

2011

## Faculty Perceptions of Academic Freedom at a Private Religious University

James A. Swezey

*Liberty University*, [jaswezey@liberty.edu](mailto:jaswezey@liberty.edu)

T. Christopher Ross

*Regent University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ\\_fac\\_pubs](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ_fac_pubs)

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Swezey, James A. "Faculty Perceptions of Academic Freedom at a Private Religious University" (2011). Faculty Publications and Presentations. Paper 224. [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ\\_fac\\_pubs/224](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ_fac_pubs/224). Reprinted from ICCTE Journal 6(1): <http://icctejournal.org/issues/v6i1/v6i1-swezey-ross/>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu).

## Faculty Perceptions of Academic Freedom at a Private Religious University

James A. Swezey, Regent University

T. Christopher Ross, Regent University

Swezey, J. A., & Ross, T. C. (2011). Faculty perceptions of academic freedom at a private religious university. *ICCTE Journal*, 6(1). Retrieved from <http://icctejournal.org/issues/v6i1/v6i1-swezey-ross/>

### Abstract

Academic freedom is viewed by many in higher education as an indispensable foundational principle offering protection to university faculty. University faculty working within schools of education rely on the protection of academic freedom to pursue and develop new knowledge, frameworks, and pedagogies with which they can train and equip the next generation of classroom teachers and school administrators. Private religious universities have been a part of the American education landscape since the founding of Harvard University, yet the perception exists that faculty at religious universities are *de facto* inhibited by the religious commitment of many of these institutions. This study examines the concept of academic freedom as viewed by 18 senior faculty at Regent University, a private religious institution. Findings demonstrate faculty generally support an institutional perspective of academic freedom and express a high level of comfort with limited restrictions on academic freedom in light of the university's religious mission. Implications exist for all faculty, especially those at religious institutions.

## **Faculty Perceptions of Academic Freedom at a Private Religious University**

America maintains a rich tradition of universities founded upon religious tenets, beginning with the venerable Harvard in 1636. While institutions like Harvard, the College of William and Mary, and Yale long ago abandoned their religious missions (Edington, 2006; Marsden, 1994), new universities arose to take their places. These new institutions purposely established missions designed to perpetuate the religious traditions of their founders. Regent University now carries this explicitly religious tradition forward as indicated by its motto: Christian leadership to change the world. The university mission is “to serve as a leading center of Christian thought and action providing an excellent education from a biblical perspective and global context in pivotal professions to equip Christian leaders to change the world” (Regent University, 2010b). In order to fulfill its mission, Regent seeks to establish an environment conducive to the expansion of knowledge and truth, which necessitates a high degree of academic freedom. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the perceptions of academic freedom among senior faculty at a religious university.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The concept of academic freedom in the American academy was definitively influenced by German scholarship. Hofstadter and Metzger (1955) relate that two paradigmatic concepts entered U.S. academia after the Civil War and have continued to the present. First is *lernfreiheit*, which granted faculty complete latitude and discretion in the teaching of their students, sans administrative intrusion, and a student’s freedom to study what and where he chose. The second is *lehrfreiheit*, the freedom of the researcher to take any direction the research seemed to indicate, without external authoritative restraints.

At first blush, it may seem that Christian scholars at religious institutions do not definitionally have this kind of freedom. Diekema (2000) distinguishes between individual academic freedom and institutional academic freedom while recognizing that both are necessary for professors to gather and transmit knowledge. Christian scholarship is generally conceived as academic freedom within the bounds of a broad Christian responsibility. For example, Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2004) posit academic research as an attempt to “seek truth in order to more intelligently love the world and every person in it” (p. 159). And Cavanaugh (2004) echoes the communal aspect of academic freedom when he positions commitment to one another in Christ as part of the Christian scholar’s understanding of academic freedom.

Indeed, Notre Dame historian, George Marsden (1994), relates that historically universities conjoined an individual sense of academic freedom with the institutional or community sense of academic freedom, which some religious universities have attempted to maintain. Marsden traces the individual and community senses of academic freedom all the way back to the birth of the university movement in medieval times. Russell (1993) agreed with this assessment when he noted that academic freedom in Christian universities maintains historical roots “in an intellectual tradition created to defend the autonomy of the medieval Church” (p. 1) from interference from the State regarding matters of spiritual principles. While the German understanding of academic freedom has been dominant in U.S. academe, possibly as an outgrowth of the Enlightenment, the Christian community sense of academic freedom is bound into the fabric of the university itself. Thus Habecker (1991) can assert that “academic freedom must be subordinate to the over-arching mission of the organization” (p. 177).

