TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

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TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
TEACHING AND LEARNING

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning are more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching–learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

1. present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries;
2. present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices; and
3. consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice, or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching–learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, innovation is a positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that lead to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with

implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural, and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and life-wide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

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PART I

PRACTICING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger

ABSTRACT

In democratic societies, universities are unique institutions that are responsible for conducting critical research, training students and educating the next generation in pursuit of knowledge for community and societal welfare. Universities are a platform where like-minded knowledgeable people are encouraged to think freely and formulate educational policies for the progress of their nation. Academic freedom to think, teach or conduct research is a key legitimating concept (Menand, 1996) and is based on the belief that faculty and even students who form a part of the body of academia should not be subjected to any kind of coercive policies and external authority that limits their ability to think, practice and pursue knowledge. Accountability to stakeholders also is a critical part of academic freedom, which comes with autonomy and is essential for optimizing the activities of a university.

Academic freedom in teaching–learning methods is crucial to a nation's growth. The concept comes with numerous misnomers and is subjected to much academic debate and doubts. This book is dedicated to seeking the widening frontiers of academic freedom and authors have put forth their opinion in the form of case studies and empirical research that considers academic freedom of faculty and students as one of the main goals to be achieved by any university. Advancement of knowledge and quality of research is to be encouraged and supported by the leadership team in any institution of higher education

where autonomy to work freely remains the foremost criterion of success. Truth and intellectual integrity remain the fundamental principles on which the foundation of a university should be laid (Downs, 2009).

Keywords: Academic freedom; intellectual integrity; responsibility; accountability; teaching–learning; research; educational policies; external authority; knowledge; stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

The concept of academic freedom as always been marked by doubt, lack of clarity, ambiguity and inconsistency in what it actually means. Some academicians describe it solely as individual freedom, some as the collective freedom of staff, faculty and students. Others think of it as a right to practice their teaching–learning and research agenda resulting in an interplay between collegial, individual and institutional freedom. The concept is often confused between a set of rights and the pairing of rights and responsibilities along with accountability to the stakeholders. The year 1980s saw a growth of debate about the role of academic freedom in a university (Marginson & Considine, 2000). Around this time, academics also warned about the constraints that will be faced by the institutions practicing freedom and will ultimately lead to the deterioration of public debate and the existence of pluralistic democracy (Melody, 1997).

There has been some empirical evidence that suggested that constraints on academic freedom could be responsible for falling teaching and student standards and a decline in student–faculty relationships (Kayrooz & Preston, 2002; Tierney, 2001). Some researchers explained the deterioration of academic freedom as a result of widespread changes that are now prevalent in higher education due to financial pressures, economic downturn and the increasing competition of treating education as a commodity and excessive commercialization of institutions of higher education. Financial pressures on institutions have also resulted from growing societal and governmental concerns and evaluation of academic performance due to the marketization and commercialization of teaching and research (Schuller, 1995).

There is an existing body of literature that shows that academic freedom has been subjected to a wide range of debates and there is not universal consensus between parties to what it actually means. The range of interpretation has often been used to support conflicting causes and positions (Kaplan & Schrecker, 1983). In spite of all the contradictory meaning and doubts, there does exist some level of understanding that defines the concept of academic freedom. It is often represented as a negative right – the right on individual academics who demands non-interference in their activities, freedom to teach and conduct research, freedom to investigate and discuss problems with students and fellow faculty members and freedom to express their opinion through publications or in the class without fearing oppression from the leadership or governmental authorities.

Blessinger and de Wit (2018) assert that the principle of academic freedom derives from the idea of freedom of thought, which is considered a basic human right. Thus, academic freedom entails the freedom to teach, learn and conduct research, which are keys to the purpose of higher education. Berdahl (2010, p. 2) defined it as:

the right of the scholar in his/her teaching and research to follow truth where it seems to lead without fear of punishment for having violated some political, social or religious orthodoxy.

While Moodie (1996, p. 129) states that:

Academic freedom is typically taken to mean, at least in British senior common rooms and among faculty members in the United States that academics and scholars should be free to pursue and proclaim the truth in both teaching and research without interference from unqualified outsiders.

"Academics possess intellectual freedom but not moral freedom. They are free to express their ideas, but not free to express their behavior" (Manan, 2000, p. 265).

