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Academic freedom: International realities and challenges

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Abstract. Academic freedom is a central value of higher education. It affects the academic profession in all aspects of academic work. Yet, academic freedom is rarely discussed in the context of the changes taking place in higher education in the current period. The concept is defined in a historical and comparative framework, and the challenges facing academic freedom around the world are discussed.

In many parts of the world, academic freedom is under attack. A prominent Egyptian sociologist was arrested for "defaming" Egypt, a Hong Kong academic pollster was warned by his university's vice chancellor not to publish polls critical of the region's chief executive, and academics in Serbia have been routinely arrested for opposing the regime (Landler 2000; Sachs 2000; Agovino 2000). Indonesian academics who took part in the democracy movement that succeeded in toppling the Suharto regime were occasionally jailed or fired by the Suharto government, which never had been much committed to freedom of expression in any case (Human Rights Watch 1998). In Malaysia and Singapore, some topics are simply taboo for research and publication due to government pressure. Academic freedom is by no means secure worldwide.

Academic freedom is at the very core of the mission of the university. It is essential to teaching and research. Many would argue that a fully developed higher education system cannot exist without academic freedom. At the beginning of the 21st century, there is considerable cause for optimism about academic freedom. After all, the countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, as well the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, have achieved reasonable levels, although as yet not always the full range, of academic freedom. Most countries and academic systems at least recognize something called academic freedom and express a commitment to it. Yet, academic freedom is far from secure, and those concerned with the core values of the university need to be ever vigilant. A global reassessment is needed.

While there are now few countries in which professors are completely under the thumb of repressive authorities, a more common pattern is one

of occasional government crackdowns amidst a general atmosphere of constraint. Indeed, the threats, current and potential, are sufficient to warrant heightened awareness and positive steps to ensure that academic freedom can flourish.

And yet, surprisingly, academic freedom is not high on the international agenda. The topic is seldom discussed at academic conferences, and does not appear on the declarations and working papers of agencies such as UNESCO or the World Bank (Burgan 1999, pp. 45–47). Those who are responsible for leading and funding higher education are far too concerned with finance and management issues. More attention needs to be given to the mission and values of the university, for without academic freedom, universities cannot achieve their potential nor fully contribute to the emerging knowledge-based society.

Elusive definitions

Academic freedom seems a simple concept, and in essence it is, but it is also difficult to define. From medieval times, academic freedom has meant the freedom of the professor to teach without external control in his or her area of expertise, and it has implied the freedom of the student to learn. The concept was further defined with the rise of the research-oriented Humboldtian university in early 19th century Germany. The Humboldtian concept enshrined the ideas of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* – freedom to teach and to learn.

These concepts of academic freedom gave special protection to the professor within the classroom and the parameters of the field of expert knowledge of the professor. From the beginning, the university was considered a special place, devoted to the pursuit and transmission of knowledge. Academe claimed special rights precisely because of its calling to pursue truth. The authorities, whether secular or ecclesiastical, were expected to permit universities a special degree of autonomy. Academic freedom was never absolute, however. In the medieval university, both church and state exercised some control over what could be taught in universities. Professors whose teachings conflicted with the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church were sometimes sanctioned, and loyalty to the civil authorities was also expected. Nonetheless, greater freedom of expression existed in the universities than elsewhere in society.

In the German university of the early 19th century, academic freedom was expanded as a concept as research became part of the academic mission. The professor was given almost absolute freedom of research and expression in classroom and laboratory. But academic freedom did not necessarily extend to protection of expression on broader political or social issues, nor

was it considered a violation of academic freedom that socialists and other dissenters were not eligible for academic appointments.

As the research university idea crossed the Atlantic at the end of the 19th century, the concept of academic freedom was expanded. By the early years of the 20th century, the American Association of University Professors had defined academic freedom within the classroom and laboratory as encompassing all issues, not just those within the field of scholarly expertise. The AAUP also linked the concept to special protection of expression outside of the university. Professors were considered valuable social critics, and they were accorded special protections of speech and writing on all topics. In Latin America, as a result of the university reform movement of 1918, a very broad definition of academic freedom came to be applied to the entire university community – to the extent that civil authorities were forbidden to enter the property of the university without the permission of the academic community. The concept of the "autonomous" Latin American university was born at this time.

