

Chapter 10

Academic Freedom and the Ethics of Marketing Education

Francine Rochford
La Trobe University, Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic freedom is acknowledged to both define the university and to protect its status. A commitment to academic freedom must be reflected in organisational structures and attitudes. However, many of the uses to which universities are put by the state, and the choices made by universities themselves, can erode the effective protection of academic freedom. The deployment of marketing techniques, including technological advances, to mimic the activities of private corporations, are frequently part of the wider systemic threat to the university 'system' in most modern economies – its deployment in instrumental economic goals. If these goals are pursued to the exclusion of other university goals, universities' raison d'être will be diminished. In particular, academic freedom as a corollary to scholarly practice and a model of inquiry will be threatened. The casualization of the university workforce is both a managerial mechanism to effect economic goals and a cause of growing instrumentalism in the sector. Universities' increasing deployment of casual staff presents a problem for the real exercise of academic freedom, and is an abandonment of the ethical role of the university.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Truth, like all other good things, may be loved unwisely – may be pursued too keenly – may cost too much. And surely ... the general evil of

infusing reserve and dissimulation, uneasiness, and suspicion and fear, into those communications which must take place, and which, unless in a condition of perfect security, must take place uselessly or worse, is too great a price to pay for truth itself. (Pearce v Pearce 1846, p. 957)

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Lofty ideals are often espoused in absolutes, but are always constrained in application. This is particularly the case in relation to freedom of speech, (Fish, 1994) and subsidiary concept, academic freedom. Academic freedom, in particular, generates prolific supplemental commentary, frequently polemical in nature. However, even the most polemical advocate of academic freedom must concede that there are limits to its definition and scope, and indeed there is a great deal of commonality between conceptions of academic freedom and that academic freedom is a societal good (Rochford, 2003; Karran, 2009).

Academic tenure is frequently advocated as a means of preserving academic freedom. Conversely, tenure which does not have a role in supporting or maintaining proper academic freedom is insupportable (De George, 2003, p. 11). Academic freedom is typically advocated as particularly important in the development of knowledge – so that there can be no unjustified interference with the pursuit of avenues of inquiry. However, it is also arguably applicable to teaching (De George, 2003, p. 12). Short of academic tenure, however, employment contracts of sufficient length to enable a university teacher to be self-determining, in order to enable the radical-creative imagination (Marginson, 2008) would scaffold the connection between research and teaching, improve pedagogy and model processes of inquiry to students. Whilst a single failure to afford self-determination to an academic is of limited importance, and maybe a number of failures to do so can also be overlooked, a systemic failure to afford self-determination to teaching staff could have serious, systemic consequences.

It is the thesis of this chapter that it is the responsibility of an academic institution to create governance systems which are consistent with the exercise of academic freedom and to resist external and internal pressures which would compromise effective academic freedom. This is a question of systemic ethics, and it requires institutions to take an approach to their systems of governance which

not only appreciates the nuanced idea of academic freedom, but is also alert to the daily application of systems of governance and the manner in which they can compromise academic freedom. The modern system of academic governance in Australia, however, is ill-adapted to this task; the primary drivers of forms of academic governance are accountability mechanisms steered by government funding models. In relation to the transmission of knowledge, the strategies adopted by institutions to create and maintain market share in the face of diminishing recurrent grants threatens an underclass of casualized academic staff exercising no academic freedom and unable to contest even the application of academic freedom to their teaching.

Using these observations as the starting premise, this case study considers the concept of academic freedom in the Australian higher education ‘system’, the diminishing contexts in which it is applicable to an academic’s work, and in particular the degree to which it applies to university teaching of undergraduates. It then considers the models of service provision – that is, the models of delivery of undergraduate courses – in the Australian education market, and the power hierarchies established by these models, particularly in the provision of ‘international’ education. The silence of a casualized workplace in the negotiation of the appropriate space for academic freedom parallels and is a function of the powerlessness of the casual staff member in the negotiation of an academic contract. Information technology, it is argued, provides the mechanism by which internationalization of university courses can be provided at relatively little monetary cost, but it also may permit the creation of a teaching and learning environment which does not sufficiently model academic freedom.

Finally, this chapter considers the ethics of the individual university in negotiating the architecture of the university system, the architecture of internal governance, and in negotiating the contract of the casual staff member. The collective obligation of those enjoying academic freedom

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