

Pugilism: An Alarming Deterrent to Academic Freedom

Brett J. Holt

University of Vermont, USA

Abstract

This manuscript begins by establishing a brief history of modern academic freedom. The manuscript then contextualizes academic freedom as freedoms in: 1) teaching, 2) learning, 3) inquiry, and 4) expression. This manuscript identified faculty freedoms as “lehrfreiheit” and student freedoms as “lernfreiheit.” Next, the manuscript identifies five fear generators associated with inhibiting academic freedoms. While five fear generators are identified in this paper (short-termism, perfectionism, intellectualism, hierarchism, and pugilism), the focal point for this paper is “pugilism.” The author characterized “pugilism” as excessive competing. The author provided examples of both inter-academic pugilism (between schools) and intra-academic pugilism (between faculty/students). Regarding intra-academic pugilism, examples were separated in to 1) real, 2) perceived, and 3) self-pugilism. Next, the article explored the consequences of inter and intra pugilism upon faculty and student freedoms. Finally, the manuscript offers suggestions for both students and faculty in dealing with pugilism or excessive competitiveness. The author concludes with an appeal to the reader to preserve academic freedoms by managing both inter and intra-pugilism.

1. Introduction

This manuscript will begin with a brief history of academic freedom. Both the freedoms of the student and the faculty will be contextualized. Next, the author will inform the reader of the five fear generators as established by Mellon [1]. One of those fear generators is “pugilism” which this author uses interchangeably with “competitiveness.” Academic pugilism will be distinguished between inter-academic pugilism and intra-academic pugilism. While inter-academic pugilism can establish a culture of fear and create challenges for academic freedom which will be discussed, this author will consider intra-academic pugilism as the primary agent for impeding academic freedom. The author will, then, establish three types of intra-academic pugilism/competitiveness for the reader:

- 1) actual pugilism,
- 2) perceived pugilism, and
- 3) self-pugilism. Examples of each category are offered subsequent sections.

After a detailed discussion of the consequences academic pugilism has on academic freedom, the

author will offer recommendations for establishing a teaching and learning culture free from pugilism. Finally, the manuscript concludes with an appeal to the reader to preserve academic freedoms through reduction and/or elimination of academic pugilism.

2. Brief History of Academic Freedom

This author will discuss and refer to two types of academic freedom throughout this manuscript, as described by Commanger [2]: 1) *Lehrfreiheit* or the academic freedoms of the instructor and 2) *Lernfreiheit* or the academic freedoms of the student. These two terms became popular during the 19th century when Wilhelm von Humboldt established a university in Berlin [2]. Humboldt’s institution differed from other higher education institutes of the time-period because the faculty and students were not beholden to any government or religious organization. Most universities at that time were either managed by religious institutions and/or governments. Humboldt’s university quickly became popular due to his commitment to freedom from political or religious authority. Faculty and students were allowed to commit to study and scholarship that focused on academic disciplines. Foreigners, especially, found Humboldt’s devotion to *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit* appealing.

During the 1900’s, adverse policies to academic freedoms, despite the rising popularity, emerged within Europe due to two world wars and two totalitarian governments. Thereby, advocates for academic freedom relocated to other countries (most notably the U.S.A. and Canada) and established organizations that would promote the tenets of academic freedom such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The concepts of *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit*, then, were preserved in North American universities [3] until once again flourishing in Europe post-Cold War. In 1997, according to Dea [3], the United Nations also committed and reinforced academic freedom throughout the world by supporting AAUP’s four primary principles regarding academic freedom. Those four principles are: 1) the freedom to teach, 2) the freedom to learn, 3) the freedom of inquiry, and 4) the freedom of both intramural and extramural expression. This author explores what happens when fear from pugilism inhibits academic faculty and students from exercising their freedoms.

3. Fear Generators

According to Efron [4], a culture of fear in academia is best described as exploiting biases to achieve incompatible goals. Efron [4] asserts that “fear” creates barriers for success. Mellon [1] identifies five fear generators: 1) Hierarchism, 2) Perfectionism, 3) Anti/Intellectualism, 4) Short-termism, and 5) Pugilism. Each of these fear generators, claims Holt [5], has encroached on the academic freedoms of both faculty and students. This manuscript will specifically explore the fear generator: “pugilism.”