Today, there is some confusion about the proper definition of academic freedom. Generally, the broader New World concept has gained acceptance within the academic community. But nowhere has academic freedom been fully delineated, and nowhere does it have the force of law. In some countries, both university and civil authorities assume the narrow Humboldtian definition. Elsewhere, within academe and outside, the broader New World ideal prevails. There is no universally accepted understanding of academic freedom.

Controversy has arisen concerning whether the claims of academic institutions and individual faculty for special rights and freedoms bring obligations as well. For example, some have argued that universities should not take overtly political stands or become enmeshed, as institutions, in political debates or movements. It is claimed that institutions, and to some extent individual academics, have a responsibility to remain out of direct conflicts in order to provide the best objective analysis. This issue is especially salient in developing countries, where the academic community was often involved in struggles for independence and where a tradition of political engagement evolved. In Latin America, for example, professors and students actively participated in the struggles against military dictatorships and sometimes supported leftist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, often bringing the wrath of the regime down upon the university. In such countries as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, large numbers of professors and students were jailed, forced into exile, or even killed by repressive regimes. While no one would condone repression, some have argued that academic institutions should keep aloof from partisan politics, making a distinction between the right of indi-

vidual professors to speak out on political or social issues and the concept of institutional neutrality (Ashby 1974, pp. 73–87). In the United States, there were debates during the 1960s concerning whether universities as institutions should take stands on such issues as opposing the war in Vietnam. No one opposed the right of individual faculty or students to participate in antiwar movements, but many felt that the institution itself should remain neutral. The issue of the appropriate role for universities in social and political spheres remains an unresolved part of the debate about the role of academic freedom.

There has also been considerable debate over the influence of political or ideological ideas on universities. In the United States, critics of "political correctness" have charged factions within academe of imposing their views on academic departments or disciplinary associations, violating as a result the norms of academic freedom (Kors and Silverglate 1998). The intrusion of partisan politics or sometimes ethnic issues into academic appointments, university elections, and publication and research, is evident in many countries in Latin America and South Asia, and by no means unknown in other parts of the world. These pressures, usually emanating from within the universities themselves, threaten academic freedom. The intrusions introduce extraneous conflicts and non-meritocratic factors into the process of academic governance, teaching, research, and affect relations among academics. Such conflicts are often not seen as related to academic freedom. If academic freedom means the free pursuit of teaching and research, as well as decision making on grounds of solely academic criteria, the intrusion of political or other factors into decision making is a concern.

Many have argued that the freedom conferred by academic freedom creates a reciprocal responsibility (Shils 1991, pp. 1–22; Poch 1993; Russell 1993). Those entrusted with teaching and research in higher education, it is claimed, have a special obligation to dedicate themselves to truth and objectivity in all their scholarly work. These critics argue that academe and politics should not be intertwined. Universities are not political institutions, and those involved in the academic enterprise need to recognize that academe's survival depends on its ability to keep an appropriate distance from partisan politics. Others have a more absolutist view of academic freedom, and feel that faculty members should have the right to participate in any activities they deem appropriate, and that representative bodies of the faculty may similarly be engaged. There is as yet no consensus and as a result there is considerable debate about the appropriate limits to academic freedom.

Academic freedom also needs to be reconsidered in the era of the Internet and distance education. Are professors entitled to academic freedom in the cyberclassroom? Does the cyberprofessor have the freedom to design and

deliver a course without external restriction from sponsors (often profit-making companies), especially when development costs may be high? Who owns knowledge products developed for Internet use? These are questions that impinge on traditional ideas about academic freedom, and need to be answered as higher education moves to new modes of delivering knowledge.

Historical precedents

Academic freedom has a long and controversial history. For centuries, church and civil authorities placed restrictions on the academic community in terms of teaching, research, and public expression. The Catholic Church forbade the teaching of theological and scientific doctrines in the universities that were contrary to accepted doctrine. Martin Luther, a professor of theology, found himself in conflict with church officials because of his theological views and was removed from his professorship. It was only later, when some German universities in areas that had turned Protestant became sympathetic to his views, that he was able to resume his academic duties. As the result of many struggles, and especially following the rise of the research university in the early 19th century, freedom of expression gradually expanded, and professors were given more latitude in their teaching and research.

