



World Dignity University
Bringing Dignity to Learning

Advancing the Promise of the World Dignity University

By David C. Yamada

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I. INTRODUCTION

This short paper is designed to invite discussion within the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HDHS) community about how to advance the mission of the World Dignity University (WDU), founded in 2010 by HDHS leaders and friends to create educational opportunities that support human dignity and reduce the experience of humiliation in our society.

THE WORLD DIGNITY UNIVERSITY

<http://www.worlddignityuniversity.org/joo/>
<https://www.humiliationstudies.org/education/education.php>

Framed by a strategy paper written by Evelin Lindner and Linda Hartling (http://www.worlddignityuniversity.org/joo/images/documents/world_dignity_university_strategic_plan_version_14_september_2010.pdf), the World Dignity University was launched in 2010 as the educational arm of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies. WDU adopted this broad-based mission:

We are living in times when nothing short of global cooperation can successfully address the dire problems developing in the world today. Education provides the most promising path toward building “a global culture of cooperation,” a culture that advances the principles of mutual respect, equality in dignity, unity and diversity, and environmental stewardship, the progenitors of lasting peace.

We have come to believe that a “**World University**” — a human-to-human network of networks — is a powerful and highly practical approach to realizing an inclusive and creative model of learning. We invite educators, scholars, practitioners, activists, learners, and people from all walks of life, from all corners of the earth, to share responsibility for leading the world toward greater cooperation by joining us in founding the first World Dignity University.

With your participation, the World Dignity University will become a global role model of excellence in scholarship, dignifying dialogue, and intellectual cooperation that ensures the survival of humankind on this planet.

Since its founding, members of the HDHS community have engaged in a variety of educational initiatives under the WDU banner, as summarized on a dedicated page of the HDHS website: <https://www.humiliationstudies.org/education/education.php>. Against the backdrop of these meaningful activities has been the challenge of growing WDU with finite resources of time and

¹ Member, Board of Directors, Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies; Professor of Law and Director, New Workplace Institute, Suffolk University Law School, Boston, MA. Email: dyamada@suffolk.edu.

funding, constricted by the demands of everyday life for many core members of our community. Among other things, aspirations of creating standalone degree programs have been shelved for the time being. This has made it more difficult to advance a broader meta-objective of HDHS's educational work, namely, to mainstream a human dignity framework in study, research, and practice.

II. THINKING BIGGER, BUT REALISTICALLY SO

Even if, at least for now, the creation of standalone degree programs requires resources beyond our current means, we can engage in initiatives that help to mainstream a human dignity perspective in all levels of education. I will divide this section into two parts, the first containing suggested activities for WDU in general, the second containing several subject-matter topics that I would offer to work on to advance WDU's contributions.

- A. **Organizing Initiatives** – During the past few months, I have had several valuable exchanges with people who are interested in the future of WDU. These conversations have persuaded me that finding the best ways to build WDU's outreach, with an emphasis on “energy efficient” initiatives that provide maximum outreach and accessibility
 1. **Resource Library** – We have at our disposal a treasure trove of written and recorded material that can be used by (1) educators who seek resources on human dignity for their courses; (2) researchers and scholars who seek the same for their scholarship; and (3) independent learners who wish to learn more about theories and applications for human dignity. However, these materials are not necessarily easily accessible. Our HDHS website, for example, is filled to the brim with valuable articles and papers, but it is more of an archive than a usable resource library. Creation of an online resource library, including bibliographical information and direct links to a curated collection of materials, would provide a valuable starting place for those who seek to tap into the rich array of materials we have to offer. (**Need:** Resource library director who can coordinate the development of a resource library on the HDHS/WDU site.)
 2. **Continuing Education** – This catch-all category can include online lectures, series, and courses, old-fashioned “on paper” resources, and other offerings on a wide variety of topics related to human dignity. Online offerings can use the digital platform developed by Uli Spalthoff, veteran HDHS board member. An eventual objective could be the building of a catalog of freely available course and lecture series offerings that could be added to a WDU resource library. (**Need:** Continuing education director who can coordinate the development and posting of continuing education offerings, including working with the HDHS/WDU online platform.)
 3. **Self-Directed Learning** – We can develop templates and bibliographical suggestions to support self-directed learning initiatives about various aspects of human dignity. In *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers* (1975), renowned adult education professor Malcolm S. Knowles defined “self-directed learning” as:

...a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Self-directed learning projects can range from the brief and informal to the extended and detailed. The latter are often associated with “DIY” initiatives that attempt to mirror formal degree programs, with more freedom and flexibility, but without tuition and required courses. Examples include:

- An “Open Masters” community devoted to fostering independent learning that mirrors self-designed master’s degree programs: <https://www.openmasters.org>
- Designing and undertaking an “Informal Ph.D.”: <https://www.self-directed.org/tp/designing-learning-paths/>

On these notes, we may also find guidance and inspiration from two organizations:

- International Society for Self-Directed Learning
<https://www.sdlglobal.com/journals>
- The Alliance for Self-Directed Education
<https://www.self-directed.org/>

(Need: Self-directed learning director who can coordinate and post self-directed learning plans and resources.)

