

Short-Termism Subverts Academic Freedom

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Abstract

This manuscript explored short-termism effects on academic freedoms of both the faculty and the students. This author began by operationalizing “short-termism” for the reader. After describing and defining short-termism, the author then discusses academic freedom with an emphasis on the concept of “tenure.” Tenure is contextualized as a specific form of protection afforded faculty from encroachments on their academic freedom. Next, this manuscript provides examples of how short-termism occurs within the academic faculty. These examples have been broken into short-termism on short-term faculty and short-termism on tenured faculty. Subsequently, the author discussed how short-termism infringes on the academic freedoms of the student body and the freedom to learn. The author, then, summarizes the consequences and provides the reader with recommendations on stabilizing both the faculty and the student body. Finally, the author ends the manuscript with final thoughts and questions for the reader.

1. Introduction

This manuscript will begin by operationalizing “short-termism” as one of Mellon’s [1] five identified fear generators. Next, this author discusses a brief history and purpose of academic freedom for the reader. Specific attention will be given to the concept of “tenure” and how it is designed to protect the academic freedom of the faculty. This author will explain why tenure provides a form of “due process” for academics and the necessity of its preservation. Examples of short-termism will be provided in both tenured and short-term faculty. After, discussing short-termism within the faculty, the author will explore how short-termism encroaches on the academic freedoms of the students. The author will, then, summarize the consequences of short-termism in colleges and universities. Finally, the author will make recommendations for stabilizing both the faculty and student body. This manuscript will conclude with the author’s final thoughts on short-termism in academia.

2. Short-termism

Short-termism occurs when there are no long-term goals allowing for a broad focus [1]. Short-termism can cause a culture of fear in both academic faculty and students thereby affecting both of their academic freedoms. A “culture of fear” is the concept that people may incite fear in the general public to achieve workplace goals through emotional biases [2]. Mellon [1] describes five fear generators that employees may experience. Those five fear generators are 1) intellectualism/anti-intellectualism, 2) pugilism, 3) perfectionism, 4) hierarchism, and 5) short-termism. This paper will specifically focus on short-termism (#5) in academia.

All employees, including academics, experience fear according to Efron [2]. And, one of the most common fears that is experienced in the workforce is short-termism. Holt [3] indicates that both students and faculty experience fear as a result of short-termism. For example, most employees (including academic faculty), according to Efron [2], experience the fear of losing one’s job and/or not having a permanent job (short-term employment). While short-term employment may be the most common fear experienced by academics, a culture of fear can manifest itself within the faculty due to short-term goals and objectives [3]. Students also can experience a culture of fear due to short-termism. Students may experience fear from short-term assignments, exams, curricula, etc. Therefore, the academic community consisting of both students and faculty experience fear due to multiple forms of short-termism.

3. Academic Freedom and Tenure

Commager [4] explains that academic freedom exists for both the faculty member and the student. A faculty member’s academic freedom is referred to as “*lehrfreiheit*” (or the freedom to teach) and a student’s academic freedom is referred to as “*lernfreiheit*” (or the freedom to learn). According to Dea [5], academic

freedom is defined by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) as: 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. However, without a form of protection to maintain these freedoms, they may be eliminated. Throughout history some high-profile academics have been persecuted for exercising their academic freedoms including Socrates, Galileo Galilee, and John Scopes. Thereby, certain protections have been implemented to protect academic freedoms. One such protection is the concept of “tenure.”

Without protections that offer “due process” academic freedom will erode states Ledoux, Marshall and McHenry [6]. The concept of “tenure” is thought to have two purposes. Tenure acts, first, as a form of evaluation of one’s expertise from within the academy and, if achieving tenure, recognizes the academic as an established expert in his/her discipline. Secondly, tenure was established to preserve the idea of “due process” and prevent wrongful termination because an academic exercised his/her academic freedoms.

