

Strategies for the Humanities

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Abstract: This article comments on the discussion on the humanities, mainly by looking at the strategies of Arizona State University in the US, Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, in Norway. The three strategies are reviewed on the background of important trends in university education: competition for staff and students, a call for relevance from society, but also from the students, and the strengthened position of science and technology. Aims and ambitions for education and research at the three universities have much in common. All of them focus on interdisciplinary work, both in education and research. But there are also important differences. ASU has a strongpoint in collaborations with their surrounding community, UU most consequently seek excellence, and NTNU is meeting the call for relevance. The article gives some concrete examples on how the humanities actually are performed at state universities of today. No crisis is spotted, but a need for changes or adjustments is argued.

Key words: university governance, humanities, university policies, the value of humanities, liberal arts, education, university strategies

1. Introduction

The crisis of the humanities has been widely debated for the last years. Such an eventual crisis is, however, experienced and described differently. Which are the problems? Declining student numbers? Letting down a proud tradition of free critical scholarship? A growing mentality of instrumentality, that demands of studies to make students employable, and research to be useful in a concrete manner? Scholars of humanities resisting change? This paper follows up on the debates of the humanities by looking at strategies for the humanities at three different universities. Before we look more directly at the strategies, we will, however, take a look at some central trends that currently influence the universities and, consequently, their faculties and schools within the humanities.

1.1 Global Competition

Since the later parts of the last millennium, it has been customary to point at how globalization has moved universities into a situation of increased competition. This competition includes both students and academic staff. Many students have the opportunity to choose globally where they want to study, as well as top faculty are sought for in every corner of the world. This increased competition leads universities to actively marketing their qualities, and strive towards high quality in research as well as in study programs, qualities that must be accounted for.

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Academic quality in studies and research is expressed in the leading worldwide rankings, like the British “Times Higher Education world University Ranking” and the Chinese Shanghai based “The Academic Ranking of World Universities”. Arizona State University, for instance, was listed as number 79 in the Shanghai ranking in August 2013. The university immediately published this news on their web site. ASU was particularly happy with the ranking’s evaluation that “... ASU is perhaps the most advanced globally in terms of merging the boundaries between academic disciplines”.

The same year, Utrecht University (UU) was ranked as the 53rd best university in the world. My home university, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) was placed in the 201–300 group. A look at Utrecht Universities’ web (www.uu.nl) shows that UU present itself as a “globally leading university”, and refers to several rankings. The UU website tells that UU is the highest ranked university in the Netherlands, according to the Shanghai ranking, and number 13 in Europe. NTNU does not present ranking information on its English web site, but gives glimpses of the activities within studies and research, and present Trondheim as an attractive place to live and study, northern and a bit exotic.

The top universities use rankings in their marketing efforts. Those lower ranked look for other rankings that fit their strong points. My own generally low ranked university, for instance, have done significantly better in rankings on collaborations with industry, as well as on rankings for the best university web presentations. Another strategy when not doing splendidly on the leading quality rankings, is to define some special fields of research or some particular study programs that are successful, and point to these in marketing efforts.

Academic competition between universities most eagerly takes place within science and technology, where results are easier to measure. Study programs and research activity within the humanities often deal with national language and culture, and international comparison and competition become more difficult. A report by Adrejs Rauhvargers at the European University Association discussing the global rankings, finds that one of the main difficulties has to do with the “...relative neglect of the arts, humanities and the social sciences” (2013, p. 18). Never the less, the humanities, too, exist within the competitive paradigm and have adjusted to a more global way of working.

1.2 Relevance

Another worldwide trend has to do with *relevance*. Governments, corporations and over-national bodies like NGOs want universities to connect more strongly to society, on the national and/or regional level, as well as globally. Universities should contribute concretely and positively to societal development. Studies and research should address the world’s grand challenges like food, health, energy, climate and sustainability. Universities should also support the economy, for instance by working actively with innovation. The students, too, seem to embrace the relevance trend, but from a somewhat different angle.

The relevance trend has challenged the US liberal arts colleges, as described by Victor Ferrall jr. (2011). The main reason why the liberal arts colleges do not attract students in the numbers they used to, is that young students in dialogue with their families seek vocational education to a larger extent than before. Studies must be relevant with respect to the labor market. Liberal arts colleges have always been dedicated to educating the whole person, and aim at turning young students into learned citizens with ethical consciousness and a democratic mind. How to earn an outcome, what occupation to choose, should follow after this platform of general education has been built. If a young person succeed in this first step of achieving an integrated personality, he or she has learned how to think and how to learn, and can easily acquire necessary skills for a variety of jobs later on.

