

Articles

Academic freedom and organisational identity*

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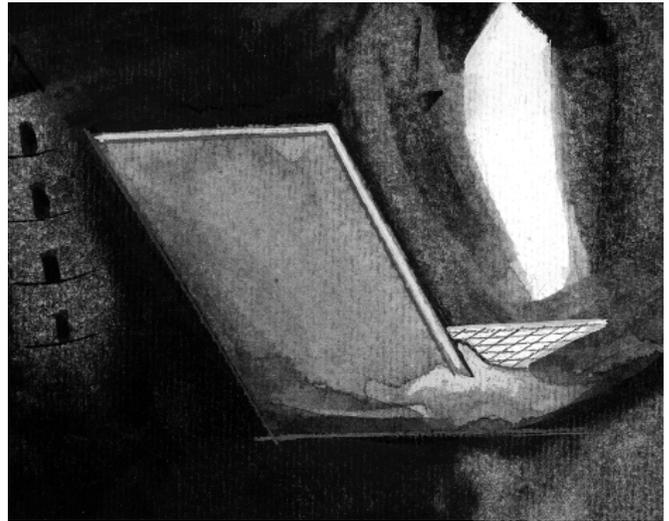
The ideal academic is an autonomus figure engaged in the unfettered search for truth. Yet academic freedom is attacked on all sides by bureaucracy and managerialism. That's the accepted wisdom in academic circles. But did this paradise of truth-seeking ever exist? And what does academic freedom mean in a world of contested truths and limited resources?

Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century the core ideal of university life was the unfettered search for truth. Whether teaching in the classroom or conducting research, the *raison d'être* of academic life was the ability for academic scholars to pursue lines of inquiry without external or internal interference. The assumption that academics should be able to conduct research and teaching without influence from anyone has been defined as academic freedom. In large part, the creation of tenure came about to ensure that academic freedom could exist, which in turn enabled the search for truth.

Over the last decade there has been an increasing concern voiced that the commercialisation of Australian universities has put academic freedom at risk. In research I conducted between December 2000 and June 2001 numerous interviewees cited examples of what some might say are flagrant violations of academic freedom. Many individuals pointed out that they felt a chilly climate had been created on campus and they no longer felt they were free to speak out. In large part the reason that individuals gave for the chilly climate was the changing condition of academic work in Australia due to the necessity of relying on the marketplace for fiscal survival.

In what follows I first summarise the most prominent current arguments on academic freedom, and discuss the limitations of some of those perspectives. I then go on to define how we might think afresh about academic freedom from a perspective that is informed by recent thinking about globalisation. I present findings from the interviews



I have done with 126 academic and administrative staff about their perceptions of academic freedom at the start of the twenty-first century. To think more concretely about the nature of the problem I frame these findings in five ways, and I discuss how we might ensure that academic freedom remains protected, if not enhanced, in Australian academic life.

Academic freedom and organisational identity

As one might expect, most writing about academic freedom is a mixture of research on the topic and philosophical investigations about the nature of Truth. The most extensive empirical study of academic freedom in Austral-

ia is a recent project undertaken by Carole Kayrooz, Pamela Kinnear and Paul Preston published in 2001. They concluded that:

Academic freedom now operates within a financial environment characterized by increasing reliance on industry research funding, fee-based courses and consulting services. These trends, in turn, involve closer attention to the needs of 'consumers' and 'markets'. The impact of this environment on social scientists' experience of academic freedom is a matter of some concern for the quality of public debate and the health of democratic pluralism (2001, p. viii).

The publication of the study created something of a brouhaha in the national press. Two higher education reporters pointed to the universities' need to make money as a key concern for the health of universities. They outlined how an increased reliance on full fee-paying international students had jeopardised the independence of academics to give a student a grade based on what the student earned, rather than on what the student had paid. (Noonan and Contractor 2001, p. 5). *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised that the loss of academic freedom, ranging from the manner in which courses were graded to research funding methods, jeopardised the health and well being of all of tertiary education and called for a government inquiry (2001, p. 14). Clive Hamilton, Director of the Australia Institute, which sponsored the initial study, asked: "The question the universities must answer is why a large number of academics, at considerable risk to their careers, would make the claims they have. Why would they lie?" (2001, p. A15). Thus, there has been an increasing crescendo of criticism to the effect that academic freedom is at risk in Australian universities, and the culprit is commercialisation.

