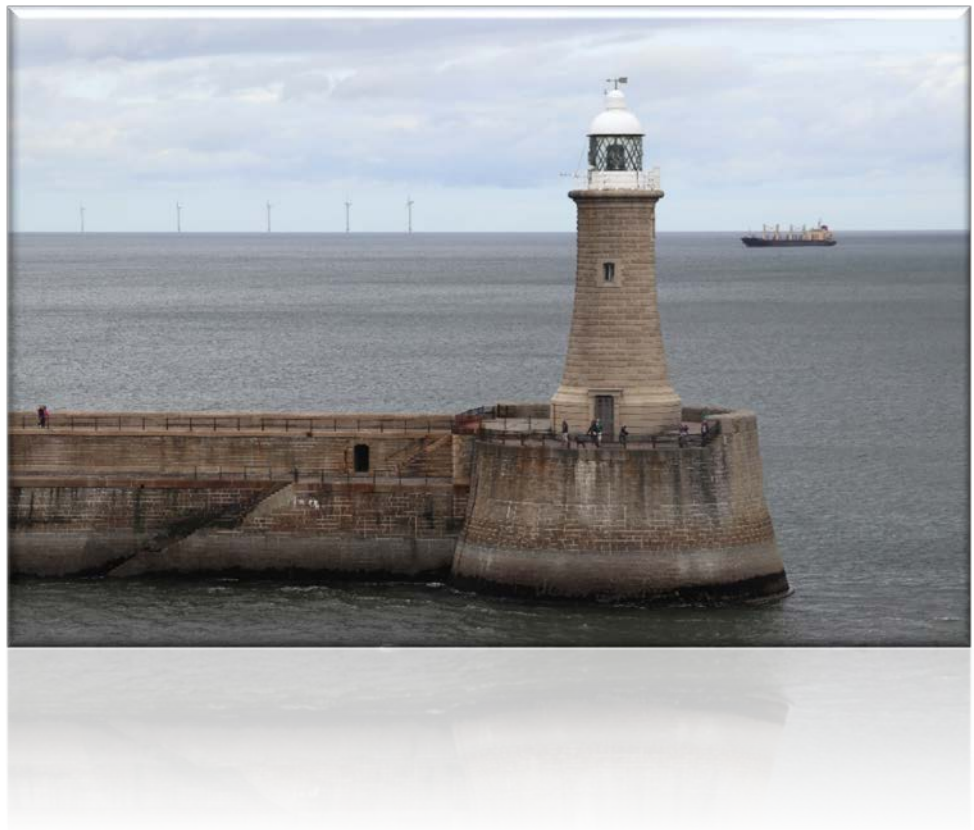


Würzburg/Bangalore, 01/2019
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Academic Values

*A harmonic portfolio
for sustainable
Universities
of applied sciences*



Abstract

The mission of universities worldwide requires a harmonic portfolio of good values that promote the pursuit of scientific excellence in research and teaching. As academic education refers to the upcoming requirements of tomorrow's world, it not just comprehends the gathering of new knowledge. Even more important, academic education also enables students to acquire competencies to arrange and position this knowledge within the context of the future. This helps at the same time in the transformation of our societies into harmonic and sustainable societies.

This keynote discussion paper for the 2019 international conference of Christ University HARMONY (Interface of Cosmic, Ethical and Religious Orders) provides a proposal for such a value set and shows how it prepares students to meet the challenges of new work. Its ideas are based on "State-of-the-Art Hochschulbildung: Welche Werte nachhaltiges Wissen fördern" (Bolsinger, H.), in: CSR MAGAZIN 01/2018, P. 6-9. The presented approach aims to provoke a new discourse about our self-concept in the academic world in times of paradigm shift. As all knowledge is context-related and exactly this context appears more and more unpredictable, universities have to change their approach in academic education by emphasizing on competence development. Fundamental changes due to digitalization, global mobility, and social networking lead to dramatic shifts in human labor and universities have to consider their consequences in designing academic education. Capabilities like collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, confidence, and communication act as key competencies, suitable to prepare students for the challenges of tomorrow's work, also named as new work. Where formal outer restraints are not appropriate anymore, an inner framework must guide individuals to find their ways in an ambiguous world. Here, values form the grounding for a well-based self-restraint.