4. Academic Pugilism

Pugilism is one of Mellon’s [1] five identified fear generators. This is a culture of “sparring,” “combateness” and “competitiveness” amongst peers. In other words, it is a constant competition of faculty and/or students desiring to be recognized as better than their peer. Mellon [1] is referring to constant competition or sparring to continually outperform one’s peers and explains that a “tournament” model has become the status quo: A model where everyone is attempting to “knock-out” their peers to reach the top of the pyramid. For the purpose of this manuscript, the author will identify pugilism as a form of sustained competition and the terms “competition” and “pugilism” will be used interchangeably.

Hart and Rodgers [6] have identified that pugilism or competition in higher education occurs both between (inter) institutions and within (intra) institutions. Likewise, Kruken [7] indicates that academic competition/pugilism occurs collectively at the institutional level (inter) or is individually embedded within the institution (intra). Both types will be explored in the following subsections.

4.1. Inter-Institutional Academic Pugilism

Higher Education institutions compete amongst each other for: 1) National/Global Ranking, 2) Student Recruitment, 3) Qualified Faculty, 4) Funding, 5) Research Output, and 6) Grants [6]. In Table 1, the author includes each of the resources and definitions that Hart and Rodgers [6] indicate colleges/universities fight over.

Many higher education institutions engage in pugilism to obtain a higher ranking in rating services such as US News and World Report, the Times Higher Education, or QS Rankings [6]. Colleges and universities also compete for student enrollment. Higher education institutions further compete for government and private funding for their operations [7]. Qualified faculty have become a source of inter-institutional pugilism with a desire to promote

offered curricula utilizing more experienced and visibly established faculty members than other institutions. Institutions want to advertise that they attracted high-caliber faculty members that are respected in their fields of study [6]. Likewise, colleges and universities also compete for grant awards. Universities seek out to secure grant awards in order to increase their capital and/or prestige. And, often, universities compete with each other through research output [6].

Table 1. Inter-Institutional Pugilism [6]

<i>Colleges Compete For:</i>	<i>Definition:</i>
National/Global Ranking	Colleges and universities compete for ranking on ambiguous scales such as US News & World Report and Times Higher Education.
Student Recruitment	Colleges and Universities compete for student enrollment.
Qualified Faculty	Colleges and Universities compete to attract top-level faculty members at the lowest cost.
Funding	Colleges and Universities compete to secure government and private funding for their institution’s operations.
Research Output	Colleges and Universities compete to produce more research papers.
Grants	Colleges and Universities compete for grants (both private and public) to be awarded their institution.

Hart and Rodgers [6] illustrate how these resources interact with each other. For example, when universities compete for more grant funding it often leads to more research output; Or, when universities produce a higher output of research, it could lead to higher national/global rankings; And, higher national/global rankings could lead to more student enrollment, etc. Thereby, when these resources interact with each other, the university is compelled to compete for all variables.

According to Mellon [1], this type of competition/pugilism amongst institutions for resources creates a “top-down” culture that applies to the faculty and students within the institution. O’hara [8] claims that the inter-academic competitiveness creates an internal culture that evolves from inter-academic pugilism into intra-academic pugilism amongst the faculty and students within the university. Intra-institutional academic pugilism will be discussed in the following section.

4.2. Intra-Institutional Academic Pugilism

O'hara [8] suggests that much of the intra-institutional academic pugilism between faculty and students at the same institution has been driven by the previously addressed culture of inter-institutional pugilism amongst colleges/universities. Because faculty/students witness institutions competing externally amongst each other, individuals, too, are encouraged to compete internally.

Crestinger [9] identifies three types of competitiveness/pugilism occurring within faculty and students: 1) Real Competition, 2) Perceived Competition, and 3) Self-competition. Real competition exists as a tangible outcome in which individuals are competing to obtain. This author has provided examples in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Compleitive Behavior

<i>Type</i>	<i>Student Examples</i>	<i>Faculty Examples</i>
Real Competition or Pugilism	Students compete to determine valedictorian.	Faculty members compete for merit based professional development funds.
Perceived Competition or Pugilism	A student feels that they are competing for positive feedback from an instructor.	A faculty member feels that they are competing with others for student enrollment in their courses.
Self-Competition or Pugilism	Student pushes themselves to score higher on exam than prior exams.	Faculty press themselves to publish more than the prior year.

Perceived competition occurs when one individual “feels” like they are competing against others but there is no tangible evidence that someone else is indeed competing. And, self-competition is defined as one pushing themselves to be better than their previous performance. In the following sections the author explores each type of intra-academic pugilism occurring between faculty members and students.

5. Intra-Academic Pugilism (Faculty)

Intra-academic pugilism has been identified within faculty. Faculty are often encouraged to compete for awards, recognitions, merit stipends, internal grants, student enrollment numbers, elected service opportunities, etc. [5]. Unfortunately, these types of relationships do not foster the collegial and shared academic goal-setting expected from

educators.

