

Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, to introduce a lecture by Peter Felten, "Relationship-Rich Education". Held in the Ceremonial Hall in the Main Building on Wednesday 13 March 2024, 2 pm

Dr Peter Felten, dear guests.

It is my honour and pleasure to say a few words here to introduce today's lecture by Dr Peter Felten, entitled "Relationship-Rich Education". This lecture is one of a series of events organised this week by the Teaching Academy of Public Universities in Iceland in collaboration with the University of Iceland Centre for Teaching and Learning and the University of Akureyri.

Our speaker today, Dr. Peter Felten, is professor of history, executive director of the Center for Engaged Learning, and assistant provost for teaching and learning at Elon University, North Carolina, in the US.

Dr Felten is a leading expert in teaching development in higher education. His research has focused on how we can effectively improve the quality of education and teaching, and how students can shape their own educational journeys. He has published seven books about undergraduate education, including *Connections are Everything: A College Student's Guide to Relationship-Rich Education*. His next book, *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Guide* will be published in late 2024.

Dr. Felten is on the advisory board of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and fellow of the Gardner Institute.

In this talk, Dr Felten will draw on hundreds of interviews at American universities to illustrate why educationally purposeful student-student and student-faculty/staff relationships are central to learning and well-being. Creating relationship-rich experiences in the classroom and across universities is crucial to re-engaging after the pandemic and to meeting the challenges that generative artificial intelligence presents to the future of higher education.

The relevance of these topics certainly goes beyond the US higher education sector as the ideas apply to universities all over the world, including Iceland. The pandemic had a momentous impact on all aspects of operations at universities, including the University of Iceland, and the post-pandemic period has brought new challenges, including changes to social behaviour and technological developments, most recently in the field of artificial intelligence. All these factors affect not only academia, but also the way we communicate as teachers and students, and how the university functions as a vibrant learning community. It is essential that we learn to understand these changes so that we can respond correctly and find effective strategies to cultivate resilience, foster purposeful faculty community, lead meaningful academic conversations, and to change conditions that contribute to burnout.

Dear guests. After Dr. Felten's lecture, there will be panel discussions about relationship-rich education in the Icelandic higher education system, chaired by Prof. Steinunn Gestsdóttir, the pro-rector for academic affairs at the University of Iceland. And now without further ado, please welcome Dr Peter Felten.

Dr Felten, the floor is yours.