However, though good arguments are delivered for the value of liberal arts education, figures document that students are hit by the relevance trend and seek vocational education. Some of the liberal arts colleges were established as early as in the 19th century. There are many different types of them, but they are experiencing an overall and clear decline. Ferrall notes that “...between 1986–1987 and 2007–2008, the number of colleges graduating at least 90 percent liberal arts majors fell by more than half, and the number graduating 30 percent or more vocational majors nearly quadrupled” (78). The relevance trend hit studies within the humanities, too. The humanities, like the liberal art colleges, consist of academic disciplines that for the most do not qualify for a particular line of work.

2. Science and Technology

The last turn of the century brought with it renewed interest in science and technology. These fields of study have been experiencing growth for the last, say, 15–20 years. In the universities, more students choose to study science and technology, and these disciplines meet renewed interest in the media and public opinion. Harvard university documents this turn to hard sciences statistically in their report *Mapping the Future* (Simpson James & Shawn Kelly, 2013). In USA, the number of bachelor degrees in the sciences grew considerable between 1987 and 2010, while a small decline took place with respect to the humanities in the period 1993–2010. Both measured as shares of all BA degrees.

The growth in student attraction to the hard sciences may have to do with the fact that in the late 20th/early 21st century people vigorously debate the grand challenges. The UN Panel on climate change with its international experts has made several reports that points at how the increased level of CO₂ in the atmosphere changes weather globally. The earth needs clean, sustainable energy. Such challenges inspire young students to work within some field of science. In addition, information and communication technology has continuously been making progress, and in fact changed the daily lives of ordinary people around the world. Scientists and engineers meet expectations of solving problems connected to the grand challenges. Official documents, governmental whitepapers and research strategies contain bold plans for the sciences, and budgets for these research areas are increasing. Budgets for humanities have not seen growth in the last decades in Scandinavia, as documented in a report by Sverker Sörlin and Anders Ekström (see also: Jordheim, Helge and Tore Rem).

In *Mapping the Future* Simpson and Kelly also point to the fact that young people of today are active users of information and communication technology. They live their lives by iPads and smart phones and PCs, and use electronic devices to get the answers to their questions, quickly and effectively. Youngsters nowadays hardly read books. This recent unfamiliarity with books may estrange young students from the humanities. *Mapping the Future*, however, encourages humanities’ scholars to consider this as a challenge, and start to use modern communication technology more actively in humanities’ study programs. Victor Ferrall, on the other side, underlines the values of books in education. He answers a young high school student who was negative towards books, because “they go through a lot of details that aren’t really needed. Online just gives you what you need, nothing more or less”. Ferrall understands learning in a wider perspective, and tells the student: “Books answer questions that have not yet been asked.”

3. How Do the Trends Influence the Humanities?

As already touched upon, worldwide humanities departments have experienced decline in student attendance, and, consequently, financial cuts. US statistics shows that the percentage of completed bachelor degrees in the humanities in 2010 was only half of what it was in 1968.

The humanities have also been discussed intensively in the New York Times. Several authors have pointed to the shrinking numbers of master's degrees in English within US. In 2013, Stanford had 45% of the faculty members in its main undergraduate division in the humanities, but only 15% of the students. Also in Norway, student numbers within the humanities have declined. As in many places around the world, Norwegian humanities consists of many different fields of studies. Norwegian official statistics show that particularly at masters' level many classes only have 5–10 students registered).

A paper by Gali Halevi, Elsevier and Judit Bar-Ilan on the global trends of funding arts and humanities 2004–2012 documents a worldwide decline. Worldwide means the English speaking world, including the English speaking part of EU, that reports funding to the SciVal funding database. The authors conclude: "...The funds allocated for A&H activities are declining, showing sharp decreases from 2009 to 2012. The global economic crisis, that culminated in 2009, may be a major contributor to this decline. State and federal bodies are still the major funding bodies of A&H."

When student numbers are shrinking, so are budgets. Many universities have trouble sustaining their existing program portfolio within the humanities. On March 16 2014 *The Pitts News* informed that Pittsburgh University planned cuts in Religious Studies as well as graduate studies in Italian and classics. The news channel npr reported that New York State University at Albany needed to take a budget cut of 640 million dollars, and proposed to cut French, Italian, Russian, Classics and Theater (www.npr.org). At Utrecht University, both the BA and the MA program in Portuguese language and literature were laid off in 2011, as well as the BA and MA program in Theology, according to their website. The Norwegian University of Science and Technology laid off its program of general linguistics, as well as its program in applied linguistics. Other Norwegian universities, for instance Bergen University, have managed to sustain their portfolio of study programs within the humanities, but have reduced number of staff to an absolute minimum, and expect students to read a large part of the curricula on their own.

