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Academic cloister?

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Quad 136

Academic Cloister?

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Academic Cloister?



In a recent *New York Times* op-ed Nicholas Kristof writes that, “Some of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don’t matter in today’s great debates.” He argues that the changing nature of academic research—too specialized and too quantitative—has made academics less relevant in public policy debates. The problem with his argument is that he provides no evidence, something most academics would suggest might be helpful. The closest he comes is citing a study that found “in the late 1930s and early 1940s, one-fifth of articles in *The American Political Science Review* focused on policy prescriptions; at last count, the share was down to 0.3 percent.” This, of course, ignores the tremendous growth in number of faculty and publishing outlets in the last 75 years and does not necessarily show less interest in policy. Furthermore, growth of the internet and social media have provided significant opportunities for faculty to interact with the general public and vice versa.

It may be true that academics are less important in public policy debates than they have been in the past, though I am very skeptical, but to simply assert this as a fact does not make the case. At best, Mr. Kristof would be asked to provide evidence and re-write his essay in a first-year college seminar. (I say this despite his praise of economics as a discipline that has bucked this purported trend!)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).