University of Zululand

University of Zululand opinions on South African government involvement in higher education, institutional autonomy and academic freedom

Overview

The University of Zululand would like to highlight the following regarding institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

According to New York University research findings (2003) this is the ability to express freely opinions about the institution, being free from institutional censorship, active participation in professional activities without fear, persecution, harassment, intimidation and violence. Each scholar possesses the international recognition and cultural rights due to all citizens including freedom of thought and conscience.

According to Minerva (Summer 1996) they refer to freedom for individual academics in their teaching and research referred to as scholarly freedom, freedom in decision making by academics as groups which can be declared academic rule and the freedom from external interference in the running of universities and other institutions of higher education and this is referred to as institutional autonomy. Scholarly freedom is the ability to teach, research and publish without externally imposed restraint.

According to Tight (1988) academic freedom refers to the freedom of individuals to study, teach, research and publish without being subject to or causing undue interference. It enhances the pursuit and application of worthwhile knowledge. It embodies an acceptance by academics of the need to encourage openness and flexibility in academic work and of their accountability to each other and to society in general.

For an institution this includes self-government according to the terms of its constitution with power to determine academic policies, the balance between teaching and research, staffing ratio’s, the appointment, promotion and discipline of students, curricular, standards, examinations and the conferring of degrees and diploma’s; and with the control over the material resources needed to undertake these activities.

It is a process where we, as institutions of higher education, should avoid the following:
♦ Repression of academics
♦ Censorship and ideological controls
♦ Suppression of student activism in accessibility to education

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy should promote access to education within the human rights culture

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RECTOR & VICE-CHANCELLOR
/ka

11 October 2005
Participatory response co-ordinated by Prof. Steve Edwards

Summary

This article constitutes research undertaken in response to a call by the South African Council for Higher Education (CHE), for University of Zululand perceptions of South African government involvement in and regulation of higher education, with special reference to the principles of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, public accountability and such related principles as democratisation and development.

A sample of 34 University staff responded to a questionnaire, which included a Likert type scale as well as an open ended qualitative component. In general more positive opinions on state involvement in higher education were held by younger female, previously disadvantaged, lower educated staff in administrative positions and more negative opinions were held by older male, previously advantaged, higher educated staff in academic positions.

Staff opinions were generally positive concerning the direction of government’s involvement in higher education, neutral as concerns the effect on institutional autonomy and negative as concerns the influence on academic freedom. Results and future recommendations are discussed in relation to other research, with special reference to the local higher education and South African context.

Introduction

In an investigation such as this, it seems critical that there is some clarity with regard to the meaning of such terms as government, higher education, academic freedom and institutional autonomy in higher education. It will be assumed that there is some common understanding of the terms government as a democratically elected ruling body of persons and higher education as a tertiary form of education occurring after so called primary and secondary forms.

The meanings of the terms ‘academic freedom’ and ‘institutional autonomy’ are based on individual perceptions, common parlance, historical, legal, constitutional, comparative and conceptual foundations, which have formed a traditional cornerstone of higher education since the middle ages (Edwards & Roelofse, 1994). The concepts are clearly inter-related, defined differently by different persons and institutions in different times, circumstances and discourses, and may be distinguished in terms of their relative focus on person and context, in the sense of academics’ freedom from interference in order to engage in appropriate academic activities in institutional settings that are sufficiently independent from other organizations in order to support this academic activity. While the concept of academic freedom is more inclusive than institutional autonomy, having been used to include both individual and institutional freedoms, its conceptual and logical relatedness to institutional autonomy is apparent when it is considered that a university without academic autonomy and freedom can be regarded as a contradiction in terms
(Dlamini, 1996; Smyth, 1995; Vidivich & Currie, 1998). The inter-relatedness and distinctions between the two terms has been comprehensively summarized as follows:

“Academic freedom for an institution usually includes autonomy or self government according to the terms of its constitution, with power to determine academic policies, the balance between teaching and research, staffing ratios, the appointment, promotion and discipline of students, curricula, standards, examinations and the conferring of degrees and diplomas; and with the control over the material resources needed to undertake these activities…

Academic freedom for the academics is generally assumed to include the right to participate in the government of the institution and its policy making, freedom in what and how to teach, choice of research topics and freedom to travel and communicate with colleagues” (Rendel, 1988, pp. 74-75).

