

Political Intervention in Education

The interdependence of educational institutions and their academic freedom are essential to the quality and integrity of all education. Teaching and learning require free and full exposure to information and ideas, the right to question or dissent, and opportunities to study, research, and debate, free of political pressure. The academy requires that inquiry and analysis must be guided by evidence and ethics, unfettered by political intervention.

A college or university must be sensitive to the conditions of the society in which it exists, but it must also be free to determine how to be most responsive and responsible. Political interference in the affairs of an educational institution presents a threat to its freedom and effectiveness. Direct intervention by elected or appointed officials, political parties, or pressure groups in the selection of faculty, the determination of curricula, textbooks, course content, or in admissions or retention policies, injects factors which are often inimical to the fulfillment of an institution's mission. In the matter of appointments, for example, political control at any level results in divided loyalty and weakened authority. To impose political considerations upon faculty selection and retention harms an institution intellectually and educationally, not only by reducing its options in the recruitment of talent, but also by creating pressures against dissent on important policy issues. When political considerations irrelevant to the functions of the office determine the selection of trustees or similar officers, they impose restrictions on choice. Moreover, appointments based on political grounds entail external liaisons which may contravene the educational purposes of the institution.

If the tenure of an educational administrator is subject to political partisanship, or if appointments to the board of trustees or the faculty are made only with regard to their political implications, the institution may be weakened and its prospects for excellence seriously diminished.