

Title: Deb Mashek, Heterodox Academy in 2020

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Transcript

[Welcome to *Half Hour of Heterodoxy*, featuring conversations with scholars and authors and ideas from diverse perspectives. Here's your host Chris Martin.]

Chris Martin: Deb Mashek is my guest on today's episode. She's the executive director of Heterodox Academy. We will spend this episode talking a bit about what Heterodox Academy does on a day to day basis. So it might be of interest if you're a member or if you follow us on Facebook or Twitter but you're not sure about what our activities actually are. We also talked a bit about events and activities that are planned for the year 2020.

Deb Mashek, welcome to the show.

Deb Mashek: Thank you so much, Chris. It's great to be here again.

Chris Martin: Now a lot of our listeners are new this year. They know this podcast is produced by Heterodox Academy. But they might not know what Heterodox Academy actually does. In fact, some of our members might be curious about that too. So on a day to day basis, what do you and the team in New York do?

Deb Mashek: It's a great question. I mean the organization's name is quite a mouthful and of course heterodoxy is the opposite of orthodoxy. So we're in a nutshell advocating for more viewpoint diversity and open inquiry in higher-ed spaces. So bringing more heterodox perspectives. And in terms of how we do our work, we get this question all the time and we really organize our work in terms of four bins.

So the first bin is we try to increase public awareness about why open inquiry is important to higher ed in the first place. So efforts like this amazing podcast and also we have a blog where we're publishing original articles at least once a week, active social media channels where we're trying to share heterodox perspectives on what's happening in higher ed.

Those are some examples in that first bin of increasing public awareness and then of course we also engage with the media. We're talking to journalists, writing op-eds, things like that.

In terms of the second area of work we try to create tools and resources that professors and administrators and others can actually make use of on campus and other disciplines and I think maybe we will have a chance to dive into some of those and some of the big plans here in a little bit.

The third bin of work is we try to find the amazing role models to hold up whether these are institutions or individuals or groups. People who are doing great work and advancing open inquiry, finding out what they're doing and then amplifying their good work.

So for instance we have the HxA Open Inquiry Awards that we give out each year. And just as a heads up to everybody, we will be putting out a call for nominations here in about a month for those. Then we're also starting a new initiative called HxA Distinguished Academies. So, I would love to talk more about that after this little overview part two.

Then the fourth bin of work, our fourth area is that we try to create communities of practice. Whether this is by gathering people at conferences or smaller events or even virtually, through for instance the Hx Communities initiative, it's a way of connecting scholars within a discipline, scholars within a particular region. Like there's one for New Zealand that's very active, and also people who have particular professional interests. So for instance, we've just started a K through 12 Heterodox Community Group. I would love to for instance have an Hx Librarians group. So there are all these different areas of expertise that connect to advancing heterodox institutions, especially in colleges—we're trying to get those people together to have conversations to figure out what they could do together to effect change.

Chris Martin: And Heterodox Academy I just realized is almost five years old in about nine months. It will be five years old and it started out as just a couple of people. How many people are now working at the head office?

Deb Mashek: It's interesting. So as you know, because you were one of the people that I always described the origin stories, like Three Dudes and a Blog, where there were these – you know, you and sociology and Jon Haidt, Nick Rosenkranz and others thinking at the same time, but then different disciplines about the role that ideological orthodoxy was playing in the scholarship area.

Then you guys started this blog and people started to say hey, we want to be a member and just things developed pretty organically and then – what was it? I don't have the calendar or the timeline in front of me. But at some point, Jon hired – Jon Haidt hired a couple of people to hang out in his office at NYU and help with some of the logistical pieces and then the real kind of hiring and staff development approach kicked off in 20 – what was it? January?

Chris Martin: I feel like it was 2017 or late 2016, early 2017 maybe.

Deb Mashek: I think it was 2018 when I actually – I think it was January 2018 that I accepted the position as executive director. So like a year ago, there were I want to say four and a half fulltime staff and by the end of the spring, we anticipate being at 11 fulltime staff. So we're growing quite a lot and the idea is to bring on not just capacity and good thinkers but real professionals who know how to support members. For instance, like what do our members need and how can we create value for our members as an organization?

How to run events, how to – like we’ve got so many projects going on that we need a project manager to help orchestrate all the moving parts and I think of her sitting in this – like the air traffic control tower and watching how everything is coming in and what needs to take off and getting all the timing exquisite.

So quite a team. They’re amazing and we have a little co-working space here in New York. So we get together every single day and hang out in the same room and do what we can to bring more viewpoint diversity to college campuses.

Chris Martin: Let’s say I’m a faculty member who has just joined Heterodox Academy and knows very little about it. Whom should I know about in the head office? Whom should I contact if I want to know more about events or about how to manage my classroom better?

