

3.3 Slow, Critical, Better Science. The "Slow Scholarship" movement as approach to the question of excellence in today's academic culture

Moderation

Patricia Felber, ZHdK

Panelists

Karin Schwiter, Alexander Vorbrugg (UZH), Maria Lissek, Joel Schaad (Office for Gender Equality Uni Bern) Julia Cahenzli Jenkins (SNSF)

Input 1: Karin Schwiter, Alexander Vorbrugg: "The feminist movement for slow scholarship: Background, principles and points of critique"

Karin and Alexander have laid out the problem of today's academic world: the neoliberalisation of academia, which increases output pressure at the expense of quality, care and creativity. The Slow Scholarship movement aims to counter this by aiming to create caring work environments in academia that can accommodate a diverse academe. It combines structural critique with intersectional perspectives and concrete strategies to promote collective strategies that aim at institutional change. It posits to recognize and share problems encountered by individuals and frame them collectively; it suggests reducing unnecessary workload and to demand institutional change.

The following discussion centred on whether the Slow Scholarship movement is equally anchored in the levels of intermediate staff as well as among established professors. Also, the question was raised whether persons in "safe positions" are willing to stand in for the demands of Slow Scholarship, or what it would take for them to do so.

Input 2: Maria Lissek, Joel Schaad: Better Science. Challenging academic practices in the 21st century

Maria and Joel introduced the project called Better Science Initiative, which calls for a rethinking of academic practice in favour of more diversity, equal opportunities and sustainability in research, teaching and administration. Better Science offers ten calls to action for all members of the university, for them to contribute to a more qualitative and care-ful research culture. Better Science addresses all staff levels equally, but of course people with leadership responsibilities are especially invited to provide nourishing and fruitful circumstances for their team members.

The subsequent discussion was focussed on how Better Science can and should be implemented at different institutes and levels. The guiding question was: Who are the agents of change to influence the current system? This is a crucial question, considering that the most precariously employed researchers are the ones most in need of a better research culture, but also the ones with the least impactful voice. There have been other projects called out, such as the "Petition for more Permanent Jobs in Academia: Better Research, Teaching and Work Conditions" for more permanent non-professorial positions at Swiss higher education institutions.

Input 3: Julia Cahenzli Jenkins: New SNSF grant application guidelines

In her input, Julia Cahenzli Jenkins talked about the new SNSF grant application regulations and guidelines. The SNSF recognizes the researchers' overall performance on a wider variety of evaluation criteria. The new criteria assess efficiency of scientific achievements instead of the quantity of output, which has been redefined to include scientific quality, value, and impact. Also, academic mobility has been redefined and is evaluated in different categories, in order to widen the scope of what academic excellence is.

In the discussion, it was brought up that the SNSF is not just the funding body for much of Swiss academia, but it is also an important actor which could influence the discourse. The career funding schemes of the SNSF reflect the precarious work environment in the universities, in which applicants have to compete for funding repeatedly. Lastly, it was brought up that while the participants are discussing vividly, they do so in their spare time – counter the demands of Better Science. In conclusion, participants were encouraged to spread and foster discussions on slow scholarship and better science in their academic institutions and kindle the spark for collective action.