BALANCING FIDELITY TO FAITH TRADITIONS WITH ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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AN EXISTENTIAL EXPLORATION IN 4 “EASY” STEPS

- Every institution his highly committed and engaged in being faithful to their faith tradition with biblical orthodoxy and integration. Are we? Owning the responsibilities for transmission of faith – making disciples
- The academy is committed to ensuring appropriate academic freedom to its faculty. Are we?
- How do prudent CAO’s maintain the right balance and achieve both commitment to faith tradition and academic freedom? Can we? What are the right principles and practices? Ensuring academic freedom in the classroom . . . and in faculty communication
- Addressing the rubs and tension points – creative ideas that work
EVERY INSTITUTION HIS HIGHLY COMMITTED AND ENGAGED IN BEING FAITHFUL TO THEIR FAITH TRADITION WITH BIBLICAL ORTHODOXY AND INTEGRATION.

Is this statement true for ABHE institutions generally? Is this statement true for your institution specifically?
WHAT EVIDENCES EXIST WITHIN YOUR INSTITUTION TO DEMONSTRATE THE FOLLOWING:

- High levels of commitment to being faithful to your faith tradition
- High levels of engagement with your faith tradition
- A commonly shared worldview
“IN SOME RESPECTS THE BIBLE COLLEGES ARE AHEAD OF THE CHRISTIAN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES IN ENCOURAGING THE PRACTICE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM. THE ASSOCIATION FOR BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION (ABHE, FORMERLY THE ACCREDITING ASSOCIATION OF BIBLE COLLEGES) REQUIRES FOR INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP “A PUBLISHED STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ADHERENCE TO ITS PRINCIPLES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INSTITUTIONAL MISSION,” AND TO PUBLISH THE STATEMENT WIDELY. THEY ALSO REQUIRE MEMBER SCHOOLS TO HAVE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES FOR FACULTY AND STUDENTS...”
ABHE WORLDVIEW PARAMETERS:

- “ABHE offers accreditation to institutions that are in accord with the Association’s Tenets of Faith” (COA Manual, page 10)
- “The ultimate goal of this process (accreditation) is to better equip institutions to prepare students for a life of service to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (COA Manual, page 10)
- “Tenets of Faith. The institution’s board of control affirms agreement with and commitment to the ABHE Tenets of Faith, as evidenced by a copy of the Tenets of Faith signed annually by the chief executive officer of the institution.” (COA Manual, page 13)
- “Enabling documents that establish the institution as a legal entity in its state or province; protect its mission/purpose, tenets of faith, and control” (COA Manual, page 19)
ABHE WORLDVIEW PARAMETERS:

- “Recruitment strategies that target students whose spiritual commitment, goals and interests are consistent with the institutional mission.” (COA Manual, page 23)
- “A faculty that is representative of the diversity of the constituency and consistent with institutional theological distinctives.” (COA Manual, page 26)
- “Evidence that the integration of curricular components supports development of a biblical worldview.” (COA Manual, page 29)
- “A culture and programs that promote development of effective witnesses and servants in the church and the world at large.” (COA Manual, page 30)
ABHE WORLDVIEW PARAMETERS:

- “An educational philosophy in which ministry formation is viewed as an integral part of the student’s education.” (COA Manual, page 30)

- The tenets of faith themselves can be found on pages 212-213 of the COA Manual.

- “Biblical Higher Education - Higher education in which the Bible is central and the development of Christian life and ministry is essential. A biblical higher education requires of all students a substantial core of biblical studies, general studies and ministry formation experiences and integrates a biblical worldview with life and learning. An institution of biblical higher education offers curricula that fulfill its overriding purpose to equip all students for ministry in and for the Church and the world.” (COA Manual, page 232)
ABHE WORLDVIEW PARAMETERS:

THE ACADEMY IS COMMITTED TO ENSURING APPROPRIATE ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO ITS FACULTY.