- 4. Partnerships** – We may not currently have the resources to create our own degree programs, but we can partner with existing educational institutions to develop offerings grounded in human dignity studies. An example of this is our current partnership with the Western Institute for Social Research in Berkeley, California (<https://www.wisr.edu/>). WISR is a tiny, independent, storefront college that has been offering degree programs in education, psychology, community service, and social change work since 1978. Several years ago, as a member of the boards of both HDHS and WISR, I helped to forge a partnership that enables WISR students to specialize in human dignity studies, starting with a core course led by Linda Hartling and Evelin Lindner. This partnership and others can help us to expand our outreach. **(Need:** Someone who can develop and promote these partnership learning opportunities.)

- B. Personal Interests** – My deliberations on the potential future of WDU have prompted my own personal brainstorming about subject-matter emphases. Here are three that are of special interest to me:

- 1. Global Leadership** – Terms such as “global leadership” are overwhelmingly associated with economic, political, and social dominance in a neoliberal context. Degree programs using global leadership or similar monikers tend to be offered through graduate schools

of business. I would like to see the human dignity community embrace this term as well, but with *global stewardship* and *servant leadership* themes, rather than mainly market-based ones. Put another way, I would like us to conceptualize global leadership in a way that emphasizes our roles as stewards of, and servants to, the health of this planet and its inhabitants.

Earlier this fall, I did a quick Google search to see how many “hits” certain relevant terms would yield. Here is what I found:

- Search “global leadership” = ~1,060,000,000 hits
- Search “global stewardship” = ~93,000,000 hits
- Search using “servant leadership” = ~57,000,000 hits

Clearly, among these terms, “global leadership” holds sway. Hence my belief that we should invoke it to advance dignitarian values, while elevating global stewardship and servant leadership in association with it. More concretely, I would encourage the HDHS community to develop educational offerings for engaging in global leadership within our spheres of influence and voice, using the WDU frame.

- 2. Therapeutic Jurisprudence** – I have also been very active in the therapeutic jurisprudence (TJ) community, and I see a natural bond between TJ and HDHS. Therapeutic jurisprudence is an interdisciplinary school of theory and practice that examines the therapeutic versus anti-therapeutic properties of law and public policy, legal procedures, and legal institutions. I and others (most notably, Michael Perlin) have discussed aspects of TJ at many HDHS December workshops. In 2019, I completed a term as founding board chair of the International Society for Therapeutic Jurisprudence (<https://intljtj.com>), a non-profit, learned association dedicated to public education about TJ. I have also recently published a comprehensive survey of TJ, “Therapeutic Jurisprudence: Foundations, Expansion, and Assessment” (*University of Miami Law Review*, 2021; https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3777552), which I believe further illustrates the natural ties between TJ and HDHS.
- 3. The Dignity of an Intellectual Life** – Dr. Zena Hitz (St. John’s College, Maryland) makes a compelling case for linking human dignity and the life of the mind in her 2020 book, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*. I am persuaded by this book and other learning experiences that the ability to have an independent, intellectual life – one that is, to borrow from Virginia Woolf, a “room” of one’s own to learn, explore, and reflect – can be part of living in a state of dignity, even under otherwise trying life circumstances.

III. THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

These possible initiatives and any others are enabled by the resources that we have within our community to make them happen. We can only do what we realistically can do, without burning ourselves out or feeling guilty about that which does not get done because of other

commitments in our lives. That said, if we are to go forward with a full-throated effort to build the World Dignity University, then I believe that we need an ongoing ***coordinating committee*** comprised of members of the HDHS community who are committed to serving in leadership and coordinating positions.

Speaking for myself, I am ready to walk this talk toward advancing these possibilities and to work with others in building this wonderful piece of the human dignity movement. I hope that we can assemble a wonderful group of people from this special community to advance this initiative.

-WDU-