

MORE INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY

**AN OPEN LETTER TO
PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND
RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS**

PUBLISHED BY

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FOR AN INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY AN OPEN APPEAL TO STRENGTHEN RESPECTFUL COOPERATION AND DIVERSITY IN EVERYDAY UNIVERSITY LIFE

With this open letter, we, as representatives of the student body, want to promote the visibility and understanding of inclusion in everyday university life. The examples we give here are designed to include and support students and members of all other status groups in everyday university life. Some of these examples are not only relevant in teaching situations, but can also improve interactions with employees and staff.

At our university, every person has the right to learn, research and live without discrimination in accordance with the General Equal Treatment Act and the Guideline for Respectful Cooperation[1]. It is therefore also part of our current university development plan to promote diversity at our university and raise awareness of diversity. This is illustrated by our university's self-image[2] and understanding of diversity[3]. For this commitment, our university was one of two universities to be awarded the "audit vielfaltsgerechete hochschule"[4] as part of a pilot phase. It is therefore in everyone's interest to develop an understanding of the different realities of people's lives at our university.

WE DON'T WANT TO MAKE ANYONE'S LIFE MORE DIFFICULT, BUT RATHER TO REMOVE THE TABOOS SURROUNDING INCLUSION AND NORMALIZE IT.

We appeal to you to see it as your responsibility to make everyday university life more inclusive. Our aim is to treat each other with respect. We do not want to make your life more difficult or dictate your use of language, but rather provide guidance on how to create safe spaces. These help to give everyone the space they need to feel free and safe and to speak openly about their thoughts, feelings and experiences without fear of judgment, discrimination or harassment.

Note that the sources of this document are in German.

[1] [Richtlinie für ein respektvolles Miteinander](#)

[2] [Selbstverständnis Universität Paderborn](#)

[3] [Diversity-Verständnis Universität Paderborn](#)

[4] [Auszeichnung der Universität Paderborn mit neuem Vielfalts-audit](#)

Especially in situations with unequal power relations, it is often more difficult to speak up or stand up for yourself or others. We hope that you can signal to students and staff that you are creating safe spaces and are open to change and suggestions.

We would also like to emphasize that this open letter does not claim to be exhaustive or permanent. We would simply like to present some ideas on what you should pay attention to and where you could start.

This does not mean that we are accusing you of not doing anything at the moment. Many teachers are already working towards more inclusive teaching and safer spaces. We are not omniscient either, and some situations are unfamiliar to us. Society and language are constantly evolving. At this point, we appeal to you to inform yourself independently and continuously and to actively work on creating safe spaces. At the end of this open letter, we have included a small dictionary to minimize the barriers to reading. In addition, a summary of the contact points mentioned in this letter can be found in the appendix.

CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH IMPAIRMENTS AND DISABILITIES

Around 10% of the population in Germany is classified as severely disabled. This definition refers to people who have been awarded a degree of disability of at least 50 by the pension offices and who are in possession of a valid severely disabled person's pass[5]. However, the actual number of people with disabilities and impairments could be significantly higher, as some may not have a formal diagnosis, reliable access to appropriate medical care or get stuck in bureaucratic processes.

Students are also affected. According to the latest social survey[6] by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research from 2023, studying is made more difficult for around 16% of students, or roughly one in six, by one or more health impairments. Students with impairments often have to find alternative ways to achieve the same level of performance as their fellow students. For this reason, affected students have the right to compensation for disadvantages both in the organization and implementation of their studies and in the adaptation of examinations and performance records. This requirement is enshrined in law and is set out in the examination regulations of the degree programs.

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[5] [Statistisches Bundesamt – Behinderte Menschen](#)

[6] [BMBF – Die Studierendenbefragung in Deutschland: 22. Sozialerhebung](#)

Our university is actively committed to supporting students with health impairments, chronic illnesses or disabilities in their studies so that they can participate in higher education on an equal and self-determined basis. It is therefore best to ask the contact points listed in the next section what you can do to avoid making studying even more difficult for students with disabilities.

For example:

Your course includes a mandatory presentation and someone with an anxiety disorder takes part in the exercise. This person no longer takes part in the exercise from the point at which the lecture or mandatory presentation of tasks is announced. In this situation, alternative solutions such as recording a lecture or holding an individual presentation in front of the trainer instead of the group could have achieved similar goals.

This example assumes that you are aware of the disadvantage. So that students dare to tell you about this, **you can point out possible other solutions at the beginning of the semester** and thus show that you also support disabled students.