Ream and Glanzer (2007) submit that “differences in definition concerning academic freedom are at times more about human nature than about academic freedom” (p. 86). They

explain that Reinhold Niebuhr's three views of humanity—(a) classical Greco-Roman (continuous self-conflict); (b) Christian, in which one's identity and freedom are dependent upon God; and (c) modern, which emphasizes humanity versus world and inevitable progress—have shaped the discussion on academic freedom, with the latter two beliefs becoming paradigmatic for today's discussion. Thus, Christian scholars operate within the understanding that they belong to their brothers and sisters in Christ, and that God grounds humanity and grants completeness.

## **Literature Review**

### **Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is a complex term that eludes concise definition. Poch (1993) describes its use in American universities as “the intellectual liberties required to explore, expound, and further knowledge” (p. 3). O’Neil (1997) expands on this conceptualization when he writes, “Academic freedom treats classroom speech as the core of protected expression for reasons that reflect the academy’s unique pursuit of truth and understanding” (p. ix). In fact he explains these freedoms may extend beyond the classroom to include “what a professor says outside the classroom and to the speech of other members of the academic community...” (p. ix). Post (2006) presents a more constrained view of the subject primarily within a social institutional context when he writes,

Rights of academic freedom are ... designed to facilitate the professional self-regulation of the professoriate, so that academic freedom safeguards interests that are constituted by the perspective and horizon of the corporate body of the faculty. The function of academic freedom is not to liberate individual professors from all forms of institutional regulation, but to ensure that faculty within the university are free to engage in the

professionally competent forms of inquiry and teaching that are necessary for the realization of the social purposes of the university. (p. 64)

In his description of the Academic Freedom amendment to the British Education Reform Bill of 1988, Russell (1993) describes a more traditional view of academic freedom as

...the freedom for academics within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy. It is the freedom to follow a line of research where it leads, regardless of the consequences, and the corresponding freedom to teach the truth as we see it.... (p. 18)

### **Academic Freedom and Religious Institutions**

Academic freedom has always been held in tension within religious institutions. It is a topic of frequent coverage among journalists who write about higher education. Recent examples include controversies at Catholic universities over the hiring (or not) of openly homosexual administrators (Jaschik, 2010a) and the Canadian Association of University Teacher's effort to create a list of institutions that require statements of faith based on the association's belief that such organizations do not deserve to be called universities (Jaschik, 2010b). Poch (1993) notes, "Medieval professors had opportunities to explore and contribute to new realms of knowledge as long as they did not trespass on the doctrinal authority of the church" (p. 3). To this end, academic freedom at religious universities is often predicated upon theological language.

Regent's statement of academic freedom is no exception:

We regard academic freedom as a sacred trust and God-given responsibility that encourages the scholarly pursuit of truth in each academic discipline to which God has called us. The foundation of academic freedom is the belief that God is the author of all

truth. All faculty are encouraged to seek wisdom and understanding, acquire knowledge and teach others. Therefore, faculty need not fear where their pursuit of knowledge and wisdom may lead, but rather be guided by the fear of the Lord. (Regent University, 2010a)

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), established in 1915, operates in order to “advance academic freedom and shared governance, to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education, and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good” (AAUP, 2009). The AAUP was instrumental in bringing about the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. Item two of the statement clearly recognizes the liberty of religious universities to establish qualifications on academic freedom: “Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment” (AAUP, 1940, ¶ 7). The *Statement* was reinterpreted as follows in 1970: “Most church-related institutions no longer need or desire the departure from the principle of academic freedom implied in the 1940 *Statement*, and we do not now endorse such a departure” (AAUP, 1970, Item 3).

