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AIARU: Panel 1 - Undergraduate Education and the Research University

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Author

Björnsson, Hans

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Panel #1: Undergraduate Education and the Research University

[Hans Björnsson](#),

Interim Dean, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, UC Merced

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FORMER ACTING
CHANCELLOR,
RODERIC PARK,
PH.D.**

Our next speaker is Hans Björnsson that I knew very well during my time here and he has some wisdom from Scandinavia to give us on this topic. Hans?

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INTERIM DEAN,
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL
SCIENCES,
HUMANITIES AND
ARTS
HANS BJÖRNSSON**

I wasn't really prepared to give too much experience from Scandinavia although I probably could do a little of that, too. I'll try to keep this very brief and I will try to, try to emphasize one thing that I think is very important for a great university, and that is undergraduate research, because I think it's a key to a lot of issues.

I think we all agree that there is nothing more central to the mission of a university than, than activities that are associated with discovery, creation, and innovation, and scholarship. So I think that what defines a great university is, is the integration of all these activities into the fabric of undergraduate education. And no activity can actually create, accomplish that better than undergraduate research can do.

So undergraduate research involves students in inquiry and research and presenting the research and so on and so forth. And the approach to learn, learning by seeking information rather than by being taught has definitely been adopted by the young generation.

In the new IT world, we all know that the attention span is very short, and I think we need to learn from that. In my, in my observation, I think young people learn a lot through this short attention, paying short attention to different things on the net. And somehow, find something in that way of learning that we need to understand better. So we must experiment with new ways of teaching our undergraduates: project-based learning, problem-based learning, undergraduate research and so on and so forth.

And I think the university is increasingly being perceived differently outside the university. I think the very nature of knowledge and education is altered as we move away from propositional knowledge to a knowledge seen as contextualized, contingent, and more immediate applicable.

So undergraduate research, first teaching in research, by the way, or combines teaching and research. Undergraduate research combines teaching and research, two historic poles of a professional dichotomy, into one integrated pedagogy, and a system of performance.

In undergraduate research, scholarship and teaching may not be seen as two separate things, as conventionally perceived or thought or practiced. In undergraduate research, teaching and scholarship becomes parts of simultaneous overlapping shared processes. I think that's what we mean by a student-centered university. That's my conclusion, is that the question where, one of

the questions that the panel had was where to allocate resources like FTEs [full time equivalent] whether they should be to the undergraduate academic unit or to graduate academic unit or to institute and so on.

I think it's the wrong question. I think all of these should somehow go together. It's one unit. It's--I don't know how to rephrase the question, however--but I think, it's, something new has to happen. Academic disciplines must continue to transform themselves. Working in multicultural teams, multidisciplinary teams, understanding and working in a global context and societal context in general is much more critical today than it has been in the past.

We're talking about interdisciplinarity, but interdisciplinarity should not be a goal. It's a means to accomplish a goal. I think that's very important to bear in mind.

So how do we reorganize our activities? Well, there's some universities in the world, and I could refer to one Swedish university, as a matter of fact, that was created in 1960 that has been very successful against most people's beliefs. Of course, it did not get much funding in the beginning. Very similar to our situation. Anyway, the organization there, if anybody is interested, look up Linköping which actually organizes, puts all the resources into themes. And themes can change over time. But they are connected to, to societal issues, global issues. And in those themes we still have disciplines. Disciplines interact with each other. And it combines undergraduate education with graduate education. In such a system, the senior professors teaches senior students. Very senior students teaches more junior students. It becomes one, one big family, so to speak, in a way.

So I think that is one way of solving the issue on how to allocate the resources and create this new

student-centered university. Not to separate research from undergraduate education, because it should be the same thing. And I think, you know, as Shawn [Kantor] pointed out in the beginning in his statement here, universities have new challenges.

And I think one of the biggest challenge for the future is really competition, global competition among universities. Because the way we deliver our knowledge and participate in activities is not like it used to be. There's no time and space and borders between things anymore. Everything is instantaneous. And as the context requires. Immediate. Thank you. [*applause*]