In the following sub-sections, this author will examine examples of intra-institutional academic pugilism in Crestinger's [9] three categories: real, perceived, and self.

5.1. Real Faculty Pugilism

Tangible outcomes that faculty compete for include but are not limited to: a) faculty awards, b) travel and professional development funds, c) merit pay raises d) course enrollment, etc. Aaltonen [10] claims that institutions place faculty in competitive/pugilistic situations where they are constantly compelled to compete in order to demonstrate that they are “working.” Warren [11] substantiates this claim by pointing out that academics are often incentivized to work against each other rather than with each other. And, this creates real pugilism amongst faculty members.

Real faculty pugilism occurs when faculty members are constantly competing against each other for tangible rewards. Lee [12] indicates that there is quite a bit of in-fighting amongst current faculty members, also referred to as academic “turf-wars.” As an example, Lee [12] indicates that faculty members are possessive of courses and content/resources within courses; for instance, many instructors do not want to share course materials that can be used in multiple sections of a course with another instructor. Despite that faculty have similar goals/objectives and could share resources to achieve shared learning outcomes, they, instead, compete.

5.2. Perceived Faculty Pugilism

Perceived faculty pugilism occurs when a faculty member, without evidence, believes that they are in a competition to sustain an objective. For example, a faculty member may perceive that they are competing for course approval or student enrollment when in reality the faculty member is not competing [9].

An example of perceived faculty pugilism can occur due to unsubstantiated beliefs such as: parents make better teachers because both involve children. Thereby, a childless faculty member believes that s/he is in competition with child-raising instructors. However, this ignores the fact that critical parenting skills are not equated to critical teaching skills.

Another example might have a faculty believing that s/he is in competition with other tenure-track faculty to obtain tenure (as if only one can be tenured). However, the concept of “tenure” is/should be afforded any faculty member that has achieved the explicit criteria. If a faculty member incorrectly believes that they are in competition with other faculty members then they are in a perceived competition.

5.3. Faculty Self-Pugilism

Self-pugilism within a faculty member occurs when a faculty member competes amongst one's own self. For instance, a faculty member who published one article this year may press themselves to publish two articles next year [9]. Or, a faculty member that collected data from 50 subjects during an initial study may seek to collect data from 200 subjects upon revision and replication of the study. Also, a faculty member may have served on two departmental-level committees one year only to seek service on two college-level committees the following year. Essentially, university faculty members are always pressing themselves to do more work or superior quality work than they previously performed.

6. Intra-Academic Pugilism (Students)

Pugilism also occurs amongst students because students feel the need to validate their performance based on the performance of classmates. The following sub-sections will explore real, perceived, and self-pugilism amongst students.

6.1. Real Student Pugilism

Real student pugilism occurs when students are competing for a tangible outcome/reward. For instance, Holt [5] describes constant competition amongst students in discipline specific areas of study. In Band and Orchestra, for example, teachers will rank their students by "chairs" (i.e., First Chair Flute, Second Chair Flute, Third Chair Flute, etc.). Thereby, a structure of in-fighting and combativeness is already in place for students wanting to engage in learning how to play musical instruments. In this example the students are competing with their classmates for a higher position within the course. Likewise, theatre students compete with one another to determine who will be the lead in the school play. In both disciplinary specific examples, there exists a "real" outcome dependent on pugilism.

Many students are frequently "ranked" in their schools/class. For instance, Murphy [13] claims that students have been denied college admissions due to their high school rank. In this regard, identified criteria such as Grade Point Average (GPA) or high-stakes test scores were not used to determine admissions but rather class-rank. This disregards the notion that a lower class-rank at school "A" might have higher GPA and test scores than student with a higher class-rank at school "B." Rojas [14], illustrates, for example, just how competitive and pugilistic class ranks have become, reporting that one student had been denied a scholarship and filed

legal charges against her school system because there had been an alleged tabulation error; and, she lost a coveted "salutatorian" ranking that included a scholarship reward.

Another example of real intra-academic pugilism amongst students occurs frequently within science fairs. A science fair, according to Sawchuck [15], commonly turns students who are conducting scientific research into "losers." The message sent to the students who do not win is that their scientific research was not important nor worthy of recognition [15]. Sawchuck [15] claims that students are forced into a competition that is antithetical to the scientific process and young students are learning that science is accomplished by competing with a classmate as opposed to working with each other to answer a research question.

