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**Diana zu Hohenlohe**

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Anmerkung zu ThürOVG, Beschluss vom 30.7.2021 - 2 EO 445/21

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Für den ersten Aufsatz der Zeitschrift für Hochschul-, Berufs- und Bildungsrecht konnte erfreulicherweise *Univ.-Prof. Dr. Richard Parncutt* gewonnen werden, der über eine langjährige praktische Erfahrung im Bereich der Hochschulstrategie verfügt und am Beispiel der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz aufzeigt, welche Strategien zu einer Verbesserung des Universitätsrangs in Hochschulrankings führen können. Diese Rankings mögen zwar allgemein kritisiert werden, unter anderem weil sie den Schwerpunkt lediglich auf Forschung legen und angloamerikanische Hochschulen bevorzugen. Gleichwohl lassen die Rankings Rückschlüsse auf die Forschungsqualität zu. Die umfangreichen und innovativen Vorschläge von *Parncutt* sind auch deswegen wertvoll, weil sie über eine Verbesserung von Rankingpositionen hinaus Reformimpulse beinhalten, durch welche die Forschungsqualität erhöht werden kann. Die Novellierungsanregungen beanspruchen weitestgehend Allgemeingültigkeit und finden über die Universität Graz hinaus Anwendung.

Ferner bespricht *Hon.-Prof. Dirk Naumann zu Grünberg* einen aktuellen Beschluss des OVG Nordrhein-Westfalen zu der Rechtmäßigkeit von Rückzahlungsforderungen der Bundeswehr gegenüber einem ehemaligen Sanitätsoffizier, der vorzeitig die Bundeswehr verlassen hat. Die Entscheidung hält *Naumann zu Grünberg* für zutreffend und verweist auf die parallele Problematik der sogenannten Landarzt-Quote, wodurch die Länder die Versorgung in den ländlichen Gebieten verbessern wollen, indem Medizin-Studienplätze für Studierende vorbehalten werden, die sich verpflichten, einen gewissen Zeitraum in medizinisch unterversorgten Regionen zu praktizieren. Schließlich werden Kriterien formuliert, die eine rechtskonforme Ausgestaltung derartiger Klauseln ermöglichen, die künftighin sicherlich vermehrt die Rechtspraxis beschäftigen werden.

Zuletzt rezensiert *Univ.-Prof. Dr. Diana zu Hohenlohe* unterschiedliche hochschulrechtliche Literatur. Dies schließt eine Lücke, da bislang die Rezension von juristischen und sozialwissenschaftlichen Büchern mit einem Fokus auf Hochschulen aufgrund der Spezialität des Gebietes nur in wenigen Zeitschriften stattfand.

## Hochschulrecht

## Uni Graz and the university rankings: Reform proposals and long-term strategies

Richard Parncutt\*

### Abstract

The University of Graz is performing poorly in international rankings, due in part to low citation rates for published research. Possible counterstrategies involve qualifications (reform the doctorate, provide better student funding, make the habilitation voluntary), professorships (empower external reviewers, use each discipline's international language, promote linguistic diversity, improve advertising, introduce head hunting, focus on international collaboration), teaching (improve the faculty-student ratio, attract international students, include research quality in teaching evaluations, teach critical thinking), language (encourage publication in each discipline's international language, promote German-English bilingualism, appoint an English translator, resist English-language cultural dominance, promote linguistic diversity), administration (reward high citation rates, train international visibility, optimize administrative procedures, promote flat hierarchies, penalize psychological violence, propose legal changes), and climate (create a professorship for future studies, promote multi-hub conferences, stop funding flying, prepare for possible global collapse).

### 1. Introduction

Austria's performance in international rankings is improving. In the Times Higher Education Ranking (September 2021), Uni Wien and Med Uni Graz were for the first time among the top 200 universities. The picture is less rosy at Uni Graz (Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz), whose ranking has steadily deteriorated in recent years and now lies in the

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range 600 to 800. That is surprising, given the impressively diverse expertise within the university and the constant stream of internationally visible research that is being published (see *Forschungsportal der Uni Graz*). As a Professor of Systematic Musicology since 1998, I have frequently experienced the high quality of research produced by internationally leading local colleagues.

Whereas the numbers may sometimes mislead, they don't lie. Clearly, other universities are doing some things better than Uni Graz. What are those things, and how can we better compete internationally?

Given that university reforms are notoriously difficult, the first step is to clarify what changes may be desirable, and for what reasons. The arguments for a given reform must be more convincing than the arguments against it. With that in mind, the aim of this document is to generate a list of proposals that could lead to future policy developments. Proposals have been chosen for inclusion in this paper if they seem promising from a theoretical or experiential viewpoint. The proposals are seldom original, and many are already being realized in some way at Uni Graz. Some ideas may be interesting for other universities.

### 1. Rankings

Whereas all university ranking algorithms are problematic, and the problems are well known, the sad truth is that Uni Graz is performing poorly across the board. Our QS ranking has fallen steadily in recent years (see Figure 1). The problem can hardly be solved by adjusting the calculation procedures, giving more weight to some aspects and less to others. We need to think carefully about the underlying reasons and address them systematically.

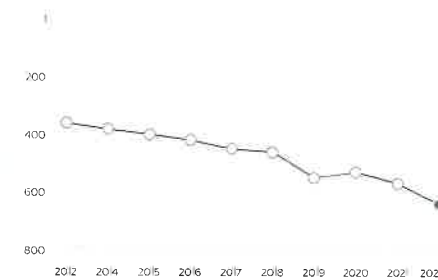


Figure 1: Yearly QS rankings of the University of Graz, 2012 - 2021 (from *topuniversities.com*, accessed 15 January 2022)

University rankings are publicly available and easily accessible. Presumably, they are regularly accessed by colleagues and students who are planning to come to Graz. Is the bad news about Graz causing promising colleagues to go elsewhere? Is that the reason for the falling line on the graph? Or is it because Asian universities are improving so there is more competition? According to *Baty*, “Asia has increased its representation in the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings from just over a quarter of all ranked universities in 2016 to almost a third today” and “in 2016, just two universities from mainland China made the world top 200. Today the number is seven”<sup>1</sup>. Can we learn from our Asian colleagues?

Uni Graz is not doing better in other rankings. Whereas QS (Quacquarelli Symonds Limited) is currently the most influential ranking, the CWTS (Centre for Science and Technology Studies) Leiden ranking better accounts for differences in language, discipline and institutional size. In 2021, Uni Graz was ranked 828th in the world by Leiden. Here again, things are going downhill (2016: 723; 2017: 741; 2018: 758; 2019: 770; 2020: 794).

Austrian rank	Institution	World rank
1	Uni Wien	151
2	TU Wien	180
3	TU Graz	277
4	Uni Innsbruck	281
5	Uni Linz	354
6	Uni Klagenfurt	501-510
7	Uni Graz	651-700
8	Uni Salzburg	801-1000

**Table 1:** QS rankings of Austrian universities in 2022 (from [topuniversities.com](https://topuniversities.com), accessed January 15, 2022)

According to QS, Uni Graz is also performing poorly within Austria, as shown in Table 1. Moreover, of the 40 most frequently cited researchers

<sup>1</sup> *Baty*, Asian universities are on the rise, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/07/asian-universities-on-the-rise-education-rankings-learning/> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

in Austria according to Clarivate Analytics, only one is at Uni Graz<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, research from our university is not being read and cited often enough internationally. If it is cited, it is seldom regarded as internationally leading or influential.

QS controversially assumes that the best measure of university research performance is the frequency with which international research-active academics regard a university as the top university in their specialist field (“Academic peer review”). If the informants are randomly selected, this indicator reflects how often and how effectively the university contributes to international specialist discussions. QS also considers citation rates (citation frequencies, citation counts, citation impact), which correlate strongly with reputation ratings and do not depend on the selection of informants. Instead, they depend on language and discipline. Since every measure has different problems, a combination of contrasting measures may be the most valid (unbiased) and reliable (reproducible) way to measure the academic output of a university.

To address the problem of falling rankings, we need long-term strategies. Here, I will consider only the *formulation* of strategies. I will not address *implementation* (the political aspect) except to stress that our universities are publicly funded, so the general public has a right to expect performance corresponding to investment. Given the financial cost of higher education to taxpayers, it is reasonable to expect Austrian universities to be internationally visible and influential.

My proposals are based on my international academic experience. Before coming to Graz, I studied or worked for more than one year each at the following universities: Melbourne (currently no. 37 in the world, according to QS), University of New England (currently in the range 801-1000), TU München (50), KTH Stockholm (89), TU Berlin (159), Dalhousie, Halifax, Canada (272), McGill, Montreal (27), Université de Montréal (111), and Keele, UK (751-800).

Looking at this list, one might guess that the best way to get a good rating is to be centrally located. But there is more to it than that. Like many other colleagues, I have often noticed apparently causal links between

<sup>2</sup> <https://science.orf.at/v2/stories/2949826/> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

behaviors, attitudes, and traditions within a university on the one hand and ranking results on the other. On that basis, I feel that I can confidently predict which reforms will significantly improve a university's ranking performance and which will not. From a scientific perspective, it is hardly possible to establish causal relationships of that kind. But given the complexity, subjective decisions based on personal experience may be an effective way forward.

### 2. *The role of Leistungs- und Qualitätsmanagement*

Every year, our LQM department quietly and efficiently publishes a thorough analysis of how the University of Graz is measuring up in the global university rankings in a report entitled *Hochschulrankings: Jahresbericht*. The latest edition explains:

“Die Gründe für das schlechtere Abschneiden der Universität Graz (beim Leiden-Indikator „Anteil der top 10 % Publikationen“) liegen [...] vor allem daran, dass andere Universitäten ihren Anteil an top 10 % Publikationen steigern oder sich auf gleichem Niveau halten konnten. Dass der Universität Graz dies nicht gelingt, liegt zum einen an der relativ hohen Abhängigkeit von wenigen publikationsstarken ForscherInnen.”