According to Ludlum [7], there were several instances of faculty being denied “due process” by the time AAUP was formed. Distinctly, Ludlum [7] offers us highlights of wrongful terminations that underscore the importance of tenure. For example, Professor Fisher was dismissed from Wesleyan University (1913) due to an extramural statement made regarding Sunday observance while at a non-college affiliated men’s club. Dr. Nearing, also, was fired from the University of Pennsylvania in 1915 after nine years of service because he expressed discontent over economic policies to university alumni. The University of Utah president (Dr. Kingsbury) recommended dismissal of 17 faculty members who had expressed (in private) an unfavorable view of the Board of Regents’ chair in 1915. And, in 1930, Governor Bilbo of Mississippi eliminated approximately 1/3 of all Mississippi public university faculty because he thought it reflected positive fiscal management amongst his constituents. Therefore, these types of recurring incidents, Ludlum [7] claims, led the AAUP to address “due process” and wrongful termination for academic faculty through “tenure.” Prior to commitments to “tenure,” academics had no protections and academic freedoms could be infringed upon with threat of job loss. Therefore, due to the afore mentioned tragedies, the concept of “tenure” and due process was supported in order to uphold academic freedom.

4. Short-termism and the Faculty

The faculty can experience fear from short-termism. And, this fear leads to self-suppression of their academic freedoms. This author will discuss how much of the

faculty have been reduced to short-term contracts (contingent faculty) and how other types of short-termism subvert faculty academic freedoms.

4.1. Short-term Faculty

Even though the concept of tenure was created as a way to preserve academic freedoms and keep faculty from wrongful termination, tenure has begun to erode at the academic level. Without tenure and the due process afforded from tenure, faculty’s academic freedoms can easily be subverted [6]. Flaherty [8] claims that approximately 75% of the American college faculty are now “off” the tenure-track. Or, that about three out of every four faculty members are not even eligible to seek tenure. Spitalniak [9] concurs with that estimate by reporting that approximately 24% of the current U.S. faculty actually hold tenure. Therefore, based on the current statistics in the U.S., we can infer, that only about one out of every four college/university faculty members has protections from wrongful termination. Comparably, outside the U.S., Pain [10] reports that approximately 35% of university faculty are currently non-tenure track in France. And, out those 35%, just over 40% reported holding contracts that expire in less than one year. Likewise, in an open letter to “The Guardian [11]”, several signees indicate similar issues in the U.K. in which they refer to the “casualization” of the faculty and highlight the inability to obtain permanent status at the university making short-term faculty an international issue.

Over four years (from 2008 until 2012), the amount of tenure track lines in U.S. colleges and universities increased by only 1% while contingent faculty increased by 11% [8]. In 2016, continues Flaherty [8], 30,865 contingent faculty members were hired while only 21,511 tenure-track faculty lines were hired in the U.S. In fact, at colleges that are classified by the Carnegie Foundation as “teaching-intensive” (or, non-research rated) only had about 20% (or one out of every five) of faculty on a tenure track line. This implies that the ability to attain tenure may be deteriorating for academic faculty that excel at teaching and only reserved for academics that engage in scholarship; even though, both the freedom to teach (*lehrfreiheit*) and the freedom of inquiry (scholarship) are protected though tenure.

Moore [12] reported that in 2019 there were more doctorate degrees awarded than in prior years; but, the amount of tenure-track positions declined. Such a disproportion creates excessive work for search committees extending the job search process as applicants per position increases. In fact, Moore [12] claims that 30 years prior, in 1989, the median number of job applicants for a tenure-track position was only 12; while in contrast, it has now increased to 82 applicants.

That means that search committees are now having to read through more cover letters, curriculum vita’s, and references than they ever had in prior search committee work. This kind of work becomes exhausting taking academics away from their primary responsibilities of teaching and scholarship.

Pain [10] declares that strong levels of anxiety, demotivation, and mistrust exists amongst the non-tenured track faculty members. Galloway [13] claims the administration values the economic advantages such as not having to pay faculty benefits while disregarding academic disadvantages such as continued turnover rate. Elfman [14] points out that contingent faculty suffer external fears from problems caused by their temporary contracts such as borrowing credit for purchasing either a home or vehicle. Contingent faculty are viewed as less stable and therefore are less likely to get approved for loans. Or, that the more time a faculty member spends on a short-term contract increases the probability that their next contract will also be short-term [12]. Many of these faculty spend much of the time they should be committing to teaching and scholarly pursuits for their current college/university pursuing job listings at other institutions. Contingent faculty, then, are really nothing more than “visitors” to a college/university claims Moore [12].