6.2. Perceived Student Pugilism

Perceived student pugilism occurs when students believe that they are competing for an outcome but in reality, there is no evidence that a competition is occurring.

Crestinger [9] provides a gender-based societal stereotype to illustrate perceived student pugilism: Society believes that men are better at mathematics than women; thereby, a female student, due to a stereotype, considers herself to be engaged in a competition (against all male students) to perform as well or better than the male students. In this scenario, the female student "perceives" herself in a competition although no evidence of a real competition exists. Such stereotypes have led to encroachments on the *lernfreiheit* of students. For example, many males avoid enrolling in Nursing programs while many females avoid enrolling in Engineering programs due to similar stereotypes.

Societal perceptions lead to perceived pugilism amongst students. Even if there is not a competition occurring, students believe that their success is dependent upon performing better than someone else.

6.3. Student Self-Pugilism

Students can feel the pressure to excel and sometimes that pressure is self-imposed claims Berner [16]. Self-pugilism means that one is constantly trying to outperform their prior score/record/grade/etc. Students want to improve their own performance from their own past accomplishments.

A self-competitive student is always challenging themselves to do better than a prior outcome. For instance, a student may challenge themselves to score higher on the next chemistry exam than the prior chemistry exam. However, this type of competitiveness is flawed because it does not

consider context. For instance, the next chemistry exam has completely different content than the prior exam.

7. Consequences of Academic Pugilism

Both faculty and students have experienced pugilism. Carson et al. [17] claim that while there may be positive results from sustained competition, the negative effects outweigh any potential gains that may be brought about from an academic culture of competition and pugilism.

Too much competitiveness/pugilism has been shown to undermine creativity and innovation amongst faculty and students [17]. Additionally, academic pugilism reinforces and legitimizes inequalities. In the following sub-sections, the author will examine the consequences of both inter and intra academic pugilism on *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit*.

7.1. Consequences of Inter-Academic Pugilism

In an ideal world, claims Warren [11], academia would work in cooperation to solve problems and accomplish common goals; however, colleges are competing against one another to achieve independent success. Even though some academics work together, they are reviewed by their institutions independently causing a disconnect between academic objectives and academic review [12].

Although universities compete for status on ranking systems, Jaschick [18], exposed flaws in popular college ranking systems. Notably, Jaschick [18] explains how competing for higher rankings causes conflicts of interest that impede the university's primary objectives. For instance, some universities are purchasing advertising space with the ranking organizations.

Considering competition for student enrollment, Musselin [19] indicates that many new forms of competition no longer have anything to do with academic enrichment or preservation. For instance, institutions now recruit students with non-academic amenities such as campus housing, events (i.e., sporting events, musical concerts, etc.), student-use facilities (i.e., campus bowling alleys, ice rinks, movie theatres, etc.), or transportation around the community (i.e., complimentary bus services). These amenities do not focus on providing resources dedicated to student learning but rather have become a way for colleges/universities to incentivize student selection.

Holt [20] indicates that universities sacrifice their academic freedoms in order to secure funding which in turn leads to conflicts of interest. Many funding opportunities come with "strings attached" that requires colleges/universities to relinquish certain

freedoms in order to secure funding. Some of these freedoms include faculty authority over search hires, curriculum, and course offerings [20].

Like funding, colleges/universities encourage a culture in which they reward faculty members for grant applications. However, Kruken [7] indicates that faculty within the colleges/universities feel compelled to compete for grants that they do not necessarily need nor put to good use [7].

Colleges/universities place publication criteria on their faculty (often referred to as "publish or perish") in order to increase research output over their competitors. The challenge, as reported by Van Dalen [21], however, is that universities often sacrifice quality of research for more research. Or, institutions in an effort to produce "more" research quickly will engage in "short-cuts" that sacrifice datasets and some have even engaged in unethical research practices [21]. More does not always mean better research practices.

7.2. Consequences of Intra-Academic Pugilism

A culture of fear generated from pugilism has an effect on both *lehrfreiheit* (faculty freedoms) and *lernfreiheit* (student freedoms). In the following subsections, the author will distinguish between intra-academic pugilism concerns to both faculty and student freedoms.

7.2.1. Intra-Pugilism Consequences on *Lehrfreiheit*. Kruken [7] documents how a drive to compete for more students drives up the student to teacher ratio on college campuses. Thereby, faculty are now competing to offer courses that have a higher enrollment than their colleagues. Sometimes faculty compete with their fellow faculty using special incentives. Documented incentives to enroll in one's course instead of another may include out-of-class field-trips, admission to events (i.e., theatre productions for Drama courses, sporting events for Athletic Training courses, dining outings for Culinary courses, etc.).

