it. It's a heavy lift. But it really is important that we have as many people involved and looking as we can because the only good thing we can really do is, like, make statements. Like, oh, here's a resolution, and then the President can do it or not. But we do need some kind of collective action behind us to protect our freedoms. If people would be involved more involved, that would be great.

Thank you.