

Assessment and Academic Freedom in Higher Education

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In the United States, politicians, accrediting agencies, and college administrators continue with increasing emphasis to encourage faculty to develop student learning and program assessment plans. But there is much debate about the agendas being served by assessment and its potential role in higher education. Linda Suskie notes that two of a handful of most common factors increasing faculty resistance to assessment efforts are (1) a feeling that one's status is threatened by assessment initiatives, and (2) a 'misconception' that assessment undermines academic freedom (Suskie 2004, 35). Her examples include: (a) an instructor of entertaining but lightweight courses feeling uneasy about assessing critical thinking skills being developed in the class; (b) an independent faculty member imagining having to conform to faculty expectations of course material and form; (c) an instructor worrying that unsatisfactory results may influence tenure and promotion decisions. She links case (c), but not case (b), to the concept of academic freedom. Suskie quickly dismisses all of these concerns, since her book is not focused on defending assessment, going on to offer strategies to assuage fears and encourage participation.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I offer a general argument that faculty ought to embrace self-directed assessment in order to prevent its becoming a tool of limiting academic freedom and to undermine the claims of academia's critics. Assessment can be an extension of academic freedom, rather than a threat to it. I examine different notions of academic freedom and different notions of assessment in order to clarify why there might be more disagreement than is necessary. This general argument constitutes the first two sections of the paper. Second, I offer a specific argument that program-wide assessment of learning outcomes reflecting a social agenda promoted by a faculty is protected under academic freedom, even if individual faculty members do not agree with that social agenda. I am concerned primarily with a case like (b), especially when the expectation is not understood as being directly rooted in the traditional understanding of the particular discipline. I do find such a case to be plausibly conceived as an example of a threat to academic freedom, but do not think the freedom of the individual faculty member overrides the freedom of the faculty as a whole. This more particular argument constitutes the final section of the paper.

Academic Freedom

I take the concept of 'academic freedom' to be a cluster-concept, i.e., one in which a number of individually insufficient and unnecessary elements group together in a loose association. Approaching the concept in this way frees one from having to restrict the legitimate use of the concept to a particular context. It seems to me that what is 'meant' by the term changes depending on which function of the academy (or one of its members) is at issue, or what is being considered as the threat to the academy (or one of its members). In this section, I identify some of the elements involved in the cluster-concept, and then focus on one potentially problematic element (i.e., that academic freedom protects faculty in their role as social reformers), especially as it pertains to assessment of learning-goals.

A political freedom always curtails the activities of those in relation to its possessor: “[f]reedoms are socially engineered spaces in which parties engaged in specified pursuits enjoy protection from parties who would naturally seek to interfere in those pursuits” (Menard 1996, 3; Rochford, 2003, 250.) So the provision of this freedom requires some sort of justification. One defense of the protection of academic freedom might stem from the liberal promotion of intellectual freedom. Jane Fowler Morse explicitly connects Mill’s defense of the freedom of ideas and their expression as supporting the ideal of academic freedom (as does Shils 2001, 187). She goes on to claim “Academic freedom fosters the development of intellectual freedom by incorporating it into education. Thus, academic freedom is an educational entitlement that benefits teachers, students, and society.” (Morse 2001, 205). On this view, academic freedom is valued because the university itself is understood as a public good (Marginson and Considine 2000, 28), and trends to market university education emphasizing individual career benefits obscure the public value of universities. The university allows the creative free-flow of ideas and rigorous examination of those ideas, specifically around issues that would not likely be pursued by the church, the state, the corporation or the privileged social class.