Who are those few “publikationsstarken ForscherInnen”, and what can we learn from them? To my knowledge, this question has never been systematically addressed, but it could be the key to a solution.

“[...] da nur sogenannte ‘Core Publications’ berücksichtigt werden. Dies bedeutet unter anderem, dass Publikationen, die nicht in englischer Sprache verfasst sind, aus der Wertung fallen, was sich vor allem nachteilig auf die Geisteswissenschaften auswirkt. Somit ergibt sich eine Tendenz zugunsten englischsprachiger Universitäten.”

The solution, evidently, is to publish more in English (with the aim of reaching a larger audience and taking advantage of good peer-review procedures) while maintaining linguistic diversity (which is one of our strengths, and should remain so).

“Die Gründe für ein schlechteres Abschneiden in den Rankings sind vielfältig und je nach verwendeter Rankingmethodik und aufgrund fehlender Transparenz der RankinganbieterInnen nicht immer nachvollziehbar. Einfluss auf die Positionierung zu nehmen, ist schwierig. Sich als Universität Graz die Ziele zu setzen, vermehrt in internationalen, englischsprachigen Zeitschriften (core journals gemäß Leiden Ranking) zu publizieren, hochrangige und international angesehene WissenschaftlerInnen an die Universität zu holen, internationale Kooperationen zu forcieren, auf die richtige Angabe der Affiliation zu achten und auch die Bereiche Lehre, Internationalisierung und Drittmitteleinwerbung voranzutreiben, sind mögliche Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der Rankingpositionierung. Die Auswirkungen der genannten Maßnahmen werden sich allerdings erst mit einiger Zeitverzögerung in den Platzierungen zeigen.”

Sadly, these important conclusions are hidden away in the last paragraph of a report that hardly anyone reads. Some recommendations are being implemented and others not.

### 3. *Legal foundation*

Part of the problem may be Austrian university law. The law traditionally focuses on local, regional, and national functions of universities – not their international functions. The principles according to which international university rankings are calculated are barely mentioned.

Consider this extract from Beamten-Dienstrechtsgesetz (BDG 1979):

Aufgaben der Universitätslehrer (Rechte und Pflichten)

§ 155. (1) Die Aufgaben der Universitätslehrer umfassen Forschung (Entwicklung und Erschließung der Künste), Lehre und Prüfungstätigkeit, Betreuung der Studierenden, Heranbildung des wissenschaftlichen (künstlerischen) Nachwuchses sowie zusätzlich Organisations- und Verwaltungstätigkeit, Management und Mitwirkung bei Evaluierungsmaßnahmen. Die Erfüllung der Aufgaben ist in

regelmäßigen Abständen, zumindest jedoch alle fünf Jahre, zu evaluieren.

(2) Die Universitätslehrer haben ihre Aufgaben in Forschung (Entwicklung und Erschließung der Künste) und Lehre in Verbindung mit den fachlich in Betracht kommenden Bereichen in und außerhalb der Universität zu erfüllen.

(3) Die Universitätslehrer sind zur fachlichen, pädagogischen und didaktischen Weiterbildung verpflichtet. Soweit sie Organisations- und Verwaltungstätigkeiten sowie Managementaufgaben ausüben und an Evaluierungsmaßnahmen mitzuwirken haben, sind sie auch zu einer entsprechenden und zeitgerechten Aus- und Weiterbildung verpflichtet.

Note the absence of the word “international”. When this word occurs elsewhere in BDG, then like this: “Einbindung in die internationale Forschung” or “Publikationen in national oder international anerkannten wissenschaftlichen Fachmedien”.

BDG is being phased out and replaced by *Kollektivvertrag für die ArbeitnehmerInnen der Universitäten* (2010, revised 2020). In that text, the word “international” does not appear at all. The first sentence of Universitätsgesetz 2002 is more promising, but similarly does not mention international collaboration or visibility:

Die Universitäten sind berufen, der wissenschaftlichen Forschung und Lehre, der Entwicklung und der Erschließung der Künste sowie der Lehre der Kunst zu dienen und hierdurch auch verantwortlich zur Lösung der Probleme des Menschen sowie zur gedeihlichen Entwicklung der Gesellschaft und der natürlichen Umwelt beizutragen.

The word “international” appears often in UG 2002, but not in connection with the visibility (Sichtbarkeit) or impact (Einfluss) of research. Instead, it appears in connection with Mobilität, Entwicklungen, Erfahrung, Zusammenarbeit, Kooperationen, Standards, Kriterien, Vergleichbarkeit. The string “zitier” (cite) occurs only once, in a paragraph on plagiarism. I could not find any reference to the goal of international leadership – perhaps because the idea is difficult to express in German (Führung,

Führerschaft). The string “führend” is also missing; the law does not mention the possibility of Austrian universities playing a “führende Rolle”.

#### 4. Disadvantages of citation rates

Before discussing how citation rates can be used to assess university performance, it is important to be aware of their well-known drawbacks.

- *Bias*

The number of times a given text is cited is typically biased:

- Texts (articles and books) in the sciences are cited more often than texts in the humanities. There are also differences within humanities or within sciences. For example, publications in biosciences are cited more often than in chemistry.
- Texts in English are cited more often than texts in other languages.
- Older texts are cited more often than newer texts.

Comparisons of citation rates across disciplines or languages, or between older and younger colleagues, can be misleading if these biases are not understood and somehow accounted or corrected for. For these and other reasons, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) of 2012, at a meeting of the American Society for Cell Biology, warned against placing too much emphasis on journal impact factors when judging an individual scientist's work. Journal impact factors should only be used to evaluate journals, not individual scholars. Even then they are problematic. DORA stressed “the need to assess research on its own merits rather than on the basis of the journal in which the research is published” (sfdora.org). When evaluating individuals (e.g., grant applications, job/tenure applications), a range of article metrics and indicators should be considered. That information should be subjectively evaluated by experts and combined with independent expert opinion.

A promising solution is to divide article citation rates by “an expected citation rate that is derived from performance of articles in the same field and benchmarked to a peer comparison group” to get a “Relative Citation



Ratio"<sup>3</sup>. In this approach, problems of locating fuzzy disciplinary boundaries are addressed by "co-citation networks".

Other problems with citation rates include the following:

- *Self-citation*

Some colleagues seem to cite themselves excessively. Google Scholar includes self-citations in its counts, although it could easily leave them out.

- *Secret agreements*

Apparently, individuals or departments sometimes agree to cite each other, although I have not seen concrete evidence.

- *Papers with multiple authors*

Papers in the sciences often have multiple authors – sometimes hundreds. The order of authors means different things in different scientific disciplines. Sometimes, the first author is most important and the last is the least important. Sometimes, the last is the unit leader and hence the second-most important. Sometimes, all authors are supposed to be equally important and are listed alphabetically. Databases like Google Scholar give every author a point as if she or he was first author. That creates an enormous bias in favor of co-authors of papers with many authors.

It follows from these various problems that *citation rates are indicators – not targets*. The goal is not citation itself, but academic leadership, as reflected by international visibility and influence. University members should play leading, constructive roles in international discussions within their disciplines on topics of current interest. Citation rates should always be evaluated in broader contexts by experts who understand their various biases. When applicants for a professorship are evaluated, for example, citation rates from various sources (Web of Science, Google Scholar and

<sup>3</sup> Hutchins/Yuan/Anderson/Santangelo, Relative Citation Ratio (RCR): A New Metric That Uses Citation Rates to Measure Influence at the Article Level, in PLOS Biology, published on September 6, 2016, <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.1002541> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

so on) should be part of the material being evaluated, along with the usual CVs, publication lists, and grant applications, as well as subjective expert evaluations of the significance, originality, and rigor of the published scholarship and research.

### 5. Advantages of citation rates

Despite these problems, citation rates provide important information that should not be ignored.

- *Concrete, objective, verifiable*

The colleagues who cite a given text actually exist and can be named. The reasons why they cite a given text can be traced. All of this information is publicly available (e.g. in Google Scholar).

- *Politically neutral*

Citation rates are not "neoliberal". With or without citation rates, some research gets financial support and some does not. Money for research is always limited, and someone has to decide what research to support. The question is, on what basis? Funding agencies usually send proposals out for peer review. It might help to include an additional, independent, contextualized, expert appraisal of citation rates. The combination of those two approaches would provide a more objective measure of research quality and/or a more reliable prediction of chance of success.

Politically, citation rates are neither left nor right. While some will perceive quasi-objective measures of academic performance as politically conservative, others will realize that, in the long term, improving the international status of a university helps both staff and students to succeed in whatever they are aspiring for. By creating a more level playing field, citation rates can be used indirectly to promote the academic careers of female students, minority groups, and members of families with low incomes or without academic qualifications. One way to promote women and minorities in academia is to make search and selection procedures for professorships fairer and more open. In that context, citation rates can play an important role.

- *Equally relevant for humanities and sciences*

Citation rates are often considered more important for sciences than humanities. But one can equally argue the opposite.

In the sciences, it is easier to evaluate research according to accepted methodological criteria. How well does the model account for the data? Did the experiment measure what it was supposed to measure? How big were the experimental confounds? Do the conclusions correspond to the results? In the humanities, it is not so easy to judge whether the content and structure of a contribution corresponds to accepted procedures, because procedures are less clearly defined. Things are inherently more complex and the criteria are inherently less clear.

Accordingly, expert opinion is more important in the humanities, which makes citation rates more appropriate. The most important ideas in the humanities are those that are being discussed globally, and citation rates are a measure of that. Not perfect, but certainly better than nothing. In fact, when considered only within disciplines and only within languages, citation rates could be the most reliable and valid measure that we have for evaluating research quality or impact in the humanities.

Citation rates are more appropriate for humanities than sciences in another way. Most humanities papers have one author – occasionally two or three. Humanities do not suffer from the problems of multi-authored papers.

#### 6. Citation denial

Denial is a dangerous trap, especially when a majority of people silently agree to avoid a given topic or to argue that the topic is unimportant. Whereas many academic colleagues may be reasonably disappointed about their citation rates by comparison to those of others, we should not politely avoid the topic or claim that it is irrelevant for that reason.

