Academic Freedom for Chairs

Which chair ....
A kind of comfortable chair

• Your colleagues do their jobs
• You run the programs (with a day-to-day headaches that entails)
... or the uncomfortable chair

- You do all that ....
  And a major problem of academic freedom confronts you
- It is uncomfortable because ...
Academic freedom

- Defending academic freedom is essential to the academic mission of universities and must be protected at all costs

- Specific cases call on one to defend unpopular causes, often to defend wrong-headed ideas, and sometimes to defend “difficult” people
Academic freedom provides... the possibility of examining, questioning, teaching, and learning, and involves the right to investigate, speculate, and comment **without deference to prescribed doctrine**. As such, it entails the freedom of individuals to practise their professions of teacher, researcher and scholar, the freedom to publish their findings, **the freedom to teach and engage in open discussion**, the freedom to be creative, the freedom to select, acquire, disseminate, and use documents in the exercise of their professional activities, and the freedom to criticize the University and the Association. Academic freedom also entails freedom from institutional censorship. *Memorandum of Agreement*
Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

“Normal science”
Established paradigms generate confidence...

Anomalies accumulate
Small adjustments to the paradigm occur... until

A crisis leads to a revolutionary science
A “paradigm shift”
Copernicus
News report 1: U of T Scarborough

2015 a sessional instructor, Health Studies course

From her blog: people should “avoid vaccinations” because they are “of questionable efficacy, full of ingredients that definitely should not be in the blood stream, and may compromise your general immunity irreparably.”

Reported by CBC news
News Report 2: Queens Univ

An adjunct professor, Health 102

“One of the PowerPoint slides states there is no scientific proof vaccines aren't contributing to increased incidences of chronic illness and disability in children. Another quotes an alternative medicine website as saying it's not known whether fetuses are harmed when pregnant women get flu shots.”

Reported by CTV news
As Provost of this academic institution, I must at all times respect the diversity of opinions and views of academic colleagues and sessional instructors. However, I do note with respect that the Deans... have released a statement ... [that] includes the following:

“...we teach our students that vaccines are safe, effective and vital to children’s health. Vaccines are one of history’s most important and significant achievements in public health and medicine. The best evidence that science can provide proves that the health benefits of vaccines far outweigh their potential side effects, and we instruct our students accordingly.”
Queens: Provost’s statement

The instructor “will not be teaching Health 102 next time it's offered.”

"When scientific evidence is being discussed, that means you present it in an objective fashion, that you direct students to primary sources not secondary sources, that if you have your own biases -- and everyone has biases -- that you declare the biases. Those are the expectations we have of faculty members."

"This was not their finest hour, but overall I think their programs are of high quality and I'm confident that the quality assurance process, when it's concluded, will offer the same comment," he said of the department.
THE CHAIR

Of the department

“This was not their finest hour ...”
You hired someone who...

- Caused the institution “bad press,” caused headaches, made the department look bad....

- Reminds of us of the importance of academic freedom and the diversity of views that make up institutions of higher learning.
Recommendations

• Know who you are hiring
• Don’t let anomalous views be a surprise

• Defend your colleagues – even if you don’t agree with them
• ...that too is your job