Similarly, grade inflation is another consequence of intra-academic pugilism on *lehrfreiheit*, according to Klein [22]. Grade inflation occurs because one faculty member wants to attract students to their courses/sections by reducing the academic rigor (easy "A"). When a professor reduces the academic rigor of a course in order to attract/enroll more students and increase the popularity of the course, then the academic freedoms of the faculty have been affected. Other faculty members are now placed in a position where they, too, must reduce the rigor in order to compete and increase enrollment in their courses [22]. Now, faculty sacrifice their freedoms in creating syllabi, designing relevant content experiences, and accurately assessing students on

course objectives in order to attract students with a GPA-boosting course.

Warren [11] explains how academics have abandoned the ideals of collaborating with one another to reach a common goal. Instead, claims Warren [11], academic faculty are trying to seek a competitive advantage to make themselves stand out in the academic community. Faculty, while expected to work together to achieve common goals, are reviewed independently of one another by administration. And, scientists are more often choosing the path of least resistance by publishing more papers rather than a path that leads to more significant discoveries [21].

Creativity and innovative ideas are hindered through continued competition and pugilism, according to Kruken [7]. Faculty strive to “conform” rather than explore novel philosophies and theories. Such stifling of academic creativity limits freedom of inquiry.

Since creativity and innovation may be hindered, Levy [23] suggests that faculty may feel pressured to steal intellectual work. In a recent interview, Levy [23] indicates that faculty are commonly taking authorships and other forms of intellectual theft (plagiarizing syllabi, conference papers, abstracts, or stealing data-sets that were collected by another person) in order to build their own individual resums. This leaves the originating faculty member with an assault to their *lehrfreiheit* because they have now been victimized in their intellectual properties.

Similarly, Eftekhari et al. [24] and Van Dalen [21] both report that internal policies that press faculty to publish more (“publish or perish”) has led to unnecessary stress that has led faculty to divert focus from their teaching responsibilities. Further, this competitive focus regarding publication output has led to manufactured data and minimally controlled/hastily collected data-sets calling into question the credibility of research results [24].

O’hara [8] suggests that faculty workload responsibilities are changing and growing in areas that now fall outside the originally intended tasks of the academic faculty. O’hara [8] indicates a trend that current faculty duties now include things like student recruitment, planning both online and in-person courses, college/disciplinary advocacy, public relations, community outreach, mentorship, and a growing amount of internal and external service. This goes far beyond the responsibilities that were once limited to planning/teaching/evaluating courses and conducting research to generate new knowledge. With more tertiary responsibilities imposed by administration, while still being measured and evaluated annually on their primary responsibilities, many faculties are beginning to take “short-cuts.” These short-cuts mean that faculty are avoiding prioritizing the very responsibilities that uniquely identify them as an academic faculty member.

The established culture of pugilism that incites faculty to continually compete amongst each other rather than work together to solve common academic problems has led to consequences that challenge the freedoms of inquiry, teaching, and expression.

7.2.2. Intra-Pugilism Consequences on *Lernfreiheit*. Inter-academic pugilism can negatively affect *lernfreiheit* or the academic freedoms of the students. When colleges and universities are competing to attract students, they often are not focused on enticing the students to choose the school through academic incentives. For instance, the institution may attract students by claiming to have more amenities in their dormitory rooms than other institutions (i.e., cable television). Or, an institution may advertise that students receive free tickets to a homecoming concert that has a popular musician.

The consequence, however, is that the students are not selecting the institution that may best enhance their academic success/achievement. Therefore, *lernfreiheit* is impeded because the students are being coerced to choose a school for non-academic reasons (“choose our school because you’ll be better entertained here”).

Sharma [25] informs the reader that a sustained culture of competitiveness de-motivates student learning. Constant comparisons devalue the idea that every student learns differently [25]. For example, a student might have received a 90% on a paper thinking s/he had done well on an assignment only to find out that a classmate (in comparison) scored a 95%; thereby, reducing the initial feelings of having done well. In this example the student no longer feels good about him/herself but rather views that they were not as good as a classmate. This type of competitiveness affects *lernfreiheit* because students no longer value the “process” of learning but rather only see value in the final product.

Berner [16] reports that constantly comparing one’s work with others creates an unhealthy cycle. Academic validation, as stated by Berner [16], is when your emotional values are correlated with your academic achievement. In other words, students are determining their own self-worth through competition amongst classmates. And, eight out of every ten college students are defining their self-worth based on their success in comparison with classmates rather than comparison to a criterion [16]. This 80% of the college student population are suggested to be suffering from anxiety and depression at a greater rate than the approximate 20% that are not continually comparing their academic work.