For another example of denial in a democratic context, consider the disconnect between private transport and climate action. Anthropogenic global warming is an existential crisis. One consequence is that the rate of car ownership and car use must urgently be reduced. But that can hardly be achieved democratically. Most people are not prepared to give up their car or even drive less. Nor can they imagine their life without their car –

even if they realize that we are destroying our children's futures with our cars. How can we break through that kind of climate denial?

Similarly: How might we break through citation denial to promote the global visibility of our research? If democratic processes within a university fail, we could instead approach the taxpayers. They would agree that universities should strive for international visibility and "excellence", especially given the financial cost. Given that research excellence, like the quality of a composer's music, cannot be reliably judged until long after the research has been published (sometimes generations later), the best we can do in the short term is to combine different measures that are known to predict long-term evaluations, at least to some extent. They include subjective expert appraisal of citation rates and subjective expert appraisal of specific research documents.

Given the impressive past successes of Uni Graz, it is reasonable to expect us now to compete with the world's best universities. The rector could use arguments of that kind to justify a relatively autocratic approach, in which colleagues with high citation rates relative to others in their discipline are explicitly promoted – an approach that is democratic from a national perspective but sometimes unpopular within the university.

#### 7. The importance of interdisciplinarity

Academics normally confine their research to their academic discipline – the area they know best. As a consequence, interdisciplinary areas tend to be under-researched. Such areas then become promising opportunities for research that will later become internationally visible and influential, leading to high citation rates.

Universities should therefore explicitly promote interdisciplinary research. At the very least, they should avoid administrative hindrances to interdisciplinarity. One of those hindrances is the habilitation, which *legally prevents* colleagues from teaching and supervising outside of their official area. A university cannot claim to promote interdisciplinarity while at the same time inhibiting it.

Related to that, doctorates should not be rigidly assigned to academic disciplines. A looser assignment can facilitate the incorporation of ideas and approaches from other relevant disciplines. Accordingly, a doctoral

certificate should not include the name of the discipline(s). My doctoral certificate from the University of New England, Australia, made no reference to academic disciplines. Although my supervisors and examiners had represented three disciplines (physics, psychology, and music), the certificate merely said that I was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

## II. Proposals

Global academic leadership and research visibility, as reflected by citation rates, can be promoted in many ways. The remainder of this article comprises specific proposals.

Experienced administrators may reasonably object that I am making too many proposals. Realistically, only a few could be realized. My response to this feedback has been to organize the proposals into clear categories (qualifications, professorships, teaching, language, administration, climate) and to emphasize the direct relevance of each point for long-term global research visibility, so that administrators can more easily evaluate each point. My intention is not to push through changes but rather to promote discussion that could, in the longer term, lead to promising new developments.

### I. Qualifications

#### a) Reform the doctorate, focusing on international recognition

The standard of the doctorate could be raised to approach that of the best international universities, as follows:

- Ensure that the dissertation is written in the international language of the discipline in question. Usually, that language is English, but there are important exceptions (e.g., Germanistik, Romanistik, Slawistik).
- Appoint three external examiners, so that any two of them can determine the outcome. If colleagues are unwilling to examine (or even if they are), offer a reasonable fee (this is currently normal practice in many countries, but not in Austria). Ensure that no examiner has a conflict of interest; for that reason, no supervisor may examine, or contribute in any way to the examination

procedure. Ensure that all examiners have frequently cited relevant publications in with leading journals or publishers. Ensure that the examiners are culturally diverse, working in different countries and speaking different first languages.

- Award the doctorate only if two of three examiners agree that the candidate has made a *significant contribution to knowledge on a global level*. That should be the *only criterion*, and it should be applied in the same way in every discipline.
- Give candidates and examiners the option of remaining anonymous, like the authors and reviewers of submissions to peer-reviewed journals. Doctoral candidates may wish to remain anonymous to avoid racism and/or sexism; unfortunately, that is hardly possible for cumulative dissertations. The standard of the doctorate (like the standard of peer-reviewed journals) depends critically on the freedom of examiners (reviewers) to recommend failure (rejection). Examiners should therefore have the option of choosing anonymity if they fear negative consequences of recommending failure. Examiners should also declare in writing that the dissertation is confidential and plagiarism (theft of ideas) is a serious offence.
- Clearly separate bachelor, master, and doctoral levels. Coursework should be required only at bachelor and master level. Doctoral candidates should be free to attend master's classes in relevant areas, but not required to do so. Professors should not instrumentalize doctoral curricula to promote their research or ideas. If an advanced course unit is important, it should be included in the corresponding master's program.
- Encourage doctoral candidates to contribute to the best international conferences and journals in their area, but do not require them to do so. They alone are responsible for getting the feedback they need from independent international experts prior to submitting their dissertation.
- Do not grade dissertations. Examiners can be given four choices: distinction, pass, rewrite, and fail. "Rewrite" means rewrite certain passages and/or restructure the work and resubmit.

- Encourage interdisciplinarity. Do not assign the doctorate rigidly to academic disciplines (Pflichtfach, Wahlfach). Disciplinary links should be flexible. Similarly, doctoral examinations should not test general knowledge within named disciplines, beyond that which is needed to explain the dissertation in its various academic contexts. General knowledge is the aim of bachelor and master programs – not the doctorate.
- When the examination procedure is complete, the successful candidate can be invited to give a high-level public lecture. The language of the lecture can be either the local or the international language. The aim is to explain the relevance, content, and implications of the dissertation in an accessible way, and to demonstrate an ability to communicate publicly – without at the same time being examined. A public lecture of this kind can replace the traditional defense or *rigorosum*. The examiners can be invited to attend in person or virtually.

The University of Graz currently has 12 doctoral curricula: *Naturwissenschaften, Geisteswissenschaften, Rechtswissenschaften, Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften, Katholische Theologie, Religionswissenschaft und soziokulturelle Diskurse, Geisteswissenschaftliches Doktorat an der URBI Fakultät, Interdisziplinäres Doktorat an der URBI Fakultät, Interdisziplinäres Doktorat Antike und Moderne im europäischen Kontext, Naturwissenschaftliches Doktorat an der URBI Fakultät, PhD Law and Politics, Überfakultäres Doktoratsstudium Fachdidaktik*. That, I believe, is an example of over-regulation. We need only one doctoral curriculum, and it could be just one page in length. Doctorates in all disciplines can and should be measured against the same international standard.

*b) Provide better funding for promising doctoral students*

Doctoral students are important drivers of citation rates in the long term. Most research of most academics is related to their dissertation. Therefore, it is especially important to fund younger researchers with original ideas who want to work independently.

That is an area in which Austria currently provides little funding. Most funding for doctoral students is provided within existing research projects, which restricts the range of possible research topics for individual students. Familiar project types include FWF stand-alone projects and the FWF international doc.funds program (FWF = Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung). Groups of researchers who successfully apply for an FWF Spezialforschungsbereich (Special Research Program SFB) receive additional funding from Uni Graz for doctoral students. Existing Austrian excellence initiatives and strategies tend to fund experienced researchers rather than doctoral students. Even the promising program “Unkonventionelle Forschung” at Uni Graz (funded by BMWF and Land Steiermark) is open only to applicants with doctorates.

The most interesting and promising doctoral students are often those who wish to investigate a new topic for which no research group currently exists. In Austria, those students usually adjust their research plans to fit those of their superiors. In the process, they experience *loss of autonomy*. They no longer “own” their project. That affects their *intrinsic motivation*<sup>4</sup>. *Deci and Ryan* reported that

“autonomy support has generally been associated with more intrinsic motivation, greater interest, less pressure and tension, more creativity, more cognitive flexibility, better conceptual learning, a more positive emotional tone, higher self-esteem, more trust, greater persistence of behavior change, and better physical and psychological health than has control”.<sup>5</sup>

Intrinsic motivation is recognized as an essential ingredient for success in competitive activities that require long periods of dedicated, concentrated

<sup>4</sup> *Kumar/Kaur*, Supervisory practices for intrinsic motivation of doctoral students: A self-determination theory perspective, *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 14 (2019), 581 seqq.

<sup>5</sup> *Deci/Ryan*, The support of autonomy and the control of behavior, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1987), 1024 seqq.

work, including music<sup>6</sup> and sport<sup>7</sup>. In the case of doctoral students, *Mason* explained:

“One theory that may help explain the high attrition rate of graduate students is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT describes the socio-context variables that assist and impede human motivation, performance, and development. These socio-context variables are innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When people have autonomy, their behavior is self-determined, and they have the option of choosing what they do. In other words, they are not controlled. Competence is understanding how to achieve desired outcomes and having the self-efficacy to carry out the actions required in the specific context. A feeling of relatedness is the feeling of being valued and cared for. A sense of relatedness provides a dual role: (a) it provides support for intrinsic motivation and (b) it gives people incentives to do activities that are valued by significant others. Research indicates that positive outcomes (such as interest, enjoyment, lower anxiety, fewer grade-focused goals, higher self-regulation, higher course performance, and persistence) occur when these innate psychological needs are met.”<sup>8</sup>

Doctoral students experience *autonomy* when they choose their own topic; *competence*, when their skills match the task they have set for themselves (often leading to a flow experience<sup>9</sup>); and *relatedness*, when they feel a sense of belonging to a group of like-minded people with similar goals, such as a research group, doctoral college, conference, or academic society.

<sup>6</sup> *Schmidt*, Relations among motivation, performance achievement, and music experience variables in secondary instrumental music students, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 53 (2005), 134 seqq.

<sup>7</sup> *Hogger/Chatzisarantis*, Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in exercise and sport: Reflecting on the past and sketching the future, in: *Hogger/Chatzisarantis* (Eds.), *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in exercise and sport*, 2007, pp. 281 seqq.

<sup>8</sup> *Mason*, Motivation, satisfaction, and innate psychological needs, *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 7 (2012), 259, 260.

<sup>9</sup> *Csikszentmihalyi*, *Flow: The psychology of happiness*, 2013.

