World Dignity University: Strategic Plan

Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, 2010

Developed for the University in Oslo (UiO)

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Introduction

This strategy paper has been written in the spirit of dignity. Its aim is to make sure to be globally inclusive in our efforts and not duplicate the achievements of others who have already worked with the issues discussed here for much longer than we have. It is at the core of dignity to join hands in mutual respect and equality in dignity.

On behalf of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS), its Founding President, Evelin Lindner, has started talks with Vice-Rectors Inga Bostad and Doris Jorde of the University in Oslo (UiO) in January 2010. Evelin Lindner proposed that she be invited to develop the World Dignity University vision from Oslo. Lindner considers herself as one of the first, or the first, professor of a World Dignity University. She is experimenting with living as a global scholar since several decades (Lindner, 2006; see also www.humiliationstudies.org/intervention/university.php).

The Director of HumanDHS, Linda Hartling, has secured the domain name for this initiative: worlddignityuniversity.org and worlddignityuniversity.com. This URL will soon be activated.

Norway is the ideal starting place for such an initiative. Norway is highly respected and credible as a peace-maker around the world. It has a long-standing cultural tradition of equality in dignity (*likeverd*). In most world regions the emergence of human rights ideals of equality in dignity is a rather recent phenomenon, while these ideals are a cultural treasure of Norwegian culture with long-standing historical roots and wide embeddedness into Norwegian culture (Lindner, 2008).

As reported by Doris Jorde, the University in Oslo has recently developed new strategies witch entail two aims:

1. *Increase in the integration* of the various peace and conflict resolution initiatives based in Oslo (such as PRIO, Human Rights Institute, Nobel Institute, Department of Psychology).

2. *Increase in internationalization*. In May 2007, an Education Commission was created (*Dannelsesutvalg*) to examine international cutting edge thinking with respect to higher education, and to develop recommendations for Norway. The report was published in 2009 (Dannelsesutvalget, 2009¹). The commission argues that liberal arts education is of utmost significance for the creation of responsible citizenship. It explains why liberal arts education is not simply "a luxury for elites." The commission therefore calls for liberal arts education to be strengthened in all relevant curricula.

The World Dignity University initiative is deeply compatible with both aims listed above. As to the first aim, the World Dignity University initiative will depend profoundly on the synergetic support and accumulated knowledge of all peace and conflict resolution organizations in Oslo and in Norway. The work of these institutions merits to be projected into the world more than it already is so far, and a World Dignity University is one path to more global impact.

As to the second aim, the idea of a World Dignity University resonates thoroughly with the recommendations of the Education Commission, namely that liberal arts education must be strengthened to foster responsible citizenship. And we come to the same conclusion as the University of Oslo, namely that responsible citizenship must include all levels, from the local to the global level, with internationalization being a crucial element.

The strategic plan presented here suggests to start with three interventions:

1. Dialogue is sought with organizations such as the Association of Universities (www.iau-aiu.net, see a list of more institutions further down) and with individual scholars such as Lalita Rajasingham, who is advocating a Global Virtual University, or Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, who works for transforming knowledge, to name but two of many.

¹ Several authors contributed to the report of Dannelsesutvalget, 2009. Inga Bostad was the head of the commission. Other contributors were, among others, Bernt Hagtvet, Gunnar Skirbekk, Berit Rokne, Anders Lindseth, Lars Løvlie, and Roger Strand.

Bernt Hagtvet's reflections open the report. He refers to classics such as the overview over American, English, and German university traditions by Flexner, 1930. He then reports on the presently growing unease, in the United States, with the current trend toward commercialization in the educational sector.

Gunnar Skirbekk's article emphasizes the significance of the Examen philosophicum (ex. phil.), which is an introductory course at Norwegian universities into philosophy and scientific method, and must be passed to receive a Bachelor's degree, thus supporting liberal arts education.

Berit Rokne and Inga Bostad and suggest a number of key issues to guide science and society (see further down in this paper).

Lars Løvlie discusses the paradox that pedagogy faces, namely that students must be nurtured in a context that offers sufficient freedom but also sufficient firmness for them to develop the maturity of responsible citizens.

