

# Strategy 2030 at The Faculty of Social Sciences

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## Contents

Introduction .....	1
Status and trends .....	1
Research.....	2
Introduction .....	2
A. Outstanding Research.....	3
B. The Other Qualities of Research.....	3
Education .....	4
Sub-goal 1: Outstanding Quality.....	4
Sub-goal 2: Relevance for Societal Challenges .....	4
Knowledge in Use.....	5
Organization and Work Environment .....	5

## Introduction

### Status and trends

Society is facing challenges that require current social science knowledge of high quality. Current examples are climate change and green transition, challenges to democracy, economic and social inequality both nationally and internationally, pandemics and other crises, migration, and value diversity. Through its core tasks and social mission, academia can contribute to solving these and other challenges over the next decade.

There is strong and increasing international competition for the best professionals and the best students. The University of Oslo (UiO) is no longer Norway's largest university and no longer the sole university in the capital. The expectations placed on universities are complex and changing. Research is expected to be of high quality, but it is also expected to contribute to solving societal challenges and to social innovation. A working life with constant change requires the institution to contribute to the continuous development of the skills of its workforce through lifelong learning.

The faculty's unique strength is curiosity-driven and researcher-initiated research with a solid disciplinary anchoring of high quality throughout the social sciences, and research-based education that builds upon this. The faculty's academic milieu have been very successful in applying for external funding. The faculty's staff compete successfully for available research funding with few directives on theme and issue.

The faculty's total budget has grown from 630 million Norwegian kroner (NOK) in 2017 to just under NOK 730 million in 2021. At the beginning of the strategic period, the faculty has 650 full-time employees and 4,600 registered students.

The most important task for the Faculty of Social Sciences in the next decade is to further develop, manage and disseminate social science knowledge through research and education, and by facilitating the use of this knowledge. The faculty shall carry out research and education of outstanding quality and with relevance to major societal challenges. It is a stated goal that the faculty shall house the best academic milieux in their respective fields in Norway, that all academic milieux are among the leading ones in the Nordic countries, and that they also do well in a European comparison.

The Faculty of Social Sciences aims to educate knowledgeable and reflective students who have good prerequisites for further learning. The faculty is to be a good meeting place for students and staff with different opinions, values, and perspectives. It is a fundamental value in the academic community between staff, and between staff and students, that we are exposed to and discuss theories and ideas, also those we deeply disagree with. Exchange of ideas shall take place through arguments and counterarguments, not by shielding from perspectives we don't like.

The faculty has substantial economic flexibility at the start of the strategic period. The faculty will use this room for maneuver to strengthen research and teaching activities at its academic units and to further develop the faculty's support functions related to the core tasks of research and teaching.

The faculty's academic units are primarily organized around academic disciplines and have a high degree of autonomy. This organization provides good conditions for strategic subject development in strong academic environments with established quality requirements based on subject-specific evaluations and subject-specific priorities. Parts of the faculty's activities are thematically organized and these also demonstrate good results. The faculty has a particular responsibility to maintain a high quality of the services that are not easily created in a decentralized system. The faculty shall enable optimal support functions and contribute to finding a suitable division of labour between UiO centrally, the faculty and the academic units for all such support functions.

The faculty has 28 study programs at various levels and offers research-based teaching in a broad range of social science disciplines and in thematically limited interdisciplinary study programs. Applications to the faculty's study programs are good, and students are well qualified and motivated. Continuing to strengthen the quality of research and teaching is the overarching goal for the faculty's strategy for the period 2021-2030.

## Research

### Introduction

A transition to a sustainable society would mean a transformation requiring significant effort from the social sciences. It is therefore critical that the Faculty of Social Sciences stands ready to continue its contributions to understanding the society we live in, and how it can be transformed in a sustainable direction.

## A. Outstanding Research

The Faculty wishes to promote applications to calls for outstanding research, such as the ERC and thematic research in the EU, and large projects at the Research Council of Norway. A focus on such applications will contribute to making the research conducted at academic units more visible, not least as a contribution to a sustainable society.

The Faculty believes that all research projects are improved with good leadership and will facilitate this. The Faculty wishes to train our research leaders through the research management courses that the university offers. We are particularly concerned that more of our foremost female researchers shall gain skills in research management. We will work to ensure that the university's courses in research management are adapted to researchers in the social sciences.

Even with decentralization and decisions taken at the discipline level, it is important that the Faculty maintains strong competency in research support. The Faculty will continue its efforts on application support. During the strategy period, we will also expand skills in data protection and social science data science.

During the previous strategic period, it became increasingly clear that the social sciences have unique needs for research infrastructure: needs that differ from those of other subjects. The Faculty will develop its own strategy for research infrastructure for the Faculty. We will work to obtain funding to establish databases. And we will continue the work to ensure that researchers' access to registry data in the form of raw data, especially from Statistics Norway, is secured in the most efficient way possible.

