

**Queensborough Community College
Committee on Academic Freedom**

TO: Faculty Executive Committee
FROM: Committee on Academic Freedom
SUBJECT: Approval for Distance Education Classes

The Academic Freedom Committee met on September 2 to discuss a potential infringement of academic freedom with regard to Department Chairperson approval of online courses. There is currently no explicitly stated college policy. A link (Academics – Online Courses – Online Course FAQs; there are also other routes to the same destination - What are QCC’s guidelines regarding online courses?) contains the following passage:

The faculty member notifies his/her Chair of the desire to teach a course online, prior to the submission of the course schedule to the Registrar. Please include the course, section, and whether the course is to be partly online (hybrid) or fully online (asynchronous). ***If the Chair approves***, then the Chair submits the entire course schedule to the Registrar and the online course schedule to the Director of the Academic Computing Center (bnaples@qcc.cuny.edu). The ACC Director is the campus coordinator for all online courses. Again, please include the course, section, and whether the course is to be partly online (hybrid) or fully online (asynchronous). The deadline for including materials in the registration book must be observed

www.qcc.cuny.edu/QCCOnline/faculty_faq.asp#Guidelines

- 1) The committee finds the present wording of the bold and italicized clause (“***If the Chair approves***”) to be ambiguous and possibly suggest that the approval or disapproval of an online course resides first and solely with the Department Chairperson, which we consider to be a possible violation of academic freedom. We recommend it be changed to “If the Department approves,” the decision then being that of the members of a particular department, as opposed to only the Chairperson. Note that if a particular department then delegates approval of an online course to their Chairperson, this would not constitute a violation of academic freedom. The approval of online courses or of online instructors might be subject to review by the Academic Senate Committee on Distance Education or Committee on Curriculum if it is so mandated by a policy that might be established by the Academic Senate.
- 2) Also along the lines of making the approval of online courses a departmental process, and with the idea of improving the departments' abilities to create and manage their own online course offerings, we recommend that each academic department establish its own policies on the offering of Distance Education consistent with academic freedom and with any College policy that might be set by the Academic Senate. Apart from our direct charge as a Committee on Academic Freedom, some of our membership have suggested that the Committee

- on Distance Education recommend policy to the Academic Senate that would set minimum uniform standards for all DE courses offered at Queensborough, upon which could be added the specifics for each department. We also envision a relationship between any departmental DE committees that may be formed and the Academic Senate Committee on DE.
- 3) Since we have devoted some time to the analysis of this issue, we also offer our help in an advisory capacity.

Respectfully,

The Committee on Academic Freedom
Julian Stark, Chairperson