



Prof Notes

The Newsletter of the Kansas Conference

American Association of University Professors

FALL MEETING EMPHASIZES THE SCIENCES

BY DONNA POTTS

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UPCOMING EVENTS

The spring 2010 meeting will be at the University of Kansas. April 23-24, Cary Nelson, AAUP President and , will be the featured speaker.

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- President: Jon Scheinman
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- Newsletter Editor: Joe Yanik
- Chapter Service Director: Elmer Hoyer



Joe Yanik stresses the importance of academic freedom in the sciences..

The Kansas Conference of the American Association of University Professors met at Kansas State University on Saturday, Sept. 26. KSU's new president, Kirk Schulz, was invited to provide the welcome for the meeting. President Schulz had met earlier with me about our AAUP chapter, at which time I mentioned that faculty morale at KSU was the lowest in the Big 12. He suggested that

I solicit AAUP members as well as other faculty and compile a list of suggestions for improving faculty morale. At the state conference meeting, I shared the list with attendees, assuming that because of recent state-wide budget cuts, their concerns would be much the same as those of KSU faculty. (See the article on Faculty Morale on page 6) Joe Yanik, a mathematician at Emporia State University who also happens to write and speak eloquently on the subject of academic freedom, discussed Academic Freedom in the Sciences (see the text on page 2).



ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN KANSAS

BY JOE YANIK

This column is the slightly edited text of the talk that I gave at the fall meeting.

There is a perception that academic freedom is not as important in the sciences as it might be in other disciplines. I disagree.

Let me begin by describing what academic freedom is. It is not a “perk” and it is not just about tenure. (If it is a perk then it is one that we pay for dearly. For example, the median starting salary for a mathematician in industry is generally almost twice that of one in academics according to data compiled annually by the American Mathematical Society.)

Academic Freedom

The goal of academic freedom is to seek an environment in which the ideas that triumph are those that are truly superior. It is based on the conviction that this is more likely

to happen in an environment in which there is a free “marketplace” of ideas that is, as much as possible, sheltered from the influence of outside influences. The best idea is not the one that is shouted the loudest or that has the most money behind it, but the one that can withstand the freely offered criticism of other experts.

In order to achieve this, an environment must be created in which the decisions about academics in either research or teaching, are made, as much as possible, at the local level—by the individual faculty member, if possible, but, where it is necessary for coordination, by the faculty within the discipline acting together. (It is interesting to me that, sometimes, the harshest attacks on academic freedom come from many people who are strong proponents of the free market in business, but, when it comes to the marketplace of ideas, they become advocates for more centralized control.)

There are a number of misconceptions about academic freedom. One is that academic freedom means that all ideas are to be treated equally or even that all individuals are to be awarded equal credibility. Just as in any free marketplace there are winners and losers. You can no longer purchase a BetaMax recorder or even an HD-DVD player. When Toyota launches a new model, buyers tend to assume that it will be more reliable than a vehicle put together by an unknown company. In a similar manner, there will not be any time spent in a science class talking about

flat earth theory or creation science.

A theory proposed by a Nobel Prize winner will have more credibility than that of a high school science teacher. In the academic community, the assertions of a student (or a politician) are not given the same weight as those of a faculty member in the discipline.



A second misconception is that proponents of academic freedom claim that, at any given time, the prevailing theories within the academic community are 100% correct. In fact, a healthy academic marketplace requires that, as much as possible, all ideas are open to question.

Rather we believe that, in an atmosphere of academic freedom, faulty ideas or flawed theories will *eventually* be replaced by superior ones and that this is more likely to happen in an environment of free inquiry.

In fact, Thomas Kuhn, in his classic book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, suggested that there are many examples in the history of science where an orthodoxy developed around certain flawed theories that required a “revolution.” Examples include the Ptolemaic model of the solar system, the concept of a mysterious substance called “ether” that permeated the universe, or Newtonian mechanics. Some have tried to use Kuhn’s book as an argument against academic freedom. But those who attempt to do this miss a central point of his book: That the tendency of the scientific community to agree on a central paradigm, even if it is flawed, is necessary for the advancement of science. It is difficult to make significant advances in a discipline that is constantly arguing about first principles.

