

Academic Freedom Policy (S.4.17)

Effective Date: []

Approved By: Board of Directors

Next Review Date: (every 5 years)

Policy Statement

Foundation Baptist College affirms that the pursuit of truth—particularly in theological education—is both a biblical mandate and a necessary foundation for developing godly leaders. As a confessional institution, FBC is committed to a doctrinal core that faculty must uphold and teach. Students are invited into the process of theological growth and discovery, with space to question, learn, and mature in a respectful and guided environment.

We hold academic freedom as a stewardship—a trust granted to us by parents, churches, and students. Ideas are powerful, and education is formative. Our mission compels us to shape students with intellectual integrity and spiritual maturity while honouring the churches and families they represent.

We are persuaded that truth is not fragile and that rigorous, honest engagement with Scripture honours God. The Berean spirit (Acts 17:11) of examining the Scriptures to see if things are true should be encouraged, not feared. We believe that Christian maturity requires discernment and that academic freedom trains students to grow from inherited assumptions to thoughtful, biblically grounded convictions. However, such freedom must be exercised under the lordship of Christ, within the unity of the Spirit, and with pastoral sensitivity toward the church.

Academic freedom at Foundation Baptist College is governed by:

- **The sufficiency and authority of Scripture** in all matters of faith and practice.
- **The primacy of the local church**, especially in student formation.
- **Respect for spiritual authority**, including parents, pastors, and denominational traditions.
- **Commitment to Christian maturity**, evidenced in respectful dialogue and submission to godly leadership.

Institutional Commitments and Boundaries

1. Faculty Freedom and Responsibility

Faculty may explore and teach within the boundaries of our confessional identity. They must represent the College's doctrinal commitments with

integrity and clarity, modelling how to handle disagreement and complexity without compromise.

2. Student Freedom and Formation

Students may question, probe, and wrestle with theological ideas in a space of safety and grace. The College supports their academic journey while affirming the authority of their sending churches and families. We encourage students to grow in confidence, not rebellion; in knowledge, not arrogance.

3. Culture of Humility and Love

Academic freedom must be exercised with a posture of mutual respect, love, and humility. Disagreements must never devolve into division or disrespect.

4. Institutional Oversight

The administration holds final responsibility for determining appropriate boundaries and responses to academic freedom issues. Faculty, administration, and then the Board provide layered accountability and support. All decisions shall aim to uphold the College's mission of strengthening churches and training future pastors.

Situational Concerns Specific to FBC

- **We hold a trust from parents and churches.** Ideas are powerful, and we intentionally shape our students through teaching. This shaping is a moral stewardship.
- **We are a confessional school.** Certain truths are so foundational that it would be unethical to teach contrary to them. Academic freedom at FBC operates within clear doctrinal boundaries.
- **We pursue truth with humility.** While we hold to essential truths, we recognize that faithful believers may differ on other matters. Academic humility requires engagement with a wide range of biblical perspectives.
- **We distinguish between college and church authority.** As an academic institution — not a church — we do not perform baptisms, ordain leaders, or administer discipline. Therefore, on some Tier 2 doctrines (necessary for church practice), we may allow greater openness than a church would.
- **We are committed to serving a broad range of churches.** In the Canadian context, FBC may be the best or only training option for students from a variety of confessional churches. We aim to serve more than just baptistic churches within our own tradition.

