

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

# UNIVERSITIES UNDER SIEGE?

4<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE  
19–20 OCTOBER, 2020, UPPSALA UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

“**THE CRISIS OF THE UNIVERSITY**” is a familiar topos in contemporary discussions about higher education. It is said that the University is facing untold threats from, inter alia, the anti-intellectualism of populist politicians and authoritarian regimes, the commodification of knowledge resulting from neo-liberal ideas about utility and international competition, the politicization of teaching and learning arising out of identity movements, the fragmenting of the university in response to stakeholder demands, and so forth.

This conference poses the question: Is this really the case? And, if so, what exactly is being threatened? The aim of the meeting is to take a serious look at what is ultimately at stake, among other things, by examining the roots of these developments in terms of our conceptions of what is useful knowledge, why it is desirable and what is required to establish, maintain and develop it through our institutions of higher education.

## KEYNOTES



**KERI FACER** Professor of Educational and Social Futures, University of Bristol; Zennström Chair in Climate Change Leadership, University of Uppsala



**STEVE FULLER** Auguste Comte Chair in Social Epistemology, The University of Warwick

The titles of their lectures will be announced shortly on the conference website: <https://www.uu.se/phec2020/>



## ■ CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

We invite abstracts outlining in brief analyses of the most pressing challenges confronting the university today. Examples of topics that may be relevant include the casualization of faculty, the rising costs of higher education, limitations on academic freedom, globalization, digitalization, politicization and polarization, and student preparedness. The scholarly approach to such questions can come from a variety of disciplines and perspectives: anthropological, economic, organizational, educational, philosophical, historical, sociological, psychological, and, of course political. We welcome contributions from all fields of study, and from scholars at all levels, from PhD students to experienced senior researchers, who want to contribute to the development of the theoretical and empirical study of higher education.

## ■ CONFERENCE THEMES

Against the backdrop of recent attacks on university autonomy in Hungary, Poland, and Turkey, as well as the ingrained dirigisme of China and Russia, the question of academic freedom, what it is and why it's needed, has returned to liberal democracies as well and with full force, after many years of negligible interest from the state and media. But many see other connections, such as the current wave of skepticism toward elites and what is perceived as the use of notions of meritocracy to veil how universities have functioned to ensure and enhance inherited social, cultural, professional and even financial capital. This issue has as much to do with the alleged domination of the global South by the academic global North as with the internal conflicts of liberal democracies themselves. Further, the global phenomenon of the commodification of research is thought to have created an unhealthy inclination among university management everywhere to accommodate the form and content of higher education and science to the demands of the marketplace, without any consideration of long-term effects on the university's core values and basic mission.

Others have pointed out that the faculty themselves have been complicit in undermining

the esteem in which universities were formerly held, to the extent that they gauge the value of their own work and that of their colleagues in terms of output, rankings, competition and impact, rather than in light of contributions to a common goal of improving our store of shared knowledge in the service of human interests. Finally, while universities today have greater autonomy with regard to how they realize the goals set for them in terms of productivity (degrees awarded, employability of graduates, patents and joint ventures with industry, for instance), there has also been a marked tendency

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to steer teaching and research toward the realization of present political goals and ambitions. In short, it is not clear that universities in liberal democracies are the bastions of the uninhibited pursuit of knowledge that they like to take themselves to be. Those with an historical bent might be inclined to add, "and they never were".

What are we to make then of the current "crisis" of the university? Is there a crisis at all? Or should we see current demands on and criticism of the academy as a sign that, at very least, industry, the political sphere and media deem what we do so important that they admit openly that they have a vested interest in it? What does it mean to be a university in the 21st century? Perhaps we need to re-think our notions of academic freedom, the relationship between the university and the State, the legitimate use and self-interested abuse of disciplinary boundaries, the organizational structure of our seats

of higher learning, the connection between the university and the school system, the role of credentialization in offering opportunity or supporting and maintaining privilege, and so forth. These issues, in turn, have direct consequences for how we understand the nature of knowledge and expertise, the role of education for active citizenship, and the connection between politics and science.

