

## Ersta Sköndal University College

### Research Programme 2008 – 2013

Ersta Sköndal University College (ESUC) was founded in 1998 to offer education at basic and advanced level in the caring sciences, social work, psychotherapy, deaconry, church music and theology. Much effort is put into research and the development of scientific knowledge, so that ESUC offers its students a lively study and research environment. In focus for the major part of our educational programmes are people's health and welfare, as well as the situations of vulnerable persons living under unfavourable conditions.

An overall goal for the research at ESUC is to be leading in certain areas and to contribute to the development of the caring sciences and of social work, both on the individual and on the societal level. Our conviction is that a fundamental task of research is the critical examination of the facts with the aim – among others – of arriving at a better understanding of the different contexts in which welfare, nursing and other forms of care, and civic involvement develop.

Ersta Sköndal University College has the important and unique competitive advantage of clinically connected research through proximity to the nursing and social welfare operations of Ersta Diacony and Stora Sköndal. Students pursue their education in a functional setting where the practical activities also supply a number of researchers with interesting and provocative issues to explore.

In the following is presented

- some starting points for research at Ersta Sköndal University College
- our vision for ESUC research, along with goals and strategies for prioritized areas
- a description of what is expected to take place within these areas in the coming five-year period, and
- how the research programme will be followed up and evaluated.

This programme is to be a guide for the design of concrete research projects in all units and departments at ESUC.

### **Points of departure**

As an actor within the scientific community Ersta Sköndal University College has a well recognized position. Our research on civil society and care of persons in the last stage of life is well established. ESUC has also made itself known for its long-standing tradition of research on health care ethics and philosophy of life science.

Priority is given to research problematising the situations of vulnerable people; applying new approaches to the critical pursuit of knowledge and investigating what can be done to increase people's autonomy and their participation in society. Also prioritized is research contributing fundamental, critical studies of different kinds in the fields of nursing, welfare work and civic involvement.

Like most other university colleges in Sweden, ESUC lacks the authority to bestow doctoral degrees. We have therefore established co-operation with other universities that have this right and offer a competitive environment at ESUC in which to pursue their research studies. Since 1998, 30 doctoral students at ESUC have taken their degrees in the fields of social work, theology, and caring sciences. Presently (2008), we have 14 doctoral students pursuing their research education here.

### **Vision**

The vision we have for Ersta Sköndal University College is to develop further our research on civil society, nursing during the last stage of life, and health care ethics with philosophy of life science, in order to strengthen our nationally already prominent role and to achieve greater international relevance. We also have the intention to develop another sphere of applied ethics; in organisations and working life. This development of our research is a prerequisite for accomplishing what is already today a considerable offering of commissioned courses in social work, nursing, deaconry, theology and psychotherapy.



Taking a longer view, ESUC is working on obtaining the authority to bestow our own doctoral degrees that will emanate from the research being done on civil society and on our two major subjects, social work and nursing.

### **Goals**

Our main goal for the coming five-year period is to refine and utilize the different and complementary competencies at ESUC within the areas stated above. Our goals also include the enhancement of ESUC as an academic environment by supporting teachers with doctorates to attain further academic qualifications, and by clarifying and strengthening the connection between research and undergraduate education at both basic and advanced level.

### **Strategies**

To achieve our vision and the goals for our research we intend to apply the following strategies:

- Research resources shall be concentrated to prioritized areas.
- Doctoral students and researchers shall be able to apply internally for time to do research in these areas.
- A 'school for docents' is to be established with the aim of giving colleagues with doctoral degrees active support to attain the competence of senior lecturer/associate professor.
- A promotion programme is to be initiated with the aim of establishing at least four new professorships during the period in view.
- Resources will be earmarked for attaching to our staff leading researchers in relevant fields of knowledge as adjunct or visiting professors.
- Research seminars and conferences are to be arranged on a regular basis both by subject field and for ESUC as a whole.
- Criteria are being developed to ensure that the research connection with each subject has a qualitative and well-balanced content.
- Work is continuously under way to maintain and develop a sustained and high level of external funding.



- A programme is also being developed to attract new resources in order to guarantee the long-term continuance of ongoing research projects.
- ESUC will be working to strengthen its collaboration with other universities with the aim of attaining the authority to bestow doctoral degrees.

