



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs et professeurs d'université

Memorandum 25:22

Date: April 8, 2025

To: Presidents and Administrative Officers
Local, Federated and Provincial Associations

From: David Robinson, Executive Director

Re: **Report on Academic Freedom in Canada after October 7, 2023**

Following the attack on Israel by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza by the Israeli military, debates and demonstrations over the war have roiled university and college campuses across Canada. These events have not only reignited deeply contested views but have also raised concerns about the censorship of discussion and debate over the long-standing conflict in the Middle East.

In the weeks and months following the events of October 7, CAUT was made aware of several instances in which academic staff were being investigated and, in some cases, disciplined for comments they had made about the conflict. In April of 2024, the CAUT Executive Committee requested that a special report be prepared to review the state of academic freedom in this polarized political environment and develop recommendations for institutions, CAUT, and academic staff associations. I am pleased to share the report with you.

The report is not an exhaustive examination of all cases of alleged violations of academic freedom. Rather it identifies key themes, foremost of which relates to extramural academic freedom -- the expression of academics on matters of public interest that is not necessarily related to their area of scholarly expertise.

Notably, the report acknowledges that there are limits to academic freedom. Academic freedom does not confer immunity from libel, true threats, harassment, or discrimination. However, these forms of prohibited expression must not be conflated with political speech that causes discomfort or is deeply controversial. Academic freedom, freedom of inquiry, and debate are essential to the analysis of even the most seemingly intractable and controversial matters. It is this freedom, essential to the mission of universities and colleges, that permits us to interrogate these dilemmas and to begin to imagine them otherwise.