

## **A University Is Not A Business**

Any change in the management model of the universities must guarantee academic freedom

By Yair Censor

Much was said and written as regards the management of Israel's universities, particularly following publication of the Maltz Committee Report in January 2000. It recommended, changes to the organizational structure of the universities, directed toward implementation of a business-like management model and submission of the whole system to an inflexible vertical management hierarchy.

Today in the universities, there exist in parallel, an administrative hierarchy (board of governors, executive committee, president, administrative vice-presidents) and an academic hierarchy (senate, rector, faculty deans, department chairpersons). They co-exist in various degrees of mutual dependence, which vary from one university to another according to the special character of each institution and according to the traditions and customs that have developed at each institution.

Submitting the whole system to a rigid vertical management structure, despite certain possible advantages, will necessarily result in great damage to academic independence. The proposed changes include removing the senate's power as the supreme academic authority, conversion of the rector to a vice-president for academic affairs without independent power, and many more. Such alterations will pave the way for the intervention by non-professional interests, both from within and outside the university, with regard to academic professional decisions such as programs of study, scientific promotions, development of scientific priorities, and even the assessment of students.

There is no universal model for management of research universities. Furthermore, some of the organizational recommendations of the Maltz Committee Report already exist in practice in some of Israel's universities. However, this does not prove the desirability of a universal and imposed implementation of all recommendations.

The achievements of Israel's system of higher education that were attained over the past 80 years with far fewer resources than those available to some of the leading universities in the United States of America, put in doubt the need to make extensive changes in the organizational structure of the universities. But even if we wish to make changes, the continuation of academic independence must be uncompromisingly guaranteed.

Academic independence is the soul and spirit of any research university; it requires not only that external and non-professional interests do not intervene in academic decisions, but has yet another extremely important facet, the principle of the academic supremacy of the senate in the university. In protecting this principle, it is unacceptable that the management will unilaterally introduce changes in the organizational structure of the university that will have profound consequences on its academic activity. The consent of the senate, headed by the rector, is essential.

An attempt to enforce changes in the organizational structure without consideration of the academic system is a fundamental breach of academic independence. An attempt to enforce uniform changes in the organizational structure of all universities, as has been proposed by the Planning and Budgeting Committee, and already rejected by the Council for Higher Education, also carries a threat to academic independence and to the universities' ability to keep their place in the forefront of the scientific world. As long as the universities are not only schools for the teaching of culture and knowledge, but also the fountain head of scientific research and cultural creativity, we must let them enjoy academic independence to the fullest extent. If there were a method of foretelling who will be the genius that will discover the next version of relativity theory, or the next visionary historian, then maybe academic independence would be less important. Because then we would have accurately predicted these geniuses and put at their disposal all the resources necessary for their development. Since, however, such is not the case, we must nurture a system with many degrees of freedom, both in its management and in the ways in which it adopts decisions. This system should not be managed according to a business-like administrative model. The flexible model of management is the appropriate way that will enable the blossoming of thought, cultural and scientific, and will increase the chances of far-reaching achievements.

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