

Understanding Academic Freedom, by Henry Reichman

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Book Review: *Understanding Academic Freedom*

Reichman, Henry. *Understanding Academic Freedom*. JHU Press, 2021, 248 pp, \$27.95

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Canadian academic librarians are employed in a sector with a high amount of union participation. According to Statistics Canada, in 2021, 74.2% of people employed in educational services are protected by a collective agreement (Statistics Canada 2022). While there are many benefits to collective organization, one of the perks is the principle of academic freedom. Closely related to the concept of intellectual freedom, academic freedom stands as something unique and only available to academic employees at institutions of higher learning. No other workplaces afford employees such a level of autonomy to pursue their work. Put in other words, as a professional academic librarian, the continuing appointment (described as tenure, or permanence) given to pursue a career-long field of work that includes teaching, research, and the general conduct of librarianship is also given a protection known as academic freedom. The modern instantiation of academic freedom is the result of a long history of many challenging cases that first began in the early 20th century. Henry Reichman's *Understanding Academic Freedom* attempts to explain this chronology and fully develop the four constituent pieces that comprise the protections offered by academic freedom. Arguably, to be a full participating member in the academy, knowledge of these topics is a prerequisite.

Faculty members and academic librarians owe much to the work of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), who in the early 20th century created the most important body that has ever existed to support this critical protection: Committee A on Academic Freedom. Through a series of reports, investigations, and published statements, the AAUP created what would effectively be the canon that all academic freedom collective agreement language would spring from. During this era, boards and regents of universities began to interfere with faculty's scholarly activity, including discontinuing appointments of professors whom spoke up in ways

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that did not align with the intended goals of the institution, and demanding that topics were taught in a certain manner to support the prevailing, often conservative, viewpoints. As a response to these threats the initial entry into this canon was the 1915 *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure* that outlined many different considerations but enshrined what we now recognize as the four key facets of academic freedom and tenure: freedom to research and disseminate results; freedom to teach; freedom of intramural expression; and, freedom of extramural expression. While the protections afforded to teaching and research are self-evident, the dual notions of intramural and extramural expression are less commonly known. These two facets of academic freedom can be described as the ability to criticize the institution without fear of reprisal (intramural), and the ability to participate in public discourse (extramural) while recognized as a member of the institution but speaking on one's own behalf. Through eight compelling chapters, Reichman examines these four facets through a series of vignettes that together illustrate the dynamics of how academic freedom has evolved. Reichman's investigations cover the following topics: the history of the construction of academic freedom, how tenure enables academic freedom, American jurisprudence in support of academic freedom, applications of academic freedom with respect to student engagement in the academy, and finally a chapter simply entitled "Knowledge", which serves an examination of the accumulation of forces that are weighing down the ability of academic freedom to function.

Reichman's examination of these impediments to academic freedom is the most compelling part of the book. Reichman outlines recent attacks on the autonomy of the institution and, by extension, against the ability for academic freedom to be exercised. Reichman posits that these forces are "deeply rooted in traditions of anti-intellectualism, entwined with the country's toxic heritage of racism and acquisitive individualism which spans the political spectrum" (177). With this, Reichman's text joins other recent rallying calls warning of the growing trend of anti-intellectualism in the West and elsewhere. Reichman presents several cases that put a fine point on how this manifests in practice. For instance, consider the recent phenomenon of organizations that include professors on watch lists for being too 'left-leaning' and encouraging bystanders to contact these professors directly using the contact information also included on these lists (Speri 2021). While not a direct attack on academic freedom per se, it is undoubtedly something that will put a chill on full engagement with extramural expression.

You will not find many philosophical digressions that posit the value of unencumbered speech and inquiry. Reichman explains cases and ideas in a straightforward fashion, likely in an appeal to the professional sensibilities of

the academic staff that are the main audience of this book. Reichman's expertise, which comes through in his prose unhindered, is likely a result of his time chairing Committee A described earlier, a position he held from 2012 to 2021. It is also fitting that this book is published by John Hopkins University Press, the first American university to be established in the German model that values this conception of academic freedom so highly (Janes and Muller 2004).

The only notable drawback of the book is that it deals almost entirely with cases situated in the United States. However, it is still useful to a Canadian audience as our conception of academic freedom draws heavily from the jurisprudence established by the AAUP. To acquire the Canadian foundational perspective, the best resource continues to be the Harry Crowe report (Canadian Association of University Teachers). Crowe was a history professor at United College who in 1958 was fired from his tenured position for writing a letter criticizing the college administration. The report describes this situation and establishes the contemporary definition of academic freedom in Canada. Paired together, these two resources serve as foundational texts for understanding the history and development of academic freedom in the United States and Canada.

One of the trademarks of modern academic librarianship is participating as a full member of the academy, most often as members of an association or union that is protected by a collective agreement. It is easy to take for granted, or not fully be aware of what our academic freedom means in its fullest definition, or what we can expect when we invoke it. That can be expected in a certain sense as most Canadian universities first won these rights decades ago. Those of us in the profession now are directly benefiting from the important work of our predecessors. This book is a reminder and introduction to what was hard fought and ultimately hard won.

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