In further explication of the broader concept of academic freedom, Moodie (1996) makes the distinction between scholarly freedom, academic rule and institutional autonomy, each of which is characterized by different levels and contexts of freedom. Scholarly freedom, comparable to religious freedom, refers to the claim for freedom by individual academics in their teaching and research. In the unfettered pursuit of truth, academic productivity derived from scholarly freedom can inform governments towards the making of wise decisions. Academic rule, which refers to the claim to freedom in decision by academics as groups (departments, faculties, senate and profession) implies a more positive freedom to allow relevant democratically decentralized decisions concerning higher education to be made by academics themselves as persons most competent to do so. The case for some degree of institutional autonomy includes academic competence as well, allowing for local decision making for specific local concerns particular to the local community context in which the tertiary educational institution is located. A particular case would be the state supported decision of the University of Zululand to become a comprehensive institution servicing rural areas and communities, rather than merge with the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

A comprehensive empirical and phenomenographic investigation assessing the meaning of academic freedom for a sample of social scientists provided an even broader framework within which to interpret the range of views found in the literature and public debate (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003). Qualitatively different ways of understanding emerged, varying with appropriate types of constraints and the role of self, peers, institution and society in creating academic freedom. For example, where academic freedom was perceived as externally determined there was focus on rights to non-interference and/or support. Where academic freedom was perceived as internally determined there was focus on responsibilities. A finding of relevance to the present research was the emergence of a distinction and interplay between rights and responsibilities involved in individual, collegial or disciplinary, and institutional autonomy. Whereas academic freedom was consistently perceived as a right of academics as individuals, respondents varied in their perceptions of the constraints and support for these rights. Some noted that these rights are appropriately constrained by
standards or criteria of colleagues, discipline or professional body. In addition to such constraints other responses noted the role of the institution and society in providing appropriate support for academic freedom. Yet others emphasized the responsibilities inherent in academic freedom, for example towards colleagues, discipline, institution and society (Akerlind & Kayrooz, 2003).

Under the former racist apartheid government and segregated universities, academic freedom was severely restricted to the extent that the historically Black, Afrikaans and English language universities became caricatures of political struggle, local segregation and ivory tower universality respectively. Academics were imprisoned, books were banned, buildings burned and lives lost in an ongoing spiral of structural, reactive and repressive political violence. Conflicting academic and revolutionary models of tertiary education reflected the influence of international ideologies of capitalism, communism and international academic movements as well as the realities of ongoing tertiary educational and societal change, with combined academic and revolutionary models becoming the rule rather than the exception (Edwards, 1988) as has been the general perspective of the present democratically elected South African government (Asmal, 2002).

The new democratic government has inherited a complex legacy and struggled to establish a systematically transfigured and transformed system. Higher educational policy making in the post 1994 period has been described as hesitant and ineffective. Fataar (2003) has argued that a shifting policy discourse around such issues as funding, private higher education and quality assurance ought to be examined in the light of the struggle over aligning educational policy discourse with macro-development policy and that historically disadvantaged institutions (HDI’s) became the key problem around which higher education policy unfolded, leading to the closure of some HDI’s and the merger of others with former white universities and technikons. Key problem issues identified were: throughput and graduation rate inefficiencies; skewed student distribution between science, commerce and humanities; low research output and poor staff equity in an increasingly market driven economy struggling to keep up with the demands of global economic competitiveness.