While antidotal in nature, Elfman [14] describes the demeaning culture in the Colorado Community College System as an example. As of Elfman’s [14] reporting, the Colorado Community College system had 13 campuses with 64 presidents or vice-presidents. The annual salary range of the administration is \$87,000 - \$437,000. However, the adjunct faculty member was paid approximately \$3299 per each course taught [14]. In the U.K., The Guardian [11] published a letter with multiple authors (over 1200 signees) demanding the permanent contract of academic faculty that are continually denied permanency after many years of service. Therefore, while administrators are stable with an annual salary (many of which are higher than average), faculty members were mostly unstable from year-to-year contracts with a below average stipend per each course taught.

When colleges/universities are increasingly hiring contingent faculty and reducing their number of tenure-track faculty, they are engaging in a subversion of the tenure process. And, the tenure process was intended to protect the academic freedoms of the faculty member.

4.2. Short-termism in Tenured Faculty

Much of the short-termism that has been imposed on the tenured faculty is by the administration. The administration could press early retirement, retrain faculty, and/or deactivate programs of study. Galloway [13] underscores how eliminating programs and

retrenching faculty in those programs has subverted the tenure process altogether and, thereby, encroached on the academic freedoms of faculty and students. Specifically, Galloway [13] indicates that academic programs such as Russian, Geology, and Religion were deactivated at one U.S. university causing fear and panic because it keeps tenure out of reach or eliminates it altogether. Even if tenured, faculty are no longer needed by a college if the academic program that once housed the faculty has been eliminated. By eliminating programs, administrators are sacrificing a commitment they once made to academic freedoms.

McClure [15] points out, many tenured faculty members also experience fear generated from short-termism. Long-term faculty feel stuck in dead-end jobs after achieving tenure. It is common that colleges and universities provide resources for faculty on the tenure-track, but once a faculty member achieves tenure, many of those resources and career advancement opportunities disappear [15].

Parker and Horowitz [16] studied why most professionals quit jobs in 2021. This author has summarized their findings below in table 1.

Table 1. Reported Reasons for Quitting Jobs [16]

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Total</i>
Low pay	37	26	63%
Lacking Advancement opportunities	33	30	63%
Feeling Disrespected	35	21	57%
Child Care Issues	24	24	48%
Time/Scheduling Inflexibility	24	21	45%
Poor Benefits	23	20	43%
Desired Relocation	22	13	35%
Too Many Work Hours	20	19	39%
Too Few Work Hours	16	14	30%

Parker and Horowitz’s [16] survey, while encompassing the entire workforce, can be applied to academia and college/university faculty as well. This author notes that the top three reasons reported on why a worker quit a job in 2021 were 1) low pay, 2) lacking advancement opportunities, and 3) feeling disrespected. Tenured faculty members have experienced each of these three fears. Many faculty members do not see a chance for advancement after achieving tenure except for making a transition into administrative roles or ad-hoc service opportunities. And, not every faculty member wants to advance their academic career through administrative duties [15]. Sometimes, even this advancement through administrative duties comes without (or minimal) pay increases and is only rewarded with a title and more managerial responsibilities that are not related to the academic’s professional growth. McClure [15] reports that it has become common for

faculty to see a greater range of career advancement opportunities outside the college/university and are leaving academia to pursue a more fulfilling career elsewhere. In other words, once an academic achieves tenure they no longer have satisfying advancement opportunities in academia. Likewise, Hawes and Reynolds [17] tend to corroborate this sentiment by reporting that empty promises, lack of compensation, and inflexible and inequitable application of measures drives academics out of their institutions.

McClure [15] sums short-termism up in the faculty by stating:

“It’s hard to conclude anything other than that higher education has done a spectacularly bad job of managing talent. Campuses have evolved over centuries and dedicated resources to perfect the art and science of human development, while largely outsourcing or ignoring the professional growth and learning of their employees. Rather than draw upon their own experts to develop and retain workers, institutions let employees burn out and then replace them.”

