

POLICY DOCUMENT

ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY

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Purpose:

The primary purpose of this policy is to ensure the establishment of a favorable academic environment at Mingachevir State University, where academic staff, researchers, and students can carry out their teaching, research, and other scholarly activities freely, independently, and without undue external influence. Within this framework, the fundamental principles of academic freedom are upheld, institutional autonomy is supported, and transparency and objectivity in academic activities are ensured.

The policy identifies the development of critical thinking, adherence to the principles of academic integrity, promotion of diversity of thought, and the application of innovative approaches as key priorities. At the same time, this policy serves to foster an inclusive, open, and dialogue-based academic environment within the university. The free expression of diverse scholarly perspectives, the encouragement of constructive discussions, and the exchange of different ideas within a framework of mutual respect are recognized as core elements of the university's academic culture. Furthermore, the policy aims to ensure alignment with international higher education standards. In this regard, the continuous development of an academic freedom environment is supported by taking into account the practices of leading universities, the criteria of global ranking systems, and the principles of the European Higher Education Area.



Mingachevir State University, as a higher education institution that plays a significant role in the socio-economic and cultural development of society, recognizes academic freedom and diversity of thought as fundamental principles of academic activity. The promotion of independent and free thinking in the fields of education and research derives from MSU's strategic objectives and its intellectual development model.

Academic freedom constitutes a fundamental right that ensures the independent and unrestricted implementation of teaching, research, and scholarly exchange activities at MSU. This right is regulated by both national and international legal frameworks, including the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Law on Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Law on Science of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Higher Education Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2022–2035), the Charter of MSU, and other relevant legislative acts.

Academic freedom provides a foundation for the development of creativity, innovation, and critical thinking within MSU's academic environment. It ensures that academic staff, researchers, and students are free from political, ideological, and other forms of pressure in their scholarly activities.

This policy document establishes the legal and ethical foundations for ensuring academic freedom within MSU's governance system. It clearly defines the respective rights and responsibilities of all members of the university community, and plays a significant role in enhancing MDU's international cooperation activities, advancing its scientific practices, and strengthening its institutional reputation.



Academic Freedom: The right of academic staff, researchers, and students at Mingachevir State University to select teaching content, conduct scientific research, freely disseminate its results, and participate in intellectual discussions and debates.



Academic Responsibility: The obligation of individuals exercising academic freedom to adhere to ethical norms, professional standards, applicable laws, and the internal regulations of MSU.



Research Ethics: A set of principles governing scientific activity, including honesty, objectivity, prevention of plagiarism, accurate reporting of research results, and protection of intellectual property rights.



Freedom of Expression: The right of academic staff and students to express their views, deliver speeches, and participate in discussions within the university and in the public sphere in relation to their academic and professional fields.



Institutional Autonomy: The right of Mingachevir State University to operate independently in academic, administrative, and organizational matters, including the design of curricula, research priorities, and internal governance structures.

Scope of Application of Academic Freedom

At Mingachevir State University, the principles of academic freedom are systematically implemented across both research and teaching activities, serving as one of the fundamental pillars of the university's academic environment. These principles are differentiated according to various levels of academic staff, with clearly defined rights and opportunities established for each group. Professors and associate professors have the right to conduct their scientific activities with full independence, including determining research topics, selecting methodologies, and deciding on the dissemination of findings. This freedom fosters scientific creativity, innovation, and internationally competitive research outcomes.

Research freedom for junior academic staff supports doctoral students and early-career researchers in engaging in independent scientific activity. They are provided with opportunities to select research directions, implement projects based on individual initiatives, and publish results freely, while benefiting from supervision and institutional support. This approach encourages the development of research capacity and strengthens the academic pipeline within the university.

In teaching, senior academic staff have autonomy in shaping curricula, selecting teaching methods, and applying assessment approaches, enhancing flexibility and quality in education. Junior academic staff are encouraged to use innovative and interactive teaching methods, fostering active student participation and the development of critical thinking skills. This contributes to a dynamic and student-centered learning environment. Additionally, the integration of modern technologies and digital tools further supports effective teaching and continuous improvement of learning outcomes.

Core Principles

Academic Independence

MSU ensures that academic staff and students can carry out their teaching, research, and scholarly activities independently.

