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How Ego, Greed, and Hubris (Almost) Destroyed a University: Implications for Academic Freedom

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Abstract

An increasing number of private nonprofit colleges are coming under financial stress due to demographic changes and other events often beyond their control, including higher operational costs. Institutions handle those problems differently, with some closing their doors, some merging, and some borrowing and depleting their endowments in hopes of a better future. To attract students, some colleges borrow heavily to remodel their campuses and develop more student-oriented amenities, such as e-sports, upscale dorms and eating facilities, and state-of-the-art gyms. While some private universities socialize their deficits widely across their operations, including administrative salaries, others place the burden squarely on the backs of faculty. Hawai'i Pacific University offers a case example of how one nonprofit university chose to deal with its financial and enrollment problems. The absence of tenure and union representation combined with HPU's hierarchal and corporatist management approach has led many faculty members to fear termination for myriad causes. The lack of job security has curtailed dissent and meaningful faculty governance, and it has severely restricted academic freedom.

These are hard times for many small private nonprofit colleges that face declining enrollment and sharp drops in revenue. Especially hard-hit are private colleges without sizeable endowments. A 2018 Ernst & Young report found that 800 US colleges are vulnerable to "critical strategic challenges" due to their small size (with enrollments of less than 1,000). Colleges where tuition makes up 85 percent of revenues are especially vulnerable (Ernst & Young 2018b; *Education Dive* n.d.). Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen predicted that 50 percent of the 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States would be bankrupt in ten to fifteen years (Newton 2018).

Economic troubles typically lead to austerity, and too often that burden is laid on faculty rather than being equitably distributed between faculty and administration. While each struggling institution faces its own unique challenges, the case of Hawai'i Pacific University illustrates how one university coped with two interconnected issues: declining enrollment and the resulting drop in revenue. In the process, academic freedom and shared governance became a casualty in the mad scramble to cut costs and personnel.

The Changing of the Guard

Hawai'i Pacific University grew out of a series of mergers. Founded in 1965 as Hawai'i Pacific College, it merged with Honolulu Christian College in 1966, and in 1992 with Hawai'i Loa College. From the 1970s until around 2009, HPU grew rapidly, with enrollment reaching almost 9,000 students in the early 2000s. However, by 2016, both enrollment and revenues had been in decline for several years. In 2010, enrollment dropped by more than 10 percent over the previous year, leading to a $4 million budget shortfall. The endowment fund dropped from a high of $90 million to $60 million in 2015 (Moreno 2014). Student numbers fell to 5,827 in 2014, and 4,781 the next year. All told, HPU had lost more than 3,500 students between 2010 and 2015. Over the same period, the only other two private nonprofit universities in Hawai'i, Chaminade University and Brigham Young University–Hawai'i, reported relatively steady enrollments (Vorsino 2016).

Chatt Wright was one of the longest-serving US college presidents, heading HPU from 1976 until 2011. An ambitious administrator and businessman, he oversaw the creation of a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degrees; by 2008, his administration claimed that HPU had more than 8,300 students (a number later disputed by Wright's successor). Chatt Wright retired in 2011 and was succeeded by Geoffrey Bannister. In 2016, John Gotanda (former dean of Villanova University Law School) became the third president of Hawai'i Pacific University.

Soon after Bannister arrived in 2011, rumors circulated that Chatt Wright had double-counted students and hid HPU's real deficits. In response, Bannister terminated almost two dozen teaching and support staff in 2013. Staff and faculty were cut further in 2013 (partly through early retirement packages), as were the number of courses, sections, and part-time lecturers. At the close of the 2014 school year, the contracts for eighteen faculty and about forty staff were not renewed (Moreno 2014). HPU's contribution toward employee retirement plans also dropped from 11 percent to 6 percent of salaries (*Hawaii News Now* 2014).

