# THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMICS: FROM ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

## Report of the Working Group on Research and Engagement

Competence Centre in Sustainability
Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in Ethics

University of Lausanne, May 2022

UNIL | Université de Lausanne

Main author: Augustin Fragnière

With the collaboration of Nicola Banwell, Nina Suckow and the members of the Research and Engagement Working Group: Fabrizio Butera, Danielle Chaperon, Nathalie Chèvre, Clémence Demay, Marc de Perrot, Nadja Eggert, Philippe Gagnebin, Jérôme Goudet, Alain Kaufmann and Guido Palazzo.

Contact: augustin.fragniere@unil.ch

# Table of contents

# Summary

## Origin, aim and structure of the report

This report is a synthesis of the reflections of the Working Group on Research and Engagement of the University of Lausanne (UNIL). This working group was formed in the spring of 2020 by the Competence Centre in Sustainability (CCD) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in Ethics (CIRE) at the request of the UNIL Rectorate. The report is presented in the context of a renewed interest in academics' public engagement and advocacy, especially on environmental and discrimination issues. The need for an in-depth reflection on the subject arises from the involvement of a growing number of UNIL academics in public debate and in activism, as well as from the many queries addressed to the Rectorate as a result. **This report aims to clarify the issues and challenges related to researchers' public engagement and to provide UNIL's Rectorate with both analytical insights and suggestions for action.** The report begins with a description of the general context for the topic and definitions of key concepts (Part 1). This is followed by an overview of the practices and perceptions of engagement within the UNIL community based on empirical data (Part 2), as well as more reflective comments drawn from the literature and the working group's discussions (Part 3).

The main message of the report is decidedly in favour of researchers' public engagement – in line with the University's mission – and of UNIL's support of it. **In particular, the report affirms the need to uphold and defend academic freedom and not to hinder the freedom of speech of scholars.** The report notes, however, that academic freedom comes with the responsibility to adhere to the ethical standards of academic professions, at both the individual and the institutional levels. The choice of whether and how to be engaged depends on one's understanding of the role of science and of scientists in the public sphere, and is therefore a matter of personal choice. For this reason, the report suggests courses of action aimed at promoting a culture of engagement and a working environment conducive to the development of such a culture, so that those who wish to be engaged are well placed to be so.

## Part 1: Definitions and clarifications

The working group's reflections start from the observation that the actions or public statements of researchers give rise to reactions, both positive and negative, inside and outside of the university. The negative reactions most often arise from the sentiment that researchers have a duty of neutrality or impartiality that they are not respecting, or from questions about how the freedom of speech of academics relates to their status as public employees. Given this, **in this report the term *public engagement* (or simply *engagement*) is used to refer to**

**any interaction with the public whose content has a normative aspect**, that is, to any evaluative or prescriptive statement on moral, political or social issues. This definition is therefore narrower than that sometimes used in the literature, which includes all types of interactions with society outside of academia, but broader than mere activism. The definition proposed here encompasses activism, but is not limited to that particular form of action.

Interaction with society and the fostering of public debate are integral to the University's mission, as is explicitly stated in the Law on the University of Lausanne and in the UNIL Charter. Thus, engagement as defined here cannot be considered a mere supplement to research and teaching; it is a key function of the academic community. However, it can be carried out in various ways and by adopting **a range of roles, such as expert, researcher, teacher, science communicator or ordinary citizen**. These different roles are subject to differing expectations and are associated with distinct challenges, a point that illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the scientific research community and the rest of society. In practice, however, these roles cannot always be clearly distinguished from each other.

This ambiguity immediately raises **the question of academic "neutrality"**, which is still often perceived as a central characteristic of the scientific process. Neutrality is often associated with **the idea that science must remain "value-free"** and removed from social influences, which would be the only way to guarantee its impartiality and credibility. However, recent developments in the philosophy and sociology of science show that such an ideal is not feasible, nor is it necessarily desirable, whether in research practices or in the public statements of researchers. The reliability of scientific knowledge production is due not so much to the absence of values as to the use of methods and procedures that control and minimise the inevitable biases resulting from the researchers' identity, culture, background and working context. **Therefore, rather than the idea of neutrality, the report puts forward the notions of objectivity, scientific rigour and transparency about values.**

## Part 2: Engagement at UNIL: Practices and perceptions

In the spring of 2020, **the working group arranged a survey of members of the UNIL community**. The questionnaire comprised 60 questions on the experiences, practices and perceptions of researchers regarding public engagement. In all, 1,039 complete responses were obtained, with 42% of the respondents reporting having carried out engagement activities in the last five years, mostly on topics related to the environment, the defence of particular groups' rights and interests, and economic and social justice. Nearly 30% of these respondents indicated that they had encountered negative reactions, but for the most part these reactions had no impact on their practice, although graduate assistants and doctoral students revealed more concern than did senior researchers about the potential negative consequences that their engagements could have on their career. The survey shows that a large majority of the participants are in favour of engagement from researchers and the

institution. Furthermore, slightly more than half of the respondents are in favour of strengthening engagement at UNIL. However, a significant proportion expressed uncertainty about the Rectorate's position on this matter. Between half and two thirds of the respondents do not think that researcher engagement has any negative impact on the credibility of the researchers or the institution in the public's perception. As for the mechanisms UNIL could put in place to better inform, advise and support its engaged collaborators, the most common proposals were trainings, a contact person, a support structure, advice and recommendations, a charter or guidelines, and more active communication from the University about engagement.

In addition, **four focus groups were conducted** in the spring of 2021 to give a voice to members of the UNIL community. These focus groups largely confirmed the results of the survey but also revealed new information. The need for more awareness from the public about the challenges and functioning of scientific research was emphasised, as was the importance of the role of academic expertise. Engagement with colleagues within the University was also mentioned. As for the challenges of engagement, participants mentioned the need to clarify the different roles that a researcher can adopt in the public sphere (researcher, educator, expert, citizen), as well as the distinctions between personal opinion, research results and the position of the institution. Doctoral students in particular also mentioned the difficulty of ensuring that the field of specialisation matches the expectations of the media and the challenge of feeling legitimate. Regarding the role of the institution, what was cited most often were the need for trainings on good practices for engaging with society and the protection of researchers from threats or harassment on social media. The University's support for engagement is generally well perceived, as long as it respects good practices.

## Part 3: Issues and challenges of the public engagement of academics

*Academic freedom, freedom of speech, duty of confidentiality*

The issue of public engagement, as defined in this report, is closely connected to the notions of freedom of science (which includes academic freedom) and freedom of speech, both of which are guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. **Academic freedom** itself has three dimensions: the freedom of research, the freedom of teaching, and academics' freedom of expression, the last of which is central to the debates on the engagement of researchers. Academic freedom, however, is a special, or professional, freedom that is constrained by the ethical standards of the academic profession. Because these standards place different demands on academic freedom than on non-academic freedom of speech, they entail some responsibility as to the soundness and content of what is said.

Within these limits, however, academic freedom offers scholars a large degree of freedom of expression in the public sphere. One consequence of this is that the **duty of confidentiality**

imposed on civil servants is more tenuous with respect to the expression of academics than to that of most other government employees. Thus, academics have greater latitude in expressing their opinions, including criticism of institutions.

**Civil disobedience** seems at first glance to be a special case in this respect, since by definition it implies committing an offence. However, it is widely recognised in the philosophy and political science literature as a legitimate means of democratic expression, including in a system of semi-direct democracy such as Switzerland has. On the other hand, current Swiss jurisprudence does not offer clear-cut guidelines for the arbitration of conflicts between the duty of confidentiality and fundamental freedoms of opinion and speech. Since the University cannot act as a substitute for the judiciary in this matter, it should not take any preventive measures to limit the participation of (or expressions of support by) its employees in civil disobedience actions. Nor should it condemn in advance this mode of engagement.

*Interactions of academics with the public sphere*

The rules of **scientific integrity** and the **ethical norms of academic life** constitute the deontological framework within which the exercise of academic freedom is embedded. Since academics are protected by both their academic freedom and their general (non-academic) freedom of speech, it must be clear which role (researcher, educator, expert, citizen) they are assuming when they speak out. Thus, the best practices of engagement include making explicit not only their role but also their area of specialisation and the nature of their discourse. However, the different public roles played by academics are not always clearly distinguished, and the scope of their area of specialisation is a good example of these fuzzy boundaries. This **ideal of transparency** must therefore be adapted to each situation in line with the current circumstances and the context of the expression. Two cases are examined in more detail as they relate to transparency: social media and teaching.

**Engagement through social media platforms**, while not essentially different from other forms of expression, does present specific challenges, notably due to the immediacy of the exchanges, the mix of users and the presence of organised ideological communities. It therefore calls for raised awareness and special support measures. As for **teaching**, it is characterised by a significant asymmetry between teachers and students. Teachers can legitimately share their personal engagement and values in class, which may also be pedagogically beneficial, but they must be careful to develop their students' ability to follow the criteria of academic inquiry in approaching problems, as well as their critical thinking skills and their freedom of choice. The converse is also true, for students with strong activist convictions.

Finally, **concerns about the risks that academics and scientific institutions lose credibility** are discussed. These risks cannot be neglected and must be taken into account. However, the few studies available seem to show that public engagement by academics does not lead to a

significant loss of public trust. This may be different in specific settings (e.g., among some political parties), but data are lacking. The risks of losing credibility through a lack of engagement must also be taken into consideration and the figures show a certain expectation on the part of the public for researchers to be involved in social debates.

*Engagement from an institutional perspective*

The notion of engagement does not apply only to individuals, but extends to institutions. From this point of view, **a university that is engaged can be understood as a university with values**: scientific values, democratic values and the specific values that it chooses to include in its governance principles (such as in its charter and plan of intent). **A university that is engaged is also a university that supports a culture of engagement within its community**. There is, however, a clear distinction between the public stances of the institution and those of the members of its community. Unless one holds a representative position (rector, vice-rectors, deans, etc.), displaying one's institutional affiliation for identification purposes does not create an ambiguity between individual and institutional communication. Hence, there does not seem to be justification for limiting this practice within the framework of engagement activities. The public interactions of researchers do, however, contribute to shaping the public image of the institution.

Another issue is the institution's reaction to the questioning it receives as a result of the actions or public comments of its community **The default reaction of a university should be to defend academic freedom and the freedom of speech of its researchers**. However, in rare cases the institution may need to distance itself from the statements made, or even to take administrative measures if there is a flagrant violation of the norms of scientific integrity. Moreover, despite its strong defence of freedom of expression and its promotion as a place for the constructive confrontation of ideas, a university has some leeway in deciding whether to accept external speakers on campus. This leeway relates to the values the institution upholds, foremost among them the standards of academic debate.

*Supporting engagement: possible courses of action*

Engagement is part of the university's mission and as such deserves to be supported. While its activities must stay consistent with the ethical standards of the academic community, that compliance is better achieved through peer dialogue than through top-down regulations. The analysis of cases that have recently given rise to controversy confirms that it is difficult to prevent these situations without infringing too heavily on academic freedom or freedom of speech. It therefore seems more appropriate to make the context and nature of the statements transparent than to try to regulate them or treat them in a prescriptive manner. However, issues of transparency are as much the responsibility of the institution as of the researchers. It is the University's responsibility to bring to mind the norms attached to its

status and its role in society, but also to clearly establish the kind of working environment it offers to its researchers, whatever their level of public engagement. A culture of engagement can be achieved through the creation of a work environment conducive, under the right conditions, to the practice of engagement and the availability of tools for the development of knowledge and skills that allow members of the community to navigate more peacefully, effectively and transparently between their various roles.

In order to develop conditions that are favourable to researcher engagement, the working group recommends the following measures:

1. *Clarify the Rectorate's position on the issue of public engagement.*
2. *Stimulate and support discussions about engagement within the UNIL community and with people outside of academia.*
3. *Better recognise the value of engagement in professional duties and careers.*
4. *Continue to develop institutional structures supporting the University's relationship with society and promote associations on campus, in order to stimulate exchanges and opportunities for engagement.*

A set of tools to enhance understanding of the challenges related to engagement, as well as improving effective and transparent communication techniques, could be developed through:

5. *Trainings.*
6. *Information handouts.*
7. *Discussion and feedback groups within the community.*
8. *A contact person in case of difficulty.*

**NB: The different parts of this summary are reproduced in the grey boxes at the top of the corresponding sections of the report.**

# Introduction

**Main messages:** The issue of public engagement by academics is not new, but it has garnered significant attention in recent years, especially on topics such as climate change and gender equality. Public commentary by academics elicits reactions, both positive and negative, from outside and inside the university. These reactions and the resulting calls for action from the Rectorate serve as a starting point for the reflections summarised in this report. The report takes a favourable view of the public engagement of researchers and UNIL's support of such engagement, but its objective is not to develop an exhaustive argument in its favour. Rather, it aims to clarify the issues at stake at both the individual and institutional levels, while providing the UNIL Rectorate with points for understanding, analysis and possibly action.

Researchers' public engagement, i.e. taking a public stance on societal issues,[1] has been on the rise for the past two decades, with a particular intensity in recent years on issues such as environmental and health problems, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and gender equality. In 2019, for example, a collective of scientists issued a declaration in support of the Climate Strike signed by more than 20,000 Swiss, German and Austrian scientists, also calling for a sharp increase in resources put in place to limit global warming.[2] Similar appeals have been published in scientific journals, such as the "World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency" with over 11,000 signatories from 153 countries.[3] Many academics are using social networks to multiply the reach of their media interactions and positions, joining demonstrations and supporting or participating in civil disobedience actions. They are not merely communicating their research results, but also sometimes proposing or demanding concrete political measures or actions.[4]

[1] The definition used in this report includes actions and statements that are both public and normative in nature (see section 1.2.1). It is therefore significantly narrower than some definitions used in the literature, which may range from simple public information activities to activism in support of particular social choices or policy options. See: Crettaz von Roten, F., & Moeschler, O. (2010). Les relations entre les scientifiques et la société. *Sociologie*, *1*(1).

[2] Hagedorn, G., *et al.* (2019). The concerns of the young protesters are justified: A statement by Scientists for Future concerning the protests for more climate protection. *GAIA - Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*, *28*(2), 79–87.

[3] Ripple, W. J., *et al*. (2020). World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency. *BioScience*, *70*(1), 8–12.

[4] Green, M. (2019, October 13). Nearly 400 scientists support Extinction Rebellion's civil disobedience campaign. *The Independent*; Garric, A. (2020, March 9). Savants ou militants ? Le dilemme des chercheurs face à la crise écologique. *Le Monde*; Borloz, E. (2021, June 23). Affaire des joueurs de tennis de Credit Suisse – Peut-on être prof à l'Uni et prôner la désobéissance? *24 heures*.

**Origin of the mandate, composition and organisation of the working group**

It was in the light of this upsurge in engagement activities, and in particular of a letter of support from the academic world to the Extinction Rebellion (XR) group signed by many members of the UNIL community,[5] that the UNIL Rectorate decided to initiate a reflection on the questions raised by the engagement – sometimes described as militant – of researchers. In January 2020, the Vice-Rector for Research, Professor François Bussy, met with Nadja Eggert, Director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in Ethics (CIRE), to inform her of this intention. At the same time, Augustin Fragnière of the UNIL Competence Centre in Sustainability (CCD) had begun to reflect on the links between commitment and research in the field of sustainability. It became clear that the two centres should collaborate. In February 2020, the Rectorate therefore mandated CIRE and CCD to organise a series of public events such as conferences, colloquia and round tables on issues of engagement, and to set up and lead a working group to take stock of these issues.

The first round table was organised on 15 June 2020 by the CCD and the CIRE on the theme: "What role for researchers in the public debate?"[6] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis and the restrictions imposed by the federal authorities, the round table was held remotely and the planned activities had to be reconsidered. The working group was set up by Nadja Eggert and Augustin Fragnière in April 2020, with one member from each faculty and representatives from some relevant departments. The members of the working group were selected to ensure a diversity of views, skills and positions within the institution. They were: Fabrizio Butera (SSP), Danielle Chaperon (Lettres), Nathalie Chèvre (FGSE), Clémence Demay (FDCA), Marc de Perrot (General Secretariat), Nadja Eggert (FTSR), Augustin Fragnière (CCD), Philippe Gagnebin (UNICOM), Jérôme Goudet (FBM), Alain Kaufmann (ColLab) and Guido Palazzo (HEC).[7]

Augustin Fragnière was responsible for the coordination and organisation of the working group. Thirteen sessions were carried out between July 2020 and March 2022, mostly remotely. With the help of the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), the working group conducted a survey in January and February 2021 in order to better understand the UNIL scientific community's practices and perceptions of engagement. A series of focus groups (bringing together assistants, doctoral students, mid-level staff, administrative and technical staff and professors) were set up between May and June 2021 to complement this quantitative survey with qualitative data. The working group collaborated with Florence Graff

[5] Collective. (2019, October 21). «Nous déclarons notre soutien à Extinction Rebellion» : Lettre ouverte du monde académique suisse. *Le Temps*.

[6] Competence Centre in Sustainability & Interdisciplinary Centre for Research in Ethics (2020, June 15). *What role for researchers in the public debate?* https://www.unil.ch/centre-durabilite/recherche-et-engagement

[7] Two others, Jacques Cornuz and Sarah Schmid from the Faculty of Biology and Medicine, were initially part of the working group but had to leave during the course of the mandate due to time constraints.

(SSP student), Sarah Koller (CCD), Nina Suckow (CCD) and Nicola Banwell (CIRE) to process the data and analyse the results of the survey and the focus groups.

**Starting point: Why does engagement provoke reactions?**

The working group was set up in response to the frequent questioning UNIL receives on the public statements made by its researchers. These challenges, in the form of letters, emails, press articles, or, more rarely, political challenges, generally express dissatisfaction with certain actions or positions taken by members of the UNIL community. The working group's review of a number of the reactions shows that the reasons for the grievances are generally one of the following:

- a perceived misuse for activist purposes of the "authority" conferred by the status of researcher, particularly when a researcher speaks on a matter outside their field of specialisation or is deemed biased;
- a perceived blurring of the line between scientific results and personal opinions in the statements made;
- statements that are deemed to be contrary to a well-established scientific consensus;
- a risk of the institution or of science in general losing credibility;
- participation by members of the university community in civil disobedience in a manner deemed problematic;
- criticism of the federal or cantonal authorities that is deemed unacceptable.

These reasons seem to come down to two main concerns. They reflect either a certain understanding of the posture of neutrality that academics should adopt when interacting in the public sphere (see Section 1.4), or questions about the freedom of action and freedom of speech that academics have when they are employees of the state (see Section 3.1).

**Objectives and structure of the report**

The intention here is not to respond point by point to these criticisms, as each case is specific and has its own context. The working group thought it would be more interesting to examine how the question of engagement may be linked to the general ethical and legal norms that govern academic life. This approach made it possible, in particular in Part 3, to identify a few keys to understanding the issues surrounding the most common reactions to researchers speaking out.

This report therefore brings together the results of the discussions, the survey and the focus groups conducted by the working group over the past two years. It is not a scientific study, but a synthesis partly grounded on academic and institutional literature. The report takes a favourable view of the public engagement of researchers and UNIL's support of such engagement, but its objective is not to develop an exhaustive argument in its favour. Rather, it aims to clarify the issues at stake at both the individual and institutional levels, while providing the UNIL Rectorate with points for understanding, analysis and possibly action.

In the first part, after a brief overview of the existing literature on the subject, the report proposes a definition of the term "public engagement" and addresses the much-debated notion of neutrality. The second part provides empirical data on UNIL employees' practices and perceptions of engagement (information drawn from the survey and focus groups carried out in its community in spring 2021). The third part is more reflective, examining some important issues related to the problem of engagement: academic freedom and the duty of confidentiality, good practices for interacting in the public sphere, and engagement from the point of view of the institution. This third part concludes by suggesting measures and courses of action to support the members of the UNIL community that will promote the development of a culture of engagement within the university.

# 1. Definitions and clarifications

Research and engagement issues are the subject of rich and varied debate that involves a large number of actors with very different views. The issues addressed by the working group are deliberately circumscribed. This section first outlines the types of arguments that structure the debate, and then attempts to clarify certain key terms as they are used in the remainder of this report. The choices made by the working group in this respect follow directly from the way the mandate it was given originated and the particular context in which it was carried out.

## 1.1. Limited academic literature

**Main messages:** The question of engagement is linked to the conception of a university's role in the public debate and finds various answers both in the academic community and among the general public and the political class. However, it is still little investigated scientifically. The existing literature consists mainly of publications discussing the benefits and risks of engagement. The theoretical basis of the working group's work was only a few reports from academic societies and some empirical studies on practices and their perceptions.

The debate on the engagement of academics is not new; some date it back to the beginning of the 20th century.[8] It belongs to a historical line of questioning about the role of scientific institutions in the public debate and the relationship between scientific objectivity and the social responsibility of researchers. The question of the engagement and activism of researchers is sometimes very divisive, with some being very critical of such activities,[9] while others see engagement as an inevitable form of relationship to society in the current context.[10] Various arguments have been put forward for and against the engagement of researchers, but there has been no systematic factual basis for them. Arguments against engagement include the idea that it would undermine the credibility of scientists or their ability to do their work properly, or that it would be contrary to fundamental aspects of the

[8] Nelson, M. P., & Vucetich, J. A. (2009). On Advocacy by Environmental Scientists: What, Whether, Why, and How. *Conservation Biology*, *23*(5), 1090–1101.

[9] See for example the recent controversial essay by Nathalie Heinich: Heinich, N. (2021). *Ce que le militantisme fait à la recherche*. Gallimard; or Pullmann, J., & Maitra, D. S. (2020). *'Witches' and 'Viruses': The Activist-Academic Threat and a Policy Response* (SSRN Scholarly Paper N° 3630654). The James G. Martin Center for Academic renewal.

[10] Nelson, M. P., & Vucetich, J. A. (2009). Op. cit.; Schmidt, G. A. (2015). What should climate scientists advocate for? *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *71*(1), 70–74; Gardner, C. J., & Wordley, C. F. R. (2019). Scientists must act on our own warnings to humanity. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 1–2.

scientific process such as neutrality or impartiality.[11] Conversely, arguments in favour of academics engaging with political and social issues include that it is their duty as citizens,[12] that a lack of engagement with certain issues could be detrimental to society as a whole, and that since there is no clear-cut distinction between facts and values, some form of engagement is inevitable.[13]

Surprisingly, given the vigour of the debates it generates, the question of the link between academics and society has long remained relatively unexplored.[14] In Switzerland, such situations as the referendum on genetic engineering in the 1990s, and more recently the COVID-19 health crisis, have contributed to widespread media coverage, and sometimes criticism, of the positions taken by scientists on social issues. The role of science and scientists in the public debate has thus become a subject in its own right, one that social science researchers have gradually included in their studies, focusing in particular on the perceptions and practices of scientists' public engagement. Since the 1990s, an interdisciplinary literature on the subject has been developing in disciplines such as sociology, psychology, ethics, law and communication sciences, first on the normative issues of engagement (should academics engage, and how?) and more recently with empirical studies that attempt to quantify the phenomenon and the reactions it elicits.[15]

At the same time, the issue of engagement has received renewed attention from various scientific institutions and academic societies since the early 2000s, albeit with a broad definition of engagement largely focused on science communication that therefore only partially overlaps with the definition used in this report (see Section 1.2). There are reports on this subject by the German National Academy of Science and Engineering (Acatech)[16] and by the CNRS Ethics Committee (COMETS) in France,[17] to name but two examples. Large-scale studies, the largest of which involved nearly 2,500 researchers, have been conducted in England since 2001 by the Royal Society and the Wellcome Trust.[18] A report entitled *The State*

---

[11] Nelson, M. P., & Vucetich, J. A. (2009). Op. cit; Cologna, V., *et al.* (2021). Majority of German citizens, US citizens and climate scientists support policy advocacy by climate researchers and expect greater political engagement. *Environmental Research Letters*, *16*, 1–12.