However, Ream and Glanzer (2007) posit that academic freedom cannot be separated from metaphysical beliefs (religious or otherwise), especially those related to the nature of humanity. According to them, liberal education is based on the view that a religious institution's metaphysics should not intrude on academic research. But Wagner (2006) writes that evangelical universities that require faculty to sign statements of faith as a condition of employment gravely limit academic freedom in the academy. He goes so far as to impeach the very purpose of these institutions when he writes that “rigid orthodoxy does not go well with the quest for knowledge”

(p. 21). Yet Wagner fails to perceive that public institutions operate within their own metaphysical worldview and constrain academic freedom when faculty deviate from the cultural norms of the institution, whether conservative or liberal. This apparent hypocrisy is a common complaint among Christian scholars who work at public institutions.

The point remains that for religious universities, statements of faith are a critical way to distinguish the unique missions of private religious universities from their secular counterparts at public universities. Ream and Glanzer (2007) note that secularization is “institutionalized in colleges and universities through a host of concrete institutional practices, not merely through intellectual means” (p. 65). While noting that faith statements are often criticized, they nonetheless make the case that “maintaining the particular theological heritage and traditions of a religious college often starts with requiring a faculty member to affirm the particular mission and identity of the institution” (p. 75). This affirmation often takes the form of agreement or alignment with the institution’s statement of faith.

Wagner (2006) makes a vacuous argument against faith statements when he concludes that popular faculty with high evaluation marks are sometimes wrongly dismissed for violating the faith statements to which they agreed to adhere. Yet, he fails to note that examples abound of tenured faculty members at public universities disciplined and even fired despite their claims of academic freedom. The most recent case to be popularized in the media is that of Ward Churchill who recently had a jury award vacated by a judge. Faculty can run into trouble even at private religious universities where there is no requirement to sign faith statements. Norman Finkelstein was denied tenure and fired from DePaul University for expressing what his detractors considered anti-Israel views. In the case of the professors fired at Cedarville University, the



underlying issue was not theological, but rather collegiality. The fault in many situations doesn't lie in the faith statement, but rather the faculty member's unwillingness to adhere to the statement. Wagner also weakly argues that recent doctoral graduates are compelled by market forces to accept teaching positions at institutions whose religious views do not approximate their own. In order to make this argument, Wagner must embrace an exclusively individualistic definition of academic freedom, thus denying religious institutions the right to determine their identity and mission.

### **Academic Freedom and the Courts**

Kors and Silvergate (1998), citing Alstyn's article "Academic Freedom and the First Amendment in the Supreme Court of the United States", identify *Adler v. Board of Education* (1952) as the first time the phrase academic freedom was used by the courts. It occurred in a dissenting opinion regarding the New York Board of Regent's regulation excluding from public school employment those persons who belonged to groups that supported the use of force or violence in the overthrow of the federal government. Strum (2006) points to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1957 ruling in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire* as "the first time that there might be a constitutionally protected right to academic freedom" (p. 147). Strum quotes Chief Justice Earl Warren's opinion for the Court: "We believe that there unquestionably was an invasion of the petitioner's liberties in the areas of academic freedom and political expression" (p. 147). In a concurring opinion Justice Frankfurter delinked the protection from the individual and placed it within the context of its benefit for society implying it may be an institutional right (Strum).

Based on this and other decisions, one of the most important clarifications needed in the debate over academic freedom is the complex relationship between academic freedom and the First Amendment's freedom of speech clause (O'Neil, 1997; Poch, 1993). This is a critical

distinction because the Supreme Court has yet to extend full constitutional protection for academic freedom. In fact, American courts have provided faculty a confusing series of decisions as to what speech is protected. Most recently the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit ruled that complaints against university administration made by a professor regarding the handling of an awarded grant were not protected free speech. The court ruled that he would only merit protection if his speech had been made as a private citizen, not in the context of his role as a public employee (Schmidt, 2009). In light of this and other recent cases, Schmidt reports, “The American Association of University Professors has begun aggressively monitoring — and looking to wade into — legal battles over faculty speech” (p. A1). The AAUP is concerned that such rulings will prevent faculty members from speaking out on any issues related to the university workplace. Compounding AAUP concerns about the Court’s actions (or in this case inaction) is the chilling effect of 9/11 (Doumani, 2006) as new federal laws and regulations place even greater restrictions. Schmidt concurs, writing,

The Supreme Court has held for more than half a century that the First Amendment’s restrictions of government infringement on speech protect academic freedom at public education institutions. But it has left unanswered a host of key questions like what types of activities “academic freedom” covers, or whether it affords individual faculty members speech rights beyond those of other citizens. (¶ 18)

Another recent blow to academic freedom came in 2000 when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit ruled in *Urofsky v. Gilmore* that academic freedom applies to higher education institutions and not to individual faculty members. Schmidt (2009) explains that faculty at public institutions of higher education possess no speech rights beyond those of other public employees.