It is important that we emphasize the many benefits that are derived from this free marketplace of ideas. A few examples might be helpful. The first example occurred in the Soviet Union. In the late 1920s the Soviet government decided, for ideological reasons, to endorse the biological and agricultural theories of Trofim Lysenko. Lysenko rejected modern genetics and, instead, favored the discredited theories of LaMarck that held that acquired traits could be passed on to succeeding generations. Soviet leaders were convinced that competing ideas

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were influenced by capitalism and used the full force of the government to suppress them. Scientists who did not conform were purged from the government and from academia. Some even served time in the Gulag or were executed. As a result of these efforts Soviet biology and agriculture fell behind the rest of the world. Millions of Soviet citizens suffered from the resulting lack of productivity in the area of agriculture. It wasn't until the middle of the 1960s that the Soviet government admitted its mistake.

The second example took place in the United States in the 1970s. During that time a number of mathematicians—some motivated by a suspicion of the government—began working on a form of “public key cryptography”. Their goal was to create a system whereby two people who had never met before could exchange information without fear of eavesdroppers. Their efforts attracted the attention of the National Security Agency. (NSA). The NSA was concerned that, if they were successful, it would make it harder for the government to monitor the activities of potential criminals or enemy agents. There were attempts to suppress the results of this research by restricting its dissemination. Protected by academic freedom, the mathematicians successfully resisted these efforts. The result of their research is the backbone of the Internet today. Without it, Internet commerce would be virtually impossible. Ironically, the techniques of encryption that they developed serve as our strongest line of defense against cyber terrorism.

A last example illustrates the benefits of academic freedom in teaching. In my lifetime there has been a considerable amount of controversy among mathematicians and mathematics teachers over the appropriate use of technology such as computers and graphing calculators in the teaching of mathematics. There were parallel movements at both the college level and the K-12 level to integrate the use of technology and other reforms into the teaching of mathematics. Although these movements had similar goals, they were handled very differently—primarily because of the existence of academic freedom at the college level.

At the K-12 level the reform efforts often had a top-down approach. National standards were developed—followed by concerted efforts to create state standards. In some cases this resulted in teachers who did not agree with the reforms being pressured into implementing them. The predictable result was that many of these teachers did a poor job of making the transition. Some focused on the superficial aspects of the reforms and neglected the mathematics.

At the college level, because of academic freedom, there was no way to achieve any reform without the support of the individual mathematics faculty members. A vigorous debate on the merits of the reforms resulted—both at the national level and, often, within each individual department. This debate is still ongoing, but the effects of the reforms are starting to be felt. Although the pace of change may have been frustrating for those who were reform advocates, throughout the transition, while the teaching styles may have varied, the mathematical content did not suffer.

In order to maintain this free marketplace of ideas we must be vigilant. There are a number of threats to academic freedom.

The Academic Bill of Rights (David Horowitz): This calls for efforts to enforce a “diversity” of views within the university and is based on one of the fundamental fallacies about academic freedom that are mentioned above: that all ideas should be treated equally. It would require that : “academic institutions and professional societies should maintain a posture of organizational neutrality with respect to substantive disagreements that divide researchers...” As I said in my testimony before the Kansas legislative committee that was considering this, “It is the very nature of academic freedom that professionals will be making judgments about substantive disagreements and, if they are not permitted to express those judgments freely, either individually or as a group, then the mechanism for separating out the bad ideas from the good will be irreparably harmed.”

The Spelling Commission: In September 2006 the Secretary of Education’s Commission on Higher Education released its report—the result of a two year study of higher education in the United States. One aspect of the report that has received a lot of attention is the recommendation that “Postsecondary education institutions should measure and report meaningful student learning outcomes.” The report recommends that the federal government should “provide incentives for states, higher education associations, university systems, and institutions to develop interoperable outcomes-focused accountability systems ...” As a result of this there have been demands for “external assessments” at the college level. An industry has emerged to design assessment tests to satisfy these demands (the Collegiate Learning Assessment is one example). Once these assessments are in place, there will undoubtedly be pressure for faculty to teach in a way to improve the assessment

(See *Academic Freedom* on page 4)

“It is the very nature of academic freedom that professional will be making judgments about substantive disagreements...”

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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scores. My concern is that there will then be an irresistible temptation for political forces to put pressure on those who are creating the assessments to design them in such a way as to drive a particular agenda. We saw this happen in Kansas at the K-12 level with the state assessments in Kansas.

Academic Tuning: This is an effort that has been launched in three states, Indiana, Utah, and Minnesota. It is based on a similar effort in Europe and its goal is to “to determine exactly what a degree in a given field stands for in terms of students’ learning and competencies.” This raises the same concerns as the assessment efforts mentioned above.

