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ABSTRACT

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From success to elimination – and what's next? The case of gender and law in legal education at Umeå university

For almost two decades Umeå university was famous for its comprehensive ingredient of gender and gender equality perspectives in legal education. During the 2000's, gender and gender equality perspectives were integrated into mandatory courses on the law programme by teachers at the Department of Law. During 2012 – 2018 such knowledge was primarily offered on two masters programmes and on isolated optional courses on the law programme by teachers at Umeå Forum for Studies on Law and Society. The driving force behind this development is a persistent and growing opposition at the Department of Law against teaching law from critical and gender perspectives, especially on the law programme. This opposition was expressed in increasing aggressive and destructive ways and ended up in a severe conflict. Therefore, in 2012 the vice-chancellor established the independent unit Umeå Forum for Studies on Law and Society and transferred 12 people to the new unit. The Forum took over some optional courses on the law programme and succeeded to start two international masters programmes, one of them in collaboration with Umeå Centre for Gender Studies. Since early 2018 there is no place anymore for gender and law in legal education at Umeå university. Umeå Forum for Studies on Law and Society has been forcefully terminated. Lecturers and professors have lost their job or been scattered all over the university. The masters programmes have been closed down and just a few members of the former teaching staff at the Forum are today allowed to teach on the law programme. In this paper I will describe and reflect upon these two decades in terms of what strategies we employed to make space for gender and law in legal education and what we accomplished. Finally, I will discuss the current situation. Political demands to include gender related knowledge in the curricula are increasing in Sweden, especially regarding men's violence against women, and law students organize with the aim to critique how Swedish legal education neglects gender, critical and societal approaches to law. At the same time, the opposition inside academia towards gender and gender equality perspectives is nurtured by antifeminist, nationalistic and conservative societal forces. Is there currently any prospect at all to reclaim a place for gender and law in legal education at Umeå University?