From these perspectives, academic freedom is an understood quality, a virtue of the academy, and it is at risk. The teacher is no longer free in the classroom to provide the correct grade to a student; the researcher is no longer able to pursue research that he or she desires to do, and the scholar has become a managed professional (Rhoades, 1998) without autonomy, working under what Slaughter and Leslie have coined "academic capitalism" (1999). The implicit assumption is that academic freedom was not threatened until the universities needed to become responsive to the marketplace. The marketplace is seen as an unsuitable arena for academic freedom to thrive, and individual autonomy is assumed to be the necessary condition for academic freedom to exist.

Philosophical analyses of academic freedom have followed a similar path. Raimond Gaita, in a thoughtful treatise about the decline of academic freedom, claimed that the reconceptualisation of the university as engaged in little more than job training had diminished the search for truth. "The universities are now marked by a pervasive mendacity" he wrote, "in their descriptions of what they

have done to save subjects and jobs" (1997, p. 18). The central "lie" that Gaita refers to is the debasement of the search for truth. The crux of the matter lies in the lessening of government support for tertiary education and the increased reliance on the marketplace.

In a more nuanced argument about academic freedom, Simon Marginson points out how academics pursue a form of regulated freedom within institutions in a state of regulated autonomy (1997, p. 360). His point is that academic freedom is not a timeless absolute, but instead is historically defined. Accordingly, when a university's autonomy is lessened and it becomes more of a "managed university," then it stands to reason that academic freedom will be reconceptualised, if not lessened. He writes, "In the globally-competitive university, whose purposes would be controlled by the most powerful market actors in conjunction with governments, the ideal of social equality ... and the ideal of free creative exchange are placed out of reach" (1997, p. 368). He calls for a counter model that enables difference, rather than homogenisation, which in turn would enable an unregulated academic freedom.

Although there is much with which I am in agreement in Marginson's analysis, I turn now to a significantly different interpretation of academic freedom, which shall serve as a framework for analyzing the data from the interviews.

An alternative conception of academic freedom

Academic freedom is most often defined by a violation or an abridgment of a particular right. In other words, academic freedom is often defined by its absence. In the United States, for example, the historical exemplars that scholars point to highlight my point. Much has been made of the liberal economics professor at Stanford University who spoke out against private ownership of railroads and immigration and ended up being fired by the sole member of the Board of Trustees, Mrs. Leland Stanford (Tierney, 1993). Sheila Slaughter (1980) has written about how Scott Nearing was fired at the University of Pennsylvania in 1915 because he opposed the use of child labor in coalmines. Walter Metzger (1955) wrote of John Mecklin, an outspoken liberal professor at Lafayette College, who was forced to resign in 1913 because of his philosophical relativism, interest in pragmatism, and the teaching of evolution. More recently, we have seen the case of Joel Samoff, a well-respected political science professor who was denied tenure because he employed a Marxist approach to his subject matter (Ollman, 1983). Bruce Franklin lost his tenure at Stanford University in the United States because of his vociferous, some would say violent, opposition to the University's involvement with activities concerned with the Vietnam War (Tierney, 1993). Slaughter pointed out how George Murray and Staughton Lynd also had to face attacks on their academic freedom (1980).

All of these examples fit within the general characterisation of academic freedom I have just discussed. They are clear violations of one's academic freedom, albeit not all of them are due to the commercialisation of the institution. It is in good measure as a result of these experiences that we tend to define academic freedom in the manner we do - as the right of the professorate to a significant degree of autonomy in the manner in which they conduct their work in order to have the freedom of thought and expression that is seen as necessary to advance knowledge and learning. Burton Clark has noted that academic freedom is a "totem" - the *sine qua non* of academic life (1987a). Although one may certainly agree with the liberal presuppositions attached to the basic belief of academic freedom, I am concerned about the epistemological suppositions that underlie the idea.

Hofstadter and Meteger have pointed out how our beliefs about academic freedom dovetail with our belief in modern science and the assumption that knowledge exists as a free market where we desire the "free competition among ideas" (1955, p. 61). Marginson's call for an unregulated academic freedom works within a similar framework. From this perspective, knowledge is a social product that scholars study and investigate. The modernist concept of science assumes that facts exist and scholars function to uncover meanings and patterns of those facts. The objects of knowledge exist independently of the efforts of the researcher to discover them; likewise, the advancement of knowledge occurs irrespective of the methods of the scientist conducting the work. In essence, throughout the twentieth century social scientists tried to ape the objectivity of the natural scientist's laboratory. Objectivity was what was honored. I previously have noted that this portrait is one that presents knowledge as a "jigsaw puzzle that can be shaped into multiple [images]; even though different representations can be drawn, the pieces of the puzzle are the same to all" (Tierney, 1989, p. 73). The implications for academic freedom are that we need to protect the manner in which someone studies the puzzle. The battle of opposing ideas must occur so that an objective analysis and persuasive solution can be found for whatever puzzle is being studied.

