

## ***Faculty Academic Freedom Position Statement***

Presented by the Faculty Senate President

Passed: February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Recently, the reactions of a few community members to the NPC theatre department's production of *Grease* have raised very significant academic freedom questions. Some members of the community have suggested that entities outside of the college should have power to oversee and censor the content of NPC plays, and by extension the content of college courses (NPC plays are produced as part of an NPC course). This clearly represents a monumental change to official academic freedom policies, and the undersigned faculty members request that the board reaffirm the college policy on academic freedom. A reversal of this policy could have a significant negative impact on the college.

In 2007, NPC's District Governing Board adopted an official stance concerning academic freedom in policy # 1810 (a copy of the policy is attached). Any changes in procedure regarding the content of NPC plays would change the policy significantly. In addition to the obvious first amendment issues, academic freedom is a long-established American concept. While protection from institutional actions based on content that someone dislikes is essential, transferring power to any group *outside* of the institution would be disastrous.

We believe that the board should consider that granting oversight power to an ad hoc community group over *any* college decision would constitute a significant change and set an extremely dangerous precedent. Such decisions have traditionally been the role of the district governing board, and of academic departments and faculty members. Does the board want to open the door community approval of college course content? Should the content of literature, psychology, history, art, anthropology courses etc. have to meet the approval of a self-appointed group of citizens?

This change in policy could have profoundly negative consequences. NPC would find it extremely difficult to hire and retain high-quality faculty members in an environment where the institution has endorsed such an attack on academic freedom. Such a position might also leave the college vulnerable to significant legal actions, both from parties seeking to further erode academic freedom and from those seeking to defend it.

While the particular theatre production in question is only a secondary issue, it is worth noting that *Grease* enjoyed the best community support, based on ticket sales, of any play that has been produced in recent years. We recommend that the board re-affirm established standards of academic freedom, rather than embark on a significant and dubious change of policy based on the views of a small minority.

Sincerely,

Faculty Senate