In response to a call by the South African Council for Higher Education (CHE), the purpose of the present research was to investigate the University of Zululand, an HDI’s perceptions of South African government involvement in and regulation of higher education, with special reference to the principles of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, public accountability and such related principles as democratisation and development.

**Method**

The method in this investigation was informed by a phenomenological approach or attitude of consciously suspending any assumptions, in order to allow phenomena to reveal themselves in their fresh, original reality. Such an approach means intensive investigations of essential structures of perceived reality as well as continually new
discoveries as reality changes. The approach was subjective to the extent to which it was concerned with the lived-reality of staff at Zululand University. It was objective to the extent to which such experienced phenomena as government involvement, higher education and academic freedom were accurately interpreted by individual staff and the truth of their reality endorsed by other staff. Such an approach prevents absolutising any particular essence into a dominant characteristic of consciousness, existence and reality. It implies pursuit of an ultimately unrealisable final truth of benefit to humanity and society (Edwards, 2001; Giorgi, 1970).

Further investigation, which included quantitative and qualitative components, proceeded along five phases. Firstly a questionnaire was constructed in standard Likert scale format requesting answers to ten unambiguous opinion statements, five of which were positive and five negatively phrased. The specific scale items were chosen to match those requested by the CHE, to reflect everyday university collegial discourse, and were randomly numbered. Responses were required along a five-point scale, ranging from strongly agree, through agree, uncertain and disagree, to strongly disagree. As reflected in the scoring stencil, which accompanies the scale in Appendix A, the scoring for negatively phrases items is reversed. The scale therefore has a theoretical mean of 30, a lowest possible negative opinion score of 10 and a highest possible positive opinion score of 50.

Secondly, this questionnaire was posted and/or emailed to all university staff, in a form of course sieve phase, to allow equal opportunity for all staff to respond. All respondents were asked to respond within a week of the request owing to limited academic term time before university recess. Students and other university stakeholders were not asked to respond owing to the particular nature of the investigation and time constraints. Thirdly, faculty responses were requested from all faculty deans. Fourthly, individual responses were requested from eight persons, two from each of the four academic faculties of the university, who were considered to have special knowledge and/or experience of the investigation. Finally as only 22 responses had been received by the due date, two secretarial staff requested responses from a further 12 staff they had randomly encountered. In this way a total sample of 34 responses were obtained, which may be regarded as fairly representative of University of Zululand staff.

The sample consisted of 18 men and 16 women. In terms of home language, there were 19 isiZulu, 6 Afrikaans, 4 English, 2 Xhosa, 2 South Sotho and 1 Sepedi speaker. For purposes of statistical analysis, these language groups were further categorized into two groups, consisting of 24 and 10 persons respectively, to reflect persons historically disadvantaged or advantaged in terms of apartheid categories such as black and white. There were 10 doctorates, 12 masters, 6 honours, 3 bachelors and 3 persons who listed matric as their highest educational qualification. These educational groups were further categorized into two groups, comprising 10 persons with a doctoral degree and 24 persons without doctorates. There were 8 persons from administrative departments and 26 from various academic departments; 13 from the Faculty of Arts, 6 from Education, 6 from Science and 1 from the Faculty of Commerce.
The small sample size necessitated the categorization of data in statistical analysis, which was performed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), using reliability analysis, \( t \) tests for independent means and \( X^2 \) analyses. The total mean score for all participants was 28.3, which is slightly below the expected mean of 30 on this Likert scale. Following consultation with local university statistician, Jacques Cloete, comparisons were made between: older and younger participants, those above and below the mean of 43.2 years; women and men; black and white; higher and lower educated, those with doctorates and those without; administrative and academic staff. Reliability analysis of the ten-item scale yielded a high alpha coefficient of 0.87. In the results that follow, a single asterisk * refers to statistics significant at the 5% level and double asterisks** refer to statistics significant at the 1% level.

