

1st Liberal Education Student Symposium (LESS)

Final Report

Outreach Committee, University College Freiburg (UCF)

“Education F(r)ees or Freeing Education?”

The Interdependencies Between Liberal Education and Politics in Theory and Practice

— Kandelblickhütte Vöhrenbach, 13-15 April 2018 —

From April 13 until April 15 2018, a group of 37 students from Liberal Education programs¹ located at eight different European universities² gathered at the Kandelblickhütte, a Black Forest hut, following the invitation of the University College Freiburg (student-run) Outreach Committee. Under the overarching theme of “*Education F(r)ees or Freeing Education? - The Interdependencies between Liberal Education and Politics in Theory and Practice,*” the students discussed issues involving the effects society or politics have on Liberal Education and the other way around. Topics included, for example, the philosophical foundations of Liberal Education, the aim of Liberal Education to shape citizens and, vice versa, politics shaping (Liberal) Education through, inter alia, tuition fees. A special quality of the symposium, as compared to the Liberal Education Student Conferences (LESC), was the rather small scale of the event, the personal atmosphere, and the almost entirely student-based input. Supplemented with two keynote talks by UCF instructors, the participants themselves contributed the events that became the building blocks of a diverse and fascinating academic [program](#) featuring a variety of different settings. Thus, the symposium was able to create an atmosphere of intrinsic motivation, to allow for critical and fruitful discussions, and - most importantly - to connect like-minded yet diverse students from all over Europe.

The main goal of the symposium, as announced in the [concept paper](#), was to “to enable students from different universities to interact in a personal setting and continue their academic reflection and exchange on Liberal Education from various perspectives.” Taking this goal as a measure for the conference’s success, the five following points give every reason to judge the symposium as successful:

- 1) The symposium was able to attract 37 invested and motivated students from eight European universities who actively connected with each other at the event.

¹Often called “Liberal Arts and Sciences”.

² University College Freiburg, Leuphana University Lüneburg, University of Birmingham, Utrecht University, University College Maastricht, Leiden University College, University College Tilburg, and European Humanities University Vilnius

- 2) Interaction and a personal setting were self-evident, as participants were responsible not only for their own academic contributions but also for very practical tasks such as cooking or cleaning.
- 3) Both the two well-received keynotes and all of the participant contributions encompassed active academic reflection and exchange. There was hardly a moment when students were not listening to, discussing and exchanging ideas.
- 4) The liberty of gathering at a Black Forest hut and the unusual student-led setting enabled contributors to think outside the box and implement a varied set of activities, ranging from walking discussions to debates in the Karl Popper format and cultural simulations - to name just a few.
- 5) Documentation of events was taken care of by all participants and we expect to be able to publish an ebook containing all proceedings in July.

Finally, we - the Outreach Committee - were extremely pleased to successfully reach out to and get to know peers from so many different places and with such diverse educational backgrounds. We will take on board the feedback we received and are looking forward to future LESSes, possibly organised by one college or multiple cooperating colleges. Contact details of the participants have been shared internally and we are exceptionally grateful to all participants, contributors, supporters, especially the UCF Students Council for the financial support and UCF staff, namely Paul Sterzel, Nina Kupke, Dr. Nicholas Buchanan, and Dr. Ryan Plumley, for the administrative and organisational support.

Freiburg, May 22 2018

UCF Outreach Committee

