



UMC Utrecht

The Role of the University in a Post-Truth World

Harmen Tiddens Educational Grand Lecture

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The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) declared that 2018 the word of the year was 'post-truth'. We have entered an era in which, to use the words of OED "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Public and political discourse is overrun by slippery uses of facts and overtly manufactured 'truths'.

A critical question is which individuals and what institutions will be trusted to speak 'truth' and on what basis. Universities can and must play this role: they are well positioned to challenge scientific and historical untruths, false associations and to call out unsupported claims.

Even more powerfully, universities have the tools to study what makes it possible to state that something is true in the first place. Without attention to how 'truths' are constructed, one is left to hurl back weak pleas that claims are 'not evidence-based'. But by understanding how 'truths' are constructed it becomes possible to challenge and dismantle the most egregious.

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