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## **CHALLENGES TO ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES**

### **Abstract:**

Academic freedom can be defined as the absence of outside interference, censure or obstacles in the pursuit and practice of academic work. This freedom is embedded in the right to education. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights views education as a window to other rights. Institutional autonomy speaks to self-regulation or the right of self-government; self-determination; autonomy with respect to local or internal matters. Academic freedom (and institutional autonomy) is a constitutional right in South Africa. There is debate whether there is a threat to the constitutionally guaranteed academic freedom in South Africa. This comes from the background that universities often function as centres of political and intellectual dissent, and regimes are thus reluctant to allow institutions the freedom and autonomy that may contribute to instability. This paper looks at academic freedom and institutional autonomy in South Africa before and after 1994. The pre-1994 era grouped the universities into two - the open universities, which enjoyed many privileges and the "other" universities which were tightly controlled by the government. The post-1994 era saw the national Constitution guaranteeing academic freedom. The new government adopted new policies creating a unitary tertiary education system. This was built around the "cooperative governance" framework. However, with dynamics in the higher education system, this framework had to be amended. The amendments give the government more powers to intervene where necessary. Whatever justification, increased government involvement has implications on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

### **Keywords:**

freedom; autonomy, academic, university; higher education

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