It is in this light that I view the justification of academic freedom. While universities are multi-faceted institutions, there are two prominent functions played by the academy: The attainment of knowledge and the construction of new knowledge forms, and the development of the intellectual capacities of the citizenry. In order to pursue these ends, academics articulate a number of conditions and protections vital to their work. Far from having a uniform and clear vision of academic freedom, academics vary on their understanding of the concept. For example, Kayrooz and Preston (2002) discovered a range of elements comprising the cluster-concept of academic freedom in their survey of Australian social scientists. These included:

- (1) the right to teach, research and publish on contentious issues;
- (2) the right to choose one’s research colleagues;
- (3) the right to receive institutional support when speaking or writing on social or policy issues in areas of expertise;
- (4) the *freedom from* constraints – although some suggested that constraints should be self-imposed and others, that constraints could be imposed by the institution
- (5) the *freedom to* pursue non-specified academic activities
- (6) the right to determine research and teaching standards and to participate in transparent decision-making the provision of a culture and structure free of vested interests
- (7) the ability to responsibly pursue intellectual work unencumbered by the economic survival of the university and free from political interference
- (8) the freedom to teach responsibly within the confines and in respect of human rights, without political interference and without the necessity to consider the economic implications in terms of direct fiscal income
- (9) the possession of the time to undertake the necessary academic activities, to exercise one’s academic freedom¹

¹ These nine elements are taken almost verbatim from throughout Kayrooz and Preston’s article (2001), with only minor modifications where necessary for uniformity.

It seems rather clear that academic freedom involves a large degree of independence of the academy as a whole from governmental, social and corporate interference. Additionally, individual scholars are protected against conformity to some dominant group within the academy itself through the mechanism of tenure, earned through the display of one's competence in one's field of expertise. These freedoms are privileges awarded to individuals within the academy so that they generate new knowledge claims, edit existing knowledge claims, and competently educate the citizenry in both the newly created knowledge and the most important of preserved knowledge. To be clear, the freedoms are justified by the greater value the service a free academy provides to society than that of a restricted faculty.

Some have argued that the university should also be playing a role in social reform and critique, advocating actively for progressive change (Ivie 2005, Chomsky 2007), while others advise a distance from immediate socio-political controversy and a focus on the extension of research and the teaching of the core skills and knowledge of the various academic fields (Kerr 1998; Fish 2004). Kerr has explicitly argued that universities cultivating a culture of political activist reform may violate the academic freedom of faculty members.

Kerr rests his understanding of the role of the university on Cardinal Newman's 1852 series of lectures published as *The Idea of a University*, seeing the special offering of the university as the inculcation in its students of a 'philosophical habit,' a calm, equitable and wise disposition. Academic freedom is thus understood as a protection of the life of the mind and the inheritance of our history of intellectual pursuits. Kerr argues that Newman understood the university as a secluded realm, buffered from society, rather than actively engaged. He claims that a politically engaged university creates an environment of enshrined politically-correct positions, a formation of an 'elite opinion' that not only can easily undermine the supposed threat of the popular opinions, but inhibits the very critical thought that academic freedom is meant to protect. This is not to imply that scholars may not individually speak out and be politically engaged; but that the institution should not, and life within the secluded campus should be sheltered from self-appointed social consciences. This concern goes beyond being sure to refrain from using the classroom as a political pulpit in order to protect students from mere ideological imposition substituting an authentic education; the concern is that faculty will themselves feel a need to conform to a campus' ideological culture in their teaching, scholarship and service.

In defense of Kerr's view, it seems quite clear that faculty hold tremendous authority to silence students that have elected to make themselves vulnerable to the intellectuals of the academy. Almost everyone I've talked to about these issues has had some experience of a faculty member abusing their intellectual authority in the classroom or on campus. Professors who are outspoken about their views and judgmental about dissent create a pressure for colleagues and students to conform, or at least feign conformity, in order to preserve a peaceful atmosphere. Since faculty have an institutional authority over students within the framework of the university, a respect for truth and dialogue demands a great humility in faculty interactions with each other and their students, which is compromised the more the institution as a whole or a faculty member in particular aggressively broadcasts their elite judgments.

Furthermore, Kerr is concerned that such activism will diminish the quality of the academic research. Kerr draws on Evans to make this point:

At the very most, the role of critic and conscience of society must be secondary to the primary goal of quality research. It may actually inhibit research quality and undermine the values and goals of the university system by legitimising the involvement of university staff in wide-ranging public debate as part of their university employment, whether or not such debate is in the area of their research and even if they have no credible research record (Evans 1997, 401).

Kerr further worries that “academic anthropologists or archaeologists may criticise official economic policies in their professional capacity, and even claim it is their duty to do so under the ‘critic and conscience’ clause, yet suffer no penalties or loss of reputation if their criticism is completely fatuous” (1998, 9). An atmosphere of social activism, it is argued, may result in colleagues assessing each other’s contributions to the academy more in terms of loyalty to the cause than in traditional discipline-based competency.

I am not convinced that this worry should be so troubling. First of all, an anthropologist may criticize an economic policy from a perspective not recognized by most economists; part of the academic enterprise is to enlarge the debate by allowing interdisciplinary dialogue. Second, the anthropologist may be quite familiar with economic theories, while Kerr’s worry seems to frame this as an unlikelihood. Of course, it would be inappropriate for an anthropologist to offer opinions without supporting research and evidence about issues outside her expertise as if they were conclusions of her intense study, but it is not clear that faculty being active in social criticism increases the number of cases like this. Finally, Kerr’s own hypothetical is problematic, since economists, strictly speaking, shouldn’t be able to criticize or commend official economic policies: economic policies are adopted not simply because they work, but because they are taken to be for the common good (at least, ideally speaking). If anthropologists *per se* have no place commenting, then neither do economists *per se*, since this is obviously the field of the political philosopher *per se*. An economist should merely point out the consistency of the policy with others (not make the value judgment of whether the degree of inconsistency is commendable or objectionable), predict the array of probable consequences (without assessing which outcomes are preferable), etc. Of course, this fencing in of the practitioners of disciplines is a bit silly and defeats the purpose of the intellectual freedom Mill argued as necessary for intellectual development.

All the same, I agree with several of Kerr’s general observations and welcome the caution to academics to remember to empower students to gain skills, to expose them to a variety of enriching material and to challenge them to consider opposing perspectives, rather than trying to persuade them to particular conclusions that are plainly contentious. Nonetheless, my own experience is that the majority in the academy do in fact hold to this program of education and the values that inform it. At the same time, I would be disingenuous if I denied recognizing dominant ideologies in the explicit dialogue among faculty. To what extent does this really silence students? I imagine that it does have a silencing effect, but I am not so sure that it is as simple a matter as Kerr suggests; nonetheless, that topic is not my present concern. In any case, the issue is complicated by the fact that silence or feigned neutrality in the role of the academic

also promotes values practically speaking, e.g., a political scientist refraining from pointing out the unconstitutionality of some current governmental policy or activity serves to legitimate it.

My concern is Kerr's claim that this threatens academic freedom, specifically in terms of the assessment of learning goals. At my university, we have a general education requirement of a 'diverse communities' course. Currently, several faculty members are working to refine exactly what the goal of the requirement is and how to assess whether it is being met in the various courses that qualify as meeting the requirement. I wonder, now, if this requirement may be used in a way to infringe on the academic freedom of faculty members as Kerr suggests. In other words, will this explicit learning goal require faculty to promote an ideologically enshrined value, regardless of the faculty member's views, and if so, is this an unjustified imposition? I will return to this question in my third section. Next, I briefly examine what is meant by student learning goal assessment and argue that it is a responsibility of faculty to engage in this activity and that doing so can help preserve academic freedom.

Assessment of Student Learning Goals

Any form of instruction intends for the student to achieve some goal, from mastering specific content to sharpening some mental skill. These goals may be quite directly measurable or may not be easily measured. There is a widely recognized distinction between summative and formative assessment. Formative assessment "intends to improve the quality of learning," while summative assessment "concerns the accreditation of knowledge or performance: students are assessed to certify their achievements" (Boud 1990). The assessment of student learning goals is a species of formative assessment that typically examines the learning goals of the program, rather than of individual courses (although a particular course may be the sole locus for instruction and assessment of a particular program learning goal). Student learning goal assessment involves the methodical collection of data and interpretation of that data to determine as well as possible the effectiveness of one's program or some element of it in facilitating student achievement. This requires a faculty becoming explicitly aware of the desired learning goals they have in mind for their students.

Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross (1993) have found that there is a wide array of differing learning goals among faculty members, often differing from stated departmental and institutional student learning goals. Such an arrangement leaves the actual learning outcomes of the various students within a program as something like an emergent property; the parts of the system operate independently enough that one cannot predict with any reliability what the students of the program will achieve. Perhaps this is not so bad. It seems rather odd that the academy bent on intellectual freedom should wish to structure its program so rigidly that it tends to produce graduates in carbon copy. But this rhetoric may be too harsh; we do, after all, want the characteristics of our biology graduates to gravitate toward whatever characteristics the discipline finds valuable in its practitioners. Should not a philosophy faculty wish to cultivate in its student skills in conceptual analysis, familiarity with the many important and fruitful philosophical distinctions, methodologies and principles, and a sense of how to creatively apply these skills to contemporary issues? The freedom Mill spoke of involves having the option to engage in a particular discourse as one sees fit and having the option to select among discourses, but not the option to enter any discourse and remain unaccountable to it.

Student-learning assessment seems a vital part of explicitly stating what a discipline actually is, since it would be through the achievement of the totality of goals that a particular student would be recognized as a fine graduate in the discipline, fit to continue on in the field. Thus, the observations of Angelo and Cross should be troubling. Faculty ought to clearly know what it is they are doing as members of their field. There need not be a demand for absolute conformity, but differing archetypes within the discipline should be explicitly available, and a particular department should recognize which archetype(s) they endorse, which do they respect, which do they denounce, etc. This kind of explicit self-knowledge better informs the community of colleagues and the students. Potential graduate students in philosophy often ask whether a department is ‘continental,’ ‘analytic,’ or more ‘historical’ in its emphasis. How much better can their decisions be if they were provided information about the department’s explicit learning goals and how the department plans to help the student achieve them? On the other side, untenured faculty should know exactly what kind of teaching and research is expected of them by their colleagues. I am not claiming that faculty and students have no information of this sort available to them without explicitly stated and clearly communicated student learning goals, but only these would greatly add to the cohesion of a community within a discipline and better inform those electing to enter such a community.

While it may be the case that faculty generally resist efforts to engage in well articulated assessment plans, reflection on the justification for academic freedom provided above strongly suggests that it is in fact a professional obligation for them to engage. Indeed, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has made this connection clear:

Faculty are responsible for establishing goals for student learning, for designing and implementing programs of general education and specialized study that intentionally cultivate the intended learning, and for assessing students’ achievement...Academic freedom is necessary not just so faculty members can conduct their individual research and teach their own courses, but so they can enable students—through whole college programs of study—to acquire the learning they need to contribute to society (*Academic Freedom and Educational Responsibility*, AACU 2006, p. 1).

While this document is arguing against the insistence by politically motivated interest groups that all opinions on an issue be taught in fairness, the presumption that academic freedom is awarded to serve the education of the students is clear. The academy must provide and protect the freedom of individual scholars in a way a privately-funded research institute need not, because the academy’s purpose is to serve as a vehicle of higher education. A self-financed scholar may direct her research as she sees fit, without the need to justify her autonomy. But a member of the academy has an obligation to earn the autonomy afforded her by serving the academy’s mission.

The fundamental notion behind the obligation of assessment is accountability. If academic freedom is being awarded to faculty in order to promote the common good, assessment is the means by which the faculty responsibly ensure that their activities are effective. Faculty should be honestly interested whether their techniques really help facilitate learning, if they are indeed interested in serving in the academy. So where might the resistance come from? Bruce Berger

notes how academic freedom may cover for irresponsible pedagogical techniques and the desire for individuals to be free from accountability to their colleagues. Citing from an AAUP report (1995), Berger emphasizes how academic freedom does not permit a faculty member to stray far from the departmental vision or fail to address student learning needs:

It is the mastery teachers have of their subjects and their own scholarship that entitles them to their classrooms and to freedom in the presentation of their subjects. Thus, it is improper for an instructor persistently to intrude material that has no relation to the subject, or to fail to present the subject matter of the course as announced to the students and as approved by the faculty in their collective responsibility for the curriculum' [AAUP 1995]. It should be noted in this quote that the course is to be approved by the faculty as a whole. This implies that the content and competencies of the course are derived by decisions made collectively by the faculty... To continue to use lectures and use multiple choice exams when these methods will not meet the course competencies (objectives) because a faculty member believes academic freedom allows it, shortchanges our students and disrespects the whole process of curriculum development (Berger 1998, 96).

I would not argue that the resistance to the assessment movement emerges simply from irresponsible faculty members, but assessment does bring with it the need to change one's habit and the challenge to find new ways to improve one's teaching methods. It adds a layer of work to an already busy academic life and is psychologically discomfoting to one's sense of competency. This certainly contributes to the initial broad reluctance to engage in assessment efforts. Nonetheless, other factors also contribute to the general resistance to the assessment movement.

As mentioned earlier, assessment can help make explicit our individual and communal missions, but it runs the risk impeding on academic freedom. Even if individual faculty don't have the right to be free from some basic pressures to conform to a departmental vision, departments may be worried that administrations may use assessment policies to control the faculty in some measure. Using a Foucaultian analysis, Leanne Broadhead and Sean Howard (1998) have argued that assessment plays a role in the restriction of academic freedom via a disciplining of the faculty. Specifically, they focused on the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the U.K., a measure to assess the quality of departments in order to determine funding. This kind of assessment is directly aimed at disciplining faculty, so this effort initiated by the Conservative government of June 1992 is not exactly analogous to the present push for explicitly stating and assessing learning goals for students. Nonetheless, student-outcomes assessment, once performed, can be used precisely for the purposes of undermining an undesired faculty or faculty member.

In response to concerns like this, Larry G. Gerber has argued for the importance of a robust academic freedom irreducible to the general freedom of speech by emphasizing the need for a shared governance model within the academy in order to protect the integrity of higher liberal arts education from administrative interests.

Without shared governance, our colleges and universities would be less likely to foster the unimpeded pursuit and dissemination of knowledge that are necessary for the healthy development of society; they would also be less likely to provide students with the broad liberal education they need to become informed citizens who can participate fully in our democracy (Gerber 2001).

Dianne Gardener (2005) argues that there is no fundamental conflict between assessment and academic freedom, emphasizing the role of shared governance as Gerber does. The link between academic freedom and self-governance is not new. The Harvard Law Review's lengthy report on academic freedom in 1968 also emphasized this same point: "By obtaining a voice in decisions of academic policy, faculty members are able to secure an area in which scholarship can thrive free from administrative restraint" ("Academic Freedom," 1968, 1049). The point here is that faculty must own the assessment process to ensure that assessment cannot be used against them in an illegitimate way. This would include keeping the data confidential and presenting the findings in way that does not tie successes or failures with any particular faculty member or course. Of course, if the faculty conducts its assessment well and finds room for improvement, the administration may legitimately expect changes in the program.

Approaching the issue from this angle, Richard Hersh provides three reasons to engage in rigorous and honest assessment, providing an ideal, a prudential and a deontic motivation:

First, because our primary responsibility is educational—student learning is our *raison d'être*—and we know that appropriate and timely feedback to students, which requires formative and summative assessment, increases student learning. Appropriately assessing student learning is the best way we as "learning organizations" can explain and defend to ourselves, our students, and others our curricula, pedagogies, and proposed changes.

Second, we in the academy *ought* to take the lead on assessment and accountability because we are professionals. Because of our training and professional status we are obligated and best equipped to assess learning. Might I also say that if we do not do it, others less capable will do it for us.

Third, whether private or public, we are all subsidized by the public, either directly through tax revenues or by the subsidy for privates through tax exemption. We thus have a responsibility to the public to be transparent in our assessment and accountability. Answering the question "what difference do you make?" can best be answered by including evidence of student learning (Hersh 2004, 2).

Moreover, when Universities lack quality assessment information to measure their performance, other 'assessors' will offer their opinions without challenge. *U.S. News & World Report's* rankings, widely criticized by universities for its methodology that greatly advantages wealthy and old institutions, "filled a vacuum" (Hersh 2004, 3), since academies have not offered their own way to assess the quality of their education. At this same time, college education in the U.S. is becoming increasingly more accessible, but critics are becoming louder that the quality of the

student turned out is increasingly lower. Robust assessment provides tools for the academics to accurately represent themselves to potential students and to critics and ensure that the critics' claims are not accurate after all.