Anders Lindseth emphasized that liberal arts are not an elite project. He calls for a new and deeper listening to students and faculty. He argues that the personal experience of scholars is of profound importance not only for their personal maturation, but also for their contribution to society at large.

Roger Strand highlights the last three points of the Dublin Descriptors of the Bologna Process . See more further down in this paper.

- 2. An experienced negotiator is recruited, who has the necessary know-how with respect to creating global alliances (such as, for example, The Convention on Biological Diversity, or similar initiatives). Since funding is crucial, it would be appropriate to begin by bringing together, into an Expert Meeting under Chatham House Rules (which means that nobody can be quoted outside), representatives from ministries of education and universities from all around the world, with the aim to develop the Global Education Fund that is needed to fund a World Dignity University (see also www.humiliationstudies.org/education/educationfund.php; a related idea is the Global Education Fund that Barack Obama announced in a 2007 speech, or Desmond Tutu's Educational Trust that was seeking to redress the educational imbalance experienced by Black, Coloured and Indian students in the Western Cape during the regime of apartheid).
- 3. Linda Hartling is currently making preparations for a global e-learning platform for Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies. The aim is to offer courses and seminars to a wide range of audiences, from life-long learning for a wider public to a Master's degree and Ph.D. in Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (online teaching combined with local face-to-face gatherings). All universities from around the world will be invited to subscribe so as to give their students access. This aim dovetails with the strategic plan of UiO, insofar as this global e-platform can be part of a larger platform that includes all peace and conflict initiatives in Oslo. UiO is the ideal host for such an "Oslo Peace and Conflict Resolution" e-platform, with Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies as part.

Brief Analysis

Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS) is primarily grounded in academic work. We are independent of any religious or political agenda. However, we wish to bring academic work into "real life." Our research focuses on topics such as dignity (with humiliation as its violation), or, more precisely, on respect for equal dignity for all human beings in the world. This is not only our research topic, but also our core value, in line with Article 1 of the Human Rights Declaration that states that every human being is born with equal dignity (that ought not be humiliated). We agree with Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, who advocates the building of bridges from academia as follows, "I have always believed that good scholarship can be relevant and consequential for public policy. It is possible to affect public policy without being an advocate; to be passionate about peace without losing analytical rigor; to be moved by what is just while conceding that no one has a monopoly on justice." We would like to add that we believe that good scholarship can be relevant and consequential not only for public policy, but for raising awareness in general.

We resonate with John Dewey's call for *critical thinking* to make democracy viable. Immanuel Kant made maturity (*Mündigkeit*) a *conditio sine qua non* of the Enlightenment, which he defined as the emergence from self-imposed immaturity and dependence. Kant summed up this idea in the Enlightenment slogan: *Sapere aude*! "Dare to know! Dare to think independently!"

Inga Bostad was the head of the Norwegian Education Commission (*Dannelsesutvalg*)

mentioned above. In the report of this commission in 2009, together with Berit Rokne, Vice-Rector for Education of the University of Bergen, she suggests a number of key issues to guide science and society:

- What is democracy?
- How to defend the differences in global health?
- Why is education important?
- How to practice justice?
- What is the role of religion in the multicultural Norway?
- What characterizes Norwegian identity?
- What is consciousness?
- Are men and women thinking differently?
- What characterizes sustainable development in 2020?
- How will climate change affect the relationship between rich and poor? (Dannelsesutvalget, 2009, p. 29, translated from the Norwegian original by the author)

Roger Strand, another contributor to the report of the Norwegian Education Commission, emphasizes the three last of the Dublin Descriptors of the Bologna Process, namely, that a Ph.D. is awarded to scholars who:

- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas:
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society. (Dannelsesutvalget, 2009, p. 62²)

In sum, we deeply admire the aims for scholarship as they are defined in Norway, namely, that scholars should exercise their research with academic integrity and **identify** new relevant ethical issues.

We see the following ethical issues both within academia and with respect to academia's role in the world: The ideal of academia is to be free, free of national and corporate interest. Many academics suffer from the lack of the true realization of this ideal. Clearly, this ideal is only truly attainable in a situation where the institutional frames for academic work mirror it.