**Results and discussion**

**Quantitative findings**

Table 1: Summary of means, with \( t \) statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Younger staff-30.8</th>
<th>Older staff-26.6</th>
<th>( t=1.4 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Woman-30.6</td>
<td>Men-26.3</td>
<td>( t=1.4 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous disadvantage</td>
<td>Black-31.1</td>
<td>White-21.7</td>
<td>( t=3.1 \ **)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Less Educated-30.0</td>
<td>More educated-25.1</td>
<td>( t=1.4 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Administration-27.9</td>
<td>Academic-19.8</td>
<td>( t=0.5 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Owing to small sample size, the main findings as appear in Table 1 should be viewed with caution. However, while only one comparison reached statistical significance, there are clear trends in the direction that more positive and/or approving opinions on government involvement in higher education were held by younger, female, previously disadvantaged staff with lower education in administrative positions. On the other hand, more negative and/or critical opinions were held by older male, previously advantaged staff, with higher education in academic positions. Given recent South African national and higher educational history, these trends are both predictable and understandable. Further research with larger samples would affirm or negate these trends.

Table 2: Opinion statements, means and \( X^2 \) statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>( X^2 ) statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A destructive state interference model has been pursued</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state steering model has given valuable direction</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>13.7**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is less efficiency</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is less public accountability</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>13.7**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational development has increased</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional autonomy has decreased</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic freedom has improved</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>9.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratisation has improved</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>21.4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an improved quality of higher education</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Equity attempts have been ineffective

Table 2 results refer to X2 analysis of the opinions of the sample of 34 University of Zululand staff on each of the ten opinion statements. Means are given simply to indicate if the statements were viewed negatively or positively from a hypothetical normal sample distribution mean of 3. Individual opinion statements means obviously give no indication of the actual distribution of scores along the five response categories, which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

It is clear that the University of Zululand staff sample were in significant agreement that a state steering model had given valuable direction, that there was more public accountability, that democratisation had improved and that equity attempts had been effective. It is equally and significantly clear that staff were of the general opinion that there was less efficiency and that academic freedom had waned. From the relatively neutral, non significant responses to the remaining four opinion statements, it can be interpreted that staff were generally uncertain as to whether a destructive state interference model had been pursued, whether institutional autonomy had increased or decreased, whether or not there had been higher educational development and whether the quality of higher education had improved or worsened.

**Qualitative findings**

As indicated above, a phenomenological approach implies pursuit of an ultimately unrealisable final truth. The connotations of the isiZulu concept for truth “iqiniso” are apposite when conveying local experience. More specifically, iqiniso has connotations of an experiential, reality based, morally strong, form of truth. The Likert scale provided some quantitative, statistically significant perceptual truths in the form of opinion statements related to the actual investigation requested by the Council for Higher Education. Such perceptual truths are experientially amplified in the following six comments on the qualitative component of the questionnaire from four black and two white staff, two from administrative and four from academic departments, in Arts, Education and Science Faculties. The comments were chosen as reflecting positive, average and negative opinions towards government involvement in higher education respectively.

**A positive opinion score of 45**

‘It is necessary for the state, particularly in the South African context, to regulate through legislations that promote, *inter alia*, redress and equity, through transformation processes at institutions of higher education. If this does not occur the education system of this country will not progress according to the pace that is globally expected of us as a country given our history. The National Education Plan (2001) identified five key policy goals for transforming higher education. These are:

- to increase access, produce skilled and competent graduates to meet the human resource needs of the country
- to promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equity attempts have been ineffective</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• to ensure diversity in the institutional landscape of higher education
• to promote research linked to national development needs
• to restructure the higher education system to transcend the fragmentation and
  inequalities of the past

Therefore regulation to achieve among others the above policy goals is more than
necessary. To this end Prof. Haddam Tahir, a retired vice-chancellor of the University of
Malaysia had this to say: “Because we are a public university, we are expected to assist
the government.”

