

Washington University Law Review

Volume 75 | Issue 4

January 1997

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Recommended Citation

M. W. Friedlander, *Academic Freedom and Its Defenders*, 75 WASH. U. L. Q. 1365 (1997).

Available at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol75/iss4/3

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ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ITS DEFENDERS

M.W. FRIEDLANDER*

This collection of tributes provides a very welcome opportunity to take note of one of our most effective but very quiet defenders of academic freedom, R. Dale Swihart. Almost thirty years ago, we were colleagues on the Executive Committee of the Washington University chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). It was a time when the inadequacy of Washington University's old tenure policy was clear. Chancellor Tom Eliot asked our AAUP chapter to undertake the initial drafting of a new policy and, of course, it was Dale who did this writing. The draft went through rigorous review by our committee, by the Faculty Senate Council and the Administration and, finally, by the Board of Trustees before adoption in May 1974. Though there have been several amendments and additions over the years, the fundamental framework still stands—it has worn well, a tribute to both its soundness and the general will of most (if not all) people to abide by its spirit as well as its letters.

The work of most university faculty does not attract hostile criticism, and consequently they face no threats to the security of their positions or their freedom to explore, in their teaching and pronouncements, ideas that may be unpopular. When, however, difficulties emerge, the phone of the local AAUP rings. Our committee will listen to aggrieved faculty, and talk with their deans, or departmental heads. We advise our faculty of their rights and we remind the administrators of those rights, especially that of due process. Most of this discussion goes on away from public view and it can be effective. None of this, however, could take place if we did not have a strong tenure policy and it is here, again and again, that we are grateful for Dale's legal drafting. Our Policy is based, to a considerable degree, on the national AAUP's Recommended Institutional Regulations that provide a set of standards that are very widely followed.

Dales' contributions are by no means confined to the past. As might be expected, there are occasions when there are differing interpretations of the Policy, and it is comforting to know that we are still able to draw on Dale's incisive analyses.

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