But academic freedom has always been contested terrain – even in academic systems with strong historical traditions. Academic freedom was effectively obliterated in Nazi Germany despite the fact that its modern ideal was a German invention. Not only were direct restrictions placed on what could be taught in German universities during the Third Reich, but tenured professors who did not conform to the new ideology as well as professors who were Jewish or known to be politically dissident were fired. Few voices were raised in protest in Germany against these developments, and both the German professors' organizations and the student unions supported the Nazi suppression of academic freedom. In many cases, the universities themselves implemented the changes. During the 1950s Cold War-era anticommunist hysteria in the United States, academic freedom was challenged by governmental authorities seeking to rid the universities of alleged Communists. In some cases, such as in public universities in California and New York, a number of professors were forced from their positions by state regulations. In others, investigations "exposed" leftist professors, leading to firings or forced resignations. Some universities protected their faculty members in the name of academic freedom, while others gave in to outside pressure and fired professors. While only a few faculty were actually fired during this period, academic freedom was imperiled in an atmosphere of repression and many academics feared dismissal. These examples show that even in coun-

tries with strong academic traditions and commitments to academic freedom universities can suffer serious consequences.

The Latin American academic tradition also contributed an important concept to the debate about academic freedom. The idea of university autonomy enshrined in the Cordoba Reforms of 1918 has long been a powerful force in Latin America (Walter 1968). What originated as a student protest resulted in a significant reform of the universities not only for Argentina, but for most of Latin America. Many of the continent's public universities are by law and tradition autonomous. This has implications for relations with the state as well as for academic freedom – the autonomy ideal provided significant protection for professors and students during periods of political unrest in Latin America. The protection has not been complete, especially during the era of military dictatorships during the 1960s and 1970s, but has nonetheless been a central part of the continent's thinking about higher education.

In countries that experienced colonial rule, academic freedom is less firmly rooted historically and less well protected. The colonial powers – whether British, French, Japanese, or others – feared unrest from subject peoples (Ashby 1966). Thus when universities were established in the colonies, while otherwise modeled on the metropolitan home university, they were generally not permitted freedoms that were allowed in the metropole. As it turned out, these fears of unrest were justified, since intellectuals and students were often in the forefront of struggles for independence. The universities in formerly colonial countries have often had to struggle to build commitments to academic freedom. Governments have been quick to interfere in academic affairs in order to maintain stability. Traditions of unrest die hard, and universities, especially in developing countries, remain centers of dissent. When conflicts arise, academic freedom is sometimes forgotten.

Contemporary realities

With more data, it would be possible to create a "world academic freedom barometer" as is done for human rights, corruption, and other issues. Such a mechanism, while useful, would be quite difficult to develop due to the problems discussed earlier of defining academic freedom. The following survey may serve as the first step in such a comprehensive accounting.

Severe restrictions

There are a few countries in which academic freedom is nonexistent. Perhaps the most egregious example is Burma, whose universities have been closed

for several years and are only now beginning to reopen, but under conditions of severe restrictions and with no academic freedom. The military government closed the universities in response to student political activism, but the regime did not trust the academic community generally. In countries with unstable governments, universities are closed from time to time, usually to combat student unrest, but also to limit criticism by the faculty. Regimes that are willing to shut universities down are also likely to place severe restrictions on academic freedom of faculty – especially on their freedom to speak out on social or political issues but including views expressed in the classroom and in the course of research.

Iran is an interesting case in point. Oppositional ideas and movements have emerged from the universities, especially the University of Tehran, for decades. Students and faculty provided leadership in opposing the Shah. Now, the academic community is calling for a liberalization in Iran's theocratic regime, and conservatives in the government and among Islamic religious authorities see the universities as a threat. The professors are caught in the midst of a power struggle in society, and it is unclear how the university will be affected by external forces.

In countries in which the universities are considered to be an integral part of a governmental apparatus that is itself repressive, restrictions are built into the academic and political system – rather than being caused by social unrest or political crises. Countries such as North Korea, Syria, and Iraq are examples.

Significant limitations and periodic crisis

In a much larger group of countries, while a measure of academic freedom is present in many scientific fields, significant restrictions exist. The involvement of professors in activities viewed as antiregime is not tolerated. Penalties for transgressions can be severe, and include not only loss of academic jobs, but sometimes prosecution and imprisonment. Certainly China, Vietnam, and Cuba are examples of such countries. Restrictions on academic freedom are an integral part of university life, especially in the social sciences and other fields that are considered politically or ideologically sensitive. But even in these countries, the universities generally enjoy an academic environment similar to that in other countries with greater degrees of academic freedom in most fields. Participation in international scientific and scholarly networks is permitted, and in most disciplines, teaching and research are only minimally inhibited by government. At times of political tension, such as during the Tienanmen Square crisis in China in 1989, governmental repression is dramatically increased. Indeed, the Chinese universities were kept on a tight leash by the government for years after Tienanmen, reflecting

the historical importance of the Chinese universities as centers of political dissent (Hayhoe 1999). After all, the Chinese Imperial government was toppled in considerable part by university-based demonstrations a century earlier.