And yet, the course of social and cultural theory over the last few decades suggests that such beliefs are no longer well founded. The production of knowledge is socially constructed and incorporates the manifold perspectives that account for the common good. Participants define knowledge according to their social and historical contexts. In this light, how we have come to think about gender, for example, is not simply a result of the accretionary advances in knowledge, but is specifically tied to the social and cultural contexts in which we have lived. Instead, following Foucault's well-worn path, I am arguing that institutions, individuals and the constantly shifting

social forces of society combine to determine what accounts for knowledge at a particular moment in history.

What I am suggesting is an alternative conception of knowledge production more in tune with contemporary trends in social and cultural theory. In doing so, I reject Professor Miller's over-the-top depiction of postmodernism as being 'contemptuous of academic values such as truth, reason, knowledge, and individual academic autonomy' (2000, p. 114). I agree that ideas such as academic freedom are indeed central to the life of the academy. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the idea of the university as a hermetically sealed monastery where scientists develop knowledge without external interference or internal prejudice has always been mistaken. In one way or another, knowledge production has always been informed by, constrained by, and enhanced by external agents and internal belief systems. One need merely look at new forms of knowledge over the last thirty years to find examples of what I am suggesting. Is it merely coincidence that a primarily male professorate had created histories where the study of gender was absent until the last generation? If academic freedom existed irrespective of outside influence, then how free was someone a half century ago to conduct work on gay or lesbian studies? How is it possible to say that the professorate was free to advance knowledge according to liberal humanist notions at the start of the twentieth century, but there were no Aboriginal scholars in the universities to advance understanding about traditional societies?

My point here is neither to disdain liberal humanist ideals such as the search for Truth, nor to suggest that today's scholars are more enlightened than yesterday's. However, at a time when globalisation is upon us and tertiary education is undergoing a sea change in focus and funding, it behoves us to understand the dynamics of knowledge production. We ought not bemoan a paradise that never existed - or at least it did not exist for those of us on the margins. We ought not assume that the unfettered discovery of knowledge existed in a romanticised version of the past. Instead, we need to come to grips with the changing nature of the university in a globalised economy, and with the kinds of notions of civic democracy that can ensure that central ideals are protected not according to outmoded notions of knowledge production, but through an understanding of how knowledge gets created.

Huppaufer has usefully pointed out that "the autonomy of the modern university was never an absolute one, but determined by a delicate ambivalence based on a careful balancing of dependence on, and a simultaneous critical distance from, society" (1988, p. 150). The assumption was that such a tightrope act was for the betterment of society in general. Such an assertion is fundamentally different from one that believes academics have an absolute freedom to explore or that it is possible to develop contexts

where unregulated academic freedom could actually exist. It strikes me as a fundamental misreading of academic life to argue that the resuscitation of academic freedom in Australian universities turns on a return to individual autonomy. One cannot return to that which one never had.

By way of analysis, I now turn to a discussion of the interviews I conducted.

The interpretation of academic freedom by Australian academics

Methodology

Between December 2000 and June 2001 I conducted 126 individual interviews at six universities in Australia. All of the individuals were guaranteed anonymity. The interviews lasted no less than a half hour and no longer than two hours. In addition, I held four focus groups that ranged in size from five to fifteen. I chose individuals according to a pre-arranged framework that was then aided by snowball sampling, where one suggestion led to another, and so on. I sought individuals according to the following general categories: academic staff, senior administrative staff, deans and department heads, and union leaders and leaders of academic councils/senates. Within the academic staff I interviewed individuals according to the following categories: senior/junior, humanities-social science/professions, men/women. Although the study is not a case study, I focused my attention on institutions that were, according to the typology advanced by Marginson and Considine (2000): Sandstones, Gumtree, or Unitech. My point in choosing these sites turned on how current changes had affected academic work with regard to teaching and research.