How might Austria offer financial support to independent doctoral students? One solution might be for professors to negotiate finance for doctoral students upon appointment. A better option, I believe, is to give all doctoral students in Austria the opportunity to apply independently for national doctoral fellowships, possibly through FWF or the Austrian Academy (ÖAW)<sup>10</sup>.

*c) Make the habilitation voluntary*

To improve the international competitiveness of German universities and prevent brain drain, *Bulmahn* (2001) introduced junior professorships – tenure-track positions for which the habilitation was no longer required<sup>11</sup>. Two decades later, the habilitation tradition remains strong at Uni Graz and many other universities in Europe and elsewhere. Many of those universities are also performing poorly in global rankings.

The Satzung of Uni Graz still stipulates that

Vorlesungen, Seminare und Privatissima dürfen grundsätzlich nur von Personen mit Lehrbefugnis (*venia docendi*) gehalten werden. Über Ausnahmen entscheidet die Studiendekanin/der Studiendekan.

If this regulation is applied strictly, it is impossible to supervise a doctorate or teach advanced courses without habilitation (and hence *venia docendi*) in the same area unless the Dean of Studies (of the faculty in question) grants an exception. The habilitation alone is insufficient if it is judged to be in the wrong area. The regulation depends on how disciplines are defined and where their boundaries are located. The regulation is also interpreted differently in different faculties or academic traditions. In some areas, it is strictly applied, whereas in others it is almost ignored. Some professorial selection committees regard it as essential, while others do not consider it.

<sup>10</sup> The usual translation of Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften is “Austrian Academy of Science”, suggesting that humanities are excluded. This error could easily be corrected.

<sup>11</sup> *Bulmahn*, Es ist Zeit zum Handeln, in: *Spiegel* of May 28, 2001, <https://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/job/debattenbeitrag-von-edelgard-bulmahn-es-ist-zeit-zum-handeln-a-135282.html> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

The Satzung also refers to “Habilitierte”, for example as committee members. In many cases, the doctorate could suffice.

The habilitation is problematic in the following ways:

- The world’s best universities do not have it. That alone is a good reason for phasing it out.
- The habilitation tradition inhibits interdisciplinarity. Whereas colleagues usually limit their teaching and supervision to an area defined by their main qualifications and publications, university administrators should not *require* them to do so. Instead, interdisciplinarity should be encouraged. A dean of studies who is worried about the standard of teaching in a course unit can always negotiate with the lecturer, regardless of the topic of the unit and the lecturer’s expertise.
- Doctoral students should be free to choose their supervisors, regardless of habilitation (*venia docendi*) or lack thereof. If the result of a doctoral examination is determined entirely by international examiners, the standard of the doctorate is guaranteed and there is no need for the university to control the choice of supervisors; responsibility lies instead with the student.
- Postdocs can be more creative if they are more independent. The habilitation tradition makes them dependent on their superiors, limiting their development. They spend years writing habilitation treatises at a time when they should be getting their research published in the best international journals and with the best international book publishers. That undermines both their ability to compete internationally and the university’s international ranking. If we are serious about promoting the academic careers of postdocs, we should be encouraging (not preventing!) anyone with an internationally competitive doctorate (as described here) to teach advanced courses and supervise dissertations.
- Habilitation committees that are dominated by research staff from a single university are seldom in a position to evaluate academic quality in a specific subdiscipline and at the highest international level. They are also subject to bias and political

intrigue. Senior colleagues sometimes arbitrarily prevent junior colleagues from submitting habilitation applications, threatening to recommend rejection. Clearly, any such practice must be stopped, and colleagues who experience anything of the kind should report to Arbeitskreis für Gleichbehandlungsfragen (AKGL). But colleagues often fear negative consequences if they do that.

To clarify the last point, allow me to recount my personal experience. Before I came to Graz in 1998, I held a permanent lectureship in the Department of Psychology, Keele University, UK. I was supervising doctoral students in my area of research, which is music psychology. In Graz, my *venia docendi* “systematic musicology” was determined by the denomination of my professorship. I realized later that the university understood systematic musicology to belong to musicology, which in turn belongs to humanities in a strictly hierarchical structure. Therefore, I could not supervise in (music) psychology. Nor could I supervise students whose main undergraduate training was in psychology, although training of that kind is the most important prerequisite for good doctoral research in my area. Catch-22! The following counterarguments failed to convince colleagues:

- Music psychology is today considered the main subdiscipline of systematic musicology.
- I hold a Bachelor of Science with Honors in Physics (equivalent to a master’s).
- My main publications belong to the sciences (Natur- und Sozialwissenschaften) – not the humanities.
- My citation rates in music psychology are high relative to other Graz psychologists.

To my surprise, the university then started rejecting applications by promising students to enter the doctorate under my supervision. So I asked about the procedure for applying for a habilitation in (music) psychology. I was advised not to apply, because my submission would be rejected; no reason was given. Finally, I applied successfully at another university. Practices of this kind are undermining the university’s academic performance. The doctoral students that applied to work under my

supervision and were rejected would have published frequently cited academic papers, boosting the university's international reputation.

Given the high esteem with which the habilitation tradition is still held in countries such as Austria, France, and Germany, and the parallel existence of dedicated programs to support postdoctoral students (e.g., PostDoc Initiative and Young Researcher Groups at Uni Graz), a compromise solution may be appropriate. I propose changing the law such that the habilitation becomes *entirely voluntary*, in the following way:

- Ensure that the habilitation is no longer a criterion for professorships, regardless of nationality. Applicants from countries with the habilitation tradition should not be disadvantaged if they do not have the habilitation.
- Give doctoral students the freedom to choose their supervisors, regardless of their habilitation or lack thereof. It is up to the student to choose appropriate supervisors or risk failure. In that process, the university can only advise.
- In the interests of interdisciplinarity and international impact, give academic colleagues the freedom to teach or supervise at any level and in any area, while maintaining the right of the dean of studies to negotiate with colleagues who teach or supervise across disciplines.

In addition, raise the level of both the doctorate and the habilitation. The doctorate has already been discussed. The habilitation procedure could include an expert evaluation of the candidate's citation rates – relative to international leaders in the same area, and without specific targets.

Consider the following analogy. In many countries, there are still royal families, but they have almost no political power. The function of royalty has become purely symbolic; the real power lies in the hands of democratically elected politicians. Royalty is nevertheless still considered valuable and worth preserving by most people. Similarly, the habilitation tradition can be maintained and celebrated, provided it is powerless. The tradition should be disconnected from university law such that young researchers are free either to participate in the tradition or not, without fear of career consequences.

## 2. Professorships

### a) Empower external reviewers

Choosing professors is the most important administrative decision of any university, because the university's main output and achievements depend mainly on the projects and publications of its professors. According to current Austrian law, the procedure involves at least one internal and one external reviewer (Gutachter:in). That is not enough. There should be three external reviewers, so that two can prevail if there is a disagreement.

They should:

- be diverse, working in different foreign countries, speaking different first languages, and mixing female and male;
- have published with leading journals/publishers, with high citation rates within the discipline of the advertised professorship; and
- have full voting rights as committee members.

Reviewers can be invited to participate in meetings virtually. If the committee votes against the recommendations of an external reviewer, that contradiction should be documented and justified. It should not be possible for committee members to ignore the recommendations of reviewers.

### b) Use the discipline's international language

Professorial search and selection procedures should be carried out and documented entirely in the international language of the discipline. If that language is not English or German, key documents can be translated for administrative purposes. All reviewers should receive and be able to read all documents that are provided to committee members. Whereas in some cases that is already happening, the suggestion here is for procedures of this kind to become standard.

### c) Promote linguistic diversity

Currently, if a female and a male applicant are judged equally suitable for a professorship, the female applicant is preferred. This principle has not only improved the gender balance among professors – it has also, I

believe, improved the academic performance of the entire university, or at least the social relevance of its research, by improving diversity.

I recommend extending this principle to applicants whose first language is not German, provided their German skills meet a given standard. If a native speaker of German and a native speaker of another language are considered equally suitable for a professorship, the native speaker of the other language should be preferred, in order to increase cultural diversity (note that the QC rankings depend in part on diversity.) The same principle can be applied in any country: promote applicants for professorships whose first language is not the national language.

Applicants that are unable to teach in German can teach in English, assuming that German and English are official languages of the university in all areas of research, teaching, and administration. They can also teach in a language that is relevant for their discipline (e.g., French or Spanish for Romanistik). Students in all disciplines can be expected to have a good command of both German and English, with the exception of those in English-language master's programs that are specifically targeted toward international students.

Professorial advertisement texts could be adjusted accordingly. Normally, the criteria for a professorship or lectureship include fluency in either German or English – preferably both. At that point in the advertisement, one could note that the university is striving to increase not only gender diversity but also linguistic and cultural diversity. To achieve that goal, candidates whose first language is not German may be preferred.

Colleagues may object to this proposal on legal grounds. Surely one cannot discriminate against a professorial applicant on the basis of language? In reply, one might argue as follows:

- German speakers already have a cultural advantage over speakers of other languages when it comes to applying for positions in German-speaking universities – just as men have an advantage over women, due to everyday structural sexism.
- Professorial selection procedures are generally biased toward candidates who fluently speak the language of the procedure. A bias of that kind is appropriate if the language in question is part

of the job. The bias only becomes a problem if the successful candidate can work in multiple languages.

- The university's first priority is to achieve its internal developmental goals. If those goals include enhancing linguistic and cultural diversity, the university has a right (and indeed an obligation) to choose corresponding candidates for professorships and other positions.

*d) Improve international advertising of professorships*

Professorships are already advertised internationally, but the process could be improved. An effective advertisement procedure could comprise three stages:

- Establish the current main international modes of communication in the specific subdiscipline, including email lists and diverse social media.
- Send the information to those lists and media.
- Check whether selected colleagues on those lists got the message.

This process could be documented by a member of the selection committee. At the same time, the personnel department would place the advertisement in the usual official places.

