

# The university defends the work environment

Upsala Nya Tidning 2007-05-04

That two professors at Uppsala University have been warned for dereliction of duty and resigned has caused much attention. In this connection questions have been posed concerning the views of the university on academic freedom. The university administration upholds this freedom and works actively so that academic freedom always shall have the space it requires.

The German university ideologist Wilhelm von Humboldt gave academic freedom a classical formulation. Universities should be characterised by two kinds of academic freedom. *Lehrfreiheit*, i.e. the teacher should himself decide what he wants to research or teach and *Lernfreiheit*, i.e. the student himself may choose what he wants to attend. Academic freedom means that the teacher/researcher shall himself decide the subject, i.e. himself choose the direction of his research and himself interpret the results of his research and draw his own conclusions and finally be able to publish his results where he himself finds most appropriate. The opposite is that research and teaching both in regard to theory and in regard to conclusions is steered by e.g. the state or church through political influence or religious fanaticism. Academic freedom is also to openly discuss the development of the subject, theory and methods of the research and results in the form of seminars, thesis defences, debates in newspapers and so on, with preserved respect for academic tolerance and intellectual dignity. An open discussion of this kind is the life and nerve of scientific activity.

To undermine or go against decisions that have been made by the department head or the department board has nothing to do with academic freedom. Neither does academic freedom absolve a professor from being present at the work place. A university department is a work place like any other, where laws, regulations, agreements, instructions and decisions made in a duly fashion are to be followed. The university must protect academic freedom by actively making sure that we have a good work environment where there is lots of space for diverse views, where all categories of personal feel involved and can be heard and where made decisions are respected. All personal must be able to safely go to his or her work place without needing to feel worried about harassment.

That the two professors at the mathematics department were warned and the same day were offered severance pay was just a part [of an action] with the purpose of defending academic freedom and restoring a good work environment. The work environment at the mathematics department has for several years been totally unacceptable. There has been harassment. Personal has, despite various measures of support, felt so bad that they have chosen to resign. Already year 2003 one of the two professors received a written warning from the department head for harassment. Despite this warning the professor did not change his behaviour. Both of them have refused to follow made decisions despite reminders from the head of the mathematics department as well as the vice-rector. When it comes to conduct at the work place the university places the same high demands on professors as on other groups of personal. I refrain from further specifying the details of the dereliction of duties for consideration of those involved, since I prioritise personal integrity over the interest of insight.

It has also been emphasised in the external debate that the two professors have criticised an appointment of a newly created chair. The views of the two professors have not at all been discussed by the university administration and have naturally had no bearing on the decision to give them the warning.

The effort to improve the work environment for the 70 – 80 employees at the department continues on several levels and it is the hope of the university that the activity there shall be normalised as quickly as possible. Bad work environment risks leading to stifling the academic debate and freedom to be restricted. What is needed now, in the present situation for the department, is peace and quiet.

Uppsala University takes problems with work environment seriously. It is important for me as vice-chancellor of Uppsala University to make sure that such centres of conflicts will not appear at all in the future. Academic freedom presupposes a good work environment.

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