After reading more than 240 cases related to issues involving academic freedom, Standler (2000) found that “the university nearly always wins” (§ 2). Poch (1993) agrees: “Where as the AAUP tends to emphasize the academic freedom of individuals, the courts – and particularly the Supreme Court – tend to recognize institutional academic freedom” (p. 60). Standler also identifies three primary legal barriers erected by the courts. The first is academic abstention which he describes as judges’ refusals “to decide purely academic disputes” (§ 2) in favor of cases which raise issues related to constitutional rights. The second barrier is that untenured faculty members are typically at-will employees and therefore not subject to protective employment laws. The third is that most professors work at government-run universities and are viewed as public employees. Since 1977 the Supreme Court has consistently restricted their right to free speech. As recently as 2006, in one of its most important rulings, the Supreme Court decided in *Garcetti v. Ceballos* that public agencies can discipline their employees for any speech made in connection with their jobs.

### **Research Question**

What are the perceptions of academic freedom expressed by senior faculty at Regent University?

### **Subsidiary Questions**

1. How do faculty define or describe academic freedom?
2. How do faculty perceive academic freedom differs between private religious and public universities?
3. How do faculty perceive religious restrictions on their academic freedom?

## Methods

Case study methodology served as basis of this research study. “Case study methods involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions” (Berg, 2004, p. 251). McDowell (2002) states the quality of research “depends to a significant extent on the availability, careful use, and proper documentation of source material” (p. 54). Conducting research using participant interviews is complicated. Careful use of source material is imperative. The semi-standardized interview structure described by Berg was used during each interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and data coded and analyzed using the constant comparative procedure of open coding. Data was triangulated among participant responses as categories emerged.

## Setting

The examination of religious beliefs must take into consideration the impact of the context or setting in which the phenomena occurred. Creswell (2005) describes setting as “multilayered and interrelated, consisting of such factors as history, religion, politics, economy, and the environment” (p. 447). The setting for this study was Regent University. Regent opened its doors in rented classrooms offering graduate courses in communication in September 1978. As enrollment increased the university added additional school divisions: School of Education (1980); School of Business (1982); School of Divinity (1982); Robertson School of Government (1983); School of Law (1986); School of Psychology and Counseling (1988); and Regent School of Undergraduate Studies (2000). Regent’s Virginia Beach campus includes six major buildings on 70 acres. The fully accredited university offers more than 70 degrees to its 5,300 residential and distance education students. The faculty includes 166 full-time and 377 part-time or adjunct

professors with earned degrees from a variety of public and private universities (Regent University, 2010c).

Regent University most often describes itself using the term “Christian” in promotional materials. Occasionally, it will use the term “evangelical” to describe its approach to the Christian faith from a more narrow perspective. Participants described Regent as diverse, even if it is within a narrow band of Christian religious perspectives. They often noted that while faculty are required to profess to be Christian and sign a statement of faith, they still view themselves as a diverse group. They cite their racial, ethnic, cultural, and denominational differences as evidence of their diversity.

### **Participants**

Primary sources of evidence came through extensive interviews conducted with current and former senior Regent faculty and administrators ( $n=18$ ). Participant gender (*male*=16; *female*=2) and race (*Caucasian*=18) reflected the white, male dominance of the professoriate during Regent’s early history. Participants were identified from each of the seven graduate schools: communication, education, business, divinity, government, law, and psychology and counseling. Participants possessed terminal degrees ( $n=17$ ) or master’s degrees ( $n=1$ ) in their fields of study.

All faculty served in a variety of capacities at the university including deanships, senior administration, and one as a former Regent president. Interview participants identified themselves as representing a variety of Christian faith traditions to include: Episcopal, Roman Catholic, “Evangelical Catholic,” Methodist, Lutheran, Mennonite, Baptist, “Messianic Jewish,” Greek Orthodox, Assemblies of God, Four Square, Church of God, and United Methodist.

