ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY

SUBMITTED TO MANAGEMENT

AUGUST 2025

Policy No.	
Approval Date	
Effective Date	
Approving Authority	Council
Review After	Three (3) years
Responsible Office	Registry
Responsible Officer(s) / Committee(s)	Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Executive Deans, Heads of Departments and Human Resources Manager

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
MUBAS	Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences
VC	Vice-Chancellor

DEFINITIONS

Academic Freedom

Refers to:

a) autonomy of the University in relation to the choice of academic courses and offerings, the ways in which they are taught and the choices of research activities and the ways in which they are conducted;

b) freedom of academic staff members, students and affiliates to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express their opinions and beliefs, and to contribute to public debate, in relation to their subjects of study and research;

c) freedom of academic staff members, students and affiliates to express their opinions in relation to the University;

d) freedom of academic staff members and affiliates to participate in professional or representative academic bodies;

e) freedom of academic staff members and affiliates to teach, discuss, research and to disseminate and publish the results of their research;

f) freedom of students to participate in student societies and associations.

Academic staff

Refers to anyone employed under a contract of employment as teaching and research staff member of MUBAS.

Affiliates

Refers to all individuals or entities associated with the University other than its staff or enrolled students. These may include but not necessarily limited to collaborators, partners, exchange students, visiting scholars, consultants and alumni.

Constitutional rights

Refers to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed to individuals under the constitution of the Republic of Malawi, including but not limited to the right to freedom of expression, academic inquiry, association, assembly, equality, and access to information, provided these are exercised within the confines of applicable laws.

Extramural expressions

Refer to statements, opinions, writings, speeches, or any form of expression made by academic staff, students, or affiliates outside their official university roles, particularly when addressing matters of public interest, policy, or scholarship.

Lawful

Means any conduct, action or expression made in accordance with the guiding laws, regulations and statutory frameworks under which MUBAS operates.

Speech

Refers to all forms of expressive conduct, including oral speech and written, artistic, musical and performing works and activity and communication using social media; the word ‘speak’ has a corresponding meaning.

Staff

Refers to anyone employed by MUBAS.

Student

Refers to a student enrolled at MUBAS in an academic programme designated by the statutes or rules to be an undergraduate or postgraduate program.

The University

Has the same meaning ascribed to that expression in the University’s enabling legislation (in this policy, it shall mean MUBAS).

Unjustified interference

Refers to any unauthorized or unreasonable obstruction, restriction, intimidation, or coercion that hinders an individual's academic freedom, professional duties, or research without a valid legal or institutional basis.

Unjustified limitations

Refer to restrictions placed on academic freedom without lawful authority, reasonable justification, or adherence to due process.

Unlawful

Means in contravention of a prohibition or condition imposed by law.

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to promote and protect the freedom to engage in intellectual enquiry, teaching, research and expression; fostering a learning environment that values critical thinking, creativity and open exchange of ideas while recognising the rights and dignity of others within and outside the academic community.

2.0 Policy statement

The University shall promote academic freedom to enable staff, students, and affiliates to freely teach, learn, express opinions, contest ideas, disseminate knowledge and engage in discussions that promote academic growth. The University shall ensure that academic freedom is not viewed in isolation but in relation to other core values in higher education, including equitable access, accountability, institutional autonomy, social responsibility, and human rights.

3.0 Scope

The policy shall apply to all university students, staff and affiliates of the University, including representative bodies.

4.0 Authority

This policy draws its authority from the MUBAS Act of 2019, MUBAS Statutes, and the MUBAS Strategic Plan.

5.0 Principles

5.1 Knowledge and Expression

MUBAS shall protect teaching, research, publication, open debate, and lawful speech, allowing staff, students, and university affiliates to express ideas, whether controversial, unorthodox, or unpopular, without unjustified interference.

5.2 Institutional Autonomy

MUBAS shall retain independence over academic programs, teaching, and research priorities, while remaining accountable to national policy, constitutional rights, and ethical standards.

5.3 Ethical Responsibility

Staff, students and all university affiliates shall uphold intellectual and ethical integrity, comply with professional codes, and safeguard the dignity and rights of participants.

5.4 Freedoms and Responsibilities

Freedom of expression shall be exercised within the confines of the law, MUBAS policy requirements and individual obligations within the university frameworks.

5.5 Accountability and Transparency

The University shall ensure openness and fairness in governance, and treatment of staff, students and its affiliates including taking accountability for one's actions.

5.6 Protest and Dissent

The University shall uphold peaceful, constitutionally protected protests as part of academic freedom, provided the protest respects safety and the rights of others.

5.7 Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity

MUBAS shall guarantee equal access to academic freedom for all its members regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, or disability, while upholding respect for diversity in knowledge, ideas, and experiences.

6.0 Priority Areas

The University shall take deliberate measures to lawfully safeguard:

6.1 Academic Work

6.1.1 Freedom in teaching

MUBAS shall protect the right of staff and students to teach, learn, and engage in academic discussion without unjustified interference, provided such engagement is lawful, ethical, and aligned with the University's academic standards.

6.1.2 Freedom in undertaking research

MUBAS shall safeguard the right of staff and students to undertake research of their choice, subject only to ethical guidelines, professional codes, and regulatory requirements, ensuring integrity and innovation in knowledge production.

6.1.3 Freedom in publications

MUBAS shall protect the right of staff and students to publish research results and academic opinions, provided such publications meet scholarly, legal, and ethical standards, and shall not impose unjustified restrictions on dissemination.

6.1.4 Freedom for staff in executing their roles

The University shall guarantee that academic and administrative staff can execute their roles and responsibilities in teaching, research, and service without undue interference, while upholding accountability to professional, ethical, and institutional standards.

6.2 Extramural expression

6.2.1 Freedom to be heard

The University shall guarantee that staff and students can present their academic ideas, opinions, and findings in appropriate forums, with their voices valued and protected against suppression or intimidation.

6.2.2 Freedom of expression

The University shall safeguard the right of staff and students to express academic and personal views, including controversial or unpopular opinions, subject only to lawful and proportionate limitations necessary to protect dignity, rights, and safety.

6.3 Policy and shared governance

6.3.1 Freedom to question institutional practices

Staff, students, and university affiliates shall have the freedom to address, question, or critique any matter of institutional policy or practice, whether as individuals or as members of any university unit or committee.

6.3.2 Freedom to participate in professional bodies

The University shall support and protect the right of staff, students and all its affiliates to participate in professional associations, unions, and representative academic bodies, recognising these as essential to academic growth, collaboration, and institutional accountability.

7.0 Implementation

The University shall implement the policy through transparent governance, collegial decision-making, and policy alignment with constitutional protections. Institutional leaders and academic staff are responsible for upholding academic freedom, ensuring epistemic justice, and balancing autonomy with public accountability. The principles will be embedded into teaching, learning, research, administration, and public engagement, with regular reviews to address emerging challenges and threats.

8.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring of this policy shall be overseen under the overall accountability of the Vice-Chancellor (VC) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC). Reviews, informed by reports from the University's Legal Counsel and the Office of the VC, will assess the protection of academic freedom, ethical compliance,

wellbeing, and accountability, with findings submitted to the University Council where necessary. Regular reporting and periodic external audits will ensure transparency and institutional autonomy, while scheduled reviews will align the policy with evolving legal, academic, and constitutional standards.

9.0 Review

The policy shall be reviewed every three (3) years or following institutional restructuring, or regulatory change.