



# World Dignity University

Bringing dignity to learning, globally and locally

**A Project of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies**

## **Project Summary**

### **Development Team:**

**Evelin G. Lindner, M.D., Ph.D. (Dr. med.), Ph.D. (Dr. psych.)**

Founding President of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies:  
e.g.lindner@psykologi.uio.no

**Linda M. Hartling, Ph.D.**, Director: lhartling@humiliationstudies.org

**Richard L. Slaven, Ph.D.**, Business Director: slaven@brandeis.edu

**Ulrich Spalthoff Ph.D. (Dr. rer. nat.)**, Director of Project Development and  
System Administration: uli@spalthoff-web.de

**Michael Britton, Ph.D., Ed.D.**, Board of Directors: michael.brtn@gmail.com

**April 2011**



## Building Equal Dignity through Excellence in Scholarship

### Dignity, Peace, and Survival

As we have seen illustrated in the rapid changes occurring in the Middle East, working for equal dignity is not only crucial for reducing human suffering, it is an essential pathway to peacemaking and thus human survival. Indeed, as Ole Danbolt Mjøs, MD, Ph.D., former Chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, reminds us, “the future of humankind is at stake” (Lindner, 2010).

For the last decade, **Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS)** has brought together a community of distinguished scholars, activists, leaders, and practitioners dedicated to building social and environmental sustainability through dignifying dialogue and collaborative action. We work to end all pernicious and pervasive forms of indignity, in particular, profoundly humiliating practices that lead to violent conflict, locally and globally.

“If I’ve learned one thing covering world affairs, it’s this: The single most underappreciated force in international relations is humiliation.”

— Thomas Friedman, author of “The World is Flat”

HumanDHS analyzes and illuminates the many ways we can build mutually beneficial relationships, relationships *rooted in the principle of equal dignity for all*. Furthermore, its transdisciplinary, global approach aims at realizing the key tenet of the **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights**:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

As a learning community, HumanDHS efforts have demonstrated that dignity is not something one gives to others; *it is a way of being in relationships*. Thus, it needs to be cultivated through thoughtful actions that consistently communicate mutual respect and build mutual understanding across differences. Moreover, equal dignity will not be achieved through individual change; it will be achieved through changing relationships—relationships at all levels, e.g., interpersonal, social, and international—and these changes will promote dignity!

Inspired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s call to establish a “Global Educational Trust” (Lindner, 2010, p. viii), the HumanDHS community has come to believe that there is an urgent need for an independent educational system organized specifically to promote and advance *equality in dignity* in the world. This will be a powerful and enterprising vehicle linking together institutions and individuals who place dignity at the core of learning: a **World Dignity University**.

A **World Dignity University** will not only create new possibilities for promoting peace, but also new possibilities for ensuring the survival of generations of human beings, now and far into the future.

## Why a World Dignity University?

We are living in times when nothing short of global cooperation can successfully address the dire problems developing in the world today. Cooperation across vast differences begins with building a strong and resilient “relational infrastructure,” a relational system grounded in equal dignity and mutual respect. Education is among the most effective vehicles for cultivating the crucial relational principles and practices of equal dignity. Therefore, our aim is to invite educators, academics, and practitioners from around the globe to share responsibility for leading the world toward greater cooperation by bringing dignity to learning, both locally and globally.

## A Model of Global Academic Cooperation

We are not envisioning another locally based physical institution. Rather, we are looking to build partnerships through the use of emerging technology to generate a new model of cooperative global education. This would be a highly flexible, highly responsive integrative system easily usable by existing universities and colleges, as well as individuals and communities around the world. It will incorporate the latest developments in self-directed learning and multi-centered studies to advance the complex knowledge and skills essential to the global proliferation of dignity and enduring peace.

A **World Dignity University** must respect and draw from global wisdom. Our vision is to connect across cultures, disciplines, and institutions, serving the important goal of creating *unity in diversity*. Technology allows us to easily build cyber-bridges across cultures, disciplines, and institutions, opening the door to new possibilities and innovative ideas.

This initiative is strongly committed to collaborative efforts that insure that the **World Dignity University** becomes a unique, globally inclusive learning community that avoids duplicating the achievements of others who work on similar issues. *Unity in diversity* will be the guiding principle at the core of a continuously evolving growth process. Consequently, the focus will be on developing extensive and diverse partnerships with individuals and supportive institutions that wish to share responsibility for building a global vision of dignifying lives through learning. Much more than any existing institution, the **World Dignity University** will be a humanizing, human-to-human collaborative learning movement.