University administrators, who for the most part are interested in maintaining the quality of education, are attempting to manage the university in a fiscally responsible way. Often they may place pressure on faculties to increase the number of filled seats per section at the same time that college recruiters tout the intimate class settings as an advantage of the institution. This is especially problematic in 'state-assisted' institutions, which in general have felt over recent decades a reduction of support from 40-70% of the budget to only 15-25% (Hersh 2004, 4). Having solid assessment demonstrating the advantages one offers students in one's smaller classes can provide a buffer to those pressures. Likewise, when those fiscal needs cannot be ignored, assessment will help inform faculty the best way to deliver the highest quality they can to larger class sizes.

Hersh notes that an important part of the shift of popular opinion from seeing higher education as a public good to a private good to be supported by its potential benefactors is the rhetoric of college marketers that has emphasized the student's gain in terms of future expected income as a reason to invest in a college education. If you're going to college to get a better job, then why should those not getting that better job pay your way? Universities may wish to reframe their marketing to emphasize the importance of education to the commonwealth. Evidence of the value of education will make the case much more effectively than rhetoric, and assessment is the key to accumulating that evidence.

It should be clear that engaging in a robust assessment plan is an act that is required by academic freedom and both protects and augments academic freedom. As a privilege of the academy granted for the sake of the common good, academic freedom requires that the faculty responsibly instruct the student body. Assessment is the means to measure objectively how well the faculty is upholding its end of the bargain. Further, the evidence of good learning serves to protect the value of the academy from skeptics and critics and attracts those gifted and dedicated students who value what the academy has to offer. Evidence of poor learning, while difficult to receive, merely records what is actually taking place, so serves as an opportunity to address the problems to make progress. Finally, bringing the faculty together to clarify what exactly they wish to honor in their discipline and to share techniques to facilitate student learning will only enhance the ability of individual members to contribute as they can.

Assessment and the Socially Conscience Academy

At this point, I would like to return to the specific challenge emerging from Kerr's critique of socially active academy. I claimed that the activities of the academy inevitably result in endorsements, explicit or implicit, so that Kerr's main contentions were exaggerations that at most should serve to caution academics about the potential abuse of authority in the classroom. They do not succeed in motivating a limitation on the freedom of the academics to engage public discourse. We should remember, though, that it was argued that an atmosphere of social activism may result in colleagues assessing each other's contributions to the academy more in terms of loyalty to the cause than in traditional discipline-based competency.

I believe that Kerr's concern here is a legitimate one. Anecdotally, a colleague at my university expressed displeasure that so many professors have posted LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer) Ally stickers on their doors. This practice comes from optional training sessions offered to faculty and students sensitizing them to issues facing this community in hopes to create a safer environment on campus for the community. The stickers serve as signals to students that the faculty member has taken the training and is accepting of their orientation. The colleague expressed that he is not homophobic, but does agree with this practice, since it potentially places the professor in the role of something like a counselor. He prefers to show by his conduct that he is open-minded and accepting, without somehow explicitly signaling he is in alliance with this community. After all, such explicit alliance may put off students holding 'traditional' values, and a professor must make sure that all students feel equally accepted.

This concern relates directly to assessment, since institutions or departments may very well have desired learning outcomes that focus on a value embedded in a larger social agenda. At my university, we have a general education requirement of a 'diverse communities' course, and often race, gender, and orientation issues will be examined in order to meet the requirement. May this requirement may be used in a way to infringe on the academic freedom of faculty members as Kerr suggests. Will this explicit learning goal require faculty to promote an ideologically enshrined value, regardless of the faculty member's views, and if so, is this an unjustified imposition?

Given my examination of the nature of academic freedom above, any given faculty ought to be free to promote a social agenda. Nothing prevents other faculties from promoting different agendas, and if the agenda did not serve the interests of some portions of the society, then that particular faculty would suffer from a lack of general support (low enrollment, shunning by other academics, etc.). While it is difficult to *require* a social agenda, it also is inevitable that the academy will support social and political agendas, even (or perhaps especially) when the academy retreats into the Newmanesque seclusion that Kerr encourages. For example, Noam Chomsky (2007) recently spoke about the need for an academy free to criticize government propaganda and media complicity. He was mostly concerned with the US academy's embarrassing history of "conformist subservience to those in power," including the tolerance of the current demonization of Iran as a proaedeutic to justifying war with the country.