HPU has no system of tenure, and all faculty contracts are for two years (for new hires), or three, five, or seven years (for senior faculty), with a comprehensive diagnostic review in midcontract that could result in termination. While contract renewal was traditionally based on teaching, research, and service, research was removed from the criteria in 2019 following the elimination of research support. Faculty up for contract reappointment create an extensive portfolio that is reviewed by a departmental panel and a college review committee. The reappointment recommendation is then forwarded to the dean, who can endorse or reject a recommendation and choose not to renew a contract. The provost and president have to sign off on nonrenewals. Faculty can grieve a decision, but the HPU grievance committee is largely advisory. Without tenure and union representation, it was relatively easy for the administration to fire employees at will. The lack of job security made faculty less likely to express their opinions for fear of upsetting administrators. In the words of one faculty member, "Open dialogue is important. . . . The real threat . . . is a complete lack of security, a complete lack of people feeling free to express themselves. It's linked to no tenure, no security and, therefore, it feels like (there is) very little respect for faculty" (Bitter 2014). Without workplace protections, academic freedom, including the freedom to express oneself freely, depends on the benevolence (or whims) of the administration in power.

The Aloha Tower Marketplace (ATM): False Promises, Ego, and Crippling Debt

HPU has historically been splintered into several locations. It was the largest renter in Honolulu, having leased all or parts of seven downtown buildings and student apartments. Administrative offices were in two office buildings, and classes were offered in several locations, including the beautiful, semirural 135-acre Hawaiʻi Loa campus (which also had dorms), a twenty-minute drive from downtown Honolulu. Other classes were offered on military bases.

Before retiring in 2011, Chatt Wright envisioned consolidating the university by moving from downtown Honolulu to a $100 million expansion of the Hawaiʻi Loa campus. He imagined a hillside university with new dormitories, classrooms, laboratories, a student center, a performing arts and theater center, and a contemporary art museum (Moreno 2014). Incoming president Geoffrey Bannister, however, had a different vision. Against the backdrop of a university in financial trouble, and without significant faculty consultation and support, Bannister forged ahead with a plan that required issuing more than $75 million in bonds. Bannister's "build it and they will come" approach may have been predicated on the belief that students and their families choose a university based on the look of the campus. In some cases, the building frenzy of some universities represents administrators' desire to leave their mark. Too often, building and renovation comes at the expense of academics, with the resulting budget crunch leading to termination of programs with lower enrollments. Nevertheless, misrepresenting Wright's vision, Bannister claimed that "one thing I've had to do a little bit was try to get the university back to that founding view that he'd [Wright] put in place. It was a stroke of genius for Chatt to have come up with this 35 years ago. . . . So many of the small liberal-arts colleges on the hills, all across the country, are going out of business. But it's the urban-centered . . . comprehensive university that is doing well" (Moreno 2014).

Why Bannister mortgaged HPU's future to move to Honolulu is unclear. Perhaps it involved putting his imprint on HPU following Wright's long tenure. Or maybe he believed that transforming HPU into a fully urban university was the only way to save it. New to Honolulu, Bannister chose to disregard the fact that Honolulu already had two urban universities (Chaminade and the University of Hawai'i). Like most tourists, mainland students (HPU's bread and butter) are drawn to Hawai'i's beaches, outdoor activities, and climate. Students seeking an authentic urban experience would probably be drawn to Los Angeles; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco; New York; Boston; or Chicago rather than Honolulu.