Global interdependence forces humankind to face global challenges, both ecological and social, and this is a shared responsibility that has to be shouldered jointly. The consequences of global interdependence punish all players who try to preserve a conceptualization of the world as being made up of independent entities that can survive as isolated "islands."

In other words, ideally, all universities of this world that wish to realize their own core ideal of academic freedom, will at some point have to be part of a free World University

² The Bologna Process aims to make academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe (www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf)

that is that is organized according to the *unity in diversity* principle. Only then can "faulty generalizations, circular reasoning, mystified concepts, and partial knowledge" be truly unmasked (in *Transforming Knowledge* by Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, 2005).

Our aim, as HumanDHS, is therefore to invite academics around the world into the joint responsibility of leading the world away from divides that might cost humankind its survival in times when only global cooperation can address global challenges.

We ask: Why is there not a World University dedicated to the human rights ideal that all humans deserve to live dignified lives? Academia should be free, free from national or corporate interest. Academic freedom ought to be exercised globally and not harnessed into national or corporate interests. "With science and business merged into a new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 'science could be lost in a black hole," is the verdict of British scientists in the face of attempts in the United Kingdom to merge science and business even more than before.

Would not a truly independent World University be a more suitable way to realize the ideal of academic freedom? Such a World Dignity University should exist, and, ideally, connect all national universities. Currently, there is one United Nations University, it is based in Tokyo, Japan, and one UN-mandated University for Peace, based in San José, Costa Rica, both are not truly independent.

We have developed this Strategic Plan that starts with building an alliance with one university (or a core group of universities) that would seed the development of a step-by-step strategy to build a truly global institutional foundation for a World Dignity University (at www.worlddignityuniversity.org).

The vision is that every national university should contribute to creating a true World University, which would not have a local physical base, but will exist as part of local universities, funded by a Global Education Fund.

We wish to contribute through our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Global Education Fund (www.humiliatoinstudies.org/education/educationfund.php). (As noted earlier, the Global Education Fund that Barack Obama announced in a 2007 speech is a related idea—he said: "I will support a \$2 billion Global Education Fund"⁴).

The World Dignity University will not have to have a local physical base, but will exist as part of local universities that are globally connected. This serves the motto of *unity in diversity*. Currently global uniformity crowds out true unity, and diversity is being sacrificed for this uniformity. Only true unity can create the space for diversity to flourish. Research on cultural diversity and biodiversity, for example, requires a strong global consensus built on human rights rather than on the presently dominant nexus of corporate and national interests that, by engaging in a global race to the bottom, endangers also the core ideal of academic freedom.

Several metaphors can be used to describe the conceptual foundation of unity in diversity that guides the World Dignity University initiative. In the Human Dignity and

³ See news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/science/nature/8097306.stm; see also Robert M. L. Winston's BBC World News HARDtalk interview with Stephen Sackur on February 24, 2010, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/hardtalk/8534891.stm. Even the peer review system may have to be recalibrated. A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision suggested that far from filtering out junk science, peer review may be blocking the flow of innovation and corrupting public support of science (Horrobin, 2001).

⁴ See www.barackobama.com/2007/08/01/the_war_we_need_to_win.php.

Humiliation Studies network (HumanDHS), we use the metaphor of a forest, or a raft, but most often we use the metaphor of a tree. The roots and the trunk of the tree represent unity, while the branches represent diversity. Human rights ideals of equality in dignity unite us and open space to unfold diversity.

The tree metaphor is suitable not only for the work of the HumanDHS network and for the World Dignity University initiative, but also for world society at large.

