

Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the concept of academic freedom has any relevance in the present discussion of higher education in Sweden.

There are, of course, few who outright want to discard the notion of academic freedom. But it has become a matter of contention whether the special rules and institutional arrangements that are seen as inherent in the idea of academic freedom can be upheld in a globalized “knowledge society”. What was once a marginal activity on the outskirts of society, at least in terms of numbers, has now become an enterprise that daily involves more citizens than most traditional Swedish industries; the elite university has become the mass university. Expectations of what institutions of higher learning and research should deliver have skyrocketed: make new discoveries, expand our horizons, create economic growth, supply skilled labor, solve social problems, contribute to equal opportunity and gender equality and stimulate individual self-realization.

There is a general consensus regarding the advantages of this academic expansion: democratization, increased social mobility, higher educational levels and more scientific research. As for the downsides there are more divergent opinions. Some argue that we must accept that the idea of the university as place where teachers and students follow individual curiosity and make serendipitous discoveries is nothing more than an antiquated notion that has little to do with the realities of today's specialized and competitive university culture. Others worry that something unique is being lost. Universities, they claim, should be guided by a pursuit of truth that is independent of profit or political upsides, in accordance with the traditions of academic freedom. In the long-run this is the best guarantee that higher education and research will deliver the goods.

“Academic freedom”, however, is a notoriously vague concept. Below the rhetorical level there is seldom agreement on what it exactly means, which groups or institutions should enjoy it and, perhaps most important, why they should do so. This study poses four questions regarding academic freedom: 1) What is it? 2) What role has it played in the transformation of Swedish higher education post-WWII? 3) Is it possible/desirable to uphold academic freedom in the “knowledge society”? and 4) If so, what are the appropriate institutional arrangements?

The first chapter takes stock of the contemporary debate on the state of higher education, mainly in Sweden but with some international references.

The second chapter delves into different theories about the nature of academic freedom. Four tensions within the concept are highlighted. Firstly, the difference between the German and the American tradition. When Wilhelm von Humboldt put forth his vision at the beginning of the nineteenth century he saw academic freedom as part of building a nation; the state gave the universities freedom in order to create a competent and responsible elite. In the US institutions of higher learning were conceived as a part of civil society (though often with public funding) which created a stronger incentive for teachers to safeguard their individual freedom against university administrations and boards.

Secondly, the conflict between institutional autonomy and the faculty's academic freedom. Some see autonomy from the state as a condition for free research, while others maintain that independent university administrations can pose a threat to the academic freedom of the faculty.

The third tension is the classical conflict between “positive” and “negative” liberty. Is it sufficient that there are no restrictions in research and teaching or does academic freedom entail some kind of structural or institutional arrangements – for instance, money – in order to be realized? And lastly, there is a discussion about academic duty; if the academic faculty is to have certain privileges shouldn't also its duties to students, the university and the surrounding society be more clearly defined?

In the third chapter the concept of academic freedom is broken up into its different component parts: 1) Individual freedom of research 2) Individual freedom of teaching 3) the unity of teaching and research 4) the collective freedom of the faculty 5) Institutional autonomy from the state 6) Freedom to study and 7)

Independence from economic interests. These freedoms can be mutually supportive, but they can also counterbalance each other. Increased freedom on one level can mean less freedom on another. A meaningful discussion must weigh the individual importance of these different aspects of academic freedom.

The fourth chapter outlines the development of the Swedish system of higher education, focusing mainly on the period after WWII. It highlights the two great waves of reform; first the sixties and the seventies when values such as employability, equality, social use, uniformity and centralization were stressed, then the last two decades, which have been characterized by great faith in autonomy, New Public Management and market solutions. This historical analysis shows, on the one hand, how wide the pendulum has swung between state control and laissez-faire in Sweden. On the other hand two historical continuities are visible: the persistent low status of teaching within Swedish higher education and devolution of power to local and regional levels that started already in the seventies. Another point is that the roll-back of the state during these last years is somewhat deceptive, in part because of the universities increased dependence on external funding, in part because of aggressive external evaluation systems.

Chapter five takes stock of the seven aspects of academic freedom that were defined in chapter three in a historical light. The results are divergent.

Individual freedom of research is upheld on a rhetorical level but in reality weakened because of the dependence on external funding and the general decline of the power of university teachers within the university.

Individual freedom of teaching is basically intact, though it should be noted that this freedom has been circumscribed for quite some time by the collective powers of the faculty to determine the curriculum.

The unity of teaching and research continues to be a very troubled area in the Swedish system. This is mainly due to the low status of teaching and the fragmentary nature of the faculty. A unified career system (tenure-track) with equal teaching loads for all teachers seems like a good solution to what has become a chronic weakness.

The collective freedom of the faculty is probably the academic freedom that has taken the worst beating. At least constitutionally, as it no longer is mandated by law. But it is doubtful whether this

freedom can be fully restored, given the enormous changes that have occurred within higher education under the last decades.

On appearance *the institutional autonomy* of universities and colleges has increased greatly. But there is great skepticism to whether this has led to greater academic freedom. Some see the existing measures of autonomy as unsatisfactory because of lack of funding and constitutional safeguards and demand full autonomy. Others see autonomy as a problematic ideal which has weakened institutions of higher learning in relation to outside forces.

The traditional *freedom to choose what to study* has been greatly weakened. Entrance to all programs and fields is restricted and most students are organized in set programs. Still, a substantial number of students compose their own degrees.

Independence of economic interests has also decreased. In some fields, notably medicine, many researchers have their own companies or have secondary employment in other companies. Some argue that this movement toward “academic capitalism” is unproblematic while others claim that the integrity of university culture is being compromised.

The last chapter lays out a platform for academic freedom in the knowledge society. The point of departure is an attempt to synthesize the European and American tradition.

Regarding the issue of institutional autonomy the recommendation is a cautious movement towards increased independence. This presupposes, however, a high degree of responsibility at the level of the state, both in terms of economic support and constitutional safeguards for both individual and collective academic freedom. A state strategy for the great number of universities and colleges that cannot, should not or do not want to be autonomous must also be developed. The California Plan for Higher Education from the sixties is invoked as a possible model.

But regardless of what happens with institutional autonomy the position of the individual university teacher must be strengthened. To this aim a basic constitution for all Swedish institutions of higher learning is proposed:

- All qualified teachers must be part of a unified career-plan (tenure-track). All should have equal obligations/rights to teach and do research. The distribution should be roughly 50 percent teaching and 50 percent research.

- All qualified teachers must have the right to continuous periods of paid research-time, sabbaticals. This should be an individual right, and not subjected to collective faculty approval.
- All teachers have an academic duty to contribute to their university or college as an inspiring social and intellectual environment.
- All institutions of higher learning must have a faculty board that determines the curriculum and distributes the collective university funding for research in cooperation with the university administration.

If a university or a college wants to hire a teacher that has received his or hers Ph. D. from the recruiting institution period of six years should have passed since the l degree was awarded.