*e) Introduce controlled "head hunting"*

Professorial search procedures often involve head hunting, either official (when a member of the search committee contacts a colleague on behalf of the committee) or unofficial (when any colleague sends the advertisement to any other colleague). It may help to make this procedure more systematic, and document it.

When advertising professorships, search/selection committees could systematically survey the world's scholars and researchers aged, say, 35 to 45, or those whose doctorate was completed in certain time period. Look at their internationally visible publications in good journals and books with good publishers. List the ones whose work is frequently cited, on the assumption that their total number of citations is a good predictor of later citation rates. Correct bibliographic data for academic age and



biases such as discipline, age, or language. Then contact the leading potential candidates individually and encourage them to apply. The rector might offer professorships only after this process has been carefully documented.

#### *f) Focus on international collaboration*

The university's performance in global rankings depends on high-level international collaborations. A good way to promote them in the long term is to appoint professors who are already working within such networks. Candidates for professorships can be asked to list their main international collaborations. Selection committees can be asked to formally evaluate each candidate according to this criterion, as part of a systematic holistic evaluation. Whereas many selection committees already do that, it may help to recommend a documented procedure of this kind for all selection committees.

### 3. Teaching

#### *a) Improve the faculty-student ratio*

This point is well-known, and the QS rankings depend on it directly. Relative to other Austrian universities, Uni Graz is relatively poorly funded in this regard. That can explain why student numbers are stagnating (neither rising nor falling<sup>12</sup>), both in Graz and in Austria generally. Another possible reason is falling birth rates.

We need more public money to finance teaching in disciplines with large numbers of students. Improving that funding would cause student numbers to rise (or at least to stop falling), justifying the expense. It's a great long-term investment!

This is not an argument in favor of tuition fees. An economic model for financing universities in future should assume that universities benefit the economy and society in many ways – often invisible.

<sup>12</sup> See Statista, Number of students in Austria from 2017/2018 to 2020/2021, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/289726/umfrage/anzahl-der-studierenden-an-oeffentlichen-hochschulen-in-oesterreich/> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

#### *b) Attract the best international students*

The best students are often the international ones. That is not surprising, given their international experience. In recent years, Uni Graz has been attracting international students by increasing the number of programs that are offered in English or in two languages. But the proportion of international students at Uni Graz is still relatively low. To attract greater numbers of good international students, we need to improve the university's performance in international rankings and become more consistently bilingual.

It is promising that fees for international students are currently low in Austria. Fees could be made to depend on the gross domestic product per person of the country of origin, and/or the finances of the student's family could be taken into account, as a contribution toward international development aid. In some cases, fees could be waived.

#### *c) Consider research quality when evaluating teaching*

University teaching is research-based (*forschungsgeleitet*), implying that content is more important than presentation. Whereas teaching methods are undeniably important, they are also undeniably secondary. The quality of teaching content depends crucially on the international visibility of the corresponding research. Therefore, teaching evaluation should include research evaluation. Were the teacher's best relevant publications peer reviewed? Were they frequently cited? It's no good having the best teaching methods if the content of teaching is problematic. University procedures for evaluating teaching should be revised to achieve a better balance between research quality and teaching skills.

#### *d) Promote critical thinking and argumentation theory*

The steady expansion of published "knowledge" that is relevant for master's programs means that students have less time to study general research principles. The sciences offer ample training in empirical methods, but may neglect to address general principles for the construction and testing of scientific theory.

A possible solution is to include a unit on critical thinking and argumentation theory in every master's program. The unit would be an

opportunity to study the main philosophical and educational literature in that area, and to apply the main ideas to current issues in the discipline in question, or to issues of interest to individual students<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. Language

##### a) Encourage publication in each discipline's international language

English comes in different international variants. The English that is of primary interest for a university outside of an English-speaking country is not necessarily that which is spoken and written in the USA, the UK, or any other country. Nor are differences between variants of English necessarily important.

We need to cultivate a consistent approach to *English as a lingua franca* (ELF), also called international, global, or world English. ELF is almost the same as British or American English, but more consistent (less irregular) and less colloquial. We German-speaking academics can regard ELF as our "own", just as we regard the German language as our "own". The quality of research in peer-reviewed international journals is higher, on average, if the research is published in the discipline's international language. That is because a larger number of international colleagues in a given discipline can work in the international language of the discipline. Those colleagues can act as anonymous reviewers, with the power to reject poor work.

All researchers at all universities should be striving to publish their best scholarship and research in the best international journals in the main international language of their discipline. This point should be raised to the level of university policy. If there is any doubt about the international language or languages of a given discipline, it should be clarified.

Incidentally, the German language is in no danger and does not need to be saved. Every day, a massive amount of good literature, academic and popular, is published in German. For most academic disciplines, there is no need to promote the German language, or if there is, that need is small

<sup>13</sup> See my guidelines entitled "Structuring the argument of a theoretical paper in the social sciences", <https://homepage.uni-graz.at/de/richard.parncutt/supervision/theoretical-papers/> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

compared to the need to promote the international visibility of research and the international reputation of the university.

##### b) Promote German-English bilingualism in all areas and at all levels

Bilingualism is a strength that Anglophone universities lack. It should be promoted in all aspects of teaching, research, and administration, and in all faculties. The research/teaching staff of the Faculty of Humanities at Uni Graz are often multilingual, speaking German, English, and one or more other languages fluently. In the Faculty of Law, whose research/teaching staff are often concerned with national legal issues, the trend toward internationalization and bilingualism is nevertheless welcome and unmistakable, for example in EU law.

As a rule, every new university staff member at all levels of research, teaching, and administration should be fluent in both German and English. This point should be mentioned in every job advertisement and considered by every selection committee, including at the professorial level. Job interviews in all areas and at all levels can be carried out in English, or German if the applicant is a native English speaker. Exceptions are possible in a handful of disciplines whose international language is not English. When professorial candidates make two presentations (one on their research and one to demonstrate their teaching ability), one can be in English and the other in German.

##### c) Appoint an English translator at senior-lecturer level

Surprisingly poor English translations can be found on our university homepage and in brochures and other documents. Consider the current version of the university mission statement, which was translated from the Leitbild by a translation office in Graz. Here is the start of the original German text:

“Die Universität Graz als Allgemeinuniversität versteht sich als eine internationale Bildungs- und Forschungseinrichtung mit Auftrag zur gesellschaftsrelevanten und gesellschaftsfördernden Forschung und Lehre unter Wahrung des Grundsatzes der Freiheit von Forschung und Lehre setzen wir uns permanent mit sozialen, politischen und technologischen Entwicklungen

auseinander. Zunehmende Flexibilisierung und Globalisierung sind dabei wesentliche Rahmenbedingungen.”

The first thing to note is the high quality of the original. Every word has been carefully chosen. Not so the translation:

“As a comprehensive university, the University of Graz regards itself as an international institution for education and research committed to research and teaching for the benefit of society. It is our policy to maintain freedom in research and teaching, which permanently commits us to social, political and technological developments. Increasing flexibilisation and globalisation are the essential frame conditions.”

Every sentence of this short excerpt is problematic. International readers cannot be expected to spontaneously guess what is meant by a “comprehensive university”; preferable translations include “traditional university” and “university representing a wide range of academic disciplines”. The words “regards itself” have a different meaning, in this context, from “versteht sich”, but the difference is irrelevant, so an appropriate translation might simply be “is”. The expression “for the benefit of society” is rather weak and cliché-like by comparison to “gesellschaftrelevant und gesellschaftsfördernd”; “socially relevant and socially beneficial” might have been better. The normal translation of “Freiheit von Forschung und Lehre” is “academic freedom”. The above translation implies a link between academic freedom and commitment to social developments that is neither present nor intended in the original. “Flexibilisation” is awkward, and “frame conditions” is unusual; “boundary conditions” would be preferable; but it would be even better to turn nouns into verbs (the opposite of Substantivierung).

Whereas the mission statement is surely one of the most important documents of the university, the translation could hardly be worse – and I have only considered the first few sentences. Even the text generated automatically by Google Translate is better:

“The University of Graz as a general university sees itself as an international educational and research institution with a mandate to socially relevant and socially promoting research and teaching. While maintaining the principle of freedom of research

and teaching, we constantly deal with social, political and technological developments. Increasing flexibility and globalization are essential framework conditions.”

The quality of English texts is crucial for the university’s international image. Poor texts give the impression that the university is out of touch. For the past two decades, I have repeatedly noticed poor English translations of important texts on webpages and in printed documents, and tried in vain to help the university improve procedures. I repeatedly observed a failure to understand the nature of the problem and a consequent polite resistance to change.

Translators are not machines, and translations are not one-way, cause-effect products. Translations generally involve negotiation among diverse stakeholders. The participants may be either virtual (imagined by the translator) or real<sup>14</sup>. Translations are usually new interpretations, and they often have political implications.

The target audience for a translation is different from that for the original text, which often necessitates changes in content. English translations of important university documents should therefore be checked with both the authors of the original text and one or more of the university’s native English speakers. That would be necessary even if Uni Graz established a working relationship with a translation office in the UK or the USA that regularly translates for local universities.

Perhaps the best solution is to appoint a full-time German-English translator at senior lecturer level. That colleague would be responsible for all the university’s official English texts, including internet pages, brochures, and curricula. She or he would be a native speaker of English with substantial professional experience as a translator of academic texts. She or he would speak German fluently, have a doctorate, and have worked for extended periods at universities in both the UK and the USA. To ensure that these criteria were fulfilled, the selection committee would be dominated by research-active native speakers of English, and our Department of Translation Studies (ITAT) would play a leading role.

<sup>14</sup> *Federici/Tessicini*, (Eds.), *Translators, interpreters, and cultural negotiators: Mediating and communicating power from the Middle Ages to the modern era*, 2014; *Sareen/Gupta*, *Translation as cultural negotiation*, *Journal of South Asian Studies* 23 (2000), 15 seqq.

Candidates would be asked for spontaneous verbal translations of difficult sentences during the interview, as well as written translations of short documents forwarded beforehand.