Pressure Groups: It has become an all-too-familiar pattern. It begins with a policy proposal that is a response to a scientific finding. A group with a vested interest in preventing the policy from being enacted responds by attacking the science that inspired the policy. They do this by “manufacturing” uncertainty. Think tanks are created to generate competing evidence. These think tanks turn the normal process of scientific inquiry on its head. Instead of gathering evidence before arriving at a conclusion, they start with a desired conclusion and seek out evidence to support it. The science that contradicts that conclusion is labeled as “junk science”, while any science that supports it is deemed “sound science”. One of the earliest examples of this came from the tobacco industry in response to the findings about the dangers of smoking, but the playbook has been used on scientific findings in the area of environmental findings, nutritional recommendations, evolutionary theory, stem cell research, and global climate studies. These efforts create pressure from outside the academic community for people in power to interfere with academic freedom.

Budgets. The effects of shrinking public support for higher education have a number of side effects that threaten academic freedom. The need to seek other forms of revenue can result in a “corporatization” of the academy in which decisions are increasingly made with an eye on the “bottom line.”

There may be pressures on faculty to lower standards in an effort to increase retention rates. One example of this was cited in an AAUP investigative report on Nicholls State University. It said that faculty members in the mathematics department described the administration’s approach to student retention as “threatening” and “intimidating”. The administration had compiled information about the pass-failure rate of individual instructors in College Algebra and was apparently terminating the services of those who showed the lowest pass-failure rate. I found it interesting that this occurred after the Louisiana Board of Regents had decided to lower the minimum ACT score to qualify for College Algebra from 21 to 18. This is a clear violation of the basic principle of academic freedom that decisions about teaching should be made, as much as possible, at the local level by those who are most qualified to make those judgments.

Another consequence of this bottom line approach is that there may be a shift of resources from those disciplines that, while vital to society, are not producing as many students, towards other disciplines that are more popular.

An additional concern is that, as institutions become more reliant on outside sources of revenue, there is a danger that those who are providing the revenue will be able to exert undue influence. This could be explicit or could be implicit. For example, by rewarding those faculty members who are successful at getting grants, we are indirectly allowing those who provide the grants to have the power to influence the composition of the faculty. These could be corporations or government agencies that have an agenda that is not consistent with academic freedom. (the tobacco industry, the defense department, the petroleum industry, the pharmaceutical industry.)

All of these threats have a potential to directly impact those of us who teach in those disciplines that might have once been considered noncontroversial. It is more important than ever that all of us in higher education join together to defend the marketplace of ideas from further encroachment.

BOOK REVIEW: NO UNIVERSITY IS AN ISLAND: SAVING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

BY CARY NELSON, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, \$27.95

REVIEW BY DONNA POTTS

As the economy weakens and as faculty grow increasingly entrepreneurial in their approach to the profession, threats to academic freedom are certain to escalate. At my own university, I recently discovered precisely how threatened faculty members feel, when my colleagues were reluctant to sign off on my letter to the local newspaper that merely explained what faculty members do (in response to the governor's call for faculty members to work 10% harder). I had always assumed that faculty members would consider it their responsibility to convey accurately to the public what their jobs entailed, especially when these jobs appeared to be under siege.

Cary Nelson's timely book eloquently examines the evolution of the concept of academic freedom as well as the cultural context for the threats that have undermined academic freedom at my university, as well as hundreds across the nation, citing the 2006 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, which ruled that a public employee's statements about official responsibilities and administrative policy are not shielded from disciplinary action by employers, and thoroughly exploring the chilling climate that led to the decision, as well as its continuing ramifications for faculty.

Nelson begins by defining academic freedom, a concept that he rightly recognizes is lost on most faculty members. He cites AAUP's 1915 Declaration of Principles, which states that Academic freedom "comprises three elements: freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college, and freedom of extramural utterance and action..." His first chapter, "The Three-Legged Stool" examines the integral relationship between academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure, arguing that "you cannot really have either professional authority or academic freedom if you can easily be fired or not renewed... But you do not have functioning academic freedom unless the faculty is in charge of the curriculum and the hiring process and can thus control who does the teaching and what they can teach."

Perhaps the most useful chapter in Nelson's book is the second one, "How a Campus Loses its Way: Sixteen Threats to Academic Freedom," among which are instrumentalization (the notion that higher education is first and foremost job training), which ultimately hampers a democracy's capacity to prepare its citizens for full participation in it; contingency (contingents, who now do two thirds of all college teaching, have no real protection from threats to academic freedom),

Authoritarian administration, circumvention of shared governance, and claims of financial crisis.