[12] The term *citizen* is used generically here to include all members of society, including those without citizenship.

[13] Ibid; Runkle, D. (2012). Advocacy in Science. Summary of a Workshop convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. *Workshop on Advocacy in Science*, 1–13.

[14] Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. (2021). Science in the Swiss Public. The State of Science Communication and Public Engagement with Science in Switzerland. *Swiss Academies Reports*, *16*(8).

[15] The references found in Nelson, M. P., & Vucetich, J. A. (2009) and Cologna, V., *et al.* (2021) provide a good overview of the state of the academic literature on the subject.

[16] Acatech (2014). *On Designing Communication between the Scientific Community, the Public and the Media*. Acatech.

[17] Letellier, L. (2021). *Communication scientifique en situation de crise sanitaire : Profusion, richesse et dérives*. CNRS Ethics Committee. https://comite-ethique.cnrs.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AVIS-2021-42.pdf

[18] The Wellcome Trust (2001). The role of scientists in public debate: Full report. Wellcome Collection; Royal Society (2006). Survey of factors affecting science communication by scientists and engineers. Science Communication, 46; The Wellcome Trust (2015). Factors Affecting Public Engagement by Researchers: A study on behalf of a Consortium of UK public research funders, TNS, 69.

*of Science Communication and Public Engagement with Science in Switzerland* was published by the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences in 2021; it offers an inventory of the state of engagement in Switzerland, in order to identify where there is room for improvement and recommendations for such improvement.[19] At a more local level, the Observatoire Science, Politique et Société (OSPS) of the University of Lausanne has been studying the subject for several years, notably conducting a study in 2007 involving 810 teacher-researchers[20] (see Annexe 5.2 for more details). All these reports consider the current state of scientific communication, most often including the specific issue of digital platforms. As Crettaz von Roten and Entradas. point out in a review article[21] on the measurement of academics' public engagement, the lack of a common definition and of standardised survey protocols makes it difficult to compare the various studies. The many recommendations that conclude these reports include a focus on training; more professional, psychological and legal support for scientists; and the establishment of charters of good practice. Among the institutional sources are some university charters and regulations that give a better idea of the current positions and reflections in academic institutions on the subject of engagement. Examples include the engagement guidelines of the University of California (n.d.)[22] and of Princeton University (n.d.),[23] the public expression charter of INRAE in France (2022),[24] and the University of Bern's directive on information and expression of opinions (2021).[25]

The various resources mentioned in this section will be used in the development of this report, whether to find arguments and examples or to distance the working group from them. However, no systematic, much less exhaustive, review of the literature was conducted in the preparatory phases leading up to the writing of this report; the various publications consulted served primarily as a source of inspiration for the working group.

[19] Swiss academies of Arts and Sciences. (2021). Science in the Swiss Public, op. cit.
[20] Crettaz von Roten, F., & Moeschler, O. (2010). The relationship between scientists and society. Sociologie, 1(1), 45–90.
[21] Crettaz von Roten, F., & Entradas, M. (2018). Public Engagement Measurement. In *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*. Springer Netherlands.
[22] For example: UC Berkeley (n.d.). *Advocacy Guidelines at UC Berkeley | Office of the Chancellor*. Retrieved 11 May 2022, from https://chancellor.berkeley.edu/office-services/government-and-community-relations/advocacy-guidelines-uc-berkeley
[23] Princeton University (n.d.). *Guidance for Faculty and Staff on Political and Public Advocacy Activities | Dean of the Faculty*. Retrieved 11 May 2022, from https://dof.princeton.edu/policies-procedure/policies/guidance-faculty-and-staff-political-and-public-advocacy-activities
[24] INRAE. (2022). *Charter for Public Expression.* https://www.inrae.fr/actualites/charte-dexpression-publique-au-service-du-dialogue-entre-science-societe
[25] University of Bern. (2021). *Guidelines on information and expression of opinions*.

## 1.2. Definition of engagement

**Main messages:** The definition of engagement used in this report is the following: any interaction with the public whose content has a *normative* aspect, i.e. an evaluative or prescriptive stance on moral, political or social issues, can be described as engagement. This definition is narrower than the one used in some of the literature, which includes all types of interactions with the world outside academia.

What is an “engaged” researcher? Does engagement depend on the way research is done or on the way some scientists understand their own role in public debate and collective action? Is the term synonymous with activism? There is currently no fixed definition of the term engagement, but different conceptions that do not exactly coincide or fit together.

At the most general level, the English term *engagement*, to which the adjectives *public* or *citizen are* sometimes added, refers to "actions taken by scientists to communicate their results and interact with the public outside the university or the scientific sector".[26] Some definitions, however, go beyond the field of science communication to include all forms of involvement and collaboration with social actors that aim to build bridges between "the university's many resources and the most pressing social, civic and moral issues".[27] In the second half of the 1990s, the notion of *engaged scholarship* emerged from this understanding of engagement, referring to exchanges between the university and civil society that aim to reduce the gap between knowledge production and action. From this perspective, originally specific to the United States, engaged scholarship is "a new academic paradigm that affects not only the role of the researcher, but also that of the student and the university within society".[28] This conception of the role of universities thus implies not only broadening academic functions – placing the mission of service to society at the centre – but also adopting a conception of research that moves away from a neutral and apolitical vision of science.[29]

In French, the language of the working group, however, the term *universitaire engagé* can, like the *intellectuel engagé*, take on a narrower meaning and sometimes designates a person committed to a particular cause. This tradition, well known in Europe starting from the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th (consider Zola, Sartre, Malraux or Foucault), then seems to have moved across the Atlantic with the notions of *activism* or *academic militancy* most often encountered in the Anglo-Saxon world (from which it has now been reimported). Very current especially in American universities, *scholar activism* conceives the role of the

[26] Crettaz von Roten, F. (2017). Factors Influencing Scientists' Public Engagement. In J. C. Shin & P. Teixeira (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, Dordrecht, Springer, pp. 1–4.
[27] Boyer, E. L. (1996). The Scholarship of Engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, *1*(1), p. 20.
[28] Beaulieu, M., Breton, M., & Brousselle, A. (2018). Conceptualizing 20 years of engaged scholarship: A scoping review. *Plos One*, 13(2), e019320, p. 13.
[29] Ibid.

academic[30] as a supporter of struggles for social or environmental causes involving members of disadvantaged minority groups or victims of discrimination.[31]

### 1.2.1. Definition used in this report

The questions studied in this report fall midway between an (overly) broad definition of engagement that would encompass all forms of interaction with the world outside academia and an (overly) narrow conception that would limit the notion of engagement to that of activism for a particular cause.[32]

Given that the working group's reflections arise from the observation that the actions or public interactions of researchers sometimes provoke negative reactions, the goal is above all to examine the reasons for these reactions.

In line with this initial question, the working definition adopted is therefore that engagement, in order to qualify as such, requires:

- a ***public*** speech or action
- with ***normative*** content (moral, social or political evaluation or prescription)

The first point concerns the ***public*** nature of the engagement: to be considered ***engaged,*** the acts and words must be outside the private sphere and must not be exchanges between specialists in a discipline or theme. They may include participating in public lectures and debates, commenting in the media and on social networks, writing blogs or other publications on the Internet, signing petitions or open letters, taking part in demonstrations or civil disobedience actions, and participating in the activities of political parties or other interest groups (associations, etc.). Engagement may also include consultancy, sharing expertise or political lobbying.

The second point underlines the ***normative*** character of the interaction: it goes beyond the purely factual or descriptive and into the sphere of ***evaluation*** (good, bad, fair, unfair, etc.) or

[30] The term "academic" is used in this report as a synonym for "researcher" or "scientist"; it is the translation of "*universitaire*" but not in the broader sense of "person who has studied at university level".

[31] See for example: Ibid. p. 5; Salomon Cavin, J., *et al.* (2021). L'engagement militant dans la recherche en agriculture urbaine. Réflexions sur le contexte français au miroir du scholar activism nord-américain. *Natures Sciences Sociétés*, *29*(3), 288–298; Bhattacharyya, G., Murji, K. (2013). Introduction: Race critical public scholarship. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *36*(9), 1359–1373.

[32] Nor does the report address the epistemological issues related to alternative forms of research such as action research or collaborative, participatory, embedded or engaged research. See on this subject: HETS-FR. (n.d.). *Action Research: Home*. Retrieved 11 May 2022, from https://recherche-action.ch/Pages/default.aspx

***prescription*** (what should or should not be done). Thus, by this definition the mere public reporting of research results or of the state of scientific knowledge is not in itself an engaged act. Engagement can of course be grounded on research results or the accumulation of scientific evidence on certain issues (e.g. environmental, social, health or other), but it requires an additional step: a ***value judgement***, which gives it its normative dimension.[33] Engagement can therefore be conceptualised, as some authors propose, not as a discrete category but as a progressive category that varies with the intensity of the normative content. Simon Donner, for example, proposes situating academic public speaking on a continuum from purely "scientific" (objective) communication to purely "engaged" (normative) communication.[34]

The frequency of engagement may also vary greatly from one person to another, ranging from those who occasionally speak out when asked to do so, to those whose more proactive attitudes lead them to participate in social, political or advocacy movements.

The working group decided to adhere to this definition of *engagement* in order to circumscribe the field of its reflections while distinguishing it from the notions of *militancy* and *activism*, which seemed to take a too limited part of the continuum described above into account. Engagement therefore includes normative and public acts or statements that are not necessarily part of a collective and militant approach. The proposed definition therefore includes, but is not limited to, activism. It is also close to, but not interchangeable either, with the term *advocacy*. It could include, for example, the case of a researcher who expresses an informed specialist opinion in the media on what should be done about a future vote.

Finally, it should be noted that while the term engagement most often refers to an individual's actions, it can also be applied to groups and therefore to institutions, an issue that will be addressed in Section 3.3 on engagement from the perspective of the University.

[33] However, the normative nature of engagement does not necessarily refer solely to the subjectivity of the person engaged. An engagement may be based on widely shared, even consensual, norms and values within a society (e.g. equality, dignity, etc.).

[34] Donner, S. D. (2014). Finding your place on the science – advocacy continuum: An editorial essay. *Climatic Change*, *124*(1), 1–8.

## 1.3. The place of academics in the public debate

**Main messages:** The relationship with society and stimulating public debate are integral to the missions of universities, as clearly stated in the Law on the University of Lausanne and in the UNIL Charter. Engagement is therefore not a mere supplement to research and teaching but is a core function of the academic community. This function can be manifested in various ways and by adopting various roles.

### 1.3.1. The relationship to society as integral to the mission of universities

Before questions of engagement are discussed, it should be made clear that the relationship with society and participation in public debate are part of the mission of universities and of their teachers and researchers. This is most often explicitly stated in the guiding principles that govern the universities. The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, for example, notes that "Institutions of higher education, and more particularly universities, are communities of scholars preserving, disseminating and expressing freely their opinions on traditional knowledge and culture, and pursuing new knowledge without constriction by prescribed doctrines".[35]

As for UNIL, the Law on the University of Lausanne includes among the University's missions: "to promote the development of intellectual life and the dissemination of culture", as well as "to exercise a service function in favour of the community and to stimulate social debate" (art. 2 LUL). The UNIL Charter has a section on civic engagement which we reproduce here in full:

> UNIL is driven by the desire to serve the community in order to contribute to its scientific, cultural, economic and political influence; it acts in interaction with its social environment.
>
> UNIL considers knowledge to be a public good; it intends to make it available to society in order to address the major issues of our time in all their complexity.
>
> UNIL expects its researchers to constantly assess their responsibilities with regard to the potential consequences of their work.
>
> UNIL contributes to the training of humanistic, critical and responsible citizens, autonomous and supportive, willing to constantly develop their skills and motivated by the desire to surpass their achievements, throughout their lives.

Contrary to some preconceived ideas, universities and academics are not employed for the sole purposes of producing new knowledge and teaching it in the confines of lecture halls. They also have a collective mandate to disseminate this knowledge and to spark reflections

[35] UNESCO. (1997). *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*. UNESCO / Earthscan, p. 49.

and social dialogue on the implications of the knowledge and the uses to which it should be put. This mandate can be achieved in part through publication and education, but this aspect of the university's mission is also fulfilled through lively exchanges between the university and the community. Engagement, as understood here, is thus more than just a 'soul supplement' to the standard activities of the academic community. It is an integral part of the community's mission.

### 1.3.2. Multiple roles

The first point to observe about the pursuit of this mission is that academics interact with the rest of society in multiple ways. The following roles can be noted (the list is open-ended and not exhaustive):

1. **Expert**: responds to a specific question asked by society in the light of the academic's scientific/disciplinary knowledge (e.g. about the impact of a pollutant on health, about the data on discrimination, for aa legal opinion, etc.). The expert provides diagnoses and solutions, sometimes within the framework of mandates for an agency, a political authority or civil society.

2. **Researcher**: seeks to explain, understand or interpret phenomena, using the methods specific to the academic's discipline. Researchers interact in the public sphere from the point of view of their own research questions and the theoretical framework chosen to answer them. Researchers are specialists in a discipline or field of study, but do not always assume the role of expert.
3. **Teacher**: teaches their own discipline within a scientific institution, but in doing so reaches a wide student audience.
4. **Scientific communicator**: disseminates and popularises science, in their field of competence, outside scientific institutions.
5. **Citizen**: interacts on their own behalf on social issues.

This diversity of possible roles illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the scientific research community and the rest of society. The roles mentioned here have different functions and involve the development of significantly different knowledge and skills. They also come with varying expectations and relate to a variety of issues. How a statement is produced and how it is received will therefore depend to a large extent on the conditions of its utterance, i.e. where and when it takes place, the means of communication used, its audience and the role that these conditions create. Distinguishing between the different roles

is therefore essential to a better understanding of the issues surrounding the engagement of academics.[36]

However, while identifying these different roles is useful for structuring the debate about researchers' engagement, it should be borne in mind that separating them completely from each other can be difficult in practice. Even in their role as a citizen, the academic remains a person trained in the scientific process; the expert or teacher cannot always avoid referring to their personal convictions; and researchers choose their objects of study and research questions in part by appealing to their prior values or worldview.

## 1.4.The notion of neutrality

**Main messages:** The notion of neutrality is often associated with the idea of a "value-free" science, isolated from social influences, as the only way to guarantee the impartiality and credibility of scientific institutions. Recent developments in the philosophy and sociology of science show that such an ideal is not only unattainable, but also undesirable, whether in research practices or in public discourse. We therefore prefer the idea of the quest for objectivity, scientific ethics and transparency of values.

Engagement raises the question of scientists' "neutrality", especially when they join the public debate as part of their function. Rightly or wrongly, axiological neutrality is still often perceived as a central characteristic of the scientific process, shielding that process from political, financial or ideological influence in its pursuit of a factual description of its objects of study. Some people hold the same expectations for academics speaking out in the public sphere, and, especially when they dislike the academics' positions, often transform such expectations into accusations or denunciations of conflict of interest or ideological bias.

The difficulty here is that the notion of neutrality can have different meanings depending on the context or the person speaking. Without embarking on a lengthy epistemological exposition, we must clarify what can be designated by the term neutrality, starting by distinguishing between the neutrality of ***research practices*** and the neutrality of scientists' ***public speech.***

[36] Charaudeau, P. (2013). Le chercheur et l'engagement. Une affaire de contrat. *Argumentation et analyse du discours*, (11), 1–15. Charaudeau distinguishes four different statuses for academics in the public sphere: the expert, the researcher, the critic and the intellectual.

### 1.4.1. Neutrality of research practices

The notion of the neutrality of science is usually associated with two complementary ideas: the separation of research practices from the rest of society, its needs and potential influences, and the ideal of value-free science, in which ethical and political convictions have no role to play in the production of knowledge. This ideal has a complex history, but only took hold in its modern form in the 1960s.[37] It requires scientific research to be free from normative influences other than those that underpin the objective production of knowledge throughout the research process, from the choice of questions and hypotheses to the interpretation of results. Within this framework, only values deemed "epistemic" are tolerated, such as simplicity (also called "elegance"), the predictive or disruptive power of a model, or the fruitfulness of a theory.

Such a position continues to have its supporters today. Since the 1960s, however, a different vision of science has developed in parallel, notably by the Frankfurt School, that questions this ideal of neutrality. In the light of research in the philosophy and sociology of science from the last few decades, it seems increasingly clear that not only is such an ideal unattainable, but also that it is not necessarily an ideal to be pursue. First, science and scientists are part of society: scientific research is subject to influence of various kinds – the political choices that shape the organisation of research organisation, the means of funding available, the interests and ethical or social motivations of researchers – and therefore does not develop in an axiological vacuum. Meanwhile, several recent works in philosophy of science have also questioned the desirability of this ideal, asserting that ethical and social values must be taken into account at certain stages of knowledge production (notably the in choice of questions investigated and in the evidence needed to validate a hypothesis), particularly when there are large uncertainties and when the knowledge in question has important social implications. There may be differences in this respect between the so-called "natural" sciences and the so-called "humanities and social sciences", but the argument here is that even the natural sciences cannot – and therefore must not – claim absolute neutrality.

Though value judgements are inevitable at certain points in a research process, assigning them an indirect role – secondary to the empirical evidence and methodologically framed – will ensure the greatest possible validity of the knowledge produced.[38] Scientific research is an extremely reliable source of knowledge production, due in particular to the use of *methods* and *procedures* (e.g. experimental protocols for data collection and analysis, systematicity, rigour of argumentation, reproducibility, peer review) that aim to guarantee the objectivity and quality of the results. As mentioned by many philosophers and sociologists of science, there are also a certain number of *ethical standards* associated with the practice of science.

[37] Douglas, H. E. (2009). *Science, Policy and the Value-Free Ideal*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press.
[38] *Ibid*. See also the three-part podcast specifically dedicated to this issue, published by the science journal *Nature*: Howe, N. (2020). *"Stick to the science": When science gets political*. Nature. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03067-w

Thus, it can be said that the scientific community, whether engaged or not, should be driven by the common values of integrity, rigour and the search for objectivity.[39]

It therefore seems necessary to clearly distinguish between the often misunderstood and idealised notion of ***neutrality*** – the unreachable horizon of a science unmarked by any societal influence and devoid of any ethical driving force – and the ideas of objectivity and methodological rigour, which are central principles of scientific research.[40] Striving for objectivity and methodological rigour therefore in no way implies subscribing to the ideal of a value-free science, but rather to the implementation of rigorous mechanisms designed to ensure the reliability of the knowledge produced. Indeed, scientific rigour can be understood as the fact of providing oneself with the methodological, metrical or analytical means to validate something other than what the researcher assumed at the start. This implies that the researcher may have values, opinions and even beliefs when they are designing the research, but that their respect for the procedures allows for the initial hypotheses to be disproven.

In addition to the methodological and ethical requirements already mentioned, the most recent developments in the philosophy of science suggest that a dialogue conducted within a ***diverse*** scientific community (in terms of gender, age, culture, language, affiliation, etc.) better corrects the inevitable biases linked to the identity, culture, background and working contexts of the researchers.[41] It should also be noted, with regard to the question of engagement, that personal biases are not necessarily more significant among engaged researchers than among non-engaged researchers, the latter being defined simply by the fact that they do not publicly share their personal values and convictions.

Finally, it should be remembered in this context that uncertainty is an integral aspect of science and that knowledge evolves or stabilises as discoveries are made and as research progresses. Confronting views and arguments, some of them normatively charged, is therefore integral to scientific practice and the organisation of academic debate.

---

[39] Among the many conceptions of scientific ethics, one of the most famous is still that formulated by Robert Merton as the four norms of universalism, communism, disinterestedness and organised scepticism. Merton, R. (1973). The Normative Structure of Science, in Storer, N. W., *The Sociology of Science*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 254–266. While Merton's norms no longer seem equally aligned with contemporary sensibilities and practices in the research community, they do illustrate the idea of the existence of a professional deontology that imposes a number of ethical duties on researchers. See: Macfarlane, B., & Cheng, M. (2008). Communism, Universalism and Disinterestedness: Re-examining Contemporary Support among Academics for Merton's Scientific Norms. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *6*, 67–78.

[40] Standards of methodological rigour vary from discipline to discipline, of course, but this is not limited to empirical methods and disciplines. As an example at the other end of the spectrum, some academic disciplines that are normative in nature, such as ethics or political philosophy, offer a rational and systematic approach to normative issues. While they cannot claim "objective" results in the strictest sense, they are nonetheless governed by a number of rules and practices of argument and by the organisation of academic debate.

[41] Oreskes, N. (2019). *Why trust science?* Princeton University Press, Chapter 1. See also: Gould, S. J. (1981). *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York, Norton & Company.

### 1.4.2. Neutrality in public speech

In the context of researchers' actions or public statements, neutrality can also mean ***neutrality of statements*.** A distinction must be made here between ***descriptive*** statements (facts) and ***normative*** statements (based on values). If neutrality is the absence of a normative stance, it therefore equates to the absence of engagement as defined above.[42] However, it seems difficult to achieve neutrality of statements understood in this way. For one thing, contemporary epistemology increasingly questions whether a clear-cut theoretical distinction between statements is possible. For another, neutrality in public debate seems untenable in practice, if only because of the importance of the context of the speech. The simple fact, for example, of reporting research results, in the plainest and most descriptive way possible, during an event organised by an activist association, or in the context of a debate on a controversial social issue, already constitutes an argument in support of prescriptive intentions. Such a distinction between purely descriptive and purely normative statements is also unnecessary, as most of the audience for the statements in question do not clearly distinguish between scientific facts and their political, ethical or social implications. For example, the facts of climate change or species evolution are rejected not for scientific reasons, but because they directly contradict certain worldviews (economic liberalism, divine creation, etc.).[43] An increasingly common suggestion in discussions of academic engagement is therefore to stop hiding behind the ideal of a value-free science, but to be transparent about one's own values in order to defuse suspicion and to establish a clear dialogue with other stakeholders in the public debate.[44]

A more moderate view of the neutrality of public speech calls for a kind of accountability that leads researchers to avoid imposing their own values by authority when they speak in the public domain. In practice, this could mean avoiding moving from descriptive to normative statements without explanation, or more simply clarifying the status of the statements made (e.g. research results vs. personal opinion). The question of whether and under what conditions such accountability can be required of researchers when speaking in public will be discussed in Part 3 of this report.

Because of its many, sometimes divergent, interpretations and the misunderstandings it gives rise to, the concept of neutrality seems too controversial to be of any real use in the present

[42] It should be noted that Max Weber, who is often referred to in discussions of axiological neutrality, did not think that it applied to public deliberation, in which the scientist can express themselves in a private capacity, and which offers a fertile ground for the exercise of critical thinking. For Weber, the requirement of axiological neutrality applies above all in the institutional setting, i.e. in teaching and in the recruitment of researchers. Weber, M. (2003). *Le savant et le politique*. La Découverte.

[43] Oreskes, N. (2019), *Why trust science?* , op. cit.

[44] Ibid, p. 147; Schmidt, G. A. (2015). What should climate scientists advocate for? Op. cit, p. 71.

discussion. It will therefore not be used in the rest of this report. It will suffice to note that neutrality is considered here as an ideal that is at best unattainable, at worst undesirable, and that the notion sheds no light on the actual functioning of research or on the public discourse of academics.[45] The notions of objectivity, scientific ethics and transparency are therefore preferred.

[45] Douglas H.E. (2009), Science, *Policy and the Value-Free Ideal*, op.cit; Oreskes, *Why trust science?* op.cit.

