

Doctoral Project 9: Academic Freedom in Higher Education Teaching: A Comparative Perspective on Europe and the Asia Pacific Rim

Academic values

The two key academic values, 'university autonomy' – the freedom of the individual university to run its own affairs without interference from the outside (Anderson & Johnson, 1998) – and academic freedom – the right of the individual scholar to follow truth without fear of punishment (Berdahl, 2010) – seem to be well elaborated and are set as significant concepts in the field of higher education. Beyond doubt, this is true for university autonomy as part of contemporary discourses about New Public Management and managerialism. Similar could be said about academic freedom in research and publishing.

Academic freedom in university teaching

But even if academic values are a common and repeatedly mentioned topic in literature and research there is still one largely neglected aspect today, namely academic freedom in higher education teaching. Teaching in universities as one of the core tasks is still perceived as a kind of black-box even if it is highly value-laden and historically rooted in universities. In times of mass higher education and globalisation teaching methods, approaches, orientations and the status of teaching in universities changed. This also influenced the perception and application of 'Lehr- und Lernfreiheit' as the heritage of the Humboldtian University.

This project

This research project will examine the role and status of academic freedom in higher education teaching in contemporary university settings in Europe and the Asia Pacific Rim. It will conduct a qualitative research design to examine the policy background, the main discourses and the academic teacher's individual perception of academic freedom in their daily work life. In doing so, it will provide a context rich narrative to inform policy makers, academics and the wider society about the significance of academic freedom in university teaching in different cultures. It tries to close the gap between academic freedom and higher education teaching.