Cutting programs and disciplines depresses scholars who works in these fields of studies, as well as their students, both of whom having a burning passion for their work. Feelings of despair arise. Negative feelings may influence the whole environment of humanities, as other scholars fear they may be next in line. When speaking about the humanities' crises, scholars and students working with the programs under threat of cuts, are those experiencing the crisis most deeply.

4. What is Wrong with The Humanities?

Many humanities' scholars will just answer this provocative question with "Nothing". Among them we find Toril Moi, professor of literary studies at Duke University, who encourages her colleagues to stand firmly on the traditional ways of doing humanities, and neglect all calls for useful contributions to society (2011). Her view equals that of Stanley Fish, who in an Opinion contribution in New York Times agrees that "The subject of these studies are not to be used as tools to achieve something else . . . they are the achievement" (2010). However, there

are scholars of humanities or adjacent fields who think that scholars of humanities themselves have some responsibility for the challenges their fields of studies are facing.

In his book *Blow Up the Humanities* Toby Miller distinguishes between a “Humanities 1” which is performed at the top, elite, private universities, and a “Humanities 2” which take place at the large state universities. His critique has to do with humanities as an elite activity. Miller is not questioning the value of having a limited number of students study for instance canon literature or classic philosophy. He has nothing against such texts being discussed in classes and explained in essays, but he points to the fact that the larger number of students will need jobs, and they must be prepared for society and the labor market. Most students need other skills and knowledge than humanities 1 will give them. Humanities 2 make the mistake of just copying humanities 1. Miller finds that study programs for students masses must be socially and politically relevant, and the humanities must connect more obviously to the society. Yet, he makes a strong case that critical activity should be maintained within the humanities. Students need to learn to think — independently, critically and well informed.

Like Miller, Lawrence Grossberg is a cultural studies’ scholar. In his book *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* he sums up how this field of study has developed. He himself has played an active part in this development, from the late 60s until the present. Grossberg points out where Cultural Studies need to go in the future. He understands this field of study partly in opposition to the humanities’ disciplines. According to Grossberg, the latter had become too introvert. The humanities showed little interest in interdisciplinary work, as well as in contemporary society. Contrary to cultural studies, the humanities did not see political injustice as their task. Grossberg regrets not seeing traditional scholars of humanities’ fight for a better world. Nor do they actively address matters that are political in character. Humanities’ scholars should stop hiding within their disciplines, according to Grossberg. Yet, even cultural studies need to renew and strengthen their mandate, and Grossberg recommends fellow scholars never to give up on interdisciplinary work, even though he recognizes how hard it is to deliver really good, interdisciplinary research. Also, researchers and scholars should feel obliged to fight for a better world and a just society. As an example of a field of study that could gain from more clearly profiled interdisciplinary studies, as well as push cultural studies forward, Grossberg mentions *economy*.

Steven Pinker, a Canadian experimental psychologist at Harvard University, discussed the humanities in the *New Republic*, Aug. 6 2013, in an essay entitled “Science Is Not Your Enemy. An impassioned plea to neglected novelists, embattled professors, and tenure-less historians”. Pinker is a researcher within cognitive science, and also a linguist. His essay provoked many scholars within the humanities, and their general impulse has been to strike back. It is true that there are passages in the essay, that shows that Pinker is not quite updated on what actually goes on within the humanities. But that aside: on what grounds is Pinker placing his critique? He supports humanities: “No thinking person should be indifferent to our society’s disinvestment from the humanities, which are indispensable to a civilized democracy.” But he laments that scholars of humanities are unwilling to learn from results within science.

Diagnoses of the malaise of the humanities rightly point to anti-intellectual trends in our culture and to the commercialization of our universities. But an honest appraisal would have to acknowledge that some of the damage is self-inflicted. The humanities have yet to recover from the disaster of postmodernism, with its defiant obscurantism, dogmatic relativism, and suffocating political correctness. And they have failed to define a progressive agenda.