# 2. Engagement at UNIL: practices and perceptions

## 2.1. Summary of the results of the 2021 UNIL survey

**Main messages**: The survey conducted at UNIL shows that a large majority of respondents have a positive opinion about the engagement of researchers and the institution. Slightly more than half of the respondents are even in favour of strengthening engagement at UNIL. A significant proportion expressed uncertainty about the Rectorate's position on this topic. As for the impact of engagement on public perception, between half and two thirds of respondents do not think that engagement has a negative impact on the credibility of researchers or the institution. On the contrary, about a third believe that a *lack* of engagement could have a negative impact on credibility. Of the 42% of respondents who identified themselves as engaged, just under a third said they had met with negative reactions to their engagement. For most this had no impact on their practice. Assistants and doctoral students, on the other hand, were more concerned than senior researchers about the negative consequences that the practice of engagement could have on their careers.

The working group conducted a survey within the UNIL community in spring 2021 in order to obtain a better understanding of the community's practices and opinions regarding engagement. This section provides a summary of the methods used in and the results obtained from this survey. A full analysis of the results, prepared by FORS, is provided in Annexe 5.1.

### 2.1.1. Methods

The aim of the survey was to poll people directly involved in research within the UNIL community about their practices, experiences, perceptions and attitudes regarding engagement. The Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS) was commissioned to carry out the data collection and analysis, in order to guarantee the anonymous treatment of the responses. The questionnaire was developed by the members of the working group. It began by recalling the definition of engagement used in the survey (a process, speech or action that is both *public* and *normative* in content) and included a total of 60 questions on the experiences and practices of UNIL researchers with regard to engagement and their assessment of the engagement of scientists and of the institution. The survey was conducted using the online survey software Qualtrics, in French (73% of responses) and English (27%).

From the 3,464 researchers who were invited to participate in the survey, 1,332 responses were received, of which 1,039 complete and valid responses were retained for analysis. It is

important to note that although a special effort was made to invite members of the UNIL community to participate in the survey, it is likely that there was a selection bias of those interested in the topic; the results cannot therefore be extrapolated to all UNIL researchers without precaution.

*Table 1. Survey participation rates and numbers, and column percentages of participants by category*

| Catégories | Effectif de l'échantillon | Taux de participation | Nombre de participant·e·s | % en colonne pour chaque catégorie |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 3'446 | 30.2% | 1'039 | 100% |
| | | | | |
| Faculté[4] | | | | |
| Lettres | 459 | 42.9% | 197 | 19.0% |
| FBM | 1'321 | 24.3% | 321 | 30.9% |
| FDCA | 338 | 35.5% | 120 | 11.5% |
| FTSR | 78 | 38.5% | 30 | 2.9% |
| FGSE | 284 | 31.3% | 89 | 8.6% |
| HEC | 444 | 23.0% | 102 | 9.8% |
| Services centraux | 66 | 30.3% | 20 | 1.9% |
| SSP | 456 | 35.1% | 160 | 15.4% |
| | | | | 100% |
| Statut[5] | | | | |
| Chercheur·euse·s seniors | 1'661 | 31.5% | 524 | 50.4% |
| Assistant·e·s | 1'485 | 27.1% | 403 | 38.8% |
| PAT | 300 | 37.3% | 112 | 10.8% |
| | | | | 100% |

### 2.1.2. Summary of quantitative results

Of the 1,039 respondents, 42% (n=436) answered that they had been engaged, broadly defined, in the last 5 years. Figure 1 shows the proportion of engaged researchers by faculty, showing a significantly higher rate of engagement for SSP (61%; n=94) and for FGSE (57%; n=51). Figure 2 shows that senior researchers were more engaged (46%; n=241) than assistants and doctoral students (39%; n=157) or administrative and technical personnel (research PATs only) (33%; n=37).

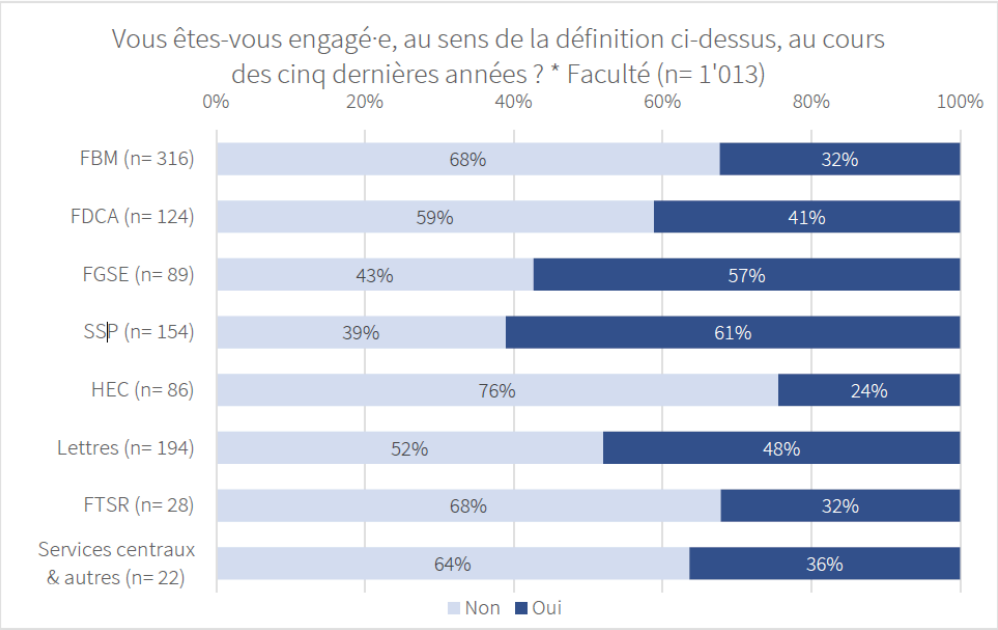


*Figure 1. Engagement of respondents by faculty*

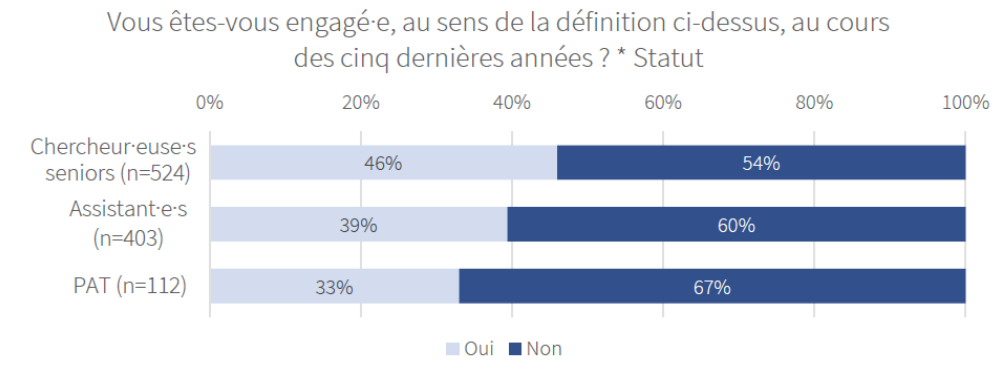


*Figure 2. Engagement of respondents by status*

Of the respondents who are engaged (n=436), 50% (n=218) are engaged both within and outside their areas of research and expertise, 42% (n=183) are engaged almost exclusively in their fields of research and expertise, and the remaining 8% (n=35) are engaged almost exclusively outside their fields. There are significant differences in this respect depending on the status of the respondents (Figure 3). Most senior researchers declared that they were engaged almost exclusively in their field of research (59%; n=142), most assistants and doctoral students were engaged both in and outside their field (68%; n=107), and the majority of research PATs were almost exclusively engaged outside their field of expertise (59%; n=21).

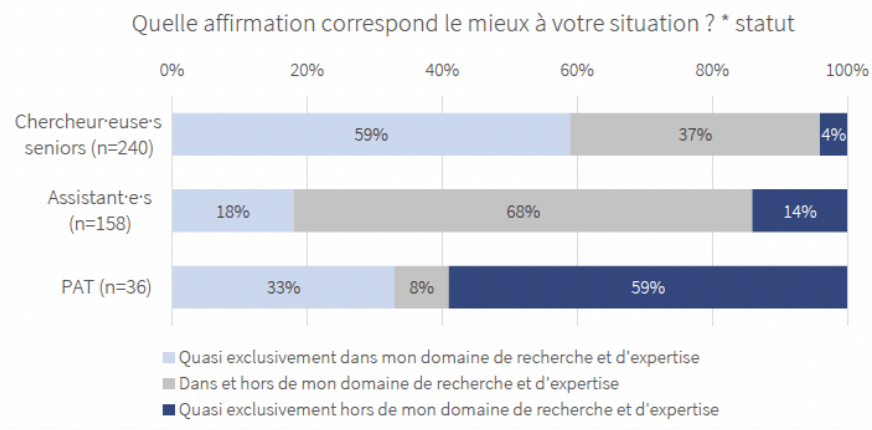


*Figure 3. Area of engagement of respondents by status*

Respondents were asked about the themes of their engagement; 10 themes were listed, and they could select several options (Figure 4). The environment was the most frequently selected cause (55%; n=240), followed by defending the rights and interests of particular groups (48%; n=209) and economic and social justice (46%; n=201).

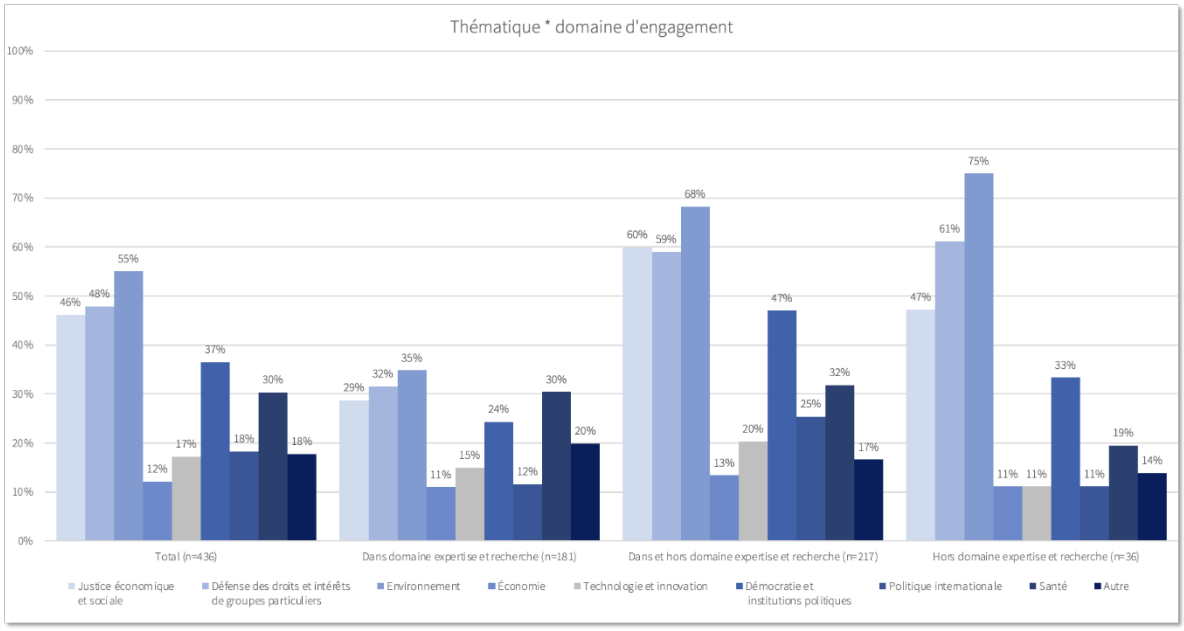


*Figure 4. Theme of engagement by respondent's area of engagement*

The most frequently used (i.e. at least six times a year) modalities for engagement are political activities and associations (30%; n=125), debates and statements on social networks (22%; n=92) and signing petitions and open letters (22%; n=93). Although debates and statements on social networks had one of the highest frequencies of use, a large proportion of respondents said they never used these modalities (48%; n=200).

**Negative reactions encountered following an engagement**

Of the 432 responses received to the questions on negative reactions encountered, 29% (n=125) indicated that their involvement had given rise to negative reactions (remarks, criticism, etc.), whether within or outside UNIL. For more than half of these people, the negative reactions were manifested outside UNIL (54%; n=68), for two out of five people both at UNIL and outside (39%; n=49); only 7% (n=9) replied that they had been confronted with negative reactions only at UNIL. Of those who had received negative reactions within UNIL, 70% (n=39) had received them from colleagues and 32% (n=18) from their superiors (Figure 5). Of the negative feedback received outside UNIL, 56% (n=64) was received via social media and 37% (n=43) was received from close contacts. The negative reactions in question included remarks (72%; n=90) and criticisms (69%; n=86), with about one in six respondents mentioning threats (16%; n=20).

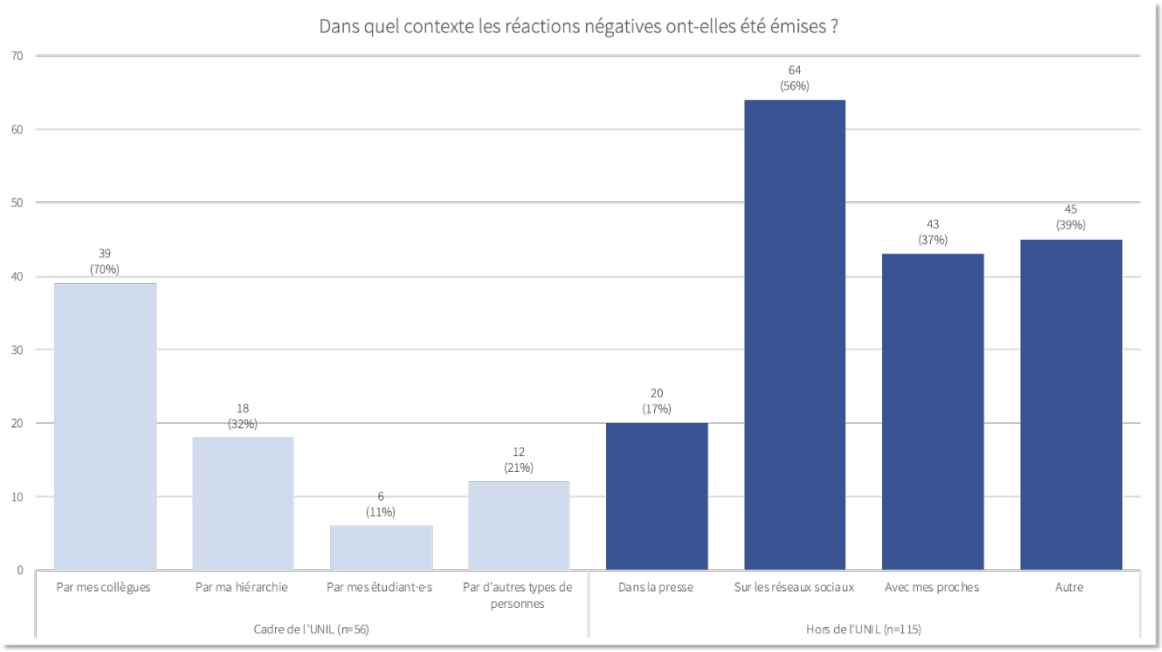


*Figure 5. By whom / in what context were the negative reactions encountered*

More than three quarters of respondents (77%; n=96) who had received negative feedback had spoken about it at least once. Respondents said that they had told their family or friends (88%; n=84), colleagues (76%; n=73), the Rectorate (42%; n=40) or their direct supervisor (26%; n=25). When asked about changes in their engagement after experiencing negative feedback, 83% (n=102) of respondents indicated no change in their engagement, while 11% (n=14) indicated an increase and 6% (n=7) a decrease.

**Perceived link between engagement and research, teaching, or career development**

When asked about the link between their engagement and their research, more than half (51%; n=238) of the respondents indicated that their research activities were the source of their engagement, and 35% (n=150) indicated that their engagement led them to evolve in their research. A large majority of respondents (84%; n=360) suggested that their engagement was mainly the product of prior moral, social and political convictions.

A third of respondents (66%; n=283) consider engagement to have a positive impact on the creativity of their research, compared to 2% (n=9) of respondents who consider the impact to be negative. A considerable proportion of respondents (85%; n=367) believed that the knowledge developed through their research was useful to support their engagement, and 5% (n=22) thought that this was not the case.

Respondents indicated that their engagement influences their teaching choices and the way they teach (59%; n=246), in particular that it helps to make their teaching material more concrete (60%; n=246). However, 52% (n=215) of the respondents stated that they avoided talking about their engagement in the context of their teaching.

Finally, researchers were asked whether they were concerned that their engagement would have an impact on their career and on their relationship with their peers. Of the engaged respondents 16% (n=68) and 14% (n=59), respectively, expressed such concerns, while more than a third of the respondents declared that they had no such concerns (38%; n=160 and 34%; n=143 respectively). Separating respondents by status makes clear that assistants and doctoral students (25%; n=38) have more career-related concerns than do senior researchers (11%; n=26) and PATs (9%; n=3).

**Perception of researchers' engagement**

The following results concern all respondents (n=1,039), regardless of their personal engagement. Regarding the perception of the level of engagement in the academic community in general and within UNIL, little difference was identified between those who consider themselves engaged and those who do not. The majority of respondents are in favour of more engagement in general (68%; n=613), and in particular in the academic's field of expertise (80%; n=773), with only a small proportion of respondents indicating that researchers should not be engaged at all (2%; n=19) (Figure 6).

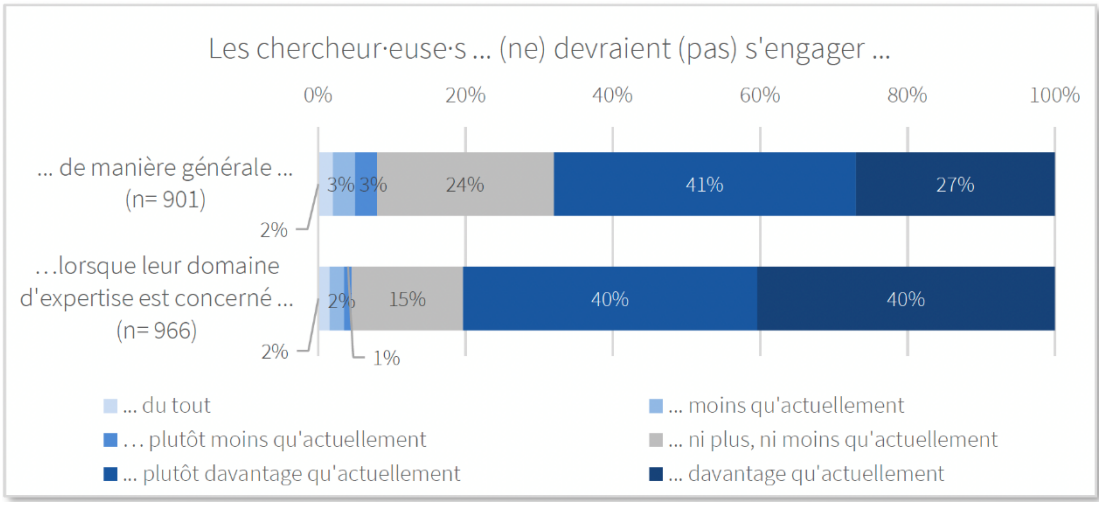


*Figure 6. Level of engagement of researchers preferred, in general and where their area of expertise is concerned*

The perception of the reactions that engagement can provoke is mixed. While 22% (n=175) of the respondents indicated that they thought engagement provoked negative reactions in the academic environment, 49% (n=429) thought it provoked positive reactions. Outside of academia, 14% (n=129) of respondents thought it caused negative reactions, compared to 65% (n=598) who perceived positive reactions. Among those who perceive UNIL as an engaged institution (details below), the assessment of the reaction is more positive. Conversely, those who do not perceive UNIL as an engaged institution indicated that they perceived the reactions around engagement as more negative.

Respondents expressed a strong opinion in favour of the freedom of researchers to engage generally (78%; n=782) and in their areas of expertise in particular (82%; n=822). A smaller proportion of respondents saw engagement as an obligation that researchers must fulfil both generally (35%; n=352) and in their areas of expertise (55%; n=556).

Only 16% (n=161) of respondents support the idea that researchers should limit themselves to establishing facts and not engage with political or social values, compared to 65% (n=655) who disagree with this idea. Some 65% (n=653) of respondents also disagree with the idea that there is a conflict between engagement and scientific objectivity, while 17% (n=171) believe that such a conflict exists. This result varies between engaged and non-engaged individuals (Figure 7).

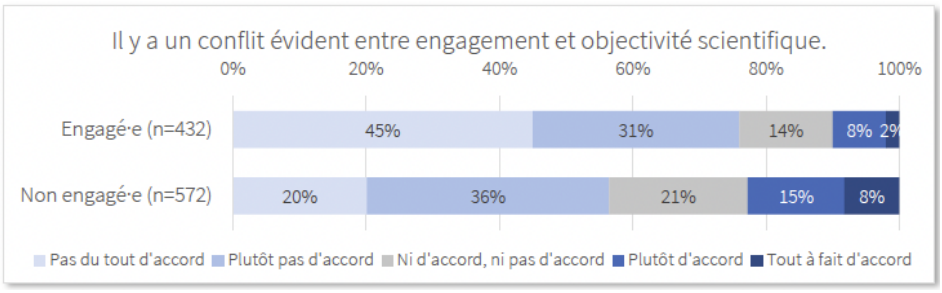


*Figure 7. Perception of a conflict between engagement and scientific objectivity*

The survey also examined the perception of how engagement, or the lack of it, may negatively impact on the credibility of the researchers, the institution and research in general (Figure 8). Between 52% (n=515) and 60% (n=596) of respondents disagreed with the statement that engagement affects credibility. On the other hand, between 19% (n=189) and 24% (n=238) agreed with this statement, with the credibility of researchers being the most likely to be negatively impacted (24%; n=238). It is worth noting that Figure 8 below shows that more respondents reported that *lack* of engagement was a problem than thought that engagement had negative consequences. Engaged respondents expressed more concern about possible negative impacts on credibility at all levels. At the same time, those who are engaged expressed more concern about the impact that *not* being engaged may have on credibility at all levels.

Respondents were asked to indicate how they thought engagement was perceived by different actors and social groups. Notably, 38% (n=394) of respondents indicated that they did not know how engagement was perceived by the UNIL Rectorate, and 22% (n=228) did not know how it was perceived by their superiors, compared to rather low percentages (between 11% and 16%) for all other entities.

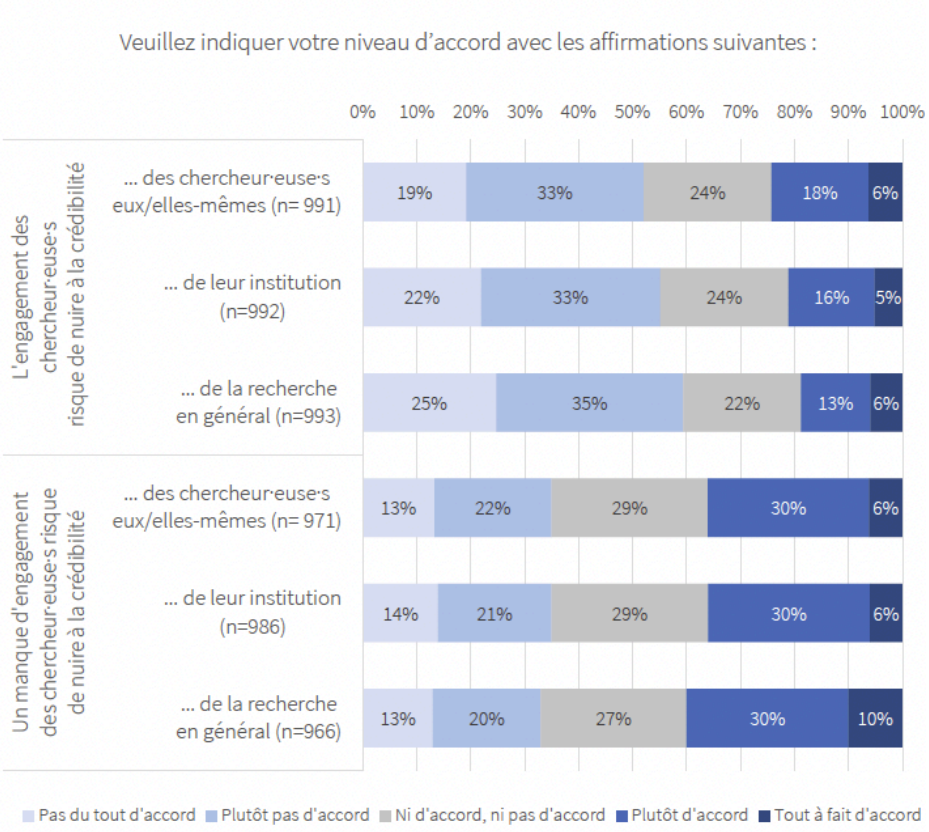


*Figure 8. Perceived risk of researchers' engagement or lack of engagement damaging the credibility of researchers, their institution and research in general*

**Engagement from the perspective of the institution**

Respondents were asked about the legitimacy of displaying one's institutional affiliation in engagement activities and about the engagement of UNIL as an institution and that of universities more generally. Almost two thirds of the respondents (58%; n=602) think that researchers should be able to display their institutional affiliation when engaging in their fields of expertise. Only 26% (n=270) thought that this should be an option in all cases (i.e. within or outside the field of expertise).