Human centering, interconnectedness, freedom, diversity, intercultural openness and future orientation are anchoring the key competencies. Key competencies remain uncompleted and detached without underlying values. In insisting this inevitable correlation, higher education prepares young people to find their role in the work place and enables them to develop themselves furthermore. In this context, sustainability in academic education strives for love of truth in a networked community, intellectual modesty in the discussion of research results, and appropriate humility. The ability to reflect also contains the willingness to discuss and accept freedom of thoughts among researchers, teachers and learners. To make this always visible, transparency acts as a mechanism of academic self-control.

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1 In harmony with society: Sustainable higher education

Colleges and universities are THE places where intellectual diversity and understanding of sustainability can grow. They exist to provide education in the mirror of the current state of society. It is society, through its demand, that determines the WHAT of this education and sets a normative framework for HOW. The HOW describes the values that should guide the design of education. A minimum set of (only) educational values that function together in harmony can protect us from the social demand for sustainable development being ignored or from being overemphasized. A university that is characterized by academic freedom and independence in research and teaching has to fulfill the task to reflect on socio-politically fixed values autonomously, to question them, to make suggestions for further developments and to deal with them in an own decision-making responsibility. This also applies to the politically filled concept of sustainability. Universities contribute to overcoming socio-political challenges with knowledge and competence development. They have the task of enabling students to become part of a solution themselves, which can ultimately only be determined in terms of discourse ethics and socio-politics. After all, higher education is just as much a subsystem of society as politics, business, art, law, religion and other subsystems. In order to fulfill the mission, a timelessly valid harmonic portfolio of values is necessary, which is closed to the influence of politics.

1.1 From research to teaching

The core tasks of universities as higher education institutions are research and teaching. Research is the production of knowledge and new findings. These findings must be documented, conserved and transferred to society and discussed and commented on by it. Scientific conferences, publications, technology transfer events and other methods are available. Teaching should convey the old and newly acquired knowledge and form the competencies for its application especially in universities of applied sciences. Current and contemporary teaching requires participation in the research process, as this is the only way to keep the understanding of doctrinal opinions up to date.

1.2 From knowledge to sustainable education

Research-based knowledge generation and teaching alone do not ensure a high-quality education. This is why competence orientation has found its way into higher education. Knowledge is constructivistically understood in its research-induced dynamics. It is accepted that only a snapshot under development will be discussed. This includes the commitment and involvement of the learners with their different perspectives, who construct their own knowledge from teaching and through teaching with feedback and in discourse with teachers at university. From this

understanding, a minimum framework for successful teaching as a basis for holistic higher education can be derived: The positions of the teachers must be transparent, reflection of the teachers by the learners must be affirmed. Then a further development is automatically integrated, which leads to new research questions, which in turn enrich the teaching with new knowledge. The discourse as part of the teaching permanently refines every teaching program. Sustainability in the sense of responsibility towards people and the world has always been part of the mission of universities and is not suitable as a separate instrument. It has to remain part of the discourse process, too. Normativity in teaching and science is only as good as it remains free and discursive - also with regard to sustainability. Due to this reason normative sustainability is not suitable for university positioning or even marketing – only a specific way of competence building on sustainability matters could be chosen for differentiation, as long as university has not to be perceived as a political player and scientific credibility shall be preserved in the long run.

However, the harmonic functioning of the mentioned teaching discourse cycle requires specific values so that research does not degenerate into narcissistic self-realization of individuals and so that teaching is not exhausted in the Nuremberg funnel. In order to make this discourse possible, learners need a context that allows them to engage with their entire personality in the debate, the evaluation and their own orientation and to be able to apply new insights for their future.