This connects with some points made by Grossberg and Miller, on the need for good, interdisciplinary work,

in which the humanities should fully contribute. Pinker, too, encourages the humanities to connect more obviously with society and politics. Pinker knows that some collaboration between science and humanities is already taking place, for instance in archeology and linguistics. He argues that new results within neuroscience, having to do with perception and emotion, and thus with disciplines like literature, film, art history, should more explicitly be discussed and taken advantage of within the humanities.

Pinker's essay witnesses his empiricist attitude towards research. Concerning methods, he works differently from many researchers within the humanities, for instance within the discipline of philosophy. Some of the most outspoken critics of his essay have been scholars of philosophy, for instance Simon Wieseltier, who is also literary editor of *The New Republic*. As Wieseltier sees it, Pinker advocates humanities to submit to science, and he seeks to (2). Wieseltier also accuses Pinker for reductionism, for thinking that all kinds of scholarly knowledge are basically the same, and for not understanding the specific knowledge that humanities provide. Wieseltier is against humanities infusing new ideas from science, which is what Pinker recommends, but demands "respect for the way things have always been done", thus defending humanities' traditions and historically developed methods.

The Pinker–Wieseltier discussion points indirectly to a core point in discussions between humanities scholars on strategies for the humanities. Should we change or defend our traditions? Should the changes moves us in the directions of societal needs and collaborations with other disciplines, or should eventual changes cultivate humanities' own traditions and methods?

5. Crisis?

The concept of crisis no doubt covers the feelings of university scholars in fear of having their programs shut down, and the falling student numbers pose serious challenges to the humanities. There are evidence that many students of today seek education that qualify for specific occupations. Even though crisis may be a too strong word, several reports call for changes to be made within the humanities. In addition to the already mentioned report from Harvard, *Mapping the Future*, there is *The Heart of the Matter* from American Academy of Arts and Sciences, that shows how and why humanities and social sciences are crucial for taking the US safely into the future. This report encourages the humanities to address the needs of society in their scholarly work. And there is the Swedish report *Humanisterna och framtidssamhället (Humanities and future society)* by Sverker Sörlin and Anders Ekström, as well as the Norwegian *Hva skal vi med humaniora? (Why do we need the humanities?)*, by Helge Jordheim and Tore Rem. The Swedish report compares the contemporary situation for the humanities with earlier times. Even though the humanities have experienced decline since around 1990, when compared with the fifties and even the seventies, there has been a huge growth, measured by numbers of students and faculty. The Swedish report sees no crisis for the humanities, but discusses if the depressed state of mind among scholars of humanities has to do with losing hegemony to the sciences. The report finds that scholars of humanities have not been able to describe the societal role that they want their fields of study to fill. The Norwegian report argues that core aspects of the liberal arts tradition need to be sustained, and even strengthened. It also encourages modernizing the humanities tradition concerning building national identity. International and global cultural impulses should be more convincingly taken into account, and scholars of humanities should analyze the interplay between the national and the global dimensions in contemporary culture and identity.

No crisis, then, but the reports advocate some changes. This article will turn to the humanities' strategies at three different universities, to examine how they relate to the challenges. We will see if, and how, they plan for the

humanities to change in the future. To what degree do the strategies of Arizona State University, Utrecht University and Norwegian University of Science and Technology speak differently about ambitions and goal for the humanities? Which similarities do we find? Structurally, there are some differences. ASU has elaborate strategy documents on the top level, less is put down in print on the levels of schools and departments. UU and NTNU have a common system: an overall strategy at the top level, under which the faculties and departments place their own strategies. There is, however, a difference in the fact that UU's central strategy has more detailed goals and indicators, while the faculty strategy is quite general. At NTNU, both the university level and the faculty level have strategies that are general and focused on goals.

6. Strategies at Arizona State Universities

ASU describes itself as a new American university. It seeks to stand forth as different from the Ivy League universities, by giving access to many students, and being open and available for young persons seeking education, as well as to the surrounding community and the state of Arizona. ASU vision runs like this:

To establish ASU as the model for a New American University, measured not by who we exclude, but rather by who we include and how they succeed; pursuing research and discovery that benefits the public good; assuming major responsibility for the economic, social, and cultural vitality and health and well-being of the community.

In the fall of 2013, ASU web site informs that the university had a total of 76.000 students on four different campus in The Valley of the Sun — the Phoenix area. 60.000, including a large portion of students in the humanities, study at the Tempe campus. At the College of Liberal arts and Sciences, Humanities form the smallest unit compared to Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, granting respectively half and 1/3 of the number of degrees granted by the two other parties.

