

Academic Freedom and Quality Education: It's Everyone's Job."

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Academic freedom and responsibility have long been topics for public concern and debate. Academic freedom to explore significant and controversial questions is an essential precondition to fulfill the academy's mission of educating students and advancing knowledge.

There is, however, an additional dimension of academic freedom that was not well developed in the original principles, and that has to do with the responsibilities of faculty members for educational programs. 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. But what constitutes a quality Faculty? Credentials? Experience? Classroom performance? Test scores? Parent satisfaction?

In any education of quality, students encounter an abundance of intellectual diversity—new knowledge, different perspectives, competing ideas, and alternative claims of truth. This intellectual diversity is experienced by some students as exciting and challenging, while others are confused and overwhelmed by the complexity.

The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them. -Albert Einstein

India has been experiencing tremendous economic and social transformation with the rapidly changing world economic scenario. To match the pace of global economic progress, we need healthy and skilled manpower- this can be ensured through a robust education system. Increasingly, educators are becoming aware of their responsibility to make education meaningful in a more international, more global context. We now recognize that our students must navigate a complex, transforming world that is becoming ever more interconnected and interdependent. Education must provide students with skills to navigate this globalizing world, as well as an international perspective that will enable them to

reflectively and critically understand their roles in today's society as professionals and as compassionate human beings - "citizens of the world."

Linda Zecher, vice president of the U.S. Public Sector at Microsoft, said "the education community is facing an enormous challenge in developing and delivering 21st century teaching methodologies to keep pace with today's knowledge economy. Within that challenge lies an opportunity for community members to support innovators, helping states and educators to discover and foster the long-term education solutions that exist within their systems."

The information revolution that is transforming communication poses special challenges for communicating across cultures and continents. The challenge of the information age is enormous for all. The challenge today is to incorporate into teacher preparation programs new "21st century" skills, tools, content, and assessments so that the next generation of teachers is able to teach them effectively. The goal is to improve and enrich teacher preparation programs by providing faculty members with access to emerging resources and to a variety of partner organizations to advance 21st century learning.

Teachers often do not see the relationship between the events they experience in their own classrooms and the generalizations about teaching and learning they are taught in universities. Many teachers report that they learned little of value about teaching until they began to teach. This finding challenges teacher education programs to create more effective ways to help prospective and experienced teachers connect general principles of teaching and student learning to specific problems and events in classrooms

Today new challenges to academic freedom have arisen from both the right and the left. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY have long been topics for public concern and debate. Academic freedom to explore significant and controversial questions is an essential precondition to fulfill the academy's mission of educating students and advancing knowledge. When learning is eventually liberated from institutionalised teaching, people will wonder how a system as inefficient as the current education system lasted so long. For a man-made institutionalised mechanism setup to impart education to all, just consider the many failings of our education system; most people cannot learn what they want in spite of willing to pay for it. The publicly funded education system in India is not capable of meeting the quality challenge alone. India already has the world's second largest publicly funded (or aided) education system after China, with total enrolment of about 10.5 million. It is the

sheer size of the system that inhibits quality improvement. Public funds are stretched just to meet administrative costs. While administrative reform and better targeting of education subsidies can be a long term policy goal. The immediate need is to create additional capacity, especially in professional and technical courses that meet global standards. Quantity is not the only factor which is a matter of concern but the report submitted by McKinsey that only 25% of Indian graduates are considered fit to work at MNCs. In Indian thought, knowledge is seen as something which liberates. Time has now come to liberate learning from the shackles of institutionalised teaching.

Here, SEZs devoted to education may be a solution. They can use a public-private partnership model funded by FDI and the Indian private sector. Since these SEZs will be in urban areas or in the suburbs of big metros, it will be easier for investors to acquire land and create world class education infrastructure. Syllabus flexibility will be there which will allow courses to be designed that meet the professional and research requirement of industry, not just in India, but globally. Fee structure will allow innovative fee structures. These SEZs will make immense sense in trade policy terms. In 2007, India spent \$300 million importing intellectual property from the US, and spent \$3 billion, 10 times that amount, importing education, most of it Mode 2 (Indian students going to the US). With world class education in SEZs in India, the import substitution and addition to GDP will be a big gain in itself. If it succeeds, very soon, top US and UK universities will face stiff competition from these SEZs.

The 11th Five-year Plan envisages an allocation of Rs.1.25 lakh crore for elementary education and Rs.53,000 crore for secondary education. It also proposes to set up 6,000 model schools that would serve as a benchmark for excellence in secondary schooling. The 11th plan has apportioned Rs.5,000 crore for ICT, but the implementation of ICT depends on connectivity between schools and the major educational bodies. In addition to connectivity, there should be training and orientation of teachers towards using computers for educational and management purposes to enhance a school effectiveness.