*d) Systematically resist English-language cultural dominance*

The international university rankings are biased toward English-speaking universities. In that sense, they are a form of cultural imperialism. They allow English-speaking universities to dictate what other universities should be doing and how they should be evaluated.

Global academia needs a more level playing field. The solution is not to avoid speaking English but – paradoxically – to use ELF to systematically undermine the dominance of English-speaking universities.

As an example of how that might work, consider Brexit. The European Union spent years negotiating with Great Britain. ELF was used to ensure that the British kept their agreements and the negotiations were conducted fairly. The EU is still using ELF as its main medium of communication, after the UK's formal departure.

We need to talk creatively about specific ways to challenge English cultural imperialism. The following point is an example.

*e) Promote linguistic diversity*

To avoid Anglophone dominance in international research projects, familiar principles of affirmative action can be applied. Whenever there is a choice between two international colleagues with whom one might collaborate, each of whom is equally appropriate, the university could recommend preferring the one that speaks neither German nor English as a first language, so as to increase linguistic and cultural diversity. In that way, collaboration with speakers of French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and so on, could be promoted, while communicating in ELF.

The same principle can be applied when choosing examiners for a dissertation. As explained elsewhere, there should generally be three examiners – all external – to enable two of them to determine the outcome. When approaching potential examiners, dominance by English and German speakers could be systematically avoided.

*5. Administration*

*a) Identify, reward, and consult colleagues with high citation rates*

The number of papers published by a researcher is not necessarily a good indicator of research performance, unless it is clear that all papers have appeared in the best international journals. Citation rates give a better indication of research quality, but citation rates are not aims in themselves. The aim is for research-active colleagues to play leading roles in global research within their specific academic disciplines or areas and in that way to co-determine the content of cutting-edge global discussions. Given how difficult it is for outsiders such as university administrators to evaluate the extent to which local colleagues are leading global discussions (rather than attracting local attention), citation rates are a necessary ingredient of any research evaluation. Despite the problems, citation rates are the best quasi-objective indicators of international visibility and impact. In every organizational unit, the university administration (including LQM) could therefore analyze the citation rates of published research. The university could then identify, reward, and celebrate colleagues and groups who achieve high citation rates.

Often, an internationally respected expert is asked to evaluate a project submission or the work of a colleague or department. Procedures of this kind should consider citation rates. First, experts should be chosen on the basis of their citation rates. Second, their evaluations of other colleagues should consider their citation rates relative to their disciplinary context, systematically combining qualitative and quantitative elements. Depending on the goal, citations may be considered more valuable if they appear in high-quality academic literature rather than popular sources.

Colleagues with high citation rates should be approached when distributing research funding within the university, such as funding doctoral students. They should have the opportunity to negotiate relief from teaching or administrative duties, to help them to publish their research. As retirement age approaches, procedures for nominating emeritus professors should include appropriately nuanced considerations of citation rates; one can hardly speak of “long and distinguished service” if a colleague's publications are barely known internationally.

Finally, university colleagues whose work is frequently cited know best how to improve the university's performance in the international rankings. The university could benefit from treating them as experts on the university ranking problem, because they have solved the problem in their area. For that purpose, they might be interviewed by their dean or the rectorate, and they should in particular be asked to comment on long-term development plans including future professorships.

*b) Train staff to improve their international visibility*

Further education for academic staff might address strategies for improving the international visibility of individual research, as reflected later by citation rates. Possible strategies include:

- publishing in the international language of the discipline;
- predicting future “hot topics”; addressing current “hot topics” if they are likely to be interesting in 10-20 years; avoiding them if not; revisiting old ideas in original ways;
- submitting articles to the best journals and publishers, even if rejection is likely; if rejected, gradually moving down the list;
- including the most-often-searched keywords in article titles (or at least abstracts);
- choosing the right article format (e.g., in the sciences, review articles may be cited more often than empirical articles);
- consulting tips in the literature, e.g. Web of Science; or
- improving personal homepage presentation (university support staff could identify colleagues with unclear homepages and help them).

A focus on citation rates does not mean quickly writing many superficial papers. On the contrary, the best way to achieve high citation rates in the long term is to think big and dare to experiment with different ways of thinking. Colleagues should be encouraged to spend time on challenging projects and to risk proposing ideas that some colleagues find problematic or even crazy, if that is what it takes to push thinking along new tracks, and academia in new directions. Jump off the bandwagon and try something different.

Incidentally, the expression “slow science”<sup>15</sup> should be avoided because it excludes humanities. “Slow scholarship” includes both humanities and sciences. The misleading use of “science” as a translation of *Wissenschaft* is a recurring problem<sup>16</sup>.

University staff can be encouraged to make their existing publications more visible:

- Ensure there is an abstract in the internet for all major publications, in the international language of the discipline.
- Set up a user profile in Google Scholar (check that the listed publications are correct – the system often makes mistakes) and/or Academia.edu (upload the main publications yourself and enter appropriate keywords).
- Work with international colleagues to improve the international visibility of your discipline.
- Use social media to attract attention to your latest research while keeping up with that of selected others. In Twitter, build up a manageable number of followers (say, 100) who are leading colleagues in relevant areas.

*c) Optimize administrative processes*

The overall benefit of an administrative process should exceed the overall cost, when all kinds of benefits and costs are considered. Costs include money, time, creativity, and emotional investment; benefits include global research impact. In a general approach of this kind, a vice-rector could organize cost-benefit analyses of diverse administrative processes. Those for which the costs exceed benefits could then be simplified.

*d) Promote flat hierarchies*

According to *Burkus*

“[...] the chain of command works well for issuing orders and making decisions. It works so well that creative ideas stand little

<sup>15</sup> *Stengers*, Another Science is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> *Parncutt*, The two cultures in German translation: Humanities, science, and *Wissenschaft*. *Scottish Music Review* 4 (2016), 1 seqq.; see also the English-language Wikipedia page on “*Wissenschaft*”.

chance of being utilized unless they're being shared from the top downward. Creative ideas that come from the middle or lower levels of a hierarchy have to work their way up through a series of managers, each with the power to veto but each lacking the power to implement. Supervisors often reject innovative ideas because the individuals who developed these ideas understand the novelty and applicability of them better than supervisors. As an idea moves through the different levels, the likelihood of rejection increases, since those managers are further from the domain the idea applies to and less likely to understand its true value in that domain. This turns a chain of command into what Vanderbilt professor Dave Owens calls a "hierarchy of no." Owens, who worked as a designer for IDEO before joining the academy, asserts that the standard organizational structure contains natural constraints that kill innovative ideas.<sup>17</sup>

The take-home message is not that the organizational hierarchy (Organigramm) should be abolished. On the contrary, it is important to clarify duties and responsibilities so as to avoid conflicts. Instead, we need to reduce the *perceived distance* between the levels. All members of a university should feel free and even welcome to talk about promising ideas with anyone who might be interested, regardless of hierarchical differences, while at the same time respecting different responsibilities and time constraints. We need a culture of listening to each other and being interested in changes that could improve creativity or productivity. We also may need to study creative processes: how individuals and groups evaluate and select promising ideas, and how they perceive and apply criteria such as usefulness, feasibility, originality and novelty<sup>18</sup>. Social-administrative hierarchies are partly real (Organigram) and partly imaginary, by common tacit consent. For example, loud or bossy people

<sup>17</sup> Burkus, Why Hierarchy Stifles Creativity, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/creative-leadership/201403/why-hierarchy-stifles-creativity> (last accessed on December 31, 2021) citing Owens, Creative people must be stopped: 6 ways we kill innovation (without even trying), 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Reiter-Palmon, Creative cognition at the individual and team levels: What happens before and after idea generation, in: Sternberg/Kaufman (Eds.), The nature of human creativity, 2018, pp. 184 seqq.

may be taken seriously to avoid conflict, or people who differ significantly from the white male German/Austrian norm may be taken less seriously, in proportion to their perceived differentness or failure to conform. By comparison to other universities where I have worked, Uni Graz is characterized by a relatively high degree of deference to authority (a remnant of the monarchy, I am told). People hesitate to do things differently or take matters into their own hands unless the change was initiated at a higher level. People also tend to exaggerate the importance of rules and laws by comparison to common sense, forgetting that those who made the rules could not foresee everything. These are old clichés, and many colleagues manage to completely avoid them, but the tendencies remain.

Creative energies can unfold when hierarchical attitudes and behaviors are relaxed. One strategy is to address the issue directly from the top, encouraging people at all levels to come up with new ideas and propose them to others in their group regardless of hierarchical level. It might help to avoid putting titles before people's names; after all, titles are seldom used at academic conferences or in academic research papers. We could either limit titles to Prof. Dr., as in Germany, or to either Prof. or Dr. but not both, as in the UK. If that is legally problematic, we could recommend corresponding legal changes.

#### *e) Penalize psychological violence*

Sexual harassment and mobbing (bullying) are examples of psychological violence, which happens frequently in larger institutions worldwide. To promote and maintain relatively flat hierarchies in universities, it helps to systematically prevent psychological violence, as far as practically possible. That includes identifying it when it happens and effectively stopping it.

I am using the term "psychological violence" in the sense of deliberate or premeditated acts that repeatedly cause psychological or social harm to another person or other people. The attacks may take the form of insults, threats, abuse, manipulation, discrimination, reputational damage (character assassination), or social exclusion.

An important advantage of European universities over their US counterparts is the relative absence of physical violence. To my knowledge, the only gun you will ever see on a European campus is one that is carried by a police officer – but you rarely ever see police on campus. Psychological violence is less visible, but presumably no less common in Europe than the US.

Mobbing and harassment are well-defined, well-researched behaviors. They waste creative energy, which affects the quality and quantity of an institution's output. Whereas the size of this effect is hard to estimate, the recent upsurge of literature on the subject suggests that it is considerable. Thus, one strategy to improve the creative output of a university is to reduce the incidence of psychological violence.

