

05.7.2025

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**Title**

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom : a perspective from the American continent

**Publication year**

2007

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education policy. - 20 (2007) 3, S. 275 - 288

**Inventory number**

22868

**Keywords**

Ausland : Lateinamerika : Hochschulwesen allgemein ; Ausland : USA : Hochschulwesen allgemein ; Freiheit von Forschung und Lehre

**Abstract**

This article presents a brief historical overview on the origin and development of institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the United States of America and in Latin America. Such overview allows the reader to contrast two different geographical contexts, as well as different and even opposing opinions concerning the meaning of the concepts involved. The author illustrates how ideology, along with political conditions, explains the variety and heterogeneity of the universities and institutions of higher education. Other issues discussed include accountability and autonomy; the rapid growth of private academic institutions exemplifying the enormous demand for higher education services and how this is linked to the concept of autonomy; the public vs private controversy; the role of the State and the matters of pertinence and quality. Finally, the article discusses and illustrates some of the current debates that have to do with the exercise of institutional and individual autonomy. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)