

Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee

Annual Report 2024-2025

May 6, 2025

Committee members:

Tina Plottel, LIBR, 23-26, At-Large

Vacant, ----, 25-26, At-Large

Tom Goyens (Chair), HIST, 22-25, At-Large

Eric Rittinger, POSC, 24-27, At-Large

Christopher Vilmar, ENGL, 24-27, At-large

Designated Senator: Elizabeth Ragan

During the fall 2024 and spring 2025 semesters, the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee (AFTC) did not receive any formal charges from the Faculty Senate.

Motion on Action Plans for Faculty Not Meeting Expectations

The AFTC developed a motion to amend the Faculty Handbook by requiring action plans for junior faculty making unsatisfactory progress. The importance of such mutually agreed-upon plans became clear during our investigation of a faculty grievance the previous year. We included this recommendation in our 2023–2024 Annual Report and now believe the topic warrants formal debate.

Although many departments already implement action plans after an unsatisfactory annual review for junior faculty, this practice is neither campus-wide nor explicitly outlined in the Faculty Handbook’s section on junior faculty. Currently, the Handbook mentions development or action plans only in the section on the “Comprehensive Review of Tenured Faculty.” However, that section begins with the phrase “as with the annual reviews,” implying broader applicability. The AFTC believes it is best practice for department chairs to initiate such plans to prevent grievances and appeals. These plans foster communication, collegiality, and provide junior faculty a clear opportunity to improve their performance.

We submitted our motion to the Faculty Senate in November 2024. However, the Senate did not discuss it during its November 26 meeting. The motion was first debated at the April 8, 2025 meeting, at which an alternative motion was proposed. The AFTC Chair attended that session to offer clarification. Although further debate was scheduled for April 22, other urgent matters delayed discussion. The motion passed the Senate on May 6, 2025.

Perdue Inquiry regarding Academic Freedom

On October 13, 2024, Associate Dean Jamie Emerson (Perdue School of Business) contacted the AFTC for feedback on a potential academic freedom concern. This was not an official grievance. The Perdue School of Business is required to assess its Learning Goals to maintain AACSB accreditation, a process overseen by the Assurance of Learning Committee, which gathers data from faculty teaching core courses. However, faculty from one course have refused to participate in data collection for a new learning goal, claiming it infringes on their academic freedom. The author argues that because this data collection is necessary for accreditation, it should be viewed as a required faculty service, not a violation of academic freedom.

After gathering additional information, the AFTC discussed the matter and recognized its broader relevance, as assessment practices affect all schools and programs. We consulted the Senate president to determine whether the Senate should issue a formal charge to develop campus-wide guidelines on the relationship between assessment and academic freedom. Senate Officers agreed that such guidelines, supplementing the academic freedom statement in Chapter 1 of the Faculty Handbook, would be useful.

On November 7, 2024, the AFTC recommended that Dean Emerson advise the concerned faculty to file a formal grievance, presenting a detailed argument with supporting documentation. This would allow the AFTC to review a specific case. Dean Emerson subsequently informed us that “this specific issue/concern has been successfully resolved internally, for the time being at least.”

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Goyens', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Goyens
Chair, AFTC