7. Project Humanities at ASU

ASU, too, experienced a drop in student numbers and degrees produced within the humanities around 2010. *Project Humanities* was set up, chaired by dr. Neal Lester, Dean of Humanities at that time. A central project strategy was to demystify humanities, the concept itself as well as humanities' fields of study. This should make people, including young seekers of education, more familiar with the humanities. The project also aims at demonstrating the usefulness of humanities' knowledge and competences in setting up many sub projects in collaboration with organizations and institutions in the surrounding community. Project Humanities is mainly financed by ASU itself, as a strategic initiative from the president's office. However, many subprojects are externally cofinanced, and donations are coming in as well.

Project Humanities partners consist of a wide range of NGO's, community organizations and businesses in the Valley. Almost every Project Humanities initiative connects with parties outside of the university. Among them we find a number of organizations of people who experience themselves as different from mainstream society, for instance by ethnic background or sexual orientation. The collaborations include several open meetings, film screenings and discussions on sexual identity. Ethical consciousness is of great importance in the project work, and a campaign entitled Humanities 101 has also been launched, to focus on the core human values of forgiveness, integrity, compassion, kindness, respect, empathy and self reflection, on what these mean today, on different social arenas. This campaign, too, aims at placing humanities in close connection with people's everyday lives,

demystify these studies, and show humanities' relevance for people's lives.

Another example of Project Humanities' collaborations with community is the Phonetic Spit project, directed towards high school students. They are invited to workshops to learn to perform new forms of poetry, like rap. The Phonetic Spit mission goes like this:

Phonetic spit creates a safe place to empower young people to establish their voice and use it to become driven and contributing citizens of the world, using the art of the spoken word poetry in an effort to combat illiteracy and silence.

About 30 high schools and several youth clubs in the Phoenix area arrange workshops in new, young genres of poetry like rap and poetry slam. Project Humanities participate in this through Myrlin Hepworth, himself a rap artist and former ASU student, and Thomas Stanton, a student of poetry. The workshops are connected with a national US network for rap and oral poetry, which gives the best performers the chance of participating in the US competition *Brave New Voices*, or maybe even in the international Youth Poetry Festival.

Project Humanities' sub project with Phonetic Spit is not a research project in a traditional meaning of the word. Yet, it does address societal issues, but in a different way. The project contributes in educating young people, and in widening the concept of poetry, and it could possibly lead to new poetry sub genres. New didactic knowledge may be gained through the project, and new art may be produced. In many countries the rate of high school drop outs is too high. Helping young people to find their voice and themselves by means of new forms of poetry may help. If humanities at our time need to demonstrate social relevance, this is one way of doing it: by widening the concept of research and work with a wider range of different methods, in collaboration with the community.

Project Humanities has met positive interests at several US universities, and it also has international contacts. Others want to learn not only from the project's active community collaborations, but also from how the students are integrated in the project work. Project Humanities have interns, and most of these belong to ASUPHSI, the ASU Project Humanities Group for Student Initiatives. This is an open group, that gathers students from all over the university. In the spring term of 2014, ASUPHSI worked under the motto of *building bridges*. Their Login2Life initiative is directed at teen gamers and retirees, aiming at bridging the generation gap, while Louder than a Bomb addresses high school poets and performance artists. Another student initiative examined bridges between religions, and consisted of inter religious dialogues on ASU campus. The activities themselves have been rewarding for the participants, but Project Humanities' students also acquire skills in practical project work, valuable for them to prepare for life after studies.

8. Other ASU Humanities Strategies

ASU's vision of becoming a "model for a New American University" also includes an emphasis on interdisciplinary activity, and the goal is to "establish ASU as a global center for interdisciplinary research, discovery and development". ASU has established Institute Humanities Research (IHR), headed by Professor Sally Kitch, a researcher of women and gender studies, and in this capacity familiar with interdisciplinary research. IHR seeks to be an arena where researchers from different fields can meet and develop new research projects. Research on sustainability is a major field within the institute, but digital humanities, and medicine and humanities are also important.

The research on sustainability has been successful. IHR got a grant from the Mellon Foundation last year:

Humanities for environment. To the donor, it was important that this was a global project, under the international CHCI (Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes) network. Professor Kitch heads the North American branch of this project, and tells that deciding on themes and research questions was challenging, both within the different sub groups, and between them. Not only did the grant require new projects on sustainability to be developed by international academic collaboration, but communities should also been engaged, and projects should lead to, or contain, action. North America has decided to concentrate their activity in three different fields, loosely described below, as this is work in progress:

(1) Archives of hope.