As with any qualitative study, one cannot attempt to do everything. I did not, for example, look at either the former colleges of advanced education that had become universities, or any aspect of TAFE. I did not take into account issues pertaining to race, sexual orientation or disability and how such characteristics impacted academic identity and the nature of one's work. The project is also a study that occurred over a six-month time horizon, so I am able to provide thick description of a particular moment in time rather than a history of how people's perceptions have changed over time.

Findings

One ought not be surprised that different individuals conceptualised academic freedom in a variety of ways. Although over 80% of the interviewees expressed some concern about a particular aspect of academic freedom, some individuals also maintained that academic freedom was not an issue: "I don't see it," said one person. "I am free to say what I like, and no one has ever interfered with me. Some people natter on about problems, but they just lack guts." A second person agreed by saying, "You always

need courage to speak out. When people say academic freedom is at risk they're just saying they lack courage."

Other individuals were more focused on their own work and did not generalise to others. One scientist, for example, commented that she did not see any limits on her work, and she was not involved in issues on campus, so it was not a concern. Another person commented, "I've been a vocal critic here, especially with the previous VC. Never had a problem. And in my work it's just not an issue." A third person made a similar point, "I don't think about it, to tell you the truth. I go about my business and do my work. It's not something that affects me."

Nevertheless, the vast majority of individuals did have something to say. Based on an analysis of the data, I have developed a provisional typology of five categories that structures the different comments individuals made. As with any typology, comments at times overlap with one another, and to a certain extent, the typology posits ideal types when daily life is more complex. At the same time, such a typology that derives from the data helps make sense of the comments that the interviewees made.

Criticising the university

"I'd tell a young person to keep his head down," said one person. "If you criticise the VC, you'll get in trouble. Don't speak out," said another. A third commented, "In a way I sympathise with them [administrators]. It's an impossible job right now, and when we point out disagreements they just don't want to hear it. They don't have time to hear it. There's a climate that you had better keep quiet or else."

The "or else" referred to frequently discussed examples that many individuals knew about, even if it occurred on another campus and they had not experienced it. "So the next day he gets a letter telling him to get out of his office by the end of the day because he had been discourteous," summarised one individual. He had been speaking about an example where a respected emeritus professor had attended a meeting and spoken against a particular action that had been proposed. "What signal does it send when you throw someone out, someone who has served the university, because he disagrees with you," asked one person. "It was an iconic moment," explained another individual. "I don't know if he [the VC] meant it that way, but he sent a signal to all of us: Keep your mouth shut."

A second frequently-discussed example had to do with the removal of someone's email account because he had used email to broadcast his criticism of the university. "How bloody stupid!" commented one person. "When you take away someone's email all they need to do is get another account. But it puts a chill on dialogue. They certainly don't want debate." "I hear examples of taking people's email away and it sends shivers through me," explained another person. "That's not what a university is supposed to be."

Another academic had an example of what she felt was the result of such actions:

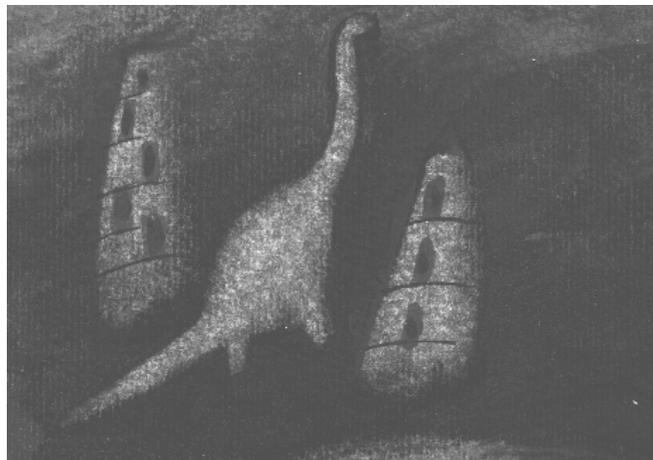
A year or two ago, soon after I'd become full-time – I'd switched from casual to full-time – they [the administration] did something that was just off. Just stupid. Everybody around here was angry and we decided to protest, to let them know how we felt the next week. Later that day I asked a senior prof what he was going to do, how he was going to handle it, and he said, 'Well I'm going to wait and see what the others do. I don't want to be out front.' I don't know if he knew how that affected me. You hear things about people getting kicked out or removed or having things done to them, and the result is that people are afraid to speak up. Is that what we want from our senior academic staff? Wait and see? That's what I mean when I say academic freedom has been threatened.