However the issue of government involvement in order to interfere in the day to day
running of the university with the policies implemented is unacceptable, for the
autonomy of the institution suffers a blow in that situation. Rather, only an intervention
to correct/ improve or enforce the policies’ implementation, if this is resisted, is
understandable, otherwise a crisis situation could reign supreme and even amount to
mutiny. Finally the spirit and the letter of the constitution principles should be observed
by both the state and the institution, for the two need each other.’

A positive opinion score of 43

‘Owing to the fact that the government pays university’s subsidy, some amount of
monitoring and control can be expected. The previously disadvantaged institutions were
the primary beneficiaries. Previously advantaged institutions understandably lost some
advantages and some of their freedom. On the whole, all institutions are bound to benefit
almost equally with the new equity system.’

An average opinion score of 37

‘I think it is necessary for the government to get involved in the regulation of higher
educational institutions. The government is the major funder of these institutions.
Institutions are therefore accountable to government.’

An average opinion score of 24

‘The biggest problem with the attempts of government to regulate is that up to now the
message/guidance/instructions received were unclear/confusing/contradictory, which
contributed to the vast amount of paperwork. This again contributed to a significant
reduction of time/motivation for the day to day work/effort/initiative to supply high
quality education at ground level.’

A negative opinion score of 17.

‘The government’s interference has affected academic freedom and the quality of
education generally. The government should revise the policy of how higher education
systems are subsidized.’
A negative opinion score of 13

‘The government has interfered in the councils of some universities; it has meddled with the internal politics of others; it has tried to make sure that its cronies are in the positions of chancellor and vice-chancellor in as many of them as possible. It has created an environment in which real debate is difficult because too many stakeholders know on which side their bread is buttered. Its attempts to ‘restructure’ universities ‘on business principles’ is a plot to create a top down management system in which everyone has to do what s/he is told. Worse it delivered dire threats to institutions that do not produce sufficient graduates of specific types or that produce too many of others. The graduates of which it approves are not educated in any extended sense of this word but ‘trained’ only – to fit specific jobs that government planners believe (often erroneously) are largely vacant and essential to the advantage of the country’s economy. When these planners’ predictions prove wrong, the graduates are often found to be too superficially and specifically trained to fit any other kind of job.’

The past millennium has been characterised by various forms of power struggle between such social institutions as university, state and church. Higher educational institutions are endemically political in both the local sense of that word and as catalysts for discourse on prevailing party political ideologies and discourses. Moodie (1996) has pointed out that conflict is inevitable between academics, answerable mainly to other academics within their discipline in their pursuit of knowledge, and politicians, answerable to their voters in their pursuit of power; that it is predictable that any state directed social transformation will threaten academic freedom and that academic freedom will form obstacles to any speedy transformation process. However, the conflict usually only becomes acute on the principle of scholarly freedom (Moodie, 1996).

This seems to have been the case in the present research, where perceptions of the direction of state involvement were generally positive, neutral as concerns institutional autonomy and negative with regard to influence on academic freedom. The following two independent submissions by academics intricately trace perceptions of some degree of state involvement in academic freedom. In the first submission, the focus is mainly on scholarly freedom. In the second, some degree of interference in scholarly freedom, academic rule and institutional autonomy is perceived.

Independent submission 1

‘A university’s teaching mission is not, as is widely believed in South Africa in this century, just to push out as many job-oriented graduates as possible in order to feed the country’s economy. Nor is its mission to produce ‘good citizens’ who will do nothing more intellectually than mouth the clichés of the reigning ideology.

On the contrary, a university’s main function is to teach people to think. The ability to think for oneself—to think critically and creatively; to see through the hypocrisy and doubletalk of one’s age; to dream of social, political, scientific and artistic possibilities that have not yet come into being—this is the most powerful competence that we possess
as human beings, and politicians and governments have always been rightfully scared of
it. The apartheid government was at war with this kind of thought and went to great
lengths to suppress it, especially in the case of black people, but it lost its battle in the end
and that is why apartheid has disappeared. Without critical thought and creative dreaming
it would probably still be with us.