Transnational, transhistorical cautionary tales about man and nature.

(2) Species overlooked: working with multi species relationships.

(3) Transdisciplinary dialogue: Dinner 2040.

What will we eat in 2040? A project on more sustainable food.

These preliminary titles seem to be good examples of interdisciplinary research, where the contributions from the humanities are rooted in humanities' own traditions and methods.

Concerning education, a central point in ASU's strategy is about giving a large number of students access to higher education. The strategy also commits ASU on helping the students to succeed. Around 2010, only 50% of the students finished their degrees, in 2013, this figure comes close to 70%. An expanded system of supervising and help for the individual student has been successfully developed. The ordinary four years BA degree at ASU requires every student to follow a course on composition, to learn academic writing. Also, there are for instance group work and more writing classes to support students' learning process.

ASU has sustained the ideals of liberal arts education. It still takes four years to accomplish a BA degree. Students meet different types of knowledge and learn to be aware of different methods for gathering knowledge. A BA degree at ASU requires one course in the arts, two in the social sciences, the natural sciences and the humanities respectively, no matter which programs the students are registered in.

ASU has succeeded well with new interdisciplinary study programs. Of these, the sustainability program has been of great importance. ASU established School of Sustainability in 2006.

The ASU strategy for the years 2013 and beyond continues along the same lines that have been developed since Michael Crow became president in 2002. Freshmen persistence should be of 90%, graduation rate between 75 and 80%. Compared with Norway, these goals are ambitious. Focus on service to society and collaboration with community shall continue with increased strength, with particular emphasis on entrepreneurship. Concerning the humanities, the dean wants more new initiatives that present humanities' knowledge for students of today in new ways, for instance by use of electronic media. "In the end we can't lose. We have William Shakespeare" Teddy Wayne wrote in an article in The New York Times. To ASU dean George Justice, even Shakespeare could gain from being presented in ways that are familiar to new, young generations of students.

9. Strategies at Utrecht University

Utrecht University in the Netherlands had a total of more than 30.000 students in 2012, according to their web site. As already mentioned, UU performs very well on the most prestigious international rankings, and it presents itself as the leading Dutch university. UU revised its strategy in 2012. Overall, elite ambitions are more obvious here than at ASU. The 2012–2016 UU strategy is entitled "Curiosity Driven — Relevant to Society", a

title indicating that both researcher initiated research, out of a pure scholarly interest, and research initiatives from external parties, applied research, and probably everything in between, are welcomed at UU. The same goes for students. Both those driven by a passionate interest in a subject, and those who primarily want to qualify for the labor market, should study in Utrecht, according to the web site. However, UU particularly invites students with high ambitions for their academic careers, and the strategy addresses students who are prepared to work hard and ready to participate actively in the academic society that UU constitutes, where students, according to the strategy, work side by side with their professors. Of the three universities looked at in this article, UU is special in the fact that its strategy declares what the university expects from their students. The two others have focus on presenting what they have to offer.

Like ASU, Utrecht University's strategy also have concrete goals on how UU wants to perform on important indicators. Concerning education, UU has a dropout rate below average compared to other Dutch universities. However, UU wants to perform even better, and get its dropout rate down to 15% in 2016, measured by students who quit within their first year. The rate was 20% in 2006 and 18% in 2010. There is also a goal for graduating in the strategy. UU aims at having 77% of the students achieving their BA degree four years after starting on it, roughly the same as ASU's goal. NTNU does not present such concrete goals in its strategy, but the figures are considerable lower. At UU, the graduation rate was 74% in 2010, and 77% should be within reach, as the UU's strategy also have set a goal for BA students' teacher led education: "By 2016, the average number of scheduled contact hours and other structural education-related hours in...all of Utrecht University Bachelor's programs will total 12–18 hours per week."

UU shows its elite ambitions also by aiming at having a larger share of its students in honors' programs. In 2006, this share was 5%, 9% in 2012, and the goal for 2016 is 12%.

The humanities at UU follow up on the general strategy. The faculty present itself as "Comprehensive, yet specialized", and continues:

The Faculty of Humanities is home to the disciplines of history, art, philosophy, music, literature, language, religious studies, and media. Our education and research in these fields are centered around Western culture, from classical antiquity to the present day, examined from a global perspective. Within this broad context, the faculty has earned a special reputation in certain fields, such as linguistics, economic and social history, philosophy and gender studies. It is also the only university in the Netherlands offering a study programme in Celtic studies (in Dutch).