Respondents were also asked about the engagement of UNIL as an institution. In general, at least half of the respondents indicate that UNIL should be more engaged (15%; n=158) or rather more engaged than at present (36%; n=374). On the other hand, 25% (n=260) indicate that the current level of engagement is sufficient (Figure 9). A higher proportion of engaged respondents expressed the need for more engagement at the institutional level (72%; n=285) compared to those who did not identify themselves as engaged (51%; n=249).

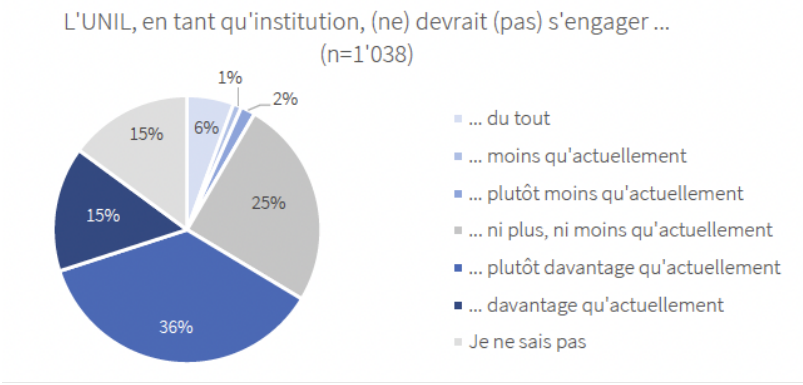


*Figure 9. Engagement by UNIL preferred by respondents*

On the topic of institutional neutrality, the majority of respondents (57%; n=572) disagree with the statement that a university should remain neutral on social and political issues. There is a difference in proportion between the opinions of engaged and non-engaged respondents regarding the neutrality of the institution: 72% (n=311) of the engaged respondents disagreed with the idea that an institution should remain neutral, compared to 46% (n=263) of the non-engaged respondents (Figure 10).

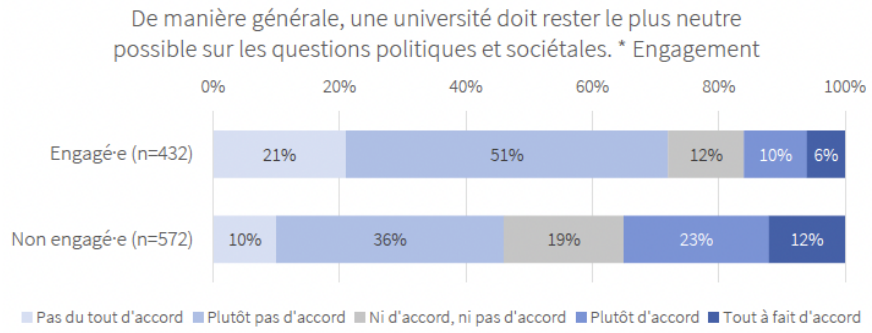


*Figure 10. Perception of a university's duty of neutrality on political and social issues, by respondents' engagement*

### 2.1.3. Summary of qualitative responses

An open-ended question in the survey asked respondents to share their ideas for schemes to support engagement .

**What arrangements could UNIL put in place to better inform, advise and support its researchers and collaborators on the issue of advocacy (i.e. contact person, recommendations, trainings, etc.)?**

From the 358 responses to this question received, nine categories of measures to support the commitment of UNIL researchers can be defined. In addition, there are two categories representing the opinions of those who advocate the absence of institutional measures or who specifically mention the importance of academic freedom in this debate (grey boxes in the table below). The responses fall into these categories as follows:

**Preferred devices**

| Categories | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Training | 113 | 32 |
| Contact person | 71 | 20 |
| Structures for support and connection | 67 | 19 |
| Advice and recommendations | 58 | 16 |
| Charter and regulations | 49 | 14 |
| Communication on engagement | 45 | 13 |
| Relationship between science and society | 30 | 8 |
| The University's position paper | 27 | 8 |
| Incentives and protection measures | 21 | 6 |
| No constraints or restrictions | 14 | 4 |
| No action required | 13 | 4 |
| Unclassified | 20 | 6 |
| No opinion | 4 | 1 |

This typology is useful for indicating an order of magnitude in the expression of the needs and desires of the UNIL community. However, certain choices had to be made in creating these categories and counting the suggestions that relate to them, especially when answers fall into

several categories (which is why the final count is higher than the number of answers). It should also be noted that the three categories given as examples in the question statement are among those named most often: "Contact person", "Training" and "Advice and recommendations". Finally, these figures represent only the opinion of the 35% of the sample that answered the question, and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the silent majority.

Here is a slightly more detailed overview of the suggestions corresponding to the categories in the table above:

**Description of categories and summary of comments**

Many questions and needs were raised by the UNIL community regarding engagement; these sometimes overlap, independently of the mechanisms mentioned. They concern, among other things, the University's expectations of its employees, good practices – in terms of both communication and engagement – and the issue of university affiliation. The needs expressed converge on the need for a better understanding of the issues related to engagement, its opportunities and risks, and the desire to have access to examples of good practice.

### Training

Training in a variety of formats and content, from media communication support to training on good practice in engagement.

### Contact person

Any structure that allows contact with an expert or trained person, providing advice, support and information, particularly in order to avoid and manage legal problems or media hype. Individual, independent and confidential support. By faculty or centralised for all of UNIL.

### Structures for support and connection

Internally, a structure that informs, brings together and connects the UNIL community through interdisciplinary exchange frameworks (for or by researchers), in order to support and stimulate debates on societal issues and engagement.[46] This may take the form of workshops or sharing circles.

### Advice and recommendations

Non-prescriptive advice on how to engage, or not engage, addressing the many questions and needs raised by the community. This may take the form of a guide, an FAQ or a *vade-mecum*, for example.

### Charter and regulations

Clarification in writing of what is expected by the institution, e.g. regarding the use of the UNIL affiliation. This may take the form of a charter or code of ethics.

[46] This category includes many interventions that are already and/or can be taken care of by a service like UNICOM, such as the organisation of workshops and conferences or the creation of focus groups.

| Communication on engagement | Relationship between science and society |
| --- | --- |
| A platform or site that relays information on engagement and facilitates addressing the issues and questions surrounding it, what is being done, how and where to find information, and to recognise people who are engaged. | Various measures and actions to create and maintain the link between science and society. |
| **UNIL's position paper** | **Incentives and protection measures** |
| Positioning and clarification of UNIL's position on the engagement of researchers and the causes it supports as an institution. | Actions and structural changes at the Rectorate level to protect and encourage engagement. For example, including engagement in employee appraisals and job descriptions, or direct measures to protect the academic freedom of employees who have been singled out. |

---

Of these responses, 4% were that nothing should be done, notably considering the issue a personal decision. Only 2% (8 responses) responded that researchers should not be engaged ("Charter and regulations" category). Conversely, and in similar proportions, 4% of the responses noted the importance of not implementing anything restrictive or binding. It is also interesting to note that 6 comments among the "unclassified" responses mention the relevance of going beyond a survey to judge situations on a case-by-case basis.

A number of needs and questions arise frequently and deserve comment here. The responses reveal a clear need for participants to be supported and guided through good practice in engagement, with a marked need for more support in communicating with the media (almost a third of the responses in the "training" category). Some respondents would be interested in having access to various additional information such as lists of researchers working at UNIL or the latest news on UNIL recruitment. Legal and judicial advice is mentioned about 10 times in the responses.

## 2.2.Summary of the focus groups

**Main messages**: The focus groups carried out largely confirmed the results of the survey but also brought new elements. The need for greater public awareness of the issues of research and how it functions was emphasised, as was the importance of the role of academics as experts. Internal engagement with colleagues in the university was also mentioned. As for the challenges of engagement, the clarification of different roles and the distinction between personal opinion, research results and the position of the institution were mentioned many times. The difficulty of ensuring that the field of specialisation corresponds to the demands of the media, and the difficulty of feeling justified in expressing oneself, were also noted, by doctoral students in particular. In discussions of the role of the institution, training on engagement and defending researchers in the event of harassment or threats came up most often. The University's encouragement of engagement is generally well perceived, provided that it respects good practice.

### 2.2.1. Background and methods

The focus groups (FGs) set up by the working group were intended to complement the results of the survey and to give members of the UNIL community the opportunity to express themselves in greater depth on the subject. Participants in the FGs were recruited through the survey (see previous section). Of the survey respondents who expressed interest in participating in the FGs, 40 were invited to participate, chosen on the basis of criteria such as diversity of functions, faculties and levels of researchers (junior and senior). Four FGs were organised in April and May 2021 with a total of 14 participants. The composition of each FG is described in Table 2. Most of the FG participants (n=10) were themselves engaged through their work or in other activist roles. The remaining participants were either not engaged (n=2) or did not specify their own engagement (n=2).

*Table 2. Description of FG participants*

| FG | Date | Participants | Composition |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 27 April | 5 | Graduate assistants– SSP, FGSE, Lettres (Humanities), FTSR |
| 2 | 07 May | 4 | Senior researchers (FGSE) and central services |
| 3 | 07 May | 2 | Teachers, MERs – SPP, Lettres |
| 4 | 10 May | 3 | Senior researchers, graduate assistants – Lettres, FBM |
| | TOTAL | 14 | |

Each FG took place in two phases, the first focusing on practices and challenges. The first-phase discussion was guided by the following questions: 1) "What do you see as the role of researchers in the public debate?" and 2) "Why do you think engagement often provokes reactions (both negative and positive)?" The second phase of the discussion focused on the theme of institutional support. Participants were asked: "Do you think that the institution should support the engagement of its researchers? If so, how?" The FGs were recorded, transcribed and then analysed to identify the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the discussion.

### 2.2.2. Results

**Practices**

It became clear from the discussion of engagement practices that engagement can take place at different levels. The discussion identified three main aspects of engagement:

1. Public awareness was a key element of the discussion. This entails the disseminating and popularising research results and informing the public about how science and research work.
2. The role of academics as experts was highlighted. In this discussion, participants mentioned that they are often asked to give an expert opinion on specific topics, and noted the need to remain critical and to be reflective about what one claims one's field of specialisation is.
3. Finally, participants discussed internal avenues of engagement, including raising colleagues' awareness of various issues and teaching, in particular teaching critical thinking skills.

**Challenges**

Clarifying the different roles of academics in the public debate was the central challenge highlighted by the FG participants. In this context, participants discussed the need to state one's point of view explicitly when engaging in the public arena. In particular, it is important to distinguish between statements that reflect a personal opinion and statements that represent the position of the institution.

This discussion also highlighted the importance of being clear about whether one is sharing a personal opinion or presenting research results or scientific facts. This is demonstrated, for example, by this experience shared by a participant:

*"I often start by establishing the facts or recalling the issues, and then in a discussion obviously I also often take a position... [the media] often ask me as an expert ... 'what do you think?' so*

*I take a clear position by recalling that these are personal positions but that they are in fact linked to my personal and professional background, to my understanding, to exchanges with other experts etc." (FDG 2)*

Often, when discussing the importance of explicitly stating the point of view from which a scientist is speaking, participants pointed out that it can be difficult to do so, for various reasons. Participants also stressed the importance of teaching critical thinking about scientific facts and how they differ from personal and political opinions. A wide range of opinions was expressed on the separation of the roles of researcher and citizen, with some participants stressing the importance of separating these roles, while others insisted that such a separation is impossible in practice:

*"I would say [...] that it is an artificial separation to make between me as a researcher and me as a citizen. [...] Or as a 'mother' and all the other hats I can wear in my life. Because in fact, there are no such boundaries, they don't exist. I am a person." (FDG 1)*

Several sub-themes emerged among the challenges. The issue of scientific facts and the neutrality of science was discussed, with participants stressing the need to criticise absolute truths in the context of a scientific approach and questioning whether neutrality and objectivity are really achievable in the political context of a research institution. This is revealed in the following quote:

*"On the idea of neutrality. I think there is a deep misunderstanding of scientific practice in society, apparently, not only in the idea that scientific practice would produce neutral and objective knowledge. The academic world does not work like that. Research practice doesn't work like that, and all research is inherently political." (FDG 1)*

The theme of expertise was also addressed, with discussions focusing on the importance of demonstrating reflection and humility, the difficulty of ensuring that one's area of specialisation matches the demands of the media, and the difficulty of feeling one has the right to speak as an expert, particularly for doctoral students.

**Institutional support**

Themes that emerged during the institutional support phase of the FGs included the need for specific training on engagement, defending researchers in the event of harassment or threats, making engagement explicit at the institutional level, raising awareness of engagement and encouraging it in line with good practice, and for UNIL to be available when particular needs arise.

Preventive measures such as training were among the most frequent suggestions made by participants. This suggestion is often expressed as follows:

*"I think that one of the responsibilities of the University is [...] to train the staff a little [...], knowing that they are going to get requests from the media [...], and to provide tools to help them." (FDG 3)*

Suggested topics to be covered by for such training included good communication practices, including scientific communication aimed at the general public, media training (including for social media) and advice on dealing with the emotional aftermath of engagement. While participants mentioned that this training would be useful for the whole research community, they stressed that doctoral students would especially benefit from it. In addition, participants highlighted UNICOM as a relevant partner for the provision of such training.

With regard to the institution's defence of researchers in cases involving harassment or threats, participants stressed that legal advice and support could be useful for some researchers, but that this support should be provided on a case-by-case basis to meet specific needs.

Participants stressed the importance of the University's engagement at the institutional level on important social and political issues. For example, one person stated:

*"I would also like the institution to be able to feed off our engagement a little more ... and for the institution itself to have concrete engagements. I find this cruelly lacking. [...] There's always this statement that '*UNIL is committed to equality. It encourages female candidates', *but I still don't understand why we aren't closer to using inclusive writing in official emails. (FDG 1)*

Participants also mentioned the Rectorate's responsibility to train itself on good practice in public engagement and put that training into practice.

Several other avenues of support were suggested, such as specifically encouraging doctoral students to engage in public debate, raising awareness in faculties with less engagement, funding off-campus events, or providing advice about and resources for ethics.

# 3. Discussion of issues related to academic engagement

Beyond the description of practices and perceptions summarised in Part 2 above, the issue of engagement raises a series of questions about the role of academics in the public debate and the advantages and limits of and the conditions for bringing about such engagement. The working group therefore met at regular intervals to discuss these issues in the context of some case studies. As mentioned, the working group was established partly because academics' engagement sometimes provoked negative reactions, for reasons ranging from a perceived abuse of the "authority" on certain subjects conferred by the status of researcher, to certain academics' participation in or support of civil disobedience actions, to fears that scientific institutions would lose credibility (for more details, see the introduction). This third part therefore sets out the various issues relating to the engagement of researchers and scientific institutions, with the aim of clarifying the issues at stake and responding to the various fears that it raises. It thus provides an overview of the working group's position.

## 3.1. Academic freedom, freedom of expression, duty of confidentiality

**Main messages**: ***Academic freedom*** includes the freedom of research, freedom of teaching and ***freedom of expression*** of academics. Academic freedom is, however, a *special*, or professional, freedom that is subject to the ethical standards of the academic community. These standards entail different requirements than the limits imposed on *general* (non-academic) freedom of expression, and they imply some responsibility for the basis and content of what is said. Within these limits, however, academic freedom provides academics with a great deal of freedom of speech when expressing themselves in the public sphere. One consequence is that the ***duty of confidentiality*** has a weaker effect on the expression of academics than on that of most other government employees.

The issue of engagement, as defined in this report, is closely linked to the notions of freedom of science (which includes academic freedom) and freedom of expression, both of which are enshrined in the federal constitution and which are defined more precisely below. The existence of a duty of objectivity on the part of academics and a duty of confidentiality because of their status as government employees implies prima facie constraints on what academic researchers can do or say in the public space. The notion of academic freedom, however, contradicts such reasoning since it grants academics a great deal of latitude in the choice of subjects they study and teach, the methods they use and the modes by which they communicate their research results. Like all freedoms, however, academic freedom has its

limits, and it is the nature and extent of these limits that is at the heart of the debate on academic engagement.

This section therefore details the concept of ***academic freedom***, and the similarities and differences between it and ***freedom of expression***, before offering a juridical analysis of the legal bases for academic freedom, as well as the ***duty of confidentiality*** of civil servants and how it applies to academics. Then it examines the case of ***civil disobedience***.

### 3.1.1. Academic freedom and freedom of expression

The notion of academic freedom originated in the early 19th century in the "Humboldt model" of university organisation,[47] a model based on the idea that scientific institutions are better able to fulfil their primary mission, namely the development of reliable knowledge, if they enjoy a high degree of freedom in their organisation and in the choices that govern the practice of science. This approach is, for example, very clear from a report on this subject by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in which he emphasises "the special role that academics and academic institutions play in a democratic society" and observes that "without academic freedom, societies lose one of the essential elements of democratic self-governance, namely the capacity for self-reflection, knowledge generation and the constant search for ways to improve people's lives and social conditions".[48]

The usual definition of academic freedom includes a ***collective dimension***, which corresponds to the principles of self-governance and universities' autonomy from political power,[49] as well as an ***individual dimension***, which offers academics protection against interference in their activities from outside and within the university.[50] Although both dimensions are relevant to a discussion of engagement, we will focus first on the individual dimension. Following Olivier Beaud, we consider this dimension of academic freedom to be in fact composed of three freedoms:[51]

[47] Von Humboldt, W. (1810). " On the Internal and External Organization of the Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin".
[48] Kaye, D. (2020). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, United Nations, p. 2.
[49] This is well reflected in Swiss law in a decision of the Federal Tribunal which states that: "academic freedom postulates the autonomy of institutions and that this autonomy must be understood as the freedom of an administrative unit to act independently and under its own responsibility, in particular to set regulations and to settle individual cases (regulatory and decision-making competences)". ATF 146 II 56, c. 8.1.
[50] Kaye, D. (2020). Op. cit.
[51] Beaud, O. (2021). *Le savoir en danger. Menaces sur la liberté académique*. PUF, p. 42-46. Olivier Beaud bases his theory on another founding text of academic freedom: the "Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Job Security" of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) from 1915.

- *Freedom of research*: the freedom to conduct research without pressure or constraints, both in the choice of questions to be investigated and in the methods to be used.
- *Freedom of teaching*: the freedom of a university teacher to choose the subject they wish to teach, as well as the way in which they wish to teach it.
- *Freedom of expression*: the freedom to communicate and express oneself freely with reference to one's academic activities.

These three dimensions are clearly reflected in the UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel,* 1997, which defines academic freedom as: "the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies".[52]

The third component, freedom of expression, is the most relevant to the issue at hand, namely the public expression of researchers. It is important to distinguish this third component of academic freedom, which we will call *academic freedom of expression*, from the general freedom of expression (or free speech) enjoyed by all individuals. Academic freedom of expression is a *special* (not general) *freedom*,[53] granted to a certain category of people by virtue of their professional status. Academic freedom of expression thus grants special protection to academics in order to enable them to carry out their duties in the conditions that are deemed most appropriate. It is clear from the different roles described in Section 1.3.2 that academics can express themselves either as part of their academic function – benefiting from their *academic freedom of expression* – or as private citizens, in the name of their *general freedom of expression*. These two types of freedom of expression must be clearly differentiated because, as Olivier Beaud reminds us, they have “neither the same beneficiaries, nor the same field of application, nor, finally, the same justification”.[54]

A fundamental difference is that academic freedom, because of its status as a special or professional freedom, comes with a number of *requirements* related to the norms of research and academic life;[55] this brings us to the question of the limits of academic freedom.

Like any freedom, academic freedom has *external* limits, such as ethical and criminal norms against certain types of experimentation (on humans, animals, etc.) or against certain

[52] UNESCO. (1997). *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*. UNESCO / Earthscan, p. 56.
[53] Beaud O., Le savoir en danger, p. 48.
[54] Ibid., p. 85.
[55] Ibid., p. 49.

statements or personal attacks (calls for violence, racial hatred, etc.). More importantly, because of its status as a professional freedom, academic freedom is subject to *internal* limits in the form of obligations and responsibilities specifically linked to the scientific process of knowledge production and the norms of academic debate.[56] The Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences note that "a responsible perception of this freedom has a restrictive effect, particularly when research objectives and methods are ethically dubious, when their repercussions may be harmful to individuals, society or the environment, or when the means employed are disproportionate".[57] UNESCO states that "higher-education teaching personnel should recognize that the exercise of rights carries with it special duties and responsibilities, including the obligation to respect the academic freedom of other members of the academic community and to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views. Academic freedom carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base research on an honest search for truth".[58]

These obligations and responsibilities are manifested in practice through the *requirements for scientific integrity*, i.e. respect for the norms, methods and procedures specific to scientific research in general and to each discipline in particular, as well as through the *ethical values of academic life* (these certainly vary, but the values of transparency, intellectual honesty and pluralism of ideas are generally shared). As discussed in Section 1.4 (on the notion of neutrality), these ethical standards aim, among other things, to ensure maximum reliability of the knowledge produced. While the general freedom of expression does not entail any particular requirement and allows everyone to express their personal beliefs, whether well-founded or not (within the legal boundaries), the notion of academic freedom of expression comes with the requirement that what is said is based on academic knowledge compatible with the standards of the profession. As academics are both researchers and citizens, they are protected by both types of freedom of expression. It is therefore important to know, when an academic takes a public position, which freedom of expression they are invoking and thus which role they are assuming when speaking (see Section 1.3.2).

This issue will be examined in Section 3.2, which discusses issues related to interaction in the public sphere. For now, let us simply recall that academic freedom of expression gives academics a great deal of freedom of speech when they express themselves about their research or within their field of expertise, but that this freedom is conditional on certain deontological duties (scientific integrity and academic ethics) and therefore on a responsibility as to the basis and content of the remarks made. Finally, as academics are often employees of an institution under public law, and therefore of the State, the question arises as to whether

[56] Ibid. p. 57.
[57] Swiss Academy of Sciences. (2008). *Integrity in Scientific Research: Basic Principles and Procedures*, p. 15.
[58] UNESCO. (1997). *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel*. UNESCO / Earthscan, p. 57.

their academic freedom, and in particular the freedom of expression component of this freedom, would also be limited by a duty of confidentiality they are bound to.

