

January 17, 2023

Hamline University is the epicenter of a public conversation about academic freedom and students with diverse religious beliefs.

There have been many communications, articles and opinion pieces that have caused us to review and re-examine our actions. Hamline is a multi-cultural, multi-religious community that has been a leader in creating space for civil conversations. Like all organizations, sometimes we misstep.

In the interest of hearing from and supporting our Muslim students, language was used that does not reflect our sentiments on academic freedom. Based on all that we have learned, we have determined that our usage of the term “Islamophobic” was therefore flawed. We strongly support academic freedom for all members of the Hamline community. We also believe that academic freedom and support for students can and should co-exist. How this duality is exemplified on our campuses, especially in the current multicultural environment in which we live, is an exciting, robust, and honest conversation for academics, intellectuals, students, and the public to have.

In order to facilitate this debate, Hamline University, over the coming months, will host two major conversations. One will focus on academic freedom and student care. The other will focus on academic freedom and religion.

We have learned much from the many scholars, religious leaders, and thinkers from around the world on the complexity of displaying images of the Prophet Muhammad. We have come to more fully understand the differing opinions that exist on this matter within the Muslim community. And, we welcome the opportunity, along with our students and the broader community, to listen and learn more. We, like our higher education partners, want to do more to show that academic freedom and student support are both integral to the very fabric of who we are.

Finally, it was never our intent to suggest that academic freedom is of lower concern or value than our students—care does not “supersede” academic freedom, the two co-exist. Faculty have the right to choose what and how they teach. Faculty care for and about students. This is certainly the case at Hamline University, a place where we pride ourselves on knowing the names of all of our students.

Higher education is about learning and growing. We have certainly learned and continue to grow as we generate new knowledge to share with all of our Hamline community.

Please join us at one or both of our upcoming events as we engage in critical conversation about academic freedom.

Ellen Watters

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