The Service Center for Students with Disabilities at Paderborn University[7] offers support not only for lecturers, but also for prospective students, students and graduates. There are special contact points for compensation for disadvantages[8]. In addition, the representative for students with impairments, chronic illnesses and disabilities[9] is available as a contact person. She offers advice and support for students in difficult study situations, as well as advice on the topic of compensation for disadvantages for prospective students, students, doctoral students and lecturers. For employees, there is also a contact point at our university for the severely disabled[10]. A brief list of these support services in your teaching at the beginning of the semester could be very helpful for affected students, as they are often not aware that these services exist.

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[7] [UPB - Servicestelle Studium mit Beeinträchtigung](#)

[8] [UPB ZSB - Nachteilsausgleich](#)

[9] [UPB - Beauftragte für Studierende mit Beeinträchtigung, chronischer Erkrankung und Behinderung](#)

[10] [UPB - Schwerbehindertenvertretung](#)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN VIEW: FIRST-GENERATION UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

In Germany, access to higher education often still depends heavily on social background. According to the most recent social survey[6] conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 2023, 58% of students, i.e. more than half, come from families in which at least one parent has a university degree (academic family) and 30% of students, i.e. almost a third, come from families in which both parents have a university degree. This social selection continues even after starting university. According to the Higher Education Report 2020[11], only 17.8% of Master's graduates still come from families without an academic background, which corresponds to less than one in six and only one in eleven if they successfully complete a doctorate. This means that for every 100 children from academic families, an average of ten earn a doctorate, compared to only one in 100 children from non-academic families. This is less about motivation for education and more about the available social network, knowledge of the university system and knowledge of contact persons. Motivation for education is not dependent on social background, but equal opportunities are.

In order to create a university that is socially diverse, even small measures can make a big difference. For example, in courses at the beginning of the Bachelor's and Master's phase, i.e. in courses with first-year students, you can explain the course of lectures and exercises or provide a guide for final theses or internship reports. These guidelines do not have to be extensive, but should clearly communicate your expectations of the work.

Clear communication with students usually leads to better submitted work. For example, explain the use of Panda and Paul and announce the examination dates and rooms in a consistent manner. Let students know how they can best contact you, either by phone or in writing. First-year students in particular are often not aware of the various counseling and support options[12] at our university. By highlighting these services, you can help students to find their way around our university. You can also point out common academic vocabulary and abbreviations.

For questions about financing your studies, you can refer to our university's website[13] or the talent scouting[14] of the Central Student Advisory Service. You should also advise students to contact the relevant student representatives, who will be happy to help and clarify general concerns.

Note that the sources of this document are in German.

[6] [BMBF - Die Studierendenbefragung in Deutschland: 22. Sozialerhebung](#)

[11] [Hochschulbildungsreport 2020 - Chancen für Nichtakademikerkinder](#)

[12] [UPB - Handlungsfeld Soziale Herkunft](#)

SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: OPPORTUNITIES AT GERMAN-SPEAKING UNIVERSITIES

In German-language courses and modules, it is not always easy to include all international students. Of course, it is primarily up to the students to inform themselves. Nevertheless, international students face similar challenges to first-generation university students when it comes to finding their way around the German university system. This is primarily about the existing social network, understanding the university system and knowing the right people to contact.

To create a university that is internationally and culturally diverse, even simple measures can make a significant difference without requiring much effort. For example, basic information about your module can also be made available in English. This way you can make the course bilingual. In addition, you can ask comprehension questions at the start of the semester so that you know whether it is necessary to translate work assignments into English.

In addition, when setting exam dates, you can take into account not only Christian holidays, but also the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, for example. You can also point out support options, such as the AStA Department for International Affairs[15], which can help with any questions international students may have. The International Office[16] of our university offers a list of contact persons for administrative processes[17] or information on learning German[18].

The International Students' Association[19] (ASV) also helps with finding accommodation or a job, accompanies students to the authorities and advises them on study and social issues. The ASV also organizes sports courses and cultural events where international students in particular can network.

Note that the sources of this document are in German.

[13] [UPB - Stipendien](#)

[14] [UPB - Programm Talentscouting](#)

[15] [AStA UPB - Team](#)

[16] [UPB - International Office](#)

[17] [UPB International Office - Formalitäten und Services](#)

[18] [UPB International Office - Deutschkurse und mehr](#)

GENDER AUTONOMY AND INCLUSION AT OUR UNIVERSITY: PROGRESS AND WAYS TO HELP SHAPE IT

WE EXPLICITLY DO NOT WANT TO FORCE ANY OF THE LECTURERS OR STUDENTS TO STATE THEIR OWN PRONOUNS OR TO PUT THEM UNDER PRESSURE OR FORCE THEM TO COME OUT. PRESSURE OR FORCE THEM TO DO SO.