The ability to think independently is extremely practical as well as idealistic. The person
who can ‘think outside the box’ is the one who designs the new bridge or house, copes
with the medical emergency or manages the multicultural workforce effectively, not the
diligent but unthinking drudge who does what s/he is told and learns his/her course notes
for the exam.

A university, in order to foster thought, needs to be free of interference by both
government and business. This is not to say that the employment and research needs of
the country should be ignored, but it is to stress that a university should not be merely a
piece of state (or business) machinery, obliged to do exactly as it is told. Researchers
should be able to conduct research freely, even if that research may seem ‘irrelevant’ to
current vested interests, because that is the only way real discoveries will ever be made.
Students and lecturers should be free to come to unorthodox, disquieting conclusions that
are not what their potential sponsors would approve of, because this is the only way that
the sciences and the humanities are furthered. Real discoveries and disquieting
conclusions can turn people and institutions into dissidents and social critics; but this is a
risk that any government that is serious about education has to take. Without criticism,
irrelevancy and the play of that perverse turn of human nature which prevents us all from
seeing the world in the same way, we not only turn into a totalitarian state, but we lose
the creative and innovative spirit that actually makes the best workers as well as
thinkers.’

Independent submission 2

‘1. Education is over legislated. Too much time is lost in sorting out the overlaps between
departments and programmes. The real new initiatives do not get the focus they deserve.
Government is intent on overkill. This does not make for freedom.

2. The OBE programme was badly introduced and was disruptive to the academic
integrity of our institution. Elsewhere it could have been managed well, but not here.
Result - less freedom to operate and innovate.

3. Due to bad management, and severe economic conditions, we are the poorest of the
poor universities in SA. Autonomy would not have helped us. How to balance freedom
with responsibility to the tax payer, that is the question.

4. We were encouraged to take education to the people -- and thus we got engaged with
academic programmes at colleges who became our affiliates. Now the DoE is retracting,
and trying to discourage us in this. This type of interference is negative and destructive.
5. There is the real danger that due to our low academic salaries, we will only attract the weakest of the weak lecturers in the world.

6. Affirmative action is also increasing the danger that some may use it to appoint inferior qualified lecturers, thus disabling the students who are in real need of academic empowerment.

7. The constant feeling that government is looking over the shoulders of universities makes work inhibitory.

8. The insistence of government that all students have the right to be taught in English at all universities is in direct conflict with the constitution and a breach of trust. It also flies in the face of academic freedom. The correct way to go is to support qualifying language courses at the universities.

9. University councils have been loaded with politically minded people, at the cost of professionalism. These "politicians" have a wrong impression of what a university is, and cannot keep their hands off the day to day management of universities. They take rash decisions.

10. Government is providing bad leadership: they do not teach people what academic freedom is, and do not visibly uphold its values in public. This is a widely held perspective.

11. There is a boundary that Government is not supposed to overstep when it comes to interfering in universities. This boundary is not clear and nothing is done to clarify it.

12. In the drive for political correctness, freedom is denied to those without proper funds to do research and to study. The concept of freedom is married to the concept of merit. If you damage the one, you also destroy the other. Affirmative action is good, but should be clearly limited. It is a temporary measure, and it should be clearly indicated as such. Affirmative action on the ground of race, without the clear provision of a sunset clause, amounts to privileging on the ground of race. This is the end of freedom.'

To sum up this discussion, transformation of higher education in South Africa has long been generally accepted as necessary. In this research staff opinions were generally positive concerning government’s involvement in higher education. The results also relevantly contextualise views on state attempts to integrate revolutionary socialist and academic models of tertiary education in an increasingly market driven economy struggling to keep up with the demands of global economic competitiveness (Asmal, 2002; Edwards, 1988; Fataar, 2003). In the critical view of some respondents this has lead to unnecessary beurocracy, confusing regulatory attempts and contradictory instructions, which contributed to little more than vast amount of paperwork.

