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# Free Inquiry and Public Mission in the Research University

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**15 March 2010, 14:00 followed by a reception**

Berrill Lecture Theatre

The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

<http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/locations.aspx>

A widespread model of the research university unites freedom of intellectual inquiry (for both students and professors) with the creation of new knowledge through research, the nurturance of a scholarly community integrating disparate fields, open public communication, and the effort to make knowledge widely available as a public good. In this talk I ask to what extent this basic model is challenged by changes underway in research universities today. The changes range from transformations of scale to shifts in financing, growing interests in private rather than public goods, new inequalities, and obsession with rankings. I will particularly urge thinking of free inquiry as a social matter, a public good. It is not enough to ask whether individual scholars are free from censorship or illegitimate attempts to control their work. We should also ask how much the university as an institution contributes to overall freedom of inquiry. This requires assessing how well universities educate students to be participants in free inquiry, how well researchers communicate their work to raise the quality of public discourse, and whether the results of scientific inquiry are made freely available to advance further inquiry or controlled as private property. It requires asking whether the specific structures and practices through which we organize academic work – from disciplinary departments to evaluation procedures to publication systems – do more to facilitate or obstruct free inquiry.

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