Since December 2018, it has been possible to officially change gender details and first names in Germany[20]. This means that four gender registration options are now available: male, female, diverse and no registration. This development strengthens the right to gender self-determination and is particularly groundbreaking for trans* people and those who identify as non-binary. Since summer 2022, this option has also been available to students at our university. From this summer semester, i.e. from summer 2024, it will even be possible to change the data provided during enrolment compared to that on the identity card[21].

In addition, a resolution published by the Presidium of our university in February 2022 obliges us to use inclusive language in public documents[22]. Here, too, our university is strongly committed to inclusion and positions itself in favor of gender diversity (within the scope of legal possibilities). As a lecturer, you can contribute to this without much effort or new concepts. For example, you can apply the Presidium's resolution to your teaching. In the following, problems and possible solutions regarding form of address, names and pronouns are explained. Né Fink[23] provides a brief guide to frequently asked questions with a practical focus (note that it is written in German). Né offers workshops and training for employees at colleges/universities or in organizations with a focus on gender diversity.

If you have any questions, please contact the Diversity Officer at Paderborn University, Laura Maring[24].

Note that the sources of this document are in German.

[19] [Ausländische Studierendenvertretung an der UPB](#)

[20] [BGBl - Gesetz zur Änderung der in das Geburtenregister einzutragenden Angaben](#)

[21] [UPB - Vorzeitige Änderung des Vornamens- und Geschlechtseintrags](#)

[22] [UPB - Geschlechtergerechte Sprache](#)

[23] [N. Fink - Handreichung zu geschlechtlicher Vielfalt](#)

SALUTATIONS FOR ALL: INCLUSION IN CONVERSATIONS AND EMAILS

It is now widely recognized that it is preferable to use generic terms such as “students” rather than the generic masculine “students” or the gender-stereotyped form “students”. In this way, all people who are studying are included. Using a more general term has the advantage that students who do not identify with a binary gender system are also taken into account and addressed. Our university offers further information and tips on gender-sensitive language on its website[25].

In order to avoid students being addressed with the wrong pronouns, i.e. being misgendered, it is advisable not to assume a gender when using first names. It is therefore advisable to refrain from using forms of address such as “Mrs/Mr” unless you know explicitly that the person in question prefers this form of address. Instead of addressing students in emails or personal conversations as “Mr./Mrs. sample name”, it is advisable to simply address them by their name. If you wish to use a form of address, ask the person about their preferences and respect the fact that students do not wish to be addressed as such.

In addition, it is important to pay attention to the name with which the e-mail was signed in order to avoid using the previous name. Please also note that the name in the email address should not simply be copied. To ensure that everyone feels addressed by your emails, here are some suggestions to replace the outdated “Dear Sir or Madam”. **Example salutations:**

Dear

- Students
- Employees
- Colleagues
- Members of the faculty
- Interested parties (public)
- Professors, Lecturers, Docents

[24] [Laura Maring - Referentin für Diversity an der UPB](#)

[25] [UPB - Geschlechtersensible/-reflektierte Sprache](#)

Even in the case of invitations to lectures or colloquia, for example, the title of the person giving the presentation should only appear in consultation with them. **Example: Invitation to a defense:**

Subject: Thesis defense – Alex Mustername – on Wednesday, 14.06.23, 9:30 a.m., room A1.322

Mail: “Dear members of the faculty [...] and (dear/other) interested parties, the colloquium for the final thesis of

Alex Mustername

with the topic

“[...]”

will take place on Wednesday, June 14, 2022 at 09:30 a.m. in room A1.322. All interested parties are cordially invited.”

FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT: SENSITIVE HANDLING WITH PRONOUNS AND NAMES

The use of pronouns is often closely associated with gender identity, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. Both cis and trans* people (usually) have pronouns and can change them at any time. When you talk about a person and use the pronouns “he/him” or “she/her”, you are basically assuming their gender. However, not every person read as male identifies as male and not every person read as female identifies as female. For example, registration lists for events and in PAUL and PANDA do not always contain the names by which the respective persons wish to be addressed.

For example, when you go through the list of participants in your seminar before the semester starts, you could ask the participants in the first seminar or by e-mail to contact you about incorrect information on the list. If you notice in the course of the semester that you have used the wrong name or form of address for a person, apologize briefly and correct yourself.

Some trans* people do not feel the need to adapt their appearance to their chosen gender, while others lack the resources and financial means to do so.

In particular, there are **people who do not see themselves in a binary gender system and do not feel addressed by binary pronouns; instead, they use neopronouns**. There are a variety of neopronouns that you and we may not have heard of. If you feel unsure about how to use pronouns, feel free to ask the person for an example, this often makes it easier to use the appropriate pronouns correctly. No one expects perfection from you as long as you show the will to deal with it and apply the pronoun requests.