### 3.1.2. Legal basis for academic freedom, freedom of expression and the duty of confidentiality

As the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression states: "While freedom of opinion and expression protects and promotes academic freedom in many respects, there is no single, exclusive international human rights framework addressing this issue".[59] However, defences of academic freedom can be found in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which states, notably in a 2014 judgment, that academic freedom "is not limited to academic or scientific research, but also extends to the freedom of academics to express freely their views and opinions, even if they are controversial or unpopular, in their fields of research, professional expertise and competence".[60] According to the ECtHR, the academic freedom of expression of academics also includes a right to criticise the State and their institution; it describes in a 2009 judgment "the importance of academic freedom, which entitles academics, inter alia, to express freely their opinions about the institution or system within which they work and to disseminate knowledge and truth without restriction".[61]

**Freedom of science**

In Switzerland, "freedom of science" – of which academic freedom is a sub-category – is guaranteed by the Swiss Federal Constitution (art. 20). It is discussed and made concrete in the Vaud Law on the University (under the term "academic freedom", cf. art. 15 LUL). The latter guarantees the independence of teaching, research and publication activities. It therefore imposes on the State a duty to abstain. In other words, freedom of science protects "the intellectual and methodological independence of the researcher against state intervention".[62] This also applies to the interpretation and communication of research results.

**Freedom of expression**

Researchers, like everyone else, enjoy protection of their freedom of expression – which we have described as "general" (art. 16 Fed. Const.). This also protects, within certain limits,

[59] Kaye, D. (2020). Report of the Special Rapporteur, p. 5.
[60] *ECtHR, Mustafa Erdoğan and others* v. *Turkey*, Applications no. 346/04 and 39779/04, judgment of 27 May 2014, p. 40. Quoted in Kaye, D. (2020). *Report of the Special Rapporteur*, p. 11.
[61] ECtHR, *Sorguç v. Turkey*, Application No. 17089/03, judgment of 23 June 2009, para. 35. Quoted in Kaye, D. (2020). *Report of the Special Rapporteur*, p. 11.
[62] Federal Constitution Message, Federal Law Gazette 1997 I 167.

minority opinions as well as "those which offend, shock or disturb the State or any section of the population".[63] Any restriction of freedom of expression and/or freedom of science must have a *legal basis*, respond to an *overriding public interest* and respect the *principle of proportionality* and its three sub-principles (fitness, necessity, balance of interests) (art. 36 Fed. Const.).

**Legal limits to freedom of science and freedom of expression**

There is little case law on the legal limits to freedom of science in Switzerland. Legal doctrine, i.e. commentaries and studies of legal texts and decisions, therefore most often focuses on limits too the general freedom of expression. According to one part of the doctrine, the most commonly accepted limits of freedom of expression are:[64]

- Reputational damage
- Hate speech
- Calls for violence
- Threats and coercion

It appears that academics are subject to the same legal limits in this respect as all other individuals and that academic freedom of expression in Switzerland is therefore subject to the same limits as general freedom of expression. As noted in the previous section, this does not rule out duties and responsibilities linked to the exercise of the profession of researcher, even if these are not the subject of any provision in positive law.

**Duty of confidentiality**

Because employees of the University of Lausanne are subject to the Loi sur le personnel de l'État de Vaud (LPers; the law concerning employees of the State of Vaud), they are treated as civil servants. The duty of loyalty, or confidentiality,[65] could therefore constitute one of the

[63] Federal Court judgment 109 Ia 208; Dubey, J. (2017), *Droits fondamentaux*, vol. II, Basel; Auer, A., Malinverni, G., & Hottelier, M. (2013). *Swiss Constitutional Law*, vol. II, Bern; Kley, A., & Tophinke, E. in Ehrenzeller, B. et al. (2014). *Die schweizerische Bundesverfassung*, Zurich, Art. 16.

[64] Bertil C., art. 16, in Dubey, J. & Martenet, V. (2021). *Constitution fédérale. Commentaire romand*, Basel ; Verinory, J.-M., & Waelti, F. (2008). Le devoir de réserve des fonctionnaires spécialement sous l'angle du droit genevois. *Pratique Juridique Actuelle*, 810–832.

[65] In administrative law, the term *duty of loyalty* is used to refer in general terms to the fact that employees must not harm the interests of the state. The *duty of confidentiality* is a facet of the duty of loyalty. It is defined as: "the restraint that a public official must impose on himself in the exercise of some of his fundamental rights – both at work and outside work – because of his status or activity in the service of the State". Verinory/Waelti p. 812; Dubey/Zufferey (2014*), Droit administratif général*, Bale, N 1563, p 554.

legal bases for justifying, under certain conditions, a restriction on academic freedom and freedom of expression. The Regulations for the Application of the LPers stipulate in particular that the employee has duties of loyalty and discretion to the State and must abstain "from any act that could cause the State loss or damage" (art. 124 RLPers). This applies in particular to matters of public interest, which includes the protection of State interests, public order, public safety and public health.

Any restriction of freedom of expression and academic freedom (or freedom of science) must nevertheless respect the principle of proportionality; this must be analysed on a case-by-case basis, according to criteria such as the *person* expressing themselves, the *context* in which they express themselves and the *content* of the expression.[66] Principles or guidelines guide the reasoning of judges when they deliberate on a particular case. Thus, the function exercised by the speaker is an important criterion and it should be noted that academics enjoy, by virtue of their academic freedom, a dispensation in this respect and thus greater protection of their freedom of expression than other civil servants (e.g. police officers or government officials) have. This confirms their right to criticise recognised by the case law of the ECtHR. From a legal point of view, however, the researcher's area of specialisation is irrelevant, as is the relationship between the comments made and the area of specialisation in question.

A special category in this respect is the administrative staff of universities. While it seems plausible to attribute to heads of department, for example, a certain duty of confidentiality, the situation seems more complicated in practice for some administrative staff. There are a relatively large number of people at the university with hybrid statuses, i.e. people whose contract is as administrative staff but who are involved in research activities and who have real scientific expertise (research officers and managers, etc.). Discussions in the working group suggest that the decisive criterion in these cases should be not formal (the nature of the contract) but substantive (the fact that the person in question is actually involved in research activities or has expertise). The reflections in this section are also relevant to these cases. It is also worth recalling that according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, administrative staff are also covered by academic freedom.[67]

It follows from this analysis that the special protection afforded to academics by academic freedom has few legal limits, except for the few extreme cases mentioned above. Academics therefore enjoy a wide margin for manoeuvre in their public communication and expression of opinion. We will see in Section 3.2 on freedom of speech that this freedom brings with it ethical responsibilities regarding the content and form of these speeches. But before we get

[66] Boillet V., art. 20, in Dubey, J., and Martenet, V. (2021). *Constitution fédérale. Commentaire romand*, Basel.

[67] "Academic freedom should be understood to include the freedom of individuals, as members of academic communities (e.g. faculty, students, staff, researchers, administrators and community stakeholders) or in the course of their own activities, to engage in activities involving the discovery and transmission of information and ideas, and to do so with the full protection of human rights law." Kaye, D. (2020). Report of the Special Rapporteur, p. 6.

to that, it is worth mentioning a particular case among the modalities of engagement: civil disobedience.

### 3.1.3. Civil disobedience: a special case

Main messages: *Civil disobedience* seems prima facie to be a special case since it implies by definition the commission of an offence. However, it is widely recognised in academic literature as a legitimate means of democratic expression, and Swiss jurisprudence to date cannot arbitrate the conflicting rights that apply to it. Since the university cannot take the place of the judiciary in this matter, it should not take any preventive measures to limit the participation of its employees in civil disobedience actions, nor should it condemn a priori this mode of engagement.

By definition, civil disobedience involves the performance of an unlawful act. This particularity makes it a debated and controversial issue in society and within the political class, but also within the legal community. Because of this unlawfulness, the UNIL Rectorate has been questioned about some of its members having participated in or simply expressed their support for such actions. Such questions are generally based on arguments relating to the duty of confidentiality of state employees and the limits, particularly legal limits, of freedom of expression.[68] It is therefore appropriate to examine here the question of the legitimacy of such actions when they are undertaken by university employees and the role of the institution in supervising them.

There is no unanimous definition of civil disobedience in the literature, but a number of minimum features make it possible to define this mode of action. Most authors agree that it implies at least a *collective* and *public* action *against a norm*, aimed at obtaining political or social changes, and some authors add a criterion of *non-violence*.[69] Activists, for their part, justify the use of this mode of action by appealing to motives related to the defence of fundamental rights, justice or the common good. Civil disobedience should therefore not be confused with *conscientious objection*, which is an individual refusal to submit to a legal obligation, or with the *right of resistance*, which aims to overthrow the established order and

[68] See in particular the various questionings of the Vaud State Council submitted to the Grand-Conseil: "Réponse du Conseil d'État vaudois à l'interpellation Denis Rubattel: Un fonctionnaire peut-il prôner la désobéissance civile et violer ainsi la loi", 20_INT_452, September 2020; "Réponse du Conseil d'État vaudois à l'interpellation Florence Gross et consorts - Encourager à violer la loi : est-ce le nouveau hobby des employés de l'État? 20_INT_435, September 2020; and Jean-Daniel CARRARD et al. on behalf of the PLR group "Militantisme politique et respect de la séparation des pouvoirs: Comment le CE entend-il faire respecter le devoir de fidélité et de loyauté de l'art. 50 Lpers", 21_INT_151 transmitted to the Vaud State Council on 30 November 2021.

[69] On this polysemy: Demay, C. (2021). La désobéissance civile : Un concept pour appréhender la nature politique des actes militants en droit ? *Revue de l'Institut Rhône-Alpin de Sciences Criminelles*, *8*, p. 40-41.

depose the regime in place, and even less with *vandalism* or *ordinary delinquency*, which arise from selfish motives and are committed anonymously.[70] There is now a vast body of literature in philosophy and political science wherein civil disobedience is understood as a legitimate means of expression within a representative democracy, provided that certain criteria are met, including those mentioned above.[71] Several prominent theorists of democracy and justice, including John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, have developed justifications for this form of expression and highlighted its contribution to the evolution of social, political and moral norms in a pluralist society.[72] The working group therefore takes note of the fact that civil disobedience is seen by many scholars as an integral part of liberal democratic culture, creating lively debate and contributing to the evolution of law. The legitimacy of this form of engagement cannot therefore be dismissed a priori on the grounds that it is contrary to the law, even in a semi-direct democracy, since it is a mode of action that complements the classic means of participation.

From a legal point of view, things are more complex since the concept of civil disobedience does not exist in Swiss law. Lawyers therefore resort to criminal and constitutional provisions to deal with cases that arise.[73] Since civil disobedience involves fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of expression, of assembly and of demonstration, it is the relationship between the unlawfulness of the act committed and these freedoms that is at the centre of legal reasoning. However, Swiss jurisprudence on this matter is still evolving and there is still little reflection on this subject in legal doctrine.[74] As civil disobedience may constitute a means

[70] Ibid.

[71] Sometimes added to the criteria of public action and non-violence are the points that civil disobedience should only be used as a last resort and only to denounce situations of particular gravity, and that activists should submit to the legal consequences of their action. Ibid, p. 43. See also: Cervera-Marzal, M. (2013). *Désobéir en démocratie : la pensée désobéissante de Thoreau à Martin Luther King*, Paris; Cervera-Marzal M. (2016), *Les nouveaux désobéissants : citoyens ou hors la loi ?*, Éditions Le Bord de l'eau ; Markovits, D. (2005). Democratic disobedience, *Yale Law Journal*, 114, pp. 1897 ff.

[72] For a good synthesis of the different philosophical foundations of civil disobedience, see: Muller, J.-M. (2017). *L'impératif de désobéissance*. Le Passager Clandestin; Cervera-Marzal M. (2013). *Désobéir en démocratie,* op. cit.

[73] The Human Rights Committee includes civil disobedience in the practices protected by freedom of expression and assembly. See HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, *General Comment No. 37 (2020) on the right to peaceful assembly (art. 21)*, CCPR/C/GC/37 of 17 September 2020. Also: EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION) AND OSCE OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS, *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*, CDL-AD(2019)017rev, 3ème ed, Strasbourg/Warsaw, 15 July 2020. In criminal law, the discussion focuses on the notion of necessity. See in particular: Hermann, J. (2006). Zivil Ungehorsam und rechtfertigender Notstand - Ziviler Notstand und gerechtfertigter Ungehorsam ?, in: Mona, M., and Seelmann, K. (eds.), *Grenzen des rechtfertigenden Notstands*, Zürich/Basel/Geneva, p. 85 ff.

[74] Recent case law of the Swiss Federal Court deals with the issue only from the perspective of criminal law and not from the perspective of the relation between public law and employment or marginally from the perspective of freedom of expression. Moreover, the rulings handed down by the Federal Court are subject to a challenge procedure before the European Court of Human Rights. See in this respect: ATF 147 IV 297; TF, 6B_1298/2020; 6B_1310/2020 of 28 September 2021; TF 6B_1061/2021 of 9 May 2022. In addition, there are numerous proceedings pending in other civil disobedience cases before the cantonal judicial authorities, with varying results. Some have led to acquittals based on fundamental rights (Geneva Police Court, 3 June 2022; Lausanne

of expressing fundamental freedoms, the issue to be determined is whether the preponderance of the exercise of these freedoms overrides the illegality of the act and whether to confirm the admissibility of civil disobedience as a means of democratic expression. As there is currently no consensus on this question in Swiss law, civil disobedience remains for the time being the expression of a conflict of freedoms that cannot be resolved in a general and definitive manner.

In the case of government employees, these conflicts of rights also involve the duty of loyalty and confidentiality (Art. 50 para. 2 LPers) with regard to freedom of opinion and expression (when people support civil disobedience), and with regard to freedom of assembly (when they take part). It is in the light of all these elements that the question arises, on a case-by-case basis, of the need to take disciplinary measures. Such measures would be taken, not to punish the act as such, which is the responsibility of the criminal justice authorities, but because of the State employee's participation in (or expression of support for) actions that would be incompatible with the duties of a civil servant and would be detrimental to the performance of their employment. As the Vaud State Council notes in its response to Denis Rubattel's questioning: "There is therefore a balance between freedom of opinion and expression, on the one hand, and duties of loyalty and confidentiality, on the other, a balance that can only be found empirically".[75] The Council of State adds that "it is up to *the hiring authority* to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether an employee is in breach of his or her duty of loyalty and to take the necessary measures".[76]

On this basis, it would be up to the UNIL Rectorate to determine whether one of its employees has violated their duty of loyalty by committing an unlawful act (or by inciting others to do so) and to take the necessary measures – which, by the law concerning employees of the State of Vaud, may go as far as dismissal (art. 59 LPers). It would, however, be impossible to consider such sanctions for an act of civil disobedience, because the lawfulness of acts committed in this context cannot be determined under Swiss law and because of the complexity of the conflicts of law involved. Indeed, deciding whether an action of civil disobedience can be considered lawful when fundamental freedoms are applied (thus removing the unlawfulness

---

Police Court, 25 May 2022). In judgments where fundamental rights have not been applied, convictions have more often been handed down. Therefore, the issue is not closed and developments are still ongoing. In fact, the concept of civil disobedience and its different aspects is not in itself reflected in law, making the legal situation still uncertain. Aside from this decision – which is discussed in doctrine and deals with only the criminal aspects of the act of civil disobedience – the treatment of civil disobedience in its various facets, particularly constitutional, is still being defined. See : Hermann, J. (2006). Zivil Ungehorsam und rechtfertigender Notstand, op. cit; Payer, A. (2020). *Klimawandel als strafrechtlicher Notstand*, sui generis, p. 226 ff; Stamenkovic, I., & Stawiaki P. (2021). Die rechtliche Dimension der Klimastreik-bewegungen - Legitimität ihres Instrumentariums und Justiziabilität ihrer Forderungen in einer direkten Demokratie, in: Hasani, Y., Hug, S., & Zalka J. (eds.), *Recht und Umwelt*, Zurich/Basel/Geneva, p. 99 ff; Fleisch, N. H. (1989). *Ziviler Ungehorsam oder Gibt es ein Recht auf Widerstand im schweizerischen Rechtsstaat?* thesis, Grüsch.

[75] "Response of the Vaud State Council to the interpellation of Denis Rubattel", op. cit. p. 2.
[76] Ibid, p. 3.

of the action committed) is a prerogative of the judge, who must make this determination *on a case-by-case basis* and in line with the principle of proportionality.[77] Thus, staff members' mere support of civil disobedience or participation in actions outside the University cannot be qualified from the outset as behaviour requiring a sanction for breach of duty of loyalty or of function. The University Rectorate is simply not competent to assess whether or not these actions exceed what is protected by the fundamental freedoms and should not prejudge them by determining that a disciplinary measure is always required.[78] If, after the fact, the Rectorate believes it must intervene, it must remember that it is bound by the principle of legality and that it must also avoid causing unjustified infringements of the freedoms of its employees.[79]

In the opinion of the working group, therefore, in cases of civil disobedience, caution is required in order to avoid unjustified interference in the fundamental rights of members of the community, since civil disobedience contributes to democratic expression and is a form of engagement that raises controversies. The working group considers it worth repeating that UNIL's sole concern is the question of the duty of confidentiality and that UNIL should not position itself as a substitute for the judicial system. Consequently, it should not, in the current state of the law, take any specific preventive measures to limit the participation of its employees in actions of civil disobedience. On the specific question of the duty of confidentiality, it cannot take a position *a priori*. It also seems perilous for it to take disciplinary measures *a posteriori* on particular cases in the absence of clear criminal case law on the question of whether civil disobedience is justified. As it stands, it would be better for UNIL to avoid deciding on a particular case before a criminal judgment has been handed down on the lawfulness of the action in question. If that action were to be judged unlawful by the competent judicial authorities, it would then be up to the Rectorate to decide whether it also violated the staff member's duty of loyalty. In such a case, the judgement would have to take into account the particularity of the academic context and the freedoms that are related to it and the fact that it is a mode of democratic expression considered legitimate in the academic literature in political philosophy, as well as the context in which the action is undertaken, the status of the person who took part in the action and the nature and content of the communication that accompanied the action. The various issues surrounding these contextual elements are discussed in the following section.

To sum up, cases of civil disobedience cause strong reactions, but from the point of view of a university they are not very different from other forms of engagement. While the controversial nature of civil disobedience makes it a particular and delicate mode of

[77] These elements are also recalled by the Council of State. Ibid, p. 4.
[78] The pronouncement of a criminal sanction and an administrative sanction are independent, and the two are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, in theory they serve different purposes: a disciplinary sanction should only be imposed if there is a danger to the confidence of the public, Dubey/zufferey, p. 781.
[79] Tanquerel T. (2018), *Manuel de droit administratif*, 2nd ed. Geneva 2018, p. 416 ff.

engagement, it is also a form of action that can contribute to public debate and support the dissemination of scientific statements. While it could put the institution's image at risk if applied on a large scale by academics, it could also strengthen democratic debate and draw attention to crucial social issues. This argues for a nuanced positioning of the University towards it and argues against a priori condemnation.

## 3.2. Academic interventions in the public sphere

**Main messages**: The rules of scientific integrity and the ethical norms of academic life constitute the deontological framework within which academic freedom is exercised. Since academics are protected by both their academic freedom and their general freedom of expression, it is important to know what role (researcher, mediator, expert, citizen) an academic is assuming when they express themselves. It is therefore good practice to make clear not only the role, but also the area of specialisation and the nature of what is being said. However, the different roles academics play in public are not hermetically sealed, and the perimeter of the field of specialisation is always a porous boundary. This ideal of transparency therefore needs to be adapted to each situation depending on what is possible at the time and on the context of the message.

The evidence presented in Section 3.1.2 shows that the legal limits on academic freedom of expression are tenuous and are in fact the same as those that apply to general freedom of expression. There may, however, be other reasons that a researcher would want to examine the context and question the terms of their engagement. As mentioned in the discussion of the notion of academic freedom, these reasons may include considerations related to the ethics of the research profession (standards of scientific integrity and ethics of academic life). This section therefore discusses the different issues at stake in the engagement process, in the light of the definitions in the previous section.

### 3.2.1. Ethics of the research profession

Numerous documents specify the roles, duties and responsibilities of researchers, such as the *French National Charter for Research Integrity*[80] or the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences memorandum on *Integrity in Scientific Research*.[81] In addition to such international and national documents, there is a plethora of texts on the rules and principles in force in

[80] *French National Charter for Research Integrity* (2015), Agence nationale de la recherche, https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/2015_French_RI_Charter_0.pdf
[81] Integrity in scientific research, op.cit.

particular institutions. These generally deal with issues of scientific integrity in research practice, as well as with the more consensual ethical rules of academic life, especially in the area of communication.

Scientific integrity, defined as "the personal commitment of researchers to the rules of good scientific practice",[82] includes principles, values and provisions aimed at ensuring the quality and reliability of research and its results. These include, among others, the prohibition of falsification, of the fabrication of data and of plagiarism, as well as the principles of explicit referencing of sources, recognition of prior contributions, respect for intellectual property and declaration of conflicts of interest.[83] The ethical principles of academic life include responsibility in collective work through the application of values such as respect, tolerance and recognition of each other's contributions, as well as the rejection of discriminatory behaviour, harassment and abuse of authority. The values of truthfulness, impartiality, transparency and honesty are also frequently mentioned, including in relation to communication activities.[84]

The principles and values mentioned here provide a general deontological framework within which the activities of engagement and the exercise of academic freedom should take place. It is thus clear that academics' exercise of their academic freedom, and thus of their *academic freedom of expression*, is subject to a number of ethical principles which, while not legally binding, are commonly regarded as part of the researcher's duties.[85] By virtue of the different roles they may adopt, academics are, as we have seen, protected *at the same time* by their academic freedom and by their general freedom of expression (see Section 3.1). As their different roles (researcher, expert or citizen) are often difficult to distinguish in practice, questions of transparency repeatedly arise about the context of the enunciation and about how the action or a public statement is received.

### 3.2.2. Role, area of specialisation and nature of comments

A recurring theme in debates on engagement is therefore the need for clarity and transparency about the role of the academic speaking in the public sphere. Are they speaking in their capacity as a researcher, whose status is legitimised by their titles and their affiliation with a scientific institution, or in a personal capacity as a citizen? This need for clarity relates to the authority conferred on the word of the academic as a specialist, and the fear that it will be instrumentalised (or perceived as being instrumentalised) when they express their personal opinions in areas that are or are not within their field of competence. There are therefore three main elements that help to structure this issue:

[82] Ibid, p.7.
[83] *French National Charter*, op. cit, p.3.
[84] Ibid, p. 4; *Integrity in Scientific Research*, op. cit, p. 14.
[85] *Integrity in scientific research*, op. cit. p. 15.

- The role assumed by the speaker and the speaker's professional status.
- Whether what is expressed is within or outside the speaker's field of specialisation.
- The nature of the statements made: scientific facts or personal opinion?

**Role taken on**

We have seen in Section 1.3 that there are multiple roles that academics can take in the public debate. Let us consider – for the sake of simplicity – only the role of a private citizen and the role of a researcher expressing themselves in their capacity as such. In the first case, it goes without saying that when speaking in a personal capacity, an academic is free to express a personal opinion, with no constraints linked to any ethical duty. This falls under their general freedom of expression. When speaking as a researcher, however, the ethical standards of academic debate mentioned above apply. A slightly more complex case is that of an academic speaking and taking a position as a researcher on a subject that does not fall within their field of competence. This is the type of situation that may lead to the fear or suspicion that the researcher could misuse the authority conferred by their professional status, especially as the boundaries between scientific fields are not always perceptible to the general public.

For this reason, a frequent recommendation in the literature on good practice in engagement is for academics to be as transparent as possible about the role they are assuming when speaking and the level of expertise they claim on the issue being addressed. The *French National Charter for Research Integrity* thus states that: "On each occasion, the researcher shall clearly indicate whether they are intervening in a personal capacity or as representative of their institution, and [shall distinguish] professional comments from opinion based on personal convictions".[86] Similarly, the UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* states: "When speaking or writing outside scholarly channels on matters which are not related to their professional expertise, to avoid misleading the public on the nature of their professional expertise".[87] It is particularly important to note here that these recommendations concern form and are in no way an invitation not to speak out.