The remainder of the book continues to explore these threats; to explain collective bargaining's role in protecting academic

freedom (whereas faculty handbooks may not be recognized as legally binding documents in court cases, contracts certainly are); and to emphasize AAUP's continuing central role in protecting academic freedom. Nelson reflects on his efforts during his presidency to make

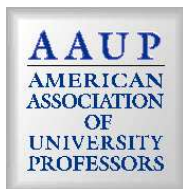
AAUP--"the only effective voice for all the faculty that speaks comprehensively on matters of principle and policy"--more visible among faculty. His final chapter, "Evolution or Devolution," speculates on the future of AAUP, noting that although its founders could not possibly have anticipated the range of threats to academic freedom in the twenty-first century, its 1915 Declaration defines faculty interests and responsibilities as eloquently as anything ever written on the subject. AAUP's continued success, however, ultimately depends on faculty (whose membership in AAUP has declined by more than half since 1970) recognizing their shared responsibility: "Intellectuals need to abandon their guilt about principled activism on behalf of their peers."

Universities in Kansas have certainly encountered most of the threats to academic freedom that Nelson describes, and they, like universities nation-wide, include their fair share of faculty members who appeal to AAUP when their academic freedom is violated. Yet Nelson notes that 80-90% of these faculty are not AAUP members, nor are they likely to

join AAUP in appreciation for its efforts on their behalf. These individuals fail to recognize that academic freedom is worth protecting not only for the sake of their own careers, but ultimately, of society as a whole. Nelson's book should thus be read with care by faculty, shared with their administrators, and taken to heart by all of us who have benefited, directly or indirectly, from the principles that AAUP has enshrined and continues to protect.



Cary Nelson speaks at the Spring meeting of the Kansas Conference



We're on the web!
<http://www.aaup-in-ks.org/>

FACULTY MORALE

BY DONNA POTTS

When I met with President Schulz, I emphasized the critical need for faculty salary increases, given that we are the lowest paid in the Big 12, and we got no raises this year. He agreed whole-heartedly that it was a goal to which he was already committed, and especially as the economy seems to be easing its way out of recession, he will have the means to do so. However, in the meantime, given that faculty morale is ALSO the lowest in the Big 12, he asked me to gather suggestions from AAUP members as to what could be done, aside from salary increases, to improve faculty morale. He asked me to send him the five most popular, which I have listed below:

1.) Providing extra funds:

- ♦ *Research and travel:* President Schulz is dedicated to increasing funds for research and travel. My meeting with him occurred shortly after the English department learned that it had received the travel funds requested earlier in the summer. Kirk Schulz was apologetic about the small amount, and also said that he would like to build travel money in as a permanent budget item, so there will be no need to go through the annual request procedure. This is a welcome change.
- ♦ *Tuition waivers for dependents:* Our current system of waiving only three hours of credit for a student enrolled full-time is unacceptable. Nearby U. of Nebraska is an example of what we can do: \$1 an hour tuition fees for faculty dependents.

2) Assuming the role of faculty representative:

The president needs to work to inform the public and the legislature about what professors do, and to promote the teaching and research endeavors of faculty. Letters to our local paper suggest that the general public assumes we all earn six figure salaries, teach a few classes and then go home, and do research that merely distracts us from our teaching. By drawing attention to the enormous salary disparities between and within various colleges, as well as the gender-based disparity, discussing our research and service, and demonstrating the way in which research enhances teaching,

President Schulz could greatly improve our morale. KSU's updated website has since begun to include far more stories of successful faculty teaching and research that emphasize the relation between the two.



3) De-emphasizing Athletics:

Locally, we are saturated with news of athletics: on home game days, the *Manhattan Mercury* makes the sports section the front section of the newspaper, even when, on one occasion, an earthquake in India killed thousands. The recent audit revealed that hundreds of thousands of dollars have been squandered on athletics, remain unaccounted for, and KSU may well end up paying millions of dollars to honor the agreement ostensibly made with former coach Ron Prince. All of the attention to athletics means that the mission of the university—the advancement of learning—is hopelessly obscured. In President Schulz's inaugural speech, he listed the athletics program as #9 on his list of priorities, and faculty need to keep reminding him to promote us.

4) Abandoning the corporate model: The corporate model of the university regards presidents as CEOs, entitled to salaries far larger than the U.S. president, and many times higher than the average employee; it provides enormous bonuses and severance packages in spite of low performance. The recent recession, driven largely by the US, should have taught us to be suspicious of the corporate model: US CEOs earn an average of 400 times that of the average employee, whereas in countries like Germany and Japan, the ratio of much smaller.

5) Promoting shared governance: On search committees, but also, in matters such as class scheduling, more faculty governance would certainly improve morale. President Schulz has already taken many steps to increase faculty involvement on a number of committees.

