

Tilburg University

On the good of the university

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On the Good of the University

Esther Keymolen

In 2022, Tilburg University entered its new strategic period which is marked by the publication of the university's vision, entitled: "Weaving Minds & Characters: Strategy towards 2027". The document provides direction for the steps Tilburg University wants to take in the coming years. It is centered around four key values that (should) guide the university community's behavior and choices: curious, caring, connected, and courageous. Explicitly preferring a rolling strategy, without committing itself "to action plans and programs for the next six years", Tilburg University invites its community to "contribute in an engaged way to the further development and realization of the Strategy".

With the book *The Good of the University* that you – as a curious reader have, rightfully so, picked up – the Tilburg Young Academy (TYA) has wholeheartedly accepted this invitation. TYA brings together early career academics from Tilburg University's various Schools with the goal of actively fostering a flourishing environment at the University. Bluntly put: they care and they are not afraid to show it!

Focusing on Tilburg University's key values – or the "four C's" as they are commonly referred to – the essays in this book flesh out what it takes to actually be(come) a good university. Backed up by scientific insights, the authors formulate both sharply and thoughtfully, as you can expect from engaged academics. This resulted in a book full of bold and thought-provoking ideas with a clear aim to shake up the status quo.

Several essays lay bare where the current university strategy deserves more depth or maybe too easily skims over intrinsic friction. For instance, what does it mean to strive for a safe university while there is also the call for innovation and interdisciplinarity, eminently uncertain endeavors? An entrepreneurial spirit is regarded as crucial at Tilburg University; but what does entrepreneurship come down to in the academic context? And if we know that university rankings and quantitative student evaluations are severely flawed and far from evidence-based, should not we oppose their use and develop our own instruments?

Taking the university's motto "understanding society" to heart, the authors do not shy away to reflect on how the university itself, as an inherent part of that society, should deal with societal challenges such as sustainability, gender equity, and the role of technology. To become a truly sustainable university might demand making well-considered choices concerning business relationships and investments. To become a truly gender-inclusive university might ask for substantial investments in setting up (or reviving) diversity recruitment programs. To become a university where technology not merely connects students and employees to increase efficiency, but actually caters to the needs of the community, it is of utmost importance to nurture a culture where the well-being of people always comes first. Several essays directly aim their attention at the core business of the university: research and education. By tackling topics such as open science and the task of educating responsible citizens, new pathways are sketched to ensure that the University does not merely talk the talk but walks the walk of a good university.

Reading this book, I am hopeful and inspired. But first and foremost, I also feel like I am getting a kick in the ass: to work harder, to listen better, and to use the bright and courageous ideas of young academics. I am sure that by reading this book, you will feel this kick too. Of course, change does not come over night and there are many things that we cannot control. But this does not relieve us of the obligation to ask ourselves every day: How am I contributing to a good university?

Prof. Esther Keymolen is vice-dean for research of Tilburg Law School. She was a founding member of the Tilburg Young Academy and its first president.