McClure [15] is pointing out a blatant hypocrisy of higher education by claiming that colleges/universities study and refine within their programs the necessary skill sets to be successful but at the same time they ignore their own faculty letting them become more discontent with the lack of advancement opportunities (a form of feeling disrespected). Thereby, even if a faculty member is long-term and has achieved tenure there are fewer long-term goals and objectives that tenured faculty members can expect for the remainder of their career. This author asserts that without long-term goals/objectives for a faculty member then faculty are tempted to leave academia for more fulfilling careers. If the faculty member leaves academia, they no longer have their academic freedoms protected through tenure and their position becomes vacant in which the college administrators are increasingly filling with aforementioned short-term positions.

5. Students and Short-Termism

While academic freedoms are more commonly associated with the faculty member, students also have a form of academic freedom known as *lernfreiheit*. Students, similar to faculty, experience short-termism that subverts their *lernfreiheit*.

Students experience fear from short-term assignments that have little or no meaning to their overall curriculum [18]. Frequently, students question the purpose of short-term assignments and how it relates to their overall goals. For example, in colleges of education across the U.S., students are often requested to maintain a portfolio during their final internship

semester. This portfolio is completed and assessed without any value to their long-term goals. In some places, these short-term portfolios are even assessed by individuals that have never had contact with the students making the entire experience questionable. Holt [18] provides another example of short-termism in student assignments dealing with an Economics class: If an assignment deals with only one month of stock trading and the student does not see any future application of the task, then, it is likely the student would view the assignment within the scope of just one single month. And, revisiting the assignment may never happen.

High-stakes exams are another way in which students experience short-term fears that subvert their academic freedoms, according to Griffith [19]. Students do not see the value of preparing for these types of exams long-term [19]. Students will study briefly for an exam such as an entrance exam but then they fail to maintain the skill sets that the exam assessed. This means that students, due to lack of maintenance, have regressed in their skill development. For example, students may have successfully practiced for a high-stakes writing exam for college admission only to be recommended to remedial writing courses later during their college studies. In this example, the students failed to maintain a skill that they once studied and achieved.

Griffith [19] articulates the lack of importance that students feel when engaging in short-term high-stakes exams, such as college entry/exit exams. During the Covid-19 pandemic, multiple colleges and universities suspended entry criteria. Students, claims Griffith [19], do not see the value of preparing for these types of exams when they can be easily suspended. Likewise, Holt [18] questions if even the colleges value exams that they later suspend? If a student is studying short-term for a high-stakes exam, then the student is not engaged in deliberate practice that would lead to long-term educational/learning outcomes [20].

Such a short-term focus changes the goals of academia. In fact, consider that without continued maintenance of basic educational skills, that the overall purpose of academia is failing to educate the students with long-term goals in mind. Ericsson [20] would interpret a subversion of deliberate practice as changing the goals of the academic curriculum. Deliberate practice, claims Ericsson and Smith [21], is what leads to expertise in the academic disciplines and students should be engaging in courses and curricula that provides them with optimal amounts of deliberate practice. Holt [18] calls attention to the increasing amount of contingent faculty who are unlikely to create long-term deliberate practice scenarios for the students since they themselves are employed short-term.

Celleni and Blanchard [22] declare that short-termism is occurring amongst students when curricula are reduced to accommodate short-term programs.

Students are incapable of engaging in the freedom of learning through designed deliberate practice (or expertise development) if the curriculum itself has been reduced. Celleni and Blanchard [22] indicate that there are, as of 2021, about 103 short-term education programs in the U.S. These programs are identified as having less than 600 preparatory hours. Purportedly, the average college student’s class schedule is about five classes per semester and each class meets approximately three hours a week [23]. Therefore, only one or two semesters worth of study would accommodate most of these short-term programs. And, Marion [23], was able to identify that students’ overall curriculum was becoming shorter. A shorter curriculum rationalized by Berliner [24] means less allocated learning time (ALT) or deliberately designed practice time.