According to Canadian sociologist *Ken Westhues*, university colleagues are more likely to be mobbed if they satisfy one or more of the following criteria ([kwesthues.com/unkindlyart.htm](http://kwesthues.com/unkindlyart.htm)):

- Foreign birth and upbringing, especially as signaled by a foreign accent;
- Being different from most colleagues in an elemental way (by sex, for instance, sexual orientation, skin color, ethnicity, class origin, or credentials);
- Belonging to a discipline with ambiguous standards and objectives, especially those (like music or literature) most affected by postmodern scholarship;
- Working under a dean or other administrator in whom, as Nietzsche put it, “the impulse to punish is powerful”;
- An actual or contrived financial crunch in one's academic unit (according to an African proverb, when the watering hole gets smaller, the animals get meaner).
- Having opposed the candidate who ends up winning appointment as one's dean or chair (thereby looking stupid, wicked, or crazy in the latter's eyes);
- Being a ratebuster, achieving so much success in teaching or research that colleagues' envy is aroused;
- Publicly dissenting from politically correct ideas (meaning those held sacred by campus elites);

- Defending a pariah in campus politics or the larger cultural arena;
- Blowing the whistle on or even having knowledge of serious wrongdoing by locally powerful workmates.<sup>19</sup>

This list draws on *Westhues'* extensive empirical investigations of mobbing in universities<sup>20</sup>. It clarifies how mobbing can seriously affect not only the victim's health<sup>21</sup> but also creative performance and productivity in all areas of a university's research, teaching, and administration<sup>22</sup>.

Mobbing denial is widespread and includes denial that mobbing is happening, denial that it affects overall academic performance, and denial that administration can successfully intervene. Mobbing denial prevents universities from responding appropriately to serious cases. In the long term, that can encourage the mobbers. The extensive academic literature on mobbing shows that mobbing does indeed happen often, and administrations can indeed successfully intervene<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, most colleagues affected by mobbing or involved in mobbing investigations agree that intervention is necessary and possible even if it contradicts power relationships<sup>24</sup>.

The incidence of harassment and mobbing can be reduced in diverse ways, with the dual aim of improving the university's creative output and protecting the rights of university staff:

<sup>19</sup> *Westhues*, *The Envy of Excellence: Administrative Mobbing of High-Achieving Professors*, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> See also *Duffy/Sperry*, *Mobbing: Causes, consequences, and solutions*, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> *Duffy/Sperry*, *Workplace mobbing: Individual and family health consequences*, *Family Journal* 15 (2007), 398 seqq.; *Zapf/Knorz/Kulla*, *On the relationship between mobbing factors, and job content, social work environment, and health outcomes*, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 5 (1996), 215 seqq.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Divincová/Siváková*, *Mobbing at workplace and its impact on employee performance*, *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics* 8 (2014), 20 seqq.; Institute for Critical Education Studies, *Academic bullying and mobbing: Introduction to the special issue*, *Workplace* 24 (2014), 56 seq.; *Josipović-Jelić/Stoini/Celić-Bunikić*, *The effect of mobbing on medical staff performance*, *Acta Clinica Croatica* 44 (2005), 347 seqq.

<sup>23</sup> *Maran/Bernardelli/Varetto*, *Mobbing (bullying at work) in Italy: characteristics of successful court cases*, *Journal of Injury and Violence Research* 10 (2018), 17 seqq.

<sup>24</sup> *Psunder*, *Mobbing prevention and intervention strategies in educational institutions: Teachers' view*, *The New Educational Review* 26 (2011), 205 seqq.

- The contracts of new staff can include a paragraph explaining that mobbing and sexual harassment will not be tolerated.
- New employees can be required to attend “leadership courses” that include sessions on collegiality<sup>25</sup>.
- Awareness of different forms of psychological violence and their consequences can be raised among deans and department heads. Those colleagues can be invited to conflict management training sessions, helping them promote a research-based conflict management culture within their sphere of influence.

Employers may be legally obliged to prevent or stop mobbing or harassment in the workplace (in Austria: Bundes-Gleichbehandlungsgesetz; in Germany: Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz). Even if the law is inadequate to prevent or stop psychological violence in practice, a university should aspire to high standards, acting as a social role model and considering the implications of harassment or mobbing for its own research performance.

Mobbing prevention at Uni Graz, as described at [akgl.uni-graz.at/de/fuer-betroffene/mobbing/](http://akgl.uni-graz.at/de/fuer-betroffene/mobbing/), involves

Mögliche individuelle Vorbeugungsmaßnahmen: Stärkung der eigenen Konfliktmanagement-Fähigkeiten, Reflexion der eigenen Anteile am Konflikt, offenes und ehrliches Ansprechen von Konflikten, Inanspruchnahme von Hilfsangeboten im Falle der Eskalation.

Mögliche betriebliche Präventionsmaßnahmen: Transparenz der Arbeitsorganisation, Verminderung von längerfristiger Über- und Unterforderung, Supervision, Coaching, Führungskräfte- und Konfliktfähigkeitstraining, Institutionalisierung eines Problembewusstseins für Mobbing, Einsatz von Mobbingermittlungsmethoden. Informationen an die Belegschaft (allgemeine Aufklärung), Informationen aus der

<sup>25</sup> Cipriano, Facilitating a collegial department in higher education: Strategies for success, 2011; Crawford, Confronting Academic Mobbing in Higher Education: Personal Accounts and Administrative Action, 2019; Ertureten/Cemalcilar/Aycan, The relationship of downward mobbing with leadership style and organizational attitudes, Journal of Business Ethics 116 (2013), 205 seqq.

Belegschaft sammeln (offenes Ohr), Informationen an EntscheidungsträgerInnen (Qualifizierung), betriebliche Strukturen gegen Mobbing (z.B. Beschwerdewesen verbessern).

The first paragraph addresses support for victims of psychological violence and the second addresses prevention. Support of this kind can help affected colleagues explore the available options; at the very least, it can prevent a kind of psychological paralysis or depression. *But there is no indication here that the university will identify mobbers or take appropriate action to stop the mobbing.* Nor is there any indication that, if a mobbing charge is upheld, the university will guarantee the victim(s) an acceptable, collegial work environment in the future. For many mobbing victims, long-term security is a prerequisite for carrying out a mobbing investigation – otherwise, the personal benefits will not exceed the personal costs. Those who fear longer-term personal consequences may see no option but to put up with a difficult situation that seriously affects their academic performance. That can affect the university’s performance in international rankings.

Regarding investigation of mobbing cases, there is no shortage of available experts with the required experience and independence. To increase objectivity, two independent investigators from different cities or countries could be appointed to a given case, and interviews can be virtual. If the two investigators disagree, a third can be consulted. The process can be managed by the personnel or human resources department<sup>26</sup> and follows a predetermined sequence:

1. Preliminary discussions with AKGL to eliminate cases with no clear foundation.
2. Concise documentation of the main relevant events by the claimant(s), focusing on what actually happened, with times, places, and witnesses.
3. Independent professional investigation of the details of each documented event (evidence, opinions). Is the information provided incorrect, exaggerated, or misleading?

<sup>26</sup> Daniel, The role of human resources in bullying and mobbing prevention efforts, in: Duffy/Yamada (Eds.), Workplace Bullying and Mobbing in the United States, 2018, pp. 235 seqq.



4. Comparison of the evidence-based record with standard definitions of sexual harassment and mobbing. Is the claim of harassment or mobbing justified?
5. If warranted, initiation of a disciplinary procedure; physical separation of the involved staff. Possible penalties for confirmed mobbers include public naming, monetary fine, compulsory workshop attendance, or exclusion from higher office.

Before each step, the claimant should be asked whether it is ok to proceed. The claimant may ask for the investigation to be stopped at any point.

Since mobbing is a power game, we might expect that colleagues with more political power within universities to oppose mobbing investigations or claim that such investigations are not reasonably possible. That is indeed what is often observed, and it can explain why mobbing denial is widespread. Opinions that are subject to social bias of this kind should be treated with due skepticism. Administrators should instead rely on the academic literature, which consistently favors improved procedures to prevent and stop mobbing.

*f) Propose appropriate legal changes*

Austrian legal texts on the aims and functions of universities (presented above) need revision. It might help to include a new text of the following kind:

Austrian universities strive to contribute the best international research and lead international discussions in areas of current interest within the disciplines that they represent. To achieve that goal, Austrian universities systematically identify, reward, and promote research that achieves global distinction. Evaluations of university performance focus on the documented international visibility and influence of research findings. Research on topics that are primarily of local significance (e.g., local history, politics, culture, geography, fauna, fauna, climate) are embedded in, and contribute to, global efforts to answer similar local questions.

Currently, a revision of UG2002 is being discussed. That could be an opportunity to revise the legal paragraphs that address the main tasks of universities and their professors.

*6. Climate change*

*a) Create a professorship for Future Studies*

To rise through the university rankings, it is not enough to respond to international developments. A university needs to lead. We need to be pro-active, seeking out new opportunities and preparing in advance.

One such opportunity is anthropogenic global warming. Predictions about the social consequences of global warming are controversial. Given their existential nature, we need to discuss them thoroughly and carefully, considering the best available international research in all relevant disciplines.

To do that we need a professorship in Future Studies. At Uni Graz, such a professor could work within either sociology/economics/law or humanities. Perhaps the Department of History in our Faculty of Humanities would be the right place, given the obvious relationship between the future and the past.

The professorship would be highly interdisciplinary, potentially involving history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, statistics, computer science, and philosophy. More specifically, it might involve cultural studies, religious studies, political science, business management, climate science, and agricultural science. No one is an expert in more than one discipline, but many people are experts in different aspects of Future Studies.

A common objection to Future Studies is that the discipline has no object of research. We cannot study the future if it has not happened yet. What we *can* do is to analyze what *could* happen and then adjust government policy to maximize the probability of avoiding difficulties or catastrophes.

Given the existential dangers that humanity now faces, nothing could be more important than funding serious research about the future. If we care about our children and young people everywhere, and are prepared to admit that we have knowingly contributed to the climate change and

biodiversity loss that are now threatening their world, we are morally obliged to fund research about the future.