It is also suggested by Berner [16], that too much pugilism amongst students ruins relationships. Students who are competitive with their grades/scores also tend to be competitive in additional activities. For instance, pugilistic students

might not just compete for a higher grade (academic achievement), but might also compete to see if they can accomplish more goals (including non-academic). As an example, Berner [16] highlights that a student might try to attract college recruiters by joining more clubs than a classmate so that they stand out on the admission application. Thereby, student relationships are strained through non-academic competition.

Lee [12] reveals that college students remain confused when attempting to decide on courses. Students cannot determine which classes they need due to an ever-changing competitive curriculum. And, as a result, students choose courses that do not benefit their goals; therefore, they turn to academic advisors who continue to place the students into a competitive atmosphere by recommending courses that do not meet student goals. However, as Lee [12] describes, the college student is disregarding the fact that by allowing others to choose courses that “they” think are beneficial rather than choosing courses that the student thinks beneficial limits their own decision-making *lernfreiheit*.

Constant pugilism leads to many unhealthy behaviors amongst students according to Gupta [26]. Some of the health issues faced by students according to Pasco et al. [27] include: 1) Anxiety, 2) Depression, 3) Increased Substance Abuse, 4) Poor Sleep Quality, 5) Impaired Physical Health, 6) Burnout, 7) Depersonalization, and 8) Lower Quality of Life. Concurrently, The Newport Institute [28] reports that that 87% of college students reported that “education” is a source of stress.

Crestinger [9] claims that constant pugilism amongst students has led to higher rates of academic misconduct since college students feel the “need” to be seen as successful. Brown and Emmett [29] estimate that over 70% of college students have engaged in academic misconduct and Gerdeman [30] corroborates this assertion by reporting a similar statistic that two out of every three (66%) students have admitted to engaging in academic misconduct. If a student engages in academic misconduct, then they have negatively affected their own *lernfreiheit* because the student has not allowed themselves to fully learn the content. Instead, the student has prioritized receiving a high mark as more important than actually understanding the material.

Not all consequences are necessarily negative according to Shimotsu-Dariol et al. [31]. Shimotsu-Dariol et al. [31] acknowledge that students classified as “academically competitive” are more involved in the learning process and thereby have more opportunity to learn. Competition could lead to student motivation and the ability to overcome disappointments; the authors [31], predict, however, that competitive students also impair the learning process for their non-competitive peers. This author, therefore, has decided to include signs of healthy

versus unhealthy student competition from Gupta [26] in Table 3.

Table 3. Healthy and Unhealthy Competition [26]

<i>Healthy Competition</i>	<i>Unhealthy Competition</i>
Student does not feel like a failure because they were not first.	Student feels like a failure if not accomplishing first place.
Student participates in extra-curricular activities for enjoyment.	Student participates in extra-curriculars even if they do not enjoy them.
Classmates congratulate each other on their achievements.	Classmates do not show appreciation for other's accomplishments.
Students focus on own growth.	Students are focused on achievements of others in comparison to themselves.
Student desires to try again when not achieving the objective.	Devastated by failure and quit trying to achieve.
Teams focus on gaining results together.	When on a team, individuals focus on proving themselves.
People build themselves up (motivate).	People tear others down to win.
Focus is on the progress made.	Focus is on the end result.
Emphasis is on what worked well.	Emphasis is on what did not work well.
One can enjoy themselves while engaging in the competitive activity.	One is overwhelmed by fear and nervousness.

Academic competitiveness, then, has become a deterrent to student learning. Pascoe, et al. [27] summarize the effect of intra-academic pugilism on *lernfreiheit* as resulting in students removing themselves from the learning experiences altogether (i.e., quitting college). Therefore, this author acknowledges that pugilism and constant competition has a negative consequence on the freedom to learn.

8. Recommendations

Since continued pugilism/competition can lead to fear amongst student and faculty in academia, this author has included recommendations below to help neutralize the threat to *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit*.

8.1. Faculty Recommendations

This author provides recommendations offered by Le Cunff [32] for faculty to preserve their academic freedoms within a competitive/pugilistic environment:

1. Set Ambitious Goals: Le Cunff [32] suggest people set purposeful, actionable, continuous, and trackable goals. This author believes that it would behoove faculty members to set goals for service,

teaching, and scholarship. Ensure that those goals are achievable

2. Define Your Values: As a faculty member, you are free to define your values. Professors are encouraged to teach content, serve, and conduct scholarship in ways that they have defined as valuable.