Since the academy's activities are understood to directly contribute to the common good precisely because of its potential to speak to issues suppressed by the interests of other sectors of society, programs like West Chester University's 'diverse communities' general education requirement are legitimately encouraged as an expression of academic freedom. Let us for the moment forget the fact that appreciation for diversity is a non-partisan value. Even apparently partisan interests may be protected: for example, when the scientific community almost unanimously accepts that global warming is occurring and that human activity contributes to this, the US academy may rightly promote an environmental agenda, even if this favors the Green Party, or tends to favor Democrats more than Republicans. Consider that:

academic freedom implies not just *freedom from* constraint but also *freedom for* faculty and students to work within a scholarly community to develop the

intellectual and personal qualities required of citizens in a vibrant democracy and participants in a vigorous economy. Academic freedom is protected by society so that faculty and students can use that freedom to promote the larger good (AACU 2006, 7).

While academics ought not distort information to serve one party over another, they most certainly can present the information as they think most appropriate, even if this results in an accidental privileging of a particular party. Again, Robert Ivie (2005) makes use of Dewey to make a further point:

Positive academic freedom, as Dewey would say, “is not a state but an act”—“no man and no mind was ever emancipated merely by being left alone. Removal of formal limitations is but a negative condition,” just as a mere “belief in intellectual freedom where it does not exist contributes only to complacency in virtual enslavement, to sloppiness, superficiality and recourse to sensations as a substitute for ideas.” (Ivie 2005, 171 [quoting Dewey 1927, 168])

Given Dewey’s reflection, we ought not merely admit the ‘freedom for,’ but ought to expect a robust exercise of it. Given that education is properly transformative and that such a transformation cannot occur without it being directed by some valuation or other, academics are necessarily promoting social agendas, or are ‘academies’ in name only. Obviously, the broad academic community is enriched when individual institutions define for themselves their values and the methods they will employ to facilitate their student transformations. This may even include Newmanesque academies, secluded from contemporary social concerns as much as possible.

An individual faculty member may always argue against current practices and values of the faculty in an attempt to alter the communal expectations that frame their program, but success is not guaranteed. Failing to persuade, the same individual faculty member may legitimately be required to follow the guidelines set by the department or institution and to participate in any assessment program related to those guidelines. The individual should have ample leeway to meet the requirements and options that allow for the individual to incorporate her expertise, but as a member of a discipline and a faculty, the individual academic must comply with the basic communal values and guidelines, including effectively teaching to student learning goals that have a social agenda not traditionally tied to the discipline itself.

Conclusion

I have argued that faculty ought to embrace self-directed assessment in order both to prevent its becoming a tool of limiting academic freedom and to undermine the claims of its critics. If academics do not devise their own assessment plans through a principle of self-governance, the interests of other sectors of society will only increase the pressure for some external body to develop assessment models. Further, assessment is rightly viewed as an extension of academic freedom, since it enables academics to better accomplish their own goal of preparing students for participation in the *polis*. While there are different elements variably associated with academic freedom, the concept involves protection from undue interference as well as an expectation of socially progressive activity.

I have also argued that assessment plans ought to reflect these social agendas of the academy. Program-wide assessment of learning outcomes reflecting a social agenda promoted by a faculty is protected under academic freedom, even if individual faculty members do not agree with that social agenda. The freedom of the individual faculty member does not override the freedom of the faculty as a whole, even when the expectation is not understood as being directly rooted in the traditional understanding of the particular discipline. There may be nothing inherent in philosophy that requires a student of the discipline to adopt a particular attitude toward the environment, or toward issues of class, race, gender or sexual orientation. Nonetheless, a particular philosophy faculty may indeed commit itself to certain progressive ideals, incorporate student learning goals reflecting those ideals into the program, require its members to address those goals in their instruction and assess student achievement in light of those goals.

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