All participants were present at the founding of Regent or among the first employees in their respective schools. Two participants interviewed were also alumni. Interviews were conducted in person or via telephone, on the university campus, and one at a private residence. Interviews varied in length from 30-77 minutes (*mean*=52) and totaled 15 hours 40 minutes. All interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and maintained on file. Participants signed an informed consent document stating that all interviews were being recorded, transcribed, and that participants retained the right to terminate the interview at any time, have the opportunity to review completed transcripts, and offered complete confidentiality for any statement recorded.

## **Findings**

### **Academic Freedom Found in Scripture**

In response to the primary research question, “What are the perceptions of academic freedom expressed by senior faculty at Regent University?” the author of this study found a diversity of views. Data analysis revealed three major categories of views related to academic freedom. The first category is that true academic freedom exists only when a person is aligned with the teaching of Scripture. A second category is that all institutions operate within a gravitational tension between complete academic freedom on one end of the spectrum and limitations, whether they are religious or political in nature, on the other. A final, unexpected, perception of academic freedom linked the topic to the role of student as consumer and their ability to make trouble for professors who students perceived to stray from perceived or real institutional orthodoxy.

### **Academic Freedom Defined**

The first subsidiary question was “How do faculty define or describe academic freedom?” Just as there is no consensus in the literature regarding the definition and nature of

academic freedom, faculty expressed a variety of perceptions. One person explained his understanding of academic freedom in terms that closely mirrored the university's own theological language.

*You start from the premise that the Bible is the truth, unadulterated truth, the absolute truth of God. Academic freedom – to be most free, not in bondage – would be rooted in the Bible. Academic freedom is rooted in the biblical text. I would say that Christian institutions have the highest opportunity for academic freedom because we are rooted in the truth of the Word and the source of that truth. But if you perceive it as whatever one wants to do in the classroom, or to write and publish about whatever you want – that is analogous to saying you should have the right to do whatever you want – well that isn't freedom – that is bondage. We have the highest potential as long as we keep God, the bible, etc. as preeminent in all that we do. We have the highest potential. It's not dichotomous at all!*

Others revealed a variety views regarding their personal perceptions regarding academic freedom. One person explained,

*Well, to me, academic freedom is pretty much you can do and say what you want in your own field of study as it relates to the issues. It's clear and some professors think that the definition gives them carte blanche to talk about anything. It doesn't. If they went into court they would lose.*

Another person described academic freedom within the context of “the dominant political forces of that campus: secular or not.” He continued, “So there is no objective [definition] of academic freedom standard out there in my mind.” He staked out a self-described philosophical position that academic freedom was subjectively defined by “what’s politically correct.”

### **Academic Freedom in Public and Private Religious Settings**

In response to the second subsidiary question, “How do faculty perceive academic freedom differs between private religious and public universities?” one participant claimed, “Institutionally speaking, I think right now we have had more academic freedom than many other universities. Of course whatever I teach should come from a context of being a Christian

faculty member.” Some even went so far as to claim Regent offered greater academic freedom than public universities. One person in particular expressed indignation and went on at length:

*I also hear this argument about academic freedom and all of the institutions that you would believe are academically free; they are no more free than flying to the moon. [I hear] about all the professors who were getting fired across the country. I watched the politics that go on in most universities, and I hear story after story, about the crossfire of academic politics. We have far more academic freedom than any professor at Harvard. To be able to talk about – to open your Bible and read a verse to your students in class and not have to say that I was just being poetic. This is the word of God and that you actually believe and challenge them to think as a student; having a robust discussion without penalty.*

Another explained that many of the original faculty members hired at Regent applied to teach there out of a desire to express their Christian faith within their discipline. He felt that many found it difficult to do in public universities where openly expressing their faith was viewed with cynicism or even hostility.