Also in line with the general strategy, the humanities at UU welcome excellent students, and promise that students will meet academics who are considered to be leaders in their fields of study. "The faculty offers excellent students and researchers the freedom and supervision necessary to develop their talents even further." UU humanities' leading scholars, price winning researchers and honorary fellows, are presented at the web site.

Utrecht University has a strategy for interdisciplinary activity, and the Faculty of Humanities follows up: "Characteristics of humanities in Utrecht are its intensive cooperative efforts across geographical and disciplinary borders".

In 2005 UU subsumed its top research activity into 16 focus areas, all of them consisting of researchers from different departments and faculties. Researchers of humanities participated in five of these, **Culture and Identity**, with emphasis on the research question *What tells us who we are?* **Origins and Impacts of Institutions**, where the question *Why are some societies more affluent than others?* sum up the activity on the humanities' side. Researchers from the humanities in the focus area **History and Philosophy of the Sciences and Humanities** seek

answers to the question *Is one type of science more important than the others?*, while humanists in **Neuroscience and Cognition** ask about the *main difference between humans and apes*, and perform research into the cognitive processes that underlie the structure and application of human language. Finally, the focus area **Conflicts and Human Rights** work under the headline of *Climate change, globalization and the crisis of democracy: new challenges for human rights*.

UU's strategy for the years 2012–2016 has turned its 16 research focus areas into four strategic themes: **Life science, Institutions, Sustainability, Youth and Identity**. This has to do with the Dutch state in a direct manner requires its universities to be of use to society, but UU's strategy underline that this is in line with their own preferences: "Since 1990, Utrecht University has consistently pursued a policy aimed at ensuring that all key research decisions were based on scientific innovations and societal needs" (University of Utrecht Strategy 2012–2016 Curiosity and Social Relevance). With the four strategic themes, the strategy states, UU "will help address social issues in the area of the environment/climate, health, education and government". The Faculty of Humanities takes part in two of these for areas. They are the leading faculty of **Institutions**, which has been renamed **Institutions of the Open Society**, performed together with Law and Management, Social Sciences, and Geography. Scholars of the humanities are also represented in **Youth and Identity**, and work together with Social Sciences and Medicine and Life Sciences. The vice dean of research at UU's Faculty of Humanities, Josine Blok, says that "...the effect of the four strategic themes for the humanities is considerable, and is a positive sense".

10. Strategies at Norwegian University of Science and Technology

NTNU's overall strategy witness ambitions of achieving excellence. NTNU is a young university, the result of a merger in 1995 of formerly separate institutions. NTNU has 20.000 students, and, as stated in its name: science and technology form NTNU's main profile. When this university was established, it was encouraged by its owner, the Norwegian state, to focus on interdisciplinary activity, in research as well as in study programs. This focus is still there, but seem to be somewhat toned down in 2011–2020 strategy. Under the paragraph Overarching Goals we read that:

Our academic environments must concentrate their activities in order to create robust groups with quality at an international level. They must create adequate scope for the long-term basic research and take advantage of the opportunities that interdisciplinary collaboration provides to create unique results within their own subject.

Even though interdisciplinary activity seems to be conceived of as a tool to reach other goals, NTNU did establish four new interdisciplinary strategic research areas in 2014, entitled **Energy, Science and Technology of the Ocean, Health, Welfare and Technology**, and **Sustainable Societies**. The first two are adjustments of former strategic areas, two last two are brand new ones. Researchers from the humanities take part in all of them.

An important goal for NTNU is to be recognized as a research university of high quality, and the strategy gives directions on how this can be achieved. Internationalization is seen as a prerequisite for development of high quality: "Visibility at the national and international level makes us attractive for collaboration with the best players. This requires robust academic environments with a distinct profile, clear priorities, and disciplinary concentration".

Internationalization is focused, but the most important concept here is *concentration*. The strategy signals that there is no longer of great importance to the university to offer a wide range of different research activity going on. Fewer subjects are called for, but stronger and more robust ones, with ambitions of top quality.

Concentration, then, also addresses education. The strategy aims to “concentrate the portfolio”. NTNU should have fewer, but larger and more robust study programs. Studies at NTNU should also be relevant and “provide clear and documented qualifications for national and international working life”.

NTNU strategy differ from ASU’s and UU’s by not having goals that represent ambitions in the shape of numbers on key quality indicators. However, all the three strategies are alike in seeking excellence, wanting to be useful to society and work interdisciplinary with study programs and research.