1.3 From academic education to future employability

Universities of applied sciences combine practice-focused research and occupational-orientated education in a unique manner. In this context, employability is interpreted as the skills and competencies that are required to meet upcoming and even unknown challenges of tomorrow's occupations.

As academic education is embedded in the current reality of societies and economies, the challenges of future requirements remain uncertain in a large part. Many of tomorrow's jobs are unknown yet, and certainly some of well-established jobs will disappear due to consequences of industry 4.0. People will meet fundamental and enduring change in their future and academic institutions have to deal with it. Therefore, preparing students for tomorrow's challenges and occupations without knowing them accordingly, requires new approaches of teaching and education. The knowledge-based view of academic education is not seen anymore as appropriate, as knowledge is context-related and exactly this context is going to change. In this respect,

acquiring competencies to meet a constantly arising ambiguity have become the most crucial part of students' education.

By integrating a value-based approach into their teaching, reflecting various perspectives and meanings, and enabling students to develop an own set of values and beliefs they deliver a significant contribution to their further self-development. In this respect, academic education determines the base for decades. Higher education must not be limited to professional skills and competencies, but has to take into account the entire personality of their students. Especially during time at university, students have the opportunity to gain new competencies and knowledge and to reconnect it in their own mind – even in the event of failures there are no more serious consequences than making individual experience and growing personally.

Assuming that skills and competencies are always context-related, academic teaching enables students to construct, describe, and reflect this context. Without being reconnected to values, each context fears the danger of exploitation or degeneration. Lectures and academic staff are responsible to prepare students for tomorrow's challenges and their ambiguity; they accompany the students on their individual path as coaches and act – to a certain extent – as role models themselves. To assist their students in this process of self-development, academic teaching needs a crystal-clear positioning in own values and beliefs.

2. A harmonic value set for high quality higher education

If you see higher education as a truth-seeking and truth-producing organization on behalf of society, some values are indispensable. These include human centering, networking, freedom, diversity, intercultural openness and future orientation. These six organizational core values require a foundation of supporting values on an individual level in everyday education in order to function optimally as a harmonic system: a love of truth, modesty, humility, reflectiveness and transparency. If the sincere search for truth drives personal research and the design of teaching content, power politics or a changing political agenda of sustainability-oriented education can hardly become dangerous any more. Understanding for the sake of understanding and not only for the purpose of achieving political goals is a prerequisite for the high quality of research and teaching that society demands from universities. Findings ever closer to the truth in a networked community is the perfect drive for research that is largely free of political interest. This is directly related to intellectual modesty in the discussion of research results and scientific opinions in the world of science and teaching. Appropriate humility and the awareness that the presented truth can only reflect the current state of affairs promotes willingness to discuss and freedom of thought among researchers, teachers and learners. The ability to reflect also supports

the indispensable willingness to discourse and requires the ability to respectfully criticize oneself and others, e.g. in the form of evaluations in research and teaching. Lucency in the research and teaching context requires the identification of competitive positions for learners. Only in this way can they be led into the freedom to choose and individually justify their own position. This also includes the self-revelation of the teacher's own worldview, so that the specialist position can be classified accordingly and in an enriching visibility of the existing diversity.

2.1 Human centering

Responsible education happens when people interact with people in a didactically meaningful and goal-oriented way. It's a people's business! The anthropocentric orientation in all areas is an absolute must if the development of the individual person with the development of his competencies is to be in focus. People are not automatic learning machines whose brains can be operated in a standardized way with digitization. Pedagogy and didactics only gain meaning through their human core. The values of the teachers have a great influence on the learners. Therefore, it is not the technological infrastructure or even the resources, but the people, which are crucial for good higher education. The selection and filling of academic chairs, the scientific and non-scientific staff and the fitting of learners and teachers are crucial to the success of sustainability-oriented higher education. This aspect can easily fall behind in all the self-governing tasks and efforts for technical expertise. Even if the focus is on people, it is clear that they live in community and permanent networking.