### **Civil society**

Researchers at ESUC have been carrying out research on Swedish civil society since the beginning of the 1990's. At first the focus was on voluntary social work; partly the activities of non-profit and voluntary organisations and partly care-giving by family, neighbours and friends. Later, these interests were broadened to include civil society in the wider sense of organisations and networks that are neither part of the public sector nor the market and whose aims vary from explicit political activity to social involvement and non-profit economic enterprise.

Pioneering work has been done in determining the extent and character of Swedish civil society sector through population surveys, of which several were carried out as part of larger international comparative projects. This international orientation is a prominent feature of the research carried out at ESUC and has given considerable experience of collaboration with institutions and networks in other countries.

Besides these quantitative population surveys, a large number of qualitative studies have also been carried out on existing institutions, organisations and the extent of citizens' voluntary, unpaid work. Civil society research at ESUC is markedly multi-disciplinary, which reflects the roots of this field of research in different scientific traditions with varied methodological and theoretical foundations. Research activities therefore embrace a number of disciplines such as sociology, social work, political science, theology, social anthropology, history and ethnogeography, and is focused on the in-depth investigation of different aspects of civil society based on theoretical and on empirical grounds. In a planning stage research proposals are being developed around the phenomenon and concept of trust. This research drive has grown out of the ever increasing scientific and



political interest in questions of trust and distrust, where a fundamental issue is what social mechanisms explain trust or the lack of trust and feelings of distrust at the local level in society.

### **Nursing during the last stage of life – a life cycle perspective**

The research on nursing in the last stage of life has been carried out since the beginning of the 1990's, primarily of patients with cancer and their families/closest relations. This emphasis has now been broadened to include last stages of caring throughout the entire life cycle.

There is a great need for studies that illuminate how people view and cope with life and death at different points in the course of life and in connection with different illnesses, for example chronic obstructive lung disease or dementia, and how the quality of life can be improved both for persons in the proximity of death, whether on account of illness or old age, and for their families and relations.

In the next few years we will be undertaking studies concerning these areas with focus on how meaningfulness in everyday life can be promoted, where one goal is to increase patients' and relatives' participation in the caring process.

Models for identity-retaining and the support of close relations/families are being developed along with models for how the philosophy of palliative care can be implemented in different areas of nursing, for example in the care of the elderly person. For some years now the research group has been carrying out studies on the importance of the care organisation and the nursing culture for what can be termed a 'good' death, where the encounter between patients, close relatives and care personnel on the individual level is also related to values on a societal level.

A development of theory and methods is also taking place, especially with regard to the concepts of autonomy, dependence, power, participation, self-image/identity, dignity, comfort/consolation and hope.

The work of developing models for nursing that promote health and meaningfulness in on an everyday basis at the end of life is an ongoing one. An



intention for the future is to extend the end of life research field to include even end of life nursing at the beginning of life.

### **Health care ethics with philosophy of life science**

Research on health care ethics and philosophy of life science has been carried out at ESUC since 1988 and constitutes a particular profile area. Health care ethics, which is one important area in the field of applied ethics, is an umbrella term for biomedical ethics, clinical ethics, nursing ethics and social care ethics. Studies on the subject encompass practical everyday issues in nursing and other forms of care as well as theoretical issues.

There is a great demand in society for the processing and analysis of health care ethical issues, and this for a number of reasons. Among other things, developments in biomedical research have led to new and previously unimaginable possibilities of preventing, curing and alleviating illnesses. This presents us with a whole new range of choices; and advances in medical techniques have led to a need to re-evaluate such traditional concepts within nursing ethics as health, autonomy and quality of life. The rights with which patients now are endowed also provide subject matter for renewed discussion on ethical demands and the obligations of society. Demographic developments have further led to a growing need for the care and nursing of an aging population at the same time as public finances are shrinking, which in turn has led to the important discussions of priorities. That growing care carried out in private homes has increasingly led to discussions on the specific values of the home as compared with the instrumental character of care institutions, while the meeting with other cultures and philosophies of life has awakened greater interest in issues of value judgements.

ESUC researchers have committed themselves to meet this interest in health care ethics by developing concepts and to carrying out empirical studies on ethics in the sphere of the home, in regard to guidance of genetic research, professional ethics, virtue ethics, and norms of professional conduct based on own initiatives and personal responsibility, along with older persons philosophy of life and the



importance of different philosophies of life for the care given to persons suffering, for example, from dementia and for the encounter between care receivers and care givers.