Deb Mashek: Great question. So your first point of contact would be Christine Richards who is the memberships manager and you can reach her at richards@heterodoxacademy.org. She would be happy to connect you with our existing initiatives, resources and so on. One of the things that those of you who have been members historically would have received over the past month or so was a little – finally a little packet that has a membership certificate in it as well as a list of 25 things you can do to advance heterodoxy on your campus this semester.

So if people join, we’re working on getting those mailings out so everybody has one of those to hang on their wall, to talk about their engagement with Heterodox Academy but also to see some concrete actions that you can take.

In terms of events, I will say that our website is not a great resource right now. So we’re developing some updates there. But we will – we drop events on there as they – as we get them scheduled. So for instance, on let’s say December 19th, so next Thursday, we’re – or the Comedy Cellar here in New York City is having a benefit show for Heterodox Academy. So all the ticket sales will go straight to Heterodox Academy as a donation. So if you’re in the New York area and you’re available Thursday night, you can come out and see us.

Chris Martin: Unfortunately, I won’t be on the line-up for that show. Oh, well.

Deb Mashek: I will send you a selfie.

Chris Martin: OK, that sounds good. So in terms of the distinguished academy honor, tell me a bit more about that because that is actually new. So what is that about?

Deb Mashek: Yeah. So OK. So do you remember the Guide to Colleges?

Chris Martin: Yeah, I remember that. That was around about – well, Sean Stevens started the work on that and he released that shortly after he started working here.

Deb Mashek: Yeah. So it was a really cool idea. The idea was how can you find out how well colleges are doing and creating these atmospheres, these contexts where open inquiry can thrive.

But it's kind of a tough question because you have to think about like what are the useful data sources that are not anecdotal.

So like it's hard to say, oh, we're going to use newspaper coverage of a student protest or if a professor says something that's silencing the students and it was caught on tape. We're going to use that as evidence. That's totally anecdotal and of course we're researchers and so ...

Chris Martin: Yeah. I mean I had that issue at Georgia Tech actually because a Georgia Tech alum out of the blue, someone I didn't know, emailed me and said, "How come Georgia Tech is ranked so low on the Guide to Colleges?" and it turned out it was because of one story. It was a true news story but it was about a police car being set on fire during a small riot. It's unclear if the people who set fire to the car were actually Georgia Tech students to begin with. On a campus of 20,000 people, that doesn't really represent the whole campus anyway.

Deb Mashek: Exactly. And if you put yourself in say the shoes of an administrator, what does that feel like to have your college hung out to dry because of the action of one person who may or may not be a student, but something took place on your campus.

So it's just – it's like we weren't feeling confident in the data sources that we're going into these rankings. So we made the tough decision to take that tool down. It was actually one of our most visited webpages on the entire site and we said, you know, this is not something we can – we still feel like we can stand behind.

So we took it down and we started this other initiative. It's going to be a slow build. We're at the beginning but we would love ideas and participation from members, from listeners.

Here's the idea. So HxA Distinguished Academy, what we will do is create a list of criteria that we believe characterizes a campus where people can come together who can interrogate ideas across lines of difference.

So in other words, what does that mean for a campus to advance open inquiry? That might be things like well, there is a speaker series and people from a lot of different perspectives are invited to look at a particular topic.

It might mean that a campus circulates some recommended syllabus language about all ideas are welcomed in this classroom that you're not going to be graded on your ideas and such. You will be graded on the quality of thought and your effective deployment of evidence.

So we have some syllabus language like that and maybe that becomes one of the criteria or maybe another criteria is something like oh, during the first year orientation, there's some effort to talk about academic freedom or open inquiry or how to handle discomfort or maybe they assigned the amazing Open Mind Platform in a shared core course or something like that.

So we're going to come up with a list of criteria and then we're going to put out a call to colleges and universities and say hey, if you want to distinguish yourself, your institution in this

incredibly important area, here's how you do it. You're going to share your direct evidence with us that you're doing these things and I can't imagine we're going to be like, oh, you have to hit every single one of this criterion. But we will have to design some sort of a process for vetting, for evaluating, for scaling and figuring out which institutions really are doing a phenomenal job and then we want to know about them. This is all part of our holding up the great role models. We want to share their stories with others through – you know, whether it's through social media, on our website certainly.

It would be awesome to eventually get some of the campus leaders from these institutions onto the podcast to bring positive light to the good work they're doing.

Chris Martin: And in terms of the HxA Communities, that started out as HxA Disciplines. So if you're on Facebook, you can find out – if you're on Facebook, you can find HxA Psychology and HxA Sociology here. But now we're moving to communities. So tell me about Australia and New Zealand because I feel like I've done a poor job of serving people in Australia and New Zealand. I mean in terms of representation, I've not had anyone.