Some people agreed that academic freedom had changed, or evaporated, but they had a different interpretation: "There needs to be more loyalty to the institution, and I have a problem when people speak against the university. That may have worked once, but we're different now. We should support one another." Another person explained, "Academic freedom is one of those things that's in the past. It was for a different kind of institution. It took up people's time. Don't get me wrong, we have legal protections now, whistle blower things, but things are just streamlined, more efficient." "People are too busy for academic freedom, actually. We want high performance and that takes extraordinary energy," she explained. She concluded by laughing: "I can't really say it, but we operate around here by the FIFO principle: Fit in or – off."

Doing research

Unlike critics of the institution who get in trouble because of what they say about where they work, few individuals commented that anyone had told them not to engage in a particular research topic. Instead, the problem pertained to the commercialisation of the university. As one social scientist explained, "I'm a feminist who does research that is critical of conservative policies and this government. The way I deal with it is that I simply will not apply for any government funding because if I did, I'd either have to bend my research or I'd not get funded. So I stay away from government grants, which means external funds."

Not everyone had made such a decision and they worried about it. "The changes in funding of course impact the work you do. They won't fund basic research; they want applied research. Of course that affects what I want to do." "We have a scheme that rewards bringing in money. Everything is set up now toward external economies, toward being international. They want me to get involved with my peers internationally, to present at conferences, they want me to get an ARC [Australian Research Council] grant. To do those things, I of course shape my research agenda." Another person added, "We all have just gone crazy around here submitting ARC proposals. In a competition where there's a 25% chance you'll get funded you try to fit what they want to do, which



is not necessarily what you want to do." And one additional person summarised, "It's benign interference. Before Dawkins, before the cutbacks began, no one ever tried to tell me what to do. Being a good academic meant doing good work. Now there are definitions to that, and it's tied to meeting what will bring in money."

Doing teaching

The area of teaching had a mixture of the problems associated with two categories just discussed. On the one hand, the topic of marking had become a recent *cause celebre*, and on the other, individuals mentioned the implicit changes involved with full fee-paying students.

The case of Ted Steele at the University of Wollongong had received a great deal of attention. He claimed that he had been instructed to increase the marks of his honour students. The Vice-Chancellor dismissed him, and the NTEU worked to defend him against being arbitrarily sacked. In his letter to Professor Steele, the Vice-Chancellor claimed the dismissal came about because he had made the matter public, and in doing so, had harmed the university.

Another well-publicised example pertained to a student at Curtin University who supposedly had plagiarised her essays three times; she had been caught each time, but she was still not punished and received her degree. The newspaper reports suggested that she received her degree because she was paying a full fee. Clive Hamilton, director of the Australia Institute, felt strongly that preferential treatment for fee-paying students was a serious issue, and in the course of his work he had become aware of some appalling cases (2001). Usually, the charge had to do with full fee-paying international students.

Although I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of these claims, no individual with whom I spoke mentioned they had ever been asked or told to provide a student with a particular mark. The issue is more complex than the portrait of a heavy-handed administrator watching over the shoulders of the academic staff. "No one would ever do that here," explained one individual. "But when

students are customers you also have a different mind-set.” “International students are told that we’re flexible, and we need to be” conceded a second person. A third added, “It’s not a causal relationship but we’re all aware of the need to have bums in seats. I have to be aware of marking.” “It’s delicate,” reflected a fourth person. “Very delicate. Formula funding is what pays my salary, and that formula depends on students in classes. Are students affected by the marks they get? Do you need an answer?” A fifth person said, “Who wants to kill the goose that lays the golden egg? We’re short of funds. International students provide those funds. Of course we’ll bend marking.”

And finally, one person pointed out: “Don’t put this on the international students. It’s almost racist the way this is being discussed. My HECS students say they want good marks too because they’re paying too. I just tell ‘em, ‘look mate, do the work and you’ll do ok.’ But of course marks made a difference.” A final person who had taught at the university for over twenty years rationalised, “Soft marking is the current hot topic. It comes and goes. The real problem is not soft marking, but our inability to police ourselves. Academic staff need to stand together and say this is what we think is excellent work and this is unacceptable work. They’ve got us doing so much right now, there’s no time for that kind of discussion anymore. I barely have time to see anyone except in the corridor.”