11. Strategies for the Humanities at NTNU

The humanities’ strategy highlights three areas: academic excellence, relevance in a wide meaning of the word, and interdisciplinary collaborations in studies as well as in research. The faculty has sustained a focus on interdisciplinary activity, because the grand challenges will be better researched when contributions from the humanities are integrated. In addition, a small humanities’ faculty in a university with a main profile within science and technology, needs to stand forth as a bit different from other faculties in the humanities, at least in its home country. Humanities in a university with a main profile in science and technology will gain from strong bonds to the main profile units.

However, the strategy’s emphasis on excellence, underlines that high quality is a goal *per se*, and will be supported and nourished wherever it will manifest itself along the faculty’s departments and research groups.

The focus on relevance has to do with the need to increase contact with working life. This point is very important to the students, who want their education to qualify for work. The relevance point in the strategy also signals that the faculty will continue building up the teacher training program, which has been important in recruiting students, but the faculty will also seek to expand collaborations with other areas of working life.

In accordance with the overall NTNU strategy, the faculty strategy signals concentration. “The faculty will have a dynamic portfolio of studies, with the ability to both create and eliminate offerings”. The NTNU Faculty of humanities’ strategy also uphold traditional humanities’ ideals, and values critical dialogue, between the students and their professors. These ambitions go even further. Scholars of humanities will, according to their strategy, contribute to critique, dialogue and ethical consciousness also in the wider society.

12. Summing Up: Strategies for the Humanities

As we have seen, there is disagreements among scholars of the humanities on how to respond to the current situation. The call for relevance, for instance: some want to stick to the traditional ways of doing humanities. They advocate to neglect all demands on the humanities to be useful and demonstrate societal relevance. They do not want to work interdisciplinary, but stay firmly on the traditional ways of doing humanities.

Both ASU, UU and NTNU have set up interdisciplinary programs in research and in education. Scholars of humanities have followed up on these strategies. New research results have been gained, results that document the humanities’ relevance to society. It takes time to succeed with interdisciplinary projects. People of the Academia are socialized into a specific discipline, with key concepts, theories and methods. It is hard to understand a subject from another angle than your own. It is important to hold on and not give in. Both at UU, ASU and NTNU they are beginning to pick the fruits of interdisciplinary work.

Most humanities’ scholars see the relevance trend as an aspect of contemporary society, and accept that it has become necessary to communicate more explicitly in what ways the humanities contribute to society. Humanities’

scholars are people of language, working with meaning and interpretation, and should be able to explain their field of studies not only to themselves, but also to colleagues from other parts of the Academia, as well as the general public. Even students are quite active in this respect. On the web site stuhum, they post information on what they gain from studying the humanities. Most likely, these activities on communicating the humanities will make the humanities stronger. To communicate the value of the humanities does not represent a threatening change. Rather, it may be necessary to prevent further decline.

The strategies of ASU, NTNU and UU do have much in common. As we have seen, all of them have ambitions on delivering top class research. All of them highlight interdisciplinary activity in their strategies. All of them will collaborate with society and communities, and all of them address the grand challenges of today's world, and want to have an impact on society. The three faculties of humanities seem to be consolidated on these strategies. One may wonder why the humanities' strategies have so many important resemblances, as we often hear that increased competition will lead to differentiation. A closer look will reveal some differences: Humanities at ASU have a strongpoint in collaborations with the surrounding community, while at UU, they succeed as an elite institution. As for NTNU, the humanities have focused on relevance in study programs, prioritizing teacher education and other courses that connect students with working life.

13. Is Something Missing?

As we have seen, critique on the humanities' social role has been delivered. One of the important things universities deliver to society, is new, educated graduates and under-graduates from the humanities. The humanities have a history of educating students as whole persons, commonly known as the liberal arts tradition. In the future, whole persons must be global citizens, not only national ones, and they should have democratic minds and ethical consciousness. Students of today are citizens of a world where there are serious conflicts concerning religion and ethnicity, where democracy many places is quite weak, and human rights are violated. In addition, there are the other grand challenges: university graduates need more than updated knowledge in their field of study. Are we, scholars of the humanities, ambitious enough concerning our educational tasks? Ambitions for education in two of the three strategies reviewed in this article are formulated as numbers, percentages of intake numbers that get their degrees. None of the strategies of the three universities formulates ambitious goals for educations along the liberal arts tradition, aimed at the situation their students will work in tomorrow. Maybe ambitions for the students' education should be set higher.

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