Universities have a tradition of privileging certain categories of people by providing them with the place and space in which they could develop the intra and inter-psychic freedom to exercise defiant imagination, either collectively or in isolation. This is academic freedom. Having this freedom does not, of course, mean that it will be exercised. (Boden & Epstein, 2011, p. 478)

Karran (2009) emphasized the reason for giving importance to the concept of academic freedom. According to Karran (2009), researchers are engaged in building new knowledge and it is often searched in unknown territories and unchartered paths. Researchers need adequate freedom to look for knowledge where it is not easily found. Society is now based on a knowledge economy, and training the students adequately to face the challenges of creating and converting society into a knowledge economy is an equally challenging job for faculty and mentors and they need a free environment in conducting so. Orthodoxy and convention cannot lead to changes and future generation needs freedom to learn concepts that may be contradictory in nature, which will allow them to lead to a value judgment and creating a strong decisive opinion of their own. Students should have adequate freedom to shoulder responsibilities and interpret society in a socially responsible manner and such an approach needs academic freedom in an institution. O'Hear (1988) argued that freedom doesn't mean the mere absence of interference but a supportive culture and encouragement to develop a new body of knowledge. The interpretation of this concept raises several issues as to:

whether academic freedom should apply only to the acknowledged special interests of academics or whether it should instead be extended indefinitely to cover any teaching, scholarship, research or publication which any academic chooses to engage in. (Tight, 1988a, p. 118)

Academic freedom is granted in the belief that it enhances the pursuit and application of worthwhile knowledge, and as such is supported by society through the funding of academics and their institutions. Academic freedom embodies an acceptance by academics of the need to encourage openness and flexibility in academic work, and of their accountability to each other and to society in general. (Tight, 1988b, p. 132)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate and discussions surrounding the concept of academic freedom have lacked empirical data. Some amount of research has been conducted focused on the perceived changes in academic freedom or the concept of autonomy and the way academics have responded to such changes in the past, although such empirical work is limited in nature.

American higher education saw the growth of the idea in the twentieth century and is driven by three academic processes that are intended to provide a great deal of autonomy to faculty, instructional staff, students and other researchers. These three processes are tenure, peer evaluation and shared governance.

Tenure: Faculty members who earn tenure after a long probationary period are protected from sanctions for saying or writing things that a particular individual or special interest group might disagree with, but that are consistent with proper academic practice.

Peer evaluation: This is the process by which academic peers at an institution and within the scholarly disciplines continually review and evaluate academic standards, content and procedures, as well as individual performance.

Shared governance: This is the set of procedures under which institutional decision-making is shared between college and university administrators and the faculty (and, less often, nonfaculty instructional staff) (The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), 2007, p. 1).

Another neglected field in the concept of academic freedom is the freedom that should be exercised by students. Academic freedom for students is the hallmark of excellence in the field of academia. In times of radical change and commercialization of education, an institution has to offer the most sophisticated information to students and give them access to all possible sources of knowledge and information. Students have to be prepared to engage in all kinds of critical sources of information and use intellectual tools to seek new information and conduct self-evaluation to judge the utility of such knowledge. Students being an important part of the stakeholder group should have the freedom to express themselves and study in an environment where they can engage in debates and refrain from any kind of fear and coercion inhibiting them from expressing their views. The free exchange of ideas and professional attitude of the leadership team is essential for academic freedom to prosper in any institution.

Standler (1999) argues that the concept of academic freedom is not a legal one but is dependent on the internal culture of faculty and management in an institution. A greater part of this concept also leans heavily on historical circumstances and power relations that exist between the members and those at the helm of the institution. Standler (1999) further stated that to a certain degree all academics enjoy considerable academic freedom and are allowed to develop their own course material and even the method of assessment. Interference is only conducted when there is a problem or a faculty member is being evaluated for promotion, tenure or salary increase. Institutions bestow a considerable amount of trust in academics and consider them to carry their own responsibility and conduct their job competently and efficiently. Freedom from interference does not allow

an academic the license to relax but to teach with competence and produce a substantial amount of scholarly publications and engage in meaningful research for the advancement of knowledge and betterment of the institution.