Doctrinal Tiers

Tier 1 — Core Doctrines (Essential for Salvation)

- These are foundational truths required for Christian faith and salvation, such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Christ, the atonement, the resurrection, and justification by faith.
- All students, faculty and board members must affirm these doctrines. Examples include the Nicene and Apostles' Creed and the historic fundamentals of the faith.
- **Students in exploration:** A student who does not yet affirm these truths or lacks a clear salvation testimony may be permitted to study on probationary status for one year. Spiritual formation is a key commitment of FBC and so we offer such students the opportunity to grow in their apprehension of doctrinal truths. However, these students must fully understand that a salvation testimony and adherence to our doctrinal statement is an absolute condition of graduation.
- **Examples:**
 - Nicene view of the Trinity
 - Deity of Christ
 - Salvation by faith alone
 - Bodily resurrection
 - Clear biblical view of gender identity and sexual ethics

Tier 2 — Institutional Commitments (Essential for Our Practice)

- These doctrines are necessary for the distinct operation of Foundation Baptist College and are consistent with our role in supporting local churches. They are represented in official FBC policy statements which are affirmed by the president and the board and by at least a 50% vote of full-time faculty.
- Faculty and staff are required to teach and minister within these boundaries. Examples include:
 - Complementarianism (only men as pastors/elders)
 - Believer's baptism by immersion
 - Not actively practicing the sign gifts
 - The historical Adam and historical fall of man, bringing the curse on creation

Distinctions and Expectations

- **Full-time faculty and staff** must consistently uphold these views in both their teaching and public communication.

- **Adjunct instructors** are only required to uphold these positions in the specific content they teach for the College, recognizing they may serve in broader contexts.
- **Students:** Agreement with Tier 2 doctrines is not required for enrolment or graduation. However, students are expected to remain teachable and refrain from actively or disruptively promoting views contrary to the College's stated positions.
- **Academic resources:** We do not require that every assigned reading or external source conform to Tier 1 or Tier 2 doctrine. However, we ask that faculty do not positively affirm or promote views that directly contradict FBC's doctrinal commitments, even in how they affirm the sources they use.

Tier 3 — Charitable Disagreements (Permissible Diversity)

- These matters are important but not essential for Christian fellowship or College identity. Faithful believers and churches may rightly differ on these issues.
- We encourage respectful, thoughtful engagement on Tier 3 matters among students and faculty. Examples include:
 - Eschatology
 - Church polity
 - Spectrum of covenantal to dispensational hermeneutics

Conduct Guidelines

- Discussions on Tier 3 topics should model Christian charity and intellectual rigour.
- Students and faculty are free to present strong arguments for differing perspectives, provided these are expressed respectfully and in a spirit of unity.
- These conversations must honour the trust placed in us by families and churches, and contribute to—not erode—students' confidence in Scripture and their home churches.

Procedures for Handling Academic Freedom Issues

These procedures ensure concerns are addressed with clarity, accountability, and grace.

1. Identification of Concerns

- Concerns may arise from class content, assignments, public comments, or conduct.
- May be raised by students, faculty, administration, alumni, or church leaders.
- Concerns must be documented with specific evidence.

2. Informal Review

- **Handled by:** Academic Dean or designate.
- **Action:** A respectful conversation clarifies intent, content, and doctrinal relevance.
- **Goal:** Resolve misunderstandings or confirm whether the issue requires formal review.

3. Formal Review Trigger

Initiated if:

- The concern involves Tier 1 (students or faculty) or Tier 2 doctrine (faculty).
- Informal steps fail to resolve the matter.
- The content or conduct appears contrary to institutional commitments.

4. Formal Review Process

- **Review Body:** Academic Dean, two faculty members, and one administrator.
- **Steps:**
 - Review of material.
 - Interviews with involved parties.
 - Assessment using doctrinal tiers.
 - Church consultation if applicable (especially with student concerns).
- **Possible Outcomes:**
 - No violation found.
 - Instructional clarification or correction.
 - Retraction or formal discipline (in serious cases, especially for faculty).

5. Appeals

- Appeals must be submitted within 30 days. The decision of the president and board will be returned in 30 days and is final.

6. Pastoral Follow-Up

- Aim is restoration, growth, and clarity.
- May include mentoring, peer dialogue, or theological coaching.
- Students are encouraged to engage their pastors and parents.

7. Documentation and Confidentiality

- All actions are documented securely.
- Confidentiality is maintained except where disclosure is necessary for resolution or integrity.