



## **SECTION 3: DEVELOPING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND VISION**

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### **THE STRUGGLE FOR FACULTY GOVERNANCE:**

#### *Its Ethical, Social, and Pedagogical Significance*

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As President of a university chapter of the American Association of University Professors, I have been asked variants of the same question: "What stake does the community have in university faculties' struggles against administration efforts to undermine our roles in university governance, our autonomy in the classroom, and our professional status?" On two occasions, this question was framed from the perspective of workers: "What is the stake for blue-collar workers and their families in these issues?" On the third occasion, the question was framed from the perspective of the social group with which we share the classroom on a daily basis: "What is the stake for university students?"

As I thought about these variations of the same question, two corollary questions came to mind. One is a restatement in somewhat different terms, which sheds more analytical light on the significance of what was being asked: "What makes our struggle against administrative incursions more than just a battle over turf of no real interest to anyone except ourselves?" The second addresses the broader implications of our work as faculty activists: "What is it that we stand for ethically, socially, and pedagogically?" This second question is especially important, because it compels us to think about what we stand for, rather than just about what we stand against. When examined in combination, the two questions are a reminder that our struggles are interrelated with other social struggles and form part of a broader effort to redefine and transform the university in response to rapid social change.

To construct a viable response to these related questions requires those of us in the AAUP chapter at the University of Missouri-Kansas City to begin to clearly identify what differentiates our shared values and our collaborative work to change the university from the agenda of administrative leadership. Keeping in mind that I am speaking as a member of the AAUP (rather than as an officially delegated spokesperson) and as a member of the faculty in the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, let me begin that process here. I only have time to give one illustration: the proper nature of our relationship with our students.

That relationship is not properly defined in capitalist terms: the relationship between customer and service deliverer. Nor should our academic programs which we as faculty develop for students be shaped by market research, customer feedback, managerial directive, or competition with other institutions. Rather,

the appropriate nature of the relationship between university faculty and students is suggested by a normative concept currently in vogue in the educational rhetoric: the school or university as a "learning community." While in administrative rhetoric this concept is often used in conjunction with a capitalist model of academic programs and of relations between university and students, the depiction of the university as a "learning community" nevertheless suggests a markedly different way of viewing programs and relations between university and students—a way which is distinctly non-capitalist.

Thinking about what we do through our teaching as fostering a "learning community" enables us to define our relationship with students. It is ideally characterized by a shared engagement in intellectually rigorous and knowledgeable inquiry, into issues that genuinely concern community. Community is understood as both a "community of scholars" within the university and the broader set of metropolitan communities of which the university is a part. From the particular standpoint of schools of education, issues would include the complex relationship between what happens in educational institutions and social-class stratification. It would further require investigation of the extent of access to educational opportunity afforded to different social groups, as well as of those institutional and cultural factors internal and external to educational systems which impede or enhance access for each group. Furthermore, it would require study of the interrelationships among race and ethnicity, gender, and social class.

Issues would also include the nature of an education which genuinely contributes to social democracy. This would entail investigation of what educational experiences and settings enable individuals to develop the full range of intellectual, social, aesthetic, and vocational capabilities necessary for democratic citizenship. In addition, it would entail inquiry into the natures of a democratic society and democratic social relations.

To fully prepare university students for rigorous and knowledgeable inquiry into issues of social importance requires in turn the sharpening of intellect and the deep humanistic insights afforded by the liberal arts—as well as the discipline methodologies of inquiry characteristic of the social and natural sciences at their best. In the case of university educators (and also of the school educators whom we teach), the technical skills necessary to be an effective educator need to be cultivated within this deep process of rigorous and knowledgeable inquiry, so that an educator can test techniques of instruction, curriculum development, or social relations with students by assessing the compatibility of technique with the broad social and ethical ends to which she/he is committed.

Such a "learning community" is, I think, what we as an organized and activist faculty need to be working to create. Creating it will require dialogue aimed at identifying shared educational and social values, using that dialogue as a means to develop collaborative relationships (among ourselves and with our students), building on what we already do which is consistent with such an understanding of engagement in teaching and learning, and identifying and changing what we do which is inconsistent with this understanding. Such a "learning community" will never be initiated from above, because of structural factors inherent in educational systems. This is in large part because it subverts administrative control of either the direct and blatant bureaucratic form or the somewhat more masked form which developed out of Total Quality Management during recent decades, and which has been analyzed in educational and corporate settings by researchers like Denise Gelberg (1997) and Mike Parker (1993). It can only be initiated "from the ground up" through the efforts of faculty and students, facilitated by those individual administrators who value the necessary collaboration and dialogue.

It is important to note that if such a "learning community" seeks to generate complex and accurate theoretical understandings of problems of importance to metropolitan communities, as well as potentially viable solutions informed by those understandings, then the means exist to establish strong ties between faculty and students, on the one hand, and community members on the other. If, furthermore, problems of justice, equality of educational and economic opportunity, and quality of individual and community

life are especially emphasized in inquiry within the "learning community", then a basis exists for establishing collaboration and dialogue with individuals and groups outside the university who share an interest in these values and in realizing them in practice.

## References

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