**Field of specialisation**[88]

As the survey conducted at UNIL shows (see Section 2.1), engagement practices are diverse. Approximately half of the engaged researchers who responded to the survey are engaged only in subjects that are directly related to their field of specialisation and slightly less than half

[86] *French National Charter*, op. cit, p.2.
[87] *UNESCO Recommendation*, op.cit. p. 59. See also: Beaud O., *Le savoir en danger*, op.cit., p. 98.
[88] Given the distinction proposed in Section 1.3.2 between the role of expert and that of specialist researcher, here we use the term "field of specialisation", which is somewhat broader than "area of expertise". However, the two terms are often used interchangeably in the rest of the literature, as well as in the UNIL survey.

(42%) only outside it. The recommendation to treat these two apparently different cases separately does however come with some difficulties.

A first difficulty is that researchers know how science works and are trained to read and interpret scientific literature and that these skills enable them to acquire and evaluate new knowledge quickly – even on a subject that is not directly related to their field of specialisation. In a paper written for an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) symposium on issues of engagement, Nicolas Steneck distinguishes between *formal expertise*, which relates to a particular subject or field of study, and *experience-based expertise*, which relates to knowledge of how science works in general.[89] While there is undoubtedly some relevance to this argument, its scope seems relatively limited (as Steneck points out). One reason is that, due to the diversity and hyperspecialisation of disciplines, skills are not always transferable; another is that, due to the complexity of certain scientific and/or social issues, genuine expertise and an overview of the relevant literature is difficult to obtain outside one's own field of specialisation.

A second difficulty arises from the fact that the very notion of a field of specialisation has blurry edges and that in practice it is not always easy to know where a scientific field begins and ends. Is it the field of research or teaching, the whole range of issues addressed by a discipline, the interdisciplinary knowledge associated with a given theme, global scientific culture, etc.? – the ramifications of knowledge are multiple and the level of specialisation required to join the public debate can vary considerably depending on the context (media, debates, advising local authorities, etc.). In the opinion of the working group, this means that it is primarily up to the person speaking to judge whether they feel that they can legitimately speak on a given issue or whether this is beyond their own professional competence. It is the responsibility of each individual to be clear about the limits of their own competence and to communicate accordingly.

Lastly, as the focus group consultations have shown (see Section 2.2), it is in practice extremely difficult to separate the different roles of a person and to specify in all situations and without ambiguity the point of view from which that person is expressing themselves. It is in many ways doubtful that the authority conferred by academic status can be completely detached from the individual, even if the person explicitly speaks as a private citizen or explicitly ventures into a field that is not their precise speciality. Some people believe that the way to avoid this difficulty is for clarity and transparency to be focused not only on the role assumed and the field of specialisation, but also on the nature of what is said.

[89] Steneck, N. H. (2012). Responsible Advocacy in Science, op.cit, p.7.

**Nature of the statements made: scientific fact or personal opinion**

Statements in the public debate can range from personal opinions, to the simple communication of research results, to a range of assertions more or less based on the state of the scientific literature. It is important to avoid simplistic dichotomies between a communication that is purely and simply a description of scientific facts and an opinion that is entirely a matter of values and personal choice. This is all the more important as many scientific questions cannot be answered univocally but only by a presumption based on a body of evidence, sometimes divergent (e.g. the assessment of the toxicity of certain products for health and the environment, or the effect of certain public policies on behaviour, etc.). An academic who speaks in public on these issues cannot always rely on consensual and stabilised results, and must therefore base their answer on both their knowledge of the literature and their own mastery of the field, even if that means sometimes bringing up the lack of sufficiently robust knowledge or the existence of an ongoing scientific debate that prevents the question from being answered simply.[90]

In the opinion of some authors writing on the subject, a researcher can therefore express their own opinion on certain subjects legitimately as an academic, as long as that opinion is based on academic knowledge and not just on personal beliefs. Olivier Beaud, for example, notes that "when an academic expresses himself in his field, he is stating an 'authorised opinion', authorised in the sense of an opinion based on knowledge and know-how [...]".[91] When this is not the case and the statements made are based solely on personal conviction outside of any academic expertise, this should be explicitly mentioned, which brings us back to the question of the delimitation of the field of specialisation. It should be noted, however, that even when an academic speaks on an issue in a discipline in which they are a specialist, the legitimacy thus conferred should not justify failing to make explicit the conditions that make the knowledge robust, where possible. Are we talking about a simple study or a meta-analysis involving a hundred studies? A study conducted in Switzerland or in all OECD countries? Ideally, such transparency about the epistemic status of the knowledge transmitted should allow its validity to be debated, even when the communication is for the general public.

Of course, the context in which an action or statement is made also plays an important role in how it is received. People do not express themselves in the same way in front of a parliamentary committee as on the TV news, in a blog post or in a satirical newspaper. Some contexts allow more room for the expression of personal opinions or provocative statements, while others require more caution about what one can say as a specialist in a field. However, there is no general rule in this respect; the contextual elements and the level of freedom they offer must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

[90] On the question of the role of ethical and social values in such expert judgements we refer to section 1.4. on the notion of neutrality.

[91] Beaud O., *Le savoir en danger*, op.cit, p. 79. See also: Engel, P. (2020). The idea of a university and academic freedom. *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire*, *27*(5), 598-610.

It appears, therefore, that while clarity and transparency about the nature of what is being said is desirable, identifying that nature is not always easy. Nevertheless, a good faith effort should be made to apply these principles. It is therefore up to researchers to clarify their professional affiliation, to assess the limits of their field of specialisation and to qualify as best they can the nature of the remarks they make in the public sphere.

### 3.2.3. Engagement on social media

**Main messages**: Engagement on social media is no different in substance from other forms of expression, but it does present specific challenges, particularly because of the immediacy of the exchanges, the mix of users and the presence of organised ideological communities. It therefore calls for special awareness and support measures.

Among the different contexts and modalities of engagement, activity on social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) raises issues that need to be specifically addressed. Indeed, researchers are sometimes subject to violent attacks on social media, simply for communicating their research results, or because of positions they take that others dislike.[92] The UNIL Rectorate is regularly called upon in such cases and has on several occasions had to defend researchers who are victims of intimidation campaigns. Faced with similar problems, some universities have decided to issue recommendations on their research staff's use of social media.[93]

At its core, the issue of engagement is no different on social media than on other channels of expression. In particular, it raises the same questions of transparency as to the role assumed by the person expressing themselves (expert, researcher, citizen, etc.), of clarity as to the nature of the remarks (scientific data, informed opinion, personal opinion, etc.) and of whether or not the institution is involved. On the other hand, social media is distinct in some important ways. For example:

- The speed and immediacy of exchanges. Everyone can react to a comment in a few clicks, which is more difficult with traditional media.

[92] See for example: "The passions of Covid-19", *Allez Savoir!* 22.09.2021, https://wp.unil.ch/allezsavoir/les-passions-du-covid-19/

[93] For example, INRAE has published a series of practical sheets on the most frequent situations of public expression, including one specifically on social media. https://www.inrae.fr/actualites/charte-dexpression-publique-au-service-du-dialogue-entre-science-societe The University of Bern has published guidelines on the use of social media: https://www.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/content/e152701/e322683/e325053/e323213/ul_rl_social_media_ger.pdf

- The mix of users (specialists and non-specialists, citizens from all political backgrounds, etc.)
- The levelling of the register of arguments (science-based, expert, opinion, etc.)
- The brevity of the messages.
- A tendency towards sensationalism or for users to seek a winning formula and to have the last word.
- The existence of well-organised ideological communities and instances of “media lynching” of individuals opposed to their worldview.

These characteristics make it difficult to conduct a nuanced and constructive debate founded on the codes of scientific ethics and academic debate. Social media therefore carries the risk that scientific discourse will lose its specificities. That difficulty in discussing complex scientific issues on social media is one of the issues addressed in the guideline recently issued by the University of Bern.[94] In the working group’s opinion, however, the issues discussed on social media are not primarily a matter of scientific debate. There are different possible ways for academics to use social media, and not all of them pose the same problems. These include:

- a "documentary" use by which new scientific publications are disseminated and identified;
- communication and exchange of information between specialists in a field;
- popularisation and communication of science;
- engagement and advocacy on political or social issues.

Academics’ primary use of social media is therefore not to establish a true scientific debate, but rather to exchange and disseminate information and to enter a debate that, while sometimes based on scientific arguments, more often concerns social or political issues. Thus, social media is a tool for dialogue, engagement and activism favoured by some researchers.[95]

[94] https://www.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/content/e152701/e322683/e325053/e1053359/ul_lignes_directrices_information_expression_opinions_ger.pdf

[95] See for example: " Sous les pavés, le clic ", *Allez Savoir!* 15 December 2020, https://wp.unil.ch/allezsavoir/sous-les-paves-le-clic/

It is important to note at this point that, on the whole, problems are rare – very much in the minority in relation to the flow of information linked to UNIL.[96] When UNIL is called out on social media it is most often for one of the following reasons:[97]

- a researcher's comments are considered offensive or inappropriate;
- the line between the roles of researcher and activist is perceived as improperly blurred;
- UNIL is subject to questioning by a disgruntled member of the community;
- a UNIL researcher is the target of a campaign of intimidation and/or denigration;
- a researcher is erroneously identified being associated with UNIL.

The extreme speed at which social media acts, as well as the relative anonymity of the exchanges, has the effect of exacerbating these difficulties and making the discussions escalate more quickly. It also makes it difficult to provide institutional responses to this questioning, because the size of the institution and its hierarchical organisation make reactions too slow.[98]

The working group believes that regulation to prevent and alleviate the various problems mentioned here (such as the University of Bern's approach) would be counterproductive and suggests instead that support measures be put in place. For example:

- Developing a better understanding of the real impact on public opinion of contributions on social media (compared to other media).
- Training and raising the UNIL community's awareness on good practices for social media and the risks and limits of its use, through information sheets or specific courses.
- Providing clear information on what to do in the event of problems such as bullying or smear campaigns (e.g. hotline or contact person).

[96] There are more than 1000 researchers and students at UNIL who are regularly active on Twitter. The SOC's "How are you doing?" survey shows that 94% of students are active on social media. https://www.unil.ch/files/live/sites/soc/files/PDF_publications/CommentAllezVous/Comment_allez-vous_2021.pdf

[97] Communication from David Spring, UNIL community manager, to the working group, 26 November 2021.

[98] Ibid.

UNICOM has already developed a number of resources for the various institutional units of UNIL (faculties, institutes, sections, services, etc.), including a charter for the use of social media, descriptions of how they work, advice on good practice, and a decision tree that helps the user decide how to react to negative or inappropriate messages.[99] These resources provide a solid basis on which materials for use by community members may be developed. Also, the informal working group OURS (orchestra of social media users) has provided support to the managers of UNIL's institutional social media accounts since 2013.

### 3.2.4. Engagement and teaching

**Main messages**: A relevant characteristic of teaching is the significant asymmetry between teachers and students. Teachers can legitimately share their personal engagement and values in class, which can also bring pedagogical benefits, but should do so with a view to developing students' ability to approach problems according to the criteria of academic investigation, as well as their critical thinking and their autonomy of choice. This converse is also true: students with strong activist convictions may share them.

Another case worth considering in which issues of engagement arise is teaching. Although it takes place within the institutional framework of a university, higher education has a public component in that it contributes to the training of citizens who also participate in the public debate on societal issues. As with the issue of neutrality of research practices (see Section 1.4.1), the question here is what place members of the academic community should give to their personal beliefs and values in their teaching role. For example, can a teacher who is engaged with a cause take advantage of the forum provided by their classes to support or promote that cause, including when it is related to the subject being taught? Or should the teacher show a level of reserve, limit themselves to stating the facts, and insert as little as possible of their personal opinions and questions of values into the way they teach?

This question arises because university teaching situations are marked by asymmetry (of power, prestige, theoretical background, experience) between the teacher and the students. This asymmetry translates into a dominant position for the teacher, which may in some cases be unfavourable to the development of an open debate of ideas and to the students' exercise of critical thinking.

[99] https://www.unil.ch/socialmedia/home.html

**Institutional values**

One of the roles of a university is to teach both the knowledge already available and how to produce new knowledge. Academics teach their students facts that are scientifically proven. These facts, which are the product of scientific research, can then be used as arguments and means of action. As such, they can be mobilised in the collective decision-making process. Decisions about what to do or not to do, however, are a matter not for science but for politics. Does this mean that a university should not concern itself at all with the question of goals and values? It certainly does not.

A university has values closely associated with its status as a scientific institution, and it seems obvious that these should be promoted and should be an integral part of a university education. But a university also serves general values such as equality, justice and the common good, as well as values specific to the university (e.g. at UNIL, gender equality and sustainability), which are not scientific norms but ethical and social values endorsed by the institution (more on this in Section 3.3.1). A university thus has values and goals that can serve as discussion points in its members' teaching. A university education should therefore not ignore the existence of these institutional values and should also make students aware of the status of the knowledge taught and how it constitutes arguments that can be mobilised in the public debate.

**Personal values**

Because of the asymmetry between teachers and students described above, teachers are role models, whether they like it or not, and thus have some influence in forming students' opinions. This does not imply that teachers have a duty to maintain strict axiological neutrality, but it does imply a duty to make students aware of the issues surrounding knowledge production and its role in shaping values and political decisions.

Requiring teachers to be perfectly neutral about their subjects would be futile and counterproductive, for several reasons. First, like researchers, teachers inevitably rely in part on their own values in making choices about the subjects and topics they teach and the methods they use. Secondly, teachers' right to share with students well-considered judgements, grounded on the state of scientific research, about social or political controversies is a matter of academic freedom, of which freedom of teaching is a component (see Section 3.1). Finally, as subjects are often best conveyed through concrete examples, there are also pedagogical benefits in having a teacher rely in part on their own beliefs when discussing a case study.[100]

[100] For example, about 60% of the respondents to the UNIL survey felt that their engagement influenced their teaching choices and helped to make their teaching material more concrete. On the other hand, about half of them said that they avoid talking about their engagement in the context of their teaching (see Section 2.1.2).

However, this is not a carte blanche for teachers to propagate their own values. One of the objectives of university teaching is the ability of students to develop a rational and systematic approach to problems. Teachers can therefore be expected to be rigorous, if not impartial, in presenting the various elements surrounding a scientific, social or political controversy. Training students to navigate the issues and controversies of a scientific discipline sometimes requires examining conflicting arguments or evidence. The teacher's assertion of their personal position should therefore not undermine this exercise in confronting divergent views.

While a teacher's personal values and goals, or even engagement for a particular cause, need not be hidden (which would be difficult to effect) and can even be used in the context of teaching, it is important not to lose sight of one of the central missions of the university: to educate informed citizens who are capable of using their critical faculties and are autonomous in their choices.

**Importance of the specificities of the scientific process**

This last point is also relevant to the opposite situation, i.e. when teachers are confronted with students with very strong militant convictions. Such students sometimes have high expectations of teachers and seek confirmation of pre-existing beliefs in the content of their teaching. A point that emerged from various faculty members in discussions with the working group was that certain students' engagement has sometimes led them to write term papers more akin to advocacy than to papers that respect the rules of academic investigation.[101]

While there is clearly no reason to prohibit student engagement, and it is even desirable, it should be recalled here that university education also aims to train students to recognise the difference between the standards of scientific demonstration and those of public debate and political argumentation. This distinction can be highlighted in conjunction with the need, already mentioned, to make the role and limits of scientific knowledge in democratic decision-making a topic in the various courses and at the level of the curriculum. University-level teaching should include conveying the implications of knowledge production on social issues, and how they can inform a point of view. The teacher may or may not achieve this by setting out their own aims and values, but must do so by emphasising the specificity of the scientific process in each discipline and the need for critical and informed reflection.

[101] On this subject, see among others the debate organised at UNIL on 15 June 2020. Available here: https://www.unil.ch/centre-durabilite/recherche-et-engagement

### 3.2.5. The risk of loss of credibility

**Main messages**: There is concern that academics and scientific institutions risk losing credibility. This risk cannot be neglected and must be taken into account, but the few studies available seem to show that engagement does not lead to any significant loss of public trust. This may not be the case in some specific settings (e.g. in some political parties), but data are lacking. The risk of losing credibility due to a *lack* of engagement should also be considered, and the figures show a certain expectation from the public for researchers to take part in societal debates.

To conclude this overview of the various issues related to the engagement of academics in the public sphere, it is worth examining the argument that researchers and scientific institutions may lose credibility as a result of their engagement.

Science and scientific institutions generally enjoy a high level of trust among the public. In Switzerland, 64% of the population have a high to very high level of trust in academics and 70% consider scientists to be competent and qualified.[102] Scientific facts also play an important role in public policy-making, especially in areas where reliable knowledge is needed. Science, its methods and its researchers have a reputation for reliability that gives them, in the eyes of many academics and of the general public, credibility in describing and understanding the world (natural, social, political, cultural, etc.) in which we live. Today, however, the general understanding of what underpins this credibility is still very much tied to an ideal of value-free science, which is seen as the only way to guarantee the objectivity of knowledge. In her synthesis of the AAAS colloquium on engagement mentioned above, Deborah Runkle reports the content of some of the discussions in the following terms: "[If] the science community is perceived as having a 'values-based' agenda, scientists put themselves at risk of losing their credibility and, thus, lessen their potential impact on policy".[103] Such a statement echoes a fear, recurrent in debates on engagement, that researchers, universities and science itself will lose credibility with the general public and the political class. Most often based on the idea that engagement – which mobilises moral, social or political values – is not compatible with a certain idea of science, such a fear is generally used as an argument to justify limiting the engagement of academics or developing a framework for it.

[102] Science Barometer Switzerland, 2019. Cited in: Swiss academies of Arts and Sciences. (2021). *Science in the Swiss Public. The State of Science Communication and Public Engagement with Science in Switzerland* (Report No. 16 (8)), p. 29.

[103] Runkle, D. (2012). Advocacy in Science. Summary of a Workshop convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, p. 8.

However, such concerns do not seem to be in the majority within the UNIL community. The survey shows that only 17% of respondents (N = 1004) agree with the statement " There is a clear conflict between engagement [advocacy] and objectivity". Only 24%, 21% and 19% believe that engagement harms the credibility of researchers, their institution or research in general, respectively.

It was noted in Section 1.4, on the notion of neutrality, that the ideal of 'value-free' science was quite inconsistent with actual research practice and was therefore both unattainable and undesirable. From this point of view, it appears that fears of a loss of credibility in the scientific world arise from the confusion of the absence of values and the search for objectivity. As already mentioned, the search for objectivity is put into practice through methods and procedures specific to each academic discipline and to the general functioning of research. It is therefore not necessarily contradictory for ethical and social values to play a role – limited and regulated – at certain stages of the research process (choice of questions, interpretation of results, etc.). There is therefore no incompatibility in principle between undertaking research that is as objective as possible and researchers' personal engagement in the name of ethical or social values. Cases of fraud or of the instrumentalisation of science for ideological or political ends are not, of course, impossible. However, such cases are a breach of the ethics of the profession of researcher and should not prejudice any engagement as such.

The fact remains that the question of the credibility of science has more to do with perceptions than with epistemology. This implies that if the vision of science as very impersonal and neutral is widespread in society and among political decision-makers, the existence of researchers publicly displaying their values and taking a stand on social issues could have an effect on their perception and on the trust placed in scientific institutions. Such an eventuality cannot be completely ignored, and a researcher who embarks on an action of engagement must consider suspicion about their ideological bias or conflict of interest a potential risk. This risk should be taken into account in particular in the context of relations with the political environment, where the perception of science and its role in the public debate can vary considerably depending on the parties and ideological currents. Again, this risk can be minimised through communication that avoids mixing roles and that is transparent about the status of speaking and the nature of what is being said.

**Little risk of a real loss of credibility with the public**

There is little empirical evidence on the risk of loss of credibility in relation to academic engagement, but the few studies that do exist are rather reassuring. Kotcher *et al.*, for example, conducted an online survey of 1,235 Americans testing six types of messages,

increasingly normative in content, delivered by a climate scientist.[104] Their results show that the content of these different messages does not significantly affect the credibility of the climate scientist, nor that of the wider scientific community.[105] Kotcher and colleagues conclude that not all normative statements are damaging to the credibility of engaged academics: "Notably, conditions where there was a heightened perception of influence of personal views and persuasive intentions did not necessarily cause participants to reach the conclusion that the scientist was less credible as result. This finding brings into question whether the extent of normative judgment in a scientist's communication is the most salient factor that members of the public utilize when forming credibility assessments of scientists."[106] In their results, only the proposal to build more nuclear power plants causes a drop in the climate scientist's credibility level, suggesting that the nature of the proposed solution plays more of a role than the fact that a scientist takes a position in the public debate. In a similar study, Beall *et al.* found that public advocacy of *uncontroversial* policies never had a negative effect on researchers' credibility, and sometimes had a positive effect, and that advocacy of *controversial* policies had a negative effect only in some cases. This leads them to state that their results contradict the loss of credibility argument often used against engagement.[107]

Finally, in another study carried out in 2020 among 1107 climate researchers and 884 German and American citizens, Cologna *et al.* conclude that "We confirm previous findings that openly supporting climate policies (as well as protests that call for action on climate change) does not necessarily adversely affect public perceptions of credibility".[108] More specifically, their results show that engaging with climate change, and publicly supporting one type of climate policy, would not affect citizens' presumption of researchers' trustworthiness and honesty. Although Cologna *et al.* identified a negative effect on the perception of the researchers' objectivity, it seems to be compensated by their being perceived as acting in favour of society.[109]

The few recent studies available on the subject are therefore rather encouraging as to the absence of a negative effect of engagement on the credibility of academics in the eyes of the

---

[104] The messages were: communication about a recent scientific discovery, information about the risks of climate change, discussion of the pros and cons of two climate policy options, a call for urgent action against climate change, and a call for a specific climate policy (with two variants: limiting coal-fired power plants and promoting nuclear energy).

[105] Kotcher, J. E., et al (2017). Does engagement in advocacy hurt the credibility of scientists? Results from a randomized national survey experiment. *Environmental Communication*, *11*(3), 415–429.

[106] Ibid, p. 425.

[107] Beall, L., et al. (2017). Controversy matters: Impacts of topic and solution controversy on the perceived credibility of a scientist who advocates. *PLOS ONE*, *12*(11), e0187511-14. Yet another study has shown the polarising effect that 'marches for science' can have between politically liberal and politically conservative people. See: Motta, M. (2018). The polarizing effect of the March for Science on attitudes toward scientists. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *51*(4), 782–788.

[108] Cologna, V., et al (2021). Majority of German citizens, US citizens and climate scientists support policy advocacy by climate researchers and expect greater political engagement. *Environmental Research Letters*, *16*, p.8.

[109] Ibid.

general public. However, it should be noted that the various studies cited here analyse engagement in or close to the researcher's field of specialisation. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions about the effect of engagement on particular social groups (e.g. politicians), especially when it concerns issues that are further away from the field of specialisation.

**The risks of a lack of engagement**

The risk of losing credibility must also be considered from the perspective of the effects of a possible lack of engagement on the part of academics. According to the above-mentioned study by Cologna *et al.*, *a* majority of German and American citizens believe that academics should be more engaged. Similarly, a large opinion survey in the US showed that 76% of Americans think it is appropriate for scientists to be actively involved in political debates.[110] Little data exists for Switzerland on engagement – as defined in this report – but the Science Barometer Switzerland shows very clearly that the public expects scientists to communicate with the public. In 2019, 79% of the population believed that scientists should inform the public about their work, a proportion that has increased since 2016.[111] In the survey of UNIL researchers, 40% of respondents believe that a *lack* of engagement risks damaging the credibility of the scientific world,[112] against 33% who disagree with such a statement. On the other hand, 51% of the respondents believe that UNIL should be more involved than it currently is.[113]

The frequent criticism of academics as being locked in their “ivory tower” and disconnected from the realities of the field also reinforces the idea that the public expects researchers to be more involved in social issues. This idea seems to be corroborated by Cologna *et al.*, who note that the credibility and level of trust accorded to a researcher by the public is largely influenced by the perception that the researcher is acting in the interests of society.[114] The risk of a loss of credibility due to researchers’ and/or scientific institutions’ lack of engagement is therefore more than a mere hypothesis and should be better taken into account in the discussions.