Some Islamic countries fall into this category of countries. An absence of democratic traditions in society, potential political instability, and intellectual struggles between fundamentalist and secular forces in the universities combine to create tensions between academe and government. With a few exceptions, universities do not have strong traditions of academic freedom and autonomy. This makes the professoriate more vulnerable to external pressure. In Egypt, Algeria, and some of the Arabian Gulf states, academics who support fundamentalist groups may face arrest or other restrictions. In Sudan, which has had a profundamentalist regime, dissident views from the other side engender repression. The recent arrest of a respected Egyptian sociologist was seen by many in the academic community as punishment for his oppositional views.

Tension in the context of limited academic freedom

A still larger group of countries might be characterized as relatively free, especially within the classroom and with regard to research in fields that are not considered to be politically or ideologically sensitive by the state. In general, these countries express a commitment to academic freedom, but serious difficulties still arise from time to time. The limits are seldom clearly articulated, and the penalties imposed for violations of the restrictions are often unstated and not fully understood by most in the academic community. Testing the limits of academic freedom in these countries may be dangerous, and the fact that limits are perceived to exist creates a significant chilling effect among academics.

Government authorities may impose fairly harsh penalties, often without warning. The Ethiopian government, for example, recently jailed a number of professors at the University of Addis Ababa for indeterminate reasons but with overtones of political repression. In many countries, it is clear that antiregime sentiments, expressed in the classroom or in public discourse, may cause problems. In Serbia, student opposition to the Milosevic regime created repression in the universities as the government sought to maintain its control (Secor 2000).

There are many countries in which a considerable degree of academic freedom may exist for most scholars most of the time, but where a political or other crisis may cause severe difficulties for the universities and for academic freedom, creating a general atmosphere of general unease for many academics. Much of Africa and a number of Asian countries find themselves

in this situation. Countries in this category include those who governments are weak and have little legitimacy, in which academic traditions are not well established – often as a result of colonialism – and whose universities tend to be dependent on the state for support. Nigeria, which has a large academic system and periodically enjoys a considerable degree of academic freedom, often faces restrictions, especially during rule by military officers. Smaller African countries with weaker academic traditions in general have less academic freedom. In Asia, Cambodia, emerging from decades of repression, is slowly rebuilding its universities. Academic freedom will be difficult to establish because of the instability of regimes, dependence on a few sources of funding, and the almost total destruction of higher education during the Khmer Rouge years (Chamnan 2000).

The challenge of instituting academic freedom under conditions of political instability is considerable. Universities are very often centers of political and intellectual dissent, and regimes are reluctant to allow institutions the freedom and autonomy that may contribute to instability. The academic community itself, unused to academic freedom, and sometimes engaged in political struggle, is often not in a position to create academic freedom, or exercise the self-discipline involved.

Academic freedom with limits

In some nations, there are restrictions on what can be researched by professors as well as on the freedom of public expression by academics. Although resisted by many, these restrictions are widely accepted in the academic community. Sanctions for violating the often unstated norms can range from mild rebukes by administrators to loss of jobs or, in rare cases, prosecution in the courts. Singapore and Malaysia are countries that have long had informal bans on certain research topics and the expression of oppositional views. Ethnic conflict, certain religious issues, and local corruption are among the topics deemed inappropriate for academic research, especially if research findings might raise questions about government policies. Academics must also watch what they say in the classroom on sensitive issues since the penalties for violating these norms can be serious. In Singapore, the former prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew, would occasionally come to National University of Singapore faculty meetings to dress down individual academics for their writings and to encourage the faculty to work in what he defined as the national interest.

Many countries have such restrictions on academic freedom. Government authorities make it clear to university officials that continued good relations, budgetary allocations, and research funds depend on the appropriate academic and political behavior on the part of the faculty.

The re-emergence of academic freedom

In two quite different parts of the world academic freedom is gaining in strength. One of these is Latin America, which has a strong tradition of academic freedom and autonomy, going back at least to the 1918 Cordoba reform movement. Political turmoil throughout much of the continent in the 1960s and 1970s led to military coups, social instability, and guerilla struggles. Many in the universities, especially the large public autonomous institutions located in capital cities, were deeply involved in the struggles, always on the side of the leftist dissidents. It is not surprising that the military authorities, who had little use for academic freedom in any case, would move violently against the academic community. Academic freedom and the idea of the autonomy of the university suffered serious setbacks during this period. Professors known for dissenting views were forced into exile, jailed, and even killed. Student movements were violently repressed. Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and others were all affected.

Latin American universities have been involved in national politics at least since the Cordoba movement, and partisan politics continues to infuse campus elections and, in some universities, academic life generally. It was possible to restore, and perhaps even strengthen, academic freedom when democracy was restored. The Latin American experience shows that strong traditions of academic freedom can be restored even in the aftermath of severe repression.

The other region that has seen a resurgence of academic freedom is Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These countries have a venerable academic history; some of oldest universities in the world are those in the Czech Republic and Poland. However, academic freedom was basically destroyed, first during the years of Nazi occupation and then during the over four decades or more of Communist rule, during which universities were considered arms of the state. Ideological loyalty was expected, and the sanctions for violating political or academic orthodoxy were often severe, including removal from their posts and prosecution. Academic freedom was seen as a “bourgeois” concept, inappropriate in a socialist society.

With the collapse of communism in the region, the academic situation changed dramatically. Academic freedom was restored as a central value of higher education, and the ideological accoutrements of the communist era were dismantled. Teaching and research are no longer considered to be subservient to ideological and political goals. However, it has not been easy to transform the universities. For example, many professors who were identified as having been overly loyal to the communist regimes were summarily removed from their posts. Yet, patterns of both funding and administration inherited from the previous regime were in many cases largely maintained.

Without question, there is now a considerable degree of academic freedom in the region. Promotions are now more likely to be decided on merit. Most academics do not fear direct sanctions for pursuing any research or teaching. Countries with long academic traditions, stable democratic governments, fairly robust economies, and closer ties to the major Western nations – such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland – quickly reestablished academic norms that valued academic freedom and autonomy for the universities. Academic freedom has only a tenuous hold in Belarus, and is in a precarious state in Ukraine and in several of the Central Asian republics. Serbia, mentioned earlier, is in crisis, and universities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo are slowly rebuilding. Conditions are much better in Russia and in most of Central Europe, with the exception of Slovakia during the Mechiar regime. Weak traditions of academic freedom, university systems dependent on governments with only limited popularity or legitimacy, and decades of severe repression have made it difficult to establish a strong tradition of academic freedom quickly in parts of the region.

The industrialized countries

Most people recognize the relative strength of academic freedom in the major industrialized nations. Countries, such as Japan and Germany, in which academic freedom was abolished, have reestablished strong traditions after World War II. The American anticommunist restrictions lasted just a few years. All industrialized nations value academic freedom in teaching and research and have accepted freedom of expression for professors within the university and in society. Few, if any, external restrictions are placed on teaching or research in higher education. Despite this generally healthy situation, there are some issues that deserve attention.

In the United States, some have argued that the greatest threat to academic freedom comes from within the academy. Critics claim that the dominant forces in the professoriate, mainly in the social sciences and humanities, seek to enforce "political correctness" – imposing academic orthodoxy, usually from a liberal or radical perspective, on some disciplines and seeking to silence those with opposing viewpoints (Kors and Silverglate 1998). Several of the scholarly associations, such as the Modern Language Association, have experienced fierce ideological battles. There is, in fact, little evidence that academics with divergent views have been restricted or have lost their jobs, but the debate about the politicization of some academic disciplines has raised questions about tolerance of perspectives within the universities. The politicization or the influence of ideology on academic institutions or disciplines is not limited to the United States. During the 1960s, ideology played a role

in academic politics and in the disciplines in Western Europe, in many cases intruding into elections and appointments to academic posts.

Some argue that the increased involvement in academe of corporations and the growth of privately sponsored research have transformed research funding and that this has implications for academic freedom (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Academe, it is argued, has become "corporatized", and the interests of firms have become dominant on campus. Basic research is being de-emphasized in favor of applied work that will yield quick results for corporate sponsors – and government support for basic research has either been reduced or has not expanded to keep pace with scientific needs. A growing portion of research funding, especially in the biomedical sciences, is directly provided by corporations, and the results are considered proprietary – leading to patents and other benefits for the sponsor. Research findings are sometimes actually suppressed because of corporate funding arrangements. This is considered by many to be a violation of the freedom of academics to disseminate the results of their research. The future of basic research has been described as jeopardized by these changed funding patterns.