Schwartz [25] indicates that the interest in short-term curricula is currently rising amongst undergraduate students. Schroeder [26] speculates that much of this interest in short-term programs is being fueled by the corporate world which is encouraging micro-credentialing (i.e., certifications) in order to fill immediate workforce positions lost from an unprecedented amount of resignations during the Covid-19 pandemic. Colleges and universities have witnessed increasing registration in these micro-credentialing courses in for-profit online companies and decided to compete in order to increase their enrollment. However, this disposition subverts the mission of most colleges and universities in developing long-term learning outcomes. Unfortunately, for the student who may view these short-term programs as a quicker way to acquire a workforce job and income, the students are not advancing in those low-level positions because they have not engaged in the long-term preparatory study that provides them with the more advanced skill set. Schroeder [26] explains that the good news for students is that they get jobs quicker without as much academic study but the downside is that they hardly ever advance past the entry level. Shorter curricula, thereby, keeps students from developing higher level skills because there is less designed deliberate practice [20] or ALT [24]. Free learning opportunities, then, become limited when colleges and universities have started engaging in the micro-credentialing/short-term curricula process.

Possibly the most fearful type of short-termism that a student faces is the fear that they will not be allowed to fully complete their studies. Young [27] explains how students at a large private school in the U.S. frequently fear being expelled or suspended from their studies due to differences in social and political ideologies. Likewise, Galloway [13] indicates that academic programs are being eliminated at colleges and universities while students are still enrolled. Both of these examples create fear within the student body and encroaches on their academic freedoms. If the student

cannot complete their curriculum, they are no longer free to pursue desired learning at those institutions.

6. Academic Consequences

Short-termism has consequences that affect scholarship, service, curriculum, teaching and learning. This author has included the consequences of short-termism in table 2:

Table 2. Academic consequences of short-termism

<i>Category</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
Scholarship	Reduction in longitudinal studies Barriers created between research rated colleges and teaching intensive colleges
Service	Rising service burden Never-ending search committees Internal committees with little variance or diversity Reduction in external service workload in order to accommodate rising internal service functions
Curriculum	Programmatic outcomes become dependent on short-term faculty Less focus on long-term curricular outcomes Revolving door of instructors with no system to track development of expertise
Teaching/Learning	Learning short-cuts valued over deliberate practice and designed experiences ALT reduction Lesson planning becomes “day-to-day” Long-term learning objectives disappear

Short-termism subverts freedoms regarding scholarship in two notable ways. First, longitudinal studies are reduced. Any research project that would require faculty commitment longer than a contractual obligation sees less engagement despite the greater

validity and reliability of longitudinal research. Faculty without long-term contracts fear not completing scholarly pursuits prior to moving into their next position at another college. Secondly, there becomes a barrier between colleges/universities with research ratings and colleges/universities that are rated as “teaching intensive [8].” Teaching intensive colleges have a higher proportion of contingent faculty meaning that faculty at these colleges are marginalized because they will only receive tenure line positions if they focus on research, even though their primary workload and contractual responsibility is to teach (plan, deliver, and assess) academic lessons. If faculty fear that having too much “teaching” responsibility is what limits them from pursuing a more stable position, then they are likely to neglect their teaching duties which in return changes the mission of the academy.

Regarding service, there are noticeable consequences of short-termism. Moore [12] claims that the service burden rises for faculty members. Thereby, academics are removed from their primary responsibility of engaging in scholarship and/or providing instruction for disciplinary courses. If internal service committees require (per internal policies) that a certain number of tenured faculty members serve upon them, then a system has been created where both the contingent faculty is excluded from governance and the same tenure-track faculty is having to serve more often. Concurrently, frequent increases in internal service leaves less time for faculty to contribute to external service such as editorial boards or governing positions in professional organizations. This is a direct encroachment on the academic’s freedom to serve in a capacity that best suits them, their career, and the overall disciplinary academies.

Specifically, Moore [12] points to search-committee work as a consequence of short-termism. Because there has been a significant increase in contingent faculty, there are more active searches ongoing. And, since contingent faculty feel unstable, they continue to look for more permanent positions. This leads to what Moore [12] refers to as the “never-ending” search. Tenured faculty are constantly engaged in the internal service of reviewing applicants while contingent faculty are continually applying to other open positions thereby keeping all faculty busy with job searches.