HumanDHS Newsletter 12 elucidate this model in more detail in the context of the HumanDHS network (www.humiliationstudies.org/publications/newsletter12.php):

- 1. Our global fellowship represents the "roots" and "trunk" of the "tree" (this reflects the unity part in the unity in diversity motto). For this part of our work, for the development of our global network in its entirety, the template of "fertilization" and "nurturing" is suitable. What we wish to nurture is the growth and the unfolding of *I-Thou* relationships of mutuality (see Martin Buber's philosophy), embedded into equality in dignity. What is important to note is the inherent limitation in "nurturing," namely the lack of control and predictability: One cannot FORCE the growth of I-Thou relationships. One can only inspire. One can only inspire people to invest their soul, time, and resources in creating a decent global home for our human family. What is needed for this inspiration to grow and have impact, is a nurturing context. The "fertilizer" is the atmosphere of respect for equality in dignity that we try to create in our HumanDHS network, an atmosphere of mutuality, an atmosphere that opens up space for people to unfold their creativity and find meaning and fulfillment in creating a decent local and global ecological and social environment (see also Martin Seligman's work on happiness and meaning—it does not only help the world, but also each individual, to seek meaning in life).
- 2. In the HumanDHS network, research, education, and intervention initiatives represent the main three "branches" of our "tree." Also here, the template of growth applies (the diversity part in the unity in diversity motto, however, is reflected more).
- 3. Our "achievements" represent the "fruits" that grow on the tree (here, the diversity part in the unity in diversity motto is reflected strongly). For making "fruits" the template of stringent management applies, if necessary with a business plan and deadlines. Here, control and predictability play an important role. When members of our network feel sufficiently inspired, we encourage them to brainstorm and identify those ideas they wish to implement, and from that point onwards, systematic planning and implementing is needed.

As noted earlier, Norway is the ideal starting place for the idea of a World Dignity University and its aim to take responsible citizenship to the global level. The Norwegian Education Commission's report referred to earlier (Dannelsesutvalget, 2009), recommends the strengthening of liberal arts education. This is indeed crucial, if students are to be enabled to build strong "branches" on the "tree of unity in diversity," and avoid becoming servants of initiatives that draw short-term profit at the price of long-term destruction of the very tree.

The report of the Norwegian Education Commission illustrates most poignantly the

contest that currently rages world-wide between two contradictory applications of the buzzwords *freedom* and *flexibility*, and how this contest affects all segments of society, including the educational system. Liberal arts education can be spoken for, but also spoken against, by using the argument of freedom and flexibility. Liberal arts education can be spoken against by saying: "In a free market economy, citizens must learn to adapt flexibly to changing workplace requirements. This necessitates less emphasis on liberal arts education at universities, since liberal arts are not part of most workplace requirements but represent a 'luxury' for elites."

Liberal arts education can be spoken for, and this is the Norwegian argument with which we deeply resonate, as follows: "More emphasis on liberal arts is needed to enable citizens to be flexible enough to exercise their freedom and ask deep questions about how human life on planet Earth ought to be organized to be socially and ecologically sustainable, including questions as to how national and economic interests can serve this aim."

Potential Global Allies

As noted at the beginning of this paper, our aim is to make sure to be globally inclusive in our efforts and not duplicate the achievements of others who have already worked with these issues for much longer than we have. It is at the core of dignity to join hands in mutual respect and equality in dignity. Team work in the spirit of solidarity is our motto, guided by the principle of unity in diversity, which helps avoiding humiliating ranking orders that create uniformity or division.

In this spirit, we have embarked on finding similar ideas and movements world-wide (some of whom we are in touch with, others we will still have to contact). Let us present here a small selection of a growing group of scholars, globally, that share related ideas:

The International Association of Universities (IAU), for example, was founded in 1950, as the UNESCO-based worldwide association of higher education institutions. It brings together institutions and organizations from some 150 countries for reflection and action on common concerns and collaborates with various international, regional, and national bodies active in higher education.

Pledge of IAU Commitment (2006):

Within this renewed strategic direction and priority actions, the IAU further pledges to continue to work in collaboration and partnership with others in order to:

- Contribute to the development and protection of knowledge, higher education and research in the public interest;
- Strengthen and encourage academic solidarity which aims to reduce inequalities among higher education institutions and promote cooperation rather than undue competition;
- Promote equitable access and equal opportunities for student, researchers and faculty members in higher education;
- Seek to understand and harness the opportunities being brought to the sector by the market, for example through public-private partnerships, while limiting the negative impact of increasing commodification and commercialisation of

education with its too narrow a vision of higher education as a service to be bought and sold on the open and competitive market...(www.iau-aiu.net/association/rtf/assoc_mission.rtf)

