

English version:

## **Scientists, listen to the science!**

*While most researchers accept the existence of the climate and sustainability crises, universities still function as if these crises did not exist. This has to change. Now.*

Universities' role has never been as important as in the ongoing existential sustainability crises, which include climate change, biodiversity loss, the transgression of several planetary boundaries and severe social, and global inequality. Our students need to acquire the skills to navigate a highly uncertain and unstable future. New knowledge is necessary to regenerate our relationship to the Earth and to each other. And disturbing scientific findings need to be voiced powerfully in the public sphere.

**Yet, the potential of Swedish universities to contribute to the transition to a sustainable society remains untapped – not least because of the inability of university leadership and senior academics to take the sustainability crises seriously.**

Swedish universities' responses to the sustainability crises have been slow and unambitious. Sure, a few solar panels were installed and some "green plans" were adopted. But scholars continue flying around around the world to academic conferences as if nothing was happening - and remain unwilling to give up their privileged lifestyle.

Most importantly, our teaching and research continues as if the sustainability crises did not exist. Think about it. It is possible to breeze through most Bachelor programs without gaining any serious understanding of the physical, chemical, biological, but also social and political causes and consequences of the sustainability crises – not even mentioning learning about what responding to these crises would require.

Of course, universities produce key climate research and green technologies. But research on polluting technologies also continues and theories that led to ecological disaster are often still hegemonic.

**As scholars, we are great at finding excuses to continue with 'business as usual'.**

Many scientists are concerned with preserving an image of impartiality. But this argument is confusing scientific objectivity with political neutrality. As scientists, we of course commit to the scientific method, rooted in empirical evidence and peer review. But scientific findings often have profound political implications. Selecting research topics that have the most societal relevance and communicate their findings to the general public is not being biased. It is doing our job well.

Others consider that sustainability issues are irrelevant to their field of research. This is based on a narrow understanding of sustainability as a problem of energy-transition, to be solved by engineers and politicians. However, the sustainability crises are justice issues. They are caused by an economic system which encourages the exploitation of nature and human fellows. Creating a sustainable, just society within the next ten years thus requires a transformation of every sector of society – for which the contribution of every academic field is needed.

Many colleagues are also just too burdened by a competitive academic system that places many researchers in situations of incredible precarity. Or they are paralyzed by policy guidelines that see education not as 'bildning' or training of enlightened citizens, but merely as preparation for the job market. While these factors go a long way into explaining passivity, they are also a motivation to demand a system where we can do our job well. We need to realise that the Earth and academics are victims of the same system, which prioritises competition and commodification instead of care and regeneration.

**To initiate the process of transforming the university to contribute more positively to a sustainable society, scholars and students need to build power through collective action.**

Small groups of staff members or students can push departments to adopt ambitious climate policies, revise course guides to mainstream sustainability issues, or obtain funding for research projects relevant to the transition. Even starting a book club on sustainability issues with colleagues can be a first step towards addressing the current lack of awareness and finding new research ideas.

For a durable shift towards sustainability in curriculums, teaching methods, and research priorities, institutional change needs to be initiated at governmental and university leadership levels. But time has shown that such reform from the top will not happen without impulsion and democratic pressure from below. To demand such change, scholars and students could build and engage in teacher/student assemblies, mass protests, or even civil disobedience.

The Week of Action for Social and Climate Justice on 15-22 September ([weekofaction.se](http://weekofaction.se)) – and in particular the Climate Strike and Demonstration on 22 September in Stockholm – are key occasions to make these demands heard. We – students, teachers, and researchers – are the university. Together, we have the power to change it.