## B. The Other Qualities of Research

**Interdisciplinary collaboration.** The core of the Faculty lies in the discipline-oriented departments, and the further development of the social sciences is crucial for the Faculty's future. At the same time, there is a growing need to find forms of collaboration across disciplines. Good collaboration between disciplines occurs when a research theme is approached in different ways and from various angles. The Faculty wishes to promote such collaboration, where disciplines retain and enrich each other, thereby advancing research in a way that a single discipline alone cannot manage. The Faculty is particularly interested in promoting international research collaboration, and we want our researchers to contribute to the university's initiatives UiO: Energy, UiO: Democracy, and UiO: Life Sciences.

**Research ethics** is becoming more and more important. The Faculty must ensure that staff are familiar with laws and guidelines, such as the GDPR rules and the guidelines of NESH and NEM. Research ethics is not only an individual responsibility but also a management responsibility and an institutional responsibility. It is therefore important that the management at the Faculty and academic units keep up with the practical ethical work at the Faculty and further develop our routines to uphold the institutional responsibility the Faculty has.

The authorities' wishes for **open research** will shape research practices during the strategy period. In particular, the need for sharing research data, and open access to research publications will be central. The Faculty will follow these developments and contribute to ensuring that the increased openness is shaped and filled with content that preserves the academic freedom and integrity of the researchers and allows the Faculty to employ researchers of the highest quality as possible and to conduct as good research as possible.

Good research becomes even better when linked to good **teaching**. The Faculty wishes to develop further the positive interaction at the Faculty between research and teaching.

## Education

**Overarching strategic goals:** Education of excellent quality and relevance to the major societal challenges.

The Faculty of Social Sciences, as a leading educational institution nationally and internationally, must deliver education of outstanding quality and relevance to the major societal challenges. Outstanding teaching must be research-based. The faculty's most important contribution to excellent teaching relevant to sustainable societal development occurs by ensuring that our academic units have the best possible conditions to operate and develop their core activities.

### Sub-goal 1: Outstanding Quality

Research-based teaching is a unique feature of universities. Through continuous focus on academic quality for both teachers and students, in our courses and programs, and with support in effective organization, the Faculty of Social Sciences will distinguish itself as an outstanding teaching and learning arena in the social sciences.

*Teaching staff:* Outstanding teaching skills and commitment to further develop teaching shall be valued and emphasized in hiring and promoted through measures for career development and merit.

*Students:* The faculty shall recruit and retain the best students, those who are motivated, talented, and interested in our subjects. Students are expected to actively and responsibly engage with their own learning, including participating actively in learning and related research activities, engage in academic discussions, contribute to student democracy, and be aware of their role in shaping their own learning environment.

*Courses and Programs:* The faculty shall work on study quality and ensure that our courses and programs are founded on the best research-based knowledge available, nationally and internationally, at any given time. The faculty shall promote the work done by the academic units in developing and adopting knowledge-based, subject-related, varied, and student-active teaching methods that consider privacy concerns and that stimulate students' curiosity, independence, initiative, and critical thinking abilities. Students shall develop skills that strengthen their academic identity, competence, and sense of work-life relevance.

*Organization:* The faculty shall facilitate efficiency and professionalism in teaching. The faculty shall contribute to effective communication, information flow, and relevant decision-making across UiO's organizational levels for education management, both academically, pedagogically, and administratively. Students' influence on matters related to both the quality of teaching and the learning environment shall be secured. The faculty must take responsibility for ensuring that the whole teaching activity represents the best utilization of the faculty's resources at any given time.

### Sub-goal 2: Relevance for Societal Challenges

Sustainability, including climate and environment, interdisciplinarity, the labour market's need for flexibility, and lifelong learning are central national and international priority areas for the coming decades. Academia plays an important role in educating professionals who are capable of learning, with

a skill-based competence that is analytical and with a research methodology that can contribute to adaptability, generate new knowledge, and find solutions both within their subject areas and in collaboration with others. The faculty's most important contribution as a learning institution to sustainable societal development is through ensuring that our units have the best possible framework conditions for providing excellent research-based and relevant teaching and learning.

*Sustainability:* Social science skills are crucial for creating a sustainable future. Teaching at our faculty shall actively contribute knowledge in all relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

*Democracy:* The faculty's teaching in its courses and programs shall contribute relevant knowledge about the prerequisites and functioning of democracy.

*Climate and Environment:* The faculty's teaching through its courses and programs shall contribute relevant social knowledge that supports the green transition.

*Lifelong learning:* The faculty shall contribute to the focus on lifelong learning through flexible programs and teaching methods.

*Social and Labor Market Relevance:* The faculty shall facilitate our graduates in gaining social science skills that meets the needs of the labour market and society in both the short and long term.