Bannister's choice for the new "urban HPU" was Aloha Tower Marketplace (ATM), a local landmark. Although the tower was built in 1926, the surrounding outdoor area was developed as a marketplace in the early 1990s and came with a history of multiple business failures and bankruptcies. Bannister envisioned the ATM as a mixed-use property featuring student dormitories, retail and dining businesses, and community gathering spaces. He promoted the ATM as a gathering place for the city: "We see it as a center for the university, but it's also a spot to see athletic events, community events, attend children's events on the weekends—all sorts of activities that will connect HPU to the city" (quoted in Moreno 2014). Bannister's vision never came to fruition. Although operational in 2016, the ATM was far from a gathering place. It had only a few restaurants, including Hooters and Gordon Biersch (both of which closed in 2020), and no large community or athletic events were hosted there. Instead, the ATM became a financial albatross around HPU's neck. Despite rosy projections that the ATM renovation would pay for itself through rents from retail businesses, many—if not most—of the retail spaces were unoccupied by mid-2020. The ATM was also a poor venue for students since it sits on the edge of the downtown business district. Nearby restaurants close by early evening, and eateries in the semigentrified Chinatown are a fifteen-minute walk through the business district's dimly lit and deserted streets. Chinatown is also one of the areas of Honolulu with the highest crime rate.

The state of Hawai'i leased the ATM to HPU, relieved to get the property off its books (Yerton 2020). Developers and city officials were equally happy to see more downtown development. HPU's renovation of the ATM fit the city's plan to develop mixed-use housing (commercial and residential) downtown. Given the checkered history of the ATM, the local press and Hawai'i business journals greeted the plans with a mix of enthusiasm and skepticism.

Bannister put the Hawai'i Loa campus up for sale to ensure that his legacy would not be undone by a new president. The process was kept secret until December 20, 2016, when Bannister announced that Castle Medical Center had bought the 135-acre campus. Only later did the terms become public: Castle had bought the campus for the fire-sale price of $18.65 million. In turn, HPU could lease back part of the property until it fully transitioned to downtown Honolulu (Shimogawa 2016). By mid-2020, Loa's dormitories and sports fields were still occupied by HPU, as were parts of the College of Natural and Computer Sciences (HPU lacked the estimated $10+ million needed to relocate the laboratories).

New president John Gotanda faced a fait accompli. He remarked that selling the Loa campus was probably a mistake, but HPU was desperate for cash and the board of trustees had already approved the sale.

The role played by the board of trustees in the decision to move HPU fully downtown is unclear. One problem is that the board's minutes and deliberations are not made public. Only upper-level administrators know what transpires in board meetings. Faculty are told that any unauthorized contact with board members is expressly forbidden. Of the twenty-one members of the HPU board of trustees, fourteen are from business, three are attorneys (largely senior law firm partners), and one is a former Republican governor. Only three board members are from education or are community leaders. No clear plan existed for relocating HPU's academic and administrative operations after the Hawai'i Loa campus sale. Desperate to move and find a suitable academic campus, HPU leased 100,000 square feet of office space in Honolulu's Waterfront Plaza, a ten-minute, half-mile walk from the ATM along a heavily trafficked road. HPU's new location is spread out over seven five-story buildings that also house a variety of businesses and government offices. On floors they shared with the university, these other tenants posted signs reading "No HPU Students Allowed." This mixed arrangement served to fracture any sense of a self-contained college community.

Waterfront Plaza proved to be a less than ideal academic environment for several reasons. Since it houses government offices, a strict security protocol requires that entrances and elevators be locked at 6:00 p.m., which is when graduate classes start. Students late for an evening class have to find a security guard to let them in. The locked stairwells require students rushing to class to cram into two elevators. The Waterfront Plaza complex also lacks a student area with student-oriented coffee shops, bars, and inexpensive restaurants. Instead, it is surrounded by upscale restaurants and specialty eateries geared toward high-income tenants and nearby residents.

The almost $80 million spent renovating the ATM resulted in about 300 student beds, study rooms, multipurpose rooms, a fitness center, an e-sports center (computer gaming), student dining services, and retail spaces. These costs have enabled the ATM to meet very few of its stated objectives. For instance, it is not a center for community activities or sports; nor has it centralized HPU's operations, since the ATM lacks the physical space for classrooms and faculty and administrative offices. Student and administrative services continue to be scattered throughout the downtown and the Loa campus. HPU's much-touted gym is in the recently shuttered St. Francis School, a two-mile, forty-five-minute walk from the ATM.

Geoffrey Bannister retired shortly after the Loa campus sale and left Hawaiʻi, a financial disaster in his wake. He received a $653,561 severance package from the board of trustees (Form 990 2018). Had the board instead shared this package among HPU's 150 faculty members, who had gone without a raise since 2011, that largesse would have amounted to a $4,357 bonus for each of them. HPU's board of trustees also failed in its fiduciary duty to protect the university. Had it reined in Bannister and vetoed the ATM, HPU might have been able to weather lower enrollment and reduced revenue, since it owned the Loa campus outright. Some of the financial problems might also have been avoided if the board had engaged faculty members who better understood higher education and college-age students. Instead, the HPU administration forbid any faculty contact with the board.

Drowning in Debt

Remaking the ATM into a campus was expensive. Apart from the $14 million lease owed to the state, HPU issued bonds for almost $42.2 million in 2013. This was followed by a second round of borrowing in 2015, this time for $32.5 million in bonds that matured in 2020. Unable to repay the earlier bond, HPU bought time by paying off the $33.3 million 2015 bond and simultaneously issuing a $34 million bond that matures in 2028. Deepening this debt spiral, HPU borrowed an additional $2 million from a Bank of America subsidiary to equip the student dining facility. All told, the ATM debacle resulted in a bond debt of around $75 million, while enrollment and revenue continued to decline (Ernst & Young 2018a).

HPU's total liabilities in 2018 stood at $91 million, while its total net assets dropped to almost $82 million (Ernst & Young 2018a). Trying to manage the massive debt from the 2013 bonds, HPU secured an amendment deferring the cost of the debt service for fiscal years 2018 and 2019. In turn, the interest on the 2013 bonds is scheduled to rise from $700,000 in 2018 to $905,000 in 2021, and finally to almost $3.26 million from 2034 through 2043. The 2018 bonds include annual interest payments ranging from $480,000 in 2022 to $690,000 in 2028, with a final payoff of $29,850,000 in 2029 (Ernst & Young 2018a). Since 80 percent of HPU's revenues comes from tuition and fees (WSCUC Team 2016), repaying the bond debt hinges on the university's ability to significantly increase enrollment and tuition. But by 2019, HPU's "new urban look" failed to translate into higher enrollment, and its 2019–20 freshmen enrollment of around 500 students was 15–18 percent below its enrollment target. Missing the target by 80 students translated into a loss of around $3.8 million.

HPU's freshmen enrollment is eroded by its high attrition rate, which in 2018 was between 35 and 40 percent (US Department of Education n.d.;). This leaves about 300–325 freshmen to enroll in their sophomore year. In addition, fiscal austerity has led to a dramatic reduction in faculty numbers, from a high of 250 or so in 2010 to the current low of 140–60. Fewer faculty and fewer students translate into fewer course offerings and fewer options for majors. Particularly hard-hit are low-enrollment majors, which partly explains why, despite being a liberal arts college, HPU does not offer a sociology, anthropology, or geography major. Unable to pursue their preferred major, some students transfer to a local Hawaiian or a mainland US university. Graduate student enrollment is equally problematic. Although HPU offered 14 graduate degrees in 2017–18, the number of graduate students was small, with the exception of the masters of business administration (MBA). Of the 160 the masters-level graduates in 2018, 57 were awarded the MBA (HPU n.d.).

HPU started several initiatives to increase student numbers. Because it relies heavily on military students, HPU (2019) provides tuition assistance to those affected by college funding cuts. HPU also provides financial assistance to Hawaiʻi residents who are first-time (never enrolled at HPU), full-time freshmen and meet federal need requirements. The university offers a $4,000 tuition reduction (covering only a small portion of the $20,000 tuition) to alumni who return for a master's degree. HPU spent about $500,000 to equip a state-of-the-art e-sports (video-gaming) center and offers scholarships from $1,000 to $6,000 to qualified gamers. There are also athletic scholarships. These incentives deplete the tuition dollars needed to repay the debt and run the university. For instance, HPU's tuition revenue totaled $80.7 million in 2018 while scholarship and other waivers cost $24.8 million, leaving only $55.9 million to run the university (Ernst & Young 2018a).

