

Faculty as Institutional Citizens: An Invisible but Essential Aspect of Vital Sustainability

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In their study entitled *The Impact of New Public Management on Academic Citizenship: A Case Study of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa*, Sharareh Ani and Lina Persson state that “[a]cademic citizenship is a relatively new theory that has not yet been studied in any depth” (2016, 14). To support their claims, they reference Shils (1997), Macfarlane (2007), and Havergal (2015). Notably absent from this list is the contribution made by Larry A. Braskamp and John C. Ory in their book *Assessing Faculty Work: Enhancing Individual and Institutional Performance* (1994). In the chapter on “Defining Faculty Work,” Braskamp and Ory note that “[t]he work of the faculty is difficult to describe, define, or classify” before proposing the following “four-part scheme” as a summary of that work: “teaching, research and creative activity, practice and professional service and citizenship” (1994, 35). These authors suggest “citizenship” as “a separate category” in order “to highlight its significance in faculty life and work,” and they contend that “citizenship is necessary for institutional effectiveness” (1994, 48). For them the “[i]nstitutional contributions [of citizenship] include work that facilitates and promotes the growth and development of the institution” (p. 49). For the purposes of this essay, academic or institutional citizenship is understood as the behavior and practices of faculty members that promote and strengthen their fit within institutional culture and contribute to personal and institutional well-being.

In light of the foregoing understanding and building on Braskamp and Ory’s assertion regarding the role of citizenship for academic institutions, this essay explores the nature, importance, and value of academic or institutional citizenship for theological education. It suggests that fostering a culture where faculty members thrive as institutional citizens is an essential and necessary aspect of vital sustainability. This exploration of the topic of academic or institutional citizenship will consider four issues. First, it briefly examines the community

dimension of academic institutions. Second, it argues that community requires citizenship. Third, it reviews some factors inhibiting or complicating the thriving of citizenship in academic institutions. Fourth, it urges leaders of theological institutions to give careful attention to the promotion and cultivation of academic citizenship.

Citizenship and Community in Academic Institutions

Beginning an essay on academic citizenship by considering *community* may surprise some readers. After all, in most cases, persons join the collective entity called “the faculty” on the basis of their expertise, teaching abilities, and/or scholarly contributions. Seldom emphasized is the idea that candidates for faculty positions are invited to join a community. Yet, as Michèle Lamont notes, “[t]he Latin word *academia* refers to a community dedicated to higher learning. At its center are colleagues who are generally defined as ‘peers’ or ‘equals’, and whose opinions shape shared definitions of quality” (2009, 2). Braskamp and Ory (1994) and John B. Bennett (2008) express similar ideas regarding the community dimension of academic institutions.

For Braskamp and Ory, “[i]nstitutions of higher education are communities of learning and teaching, discovery, discourse and development, and creative expression” (1994, 48). They elaborate further:

Citizenship cannot be examined without examining community. The fundamental question of education is not ‘What will I do?’ which is asked in reference to one’s profession; the fundamental question of education is ‘Who will I be?’ and that is a question that can only be asked in the framework of community. To the extent that the university fails as an exemplary community, it fails in its educational mission. (1994, 48)

They contend that “[a] sense of community becomes a means to enhance teaching and learning,” is “critical to faculty development,” and “provides motivation and meaning to the members” (1994, 49).

The preceding observations and statements merit careful attention today. If, for example, leaders of theological education institutions were convinced that “a sense of community [...] enhance[s] teaching and learning”, they would attend to the necessity of facilitating sustained conversation. Convinced that conversation is essential to community, I helped the implementation of two small practices at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School: serving a meal before faculty meetings and a yearly week-end retreat for faculty and spouses. For the faculty meetings, the venue was changed to a beautiful room with round tables with table cloths. Faculty

are encouraged to come before the meeting time so that they can enjoy their food while having conversations with colleagues. The yearly week-end retreat usually takes place in the spring in a nice and restful setting, at no cost to the faculty. The format of the retreat, with limited scheduled programming, provides ample time for rest, relaxation and time for unhurried and unplanned conversations. Many faculty members have expressed great appreciation for the value of these practices. One faculty member commented that these illustrate the importance of hospitality in our common life and work. Would that the observations and statements above became the subject of deliberate conversation among leaders of institutions of theological education.

