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**Abstract**

Universities need a fair degree of autonomy to be able to fulfil their mission well. Yet autonomy in itself is not sufficient for success. This article describes three factors that are essential for the success of academic self-government. 1) The missions and profiles of universities are always contextual, so academic autonomy should be practiced as a dynamic project, changing over time and responsive to new demands. 2) Even more important are the internal structure and culture of the autonomous university. Because it is at the same time a complex and a professional organization, academic autonomy should be organized at all levels, in all fields and work processes of the university. 3) Self-government cannot be practiced without changing traditional fragmentary models of academic organization. This requires strong academic leadership at all levels and in all fields. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)