While interpreting the term of academic freedom, scholars have also pointed out that institutional academic freedom is meant to protect institutions from governmental or religious interference and not an individual faculty member. University has the right to choose its own team of faculty members and the right to select its own curriculum such as the content and syllabus at each level of their teaching. However, it is interesting to note that an institution does not protect its faculty members from holding unorthodox views but protects them from dismissal by political pressures (Ansah, 2015). This condition may or may not hold in many countries where the government has set strict policies to even govern the rights of academicians. In recent past, academic freedom is challenged by several issues and obstacles like dwindling financial resources, bottlenecks in bureaucratic work and overloading the faculty with administrative work and excessive teaching loads. While academic freedom allows a faculty or a student the freedom to express themselves, the freedom of speech, it is expected that they follow norms of civility and remain sensitive to topics and subject matter. History has witnessed sanctions against academicians for holding thoughts contrary to governmental policies and opposing political issues. Restraint and respect for other people's opinion is expected with clear demarcation exhibiting the fact that although they represent the institution, the thoughts and matters expressed by an individual are his own and are not influenced or coerced by any other third party (Ansah, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Academic ideals call for tolerance by both staff and faculty members and the students as differences of opinion, teaching methods, personality or attitude will differ from people to people and each will have their preferred mode of operation. An enlightened community is made of a difference of views and respecting each one of them till they are detrimental to the health and welfare of society. The unconventional views are the result of individual style of working and this brings uniqueness to an institution. The awareness about academic freedom enables teaching staff to respect and be tolerant of each other's views. At times, the faculty may come from different cultural backgrounds and even from different parts of the world. The difference enriches the institute and ultimately benefits the students. Academic freedom enriches research and hence should be guarded by the institution. There are instances when the government funding does interfere with the autonomy of a university and to an extent, it is unavoidable when the institution is fully or partially dependent on the funding from the government and government may try to give directional guidelines to the institution through its various agencies. Universities even in the face of many such adversities should work toward one goal and that is creating a group of a future generation capable of creative and critical thinking with a democratic view of the world.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

"From a Century of Defeats: The Slow Emergence of Academic Freedom from the Courts in the Early 20th Century," by Daniel J. Perrone, traces the slow evolution of the contemporary idea of "academic freedom" through two court cases of the early twentieth century. Unfortunately for academics, this history does not end with a ringing endorsement of the right of academics to speak freely without being afraid of losing their teaching jobs. Rather, the courts have tended to agree that while faculty do have freedom of speech under the first amendment, they do not necessarily have the right to keep their jobs no matter what they say. This chapter illustrates the court's early validation of punishing the "free speech" of employees if it promotes a "bad tendency" in *Patterson* v *Colorado* in 1907 and concludes with Oliver Wendell Holmes' ruling in 1919 that introduces the concept of the "marketplace of ideas" to evaluate speech even though the defendants were convicted of espionage as they exercised their "freedom of speech." For the educator, freedom of speech is essential in having the academic freedom to pursue their discipline.

"Robbed of Academic Freedom – Imposition of a Coercive Attendance Policy on Students," authored by Enakshi Sengupta, is about academics in the field of higher education who have been studying various factors that might contribute to students' progress and impact their grading. One such factor could be practicing academic freedom among students. The concept of academic freedom in most case is restricted to faculty alone and is often interpreted as the freedom to teach and conduct research. The neglected field in academic freedom is student. As faculty are engaged in the pedagogical approach of teaching and learning, it is obvious that students will encounter ideas and beliefs through books and wider reading as it is expected of them to do so. There comes the point when students start questioning the popular beliefs and the policies that have been imposed without making them a key stakeholder in those issues. The chapter takes one case study of an international university in Iraq where a strict attendance policy undermines the key concept of academic freedom among students. The author used a qualitative method to interview a cohort of 39 students, 10% of the entire student population that are currently engaged in undergraduate study.

"Balancing the Freedom to Teach with the Freedom to Learn: The Critical Role of Assessment Professionals in Ensuring Educational Equity," by Karen Singer-Freeman, Christine Robinson and Linda Bastone, addresses the balance assessment professionals must strike in supporting academic freedom, shared governance practices and learning improvement efforts within colleges and universities in the United States. Specifically, the authors address how assessment professionals (faculty or staff whose primary job involves accreditation or the assessment of student learning) can encourage increased educational equity while supporting academic freedom. The authors offer a unique perspective. As former faculty members, current assessment practitioners and a current academic administrator, the authors work to ensure that their institutions are using assessments of student learning to improve learning for all students. This work gives them insight into the ways in which assessment