The Ethics of Entitlement in Higher Education: Greater Good Versus Self Interest in the Academy

Susan R. Madsen, Utah Valley University
Scott C. Hammond, Utah Valley University

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Presenters: Scott C. Hammond
Susan R. Madsen

Abstract: Higher education often pretends to support practical egalitarian organizations with access to all and openness of ideas. But in reality it is a hierarchy just like any private corporation. Individual identity determines status in the hierarchy. People jockey for changes in status. There are clear rules for moving up and down in status. This paper asks the question "Do the entitlements that we support in order to maintain the equalitarian ideal in fact work against it?"

- Higher educational institutions grant economic entitlements. In order to attract the "best teachers" we must give parking privileges, benefits packages, tuition wavers, etc. Is it fair to grant economic entitlements to a protected class of people in the academy?

- Higher educational institutions grant social benefit entitlements to faculty to enhance public dialogue on controversial topics and to encourage exploration. Academic freedom insulates faculty from political pressures. Is it fair to protect one class of person's speech over another? Is academic freedom anything more than freedom of speech? Should academics be immune from consequence of their speech acts when other groups are not?

- Higher educational institutions grant organizational entitlements to a class of people. Administrators have budget control. Faculty control grades and are protected by tenure. Is it ethical to empower one class of person to evaluate another?

The topic of this year’s conference is “Ethics in the Professions.” The position of a university faculty member is one of the oldest professions. Over the centuries it has accumulated a series of professional entitlements that are now being called into question by current practice. This paper will discuss these entitlements as they relate to the discipline of higher education.