*b) Host and promote multi-hub conferences*

An important way to improve the international visibility of researchers and institutions is the international conference. Global warming means that it is no longer morally acceptable to encourage a large number of colleagues to fly large distances to a central location. Meanwhile, COVID-19 has forced academics all over the world to try out new virtual and hybrid conference formats.

This new situation is an opportunity for the university to improve its international influence and visibility. Rather than waiting to see how other universities react, we should take the lead. Carefully designed multi-hub conferences that constantly mix face-to-face and virtual interaction can significantly improve social inclusion, geographic outreach, cultural diversity, and the quality and quantity of academic content, while drastically reducing emissions<sup>27</sup>.

*c) Stop funding flying*

Many colleagues are asking how best to reduce their personal carbon footprint. Whereas it is certainly good to switch to sustainable electricity, live in an apartment rather than a house, ensure heating is from sustainable sources, buy locally produced food, and consume less (buying second hand, repairing what is broken), these are not the most important strategies. Just one flight in an airplane can destroy years of progress in other areas.

Flying less, or not flying at all, does not necessarily have a negative effect on academic performance. On the contrary, it can inspire colleagues to move in new directions. Colleagues can either use the same travel budget to attend a larger number of conferences (focusing on European conferences that can be reached by train) or spend more time writing

<sup>27</sup> Parncutt/Lindborg/Meyer-Kahlen/Timmers, The multi-hub academic conference: Global, inclusive, culturally diverse, creative, sustainable, in *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, 2021, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frma.2021.699782/full> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

papers for the best international journals and less time physically attending conferences. Many colleagues find that they work creatively on trains, perhaps because trains offer a change of scene. It is typically more difficult to work creatively in airports or on aircraft.

The new carbon accounting initiative of Uni Graz is a welcome step toward decarbonization, but it may not capture the “low-hanging fruit”. University emissions could be cut more rapidly by cutting funding to journeys that involve flying (regardless of whether for research, teaching, or administration), and spending the money saved on fellowships for doctoral students.

- Roughly half of the carbon emissions from a typical university are from flying<sup>28</sup>.
- The cost of attending a conference on another continent is typically twice the cost of attending a European conference.
- Uni Graz already aims to promote European cooperation, and benefits from it.
- Practical alternatives to conference flying exist, including surface transport and virtual, hybrid, and multi-hub conferences.
- Colleagues could still fly if invited or self-financed. We should aim to get more Graz colleagues invited to keynotes.

I have personally tested this proposal. Since 2015, I have presented my research without flying or driving in Madrid, Oxford, Birmingham, Dijon, Gent, Maastricht, Prague, Vienna, Geneva, Katowitz, Warsaw, Łódź, Budapest, Cluj, Belgrade, Vilnius, Tallinn, Zagreb, and Budapest. On the way, I promoted my research area (music cognition) and the European Society for the Cognitive Science of Music (ESCOM). Trips to Brussels, Lviv/Kiev, Aarhus, Belgrade, and Cagliari were canceled due to COVID-19.

<sup>28</sup> Ahonen/Siljander/Pellikka/Johansson/Rask, The sustainability of academic air mobility in Finnish universities, *Sustainability* 13 (2021), 2948 seqq.; El Geneidy/Baumeister/Govigli/Orfanidou/Wallius, The carbon footprint of a knowledge organization and emission scenarios for a post-COVID-19 world, *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 91 (2021), 106645, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0195925521000950> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

The best way for university staff and students to reduce their footprints is to avoid airplanes, cars, and meat. We should also should plan small families, encouraging others to have small families, and welcoming academic debate on this controversial issue<sup>29</sup>. Academics could also use their influence to help the world reduce its carbon footprint by becoming politically active. That can involve writing politically relevant academic contributions about climate, which is another way to attract international attention to research of the university.

#### *d) Prepare for possible global collapse*

Global warming will cause unprecedented droughts, floods, sea-level rise, deglaciation, species extinction within essential food chains, and deadly heat waves. That in turn will cause widespread famines, mass migration, and armed conflict. We can expect a global financial crisis that could lead to global social collapse<sup>30</sup>.

Many aspects of civilization and society, including the universities, will be severely affected. "Luxuries" like arts and humanities will be hit hard. The UK recently announced plans to cut funding for arts and humanities and improve funding for other disciplines<sup>31</sup>. In future and in retrospect, that could be seen as the "thin end of the wedge".

<sup>29</sup> Wynes/Nicholas, The climate mitigation gap: education and government recommendations miss the most effective individual actions, *Environmental Research Letters* 12 (2017), 074024, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa7541/pdf> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> Branderhorst, Update to limits to growth: Comparing the World3 model with empirical data, Master's thesis, Harvard Extension School, 2020; Climate Crisis Advisory Group, The final warning bell. The most important assessment of humanity's future on earth to date, 2021, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60ccae658553d102459d11ed/t/61275c5abba2ec034eefb534/1629969503477/CCAG+The+Final+Warning+Bell.pdf> (last accessed on December 31, 2021); Ehrlich/Ehrlich, Can a collapse of global civilization be avoided?, in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 280 (2013), 20122845, <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2012.2845> pdf (last accessed on December 31, 2021); Richards/Lupton/Allwood, Re-framing the threat of global warming: An empirical causal loop diagram of climate change, food insecurity and societal collapse, *Climatic Change* 164 (2021), 1 seqq.

<sup>31</sup> The Guardian of July 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jul/20/funding-cuts-to-go-ahead-for-university-arts-courses-in-england-despite-opposition> (last accessed on December 31, 2021).

In this contribution, I have addressed various forms of denial, including citation denial, mobbing denial, and climate denial. To that list can be added social collapse denial. A polite refusal to discuss or consider the possibility of global social collapse is widespread both within the university and outside of it. Whereas there are many welcome discussions about aspects of sustainability, to my knowledge no-one is considering the likely negative consequences of current global developments for universities and preparing accordingly.

It is time for universities to be more honest about the threats and the possible future scenarios. We need a more realistic approach that balances the positive and negative. If global warming is going to cause a global financial crisis that seriously undermines arts and humanities, we should be preparing now. Possible strategies include improving global visibility and demonstrating social, political, and academic relevance.

#### *III. Conclusion*

This paper began on a somber note. At first sight, Figure 1 and Table 1 suggested that the situation is hopeless. The ensuing detailed consideration of possible counterstrategies suggested instead that the problems can be solved if their likely causes are identified and colleagues understand and agree on the necessary reforms.

The strategies that I have presented are quite diverse, and some colleagues have commented that the paper lacks focus. Perhaps, they suggested, the sections on mobbing and climate action go too far and should have been left out. I have included them because I believe they belong to the most promising strategies for improving the university's international standing and visibility in the long term. To leave them out would be to succumb to common forms of denial.

It is nevertheless interesting that some proposals *feel* inappropriate or out of place, although they are objectively promising. In a social constructivist approach<sup>32</sup>, such feelings originate in social power structures. Solving problems of that kind might involve challenging or

<sup>32</sup> Kemper, Social constructionist and positivist approaches to the sociology of emotions, *American Journal of Sociology* 87 (1981), 336 seqq.

contradicting existing power hierarchies, which feels intuitively wrong or even dangerous. But that is all the more reason for reform.

In closing, I wish to emphasize the importance of leadership. To rise through the rankings, it is not enough to study what is happening at leading universities and imitate it. That is an important part, but to sustainably improve we need to aspire to global leadership in key areas. In that regard, and considering the “flat hierarchy” idea, *every member of the university can show leadership*, regardless of her or his official position in the hierarchy. Leadership can involve formulating, recognizing, and/or rewarding good ideas, and implementing them ahead of the competition. It can also involve trying to predict the future, despite the obvious difficulties, and taking risks.

To improve our international standing, we need reliable, objective measures of global leadership and academic quality. For that purpose, *Winston Churchill* might well have said that citation rates are the worst way to measure academic achievement except for all the others.

## BVerwG, Urteil vom 24.2.2021 – 6 C 1.20

### Nachträglicher Rücktritt von einer berufsbezogenen Prüfung wegen einer Erkrankung an ADHS

#### Leitsätze

1. Der nachträgliche Rücktritt von einer berufsbezogenen Prüfung wegen krankheitsbedingter Prüfungsunfähigkeit setzt voraus, dass der Prüfling aufgrund einer vorübergehenden krankheitsbedingten Beeinträchtigung seines physischen oder psychischen Zustands nicht in der Lage gewesen ist, in der Prüfung seine individuelle Leistungsfähigkeit zu zeigen, und er diese Beeinträchtigung während der Prüfung nicht erkennen konnte.
2. Eine Krankheit, die nicht vorübergehend, sondern auf unabsehbare Zeit - dauerhaft - den Zustand des Prüflings beeinträchtigt, prägt die individuelle Leistungsfähigkeit des Prüflings und berechtigt nicht zum Rücktritt (sog. Dauerleiden), es sei denn, ihre medizinische Behandlung oder der Einsatz von Hilfsmitteln führt in absehbarer Zeit zu einer Heilung oder jedenfalls Symptombefreiheit dergestalt, dass sie die individuelle Leistungsfähigkeit des Prüflings nicht mehr prägt.
3. Das Prüfungsrechtsverhältnis gebietet es nach Treu und Glauben, dass der Prüfling einen Anspruch auf Gewährung eines Nachteilsausgleichs wegen eines Dauerleidens nach Ablegung der Prüfung unverzüglich geltend macht.

#### Tenor

Die Revision des Klägers gegen das Urteil des Oberverwaltungsgerichts für das Land Nordrhein-Westfalen vom 7. November 2019 wird zurückgewiesen.

Der Kläger trägt die Kosten des Revisionsverfahrens.

#### Gründe

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[1] Der Kläger wendet sich mit seiner Klage gegen die Nichtanerkennung seines Rücktritts von zwei Modulprüfungen seines Bachelorstudiums und die Feststellung, dass er alle Prüfungsversuche in diesem Modul ausgeschöpft hat.