[110] Pew Research Center (2009). Public praises science; scientists fault public, media. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center for People & the Press. Cited in: Kotcher, J. E., et al. (2017), art. cit, p. 415.
[111] Science Barometer Switzerland, 2019. Cited in: Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. (2021). Op. cit. p. 30.
[112] With variations according to personal practices: this percentage is 47% for respondents who are engaged and 35% for those who are not.
[113] Nine percent of respondents felt that UNIL should engage less than it currently does, 25% neither more nor less, and 15% chose the 'don't know' option. Here too, there are individual variations between respondents who are engaged and those who are not.
[114] Cologna, V., et al. (2021), op. cit, p. 8.

## 3.3. Engagement from the perspective of the institution

**Main messages**: The notion of engagement does not stop at individuals, but also applies to institutions. An engaged university can be understood in this sense as a university with values: scientific values, democratic values and specific values that it chooses to include in its governance principles (charter, statement of intent). An engaged university is also a university that supports a culture of engagement with its community. However, there is a clear distinction between the positions taken by the institution and those taken by members of its community. Other than for those holding a representative position (Rectorate, deanships, etc.), displaying institutional affiliation for identification purposes does not imply engagement by the institution, and regulations limiting this practice does not therefore seem justified in the context of engagement activities. On the other hand, all public interactions by researchers contribute to shaping the public image of the institution.

In the face of inevitable challenges to the institution following public actions or statements by its members, the default reaction of a university should be to defend researchers' academic freedom and freedom of expression. In rare cases the institution may have to distance itself, or even take administrative measures in the event of a flagrant violation of the standards of scientific integrity. Furthermore, despite a stated desire to defend academic freedom and freedom of expression and to promote the university as a place where ideas can be constructively confronted, a scientific institution has a certain amount of leeway as to whether or not to accept external speakers on its campus. This leeway can be exercised with reference to the values upheld by the institution, among which are first and foremost the norms of academic debate.

After looking at the issues of engagement in relation to the individual practice of academic professions (research, teaching, relationship with society), it is appropriate to address their relationship with the university as an institution.

This leads to the general question of what it means for a university as an institution to be engaged, as well as to the practical implications of this. A question regularly raised in debates is whether or not academics should mention their institutional affiliation when interacting publicly; another is the question of how to react to the complaints and questioning the institution inevitably receives following public actions and positions taken publicly by its researchers. These issues are examined below, as is the management of events, sometimes of a highly normative nature, organised under the aegis of the university.

### 3.3.1. The university as an engaged institution

Can a university be engaged *as* an institution? If so, does its special status as a scientific institution entail any limits to its engagement? On what should this engagement be based? This raises the question of how a university is positioned in its relationship with the rest of society, and especially with regard to the different political and ideological currents that animate public debate.

**A university with values**

It seems relatively clear that a university, by virtue of its status as a public institution, must remain non-partisan, in the sense that it cannot officially support a political party. Such restraint should not be confused with the absence of values. A university such as UNIL is not neutral in the sense defined in Section 1.4: it has its own values of various kinds, values that it can and must strive to defend. These include, of course, the values specific to the scientific process, as well as the ethical rules of research and academic life, already mentioned in Section 3.2.1. A university can also be expected to embrace the values specific to any public institution in a democratic system, such as the rule of law, equality, justice and the common good. Finally, a university may, by virtue of the autonomy that the principle of academic freedom confers, choose the specific values it wishes to defend or emphasise in its strategic choices and governance principles. These values are generally enshrined in the university's governance documents, such as the UNIL Charter or its Statement of Intent. In this way UNIL pursues its own goals – in the sense that it chooses to grant them particular importance or urgency – such as gender equality and climate protection.

On the basis of these different values, a university can therefore practise engagement, i.e. take a public position as an institution, in a more or less active way, on certain normative, social or political issues. These are in particular:

- issues that have an impact on how it carries out its core tasks (e.g. research funding, free movement of students and researchers, debates on animal experimentation, etc.);
- the values officially supported by the university, i.e. those noted in its charter or strategic plan (e.g. gender equality, sustainability, etc.).

Even when this perimeter is defined, the question of a university's engagement remains unclear. A first approach is to say that a university, as a scientific institution, must at a minmum respect scientific knowledge, at least in areas where a well-established consensus exists. Thus, no university can reasonably take a position in favour of creationism or climate scepticism. Apart from the most obvious cases, however, this approach can pose two difficulties. The first

is that many scientific questions are the subject of controversies for which current knowledge does not have an unequivocal answer (e.g. the harmfulness of certain pesticides to the environment). The second is that many social and political questions, even if they have a factual basis, are normative in nature and cannot be decided empirically. They can only be decided by political decision.

In order to best respond to these two difficulties, a university should thus plainly affirm the central importance of controversy and debate in the advancement of science, while distinguishing clearly between science "in the making" and areas in which it has stabilised and is no longer debated. But much more than taking sides on multiple controversial issues, the role of a university, as an institution, is to act as a guarantor of the conditions for debate, based on freedom of expression and on the norms of academic ethics. This latter position should not, however, be equated with the pursuit of an unattainable neutrality. Again, universities are bearers of certain values that they can defend publicly when it is deemed necessary for them to do so, and when that is not in flagrant contradiction of well-established scientific knowledge.

**A university that supports a culture of engagement**

The term 'engaged university' can also be understood in a significantly different sense, not in terms of taking a stand as an institution, but in terms of supporting and encouraging the individual engagement of its members. In practice, this means creating a climate of trust and a 'culture of engagement' that are conducive to its development and successful realisation.

The development of a culture of engagement is an objective consistent with the mission of stimulating societal debate and the responsibility researchers have towards society as described in Section 1.3.1. This is a legitimate and desirable objective, fully supported by the working group. But before coming to the courses of action proposed in Section 3.4, it is worth examining some practical issues that must be addressed by the Rectorate of a university that is engaged, in the sense defined above.

### 3.3.2. Mentioning professional affiliation: is the researcher engaging the institution?

Given the ideal mentioned above of transparency as to the researcher's role and field of specialisation and the nature of their remarks, the question often arises of the contexts in which an academic may mention their institutional affiliation when expressing themselves in the public sphere. Is it legitimate, for example, to mention one's university when speaking in the media or on social networks, when signing political petitions or when participating in actions organised by activist groups? Opinions are mixed on these points. The UNIL community survey found that 58% of the participants (n=1038) believe that institutional affiliation should only be displayed if the researcher's engagement is in their field of

specialisation, as opposed to only 26% who think that institutional affiliation may be mentioned in all cases (and 5% who think that it should never be mentioned). This question, however, cuts across two different issues. The first is whether a member of the academic community “engages” their institution in some way when they take a position on political or social issues in public by mentioning their affiliation. The second, which emerges clearly from the survey results, is the continued discussion of transparency about the role taken on and the fear that the authority and legitimacy conferred by academic titles could be abused.

The use of titles and institutional affiliation when interacting in the public sphere can have at least three different functions:

1. **To identify** the person speaking and where they are speaking from;
2. **To confer scientific legitimacy** on this person. In this case, along with the institution the title or position held (professor, lecturer, doctoral student, etc.) is usually mentioned and the field of research is the key element.
3. To assign the person the **role of representing** the institution. In this case, along with the institution a specific function is usually mentioned (rector, dean, president, spokesperson, etc.).

While these three functions, and particularly the first two, are sometimes difficult to distinguish in practice, they do relate to significantly different issues.

In the working group’s opinion the simple function of identification in no way implies engagement on the part of the institution, insofar as it seems clear that unless explicitly mentioned a researcher does not have *a priori* a function of representing their institution. A 'slip' (insults, outrageous remarks, etc.), or remarks that flagrantly contradict the values of the institution, may nevertheless damage the image of the institution, which is responsible, at the very least, for having recruited the researcher in question. It is for this reason in particular that some universities suggest that their researchers explicitly state that they are speaking in a personal capacity when they engage in the public sphere. The University of California, for example, which has fairly strict guidelines on researcher engagement, specifies that a reference to institutional affiliation may be used for identification purposes, but that it should be accompanied by a disclaimer that the individual is acting or speaking in their own name when that is the case.[115] While the working group sees such disclaimers as an effective way of

[115] https://www.ucsf.edu/cgr/advocacy/guidelines. However, this provision is part of a specific legal framework for regulating the use of public money for political purposes in the US. INRAE in France adopts a slightly more restrictive position since its *Charter of Public Expression* states that "to express oneself by claiming to be an INRAE staff member implies being able to state a direct link between the subject of the expression on the one hand, and the activities carried out and the competences mobilised in the context of the missions entrusted to the

implementing the ideal of the transparency of roles, it believes that the absence of an explicit representative function makes sufficiently clear that researchers are speaking on their own behalf, not that of the institution. There is therefore, in the working group's view, no need to make such disclaimers compulsory, although their use could be encouraged in cases where ambiguity remains.

The second function of institutional affiliation, that of legitimising the academic skills of the individual, is naturally related to the second of the two issues mentioned above. The fact that scientific legitimacy is conferred, at least in part, by affiliation with an academic institution gives rise to fears either that this legitimacy may be misused (for example, to establish the authority of positions taken outside the field of specialisation) or that the repeated misuse of this legitimacy may jeopardise the credibility of the institution itself. The issue of the risk of loss of credibility has been discussed above (Section 3.2.5). As for the fears of misuse of the authority conferred by the titles and academic affiliation of the research staff hired, the working group is of the opinion, having studied the issue, that they are largely unfounded.

A case commented on by law professor Olivier Beaud is enlightening in this respect. It concerns a collective of 25 French academics who published an open letter in the press calling for people not to vote for Marine Le Pen in the second round of the 2017 French presidential election, for ethical reasons and to preserve 'the image of France'.[116] The letter is signed with explicit mention of institutional titles and affiliations, while its content has little or no connection with the specialisation of the signatories. Have these academics misused their academic status to establish the legitimacy of their position and to exert a disproportionate influence on the political debate? Noting that mentioning titles and institutions is a frequent practice in public speaking by academics, Olivier Beaud finds no reason to believe that the signatories misled the public. The reasons given in support of this judgement are that these academics do not claim in such a case to take a position in the name of their professional expertise and that the readers of the open letter are free to judge for themselves whether or not the signatories' academic specialisations offer them any additional legitimacy in this matter.[117] In addition, it is difficult to see why academics should be more restricted than others in this respect, on the pretext that their profession enjoys a certain social status.

For these various reasons, the working group therefore considers the mention or not of professional affiliation a not particularly important issue and believes that possible abuses and slippages cannot be a sufficient reason for regulations that limit the use of academic titles and

---

institution on the other hand". INRAE (2022). *Charter for Public Expression*. https://www.inrae.fr/actualites/charte-dexpression-publique-au-service-du-dialogue-entre-science-societe.
The University of Bern states in its *Guidelines for Information and Expression of Opinion* that "Private opinions and content must be clearly declared as such. University of Bern. (2021). *Guidelines for information and expression of opinions*.

[116] Academic Appeal: Avoiding "that a score above 30% for the far right would damage France's image". (2017, April 29). *Le Monde.* https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/04/29/appel-d-universitaires-eviter-qu-un-score-de-l-extreme-droite-au-dessus-de-30-ne-nuise-a-l-image-de-la-france_5120060_3232.html

[117] Beaud O., *Le savoir en danger*, op.cit, p. 99.

functions, particularly for identification purposes, in the recruitment process. As already indicated, the working group stresses, however, that it is the responsibility of each individual to clarify as best as possible the point of view from which they are expressing themselves, and that choosing not to display one's institutional affiliation may, in certain circumstances, be one way of doing so.

This leaves the third function of institutional affiliation, namely to designate the person as a representative of the institution. This function primarily applies to people with a leadership function, mainly members of the university Rectorate and deans of faculties. Insofar as these people have a representative role, by default they speak on behalf of the institution and not in their own name when they express themselves in the exercise of their function. What they say in public is therefore much more binding on the institution than what other researchers say, and this is increasingly so as one moves up the hierarchy of academic governance.[118] However, as these people are in most cases also researchers, they may of course sometimes speak from within their own academic specialisation or as private citizens. They may therefore reasonably be required to pay particular attention to clarifying their status when they speak.

### 3.3.3. What is the attitude to take towards complaints and questioning?

A university, even one that is engaged and supportive of the engagement of its researchers, will be regularly taken to task, rightly or wrongly, for the actions or public statements of members of its community. This creates an obligation to respond; the response must be based on knowledge of the circumstances that led to the challenge and developed according to criteria that we try to clarify in the following paragraphs. Truly problematic cases are undoubtedly rare, but they cannot be ignored and must therefore also be considered here. On the other hand, as each case is different, there is no single answer that can be determined in advance, but only some principles that are summarised below.

In line with what has been discussed so far, the default position should be that of a **defence of academic freedom and the freedom of expression** of researchers. On this basis, there are three general attitudes the academic hierarchy could take: support, distancing and condemnation of the remarks (possibly with administrative measures). The difficulty here lies in determining the criteria that will lead to each of these reactions. These may include:

[118] Not everyone agrees with this, however. Olivier Beaud reports the words of a former provost of Columbia University in New York who testifies to a very horizontal conception of the university: "No one speaks *for* the university, not even its official leaders. The president, the provost and the board of trustees are responsible for conducting university policy under their authority, but the essence of the university is in its multiple voices: those of its faculties, its students, its researchers, its professors." Quoted in: Beaud O., *Le savoir en danger*, op.cit, p. 88.

- The institution’s involvement or not in what was said (see Section 3.3.2)
- The consistency of the statements with the institution's values (see Section 3.3.1)
- Whether or not scientific integrity standards are met (see Section 3.2.1)

Below are some illustrations of cases covered by different types of reactions; this is not, however, an exhaustive list.

**Support**

Supporting members of the university community, for example through a direct response to complaints received or through a public statement, is the default response, in defence of academic freedom and because of the university's duty as an employer to protect its employees. This response may cover a number of different scenarios:

- a researcher is attacked simply for publishing their research results (defence of academic freedom);
- a researcher is attacked because of their engagement in their field of specialisation (defence of academic freedom);
- a researcher engages on a personal level on a controversial issue (defence of general freedom of expression).

**Distancing**

A university may sometimes distance itself by stating that the words of one of its members are that person’s own and do not imply engagement by the institution itself. For example:

- a researcher makes statements that contradict the values of the institution;
- a member of the community makes statements that contradict a well-established scientific consensus.

It should be noted that distancing is not incompatible with a reaffirmation of freedom of expression. In such cases, the university does not take a position on the substance of the issue and can emphasise the role and necessity of controversy in advancing knowledge, while clarifying its own position. However, correcting scientific information deemed to be erroneous is generally not the responsibility of the institution but of the academic specialists in the field.

**Condemnation of acts or words and/or administrative measures (warnings, etc.) :**

Such measures should remain exceptional, applying for example, to cases in which scientific integrity standards are flagrantly violated, for which there are specific procedures.

### 3.3.4. Management of events held under the auspices of UNIL

UNIL hosts a large number of events and external speakers every year, sometimes on controversial, political or militant issues. It is therefore relevant to the issues addressed in this report to have set rules or criteria according to which the institution should accept, refuse or support certain events organised on its campus, notably by third parties.

**Why such reflection is necessary**

A reflection on the management of events organised under the aegis of the university is needed because conflicting cases arise within the UNIL community – rarely but regularly – that require arbitration by the Rectorate. Added to this is the fact that activities held on UNIL premises receive from that a form of scientific or reputational endorsement that cannot be granted under every condition.

Examples of case studies reviewed by the working group include:

- a student association's invitation to an ideologist linked to the French extreme right who has no scientific qualifications, without contradictory debate;
- a conference organised by a student association on a controversial scientific issue, inviting speakers whose scientific credibility has been questioned by some members of the community, in the absence of contradictory debate;
- a discussion panel organised by an association external to UNIL, on a politically sensitive subject, and in the presence of a speaker whose revisionist views have been pointed out by another association opposed to the speaker's visit;

  a round table organised by a student association including, among other speakers, a controversial figure from the political right in Switzerland, with scientific backing from a UNIL researcher. This was followed by a call for a boycott, an appeal to the Rectorate to ban the event, and threats against the speaker.

These different cases show the need for reflection about principles that will help the Rectorate make decisions. These principles should take into account the scientific credibility of the institution, its role as a guarantor of open and constructive intellectual debate, its non-

partisan character and its identity as an engaged institution that upholds the values contained in its Charter and its Statement of Intent (see Section 3.3.1).

**Academic freedom issues**

UNIL is a public institution, which does not mean that it is obliged to accept – in the name of freedom of expression – all types of discourse, speakers and events on its campus. For example, should we accept conspiracy theorists, openly creationist speakers or speakers who defend ideological programmes in flagrant conflict with UNIL values? As with the other questions related to the issue of engagement, these must be viewed in connection with academic freedom and the interpretation that is made of it.

There is a controversy in the English-language literature between those who advocate a full application of freedom of expression on campus, which would allow for few limits on the types of speech (including purely ideological or non-scientific speech) that are allowed on campus, and advocates of a more restrictive interpretation of academic freedom. The former rely on the democratic virtues of a university conceived as a space for free speech. Advocates of less tolerance in universities for speech that does not meet the minimum rules of the scientific process and academic debate base their argument on a distinction between general freedom of expression and academic freedom (see Section 3.1.1).[119] The latter, as we have seen, is a special freedom conditional on a number of ethical duties. It is therefore more limited in scope than general freedom of expression and does not apply to everyone indiscriminately. Defending this view, the English philosopher Robert Simpson argues that it is necessary to "move toward a more “partitioned” view, on which academic freedom is the governing norm for communication in universities, and free speech is left to do its work in the wider sphere of public discourse".[120]

According to this view, which is consistent with the interpretation of academic freedom in this report, it is not just anyone who can express themselves at the university on any terms. A university can therefore in principle legitimately impose limits related to the respect of the norms of academic debate and the values it carries as an institution. As Pascal Engel puts it well: “Challenging an expert in a forum where he is supposed to express himself, but defends ideological or charlatan positions, is not a challenge to his freedom of expression, but a refusal to grant academic freedom to someone who does not respect it”.[121] However, this has to be balanced against the ideal of a university understood as a place of open debate and a crossroads for the constructive confrontation of ideas. A balance must therefore be struck

[119] Beaud O., *Le savoir en danger*, op.cit, p. 80.

[120] Simpson, R. M. (2020). The Relation between Academic Freedom and Free Speech. *Ethics*, *130*, p. 315. Quoted in Beaud O., ibid. Robert Simpson is particularly opposed to student associations inviting 'charlatans' to universities. Ibid.

[121] Engel, P. (2020). L’idée d’une université et la liberté académique. Op. cit. p. 605. Quoted in Beaud O., ibid, p. 84.

between, on the one hand, a concern for consistency with the scientific nature of academic institutions and the values they uphold, and on the other, the desire to cultivate a diversity of views and opinions within the academic debate. Academic freedom also includes the freedom to examine and debate controversial issues that are sometimes disliked by certain ideological groups or parts of society.[122]

**Current practice at UNIL**

For some years now, UNIL has had a directive (Rectorate Directive 5.1) defining the conditions under which the University may make its premises available to third parties. According to this directive, the Rectorate must be systematic in its decisions about authorising the use of UNIL premises for external events. The following types of events are **not permitted**:

- activities that are incompatible with the University Charter;
- for-profit events;
- political demonstrations of a partisan nature;
- the practice of religious worship or rites (with the exception of those organised by the UNIL/EPFL Chaplaincy);
- sectarian practices or proselytising actions;
- activities dangerous to the infrastructure and/or physically dangerous to people;
- Unethical, racist or discriminatory acts.

**Acceptable** types of third-party events include:

- working sessions organised by the State of Vaud;
- events related to higher education or research;
- public events organised by the cantonal authorities or its services;
- public events organised by other public services (the confederation, municipalities, etc.);

[122] See for example the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, already cited in Section 3.1.2, stating that academic freedom "is not limited to university or scientific research, but also extends to the freedom of academics to express freely their views and opinions, even if they are controversial or unpopular, in their fields of research, professional expertise and competence".

- public events organised by non-profit institutions or associations, in particular student associations recognised by UNIL.

Also according to this directive, for a public event with scientific content to be authorised, it must be organised by at least one UNIL researcher or must have received the prior written agreement of the Dean of the Faculty in the field of study to which the event pertains.

**Decision-making principles for scientific and debating events involving external speakers**

The difficulty in defining criteria for deciding whether or not to accept an event or speaker on UNIL premises is that it is neither possible nor desirable to control the content beforehand. Such an attempt at prior control would quickly turn into censorship and would violate academic freedom and freedom of expression. The Rectorate would therefore have to stick to minimal, objective criteria, so its room for manoeuvre is rather limited. The rest of the research community, on the other hand, can exercise vigilance with regard to the **compatability of the content with the values of UNIL** (academic values, values of the charter, values affirmed in the statement of intent), following the principles of self-governance and peer regulation. A principle of proportionality must also apply here. With the possible exception of cases that are in flagrant contradiction with its own institutional values, and in line with the ideal of the university as a place for the constructive confrontation of ideas, the university does not have to arbitrate between the values of its own members or their guests. Indeed, it is not uncommon for groups with opposing orientations to clash within the university by requesting the banning of each other's events because of ideological differences. In the opinion of the working group, the default position of the Rectorate – in all but the most problematic cases – should be to act as a **defender of academic freedom** and as a **guarantor of conditions for a debate that meets the standards of academic debate**. This is important to keep militant minorities from excluding certain issues or people in order to prevent UNIL from playing its role as a privileged place for reasonable and dispassionate discussions on societal issues. This may sometimes require supporting the organisation of certain events, if the minimum academic conditions are met, despite the objections of some part of the community.

There are several scenarios to consider, based on these general principles:

1. *The event is organised by a UNIL unit or teacher-researcher.*

   The event has a de facto scientific guarantee of its academic quality. No authorisation is required in this case, in which the academic freedom of the members of the university community applies.

2. *The event is organised by a student association recognised by the UNIL.*

   a. The event is in line with UNIL's values: the event is accepted if it :

      i. Has the scientific backing of a UNIL unit or teacher-researcher.

   b. The event does not present a flagrant contradiction with the values of UNIL but deals with a controversial and/or politically sensitive subject (or includes a controversial guest): the event is accepted if it:

      i. Has the scientific backing of a UNIL unit or teacher-researcher.

      ii. Allows for constructive debate and/or a plurality of views.

   c. The event is in flagrant contradiction with the values of UNIL: banning the event is possible. Such a ban may be justified, among other points, on the grounds that the student associations have agreed, as part of their recognition process, to subscribe to the values of the UNIL Charter.

3. *The event is organised by an external entity*

   External entities must be associated with an institute, a teacher-researcher or a UNIL association in order to be able to organise an event under the aegis of UNIL; point 1 or 2 thus applies.

In all these cases, an ex post evaluation is possible if the events get out of control and/or involve words or actions judged contradictory to the values of the institution by the community and peers.