A related issue, not usually discussed in the context of academic freedom, is the growth of what some have called "managerialism" in higher education – the notable increase in the power of administrators and other officials as distinct from the authority of the professoriate in the governance and management of academic institutions. Academic freedom and autonomy are related, and these trends in governance reduce the autonomy and power of the professoriate. The authority of the professors to determine the direction of the university, to develop the curriculum, and ultimately to maintain full control in the classroom and in the selection and implementation of research topics is compromised by this trend. There seems little doubt that the shift in power and authority from the professoriate to professional managers and external governing bodies will dramatically affect the traditional role of the academic profession – with repercussions on academic freedom as well.

In concluding this discussion of contemporary realities, it is useful to report on how the academic profession itself views academic freedom. A survey of academics in 14 countries (all middle-income and mostly industrialized nations, on all continents except Africa) found a range of views as to whether the academic profession is strongly protected. More than 75 percent of the respondents responded positively to this question in all of the countries but two – Brazil and Russia – where majorities answered negatively. Yet, in all of the countries included except Israel, about 20 percent of the faculty responded negatively. Similar numbers reported that they felt no restrictions on their research and teaching. However, when asked to respond to the statement "In this country, there are no political or ideological restrictions on

what a scholar may publish", significant numbers expressed disagreement – 34 percent in the United States, 25 percent in the United Kingdom, and 27 percent in Mexico (Boyer, Altbach and Whitelaw 1994, p. 101). These findings indicate that while academics are reasonably sanguine about the state of academic freedom in these countries, there remains some sense of unease.

Indeed, the challenges to academic freedom in the industrialized countries are more subtle, and perhaps in some ways more harmful than the more overt violations that have been described here and that can be readily grasped and opposed.

What can be done?

History shows that academic freedom is not only a fundamental prerequisite for an effective university, but is a core value for academia. Just as human rights have become an international priority, so academic freedom must be placed at the forefront of concern for the higher education community. Higher education is international in scope – the issues that affect one country have implications in others. A sophisticated understanding of the complex issues relating to academic freedom is also required. The following items may be part of an action agenda for academic freedom.

- Academic freedom must be at the top of the agenda for everyone concerned with higher education. At present, it is hardly discussed. Rarely are panels devoted to the topic at international conferences. The major actors in the academic enterprise seem to be concentrating on financial issues, accountability, and institutional survival.
- Academic freedom needs a universal definition. Should the scope be limited to the Humboldtian ideal of protection of teaching and research within the confines of the university and in the area of expertise of the scholar? Or should the definition encompass expression, and perhaps action as well, on a wider range of issues both within and outside the university? At present, the lack of agreement on the nature of academic freedom makes common understanding and unified action difficult.
- Violations of academic freedom must be monitored and subjected to publicity worldwide. In the age of the Internet, keeping track of academic freedom issues and promptly disseminating information about crises and trends would be easy to accomplish. An Internet-based "early warning system" would provide information and heighten consciousness.
- A more rigorous mechanism for investigating academic freedom violations would increase international attention to severe violations. For many years, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

has monitored academic freedom in the United States. Universities found to have violated academic freedom can be censured, and the academic community is thus warned about the situation. When the violation is remedied, censure can be lifted. Other than being placed on a list of censured institutions, there are no sanctions, and in fact censure by the AAUP has little impact. A similar international arrangement would be more problematic and more expensive to organize but would be a valuable tool for consciousness raising.

- A solidarity network for academic freedom, such as "Scholars at Risk", organized by the Human Rights Program at the University of Chicago in mid-2000 may be a valuable tool for helping individual scholars who are being persecuted. The network seeks to identify individuals in trouble and to place them at universities committed to assisting them, with the broader goal of highlighting academic freedom conditions worldwide.

Conclusion

Academic freedom is a core issue for higher education. It is largely overlooked, when it should be central to every debate about the university. It is as important as managerial accountability, distance education, and the other buzzwords of the new millennium. Indeed, without academic freedom, the central work of teaching and research cannot be truly effective. Moreover, academic freedom at the beginning of the 21st century is facing challenges, as much from the impact of new technologies and the restructuring of traditional universities as from forces that would violate academic freedom by persecuting professors. The future of the university depends on a healthy climate for academic freedom.

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