All the results above should be regarded as preliminary. There is clearly need for more research at Zululand and other tertiary educational institutions. In view of its
demonstrated reliability, the questionnaire used in this research could profitably be used with samples of staff at other historically disadvantaged and advantaged institutions. In view of the limited size of the present research sample and abovementioned research literature indicating the variety of interpretations given to such a term as academic freedom, there is particular need for more empirical research with larger samples to further investigate the results trends as well as more in depth qualitative phenomenological and/or phenomenographic investigations incorporating focus group techniques to evaluate further the influence of government involvement on different forms of academic freedom. This is clearly the intention of the South African Council for Higher Education, who need to be supported in this initiative. If properly implemented, such ongoing interventional research has the potential for optimizing state – higher educational relationships for the early detection and prevention of unnecessary conflict as well as promoting higher educational activity in its essential task of seeking truths and ways to benefit all life, nationally, internationally and cosmologically.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the University of Zululand, an HDI’s perceptions of South African government involvement in and regulation of higher education, with special reference to the principles of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, public accountability and such related principles as democratisation and development. The research was occasioned by a specific request from the South African Council for Higher Education.

Viewed inclusively, the results provide limited yet clear patterns related to opinions on government involvement in higher education since 1994. On the one hand, there were clear trends that more positive, approving opinions on state involvement in higher education were held by younger, female, previously disadvantaged staff with lower education in administrative positions. On the other hand, more negative, critical opinions were held by older, previously advantaged male staff, with higher education in academic positions.

From a holistic perspective, a general pattern found in all forms of transformation, of movements forward and backward as well as stasis, emerged as a dominant theme in staff perceptions of government involvement in higher education. While state involvement in higher education was viewed positively, especially concerning the state steering model in its provision of valuable direction, staff opinions were also generally negative and critical of government involvement as concerns academic freedom, particularly in the sense of scholarly freedom.

It may be concluded that further ongoing interventional research is needed for detection of critical issues, prevention of unnecessary conflict, promotion of higher educational activity, optimizing of state – higher educational relationships and ultimate cosmological benefit.
References


Appendix A: Likert scale and scoring stencil

On South African government involvement in and regulation of higher education, institutional autonomy and academic freedom

The South African Council for Higher Education is investigating government involvement in higher education since 1994, with special reference to the principles of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, public accountability and such related principles as democratisation and development. The University of Zululand has been asked to respond. Your response to this brief questionnaire will provide information as to university opinions on this matter. Confidentiality is guaranteed. Please return completed questionnaires immediately or at least by 15 September to Prof Edwards at internal post box 85.

Age: _____________________________________
Gender:___________________________________
Home language:____________________________
Highest educational qualification:______________
Department:_______________________________
Faculty:___________________________________

Please give your opinion on each of the following statements concerning government involvement in higher education since 1994 by placing a cross to indicate if you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are uncertain (U), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A destructive state interference model has been pursued</td>
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<td>Higher educational development has increased</td>
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<td>Institutional autonomy has decreased</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic freedom has improved</td>
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<td>Democratisation has improved</td>
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<td>There is an improved quality of higher education</td>
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<td>Equity attempts have been ineffective</td>
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Please comment briefly on South African government involvement in and regulation of higher education, institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

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Should you wish to discuss the matter in depth please contact Prof Steve Edwards via extension 6602/3 or email: sedwards@pan.uzulu.ac.za. Thank you for your participation.

**Scoring stencil for academic freedom investigation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>U3</th>
<th>D4</th>
<th>SD5</th>
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<tr>
<td>A destructive state interference model has been pursued</td>
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<tr>
<td>A state steering model has given valuable direction</td>
<td>SA5</td>
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<td>SD1</td>
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<td>There is less public accountability</td>
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