In his book *Academic Life: Hospitality, Ethics, and Spirituality* (2008), Bennett devotes chapter seven to “Community and Covenant.” He argues against understanding *community* as “collectivism” or “aggregation.” (pp. 142-143) He proposes “the healthy collegium” as a more suitable description of community as it pertains to academic life (pp. 143-144). He writes:

In contrast to collectives and aggregations, the healthy collegium is a community of real individuals linked through mutual relationships. It is the locus for the joint transformation of possible educational goods into actual ones. Members are bound together by a love of learning and by the conviction that *how* they foster learning is important. [...] Mutual commitment is the decisive unifying factor – not location, space, or class name. (2008, 143. Italics in the original)

These scholars’ work provides a very brief consideration of the community dimension of academic institutions. *Community*, it appears, has implications for significant aspects of academic institutions. Especially in regards to the faculty, *community*, we have seen, highlights the importance of mutuality in relationships for the enhancement of education, “provides motivation and meaning,” and facilitates faculty development. For these reasons *community* is essential for the quality of the faculty’s contribution to the mission of any institution. However, *community* does not happen by itself. It requires the deliberate practice of citizenship by its members. In academic institutions, the practice of citizenship is especially important for the success of those entering as assistant professors and whose graduate studies have seldom prepared them to work for a boss and with colleagues on tasks beyond teaching and research. During my years of service as Dean, in addresses to entering PhD students, I called attention to non-glamorous aspects of the professoriate such as getting along with others and participation at faculty and committee meetings.

Citizenship and Community

According to Braskamp and Ory, as noted above, “[c]itizenship is necessary for institutional effectiveness” (1994, 48) because, as Macfarlane says, “[m]embership of a community ... implies obligations or duties of kinship in reciprocation of the benefits which membership brings” (2007, 114). Thus far the word “citizenship” has received a relatively abstract treatment. What is citizenship? A more general definition of citizenship offers useful context for the specifics of academic citizenship. Dominique Leydet begins his entry “Citizenship,” contributed to *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, with the following sentence: “A citizen is a member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership” (2017, 1). According to the author there are three aspects to citizenship: “citizenship as legal status,” citizenship as political agency, and “citizenship as membership in a political community” (207, 2). The first aspect, “legal status,” emphasizes the “civil, political and social rights” of members; the second draws attention to citizens’ involvement and participation in political life, and the third points to the “identity” dimension of citizenship. Academic citizenship encompasses all three aspects of citizenship.

As a category related to faculty life and work, academic citizenship tends to be subsumed under the “service” aspect of the well-known tri-partite division of faculty work, the other two being “teaching” and “research” (Bennett 2008; Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, and Dorman 2013; Macfarlane 2007). Braskamp and Ory, as noted above, prefer making “citizenship” an addition to teaching, research, and service. This difference of opinion does not affect the importance of academic citizenship for the vitality of institutional mission and life. Regardless of how one positions academic citizenship within the totality of faculty work, it “means a willingness to work with others, take part in projects and so on” (Macfarlane 2007, 114) and “requires faculty to acknowledge their role in society as a political one and that their daily practices – their ‘work’ – has an effect on the students, faculty, administrators, and other citizens with whom they interact” (Kuntz 2006, 6). Academic citizenship captures the societal dimension of faculty work. As Bennett notes, “[e]ducation is a profoundly social enterprise – private moments are necessary, but are preceded and followed by public moments” (2008, xiv). Teaching and research, therefore, cannot sufficiently address the “social enterprise” aspect of education.

Theological education cannot afford too much emphasis on the teaching and research aspects of faculty work. All individuals involved in theological education need no convincing as to the societal dimension of faculty work. They know that their institutions exist to serve the Church and society. Why, then, has academic citizenship remained relatively invisible in conversations among theological educators? . The next section will review some factors inhibiting the flourishing of academic citizenship.

Academic citizenship, we have seen, is not a new idea. Yet, at best, it is unevenly practiced in educational institutions in general and in theological schools in particular. This is due to multiple factors, especially the following: the nature of the university and its influence on similar institutions, including theological schools; the formation of scholars and its implications for faculty work; and the rewards system attendant to the professoriate.

Studies of the university as it currently operates usually point to its origins in the European Middle Ages in order to highlight its varied organizational patterns. We need not dwell on this here. Most simply, the medieval European university and the current one (globally) have this characteristic in common: they are a system of organization where rights and privileges related to authority are given to a group of individuals (the faculty). In that sense, “colleges and universities are unique organizations” that can be described as “organized anarchies, loosely coupled systems, and professional bureaucracies” (Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, and Dorman 2013, 29). To clarify these three widely disparate terms, not usually taken together as part of higher education, Hendrickson, Lane, Harris and Dorman add further comments. We will consider the ones made regarding universities as “organized anarchies” and “professional bureaucracies.”

Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, and Dorman suggest that “academic organizations” as “*organized anarchies*” have “three common characteristics”: “a high degree of goal ambiguity,” “decision-making processes [that] are not clear,” and “fluid” “participation in the decision-making process” (2013, 29. Italics in the original). On the other hand, they note that academic “organizations have been commonly considered professional bureaucracies because of the dominance of the operating core in which faculty members are hired because of their professional knowledge and given a high degree of autonomy to perform their work” (2013, 30). Educational institutions, such as theological seminaries, may function like “organized anarchies” or “professional bureaucracies” without being universities. Can academic citizenship flourish in the presence of these characteristics in any kind of institutional life, particularly within a theological school? Without a careful assessment of its ethos, any academic institution can, unwittingly, become a system that inhibits the development of a culture where citizenship is valued because of this inherent tension between anarchy and bureaucracy. It was with the foregoing in mind that in September 2005 I invited John Harris, then Associate Provost for Quality Assessment at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, to address faculty on aspects of educational institutions. I often reflect on one question he asked faculty to consider, “Are we a bureaucracy of disparate departments handing out our specialties?” This question can serve as a starting point in institutional conversations on academic citizenship.

The formation of scholars further complicates the blossoming of academic citizenship. *Scholarship* usually refers to the professional knowledge for which individuals are hired to join a faculty. Persons become scholars through a rigorous process of education where they acquire knowledge and expertise. During this process, they also embrace the academy's cultural values. One such value is allegiance to one's discipline. Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, and Dorman caution that "[a]llegiance to disciplinary culture embraced through graduate education... can be a barrier to faculty members' fulfillment of the mission of the institution that employs them" (2013, 312). In institutional life, allegiance to a discipline may foster what Bennett describes as "insistent individualism" (2008). Consequently, although "[s]cholarship is a social and communal activity" (Shulman 2008, xi), faculty members as scholars may not value the community dimension involved in academic citizenship unless their institution intentionally fosters a different value system.

In many academic institutions, the rewards system of the professoriate favors teaching and research. Promotion, tenure, and financial benefits normally depend upon excellence in teaching and research output. Academic citizenship does not usually account for much in the tenure portfolio, for example. In their study of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, Ani and Persson found that there was "no financial recognition or reward system for academic citizenship at the university" and that the "workload model" fails to account for academic citizenship (2016, 42, 43). This is not a unique situation.

This section of the essay has reviewed three factors inhibiting academic citizenship. The nature of the university, the formation of scholars, and the rewards system of the professoriate do, indeed, constitute challenges to the flourishing of academic citizenship. These challenges offer opportunities to leaders of theological schools.

Promoting Academic Citizenship in Theological Education: Some Suggestions

This section considers opportunities for promoting academic citizenship in theological education in light of the question raised above: why has academic citizenship remained relatively invisible as a topic of conversation among theological educators, especially in Majority World settings? The factors just reviewed may offer insights as to possible answers. Overall, however, one can only make observations based on experience in the absence of documentary evidence. Based on more than three decades of involvement as a theological educator in a variety of contexts, my sense is that, in many instances, community is taken as a given in Majority World theological education. Consequently, academic citizenship does not rise to the level of a critical issue. In light of the ideas expressed thus

far in this essay, I urge theological educators to give careful attention to the promotion of academic citizenship in their institutions.

The promotion of academic citizenship must begin with a clearly articulated institutional definition of academic citizenship. Second, academic citizenship should be incorporated into the criteria for promotion (See The University of York’s 2016-2017 “Promotion of Academic, Research and Teaching Staff: Criteria and Procedures,” available online at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/registrars-secretary/academic-promotions/>). Third, for institutions with PhD programs, the cultivation of academic citizenship must be integrated into the formation of the next generation of scholars. In my experience, this can begin with intentional and ongoing conversations with PhD students as to the importance of “fit” when they enter the process of being hired, and suggestions that they familiarize themselves with works on academic citizenship while they are students. From there, institutions may implement a more formal approach to the cultivation of academic citizenship in doctoral programs.

Theological schools are academic, spiritual and religious communities whose vitality depends on the ongoing practice of virtues that enhance the collegiality necessary for the success of their institutional missions. Academic citizenship as it pertains to current and future faculty is essential to the vital sustainability of theological education everywhere.

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