

On the need and necessity for this site:

The vision of a university as a shop

On May 23, 2012, a few days after the graduation ceremonies, when most faculty and students had left the campus, the Administration of the California State University, Fresno, cut down 164 decades-old trees to expand a parking lot. This sly, violent and environmentally unsound act, which was done without consulting the faculty members or their representatives, outraged many faculty, students and community members. Indeed, the butchering of the trees was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. It came on the heels of a number of other actions taken by the CSU Fresno Administration that were deemed by many faculty members as not only unilateral and undemocratic, but detrimental to the wellbeing of an academic institution.

In fall of 2011, using the fiscal crisis of the state as an excuse, the Administration tried to eliminate or merge certain colleges under the guise of reducing expenditures. Neither the faculty nor the Senate was consulted before the plan was unveiled. An outraged faculty pointed out that there was no cost reduction in the proposed mergers. Moreover, as the faculty argued, the Administration's plan would have only resulted in reducing academic standards. In one case a prestigious college would have been divided into pieces to support four professional schools. In another, a vibrant college with high academic standards and strong commitment to academic autonomy and freedom would have been combined with a college that is run top-down. The faculty's rage and protestation were so loud and widespread that the Administration had to act quickly. In a deceitful and surreptitious manner, the Administration appeared to withdraw its proposal, but left the door open for future implementation of its proposed mergers. To save face, they settled for moving one department from one college to another. The move, which had long been in the making and actually had nothing to do with cost cutting, would add to the existing expenditures.

The Administration then tried to expand its push for "cohort hires" and centralized funding arrangement. The move, which was seen by many as an attempt to control hiring and reduce academic autonomy and freedom, created an uproar and resulted in the passage of a resolution against cohort hiring in the Academic Senate. Yet, in an arrogant manner, and without respect for the faculty or the Constitution of the Academic Senate, the Administration dismissed the resolution and declared it null and void.

Another unilateral act by the Administration in spring of 2012 was creating a new logo, which included a symbolic bulldog paw. This was combined with changing the name of the university from "California State University, Fresno" to simply "Fresno State" in the official logo of the university. Correspondingly, the Administration changed the academic letterhead of the university to reflect the rebranding and ordered the faculty to use the new letterheads. These actions, once again, brought the wrath of many faculty members who saw the bulldog paw as unreflective of academic standards of a university and as a symbol that is used by local gang members. Many faculty members also felt that the name "Fresno State," even though used popularly, cheapens the value of an academic institution. Subsequently, the Senate passed a resolution urging the Administration to "refrain from promoting the new logo and name until the issues voiced by the Academic Senate, students, graduates, and faculty are resolved." Yet, the Administration, once more, dismissed all criticism of the faculty, defied the will of the Senate, and went forward with its decision.

It should be pointed out that in the 1990s the Administration had already tried to change the name of the university to “Fresno State.” But the faculty objected loudly and the Administration quickly withdrew.

Some have seen the actions of the Administration of CSU Fresno as manifestation of an attempt to corporatize the university. This, however, gives the Administration too much credit. The vision of the current Administration is much more primitive. The destructive conducts of the Administration are reflective of a vision that treats the university as no more than a shop. In this vision, the administrators are owners of the shop, faculty members are workers, and students are costumers. The role of the workers is to sell degrees as commodities to customers. Given this vision, the workers are expected to follow directives and not interfere with any decision making process, particularly those that interfere with sales.

This vision of a university was actually put forward publicly in the 1990s, when the Administration started to refer to the students as “customers” and advised the faculty to treat the students as such. Indeed, in a rather comical and bizarre act, the Administration issued, for the use of the faculty, bookmarkers that listed 10 ways to treat the “customers” better. However, in the earlier days the faculty members, who were more experienced and battle-hardened, refused to accept the Administration’s vision. They did not think that the university is in the business of selling degrees and that their role as educators is to facilitate trade. They distinguished between simple commodity production and centuries-old concept of a university as a center of research and dissemination of knowledge. This concept of a university, however, was too alien to those administrators whose banal and monotonous public utterances and speeches would regularly betray their level of knowledge and intellectual capacity. Given the stiff resistance shown by a highly organized and experienced faculty in the 1990s, the Administration backtracked in its public push for its vision of a university as a shop.

Over the years, and with the retirement of many experienced faculty members and their replacement with a new generation, the Administration has become more powerful and is, once again, pushing for its vision. They no longer feel any need to consult the faculty, the “workers,” on issues that impact their academic lives and work environment. They do not believe that they are accountable to the workers and need to be transparent in their actions and accounting practices. The workers, they feel, are not entitled to seek clarity when it comes to budget matters. They have no right to ask the owners of the shop to abide by rules and regulations.

With remarkable arrogance of power, the administrators dismiss all criticisms of the faculty as the usual complaints of disgruntled workers. Indeed, they seem to show nothing but contempt for what they perceive to be disobedient workers who dare to criticize certain policies. The unruly workers, they believe, are costing the shop owners money, the revenues from the “donors” that might be lost due to bad publicity.

In their expanding power as owners of the shop, the Administration of the California State University, Fresno, has also exerted complete control over all channels of communication. They have command over the websites of the university. They control the “BULLETINBOARD,” a board which is supposed to be a means of communication for the university at large. Posting on the board is limited to those who are authorized by the Administration. As a result, the board is used not as a possible means for the faculty to communicate with one another, but as a venue to bombard the faculty, the “workers,” with advertisement and inane information. The board is also used to issue directives in an infantile, multi-colored text. The directives are mostly intended to teach the faculty how to teach and

increase sales revenues. To add insult to injury, the faculty members are offered a meager pecuniary sum if they attend the workshops of the shop owners.

Even the website of the Senate has not been immune from administrative control. Indeed, an attempt was made earlier in the year to remove critical comments posted by the faculty members on the site. And, even though the Senate urged the Administration to refrain from promoting the new logo and name, the Administration now has hoisted its logo and name on the [website](#) of the Senate.

Given the level of control, a complete monopolization of the communication system by the Administration, the faculty has been left without any effective means to communicate with one another or with the students and the community at large. They have no place to air their grievances or even express their opinions. In the absence of such a communication system, one can only hope that this site and similar electronic venues created by the faculty, and for the faculty, can serve to alleviate the dire educational conditions that prevail on our campus and help to restore academic freedom, autonomy and integrity.

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