*Interdisciplinary teaching offerings:* The faculty shall promote relevant interdisciplinary teaching collaborations both locally, nationally, and internationally and ensure the most efficient organization of such teaching initiatives.

## Knowledge in Use

It is a goal that social science research is utilized by relevant actors. The faculty will facilitate the use of the employees' knowledge and expertise in the best possible way, while preserving the integrity of the researchers. Staff members shall be encouraged to participate in public committees, expert groups, and other forums that utilize knowledge and contribute to social change and innovation.

The University of Oslo (UiO) applies a broad concept of innovation in its work with innovation. Social innovation, understood as "ideas that work," is a natural part of UiO's innovation efforts. The faculty will encourage staff to use UiO's various innovation arenas and bodies, especially where the staff themselves lack direct connections to potential users of social science research.

The Faculty of Social Sciences' proximity to Norway's most attractive labour market for social scientists shall be better utilized. Interaction with organizations, other knowledge organizations/businesses, local industry, and local and national authorities is valuable to the faculty and can, among other things, provide the faculty with important impulses in the work with lifelong learning. The faculty shall be a resource for the local, national, and international knowledge community.

## Organization and Work Environment

*A discipline-based organization:* The faculty's academic units are primarily organized around disciplines and have a high degree of autonomy. This organizational structure creates good conditions for strategic subject development in strong environments with established quality requirements based on discipline-specific assessments and priorities. This organizational structure has been very successful, measured by

the quality of the research and education the units represent. The faculty wishes to continue with a discipline-specific organizational model in which the units have a high degree of autonomy. This form of organization presupposes that the academic units are robust and can make real priorities related to applications, recruitment processes, dimensioning, large scale initiatives, and other disciplinary strategic choices.

The faculty does not wish to establish new permanent academic units in the coming strategic period. It may sometimes be appropriate to organize one or more larger research projects as a center. Any new centers at the faculty in the strategic period shall, as a rule, be under a department and have an end date or a plan for how, after a certain time, the center would be phased into its parent unit.

There shall be a good correlation between available resources and the academic unit's level of activity over time.

*Staffing structure:* Research-based education is an important characteristic of universities. This implies that vacancies for permanent positions are predominantly announced as split positions - split between research and teaching, preferably as associate professor positions. Vacant positions shall be advertised internationally unless there are compelling reasons to deviate from the principle of open, international competition.

Our students shall be taught by active researchers, including the faculty's top researchers. All members of staff in split positions shall teach.

*Working Environment:* All employees of the faculty shall have reason to be proud of working at The Faculty of Social Sciences and have a conscious relationship to how their own work supports the core tasks of research, education, and knowledge in use. The Faculty shall offer a stimulating and generous working environment where there is room for disagreement and contention. The Faculty shall conduct and follow up working environment surveys. The Faculty shall ensure good linguistic and other integration of employees who do not master a Scandinavian language at the time of hiring.

*Skills Development and Career Support:* The Faculty shall provide well-functioning services and support functions and facilitate both academic and administrative staff in developing their skills in areas relevant to their work. The managerial tasks have become more complex and demanding, and the Faculty shall ensure that managers receive sufficient training and support in their work. This applies to heads of departments/centers, heads of research, heads of education, and administrative managers. The Faculty will implement career support measures for academic staff in the early stages of their career.

*Equality:* The Faculty aims for gender balance in permanent academic positions. At the beginning of this strategic period we are some distance away from the goal. The challenges are not identical at different academic units, so we need various types of measures, and we must use them flexibly. The Faculty shall work actively to raise awareness of gender equality challenges at the academic units and to remove possible organizational and cultural barriers to equality. The Faculty shall actively operate within the scope of its gender equality policy.

The Faculty desires as even a gender balance as possible in study programs. The Faculty shall work purposefully to achieve a more even gender balance in those study programs with an uneven gender balance, especially the professional program in psychology.

*Buildings and Sustainable Operation:* Although the refurbishment of Eilert Sundt's house at the beginning of the strategic period facilitates densification of staff, several of the units have space challenges. The Faculty shall facilitate the use of digital solutions where appropriate, for example with regard to meeting activities. It remains a goal to congregate the entire faculty in one location. The refurbishment of Eilert Sundt's house is an important contribution to the more climate-friendly operation of the Faculty. The Faculty will work to ensure that the rest of the organization is also operated in a climate-friendly manner, in line with UiO's comprehensive climate strategy.

*University Democracy:* The Faculty will work to create a greater degree of interest and participation in the election of representatives to the Faculty Board. The Faculty will work to strengthen student democracy at the Faculty.

- *This strategy document is a slightly adopted version of a translation by AI - UiOGPT Version 4. The AI generated translation was from the Norwegian Strategy 2030*