

A Challenge for Frodeman and Briggie
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The introduction to Frodeman and Briggie's forthcoming book, *Socrates Untenured: Toward a 21st Century Philosophy*, outlines a provocative critique of higher education and professional philosophy. Yet do the authors take their point far enough? I suggest that unless Frodeman and Briggie deepen their critique this book will fail to prompt the changes that our system of higher education needs.

There is a Catch-22 embedded in their introduction: a book challenging the traditions of academia written by two white, tenured males. The book will turn some heads. (Perhaps it cannot be any other way: you are either inside the system looking out, or outside looking in.) In fact, the book will likely upset academics who cherish the current system of knowledge production. However, there needs to be another voice in the book. Frodeman and Briggie need to add a perspective that will allow their book to speak to new audiences and ensure that their ideas in *Socrates Untenured* live past a weekend.

The Coming Avalanche

The fact that two tenured professors authored this work frames both the audience of the book and how the book will be read. Frodeman and Briggie have radical ideas about the future of higher education. However, their argument is tainted by the reality that both of them are deeply involved in the system that they are critiquing. These authors call for a revolution. They are aware of the [avalanche](#) coming to higher education, yet the ideas of field philosophy and Mode 2 philosophy will not spread far.¹ A few academics will be aware of the publication but who else? It seems a stretch to think that members of our society will respond to a critique of higher education coming from two obscure philosophy professors.

Field philosophy turns the current disciplinary nature of academia on its head. Why would a tenured professor want to change anything about his current world? He gets to teach, read, research and write. It is the life that many would love to live. The trade is that the research that professors conduct is supposed to help our community know more about a specific area of knowledge, learn how to live better, make our world a more beautiful place or at least respond to the needs of the community. Yet, as Frodeman and Briggie point out, there is a disconnection between the production of knowledge and how this knowledge is brought to society.

The research conducted in universities is rarely connected to the needs of our society. Non-intellectuals do not commonly read the articles written by academics. (Supposedly the knowledge trickles down to non-academics.) Academics write for other academics, and often even these other academics do not have the time to keep up with the massive amount of new articles that are relevant to their department and research. This is due to the specialization of the disciplines. What is the point of the research produced by our institutions of higher education if the majority of research articles are never read?

¹ Barber, Michael. Donnelly, Katelyn. Rizvi, Saad. *An Avalanche is Coming*. London: IPPR, 2013

On Disseminating and Receiving Academic Knowledge

Frodeman and Briggle provide a narrative of how our current educational systems use the knowledge that it produces to then challenge the disciplinary nature of higher education.

It is discouraging to think of how *Socrates Untenured* will be received given the current methods of knowledge dissemination. Not only will it be hard to ensure that academics will read this book, but even those academics that do read it will struggle to accept the messages of the book. For an academic to take Frodeman and Briggle's book seriously they would have to acknowledge that their research is not being received by anyone outside of a small circle of intellectuals. They would also have to change the way that they conduct their classes and research. Therefore, academics will not work to bring field philosophy and Mode 2 philosophy into the established methods of higher education.

Despite disrupting the current life that professors lead in their ivory towers, the ideas in *Socrates Untenured* will also upset the egos of many academics. Academics have worked their whole life towards attaining the position they hold in their institution. A challenge to the system of higher education will also be a challenge to each intellectual's identity. Thus, it is likely that the academics that read *Socrates Untenured* will not listen to Frodeman and Briggle's account of the state of academia. Even if academics respond the responses are unlikely to initiate a transformation in higher education. The messages in this book will fade away with the millions of other articles and books that are being produced each year.

So how can Frodeman and Briggle increase the chance that *Socrates Untenured* will not be ignored? Who is going to listen to a critique of higher education if it is not beneficial for academics to admit to any of the problems posed in *Socrates Untenured* and few others will be aware of the publication?

New Voices

One way to face this Catch-22 is to weave another voice within the text. There needs to be a perspective that will speak to new audiences, and one that will have the power to force academics to truly consider the ideas within *Socrates Untenured*. The hope is to find a way to thoughtfully continue Frodeman and Briggle's conversation.

The voice should provoke people outside of academia –the voice of a student or a non-academic could change the way that *Socrates Untenured* is received. Instead of causing a small headache in some academics who are worried about their job, this additional perspective could start a revolution from the bottom up. The younger academics and non-academics could ensure that the current heads of higher education listen to the deeper messages in Frodeman and Briggle's book. Students are passionate about their future in higher education as well as open-minded to the possibility that the purpose of academia needs to be restructured so that it properly reflects the needs of the 21st century.

21st century undergraduates go off to college without a good understanding of the purpose of their education. Even the best students follow their education blindly and do not question the state of the system that they pay thousands of dollars to be apart of. This state of ignorance is de facto welcomed by the academics who rely on the never-ending wave of students that come into their offices and classrooms each year for an education that will hopefully lead to a career.

However, the technology of the 21st century is changing the ways that people can learn. Online education is becoming more common. As the price of college goes up, the possibility of earning a degree for a fraction of the cost, and from the comfort of one's home becomes increasingly attractive. Consequently, the purpose of an institution of higher education is becoming less obvious. Change is coming to our universities and colleges, yet the students remain unaware and the professors do not want to modify the current state of affairs. Every professor's livelihood is at stake, and so the academy prefers to ignore the failings of professional academia and keep the status quo.

An Observation and a Challenge

By embedding a student's perspective on field philosophy and Mode 2 philosophy *Socrates Untenured* will bring new readers to the conversation that Frodeman and Briggie outline in their introduction. To do this I suggest that Frodeman and Briggie find an additional author who can comment on what field philosophy means for students. How could field philosophy or Mode 2 philosophy help students in their education as well as outside of academia? Which aspects of our society can benefit from Frodeman and Briggie's ideas that a younger generation can address? How can field philosophy work with social media and the other forms of communication with which students are familiar? As the conversation grows to include non-academics as well as other community members who have the power to initiate change in our society, the academics hiding in their ivory towers will be forced to listen to Frodeman and Briggie's message.

Frodeman and Briggie are trying to stay a few steps ahead of the avalanche that is coming to take down the current educational systems worldwide. It would be a misfortune if their book failed to initiate the changes that our society needs from higher education. The introduction to *Socrates Untenured* is the beginning of a conversation that is overdue. How should our society gain knowledge in the 21st century? What is the role of a college in a world where one can find all the knowledge they could ever desire at their fingertips? This book thoughtfully addresses these questions and attempts to awaken other academics to realize the state of higher education in the 21st century.

I challenge Frodeman and Briggie to find a way to cause a larger reaction to their book. I want them to find a way to ensure that the academics deeply embedded within the toppling system of higher education feel the quake of their book. How can these authors be more radical in who their book reaches? Who is the audience that will thoughtfully respond to *Socrates Untenured*? And how can Frodeman and Briggie ignite the revolution that is necessary for the future of higher education? I encourage Frodeman and Briggie to widen the audience that this book will reach, and to find a way to reach the students who are ignorantly going through their college education to realize that these

institutions are not as strong as they seem. Only then will the academics listen to the deeper messages in *Socrates Untenured: Toward a 21st Century Philosophy* and help us find a way to change the future of higher education.

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References

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- Frodeman, Robert. *Sustainable Knowledge: A Theory of Interdisciplinarity*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014