I have had people from Canada on the show and I'm originally from India. So I guess I'm partly representing the commonwealth but not very well. Yeah. But what's going on in Australia and New Zealand?

Deb Mashek: This started as a Hx disciplines and here was the big thought. It's like you know what, let's create spaces where the psychologist can get together and talk and figure out – you know, share resources but also say hey, there's a conference coming up. Let's put together a panel of heterodox perspectives on this topic and we were thinking pretty narrowly about who would be interested in something like this.

Like that was going to be our disciplinary colleagues. As soon as we launched this effort, we started to get outreach from like geographic places. So New Zealand, Australia, higher ed leadership, K through 12 educators, community college scholars and then we're like well, this whole discipline's focus probably is too narrow. So we opened it up to Hx Communities.

So you're right. That's the history of it. In terms of for example the Hx New Zealand and Hx Australia, the summer Jon Haidt was on – did a leg of his book tour over there and spoke to a lot of academics and understandably when you get people together, there's often this energy of like we wish we could continue doing something together.

We wish we could activate on this energy in some way. But what often happens is you get that energy and then it dissipates and there's nobody there to help organize or to kind of synthesize the ideas.

So while Jon was in New Zealand and Australia, there was all this energy and so we just – when he got back, he's like, “We've got to figure out a way to make sure we stay connected with these folks.”

So we just set up another group and they're talking about everything from public policy around education. One of the group's classics, they worked together to co-author a letter that they signed then as individual scholars. But the – one of the real movers and shakers from that classics group is also a New Zealand scholar. So that work has been highlighted also over the New Zealand group.

Chris Martin: All right. So we're recording this on the 12th of December. So if you follow us on Twitter or on Facebook, you've probably seen some posts already about our new Advisory Council. So tell me about who's on that council and how you selected those people.

Deb Mashek: Yeah. So the purpose of the Advisory Council is to offer support and guidance in the HxA mission. So these are higher education leaders and public intellectuals who have chosen to stand with us as a part of open inquiry in higher ed.

If you look at the list on the website, it's phenomenal. There are 15 people there including current college presidents like Ron Crutcher from University of Richmond. There are public intellectuals like David Brooks from the New York Times. Diversity officer leaders like Taffye Benson Clayton from Auburn and she's on the Board of the National Association of Diversity Officers in higher education for instance. Some high profile professors including Robbie George and Glenn Loury, Rick Shweder, Cornel West, Nadine Strossen. Other organizational leaders including Lynn Pasquerella who's the President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Eboo Patel, the President of Interfaith Youth Core, Irshad Madnji of Moral Courage College and then other higher ed leaders like Judith Shapiro who's the past president of Barnard College but also the Teagle Foundation. Diane Halpern who's the past president of the American Psych Association and Alice Dreger who I think many of you know won our Courage Award back in 2018 and she's the author of *Galileo's Middle Finger* and has been in many ways a victim of – she would never classify herself as a victim. But her life has had professional consequences due to orthodoxies on campus. So she's an amazing advocate for this work.

The ideas that will be able to turn to this Advisory Council when we have questions and when we need some support or advocacy for these ideas out there in the broader world.

Chris Martin: And I should mention a couple of things. One is Nadine Strossen is also a former president of the ACLU or former chair of the ACLU. Is that right?

Deb Mashek: Absolutely, yeah. Thank you for highlighting that. Really amazing to like read through these bios and I mean I just feel an incredible sense of personal gratitude to these folks that they endorse what we're up to and then I know it means a lot to our members too to have people like this who can help give social permission to stand up and be public about your support for open inquiry.

Chris Martin: And a shameless plug. Three of these people also appeared on the podcast. Unfortunately they were in the days when their audio quality was not great but for people

who've just started listening, we do have past episodes with Glenn Loury, Rick Shweder and Alice Dreger. I remember the Alice Dreger episode. This was recorded the day before I defended my dissertation. So that will be November 2017.

Deb Mashek: Does that count as a light bulb memory?

Chris Martin: Yes, I guess it does. I recorded both – I recorded two Heterodox Academy episodes or two Half Hour of Heterodoxy episodes that day and then Glenn Loury appeared prior to that. I think Rick Shweder appeared prior to that too and I think those two episodes are on video and audio. So you can find them on YouTube.

Deb Mashek: Oh, that's right. I forgot that you used to do a video and you could see what was in everybody's background.

Chris Martin: Yes, back in the day.

Deb Mashek: Yeah.

Chris Martin: Yeah, just four years ago. It feels like a long time ago. I said four years ago. It's two years ago. It feels like four.