Lack of Reflexivity

“Maybe this won’t make sense,” reflected one person, “But I don’t have time to think. If you mean by academic freedom the traditional things, I’ve never had a problem. No one has ever told me what to do. But doesn’t academic freedom have as much to do with the ability to go down unexplored paths? That’s impossible with all the administrative work, all the teaching, all the students today.”

“Academic freedom is a thing of the past,” added a second person. “It refers to the tenor of one’s work. There has to be a climate that is conducive to dialogue and debate and we’ve lost that. There’s no going back.” “Who has time for academic freedom,” lamented one professor. “People think we’re joking, but I’d like someone to follow me around for a couple of days. I have no time. To have academic freedom there are some prerequisites. Time is one of them.” Another person added, “They’ll say we have academic freedom, but it’s a charade. Academic freedom is based on fundamental agreements across groups, across people. It’s not a legal thing, it’s a belief. I don’t think the government’s reforms meant to destroy it, but by filling up our time on proving that we’re doing our job and running after grants, there’s nothing left.”

Lack of Engagement

The final category pertains to another implicit side effect of the reformation of the university. Most of the respondents in this category were younger academic staff who said they wanted to be involved in some of the issues before

the university, but they had neither the time nor the sense that it was possible. “I think going into distance learning in a big way is a big mistake,” said one person, “I don’t feel anyone wants to hear it, especially from me, and really, I’m too busy, so I stay out of things.” A second person had a similar comment, “I didn’t get my PhD to work in a business. I like universities, so this privatisation is all wrong in my opinion, but I’ve not said anything publicly. I’m not afraid, mind you, I just don’t know where to do it.”

Another person pointed out that he had no idea how decisions were made and an additional person felt that communication was abysmal: “They put out a newspaper the goal of which seems to be how many times the VC can get his picture in the paper. I know things are happening, but I just don’t know if they’re debated. I know I’m not in the debate.” “I’m not complaining,” added another. “I’ve got too much work as it is already, but businesses seem to be getting flatter and we’re more hierarchical. You hear decisions are made and I guess we’re supposed to fall in line.”

Discussion

In the first section of this paper I discussed different frames with which to view academic freedom and I suggested an alternative conception based on the changing contexts in which universities now exist. My concern is that most discussions about academic freedom tend to turn on the more celebrated cases that come to light; they ignore the cultural issues that permeate organisational life; and they romanticise the past from a liberal humanist perspective. To be sure, the removal of a professor from his or her office simply because he criticised the administration is wrong. The refusal to let someone log-on to his or her email – if the individual has abided by the established code of conduct – is similarly foolish. The sacking of Professor Steele, regardless of the legitimacy of his claims about marking, is emblematic of an administration’s misunderstanding of the basic protection that an academic has to have. However, such actions delude us into thinking of academic freedom by way of grand actions and narratives. The story is one of heroic individual academics locked in struggle with individual administrators.

Academic life, however, as the comments above have shown, is much more nuanced and complex. One ought not to define academic freedom solely by the presence or absence of overt interference in the conduct of one’s research. Likewise, being left alone to determine one’s own students’ marks in peace is not a reliable marker of academic freedom. And perhaps most importantly, when one’s actions are so consumed by daily trivialities that there is no longer any outlet for input and participation, we ought not be deluded in the assumption that academic freedom remains robust.

At the same time, one ought neither romanticise the past nor assume that in some previous era academic freedom

had its golden age. I received numerous comments from individuals who pointed out that the professors of previous generations also had their own foibles and prejudices. Others commented how those individuals were overwhelming white men who actively tried to keep women out of academic positions.

My point here is neither to paint previous professors nor current administrators as villains in an academic melodrama. Instead, I am suggesting that academic freedom is constantly reconsecrated. New socio-cultural conditions demand new formulations and protections. To offer a simple-minded suggestion that the commercialisation of the university abnegates the ability of the professorate to protect academic freedom because one must secure external funding is, by inference, to suggest that all private universities are without academic freedom, and that academic freedom was untroubled in the fully-funded public university of yesteryear. And yet, some of the most vocal protests that took place in the United States over the Vietnam War occurred by academic staff at private universities. There are numerous instances today where professors at private universities use their academic freedom to speak out either about a campus policy with which they disagree or conduct research that requires basic protections. Indeed, tenure came about in the United States because of violations of academic freedom on private – as well as public – campuses.