Ethical Conduct and Academic Integrity

The university ensures adherence to the principles of honesty, objectivity, and transparency at all stages of academic activity. Plagiarism, data falsification, and other ethical violations are considered unacceptable.

Inclusivity and Respect for Diversity

MSU supports diversity of thought, as well as cultural and social differences within the academic environment. Respect for each individual's opinions, beliefs, and scholarly positions is upheld.

Transparency and Accountability

The university adheres to the principles of transparency in the adoption and implementation of academic decisions.

Protection from External Pressures

MSU ensures the protection of academic staff and students from political, economic, religious, and other external influences.

Critical Thinking and Open Academic Debate

MSU recognizes critical thinking and scholarly debate as essential components of academic development.

Strategic Objectives



Ensuring a Free and Independent Academic Environment at MSU: The establishment of an open and inclusive environment based on the principles of academic freedom is identified as a key priority at Mingachevir State University.



Promoting Critical Thinking and a Culture of Scientific Discussion: The development of critical thinking skills and the promotion of evidence-based academic discussions within teaching and research environments are considered important strategic directions at MSU



Strengthening Research Independence and Scientific Activity: The independence and quality of research conducted at Mingachevir State University are identified as priority areas.



Protecting the Rights of Academic Staff and Students: The protection of the rights and freedoms of all members of the academic community is a fundamental principle at MSU.



Ensuring Alignment with International Standards and Ranking Criteria: The university identifies the development of its activities in line with international higher education standards as a strategic priority.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Objective	Indicator (KPI)	Baseline	Target	Timeline	Responsible Unit
Increasing awareness of academic freedom	Percentage of staff trained in academic freedom	2024: 55%	80%	2027	Human Resources Department / Quality Assurance Department
Reducing academic ethical violations	Number of reported ethical violations per year	2024: 21	30% reduction	2027	Ethics and Disciplinary Committee
Enhancing student participation	Percentage of students participating in open academic discussions and debates	2024: 48%	+40% increase	2027	Faculties / Student Organizations
Strengthening research independence	Share of research projects initiated through individual initiative (%)	2024: 26%	+25% increase	2027	Research and Innovation Department

Implementation Mechanism

At Mingachevir State University, systematic implementation mechanisms are applied to ensure the effective execution of this policy. In order to promote the principles of academic freedom, regular training sessions, seminars, and awareness-raising activities are organized, involving academic and administrative staff as well as students. Academic freedom and ethical conduct principles are also given particular emphasis within orientation programs for newly recruited staff.

To uphold ethical standards, a Code of Ethics is implemented across the university, and its enforcement is overseen by the Ethics Committee. Through transparent complaint and reporting mechanisms, cases of ethical violations are promptly reviewed and appropriate measures are taken.

To foster an open academic environment, scientific discussions, debates, and seminars are regularly organized, encouraging the exchange of ideas and the development of critical thinking. At the same time, independent research activities of academic staff and students are supported through internal grants, project-based funding, and international collaborations.

Academic freedom and ethical principles are integrated into the teaching process, where modern and interactive methods are applied to enhance students' analytical and independent thinking skills.

The implementation of the policy is continuously monitored and evaluated. KPI results are analyzed in annual reports and presented to the university management. To improve the effectiveness of these processes, coordination among structural units is strengthened, and digital tools are actively utilized.

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Governance and Responsibilities

Structure / Role	Responsibilities
Rector	Provides overall leadership in the implementation and oversight of the policy, ensures the adoption of strategic decisions, and assumes institutional-level responsibility.
Academic Council	Defines the strategic directions of the policy and provides guidance in the formulation of decisions related to academic freedom and ethical principles.
Academic Ethics and Freedom Committee	Receives, reviews, and objectively evaluates complaints related to academic ethical violations and issues concerning academic freedom.
Faculties	Implement the policy at the faculty level, conduct monitoring, and submit reports on the status of implementation.
Students and Staff	Comply with the approved policies and regulations and act in accordance with the principles of academic ethics and integrity.

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Monitoring and Evaluation

At Mingachevir State University, systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are implemented to ensure the effectiveness of the Academic Freedom and Ethical Conduct Policy. Annual monitoring is conducted to assess policy implementation, during which progress against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is regularly analyzed.