2.2 Interconnectedness

One of the most important findings of our time is the insight into the global nexus of all social, economic, digital, technological, ecological and spiritual sub-areas in which man is placed. This is because education for sustainable development is proclaimed and massively promoted as a normative crosscutting issue at many political levels. Networked thinking and the awareness of all systemic impacts and interactions of specialist content, which has so far been viewed almost in isolation, has become state-of-the-art in sustainable education. Everything is connected - via one or many nodes. The world is therefore understood and analyzed as an interactive network of networks. Part of these networks is the creative person who recognizes himself in this integration in order to find orientation. At present, people who vehemently deny integration and insist on a small, isolated and blind individual freedom only occasionally reject this.

Against this background, responsibility has become complex. Freedom is no longer conceivable without responsibility, and responsibility requires a normative definition that is as comprehensive and political as the networked world around us. The UN Sustainable Development Goals

currently offer an option here. Freedom today means understanding the interrelationships and acting responsibly in voluntary insight as a fellow human being and as part of the network, which is awe-inspiring due to its complexity. Insight, caution and consideration go hand in hand with networked freedom in responsibility. Nowadays, this requires much more than the presentation of one-sided scientific specialist content at a high level. Networking must become tangible - through interaction with the other: the other person, the other culture, the other worldview, the other discipline, the other technology, the other political thinking. It is characterized by the affirmative enabling of this interaction in an international context, with other students, with academic and practical partners and much more. Here new forms of digitized interaction can be helpful - but never for their own sake.

2.3 Freedom

The freedom of the individual, as well as that of the university organization, guarantees a genuine discourse on content, directions and an ongoing adaptation of educational content and forms to social reality, the state of scientific research and the definition of political responsibility. To be educated at a high level requires a free decision, one's own yes to personal development in a self-chosen professional context. The freedom of science and teaching ensures the constant updating of teaching content and educational concepts. Coupled with the freedom of self-determination independent of influence through financially strong particular interests and power politics, universities can thus live up to their educational mission towards society. This also includes the freedom NOT to do something, NOT to follow the mainstream or to set individual priorities in the content and conceptual orientation of the universities and their faculties.

This freedom automatically gives rise to a duty of accountability: What do we do as researchers and teachers in academia? Why do we do it? How do we do it? What goals do we pursue as an individual Professor, as a department, as a faculty, as a university or as a network of universities? Freedom of action must become visible in open accountability for the origin and use of funds as well as in explaining why what content in research and teaching is moved - or not moved - in which way and with which partners. Freedom in answers is necessary for a real discourse. This is done through a willingness to provide answers and explanations on the chosen form of education and research.

2.4 Diversity

A freedom indicator with intrinsic value is diversity. It shows whether freedom unfolds. Freedom leads to a variety of opinions, specialist content and forms of teaching and learning. If these diverse opinions, specialist contents and forms of teaching and learning are not available,

either no real freedom determines the system or the education system under consideration is too small to be able to implement this important value. In teaching, a sufficient number of different subject areas is necessary, which can rub against each other in their diversity in order to keep the indispensable discourse alive. Dwarf institutions that offer only one subject and that are not integrated in any larger context cannot live this indispensable value or even understand it. They naturally tend to stew in their own juice and to construct their perception of reality themselves. They cannot reflect on sustainability in its required breadth or even teach it in a high-quality way. Teaching content requires the presentation of different perspectives on a subject. Contradictory approaches, opinions and theories are necessary in all their diversity, even against political correctness, in order to transform monologues into dialogues and discourses. Universities are THE places where even minority opinions have to find a public place in conflict. This includes allowing, welcoming and enduring tensions, even in a teaching staff college that may be divided, which must be trained to separate constructive conflicts from the relationship level. The acceptance and affirmation of diversity is the value that must be accepted by all in order to make scientific quality possible. It is also a connector to all other values.

2.5 Intercultural openness

Intercultural openness is the result of globalized people-centered networking in true diversity. Universities without international connections - without people of foreign cultural imprint on their campuses and in their courses and research efforts - find it difficult to counter ideological monotony. The learner's integration into the global community of responsibility requires direct and influential experiences with teachers and co-learners from other cultures. An understanding of global responsibility and holistic sustainability grows through personal involvement among friends and acquaintances. Intercultural openness is a prerequisite for understanding different ideological imprints and finding commonalities that are helpful in the sustainable shaping of our globe.

