

00Launching an Academic Career by Enjoying More Academic Freedom through Online Learning

Who has academic freedom? Few graduate students would be able to recognize any application of the concept of academic freedom while they struggle to meet the many requirements for earning degrees that are an essential credential for entry into the hallowed groves of academia.

For a typical Ph.D. student, studies begin with two years of mostly mandatory classes on subjects that often have no relevance to the student's interests. Somewhere along the line, many graduate students will be pressed into extensive teaching duty, even if they have no plans to teach those subjects after graduation. Finally the student shifts to developing a dissertation that will advance knowledge. Even there, freedom may be limited if an advisor pushes strongly for a certain agenda, research that boosts the advisor's career, or a focus on matters tangential to the student's subject.

This experience sounds more like indentured servitude than academic freedom, doesn't it? The only difference between indentured servitude and graduate school is that at many universities you pay a stiff price for the privilege of doing all of this academic make-work.

Following this prescribed path is fine if you are just out of college, are in no hurry, and don't have very many responsibilities. Increasingly, older students with heavy family responsibilities are seeking graduate degrees to enter teaching.

Let's look at the challenges facing those potential graduate students:

1. What if you already have a great full-time job? Too bad, many top schools only want full-time students.
2. What if you would like to only learn what interests you? Well, that choice may be available after you graduate and have tenure, some 15 to 20 years from now.
3. What if you hate classroom learning? You'll escape it except for teaching after a mere 2 years of misery.

Is there a choice that eliminates those limitations and provides academic freedom for those who want to become academics? That was a question that very much interested Mr. Tom Karp.

Mr. Karp avidly explored his options at both traditional and online universities. In the process, he was attracted to an online school, Rushmore University, that offered him an appealing combination of part-time study, low cost, and flexible choices for employing his preferred learning methods which emphasize "double-loop learning" (reading a lot, testing the learning

in practice, reflecting on the results, writing or publishing about the learning, and then repeating the process). As Mr. Karp related to me, “I have never learned anything from a lecture in my life.” Since Rushmore has no lectures, he was optimistic about his chances to learn by following his intensive style.

While at Rushmore, Mr. Karp was pleased to find that he had even more flexibility in his studies than he expected. As a result, he was able to explore, in depth, the subjects that had always interested him, build a research base of knowledge in his field, receive helpful follow-up from excellent advisors/professors, and publish papers based on his academic studies. In essence, he was already operating as though he had earned his doctorate while studying for it. That’s step one of enjoying academic freedom.

Step two in gaining academic freedom is to become a professor. How did Dr. Karp’s search for a professorship go?

Upon graduation from Rushmore, Dr. Karp was evaluated and found worthy by an academic committee which considered his strong credentials and his merits as demonstrated through research, authorship, previous academic experience and work experience. Following this evaluation, he accepted a position as an associate professor at Oslo School of Management in Norway where he lectures and researches in the fields of leadership, change management, and innovation/entrepreneurship. He also started the change maker education program, The KaosPilots. In addition, Dr. Karp accepted a position as an associate professor at Rushmore and guest professor positions at several other institutions. He combines this academic career and freedom with consulting/advisory work and work at Emergence, a leadership development center newly that he and his partners started. This success proved that while a degree from a prestigious university can certainly help with an academic career ultimately it’s the quality of the prior work done by a faculty candidate, as well as personal traits, skills, and capabilities, that will determine a professorial candidate’s career choices.

What are the lessons for you? An academic career can be launched at various stages in life by those who are willing to work hard and do excellent original work. For those who have little time and money to pursue this education, online universities can be an exceptionally valuable option for those who want to create a highly individual path to learning with few limitations set on them.