Is this statement true for ABHE institutions generally? Is this statement true for your institution specifically?
ABHE GUIDANCE:

- “A published statement of academic freedom and adherence to its principles within the context of the institutional mission.” (COA Manual, page 26)
THERE ARE TWO DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT KINDS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM, WHICH SHOULD HAVE DISTINCT NAMES:

- Individual academic freedom protects an individual professor.
- Institutional academic freedom protects universities from interference by government, a right that applies to the community of scholars, not to individual faculty. (www.rbs2.com/afree.htm; see also Kaplan and Lee, 2013.)
IN GENERAL, US COURTS HAVE RECOGNIZED FOUR MAJOR AREAS OF INSTITUTIONAL ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

- The right to decide who will teach its programs
- The right to decide what will be taught in those programs
- The right to decide how that material will be taught
- The right to decide who will be admitted into its programs (provided that public institutions do not violate antidiscrimination laws in doing so)
ACADEMIC FREEDOM DOESN'T START WITH THE INDIVIDUAL, IT STARTS WITH THE COMMUNITY.
HOW DO PRUDENT CAO’S MAINTAIN THE RIGHT BALANCE AND ACHIEVE BOTH COMMITMENT TO FAITH TRADITION AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM?
BROAD ADVICE

- (Diekema) All colleges should adopt a definition of academic freedom (he suggests using his definition, go figure!), distinguish between personal and institutional freedoms, and acknowledge the importance of worldviews in the academy. He further suggests that the AAUP should acknowledge the legitimacy of worldview differences as important ingredients in the search for truth.

- (Ringenberg) Do not fear truth. Fear bad theology or bad science or bad sociology. Do not fear truth; fear missing the truth. For where truth is, there is God. God is light, and God is truth.
BROAD ADVICE

• (Ringenberg) If a college does identify secondary conditions for membership in its community, it must do so clearly and at the time of original employment.

• (Diekema) Colleges and universities with Christian worldviews should try to advance a research agenda within their worldview by allocating resources within their ranks and in coalition with others.

• (Ringenberg) The secular academic community best acknowledges the concept of freedom when, among other things, it seeks to understand the mind of the Christian college scholarly community and how not all in academia view the concept of freedom in the same manner. The Christian college academic community best acknowledges the concept of freedom when it, together with its constituency, seeks to understand the difference between a college and a church and how their spheres can be complementary and cooperative rather than competitive.
BROAD ADVICE

• (Diekema) Colleges and universities with valued church affiliations should establish a covenant together with the church for the advancement of academic freedom - freedom anchored in the biblical concept of Christian freedom.

• (Diekema) Distinguish clearly between academic freedom and freedom of speech (“the right to say anything you want within constitutional protection”) on campus, and make sure that others know that academic freedom only makes sense within the academy, and that it only means something within the context of the individual institution’s mission and worldview (i.e., it never means that a faculty member can say whatever he/she wants to say).
BROAD ADVICE

• (Ringenberg) With respect to the status of religion, the ideal Christian college begins with an institutional commitment to a Christian worldview and then invites into its community of learning those scholars who, already of their own volition, have chosen this worldview as the framework through which they can best find truth. Then to assure that their students receive a fair understanding of the major worldviews, they employ charitable, fair-minded, no less than Christian, instructors, and regularly provide campus forums that present a variety of perspectives on primary issues. By contrast the ideal public university neither privileges nor disprivileged a specific worldview but presents each of the major ones, at least, clearly, respectfully, and fairly.
TARGETED ADVICE

• (Diekema) As soon as an academic freedom case surfaces, be the first to know the facts. This will be time consuming. Form early personal (and keep them private) judgments about the merits of the case and its significance within your institution’s worldview.

• (Diekema) Be sure your board is prepared for a case before you ever have one. The president is responsible for this.

• (Diekema) Appoint good people who are mission-fits for your institution.

• (Diekema) Be sensitive to the “chilling effect.” Find out what faculty are afraid to say that isn’t inappropriate to say, but they are afraid to say anyway.
TARGETED ADVICE

- (Diekema) Build outstanding relationships with key church leaders and constituents.
- (Me) If your policies don’t allow for time and process in academic freedom matters, you are going to have problems. If you don’t follow your policies, you are going to have problems. You may have problems anyway, but better to let them (the problems) be refined by fire.
Q&A

Addressing the rubs and tension points – creative ideas that work
SOCRATIC OATH
EXPANDED STATEMENT OF MISSION - HTTPS://CALVIN.EDU/DIRECTORY/PUBLICATIONS/EXPANDED-STATEMENT-OF-MISSION
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES?

Any other creative ideas?