2.6 Future orientation

Sustainable higher education is always future-oriented. It carries a clearly communicable vision: On the one hand, for the individual who enjoys this education and on the other hand, for the environment, which actively or passively shapes the individual. It is clear that this vision function cannot be based on normative neutrality. Future orientation is not only descriptive, but also demands and promotes the individual normativity that emerges from the discourse. The orientation as a sustainability-oriented university in administration, research and teaching is a

clear commitment to a comprehensive ideal of the future for learners and the entire global society. How should the world be and how can we behave according to the vision of the future? The type of education and its normative content ultimately determine the shape of society with a time lag of about 15 years. The awareness of learners' own values and the competence to teach them to defend their own convictions intellectually ambitiously become part of the future orientation of responsible education. Thus, the university becomes a truth-seeking and truth-producing organization that discovers together with its learners how to master the challenges of the future – independently from political power conditions.

3. Preparing for the challenges of tomorrow: new work

As colleges and universities create an inimitable area in that lectures and students can generate, share, and develop new knowledge, this discourse is also competence-related to serve occupational purposes. Teaching and educating are both sides of the same coin in preparing students for their personal and professional future. In terms of employability, higher education has to ensure that students are well prepared when they leave their academic school and enter an unknown, challenging, and ambiguous future.

So, what are the required skills and competencies that are crucial in a world, which we cannot forecast in a perfect way? It could not be worse to predict this. Instead of only insisting on WHAT the suitable skills and competencies should be, it seems to be more appropriate to discuss HOW these skills and competencies might be acquired and further developed within the cycle of life-long learning. This refers to the higher-level key competencies that enable human beings to organize themselves responsibly in a free self-determined manner. The capabilities in collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, confidence, and communication are the “Five C” that seem to turn out to be some of the most important future’s key competencies. In most professions and occupations, through digitization, global mobility, and social networks, human labour has faced a dramatic shift. The traditional model of departmentalization, fixed work places, and hierarchical reporting lines gets more and more detached by alternative ways of doing work. Virtual teams, globally dispersed work places, and flexitime change the established manner of collaboration and participation. Known as new work, the entire relationship between all participants is affected.

In opening and increasing the level of self-determination for each employee, this requires new styles of leadership and commitment that are built on mutual trust and reliability – also named as integrity. As modern leaders demonstrate a collaborative and servant style of leadership, they need to be confident in their workers’ commitment not to abuse the freedom provided. Where

formal outer restraints are not given anymore, a well-based self-restraint must guide every individual like an inner framework. As the higher-level core, competencies are just the base, to complete this required framework it takes a clear dedication to remain stable and to enable the individuals in finding their ways in a changing and unknown world. A safe and sound set of values can provide this re-assurance.

Exactly here, values like human centering, interconnectedness, freedom, diversity, inter-cultural openness and future orientation are anchoring the key competencies mentioned above. Those key competencies may guide individuals to meet upcoming challenges within an unpredictable future, but to avoid becoming arbitrary or irresponsible they need to get re-connected and infilled. Key competencies remain uncompleted and detached without underlying values. In insisting this inevitable correlation, higher education prepares young people to find their role in the work place and enables them to develop themselves furthermore. This is the modern interpretation of employability.

4. Upshot

The holistic view of human beings and their ethics in their integration into the global social context, nature and the economic and technological spheres with all their interactions characterize a contemporary sustainability-oriented higher education. Normally charged and embedded in an organizational value set of human centeredness, networking, diversity, intercultural openness, freedom and future orientation, supported by individual love of truth, modesty, the ability to reflect and transparency, higher education becomes the driver for the positive shaping of a sustainable humane future. Responsibility and sustainability are automatically and permanently transported by such a harmonic set of values and do not need to be grafted or flanged on as separate values.



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