

antioch lives!

BY ALUMNI FOR ALUMNI

The dispute over academic freedom is really about two different visions and models of education. These two models have co-existed in the Antioch University system for twenty years. The Board of Trustees and the Chancellor voted in June to end the liberal arts model with a tenured faculty and small classrooms and lots of student-teacher interaction and the Antioch version of co-op with alternating work and study. This model has an excellent track record, and its results are not in dispute.

The 'vision' currently being put forward by the Chancellor is that of a technologically connected university system with a virtual library, courses which can be broadcast to all the units, and very few 'core' faculty. It's an administrative-heavy model which relies on part-time labor and adjuncts as opposed to a professional faculty who have had to meet rigorous standards in their discipline. It's a model which relies on high-tech gadgetry and educational consultants as opposed to what we know works: committed, well-trained good teachers who identify with the institution and who know their students as individuals.

It's clear from the fact that the university's 'suspension' plans extend past the three years necessary to break tenure contracts, along with the evidence that the 'new Antioch 2012' will not include a tenured faculty, that part of the goal is to destroy the last vestige of tenure at Antioch University. We see this new plan as a deliberately deskilling of the profession. Basically

the University is firing highly trained 'chefs' who deliver individualized 'dishes' to individualized audiences, and substituting them with 'line cooks,' much cheaper labor able to deliver prepackaged, easily reproducible, standardized course 'recipes.' Often these 'recipes' are tailored toward the short-term needs of particular business interests, who then pay the tuition for their employees to take these courses. 'Line cooks' are paid by the course and receive few or no benefits and often work for several colleges and universities simultaneously. Clearly

long term financial commitments to faculty or pay benefits to nearly as many employees. However, this is not just about finances, but also about decision-making power. This is the Board/University leadership choosing to close down one educational model in which significant authority is invested in the faculty (and some in students), and leaving only the University model in which authority is invested in the administration. Who should create curricula, requirements, educational standards, vision? According to today's business-minded educational

experts, a tenured faculty with control over curriculum and standards means that the institution is "inflexible," a real liability in today's "lean and mean" consumer-oriented environment in which an institution, like a company, has to be constantly "ready to adapt."

What we are seeing, of course, is the impact of this late-capitalist philosophy on the professoriate, which has managed to remain partly sheltered from these effects, but is now being downsized and downgraded in the same way that those in more vulnerable non-professional jobs have been for the past 20 years. The University administration is absolutely correct that this high-tech adjunct model is being touted as the wave of the future – but that doesn't mean it's a good model either in terms of educational quality for the students it serves, or in terms of the working conditions of the people it employs. It's a terrible step backward for both of these constituencies, and therefore must be fought.

The Importance of Tenure at Antioch

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they have much less commitment to student development and much less reason to put in the energy and effort required for educational excellence. 'Line cooks' also cannot be invested in College governance or the running of the institution; they do not constitute any kind of power base within the institution.

There are obvious financial advantages in this 'new' model in that the University does not have to make