3. Embrace a Growth Mindset: Faculty members need to approach any form of competitiveness/pugilism as a learning experience. The most successful individuals at learning from competitiveness are those that have realized that “failure” is part of a bigger process [32]. In other words, it is ok to be unsuccessful as long as it guides the faculty member into future academic success.

8.2. Student Recommendations

Below this author recommends the Newport Institute’s [28] guidelines for managing pugilism and competitiveness amongst students:

1. Remember What Matters: The Newport Institute [28] recommends that students focus on “learning” material and achieving an understanding of the material rather than focus on a grade or arbitrary outcomes.

2. Maintain Balance: This author suggests that students try to commit an equal amount of time to their studies that they commit to their social endeavors.

3. Choose the Right College (not the best): When it comes to inter-academic pugilism, the Newport Institute [28] signifies that higher education institutions may be willing to solicit your decision to attend college at their institute by offering non-academic incentives. Thereby, students may choose to enroll in a college that does not offer the “right” resources the student needs to be a successful learner but are offering more incentives.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

This manuscript classified different types of academic pugilism for the reader. Examples were provided in the main categories of inter and intra pugilism with further examples provided in the subcategories: real, perceived, and self. Potential consequences of academic pugilism’s effects on academic freedoms have been documented and provided to establish that academic freedoms can and are forborne due to the pressure on faculty and students to continue out-performing one another. Academic enrichment and preservation suffer from the efforts to continue competing amongst one another in every academic detail.

While some authors note that pugilism and competition lead to positive outcomes such as motivation, competence, and ability to deal with disappointment [31]; This author asserts that there

are indications that academic pugilism has negatively affected both the greater faculty and broader student academic freedoms. Mellon [1] identifies pugilism as one of the fear generators and Holt [5] determined that the fear generators hinder academic freedoms of both faculty and students. If, as Efron [4] implies, a culture of fear is present within the university, then students and faculty do not have the freedom to pursue teaching and learning. Moreover, this author concludes that continued competitiveness or pugilism can deteriorate academic freedoms. Finally, this author makes an appeal to preserve academic freedoms through effective strategies to proceed cautiously with pugilism and competitive activities.

10. References

- [1] Mellon, L. (2018). ‘Why Creating a Learning Culture is the Answer to Fear’, Duke Corporate Education; <http://www.dukrce.com/insights/why-creating-learning-culture-answer-fear/> (Access Date: 30 March, 2018).
- [2] Commager, H. S. (1963). ‘The University and Freedom: *Lehrfreiheit* & *Lernfreiheit*’, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 34(7), 361-370.
- [3] Dea, S. (2018). ‘A Brief History of Academic Freedom’, *University Affairs*; <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/dispatches-academic-freedom/a-brief-history-of-academic-freedom/> (Access Date: 9 October, 2018).
- [4] Efron, L. (2017). ‘Do You Have a Culture of Fear?’, *Forbes*; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/louidefron/2017/09/25/do-you-have-a-culture-of-fear-three-questions-to-ask/?sh=2dedae651435> (Access Date: 25 September, 2017).
- [5] Holt, B. J. (2022). ‘Establishing a Fear-Free Culture of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*’, *The Journal of Information Technologies and Lifelong Learning*, 5(1), 222-230.
- [6] Hart, P.F., & Rodgers, W. (2023). ‘Competition, Competitiveness, and Competitive Advantage in Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review’, *Studies in Higher Education*, 49(11), 2153-2177.
- [7] Kruken, G. (2021). ‘Multiple Competitions in Higher Education: A Conceptual Approach’, *Innovation*, 23(2), 163-181.
- [8] O’hara, G. (2024). ‘It’s Not Your Fault That Academic Life is Getting Harder’, *Voices of Academia*; <https://voicesofacademia.com/2024/04/05/its-not-your-fault-that-academic-life-is-getting-harder-by-glen-ohara/> (Access Date: 5 April, 2024).
- [9] Crestinger, M. A. (2003). ‘Academic Competitiveness Among Graduate Students’, *University of Wisconsin – Stout Thesis*; <https://www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2003/2003crestingerm.pdf> (Access Date: 30 August, 2003).