Deb Mashek: Amazing, yeah. Time flies.

Chris Martin: All right. So 2020 events. We're 28 days from the beginning of 2020 as we're recording this. What events are we doing in 2020?

Deb Mashek: In store for 2020, thanks to the work of our membership manager and also our recently hired Events Planner, we're going to see a lot of different event formats that will be distributed across time, across geographies, across interest groups and formats.

So while our big conference will remain a cornerstone of that event plan, it's now going to occur every other year and what's cool about this is, is it's going to create the space for us to do – have a more sustained cadence of activities to really engage our members in conversation and in collaborations that are going to improve the campuses and the disciplines.

These include things like we're starting a salon series where we're going to be bouncing around across the nation and doing small in-home events with donors and members where there will be conversations about difficult topics but we will be able to – it will give us a chance to really show versus telling what heterodoxy looks like and feels like and if you are interested in hosting one of these events, please reach out. We would love to hear from you and we're also looking at how to do more virtual events, things that people can just drop into from the comfort of their own home and interact with us and interact with other members. So these include things like digital town halls on particular topics.

For example if you would like to brainstorm with others about possible conference panels that you could put together around heterodoxy or if you're getting ready to teach a first year seminar on a writing seminar for instance.

How can we infuse those courses with heterodox perspectives and modes of thinking and think together alongside other people who are getting ready to teach those sorts of courses and so we can have a discussion? We're playing around with the idea of doing virtual book clubs, perhaps in collaboration with the Half Hour of Heterodoxy podcast or maybe Chris, we could do a book club and then maybe you interview the author, something like that.

So the sky is the limit and one of the things we would like to know from our listeners and our members is if you have particular ideas for topics or formats or other ideas that – what you need to feel very much a part of and a contributor to the heterodox community, let us know. We're in a very brainstormy, generative space right now and would love to hear from you.

Chris Martin: Great. And to wrap up since we're on a podcast and you listen to some podcasts including one that you appeared on recently, which is *Two Psychologists Four Beers*, what are some of your favorite podcasts either heterodox or non-heterodox related?

Deb Mashek: OK. So I'm not one of those people who has like a podcast going at all times. But I do have a couple I'm listening to. One is called *Strong Songs* and it's this musician who breaks down songs that we all know and love and figures out why, why they work so well and he loves music. He is incredibly enthusiastic. But if you want to hear all about *Dancing Queen* by ABBA, you got to – such a good episode. Anyway, love him.

Another one I'm really enjoying is called *Dharma Punx NYC* and it's this Buddhist teacher/scholar/therapist who talks about Buddhist perspectives on everything from developing interpersonal connection to dealing with stress and one of my favorite, favorite episodes, it was back in October and it was titled "Interacting Skillfully with Irrational People". It would totally appeal to our heterodox listeners. So anyway, very much enjoying that one and let's see. You already mentioned the *Two Psychologists Four Beers*.

I will say those are my recommendations. Well and of course I can't go to sleep at night until I listen to PBS News Hour. So that's my primary source of news and analysis.

Then I would be remised if I neglected to mention the *How Do We Fix It?* podcast. So these are people who have been very close to Heterodox Academy and who also have supported us. So we've done some co-broadcast episodes with them and I love it because Jim and Richard come at the questions from very different perspectives and they do it with such incredible goodwill and open intention that they're creating amazing conversations with their guests. So I would totally recommend the *How Do We Fix It?* podcast as well.

Chris Martin: Great. Well, Deb, thanks for joining us on the show. It has been great having you for our annual *What's Up With Heterodox Academy?* episode and for people who don't follow us on Twitter or Facebook, I would recommend doing that too because that is a good way, apart

from the podcast, to figure out what our activities are and what our events are and what our goals are.

Deb Mashek: Chris, if I can just say a heartfelt thank-you to you for all the work you do on the *Half Hour of Heterodoxy* podcast. You're one of the public faces of this organization and I would say one of the unsung heroes of helping get the word out about why these issues matter so intensely both for higher ed and beyond. Thank you.

Chris Martin: Oh, thank you.

You can learn more about our activities by following us on Facebook or Twitter or by visiting our webpage. That's heterodoxacademy.org. Of course I also announce events on the podcast from time to time. So if you're a podcast listener, you will probably hear about any events that are of interest to people in the US or abroad.

As always, I hope you enjoyed listening to this episode. It will be great if you could leave us a review on iTunes as an end-of-the-year gift. It helps other people find out about the show and that's useful to us.

Also if you have any feedback about the show, feel free to get in touch with me. You can reach me at podcast@heterodoxacademy.org or on Twitter, @Chrismartin76.

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