## Who Will Benefit from this Vision?

The **World Dignity University** will network individuals and groups around the planet that share a common vision, that is, educating for peace and dignity. It will both facilitate connection and be a global role model of intellectual leadership and international collaboration, transcending corporate and nationalistic interests. The World Dignity University initiative will depend on the synergetic support and accumulated knowledge of all participating partners.

**Many will benefit from this innovative model of global cooperation:**

- **Academia will benefit** because the **World Dignity University** will both facilitate and be a global role model of intellectual leadership and international collaboration.
- **Practitioners, activists, and scholars will benefit** because the **World Dignity University** will bridge the gap between practice and theory by including both scholars and practitioners, enhancing the quality of research as well as action.

- **Communities and families—especially underserved and marginalized communities—will benefit** because the **World Dignity University** will actively pursue the human right to education.
- **Humankind will benefit** because the **World Dignity University** will encourage collaborations that lead to life-saving social and environmental solutions, ensuring human survival as we face inevitable global crises together.

## How We Will Go About

Inspired by Margaret Mead’s adage “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,” the **World Dignity University** will be a platform for building global relationships between individuals and communities, scholars and practitioners, all those who share a common vision of educating for equality in dignity.

## Building on the Work of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Community

The HumanDHS community offers an optimal starting point for bringing together the expertise and knowledge we need to form a **World Dignity University**. HumanDHS is connected to more than 1,200 personally-invited members, has several thousand supporters, and 40,000 people from 180 countries visit the website each year. Further, it has more than 250 distinguished scholars and practitioners on its [Global Advisory Board](#). Members of HumanDHS have well-established connections with colleges, universities, and other institutions around the world.

The richness of the HumanDHS transdisciplinary approach is illustrated in the backgrounds and experiences of its leadership team:

- **Founding President Evelin Lindner, M.D., Ph.D. (Dr. med.), Ph.D. (Dr. psych.)**, lives as a world citizen to develop a global understanding of dignity. She is one of the world’s leading scholars on the experience of humiliation and humiliation theory.
- **Director Linda Hartling, Ph.D.**, conducted the earliest research assessing the experience of humiliation and is an expert on relational-cultural theory. She is the past Associate Director of the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College (Boston, Massachusetts), the largest women’s research center in the United States.
- **Business Director Richard Slaven, Ph.D.**, is the former Business Administrator for the Martin Fisher School of Physics at Brandeis University (Boston, Massachusetts), with decades of experience managing millions of dollars in grants and operating budgets.
- **Director of Project Development and System Administration Ulrich (Uli) Spalthoff, Ph.D. (Dr. rer. nat.)**, is the former Director of Advanced Technologies at Alcatel-Lucent in Germany and France, highly experienced in mentoring start-ups and consulting high-tech companies in IT, telecommunication and semiconductor industries from countries all over the world.
- **HumanDHS Board Member, Michael Britton, Ed.D., Ph.D.**, is a practicing psychologist and scholar who conducted interview research with retired U.S. military commanders/planners who had

dealt with nuclear weapons during the Cold War, exploring their experience of the moral responsibilities involved. He has lectured internationally on the implications of neuroscience for our global future, and provides training for conflict resolution specialists on applications of neuroscience to their work.

## Immediate Objectives

The **World Dignity University** will be a human-to-human academic “network of networks” designed to encourage effective intellectual collaboration. This initiative will begin with a one-year foundational phase that includes the following immediate objectives:

- **Conduct Exploratory Conversations with Key Collaborators:**  
We will use a participatory approach to gain feedback about this project as it evolves.
- **Identify and Connect with Strong Partners**  
We will establish new and develop existing connections with scholars, practitioners, and other interested individuals who wish to co-create relevant courses and materials.
- **Design a Fluid Technology-Based Structure:**  
We will develop an Internet-based learning platform that integrates a learning management system and other web-based resources.

These objectives will allow us to establish a fluid and flexible framework for facilitating global collaboration while providing a firm foundation for ongoing development of this initiative.

## Global Collaboration is the Most Dignifying Approach to Excellence in Scholarship

Ultimately, we envision the **World Dignity University** as a model of global academic collaboration that keeps equality in dignity at the core of its curriculum! Unlike any other network, it will provide a platform for a world community of scholars and practitioners united in their efforts to realize equal dignity through excellence in scholarship. Most of all, it will offer an innovative and urgently needed new pathway to social and environmental sustainability based on co-created learning that dignifies the lives of all people.

## References

- Lindner, E. (2010). *Gender, Humiliation, and Global Security*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Friedman, T. L. (2005). *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux