

FINDING THE COST OF FREEDOM:  
ACADEMIC FREEDOM DISCOURSE AS IT PERTAINS  
TO THE PART-TIME INSTRUCTOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Academic freedom has been an important facet of college teaching. However, the meaning of academic freedom is often nebulous and varied for many members of the college faculty. An estimated 48 percent of teaching faculty in higher education are hired on a part-time basis. With so many college courses being taught by faculty who do not have tenure or full time appointments I raise the question: what meanings are attached to the concept of academic freedom by the part-time instructor? To answer this question the study incorporated a research strategy of discourse analysis and autoethnography.

The study revealed the meanings attached to the concept of academic freedom by the part-time instructor are: having continuous or permanent employment so he or she can express himself or herself freely in the classroom without fear of not being re-hired; being able to negotiate the basic conditions of employment, providing a freedom of choice; being free to develop course materials and to have intellectual property rights in relation to those materials; receiving an honest evaluation with access to a grievance process and thereby providing for the free flow of information; and, for women part-time instructors, no repercussion when taking maternity leave.

These are not the traditional meanings of academic freedom associated with higher education. What the study revealed is a new definition of academic freedom that encompasses structural components.