Examples of virtual universities (many traditional brick-and-mortar universities have established virtual branches or are at least providing virtual courses): The Open University

- the Open University (www.open.ac.uk)
- the Canadian Virtual University (www.cvu-uvc.ca)
- the Intercultural Open University (www.ioufoundation.org)
- the Rasmussen College (www.rasmussen.edu)
- the Syrian Virtual University (www.svuonline.org)
- the Virtual University of Pakistan (www.vu.edu.pk)
- the Virtual Global University (VGU, www.vg-u.de)
- the American International University-Bangladesh (www.aiub.edu)
- the IMA Virtual University-IMA Indian Management Academy India (www.ima.edu.in)
- the World Federation of Scientists (www.federationofscientists.org)
- Study @ Virtual University (www.apnimarzi.com/study-at-virtual-university)
- Hong Kong Virtual University (hkvu.ust.hk/hkvu)
- One Laptop Per Child (laptop.org/en)
- "European Resource Center on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Intercultural Education" at the "European Wergeland Center" (www.theewc.org)
- Networks of Excellence (www.ipr-helpdesk.org/documents/Network-Excellence_0000000188_00.xml.html)
- World Wisdom Council (www.clubofbudapest.org/wwc.php)
- Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning (PGL, www.asiasociety.org/education-learning/partnership-global-learning)
- Scholars at Risk (www.scholarsatrisk.org)
- The Network for Education and Academic Rights (NEAR, www.nearinternational.org)
- The Open University of Catalonia, UOC, Spain (www.uoc.edu)
- Academic Impact (academicimpact.org)
- Netherlands organization for international cooperation in higher educationo (Nuffic, www.nuffic.nl)

See, furthermore, *The Global Virtual University* (Tiffin & Rajasingham, 2003) by John Tiffin and Lalita Rajasingham (www.sim.vuw.ac.nz/staff/lalita-rajasingham.aspx). Lalita Rajasingham's area of research and teaching has been in the application of information technology such as the Internet, virtual reality and HyperReality and artificial intelligence to human communication, particularly to education in multicultural settings. She is widely published internationally and has presented several keynote addresses and plenary papers at national and international conferences. Lalita Rajasingham's co-

authored book titled *In Search of the Virtual Class: Education in an Information Society* (Tiffin & Rajasingham, 1995) has helped to pioneer future directions in education for the next decade in many parts of the world, and introduced the concepts of virtual classes, HyperClasses, virtual universities, and virtual learning on the Internet. Her co-authored book *The Global Virtual University* similarly breaks new ground, and sketches a philosophical foundation for the future of the university in an era of rapid technological change and globalization. Based on material gathered from research in the USA, Japan, UK, Taiwan, Brazil, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand, this book is about the shift from the modern university of the nation state to the global university of the future, and presents a paradigm from which it might be constructed.

See also the contribution by Bernt Hagtvet to the 2009 report of the Norwegian Education Commission (Dannelsesutvalget, 2009), where he documents the presently growing unease, in the United States, with the current trend toward commercialization in the educational sector. See, for example, the views expressed by Harvard's former president Derek C. Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*. (Bok, 2003).

The Education Commission report draws on a wide range of literature (among others, Adorno, 1959; Bloom, 1987; Bok, 2003; Bok, 2006; Dewey, 1902; Dewey, 1916; Donoghue, 2008; Etzioni, 1995; Gadamer & Smith, 1986; Heidegger, 2006; Hersh & Merrow (Eds.) 2005; Humboldt, 1993; Humboldt, 2002; Kant, 1790, Kant & Rink, 1803; Koblik & Graubard (Eds.) 2000; Kronman, 2007; Lewis 2006; Mill, 1873; Mill, 1859; Nussbaum, 1997; Pascarella et al., 2005; Putnam, 1995; Readings, 1996; Rorty, 1979; Shapiro, 2005; Skjervheim, 2002; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Walzer, 1992; Wilshire, 1990; Yudkin (Ed.) 1969).

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