7.6.2 ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Realizing that the principles of academic freedom are the very life blood of an educational institution, the Board of Trustees and the Will County Federation of Teachers, Local 604, have agreed to the following statement of concern:

By academic tradition and by philosophical principle, an institution of higher learning is committed to the pursuit of truth and to its communication to others.

To carry out this essential commitment calls for institutional integrity in the way a college or university manages its affairs, specifies its goals, selects and retains its faculty, admits students, establishes curricula, determines programs of research and develops its fields of service.

The maintenance and exercise of such institutional integrity requires appropriate autonomy and freedom.

Expressed positively, academic freedom is the freedom to examine data, to question assumptions, to be guided by evidence, to teach what one knows, to be a learner and a scholar. Expressed negatively, it is a freedom from unwarranted harassment which might hinder or prevent a college or university from fulfilling its responsibilities.

A college or university must be managed well and remain solvent. It must be concerned with the needs of its community and state and county, but an institution of higher learning is not a political party. It must be morally responsible, but even when church-related; it is neither a religion nor a church.

A college or university is an institution of higher learning. Those within it have as a first concern evidence and truth rather than particular judgments of institutional benefactors, concerns of churchmen, public opinion, social pressure, or political proscription.

Relating to this general concern and certain responsibilities, it is the obligation of Trustees and administrators to protect faculty and students from inappropriate pressures or destructive harassments.
It is the faculty’s obligation to distinguish personal conviction from proven conclusions and to present relevant data fairly to students because this same freedom asserts their rights to know the facts.

It is the students’ obligation to sift and to question, to be actively involved in the life of the institution but involved as learners at appropriate levels.

Intellectual freedom does not rule out commitment, rather it makes it possible and personal. Freedom does not require neutrality on the part of the individual nor the educational institution – certainly not toward the task of inquiry and learning, nor toward the value systems which may guide them as persons or as schools.

Hence, institutions may hold to a particular political, social or religious philosophy as may individual faculty members or students. But to be true to what they profess academically, individuals and institutions must remain intellectually free and allow others the same freedom to pursue truth and to distinguish the pursuit of it from a commitment to it.

All concerned with the good of colleges and universities will seek for ways to support their institutional integrity and the exercise of their appropriate autonomy and freedom. In particular, the Federation of Regional accrediting Commissions of Higher Education and the regional commissions, which have a particular responsibility to look at an institution in its totality, will always give serious attention to this aspect and quality of institutional life so necessary for its well-being and vitality.