*It takes a willingness to be a pioneer. We were all looking for a place to have the freedom to have the real academic freedom to integrate their faith into their discipline. You can't do that at many schools. If you're a Christian and they find out you'd be in trouble, especially trying to bring it into the classroom. It never occurred to [my friend] and me that we would fail. I look back now and it was pretty risky.*

### **Perceptions of Religious Restrictions on Academic Freedom**

In response to subsidiary question #3: “How do faculty perceive religious restrictions on academic freedom?” participants generally expressed the view that Regent granted them complete academic freedom. One person explained that in his 30 years at the university, he had never seen an example of the suppression of academic freedom. As an example he cited the work of a particular faculty member who wrote extensively on the subject of human sexuality and sexual identity. He noted that many consider the topic controversial, but that he is free to write. He explained how he thought that Christians above all others should be able to speak the truth regarding sexual matters. He stated,



*Christians need to be putting good research into controversial topics – gender identity, addictions; those kinds of things. We don't want to give it over to those people without a faith base. I have never known of any lack of academic freedom since I have been here.*

Another agreed when he claimed that academic freedom was “no problem.” He chuckled as he claimed that he “always operated in it” and that he would write whatever he felt led to write despite any perceived restrictions: “I would do it anyway. I say what I want to say and do it. I have never had any repercussions for being transparent or integrous.”

Some went as far as to claim that personal integrity should dictate that those who couldn't abide by these limitations should resign their positions. One person elaborated,

*If you cannot bring those back together [academic freedom and religious limitations] anymore, then maybe it's time for you to go. If you are a believing Christian, which you should be, kind of have to be, then I don't see any infringement on your academic freedom.*

Another explained,

*I think it's as good as any university. It's not as free as some – that allow anything and everything within tenure and academic freedom. You have to be in line with our spiritual roots or else, legitimately you really don't belong here. I think I have had all the academic freedom I have ever wanted. Sometimes in our history I thought were a little critical, but as a historian you have to tell the whole thing, good and the bad, but do it in a good spirit. I don't know of any cases of people being fired [over] academic freedom.*

A second group fell short of asserting that they operated under complete academic freedom because of the university's religious identity and articulated a link between perceived limits on academic freedom and Christian tenets, the religious mission of the school, and the statement of faith. They moderated their views with statements such as “We have a lot here.” This same person explained, “We have a good sense of where we are going in film. I will guarantee you that there isn't another Christian university that could show/produce some the films and live performances we do here. It can be the little things.” He admitted that while they

operate with a sense of freedom, they do self-regulate certain material and content on moral grounds.

An unexpected view on the topic emerged that linked perceived religious restrictions on academic freedom primarily to students. Regent apparently attracts certain students who hold strong views regarding issues such as the inerrancy of Scripture. One person explained that some students were “gung-ho on the doctrine of inerrancy and found out that we weren’t that.”

Another person explained it this way:

*I think we all feel somewhat restricted. I have taken heat over the years with students who have ended up in the dean’s office. I teach principles of Bible study and dare to raise questions, literary criticisms. It has made us a bit more skittish about it. I, for instance, have been writing and thinking a lot in terms of open theism and I have to tone down what I want to say. Some students complain to the dean if they felt that faculty said certain things in the classroom.*

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Although academic freedom is often a complex concept (Poch, 1993; Russell, 1993) and difficult to define (Kaplin, 1985; Ream & Glanzer, 2007), it still serves as a cornerstone in the world of higher education. Post (2006) reminds us that at less than 100 years ago academic freedom was considered “subversive because it challenged the authority of university administrators to unilaterally control the research and publication of faculty” (p. 61) and yet over time it redefined “the employment relationship between professors and universities” (p. 62). The complexity of the subject is further exasperated within the context of religious institutions. The findings of the study affirm the theoretical framework offered at the beginning of this paper.

In response to the research question, interview participants provided detailed views of their perceptions of academic freedom. They espoused a variety of positions related to academic freedom that reflect both the German concept of *lernfreiheit* (giving faculty complete latitude and discretion in the teaching of their students) and *lehrfreiheit* (freedom of the researcher to

take any direction the research seems to indicate, without external authoritative restraints). But despite their generally positive perceptions of academic freedom, some participants expressed a strong undercurrent of fear of reprisal for their comments. When discussing the issue of confidentiality within the context of questions about certain university leaders, a few expressed concern that their comments could cost them their jobs. In fact, one person emphatically stated that the guarantee of confidentiality would dictate what types of responses were provided during the interview.