Academic freedom has always been circumscribed. The male priesthood that once accounted for the professoriate in public universities, for example, viewed some work as worthy of accomplishment and other work as not. One can point to any number of examples where senior academic staff were not persuaded that a junior colleague's work was worthy of tenure or promotion and the new lecturer would shift his or her work toward an area that held greater promise for tenure. Paradigm shifts have frequently come about not because of an entrenched faculty's desire to enable someone to test questionable hypotheses, but in spite of it. What, then, might one do with regard to the issues raised by the interviews? I offer two suggestions that lead to a scaffolding for reform:

Structure and power The tendency in using seemingly universal terms such as academic freedom is to attach meanings that are supposedly trans-organisational. The liberal humanist ideal, after all, subscribes to the notion of Truth as an absolute. From this perspective, academic freedom means the same from institution to institution regardless of mission, country, era or context. Although there certainly need to be some broad agreements about the meaning of an idea such as academic freedom, from the perspective I am arguing for here concrete definitions get worked out in local contexts. In this light, we must resist the tendency to see globalisation as a version of Foucault's "regime of truth" that predetermines patterns and meanings (Porter and Vidovich, 2000), and instead

work to create meanings within our own localised organisations.

Such work needs to occur through structured relationships with internal units such as the administration of an institution, and with external agents such as unions and the federal government. I have written elsewhere about the crisis in academic decision-making (Tierney, 2001a; Tierney, 2001b). This current project has only reaffirmed a concern about the ineffective governance structures that currently exist for academic staff to participate in the decision-making of the university. On the one hand we heard from new academic staff who felt they had no avenue with which to voice their concerns. On the other hand, we heard from academics who voiced concern about marking, about institutional movements toward distance learning, privatisation, and the like. While funding arrangements for public universities will determine certain parameters, each institution actually has broad leeway to define the mission that will guide its future. Such a mission must be debated, defined and redefined by the academic staff. When the structures of decision-making are inadequate, ill conceived, antiquated or in ill repute, there is little chance that the professorate will be able to define and protect academic freedom.

Culture and power Structures are useless if they are not embedded in academic cultures that support a conception of community tied to essential values such as the advancement of academic freedom. I have reported elsewhere (Tierney, forthcoming) on academic staff perceptions about how the changes in Australian universities took place. My question had been how was it possible that there was not organised resistance to the changes that have occurred, if those whom I interviewed viewed the changes as bleakly as they did. The common response from the vast majority of interviewees was that academic staff were not well organised, involved, or committed in this respect. In effect, academic staff are more committed to their disciplinary culture than their collegial one (Clark, 1987b; Beecher, 1998; Tierney, 1989).

The paradox exists that however much we may speak of academic community, the tendency of the academic intellectual is basically to work on his or her own. "My life is one of lonely splendour," one individual commented. Indeed, the work of the intellectual often requires long hours by oneself to investigate one or another phenomena. Numerous individuals pointed out that they had gotten into academic life because it did not require a 9-5 mentality and one was able to come and go at one's will. Such a culture is an individualistic one that works against active involvement: as long as I am not disturbed, the thinking goes, then things must be OK.

Obviously, such a notion is inadequate. There needs to be active on-going dialogues about the responsibility of the academic to his or her institution. The point here is not merely pleasant words conveyed at the start of the

academic year. If mentoring means anything, then it ought to suggest not merely aiding someone in figuring out how to submit a grant proposal that will be successful. It also means an understanding of the obligations one has to one another. If deans and department heads, for example, are seen exclusively as managers, a culture will be developed where academic freedom is irrelevant and may not even be discussed. We need to think of them more as symbolic analysts who tend to the interpretive side of the academic enterprise and ensure that the organisation's culture remains true to basic academic ideals.

While the problems that exist with regard to academic freedom today are significant, such problems might be overcome if the structure and culture of the organisation is framed in a way that enables discussions and debate to exist about the identity of the university. The life of the academic is a calling, a vocation, in the best sense of the word. Throughout our lives that calling has had as its core a concern for academic freedom. Yet it is important neither to assume that universities are now businesses, and hence academic freedom is no longer important, nor to romanticise the past as if the professorial landscape that preceded governmental reforms was an academic utopia. Vigorous dialogues are called for about how to ensure that the core of academic life remains stable and protected, if not enhanced. There is no organisational magic wand that will magically make these things happen; instead, we need to concentrate once again on how to create academic decision-making structures that are more in tune with the changed context of today, and work on re-creating an academic culture that ensures community.

Note

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