An example of the use of the pronouns “they/them”:

“Lou was visiting today and we had a lot of fun with them. They brought brought a cake.”

If you feel uncomfortable using pronouns, you can also refrain from using them linguistically. There are also **people who do not use pronouns at all**. Instead, the name is usually used instead of the pronouns. **For example:**

“I visited Alev today. It was Alev's birthday and Alev's cake tasted really good.”

In this way, you can also talk about/with people who use neopronouns. These are just a few examples, you can find more in the non-binary wiki[26].

If you **regularly interact with students** and they are not just sitting in your classes, it is **advisable to ask them about their pronouns**. This should not be about pressuring a person to come out. Rather, it is about creating a safe environment in which students have the opportunity to introduce themselves as they would like to be addressed. **Introducing yourself in a one-to-one conversation or during an event with a salutation and pronoun can encourage others to do the same**. However, you should only do this if you feel confident in stating your salutation or pronouns. **An example of this:**

“I am Annika Musterfrau, Professor / Lecturer for xxx, and my pronouns are ‘she/her’.”

Another option is to indicate this in your email signature so that everyone who contacts you by email knows how you would like to be addressed. Some student councils and the student parliament allow their elected members to indicate their pronouns using a standardized design.

Marginalization, discrimination, microaggressions and physical violence are unfortunately still part of everyday life for trans* people. Therefore, they often have to weigh up whether they are dealing with an understanding person or someone who is trans-hostile. At our university, we want everyone to feel comfortable. By advocating for safe spaces and expecting others to do the same, you can make a positive contribution to this.

FINAL REMARKS

The aim of this open letter from the student body representation is to promote the visibility and understanding of inclusion in everyday university life, as well as to strengthen inclusion in the everyday life of our university. The examples listed here are designed to include and support not only students, but also members of all other status groups, in everyday university life. Therefore, some of these examples are not only relevant in teaching situations, but can also improve interactions with employees and staff. After the concluding remarks, a small dictionary is included to minimize reading barriers.

This open letter addresses many dimensions of diversity, but not all areas of action at our university. If these areas, such as age & generations, religion and worldview, should also be considered for your teaching or your personal interest, you can contact the Diversity Officer, Laura Maring[24]. If you have any questions about the gender dimension, you can contact the Center for Gender Studies[27].

[24] [Laura Maring - Referentin für Diversity an der UPB](#)

[27] [UPB - Genderportal](#)

FOR AN INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY

SUPPORT OPTIONS & CONTACT POINTS

Challenges and support for students with impairments and disabilities

- **Support for lecturers, students and graduates:**
Service center for studying with disabilities
- **Contact person for employees:**
Representative for severely disabled employees
(Schwerbehindertenvertretung)
- **Contact person for students & compensation for disadvantages:**
Zentrale Studienberatung, Representative for students with impairments, chronic illnesses and disabilities

Equal opportunities in view: First-generation university students

- **Courses at the beginning of the Bachelor's/Master's phase:**
 - Explain the course of lectures and exercises
- **Highlighting the support services for students**
 - Zentrale Studienberatung (ZSB)
 - Talentscouting
 - Paderborn chapter of the Arbeiterkind.de initiative
 - Study Compass funding program
 - AStA Social Office
Legal and tax advice, advice on financial aid
 - Social Counseling of the Studierendenwerk Paderborn Information on financial and social issues
- Provision of a rough **guide for final papers/internship reports**
- Explain the use of Panda and Paul
- Uniformly announce examination dates and rooms

FOR AN INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY

SUPPORT OPTIONS & CONTACT POINTS

Support for international students

- **Setting examination dates**
 - do not only consider Christian holidays
- **International Office**
 - List of contact persons for administrative processes
 - Information on learning German
- **International student representation (ASV)**
 - Networking for international students
 - Support with finding accommodation or a job
 - Accompaniment to authorities
 - Advice on study and social issues
- **AStA Office for International Affairs**
 - Mediation for all questions

Gender Autonomy

- **Gender portal of the university**
 - Information and tips on gender-sensitive language
- Use primarily **neutral, general terms**
- **Avoid misgendering**
 - Do not guess the gender when using first names
 - Advice: Avoid salutations such as "Mr./Mrs."
- **Provide safe spaces**
 - Introduce yourself using pronouns if you feel comfortable doing so
 - Include pronouns in your e-mail signature
- Formulate **e-mail salutations** in such a way that everyone feels addressed
- Formulate **invitations to defenses and presentations** neutrally