To compensate for less revenue, HPU increased tuition and fees to $27,493 in 2019–20, with room and board costing another $17,953. This brings the full cost of attending HPU to $45,446 a year, or $181,784 for a four-year degree. On the plus side, HPU's tuition is still lower than many private nonprofit colleges in California and the Pacific Northwest. However, HPU's lower costs come on the back of faculty and staff, whose salaries have been frozen since 2011.

Faculty

As noted earlier, HPU does not have a tenure system and all faculty are on a two-, three-, five-, or seven-year contracts. The contracts have several loopholes (including midcontract reviews) that make faculty basically at-will employees who can be terminated for myriad reasons. This contract system allowed HPU to terminate faculty and staff in 2013–14.

Faculty and staff have borne the brunt of HPU's austerity measures. HPU employed 251 faculty members in 2010; by 2019 only 140–60 remained. HPU had rarely fired full-time faculty, but in 2014, sixty professors applied for contract renewal and eighteen were denied. According to journalist Alex Bitter (2014), the eighteen faculty who were not renewed had been told in a letter two months earlier that they would have their jobs for the foreseeable future. But by 2014, HPU had fired more than 100 faculty and staff (Moreno 2014). "Those . . . still working feared retaliation from administrators [if they talked to the press]; those who took early retirement packages say those packages came with orders not to speak to the media. Even those who were let go without any compensation declined to speak on the record, saying they are negotiating with HPU to receive a severance package. All seven painted a picture of an insecure, stressful work environment. . . . Those [still] at the university frequently referred to a 'culture of fear'" (Bitter 2014).

Not Everyone at HPU Feels the Same Pain

In 2016, HPU president John Gotanda gave faculty a one-time bonus of $500. This provided little relief since the last cost of living adjustment had been in 2011. Not everyone at HPU is suffering financially. According to the 2018 IRS Form 990, Gotanda earned $733,219 in salary and benefits in 2017. He also received a $90,000 raise. (Despite HPU having fewer than 5,000 students, Gotanda earns $330,000 more than the president of the University of Hawai'i, who manages a campus of 50,000 students; Bauman, Davis, and O'Leary 2020.) If reallocated, Gotanda's raise would translate into $643 for each faculty member. While Gotanda's salary is in line with some other college presidents, some faculty find it hard to rationalize his performance-based raise since it occurred in the midst of HPU's precipitous decline.

Other administrative salaries are also generous. From 2013 to 2017, the former provost's salary rose from $173,861 to $327,725. The salary of the chief financial officer rose from $290,307 in 2013 to $325,590 in 2017. The salary of the enrollment manager rose from $175,912 in 2010 to $240,260 in 2017. HPU's general counsel earned $314,460 in 2017. Certain deans also saw their incomes rise. The salary of the former dean of the College of Health and Society was $263,244 in 2016 (Form 990 2018). By 2017, administrative salaries totaled more than $2.81 million. According to the HPU chapter of the AAUP, the 57 percent of HPU's budget going to administration is far above the approximately 27 percent national average.

For faculty, HPU's long-term wage freeze has been especially difficult to bear because Hawai'i is the most expensive US state and Honolulu the third-most-expensive US city (200 percent above the national average; Cohn 2019; Goetz 2019). At minimum, HPU employees lost about 20 percent of their real wages (after adjusting for inflation) from 2011 to 2019 (Amadeo and Berry-Johnson 2019). This has forced many faculty and staff to take second jobs. Some view HPU as a secondary rather than primary employer. Reliance on outside employment affects teaching and student satisfaction in terms of faculty accessibility and even class preparation and attendance. Service is hit hard as some faculty members lack the motivation, time, or inclination to serve on university committees. Salaries are viewed as being in the administrative domain and not open to deliberation by HPU's faculty senate or other faculty committees. The message is that faculty ought to be thankful they have a job, and that any raise would result in HPU's financial ruin.

