
“Academic Freedom. Risks and Threats” is the subject of the new call for the volume 36 dossier, number 2 (2024) of the journal ESS

The Journal Higher Education and Society (ESS) of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) opens its call for the thematic dossier entitled: “Academic Freedom. Risks and threats”.

In an ever-changing world, the academic profession faces unprecedented challenges. On the one hand, we find an increase in its responsibilities, in its workload, as well as in the diversification and complexity of its roles. On the other, we find a series of transformations in the ways in which the academic profession's work is regulated, related to an increasing interference of the State (Moreno & Muñoz, 2020; Acosta Silva, 2002) and the market (Pérez Mora, 2019; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) in its field of operation, which impacts on a growing bureaucratization, as well as a commodification of the production of knowledge (Naidorf, 2005; Scott, 2024). In addition to the above, there are the diverse and complex relationships that academics establish with power structures.

This dossier aims to encourage discussion and analysis of these and other risks and implications that threaten academic freedom in a complex and volatile context characterized by interdependence. To this end, papers that address the following thematic axes are invited to participate:

- **Academic freedom versus bureaucratic rationale.** In the last 30 years, bureaucratic controls and regulatory systems over the academic profession have increased significantly. Given the need to guarantee the fulfillment of goals, within the framework of a discourse of quality research, continuous improvement and academic professionalization, procedures, assessment, control and accountability systems have been implemented and imposed on academic staff, not only in their teaching and research work, but also in various activities such as tutoring, academic management, liaison projects, among others (Pérez Mora; Castañeda Bernal & Inguanzo Arias, 2022a; 2022b). We are interested in opening the discussion on the extent to which the rules, policies and guidelines that are established under a bureaucratic logic restrict or limit academic freedom.
- **Academic freedom in the face of market rationale.** Around this axis, the influence of economic power in the definition of relevant topics and priorities in research agendas arises (Pérez Mora; Castañeda Bernal & Inguanzo Arias, 2022a). We also find the economic value that knowledge has acquired, for example, in patents, as well as the different economic, cultural, human, and social capitals, which are developed in a market rationale. It also highlights the economic rationality found in incentive programs, and the way in which, through indicators, behavioral control guidelines are generated, which undoubtedly impacts academic freedom.

- **Academic freedom versus the logics of power.** Academic freedom and the mechanisms of restriction it faces presuppose devices for the exercise of power: the power of academics to decide freely on his or her actions as opposed to the power of an external entity that imposes behavioral guidelines, prohibitions, incentives and sanctions (Pérez Mora, 2019). In this context, it is crucial to analyze in whose hands the control of these systems resides, to understand the motivations and interests of those who define their direction, and to evaluate the populations benefited and affected by them. This may include studies on the misuse of power, imposition of interests of dominant groups, excessive control, violations, repression and/or censorship, but also, affections on the academic freedom of certain vulnerable academic sectors or those with precarious or unfavorable working conditions, for example, those with temporary contracts.
- **Academic freedom versus the culture of cancellation.** It is important to analyze studies related to the violation of the spirit of academic freedom and the development of the culture of cancellation, which promotes not, discussing ideas nor expressing feelings contrary to those who have the power to cancel (Sitze, 2023). This axis encompasses an analysis on the power of communities and digital networks to cancel writings, opinions or people, particularly in teaching and research, through exerting pressure, questioning, or criticism, but it also considers the existing risks or threats reaching the point of harassment, intolerance, exclusion, or unjustified boycott of academics and their products, thereby affecting academic freedom.
- **Limits to academic freedom.** Critical, theoretical or empirical studies that discuss or analyze the implications and limits to academic freedom, considering, on the one hand, the possible risks of abuse or overreach by academics under conditions of lax regulation and high degrees of freedom, and on the other hand, the risks and threats arising from regulatory mechanisms and control strategies aimed at ensuring the quality of teaching and research. That is, the limits between academic freedom and the mechanisms of control and regulation in a context in which academic results, the social impact of knowledge, educational quality and student success are increasingly important.

We welcome empirical studies, theoretical essays, systematization of experiences, and state of the art on the theme of the dossier, which will be organized by professors from the University of Guadalajara (Mexico): Ricardo Pérez Mora, Blanca Inguanzo Arias and Carlos Iván Moreno.

As in previous issues, the General Section of the ESS journal remains open to receive articles presenting studies and researches on higher education in the region and its university institutions.

The deadline for submission of articles for this issue is September 29, 2024.

All articles will be received through the platform of the Journal Higher Education and Society (ESS)

<https://iesalc.unesco.org/ess/index.php/ess3/about/submissions> where presentation standards and formats are available. Likewise, each article will be submitted to external double-blind peer review.

For more information write to ess-iesalc@unesco.org

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