- [10] Aaltonen, A. (2021). 'Academia as Competition', Medium; <https://aleksiaaltonen.medium.com/academia-as-competition-72031a7614ae> (Access Date: 24 May, 2021).
- [11] Warren, C. (2018). 'Professors Eat Their Own Young: How Competition can Stifle Good Science', the Guardian; <https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2018/jan/29/professors-eat-their-own-young-how-competition-can-stifle-good-science> (Access Date: 29, January, 2018).
- [12] Lee, J. (2015). 'Why Academic Politics are So Vicious', American Association of University Professors; <https://www.aaup.org/article/why-academic-politics-are-so-vicious> (Access Date: 1 October, 2015).
- [13] Murphy, J. (2020). 'The Confusing State and Uncertain Future of Class Rankings', The Elective; <https://elective.collegeboard.org/confusing-state-and-uncertain-future-class-rankings> (Access Date: 24 January, 2020).
- [14] Rojas, R. (2021). 'Her High School Said She Ranked Third in Her Class. So She Went to Court', The New York Times; <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/us/dalee-sullivan-gpa-alpine.html> (Access Date: 28 May, 2021).
- [15] Sawchuck, S. (2017). 'Are Science Fairs Worth All That Trouble? Study Seeks Some Answers', Education Week; <https://edweek.org/teaching-learning/are-science-fairs-worth-all-that-trouble-study-seeks-some-answers/2017/11> (Access Date: 6 November, 2017).
- [16] Berner, T. (2023). 'Academic Competition Triggers Stress Not Success', the Standard; <https://standard.asl.org/23167/opinions/academic-competition-triggers-stress-not-success/> (Access Date: 27 September, 2023).
- [17] Carson, L., Bartneck, C., & Voges, K. (2013). 'Over-Competitiveness in Academia: A Literature Review', Disruptive Science and Technology, 1(4), pp. 183-190.
- [18] Jaschick, J. (2021). 'International rankings and Conflicts of Interest', Inside Higher Education; <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2021/05/03/international-rankings-and-conflicts-interest> (Access Date: 3 May, 2021).
- [19] Musselin, C. (2018). 'New Forms of Competition in Higher Education', Socio-Economic Review, 16(3), 657-683.
- [20] Holt, B. J. (2024). 'Conflicts of Interest: Sacrificing Objectivity Imperils Academic Freedom', The International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education, 15(2), 4986-4994.
- [21] Van Dalen, H. P. (2020). 'How the Publish-or-Perish Principle Divides a Science: The Case of Economists', Scientometrics, 126(2), 1675-1694.
- [22] Klein, G. C. (2019). 'Statistical Effects of Competitiveness, Grade Inflation, and Prestige on Peer Assessment as Perceived by Current and Former at Institutions of Higher Education', Keiser University Dissertation; ProQuest; Ann Arbor, MI.
- [23] Levy, A. (2023). 'Bullying in Academia: Why it Happens and How to Stop It', Naure; <https://www.naure.com/articles/d41586-023-02172-w> (Access Date: 28 June, 2023).
- [24] Eftekhari, R. B., Maghsoudnia, N., & Dorkoosh, F. A. (2021). 'Publish or Perish: An Academic Status Anxiety', Pharmaceutical Nanotechnology; 9(4), 248-250.
- [25] Sharma, I. (2024). 'Academic Competitiveness Demotivates Rather than Motivates', Coppell Student Media; <https://coppellstudentmedia.com/125700/opinions/academic-competitiveness-demotivates-rather-than-motivates/> (Access Date: 24 January, 2024).
- [26] Gupta, A. (2021). 'Competition Culture in Schools', Medium; <https://mindsagewriting.medium.com/competition-culture-in-schools-68478f147601> (Access Date: 11 July, 2021).
- [27] Pascoe, M. C., Hetrick, S. E., & Parker, A. G. (2020). 'The Impact of Stress on Students in Secondary School and Higher Education', International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25(1), 104-112.
- [28] Newport Institute (2022). 'The Mental Health Toll of Academic Pressure', The Newport Institute; <https://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/academic-pressure/> (Access Date: 14 August, 2022).
- [29] Brown, B. & Emmett, D. (2001). 'Explaining the Variations in the Level of Academic Dishonesty in Studies of College Students: Some New Evidence', College Student Journal, 35(4), 529-538.
- [30] Gerdeman, R.D. (2000). 'Academic Dishonesty and the Community College', ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges; Los Angeles, CA: University of California at Los Angeles.
- [31] Shimotsu-Dariol, S., Mansson, D. H., & Myers, S. (2012). 'Students' Academic Competitiveness and Their Involvement in the Learning Process', Communication Research Reports, 29(4), 310-319.
- [32] LeCunff, A. L. (2022). 'Self-competition: Only Compete With Your Past Self', Ness Labs; <https://nesslabs.com/self-competition> (Access Date: 15 May, 2025).