The project “The future of human rights” aims to contribute to academic discussions about human rights and to foster a dialogue between society, politics, and academia by applying an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach. This project will lay the foundation for a long-term project over 4-years, remaining open to all members of the SYA who would like to contribute to its development. Every year we will revise, adjust, and develop new research areas and incorporate related concepts and ideas.

We argue that human rights are about living in dignity and consist of concrete rights to life, equality, liberty, education, justice, free speech, artistic freedom, privacy, health, food or housing. There is a certain urgency to think out of the box about the future of human rights since their foundations are under pressure worldwide, both in democratic and authoritarian regimes. This timely project examines human rights concerns related to a variety of fields, exploring how individual and collective action can stand up to injustice, oppression, and attacks on human dignity. Promoting democratic values at the foundation of the SYA, this interdisciplinary project aims to make a significant contribution to society through public and academic engagement.

The project “The future of human rights” focuses on four research areas in order to explore their implications on human dignity:

- Arts
- Climate change
- Digitization
- Health

The overarching goal of the project is to develop and disseminate original and interdisciplinary analyses of human rights issues through cutting-edge research. For doing that, during the first year we will develop partnerships with academic and non-academic organizations in Switzerland and further abroad, such as (see each research area for more information):

- Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences
- Swiss Centre of Expertise in Human Rights
- Walter Benjamin Kolleg (University of Bern)
- Freemuse (Copenhagen)
- Swiss governmental organizations
- NGOs, civil society organizations (e.g., Amnesty International, Public Eye)

Our contribution to human rights is also to analyze within a critical perspective how human rights are implemented and how the concept of human rights has been developed in recent years. Therefore, we will analyze how our different research areas are shaping human rights debates and movements and how a specific reflection on these areas can contribute to advance the knowledge on the human rights field.
Across the globe, higher education has undergone dramatic changes. The relationship of knowledge, research, and teaching, the organization of research institutions, and their place in society have become a site of conflicting debates (Thwaites and Pressland 2017, Athelstan et al. 2011). Universities increasingly have to prove their ‘worth’ by quantifiably measurable contributions to the economy and society. Critical scholars have highlighted that universities have aligned themselves with neoliberal agendas that include precarious labor conditions, especially affecting people in already unstable economic and social positions (Ahmed 2012, Pereira 2016, Sifaki 2016, Taylor and Lahad 2018). The neoliberalization of academia has taken various forms across Europe. In some contexts, Higher Education has been quasi-privatized, institutions compete for the high-paying student consumer, and, in other contexts, governments have established a competitive funding landscape for their public universities. The increasing importance of university rankings, student numbers and competitive funding has coincided with an increase of administrative positions steeped in managerial discourses, introducing utilitarian output-oriented processes and structures (Taylor and Lahad 2018, Sifaki 2016).

Junior academics and PhD students are increasingly subjected to performance indicators. These may include finishing a PhD in a set timeframe, publishing a set number of papers per year, or securing external funding. The term ‘early career researcher’ (ECR), usually referring to scholars up to five years after the PhD phase, has been critiqued, because it implies a normative, streamlined career trajectory (Taylor and Lahad 2018). Research has often benefited from cross-disciplinary career moves, experiences in other institutions and workplaces, and scholars from diverse backgrounds. We are using the term strategically, to draw attention to the particular challenges faced by PhD students and postdocs in the first years after obtaining their PhDs. We do not, however, want to suggest that these challenges disappear. What we do want to address are the hierarchies amongst scholars along the ‘junior’/‘senior’ axis and especially the frequent dependency of PhD students and postdocs on more senior and established PIs.

ECRs who are part of socially marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable to the logics of the neoliberal university as they additionally face discrimination. Feminist and anti-racist theorists have further highlighted that university gender and diversity initiatives often play on the emancipatory language of the feminist, queer and anti-racist movements while at the same time resisting real transformation and ignoring class and economic factors (Ahmed 2012, 2017, Taylor and Lahad 2018). While there is a lack of data about the lived experiences of minority scholars and ECRs at Swiss universities, international research shows that structural inequalities around race, class, ability, sexuality and gender can negatively affect career progression (Tate 2014, Taylor and Lahad 2018, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Encarnación. 2016).

This project aims to address and combat structural inequalities in Swiss universities by creating different spaces where institutional politics can be debated and where particularly marginalized ECRs can build skills that help them with career progression.
Project
„Who Gets Heard? Selecting Scientific Experts in Swiss Legislative Processes”

Project members: Ammann Odile, Maier Silvia
Speaker: Farman Darius, Grüninger Servan

This project examines the processes through which scientific expertise is taken into account by Swiss political institutions during the lawmaking process. The goal is to identify hurdles to hearing a balanced selection of experts, and within half-standardized interviews and later focus group discussions explore the most viable solutions to improve the balanced hearing of experts to reflect the state of the scientific field. The ultimate goal is to develop potential solutions to enhance balancing of expert opinion in the legislative process so that scientific messaging done by the SYA and the other Academies as representatives of their scientific fields in Switzerland reaches the legislators in the format they can best work with, in a balanced fashion that represents the state of the scientific field and not selected single opinions. The two research questions on which the project focuses are the following:

1) How do parliamentary committees select experts when they need scientific input? Is it possible to identify specific biases or path dependencies in this context? How are these consultations organised/structured? Could these processes be made more transparent?