In response to the first subsidiary question, participant definitions and descriptions reflect both conventional individual and institutional perceptions of academic freedom. But the most common theme was that of self-restraint and self-censorship stemming from personal religious proclivities. At the heart of these internal discussions are various interpretations of Scripture and the role of faith and learning integration.

The additional factor of institutional religious identity surely complicates implementation and adjudication of academic freedom. In response to the second subsidiary question, some participants clearly perceive noteworthy differences between private religious and public universities regarding academic freedom. Interestingly, instead of focusing on perceived limitations within Regent, they expressed their perception that public universities imposed even greater limits on academic freedom. They cited examples of the suppression of religious speech and political correctness. They were grateful that they could explore their academic disciplines within the context of their religious faith. While these findings affirm the view that private religious institutions possess the added burden of articulating and implementing a policy on academic freedom within the confines of religious mission and statements of faith beyond those of their public counterparts, the participants in this study repeatedly noted their perception that

their religious worldview would face opposition in a public university, thus subjecting them to even greater restrictions on their academic freedom. So it's actually quite ironic that religious universities are prone to running afoul of organizations like the AAUP, which are designed to protect the rights of the professoriate. Poch (1993) explains that the AAUP 1970 Interpretive Comments regarding academic freedom "should override institutional academic freedom in deciding which values and beliefs the college, university, or seminary elects to uphold through its affiliation with a church" (p. 59). He goes so far as to admit that adopting the AAUP definition of academic freedom could in fact "remove the distinct identity of a church-related institution as it welcomes calling into question the fundamental tenets of the church" (p. 60).

Regarding the final question, "How do faculty perceive religious restrictions on academic freedom?" most participants embraced the university's religious identity and viewed it as an acceptable and even preferable trade-off to relinquish some level of academic freedom to a university mission that aligned with their personal sense of identity. This situation makes it imperative that universities both clearly articulate its policies related to academic freedom to prospective faculty and ensure that faculty that are hired share or are at least sympathetic to its religious mission. In the case of evangelical institutions, many require that faculty sign contracts containing statements of faith in order to address this concern.

To more clearly speak to these concerns, Poch (1993) identifies three reasonable principles (pp. 67-68) that should guide religious institutions. First, they should clearly articulate the policy on academic freedom and specifically what limitations are placed on academic freedom in all contractual documents. Second, institutions that endorse the AAUP's 1940 Statement should explain their position as it relates to the religious limitation clause. Finally, all teaching contracts should include clear references to all policies related to academic freedom.

Of specific interest to educators at Evangelical, Protestant, and some Catholic universities is the role statements of faith play in the hiring process. Universities founded with a religious identity or mission or established to perpetuate the Christian faith sometimes establish doctrinal statements or statements of faith that impact the pool of potential candidates and the hiring process. For example the 109 member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) are required to “have a public, board-approved institutional mission or purpose statement that is Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith” and “hire as full-time faculty members and administrators only persons who profess faith in Jesus Christ” (CCCU, 2010). So, on a spectrum of relative strength of religious identity and mission there are universities that maintain extensive, explicit statements of faith with which faculty are expected to express and affirm complete agreement (often CCCU institutions, e.g. Corban College, Cedarville University) and those universities (often historically religious, e.g. Notre Dame, Duke University, Vanderbilt) that do not require faculty to sign a statement of faith or even profess any faith and at the other end. And then there are others somewhere along the spectrum with broader policies such as Baylor University (Baptist) that, according to university chancellor Robert Sloan, “gives hiring preference to Baptists first, followed by other Protestant evangelicals, then other Protestants, other Christians, and lastly Jews” (Goldin, 2006, ¶ 18). It is important to note that all universities, whether public or private, impose their own criteria as to which candidates would be a good “fit” for their departments. So the lesson for all educators is to discover what, if any, requirements are established for universities at which they would consider seeking employment as statements of faith and other forms of criteria inevitably affect academic freedom.

This study adds to the literature examining academic freedom within the context of religious higher education and clearly demonstrates that most faculty can work comfortably within the constraints of these institutions. Further analysis could be conducted to analyze whether or not various disciplines within the university view academic freedom differently. For instance, do those in the theater arts feel constrained by religious issues of morality, while those in law and government feel constrained by conservative political views? Do professors in the divinity school feel free to question or explore certain doctrines? Do faculty in the sciences perceive forays into the topic of evolution as hazardous to their careers? These questions and others will surely need answers if religious universities are to maintain a spirit of inquiry and advance the quest for knowledge without compartmentalizing expressions of faith.

