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# Academic Freedom Policy

## Purpose

This Policy sets out the commitment of the Sydney International School of Technology and Commerce (SISTC) to promoting and protecting the principles of academic freedom. SISTC recognises the importance of freedom of inquiry by academic staff and students, which is essential to the values of SISTC as well as to the principles of academia.

## Scope

SISTC's academic staff have the freedom to teach or communicate ideas or facts, and provide opinion without being targeted for unreasonable criticism, being disadvantaged in their employment or being made fearful of losing their job.

All members of the SISTC Community have the freedom to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express opinions and beliefs respectfully, and to contribute to public debate, in relation to their subjects of study and research.

This Policy does not offer staff or students protection for any speech or expression that is illegal under Australian federal or state laws. Further, this Policy does not protect any form of speech or expression that contravenes SISTC policies.

## Key Definitions

*Academic freedom or free intellectual inquiry* pertains to any form of expression (including communication and performance). Academic freedom includes the rights of all academic staff and students to:

- exercise academic freedom without fear of harassment, bullying or unfair treatment
- speak, write, and publish without being subject to sanction by SISTC
- hold and express opinions on a range of issues
- participate, in a personal capacity, in public debates about political and social issues;
- participate, in a personal capacity, in professional and representative bodies to engage in community service without fear of harassment, intimidation or unfair treatment Click here to enter text. and
- express controversial views, although this does not mean the right to harass or intimidate others..

*Academic integrity* means academic practice and behaviours that reflect the core values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in relation to teaching, learning and research.

*Critical inquiry* means the analytic and research process of rigorously evaluating the key theories and ideas of a subject unit so to consider the alternative and/or conflicting perspectives and understandings of an idea. Critical inquiry produces well-considered analyses that can challenge accepted ideas and spark new avenues of research and inquiry.

The *SISTC Community* means staff, students, alumni, Board and Committee members, partners, and visitors.

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### Policy Statement

Academic freedom is essential for the purpose of providing and engaging with the process of education, maintaining academic integrity, and contributing to the development of new knowledge. SISTC will ensure that the academic freedom of staff and students in teaching, learning and research is promoted and protected.

Academic speech or expression shall be based on evidence and critical inquiry, adhering to sound academic practices as outlined in the *SISTC Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy and Procedure*.

SISTC promotes investigation, critical enquiry and innovation through scholarship, teaching, and partnerships with business, industry, education partners, and government.

Academic staff are experts in their disciplines and professions and can make a valuable contribution to public debate. Academic freedom and intellectual inquiry shall be protected.

Academic staff and students are expected to exercise academic freedom in a manner that is consistent with a responsible search for knowledge and its dissemination. Academic freedom of expression does not extend to behaviour that is illegal. Academic staff and students should uphold the good name of SISTC and exercise judgement in the best interests of SISTC and its Community.

In the exercise of academic freedom, staff and students will act in a professional and ethical manner and will not harass, vilify, intimidate, or defame others in accordance with the *SISTC Bullying, Harassment and Violence Prevention and Response Policy*. Furthermore, in exercising their freedom to conduct teaching, scholarship and research, academic staff have a responsibility to conduct their activities in accordance with the principles of intellectual rigour and without any interference or suppression.

Academic freedom does not denote the freedom to neglect the basic obligations of:

- the employer-employee relationship included in employment contract(s), the *SISTC Staff Rights and Obligations Policy and Procedures Policy* and the *SISTC Intellectual Property Policy*; or
- student obligations under the *SISTC Student Rights and Obligations Policy*.

Academic staff and students may hold views and express them freely on all topics, even outside their expertise, whilst identifying themselves as members of SISTC. However, in exercising academic freedom, academic staff and students who communicate ideas publicly on topics outside their area of expertise should be conscious of whether it is reasonable, in the circumstances, to link their comments to their association with SISTC.

### Roles and Responsibilities

The Board of Directors guarantees academic freedom prevails within SISTC and may be exercised without fear of discrimination or reprisal, subject only to restraints or burdens imposed under law and reasonable and proportionate regulation of conduct. The Board of Directors shall ensure that the academic freedom of staff and students is not hindered by corporate or business interests.

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SISTC shall ensure that staff and students are informed about their academic freedom and their rights and responsibilities under this Policy through orientation, induction, and ongoing professional development activities.

SISTC will take all reasonable steps to protect staff and students from any adverse effects resulting from exercising academic freedom as defined in this Policy.

Academic staff are responsible for promoting free intellectual enquiry, critical thinking, and creative reasoning in the student body and for encouraging, facilitating, and supporting positive, analytical discourse, and awareness in the student body.

Students and staff should expect that their right to hold values of their own choosing shall be respected even when those values are being questioned. Free intellectual inquiry carries associated responsibilities to exercise professional care and competence in the conduct of teaching, learning and research, to subject academic work to the critical scrutiny of others, to consider the impact that one's work may have on others, and not to impinge on the ability of others to engage freely in teaching, learning, research and academic debate. Students and staff shall take particular care not to breach laws and regulations such as those relating to privacy, discrimination, and vilification.

The Dean will monitor any complaints or grievances related to academic freedom using the procedures outlined in the *SISTC Staff Rights and Obligations Policy and Procedures* and the *SISTC Student Complaints, Appeals and Grievances Policy*. Where a case needs to be discussed, the Dean will seek advice in the first instance from the Chair of Academic Board.

### Monitoring and Review

The *SISTC Compliance, Quality Assurance and Review Strategy and Plan 2020-2024* shows how SISTC continuously monitors the application of this Policy to achieve ongoing regulatory compliance and process improvement.

### Relevant Legislation and Standards

*Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2021*

*Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 Domain 6*

National Code 2018

### Key Related Documents

*SISTC Compliance, Quality Assurance and Review Strategy and Plan 2020-2024 (Attachment A)*

*SISTC Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy and Procedure*

*SISTC Anti-Discrimination Policy*

*SISTC Bullying, Harassment and Violence Prevention and Response Policy.*

*SISTC Intellectual Property Policy*

*SISTC Staff Rights and Obligations Policy and Procedures*

*SISTC Student Complaints, Appeals and Grievances Policy*

*SISTC Student Rights and Obligations Policy*

*SISTC Course Development and Approval Policy*

*SISTC Course and Unit Review Policy*

*SISTC Privacy Policy*

*SISTC Scholarship and Academic Enquiry Policy*

*SISTC Copyright Policy*

## Document History

Responsible Officer	Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching
Approval Authority /Authorities	Academic Board
Date Approved	2 Feb 2024
Date of Endorsement	
Previous Versions	27 July 2017, November 2018, July 2020, 28 April 2021, and 28 August 2021
Date for Review	2027
Documents Superseded by this Policy	None
Amendment History	<p><b>V1.0</b> updated with SISTC logo</p> <p><b>V2.0</b> updated with reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the <i>Model Code for the Protection of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom in Australian Higher Education Providers March 2019 (French Review)</i></li> <li>● Key Related Documents related to bullying, intellectual property, and student complaints</li> </ul> <p><b>V3.0</b> major review:±≥xs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Key Definitions and policy statements expanded</li> <li>● Roles and responsibilities updated and explained</li> <li>● Policy benchmarked against comparable providers</li> <li>● Approved by AB 2<sup>nd</sup> of Feb 2024</li> </ul>