Attempting to Unionize

In 2017 the HPU faculty tried to unionize for reasons that included salaries and job security, heavy teaching and service loads that left little time for research, lack of transparency around important university decisions, and weak shared governance. Under the umbrella of the AAUP, a group of courageous faculty members distributed union interest cards. In March 2017, the president of HPU's AAUP chapter wrote to President Gotanda informing him that 104 (71 percent) of full-time faculty members had signed cards designating the AAUP as their exclusive bargaining agent. The letter asked HPU to voluntarily recognize the union.

HPU's Antiunion Tactics

The HPU administration countered that the timing was bad for a union election given its sensitive financial condition. It maintained that unionization would endanger the bond debt by making HPU appear unstable. The administration also argued that its energies were focused on other matters, including the move from the Hawai'i Loa campus to downtown.

The administration's antiunion strategy became more aggressive when it framed unionization as a threat to shared governance (an area in which many faculty had long lost faith): "The union (AAUP) is asking you to vote on a fundamentally different model for you and your career and career-track faculty colleagues to interact with the HPU administration. Collective bargaining is a federally controlled process that would supersede and, largely replace, HPU's Shared Governance model" (Liao-Troth 2017).

An email from President Gotanda argued that "Shared Governance practices that conflict with federal labor law would have to stop (e.g., faculty who are supervisors or managers under our Shared Governance model could not continue in their current roles and be part of the bargaining unit) . . . CBA provisions would also supersede any remaining Shared Governance practices. HPU would have to follow the CBA until a majority of faculty decided to vote the union out . . . a process that . . . can take months, if not years" (Gotanda 2017).

Gotanda's view of shared governance was at odds with the experience of the faculty:

> The HPU model [of shared governance] provides for faculty engagement in virtually every aspect of our operations . . . the faculty and administration, along with the Board and other stakeholders, work together on HPU's shared mission and objectives . . . faculty representatives are involved in all levels of critical decision-making, which includes decisions to: hire, promote, discipline and retain instructional professionals. [shared governance] . . . also ensures faculty involvement in planning, budgeting, and marketing-branding. . . . Under a collective bargaining model . . . decisions on hiring, performance reviews, promotion, discipline, etc. would be left to the administration. (Gotanda 2017)

The email distorted the reality of HPU's shared governance model. For one, major decisions are made by the board of trustees, whose meetings are closed and whose minutes are not made public. The board has virtually no contact with faculty. The second distortion is the claim that HPU faculty have the power to hire, fire, promote, or retain colleagues. While hiring committees can cull an applicant pool, they do not rank nor hire candidates. Hiring decisions are made exclusively by the dean (sometimes against the committee's implied preference). While faculty can recommend promotion or retention, the dean and provost make the final decision, sometimes bypassing the faculty vote. In contrast to shared governance, HPU employs a top-down corporatist model that leaves few, if any, important decisions to the faculty. Gotanda also distorted the role of the union. In a unionized university, the faculty senate typically handles academic matters, while the union focuses on employment issues. These two functions have worked well together in numerous universities.

The administration's argument was based on the 1980 US Supreme Court ruling (*National Labor Relations Board v. Yeshiva University*) that faculty at private colleges have "managerial status" since they make academic and personnel decisions. HPU claimed that any faculty member who sat on a hiring, promotion, or retention committee was a manager or supervisor. Consequently, 130 out of the 150 faculty were categorized as supervisors or managers and would thereby be excluded from union membership. Former provost Matthew Liao-Troth warned in a 2017 email that under federal law a manager or supervisor's participation in support of a union would invalidate the election. HPU's tactics were similar to the fear-based antiunion activities employed in the private sector and ran counter to the spirit of a collegial college community.