## References

- American Association of University Professors. (1940). *Statement of principles on academic freedom and tenure*. Retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/1940statement.htm>
- American Association of University Professors. (1970). *1970 interpretive comments*. Retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/1940statement.htm>
- American Association of University Professors. (2009). *About the AAUP*. Retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/about/>
- Berg, B. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- Cavanaugh, W T. (2004). Sailing under true colors: Academic freedom and the ecclesially based university. In M. Budde and J. Wright (Eds.), *Conflicting allegiances: The church-based university in a liberal democratic society* (pp. 31-52). Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- CCCU. (2010). Member Application and Criteria. Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from [http://www.cccu.org/members\\_and\\_affiliates/member\\_affiliate\\_application\\_criteria](http://www.cccu.org/members_and_affiliates/member_affiliate_application_criteria)
- Diekema, A. J. (2000). *Academic freedom and Christian scholarship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Doumani, B. (Ed.). (2006). *Academic freedom after September 11*. New York: Zone Books.
- Edington, M. (2006). God: Amen, discussion. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(15). Retrieved from ERIC database.

- Goldin, D. (2006). A Test of faith: A professor's firing after his conversion highlights a new orthodoxy at religious universities. *The Wall Street Journal*, January 7-8, 2006.
- Habecker, E. B. (1991). Academic freedom in the context of mission. *Christian Scholars Review*, 21(2), 175-181.
- Hofstadter, R., & Metzger, W. P. (1955). *The development of academic freedom in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jacobsen, D. G., & Jacobsen, R. H. (Eds.). (2004). *Scholarship and Christian faith: Enlarging the conversation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jaschik, S. (2010a, May 11). Stained glass ceiling. *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/05/11/catholic>
- Jaschik, S. (2010b, June 9). Faith and freedom. *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/06/09/canada>
- Kaplin, W. A. (1985). *The law of higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kors, A. C., & Silvergate, H. A. (1998). *The shadow university*. New York: The Free Press.
- Marsden, G. (1994). *The soul of the American university: From Protestant establishment to established nonbelief*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McDowell, W. (2002). *Historical research: A guide*. London: Pearson Education Unlimited.
- O'Neil, R. M. (1997). *Free speech in the college community*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Poch, R. K. (1993). Academic freedom in higher education: Rights, responsibilities and limitations. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 33(2), 1-85.
- Post, R. (2006). The structure of academic freedom. In B. Doumani (Ed.), *Academic freedom after September 11* (pp. 61-106). New York: Zone Books.



- Ream, T. C., & Glanzer, P. L. (2007). Christian faith and scholarship: An exploration of contemporary developments. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 33(2), 1-139.
- Regent University. (2010a). *Faculty and academic policy handbook: Faculty employment: Academic freedom*. Retrieved from [http://www.regent.edu/academics/academic\\_affairs/faculty\\_handbook.cfm#employment](http://www.regent.edu/academics/academic_affairs/faculty_handbook.cfm#employment)
- Regent University. (2010b). *Mission statement*. Retrieved from [http://www.regent.edu/about\\_us/overview/mission\\_statement.cfm](http://www.regent.edu/about_us/overview/mission_statement.cfm)
- Regent University. (2010c). *Regent University facts*. Retrieved from [http://www.regent.edu/about\\_us/quick\\_facts.cfm](http://www.regent.edu/about_us/quick_facts.cfm)
- Russell, C. (1993). *Academic freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Schmidt, P. (2009). Professors' freedoms under assault in the courts. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(25), A1. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i25/25a00103.htm>
- Standler, R. (2000). *Academic freedom in the USA: Legal barriers*. Retrieved from <http://www.rbs2.com/afree.htm#anchor555555>
- Strum, P. (2006). Why academic freedom? The theoretical and Constitutional context. In B. Doumani (Ed.), *Academic freedom after September 11* (pp. 143-173). New York: Zone Books.
- Wagner, K. (2006, Jan/Feb). Faith statements do restrict academic freedom. *Academe* 92(1), 21-22.