2) How do parliamentary groups (Fraktionen) select experts when they need scientific input? (Same questions as above). To answer these questions, we will first conduct 20 interviews with key stakeholders. We will then discuss the results with 20 representatives of these stakeholder groups, and publish a synthesis of our findings. If successful, this project could later (i.e., after February 2022) be extended to the federal government/administration and to individual MPs. The findings can be expected to help improve the processes and mechanisms by which expert knowledge is included in the policy-making process, especially with regard to transparency and fairness (e.g. in terms of diversity, representativity, and equality of access).

The proposed role definition is the following:

- Project co-leaders: Odile Ammann, Silvia Maier. The co-leads will have the scientific lead of the project. Odile Ammann will provide input on the lawmaking process and on the legal rights and duties of lawmakers and scientific experts. Silvia Maier will provide input on the research methodology. The co-leaders commit to devoting an average of 5 hours/week to all SYA activities, including to their joint project, and excluding 5 weeks of holidays, starting in January 2021.

- Other project members: Servan Grüninger, Darius Farman. The other project members will assist the co-leaders and provide feedback throughout the process. They will replace the co-leaders when they are temporarily unable to work on the project due to conflicting professional commitments. Servan Grüninger will be able to offer insights on the policy process, being a member of the Animal Experimentation Commission of the canton of Zurich. The same applies to Darius Farman, who works for the policy think tank Avenir Suisse. The other project members commit to devoting an average of 4 hours/week to all SYA activities, including to their joint project, and excluding 5 weeks of holidays, starting in January 2021.

- Project assistant: an administrative and research assistant will assist the project members throughout the project. His/her tasks will be to conduct the interviews, to prepare the results for in-depth analysis, to prepare the focus group meetings, and to record their summary. He/she will also take care of administrative matters.
Project
„What can we learn from COVID-19 fake news about the spread of scientific misinformation in general?“

Project members: Grüninger Servan, Jobin Anna, Georgi Fanny
Speaker: H. Kessler Sabrina

Since the emergence of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in early 2020, related conspiracy theories and misinformation abound. Widespread fake news on medical issues can be dangerous for individuals and populations. Our project focuses on investigating how the Swiss population keeps itself informed in the event of pandemics and which fake news about the coronavirus reached the Swiss.

Objectives: Investigation of (1) the informedness of the Swiss population, especially what fake news the Swiss population still believes in, where they obtained it from, and how it can be typified; (2) what we can learn from including different stakeholders in the analysis and interpretation of the survey data; and (3) what can we learn from COVID-19 fake news about the spread of scientific misinformation in general.

Methods: In a first project step (step 1), we will conduct a representative online survey on the informedness of the Swiss with regard to the coronavirus. The focus is on gathering data on dimensions of knowledge, misinformation/fake news, scientific/media/information literacy, and credibility evaluation. For the analysis, we will rely on traditional quantitative and qualitative survey analysis, as well as on citizen science in form of co-creation workshops (step 2). By inviting non-expert individuals to contribute to the analysis and interpretation of the survey’s results in four co-creation workshops, we aim to gain additional insights into what might otherwise be missed, ignored, or overlooked. The workshops will be held independently from one another and will include individual groups of people from various backgrounds. It is planned to have at least one workshop in the French speaking part of Switzerland, and one workshop including all interested Swiss Young Academy members. During the workshops, the participants will have the opportunity to engage with the survey data and are encouraged to suggest possible classifications for both the fake news and the people sharing fake news. Not only the final suggestions but also the discussions, justifications, and deliberations occurring during the workshop will feed back into the project and enrich future analyses. The co-creation workshops are planned to be organized in collaboration with the Participatory Science Academy at the University of Zurich, reatch (research and technology in Switzerland), the CoLaboratoire at the University of Lausanne, and Competence Center Citizen Science (UZH/ETH).

Sabrina H. Kessler (project manager): Her research expertise lies in health communication research. She conducted several surveys on health issues and has already carried out a number of outreach activities on fake news regarding the coronavirus. She will take the lead for the first project part and contribute to the project in mainly two ways. 1. Her methodological knowledge of online surveys as well as her professional knowledge of fake news in health communication will be beneficial for the planned survey. 2. Her experience in external science communication and in conducting and organizing workshops will be useful for the second part of the project.

Servan L. Grüninger: He is a biostatistician and contribute to the project in mainly two ways: 1. He will help with the statistical evaluation of the survey and 2. He has as the president of reatch long experience in communication workshops, spreading scientific information, as well as preventing and counteracting fake news, which he will use for the second part of the project.
Anna Jobin (deputy project manager): A sociologist by training, her contributions will be two-fold. 1. Her research on the sociotechnicity of algorithmic online information systems will provide a useful backdrop for the design, analysis and interpretation of the survey section on online information. Secondly, her experiences at both the Collaboratoire, Université de Lausanne, and the Citizen Science Center Zurich will inform the workshops that aim at co-creation and citizen engagement. She shares the responsibility for project part 2 with Fanny Georgi.

Fanny Georgi: As post-doctoral researcher in virology at the Department of Molecular Life Sciences, she is involved in projects aiming to identify novel therapeutics against SARS-CoV-2. She will contribute her expertise to pinpoint scientifically incorrect information and to ensure the content generated for this project remains accurate while simplifying it to address a non-virologist audience. She has a proven track-record in science communication ranging from talks, conferences and articles.