The networking and sharing possibilities provided by information and communication technologies, as well as free and abundant access to information everywhere, now presents the exciting possibility that individuals would be able to plan their own learning, according to their interest and needs. They would be able to learn from whoever they want, when and where they want, and at their own pace.

Academic freedom is a qualified freedom, which designates liberties within an academic context. As such, it serves as an antidote to intellectual parochialism in our institutions of higher learning. Clearly, academic freedom belongs in the hands of the responsible academic— the true, balanced, integral champion of the common good of mankind in whose hands the progress of a nation is entrusted. In the hands of anyone less endowed it can become a tool capable of dismantling the very foundations upon which nation building is premised. 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. In these matters faculty must work collaboratively with their colleagues in their departments, schools, and institutions as well as with relevant administrators. 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. In college they can explore different ways to relate to others, imagine alternative futures, decide on their intended careers, and consider their larger life's work of contributing to the common good intellectual diversity and academic freedom In any education of quality, students encounter an abundance of intellectual diversity—new knowledge, different perspectives, competing ideas, and alternative claims of truth. This intellectual diversity is experienced by some students as exciting and challenging, while others are confused and overwhelmed by the complexity.

Liberal education is the best and most powerful way to build students' capacities to form their own judgments about complex or controversial questions

There is a fine line between institutional accountability, and institutional autonomy. Institutions of higher learning should be autonomous, but this does not mean that they are not accountable to the nation that spawns them. Institutional accountability should therefore not be perceived as an erosion of institutional autonomy, as long as institutions strive to achieve overarching national strategic objectives, as they manifest in the core business of education and training. Head of academic institutions must be courageous

enough to stand firm for academic freedom, especially against threats, and must serve as examples for standard of values and practices.

The Teach India initiative started as an idea where committed individuals who were always keen on doing something for the society came forward to become the catalyst of social change. Sixty of India's most committed NGOs, schools and other social organisations have already pledged their support to the Teach India movement. Doctors and Lawyers, businessmen and housewives, in fact, even students and retired people trooped in to become teachers. Their objective is to bring a difference in their lives. The response is so overwhelming that there is again a shortage of infrastructure to accommodate 89,000 people as volunteers.

We have so many industrial houses in the country. They should come forward. Human resources will be the biggest problem tomorrow, so corporate must invest in education today. It is not charity but business sense.

Peer evaluation: Academic freedom depends on the set of practices by which faculty, instructional staff and other academic scholars continually establish and re-establish standards of ethical behavior and good practice, and monitor the implementation of these standards on campus. The process is largely self regulating, as in other professions such as law and medicine, and it is based on the principle that academic workers are in the best position to make academic decisions. The peer evaluation process takes place in a variety of forums—from informal hallway discussions to formal seminars to professional, discipline-specific academic conferences to editorial review boards of scholarly journals to peer review panels of funding agencies and organizations. These practices, over time, have allowed faculty to create, set and enforce the standards within and among academic disciplines for evaluating facts, data, ideas, hypotheses and theories.

Shared governance: in well-functioning colleges and universities, educators are partners with administrators in the process known as shared governance, which is the process of decision-making that encompasses everything from budgets, hiring and discipline, to curriculum and academic standards.

- Increased emphasis on student assessment will lead to improvements in teaching and learning
- Peer review of teaching
- “Top down” initiatives relating to assessment and teaching/learning improvements, but success dependent on faculty ownership
- Student Assessment

- Teaching Assessment Program
- Assessment Within Major Service Courses
- Institutional Status, Accreditation, Reputation, Post-Graduation Response to Employer Demand
- Alumni Satisfaction

When it comes to higher education, there is a wide gap between girls and boys enrolment. The rural-urban divide in terms of the gender parity index is also a factor that needs attention. In rural areas, we need to make education accessible by opening more schools for girls and also make the curriculum relevant by introducing vocational studies. To bridge the significant gap in enrollment of girls, the government launched the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in 2004. These are residential schools which helped to bring out-of-school girl children back to school.

Youth Development Society is trying to help poor children by preparing them to enter in a English medium school. This will help in upward mobility. Their philosophy is that the teachers at the centre act as mentors, helping the children review their work from school, clarify doubts, address difficulties and provide intellectual and emotional support.

The atmosphere and culture of freedom of expression and tolerance of differences must be nurtured in the academic institutions, and be promoted in the society. Head of academic institutions must be courageous enough to stand firm for academic freedom, especially against threats, and must serve as examples for standard of values and practices.

Teachers should be able to learn, investigate and improve their professional practice thoughtfully. The quality of teachers is closely related to the quality of students. Who should decide the educational policies? Why can't educators and teachers become the prominent determinants in shaping educational policies? If this keeps happening, how can we ensure sustainability in reform? All approaches are backed by research. It is just like the fight between the behaviorists and constructivists. So, how can we sustain once a decision is made? Every policy is politically driven. There is a big issue here unanswered, regarding the sustainability of reform, academic freedom and ultimately the quality education.