Based on the results, the level of implementation, challenges encountered, and areas for further development are identified, supporting continuous improvement and informed decision-making.

To assess the quality of the academic environment, regular surveys are conducted among students, academic, and administrative staff. These surveys measure the level of academic freedom, adherence to ethical conduct principles, the existence of an open discussion environment, and overall satisfaction indicators. The results obtained are statistically analyzed and used in decision-making processes, forming a basis for planning relevant improvement measures.

Based on the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation activities, annual reports are prepared and submitted to the university leadership, including relevant collegial governance bodies. These reports provide a detailed overview of the level of policy implementation, the degree of KPI achievement, identified challenges, and measures taken to address them. The reporting mechanism serves as a key tool for strengthening transparency and institutional accountability.

To ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of the policy, it is systematically reviewed and updated every three years. During this process, monitoring results, survey data, international practices, and the university's strategic priorities are taken into account. Accordingly, the policy is aligned with contemporary requirements and further developed based on principles of continuous improvement.

At the same time, the use of digital tools is expanded to enhance the effectiveness of monitoring processes, and electronic systems are applied for data collection and analysis. Coordination among relevant structural units is strengthened, and evaluation results are promptly integrated into decision-making processes. This approach serves as one of the key mechanisms ensuring the continuous development of the academic freedom policy at Mingachevir State University and its alignment with international standards.

Stakeholder Engagement

At Mingachevir State University, the active involvement of both internal and external stakeholders is ensured to support the effective implementation of the Academic Freedom and Ethical Conduct Policy. In this context, students, academic and administrative staff, as well as international partners, are engaged in the processes of policy development, implementation, and evaluation.

To ensure student participation, regular surveys are conducted to assess their perspectives on the academic environment, freedom of expression, and the teaching process. The results are analyzed and integrated into decision-making, contributing to a more student-centered approach. The involvement of academic staff is facilitated through various discussion platforms, including focus groups, seminars, and internal meetings, which support the identification of challenges and opportunities for policy improvement.

The university's international cooperation network also plays a significant role in stakeholder engagement. Through joint projects, exchange programs, and research collaborations with foreign universities and research institutions, best practices are identified and implemented. This approach not only enhances the university's level of internationalization but also contributes to aligning academic freedom principles with global standards.

In addition, an inclusive and open academic environment is fostered through open debates, public discussions, and scientific events within the university. The stakeholder engagement process is continuous and supported by regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, contributing to the effectiveness of the policy and ensuring institutional transparency.



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Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

Within the framework of SDG 4, ensuring academic freedom, creating an open and inclusive learning environment, and fostering the development of critical thinking and analytical skills are considered key components of quality education at the university.

Within the context of SDG 16, the promotion of transparent governance, the implementation of ethical conduct standards, and the strengthening of accountability mechanisms contribute to the development of a reliable and effective institutional environment at the university.

Within the framework of **SDG 10**, ensuring equal opportunities for all students and staff, preventing discrimination, and promoting an inclusive environment contribute to the advancement of social equity at the university.

Evidence and Reporting

At Mingachevir State University, an evidence-based reporting mechanism is implemented to ensure transparency and effectiveness in the implementation of the Academic Freedom and Ethical Conduct Policy. Within this framework, all activities related to policy implementation are documented, systematically collected, and analyzed, and subsequently integrated into decision-making processes.

Academic reports serve as one of the primary sources for evaluating the level of policy implementation. These reports provide detailed information on teaching and research activities, the state of the academic freedom environment, implemented initiatives, and achieved outcomes. Reports are prepared on a regular basis and submitted to the university leadership.

Ethics-related data play a significant role in monitoring academic integrity and standards of conduct. Information collected by the Ethics Committee includes the number and types of ethical violations, as well as the mechanisms applied for their resolution.

Survey results are used to assess the perceptions and satisfaction levels of students and staff regarding the academic environment. Through regularly conducted surveys, indicators related to academic freedom, ethical conduct, and open discussion environments are evaluated, and the results are statistically analyzed to support policy improvement.

Statistics on scientific activity reflect the level of development of the research environment and provide measurable indicators of academic independence within the university. The collected data are used to evaluate the university's research capacity and to inform future strategic planning.