## 3.4. Supporting engagement: ways forward

Engagement is an activity that is part of the university's mission and as such deserves to be supported. Although its practice is part of the ethical norms of the academic world, compliance with these norms should be ensured through peer-to-peer dialogue rather than through regulation. The analysis of recent controversial cases confirms that it is difficult to avoid them preventively without infringing academic freedom or freedom of expression to an excessive degree. It therefore seems more legitimate to encourage being explicit about the positioning of statements (transparency as to the situation of enunciation) than to seek to regulate or format them. However, questions of transparency are as much the responsibility of the institution as of the researchers. It is up to the university to recall the norms attached to its status and its role in society, but also to clearly establish the environment it offers to its (more or less) engaged researchers. A culture of engagement can be developed by creating a working climate that is conducive to the practice of engagement in good conditions and by providing tools (training, etc.) that encourage the development of knowledge and skills that allow the university community to navigate more serenely, effectively and transparently between the different roles open to them.

### 3.4.1. Positioning rather than regulating the voice of researchers

It is clear from the discussion in the preceding sections that engagement as understood here is part of the university's mission and that the university has a particular role to play in the defence of academic freedom. However, the exercise of this freedom is accompanied by ethical standards specific to academic activities and it may be tempting for an institution to use regulation to prevent potential breaches of these standards. The working group believes, however, that this will lead to two main difficulties, set out below, and therefore suggests that such a route should not be pursued.

Firstly, what academics, in their titles and functions, can say or do in the public sphere depends to a large extent on one's conception of the role of academics in the societal debate. The practices are not the same if the understanding is that researchers must above all produce reliable and useful knowledge and communicate it in a factual manner while expressing themselves as little as possible on the moral, social or political stakes of their research (in which case academics should engage primarily as simple citizens) or if, on the contrary, the understanding is that the role of academics is to stimulate and fuel the debate on these normative stakes (in which case engagement becomes a responsibility of the researcher).[123] However, the working group's position on this point is that how academics conceive their role in the public debate is ultimately a matter of personal choice and that the scientific institution

[123] On this point see, for example: Steneck, N. H. (2012). Responsible Advocacy in Science: Standards, Benefits and Risks. Presented at the Workshop on Advocacy in Science, Washington DC.

cannot unilaterally impose a model of their relationship to society. The practices and cultures of public interaction can vary significantly from one discipline to another, especially between the natural sciences and the humanities and social sciences, but also within these two categories, as well as from one person to another.

Secondly, the a priori regulation of researchers' public expression carries the risk of infringing too significantly on the exercise of academic freedom and freedom of expression. Although it is possible to identify certain general issues relating to public speech, as has been done in the previous sections, the criteria for the legitimacy and scientific accuracy of a statement depend above all on the discipline under consideration and the specific characteristics of each case. The evaluation must therefore be carried out primarily in the mode of academic controversy, between peers, and is not the responsibility of the institution itself. Following the principles of academic freedom, it would therefore be better to favour “horizontal” dialogue between peers rather than “vertical” institutional regulation. This is due not only to the internal organisation of universities, but also to the fact that problematic cases are rare and do not justify a preventive limitation of researchers' public expression. Slippage, breaches of the norms of scientific integrity and other abuses of the authority conferred by academic titles for personal gain do occur, but such cases must be dealt with by the institution on a case-by-case basis, after the fact and not in advance. An analysis of recent controversial cases confirms that it is difficult to avoid them without violating academic freedom or freedom of expression. It therefore seems more legitimate to encourage the explicit positioning of statements, i.e. to support an effort to be *transparent* about their nature and the context in which they were made (see Section 3.2.2), than to try to regulate or format them.

### 3.4.2. Promoting a culture of engagement: ways forward

Issues of *transparency* are as much the responsibility of the institution as they are of the researcher. While it is up to the latter to be explicit about their professional identity, their field of specialisation, the role they assume and the nature of their statements, it is the university’s responsibility to recall the norms attached to its status as a scientific institution and its role in society and to announce the values that its authorities have decided to attach to it. It is also up to the university to clearly establish the environment it offers to its (more or less) engaged researchers.

The working group believes that one promising avenue is to support and promote a *culture of engagement* within the UNIL community. This means promoting a climate and working conditions that are conducive to engagement when conditions are right, as well as providing to those who want them the tools to develop the knowledge and skills that will enable them to navigate more serenely, effectively and transparently between the various roles at their

disposal (see also the proposals that emerged from the UNIL survey on this subject: Section 2.1.3).

**Develop conditions conducive to the engagement of those who wish to engage**

The current functioning of the academic world is not particularly favourable to the engagement of those who wish to be engaged, in whatever form. This is partly due to the representations of academics themselves as to their role and that of science in the public debate, but there are also, and perhaps above all, institutional obstacles to good conditions for engagement. These include a lack of recognition of engagement activities in evaluations and career paths, a highly competitive academic environment that leaves little time for activities other than scientific publication in specialised journals, and the increasing precariousness of careers in academia.[124] The survey and focus groups conducted at UNIL tend to confirm this last point among young researchers, who show a greater fear than senior researchers of the consequences of an engagement activity for their career. The UNIL survey also reveals a high level of uncertainty in the community about the Rectorate's position on engagement, which creates a climate that is not conducive to engagement.

Among the measures the institution could undertake to develop favourable conditions for engagement, the working group recommends the following:

1. *Clarify the institution's position on engagement*. An explicit position by the Rectorate in favour of engagement, clarifying the conditions under which it is encouraged, would make it possible to reduce the community's uncertainties and strengthen the legitimacy of those who choose to develop these activities.
2. *Stimulate and support debates about engagement within the UNIL community and with the world outside academia*. As this report shows, the issue of engagement raises fears and questions about the role of researchers in the public debate. The benefits and risks of engagement, at the individual, institutional and social levels, must therefore continue to be openly debated. This would not only give the word to all voices and iron out some of the disagreements, but also provide valuable feedback.
3. *Value engagement more highly in job descriptions and careers*. Whether in recruitment or in periodic appraisals, engagement activities currently carry almost negligible weight. Given that engagement is part of the general mission of the university, developing a culture of engagement should seek to enhance its value by diversifying the criteria for evaluation at all stages of a career. This can also start by allowing in the job descriptions to include a small number of hours of engagement activities or by

[124] Gardner, C. J., et al (2021). From Publications to Public Actions: The Role of Universities in Facilitating Academic Advocacy and Activism in the Climate and Ecological Emergency. *Frontiers in Sustainability*, *2*, 679019.

allowing engagement-related projects as part of sabbaticals offered by the institution.[125]

4. *Continue to develop institutional structures dedicated to the relationship with society and promote community life on campus*. Promoting a culture of engagement also has a strong institutional component. An engaged university is first and foremost engaged by itself, in the conduct of its development strategies and its internal organisation. By pursuing the development of structures allowing for dialogue, expertise or the co-construction of knowledge with the rest of society, the University gives a strong signal and opportunities to members of its community wishing to engage in this way. Supporting campus community life also allows for the development of opportunities for engagement on a variety of themes and encourages exchange and debate.

**Tools for effective engagement adapted to the academic context**

In addition to creating a climate and conditions conducive to engagement, the university could also develop a range of tools to aid in understanding of the issues surrounding engagement in the academic context, as well as how to communicate effectively and transparently, and how to maximise its impact while remaining within the norms of academic debate. These tools may include:

5. *Training courses*: like the media training courses already offered by the SNSF, training courses in the form of workshops, dedicated to the various forms of engagement and their specific techniques and challenges (media, blog writing, social networks, relations with the political world, etc.).
6. *Information sheets*: information sheets that make it easy to clarify the specific issues at stake in different communication situations.
7. *Discussion and feedback groups within the community*: discussion groups allowing for the exchange of experiences related to engagement activities, as well as the emotional implications that these can sometimes have – similar to the discussions proposed above.
8. *A contact point in case of difficulties*: clear information on the procedure to follow and the competent contact unit in case of problems after certain engagement activities (harassment on social networks, slander/bullying campaign, problems with the hierarchy, etc.).

[125] See for example: Gardner, C. J., et al. (2021). From Publications to Public Actions, op. cit.

# 4. References


Académie suisse des sciences. (2008). *L'intégrité dans la recherche scientifique : Principes de base et procédures*. https://api.swiss-academies.ch/site/assets/files/4411/richtlinien_integrita_t_fr.pdf

Acatech. (2014). *On Designing Communication between the Scientific Community, the Public and the Media*. Achatech.

Appel d'universitaires : Éviter « qu'un score de l'extrême droite au-dessus de 30 % ne nuise à l'image de la France ». (2017, avril 29). *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/04/29/appel-d-universitaires-eviter-qu-un-score-de-l-extreme-droite-au-dessus-de-30-ne-nuise-a-l-image-de-la-france_5120060_3232.html

Auer, A., Malinverni, G., & Hottelier, M. (2013). *Droit constitutionnel suisse: Vol. II*.

Beall, L., Myers, T. A., Kotcher, J. E., Vraga, E. K., & Maibach, E. W. (2017). Controversy matters : Impacts of topic and solution controversy on the perceived credibility of a scientist who advocates. *PLOS ONE*, *12*(11), e0187511-14.

Beaud, O. (2021). *Le savoir en danger. Menaces sur la liberté académique*. PUF.

Beaulieu, M., Breton, M., & Brousselle, A. (2018). Conceptualizing 20 years of engaged scholarship : A scoping review. *PLOS ONE*, *13*(2), e0193201-17.

Bertil, C. (2021). art. 16. In J. Dubey & V. Martenet, *Constitution fédérale. Commentaire romand*.

Bhattacharyya, G., & Murji, K. (2013). Introduction : Race critical public scholarship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *36*(9), 1359-1373.

Boillet, V. (2021). art. 20. In J. Dubey & V. Martenet, *Constitution fédérale. Commentaire romand*.

Borloz, E. (2021, juin 23). Affaire des joueurs de tennis de Crédit Suisse – Peut-on être prof à l'Uni et prôner la désobéissance? *24 heures*. https://www.24heures.ch/les-militants-du-climat-refoules-a-lentree-du-tribunal-federal-131205060596

Boyer, E. L. (1996). The Scholarship of Engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, *1*(1), 11-20.

Centre de compétences en durabilité & Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en éthique. (2020, juin 15). *Quel rôle pour les chercheur·euse·s dans le débat public ?* https://www.unil.ch/centre-durabilite/recherche-et-engagement

Cervera-Marzal, M. (2013). *Désobéir en démocratie*. Forges Vulcain.

Cervera-Marzal, M. (2016). *Les nouveaux désobéissants : Citoyens ou hors-la-loi ?*. Éditions Le Bord de l'eau.

Charaudeau, P. (2013). Le chercheur et l'engagement. Une affaire de contrat. *Argumentation et analyse du discours*, *11*, 1-15.

Collectif. (2019, octobre 21). «Nous déclarons notre soutien à Extinction Rebellion» : Lettre ouverte du monde académique suisse. *Le Temps*. https://www.letemps.ch/opinions/declarons-soutien-extinction-rebellion-lettre-ouverte-monde-academique-suisse

Cologna, V., Knutti, R., Oreskes, N., & Siegrist, M. (2021). Majority of German citizens, US citizens and climate scientists support policy advocacy by climate researchers and expect greater political engagement. *Environmental Research Letters*, *16*, 1-12.

Crettaz von Roten, F. (2017). Factors Influencing Scientists' Public Engagement. In J. C. Shin & P. Teixeira (Éds.), *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions* (p. 1-4).

Crettaz von Roten, F., & Entradas, M. (2018). Public Engagement Measurement. In P. Teixeira & J. Shin, *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*. Springer.

Crettaz von Roten, F., & Moeschler, O. (2010). Les relations entre les scientifiques et la société. *Sociologie*, *1*(1), 45-60.

Demay, C. (2021). La désobéissance civile : Un concept pour appréhender la nature politique des actes militants en droit ? *Revue de l'Institut Rhône-Alpin de Sciences Criminelles*, *8*, 37-62.

Donner, S. D. (2014). Finding your place on the science – advocacy continuum : An editorial essay. *Climatic Change*, *124*(1), 1-8.

Douglas, H. (2009). *Science, Policy, and the Value-Free Ideal*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Dubey, J. (2017). *Droits fondamentaux*.

Dubey, J., & Zufferey, V. (2014). *Droit administratif général*.

Engel, P. (2020). L'idée d'une université et la liberté académique. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, *27*(5), 598-610.

Fleisch, N. H. (1989). *Ziviler Ungehorsam oder Gibt es ein Recht auf Widerstand im schweizerischen Rechtsstaat ?* Grüsch.

French National Research Agency. (2015). *French National Charter for Research Integrity (2015),* *https://www.hceres.fr/sites/default/files/media/downloads/2015_French_RI_Charter_0.pdf*

Gardner, C. J., Thierry, A., Rowlandson, W., & Steinberger, J. K. (2021). From Publications to Public Actions : The Role of Universities in Facilitating Academic Advocacy and Activism in the Climate and Ecological Emergency. *Frontiers in Sustainability*, *2*, 679019.

Gardner, C. J., & Wordley, C. F. R. (2019). Scientists must act on our own warnings to humanity. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 1-2.

Garric, A. (2020, mars 9). Savants ou militants ? Le dilemme des chercheurs face à la crise écologique. *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/sciences/article/2020/03/09/savants-ou-militants-le-dilemme-des-chercheurs-face-a-la-crise-ecologique_6032394_1650684.html

Gould, S. J. (2006). *The Mismeasure of Man* (Revised and Expanded édition). W. W. Norton & Company.

Green, M. (2019, octobre 13). Nearly 400 scientists support Extinction Rebellion's civil disobedience campaign. *The Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/extinction-rebellion-protests-scientists-climate-change-london-amsterdam-a9154336.html

Hagedorn, G., Loew, T., Seneviratne, S. I., Lucht, W., et al. (2019). The concerns of the young protesters are justified : A statement by Scientists for Future concerning the protests for more climate protection. *GAIA - Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society*, *28*(2), 79-87.

Heinich, N. (2021). *Ce que le militantisme fait à la recherche*. Gallimard.

Hermann, J. (2006). Zivil Ungehorsam und rechtfertigender Notstand—Ziviler Notstand und gerechtfertigter Ungehorsam ? In M. Mona & K. Seelmann, *Grenzen des rechtfertigenden Notstands* (p. 85ss).

HETS-FR. (s. d.). *Recherche-Action : Home*. Consulté 11 mai 2022, à l'adresse https://recherche-action.ch/Pages/default.aspx

Howe, N. (2020). *'Stick to the science' : When science gets political*. Nature. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03067-w

INRAE. (2022). *Charte d'expression publique*.

Kaye, D. (2020). *Rapport du Rapporteur spécial sur la promotion et la protection du droit à la liberté d'opinion et d'expression*. United Nations.

Kley, A., & Tophinke, E. (2014). In B. Ehrenzeller, *Die schweizerische Bundesverfassung*.

Kotcher, J. E., Myers, T. A., Vraga, E. K., Stenhouse, N., & Maibach, E. W. (2017). Does Engagement in Advocacy Hurt the Credibility of Scientists ? Results from a Randomized National Survey Experiment. *Environmental Communication*, *11*(3), 415-429.

Les passions du Covid-19. (2021, septembre 22). *Allez Savoir !* https://wp.unil.ch/allezsavoir/les-passions-du-covid-19/

Letellier, L. (2021). *Communication scientifique en situation de crise sanitaire : Profusion, richesse et dérives*. Comité d'éthique du CNRS. . https://comite-ethique.cnrs.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AVIS-2021-42.pdf

Macfarlane, B., & Cheng, M. (2008). Communism, Universalism and Disinterestedness : Re-examining Contemporary Support among Academics for Merton's Scientific Norms. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *6*, 67-78.

Markovits, D. (2005). Democratic Disobedience. *Yale Law Journal*, *114*, 1897-1952.

Merton R. (1973). The Normative Structure of Science, in Storer N.W., *The Sociology of Science*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p.254-266.

Motta, M. (2018). The Polarizing Effect of the March for Science on Attitudes toward Scientists. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *51*(4), 782-788.

Muller, J.-M. (2017). *L'impératif de désobéissance*. Le Passager Clandestin.

Nelson, M. P., & Vucetich, J. A. (2009). On Advocacy by Environmental Scientists : What, Whether, Why, and How. *Conservation Biology*, *23*(5), 1090-1101.

Oreskes, N. (2019). *Why Trust Science?* Princeton University Press.

Payer, A. (2020). *Klimawandel als strafrechtlicher Notstand*. Suis generi.

Princeton University. (s. d.). *Guidance for Faculty and Staff on Political and Public Advocacy Activities | Dean of the Faculty*. Consulté 11 mai 2022, à l'adresse https://dof.princeton.edu/policies-procedure/policies/guidance-faculty-and-staff-political-and-public-advocacy-activities

Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Newsome, T. M., Barnard, P., & Moomaw, W. R. (2020). World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency. *BioScience*, *70*(1), 8-12.

Royal Society. (2006). *Survey of factors affecting science communication by scientists and engineers*. Royal Society.

Runkle, D. (2012). Advocacy in Science. Summary of a Workshop convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. *Workshop on Advocacy in Science*, 1-13.

Salomon Cavin, J., Boisvert, V., Ranocchiari, S., Dusserre-Bresson, Q., & Poulot, M. (2021). L'engagement militant dans la recherche en agriculture urbaine. Réflexions sur le contexte français au miroir du scholar activism nord-américain. *Natures Sciences Sociétés*, *29*(3), 288-298.

Schmidt, G. A. (2015). What should climate scientists advocate for? *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *71*(1), 70-74.

Simpson, R. M. (2020). The Relation between Academic Freedom and Free Speech. *Ethics*, *130*, 287-319.

Sous les pavés, le clic. (2020, décembre 15). *Allez Savoir !* https://wp.unil.ch/allezsavoir/sous-les-paves-le-clic/

Stamenkovic, I., & Stawiaki, P. (s. d.). Die rechtliche Dimension der Klimastreik-bewegungen – Legitimität ihres Instrumentariums und Justiziabilität ihrer Forderungen in einer direkten Demokratie. In Y. Hasani, S. Hug, & J. Zalka, *Recht und Umwelt* (p. 99ss).

Steneck, N. H. (2012). Responsible Advocacy in Science : Standards, Benefits and Risks. *Workshop on Advocacy in Science*, 1-16.

Suckow, N. (2021). *Quelle place pour les scientifiques dans la société ?* [Travail de bachelor]. UNIL, Faculté des géosciences et de l'environnement.

Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences. (2021). Science in the Swiss Public. The State of Science Communication and Public Engagement with Science in Switzerland. *Swiss Academies Reports*, *16*(8).

Tanquerel, T. (2018). *Manuel de droit administratif* (2e éd.).

The Wellcome Trust. (2001). *The role of scientists in public debate*. The Wellcome Trust.

The Wellcome Trust. (2015). *Factors affecting public engagement by researchers*. The Wellcome Trust.

UC Berkeley. (s. d.). *Advocacy Guidelines at UC Berkeley | Office of the Chancellor*. Consulté 11 mai 2022, à l'adresse https://chancellor.berkeley.edu/office-services/government-and-community-relations/advocacy-guidelines-uc-berkeley

UNESCO. (1997). *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*. UNESCO / Earthscan.

Université de Berne. (2021). *Guidelines on information and expression of opinions*.

Verinory, J.-M., & Waelti, F. (2008). Le devoir de réserve des fonctionnaires spécialement sous l'angle du droit genevois. *Pratique Juridique Actuelle*, 810-832.

Weber, M. (2003). *Le savant et le politique*. La Découverte.

# 5. Annexes

## 5.1. UNIL survey - Full analysis of the results

Due to its length, the detailed analysis of the survey results, carried out by FORS in June 2021, is provided in a separate file.

## 5.2. Crettaz von Roten and Moeschler survey 2007 – summary[126]

A study published in 2010 by Fabienne Crettaz von Roten and Olivier Moeschler, entitled "Relations between scientists and society", lists the practices and perceptions of 810 teacher-researchers at the University of Lausanne, based on a survey conducted in 2007.[127] The study shows in particular how engagement varies by individual and by faculty; its aim is to better understand the representation that teacher-researchers have of their relationship with society and to draw a picture of their engagement practices. It also seeks to better understand how the experience and skills of teacher-researchers help explain the different levels of engagement observed.

**Definition**

The study uses a definition of the term engagement inspired by the English term "public engagement" which includes all activities of information, dialogue, decision or co-creation with various publics. It is therefore concerned with all science communication activities, without explicitly including or excluding normative interventions from its scope. As mentioned above, the conception of engagement used in this study is therefore more extensive than the definition used in this report.

**Variations among teachers-researchers**

According to the study, teacher-researchers engaged in between 0 and 41 activities in the 2006–2007 year, for an average of 7.6 activities in the year. The results also show that there is a great deal of variability in engagement practices among faculty members.

It is possible to represent the different forms and frequencies of engagement in the form of a pyramid. Smaller, less time-consuming activities are carried out by almost all teacher-researchers, such as speaking at a conference or public debate. The more time and effort

[126] Summary based on : Suckow, N. (2021). Quelle place pour les scientifiques dans la société, bachelor's thesis, UNIL, 47p.

[127] Crettaz Von Roten, F., & Moeschler, O. (2010). The relationship between scientists and society. *Sociologie*, *Vol. 1*(1), 45–60.

required to engage in activities, such as speaking at a science café or working with a museum, the lower the proportion of teacher-researchers who engage in them.
An interesting point to note is that teacher-researchers do not choose one or another engagement activity and then stick with it. Rather, the study shows that the more active they are, the more they explore a diverse range of forms of engagement. In other words, the activities do not necessarily reflect their preferences, but rather the time they decide to devote to them. Crettaz von Roten and Moeschler note that 55% of the activities aimed at the public are carried out by only 20% of the people who responded to their survey.
It is also important to note that in some cases the subject matter of the research carried out includes aspects of engagement through the mere publication of its results. In other cases, it is the field and the quality of the expertise of certain individuals that attracts increased demand (from the media, but also from institutions and associations, for example).

**Socio-economic variation**
Engagement practices vary according to "socio-economic" factors. Indeed, the older a researcher is, the more they engage; men engage on average more than women and the higher the status, the greater the engagement.

**Faculty variations**
There is also variability in engagement between the various faculties at UNIL. The Faculty of Theology (FTSR) has the highest average engagement per person, probably due to a long tradition of communication on the part of its members, but also due to its small size, which necessitates extra efforts to ensure a level of visibility. At the other end of the spectrum, the Faculty of Geosciences and Environment (FGSE) has the lowest average. As it is the youngest faculty (four years of existence at the time of the survey), this lower rate of engagement may reflect the time needed to build links with stakeholders.

**Barriers**
The main barriers to engagement cited by the researchers were lack of time, funding, public interest and communication skills, along with the lack of recognition of engagement in career evaluation or even negative impact in the eyes of peers (see also: The Wellcome Trust 2001 and Royal Society 2006[128]). According to the teacher-researchers, the main difficulty remains the lack of encouragement and valorisation by the scientific hierarchy.

**Perceptions**
Communicating with society about the social and ethical implications of their research is considered important by 82% of UNIL scientists surveyed in 2006–2007. The study also shows a relationship between the perceived importance of engagement and the links scientists make

[128] Confirmed in: The Wellcome Trust (2015). Factors Affecting Public Engagement by Researchers, 69.

between research and everyday concerns. The possibility and ability to summarise research results for the general public also seems to play a role.

**Indicative comparisons**

The level of engagement observed in the Crettaz von Roten and Moeschler study is of the same order of magnitude as that observed in the studies carried out in England, for example (74% participation in 2006[129]), but with significantly higher rates of engagement, since only 12% of the participants in the UNIL survey stated that they had no engagement activity. Rigorous comparisons would require standardised methods, however, and the figures presented here are indicative only.

**Perspectives**

Crettaz von Roten and Moeschler conclude their article by stressing the importance of continuing research on the engagement of academic staff and of conducting studies on the impact of engagement on careers. Such research should accompany longer-term work to change the perceptions and practices of engagement in the academic community.

[129] This figure increases for the same population in 2015 to 78%: ibid.