Curriculum also suffers from consequences of short-termism. Most notably, long-term curricular outcomes become challenging due to short-term faculty attempting to implement and assess longitudinal outcomes. Curriculum can also suffer because courses are taught by a “revolving door” of contingent faculty who never remain in a course long enough to develop expertise for delivery of that course.

Micro curricula have unfortunately become popular because 82% of corporations identify needing entry

level workers faster and students are attracted by the quick income [26]. However, students who follow this path rarely advance after the initial entry level position. But, colleges/universities have seen a revenue generator in providing short-term training while sacrificing the longer curricula that leads to a more fulfilling academic experience.

Finally, both *lerhfreiheit* (freedom to teach) and *lernfreiheit* (freedom to learn) suffer consequences of short-termism. Deliberately designed practice opportunities are reduced due to shorter curricula [20]. Likewise, learning short-cuts such as “cramming” for an exam becomes a valued disposition of students instead of valuing the long-term experiences that would lead to autonomous learning. Students begin to feel that every task or assignment is short-term and thereby not leading to anything of value.

Academic instructors become reliant on day-to-day lesson plans thereby eliminating long-term objectives. And, this leads students to become disenchanted with lessons that have no further development. Lessons, then, become meaningless and ineffective.

The overall consequence of short-termism, is one of decreased deliberate practice opportunities for students and faculty. Such a result is a subversion of *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit*.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended given the potential consequences, that both the faculty and the student bodies become stabilized from short-termism. This author will discuss some of the recommended ideas for stabilizing the academic institution.

7.1. Faculty Stabilization

The 2014 AAUP report [28] recommends that faculty be stabilized on college campuses. In order to do this, they have suggested the following:

1. Convert all non-tenure track lines to tenure-track lines. This does not guarantee tenure through the review process, but rather provides a long-term goal for these current faculty members.
2. Provide academic freedom resources for current non-tenure-track faculty. If contingent faculty are provided resources about their academic freedoms they will be more likely to exercise their freedoms.
3. If contingent faculty are part-time and not working on full-time status (i.e., adjuncts) then it is recommended that the colleges/universities adopt policies for contract renewal.

7.2. Student Stabilization

Schwartz [25] claims that overall student enrollment at colleges/universities has declined for over a decade. Current U.S. undergraduate enrollment has decreased by 5% and graduate student enrollment has declined by 8% [25]. In one year, American colleges saw a drop in approximately 727,000 enrolled undergraduates [26]. Therefore, Schroeder [26] recommends that the student body also needs stabilization. This author is making the following recommendations:

1. Academic faculty collaborate with the workforce managers to prepare students for long-term careers instead of short-term jobs while moving away from short-term curricula.
2. Create a healthy amount of preparatory assignments that focus on long-term programmatic objectives instead of short-term goals that the students neither revisit nor maintain.
3. Assess students on long-term objectives. While there is some value to short-term assessments, the true value of an educational experience comes from continual deliberate practice and maintenance so that one can develop expertise.
4. Solicit advocacy for low-enrollment programs that administrators frequently target for elimination due to quantity not quality.

8. Conclusion

This author concludes that short-termism has become common in academia. Short-termism is a fear generator that encroaches on academic freedoms. It is documented that many forms of short-termism subvert academic freedom. The concept of tenure was developed to protect an academic's freedoms by preventing wrongful termination. However, colleges and universities are subverting tenure and the afforded due process that it provides by increasing the amount of contingent positions and decreasing the amount of tenure-track faculty. Concurrently, the college and university administration has effectively burdened tenured faculty with academically unrelatable short-term tasks, lack of developmental resources, and decreases in long-term post-tenure opportunities for advancement that drive some of those faculty out of academia.

Students, likewise, are beginning to question the value of a college education when so many of their courses have been relegated to whatever contingent faculty member is available. Or, the students' curriculum has been reduced to accommodate short-term workforce needs without attention to long-term learning outcomes.

This author concludes that short-termism and the fears created from short-termism is negatively affecting the freedoms that colleges and universities once valued. Neither faculty nor students feel confident in exercising their freedoms when short-termism subverts their freedoms.

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