New research projects are being developed on ethical aspects of rehabilitation. One such project is intended to investigate the guiding principle in rehabilitation and nursing of the holistic view. Another is concerned with a new interdisciplinary area within which the importance and functioning of animals for human health, quality of life and well-being is being investigated, especially the importance of horses, dogs and cats for rehabilitation and preventive health care. Mapping-out studies, evaluation studies, concept development and philosophical studies are planned on the relationship between these animals and human beings.

### **Caring sciences**

Caring science research is directed towards the study of the social room within which psychiatric care is carried out. Special attention is given to the conditions under which human restitution and self-respect can be promoted. Eldercare is also a focus of ESUC research, in doing which the gender perspective on the caregiver role and questions of social treatment are investigated. Another thematic direction is psychosomatics, with focus on body and soul, and the creation of meaningfulness. As in social work, attention is also paid to evidence basing practices, its theoretical significance and practical application. Much of this caring science research is carried out in co-operation with the unit for research on nursing during the last stage of life.

### **Organisational and working life ethics**

With organisational and working life ethics we have in mind applied ethics in trade and industry, in public administration, and in civic organisations. This field of study includes considering the identity-building of publicly owned companies and activities as well as the growing entrepreneurial markets in counties and municipalities. Projects have been launched on ethical issues related to leadership and ethical aspects of the working environment, corruption processes, personal



integrity and aspects of rights and entitlements, surveillance, and the executive role in the media.

### **Social work**

Long-term research on the organisation of welfare is effectively being built up, where the relationship between public sector measures and the individual citizen is central. Social citizenship will be investigated with respect to content and formation in practice, with the research emphasis formulated in consultation with both social work professionals and users. The evidence base concept in social work is being investigated and given a practical application in different types of outcome studies.

### **Deaconal studies and theology**

Here research is concentrated on building up deaconry as a field of knowledge, by investigating the professional identity of the deacon/lay welfare worker, by undertaking studies in modern Swedish ecclesiastical history, and by developing the theological discussion on the concepts of faith, religious affiliation and forgiveness.

### **Psychotherapy research**

Since August, 2008, the St. Lucas educational institute has become a department at Ersta Sköndal University College, where the ESUC task of is to initiate qualified research in the field of psychotherapy and gradually to develop specific profile areas.

### **Joint research undertakings**

The hub of all research activities is the active working seminars on the different research subjects, along with joint seminars intended to give an overall context to the different thematic seminars. A series of such seminars has been started and will be further developed in the coming five-year period.

Researchers also engage in teaching activities that are regulated in formal agreements. For example, the unit for civil society studies has entered into an agreement with the Department of Social Work to carry out instruction at both basic and advanced level, while the unit for research on nursing during the last stage of life has a similar agreement with the Department of Caring Sciences. Research areas are presented at an early stage in the basic education programme and both units offer students the possibility of writing bachelor's and master's degree papers within the framework of ongoing research projects.

Research results are disseminated to the students at the different levels of their education through seminars and lectures, but also to a wider public through articles published in newspapers and journals, public lectures and participation in public debate.

### **Follow-up and evaluation**

Research leaders report to the faculty committee each year on the scientific activities carried out and how the strategies in this programme have been implemented. At research leader meetings more long-term goals are discussed. The faculty committee chairperson makes a compilation of the reports, then to be handled by the research staff and the Education and Research Board, and also communicated to the company board.

### **Summary**

The focus for education and research at Ersta Sköndal University College is human vulnerability. Important research issues concern how professions within the social field and nursing can empower vulnerable people to take charge of their lives and to improve their possibilities of active participation in society. A critical perspective and openness for new knowledge shall contribute to a questioning of nursing routines, forms of organisation and professional praxis. Resources shall be put into areas of the social field and of nursing that have previously not been paid sufficient attention. Our ambition is in the national context to be leading in research on civil society, nursing of the aged and dying, and health care ethics with philosophy of life science, as well as to contribute results that are relevant in an



international perspective. There is a substantial connection today between the various educational programmes offered and the research being pursued at Ersta Sköndal University College. We intend further to strengthen and develop this connection. Our research is concerned with the proximate practical activities in various ways; it shall stimulate the development of the professions and contribute to the current social debate about the development of our welfare institutions both on a national and a global level.

Further information about the research being carried out at Ersta Sköndal University College can be found on our website: [www.esh.se](http://www.esh.se)