The NLRB Loss

In April 2017, the HPU's AAUP chapter filed an Unfair Labor Practice complaint charging that the administration had violated Section 8(a)(1) of the National Labor Relations Act when it informed faculty during a training session to "never attend a union meeting, even if invited." Based on the *Yeshiva* ruling, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) dismissed the unfair labor practice complaint, noting that department chairs and faculty serving on committees had supervisory or managerial status in line with federal case law.

Defeating the union was a Pyrrhic victory since it further demoralized an already demoralized faculty. Recognizing that faculty morale was at a nadir, Gotanda instituted a series of "Talk Stories" (Hawaiian expression for an informal chat) designed to show transparency and concern. But morale was so low that faculty had to be pressured into attending through the use of RSVPs. The Faculty Assembly (a required semiannual meeting for university-wide faculty) was so badly attended in 2019 that it was held in a small meeting room. The low morale bled into university service, as faculty often had to be cajoled into committee membership. Despite Gotanda's "Talk Stories," many faculty members remained skeptical about HPU's future. The shortsighted union busting was a lost opportunity, since a seat at the collective bargaining table might have helped faculty better understand and even support the difficult financial choices facing HPU.

Conclusion: Implications for Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is often defined as the freedom to teach and pursue research without unreasonable constraints or interference from an academic administration or by public pressure. The AAUP defines academic freedom as "the indispensable requisite for unfettered teaching and research" (AAUP n.d.; see also 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*).

The traditional scope of academic freedom is by nature limited. However, a broader definition might include the freedom to influence one's workplace, the freedom to work in an environment that upholds high professional standards, the freedom to maintain one's ethical standards, and the freedom to protect one's interests through unionization or other forms of protection. Another prerequisite for academic freedom is the job security that comes from tenure and union representation. Without that security, academic freedom is starved of oxygen. How can a university proclaim it supports academic freedom if its faculty are not covered by tenure, are employed under porous contracts, are represented by a weak faculty senate, and are denied union or other representation? The academic freedom afforded by tenure and unionization also shields faculty whose research or unpopular positions might jeopardize their jobs by alienating members of the board of trustees. By most definitions, HPU and many other institutions have failed to meet even the rudimentary test of academic freedom.

The way forward to creating a fair, equitable, and positive academic environment is through a real system of shared governance rather than one characterized by a weak faculty senate, a series of faculty advisory committees that only advise, and a grievance procedure with no real clout.

Prohibitions against sharing information about the financial status of one's institution can also raise ethical questions. For instance, HPU faculty are instructed to not discuss HPU's financial problems outside of the university. Since private nonprofit colleges are not required to post their financial data in a conspicuous place, students and their families are often the last to know if an institution is in trouble or whether it will remain open long enough to graduate an incoming class. Parents and students may also not be aware of the reduced value of a degree from a defunct university. Consequently, should academic freedom be broadened to include the ethical prerogative of faculty to honestly discuss an institution's status with prospective students and their families?

One component of academic freedom should be the freedom to work in a nonexploitive workplace. Many struggling (and some not struggling) universities like HPU exist on the backs of their faculty. Essentially at-will employees with little or no job security, these faculty have high teaching loads, low salaries (with miniscule or no raises), and no time for research and publications. Long-serving faculty who have given up research and publications can have difficulty finding other positions when a university closes its doors. Faculty in institutions with weak shared governance have little influence on the policies, procedures, or direction of their college or university. In the extreme, these institutions are little more than academic sweatshops.

Like many smaller private nonprofit colleges, HPU is searching for its niche in a rapidly changing academic environment populated by more online programs, and by more students and families unwilling to go into deep debt for a college degree. Its survival will depend on fostering innovation that includes a renewed respect for academic freedom and a true partnership with a secure and protected faculty. That partnership can only be secured through a robust model of shared governance coupled with employee protections.

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