We invite proposals for working papers dealing with questions having to do with, for instance:

- The vulnerability of academic freedom for faculty and students in today's climate
- The promise and perils of commercialization and collaboration with industry
- The position of liberal arts education
- The position of curiosity-driven basic research
- State control, regulation, de-regulation and re-regulation of higher education
- The promise and perils of digitalization and internationalization
- The casualization of faculty
- The idea of a core curriculum, its form and content
- The role of the media and popularization in changing the face of the university
- The societal and cultural role of institutions of higher education
- Rankings and the emergence of a global higher education market

## ■ DATE AND VENUE

The conference will take place October 19-20, 2020 at Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden. Link to official website:

<https://www.uu.se/phec2020/>

## ■ DEADLINES AND REGISTRATION

To keep the discussion vibrant and to invite collaborative thinking and learning, we encourage participants to submit works in progress. We welcome abstracts for individual paper presentations as well as for thematic symposia. All abstracts must be submitted by February 28th, 2020. Submissions made after this date will not be considered. *Abstracts should be sent as*

*a word-document attached to an email to: [phec2020@humsam.uu.se](mailto:phec2020@humsam.uu.se)*

Abstracts for individual papers should not exceed 1000 words in length, including up to 5 indicative references. Presenters will have 20 minutes to present their work, followed by 10 minutes for questions, comments, and discussion in plenum. The thematic symposia should consist of 3-4 contributors, including the convener. The convener should write a general introduction to the proposed symposium of approximately 100 words, followed by a short outline, not exceeding 300 words and including 3-4 indicative references, from each contributor. The convener should submit the introduc-

### TIMELINE

- **1 November:** Call for abstracts
- **28 February:** Deadline for submission of abstracts
- **3 April:** Conference acceptance letters are sent out
- **7 September:** Conference program is published
- **19-20 October:** The PHEC conference 2020 takes place in Uppsala

tion together with the contributors' outlines. Separate submissions by symposium contributors will not be accepted.

After February 28th, the submission deadline, all abstracts and workshop proposals will be reviewed by the conference review panel. Notification of acceptance will be sent on April 3rd, 2020, so there will be ample time to make arrangements for travel and accommodations. Registration opens on April 3rd and closes on June 17th, 2020. Participants register on the conference website. *Registration is mandatory for everyone attending the conference.*

- Fee for PaTHES members: 175 Euros
- Fee for non-members: 200 Euros
- Fee for PhD-students: 125 Euros



The registration fee includes participation in the conference, lunch on Monday 19 October and Tuesday 20 October, as well as refreshments during the breaks.

Attendance at the conference dinner is optional. Registration and payment for the dinner are made on the conference website separately from registration and payment for the conference. More detailed information will be published there shortly.

## ■ ORGANISING COMMITTEE

The conference is a joint international project convened by The Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Society (PaTHES) and hosted by Higher Education as Research Object (HERO), a multidisciplinary research network, Uppsala University, and Centre for Integrated Research on Culture and Society, Uppsala University.

The conference organizing committee is: Professor Sharon Rider (Uppsala University, Sweden), Dr. Mats Hyvönen (Uppsala University, Sweden), Johan Boberg (Uppsala Uni-

versity, Sweden), Professor Thomas Karlsohn (Uppsala University)

PaTHES, the Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Society, is an international academic association whose aim is to establish and promote an effective worldwide community of scholars engaged in theoretical and philosophical research on higher education, the academic profession and the future of the University. The Society's affiliated journal is *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education* (published by Peter Lang), and the 'Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Conference' (PHEC) is the Society's annual conference. Link to the PaTHES website: <https://pathes.org>

## ■ CONTACT

For further information please see the conference website, which will be updated regularly.

If you have any questions or queries about the conference please do not hesitate to contact us at: [mats.hyvonen@antro.uu.se](mailto:mats.hyvonen@antro.uu.se) or [johan.boberg@filosofi.uu.se](mailto:johan.boberg@filosofi.uu.se)

