

# Teaching in the Light of Diversity -

## Recommendations for Holding Classes with Heterogeneous Groups of Students



The “Recommendations for Holding Classes with Heterogeneous Groups of Students” is a **joint project of the Area of Quality Assurance in Study and Teaching** of the Department of History and Cultural Studies and the Department of Political and Social Sciences. It was initiated in the winter semester 2011/12.

The websites are by no means complete – in fact, we always strive to check and develop the recommendations further. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or comments. We will also be glad to learn about your experiences and get hints for the further development of the didactic recommendations!

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## 1. Introduction: Teaching in the light of diversity

**Equal access to education requires sensitivity and respect for all members of the university.**

*Did you notice that the increasing diversity of the groups of students is a challenge for those teaching at the university? That students do not participate actively, attend irregularly or do not perform as agreed?*

In view of the demographic development, the new educational situation, increased mobility, changing social settings and concepts like “life-long learning”, the composition of the student body is changing constantly. We will have to come to accept plurality as the standard. This also means that we will always have to continue reflecting our duty to contribute to equality in the educational system.

Diversity is everywhere, also in teaching. The individual biographies of the students have an effect on their studies: sociocultural backgrounds, individual styles and types of learning, gender-specific aspects, various language skills, having to take care of children/relatives or the necessity to finance their studies, etc.

The heterogeneity of the groups of students means that students have their individual qualifications, requirements and expectations. Presumably, this implies a general moment of tension for you as a teacher. On the one hand, all students are to be faced with the same expectations with regard to their performance. On the other, individual backgrounds have to be taken into account. This task requires a transparent “fair unequal treatment”:

*Do you reflect, for example, why in some lectures, there are communication problems with and between individual students? That a severe problem becomes obvious only as late as when a student presents a paper or when you receive a written test and that this problem may be due to various features of diversity?*

On the following pages, we would like to give you some hints, explanations and didactic recommendations to support you in meeting the challenge of “fair unequal treatment”. Please do not regard our issue as a duty or as an intrusion into your teaching. Instead, we would like to assist you in integrating the diversity of students into your teaching for the benefit of all parties involved.

## 2. General hints for recognizing heterogeneity

When teaching, we always experience that every class is different. This may be due to a number of factors like the size of the group or the infrastructure. Another important factor is an increasingly heterogeneous student body.

### 2.1 Self-reflection

Check if you have a special sensitivity for gender and diversity issues: What is my role as a teacher due to my socio-cultural origin, my gender identity, the colour of my skin, religious confession / philosophy of life, etc.? How important are such features in students for me? What is my concept of a “good” learner? Am I aware of the various qualifications and expectations of the participants? Do I take their contributions equally seriously? Who do I give more time to speak?

Reflect the value system of your own academic culture and the contents in teaching that are sensitive to diversity: Which social models and values are implied in texts and materials? Which cultural contexts do they stem from? How do students from various cultural backgrounds see this very matter? How are they represented in it? What rules of discourse do we follow in our discussions?

### 2.2 Didactics

The aim of teaching with a view to diversity is not so much making up for disadvantages that may arise from individual situations of life, study contexts and learning needs. Instead, the focus is on taking the opportunity to benefit from the potential of a heterogeneous group of students in a creative and effective way. This potential includes: particularly high motivation and willingness to perform, ability to take stress, awareness of responsibility, conscientiousness, good team spirit, innovative proposals for solution, etc. Integrating the diversity of your students proactively into your teaching, topics and questions means that you will reach the individual participants of your class better and receive contributions and discussions that are more differentiated.

There are some simple means by which you can support the participation of students with special needs:

- Make sure that rooms are accessible without barriers and take care of barrier-free media and didactic methods;
- Contact the students in your classes at the beginning of the term. Use a short sentence like “If you need support due to a special situation like having to take care of relatives, do not hesitate to contact me, even after class” to tell them that you are willing to support them.
- Inform about the option of compensation for disadvantages;
- Make scripts, literature lists, topics for seminar papers etc. available at an early point in time, if possible in the Blackboard Learning Management System;
- Verbalize visual presentations and visualize verbal ones;
- Make sure to use gender neutral formulations;
- Acknowledge oral statements, address students personally;
- Ask cautious students to lead workgroups, workshops, etc.

- Summarize the results of the discussion of the previous meeting;
- Allow for flexible rules of attendance.

### **2.3 Counseling**

The academic counseling service, too, is increasingly confronted with the challenges of diversity. Students talk about their personal situation which has an effect on the individual course of their studies – in most cases, the effect is negative. On the one hand, information about centralized contact and counseling services offered by Freie Universität Berlin is indispensable. On the other, it would be helpful to listen carefully and find personal contacts for the students, if required.

### **3. Features of diversity**

A general categorization of “diversity” by various features is guided by the legal principles and applicable guidelines against discrimination.

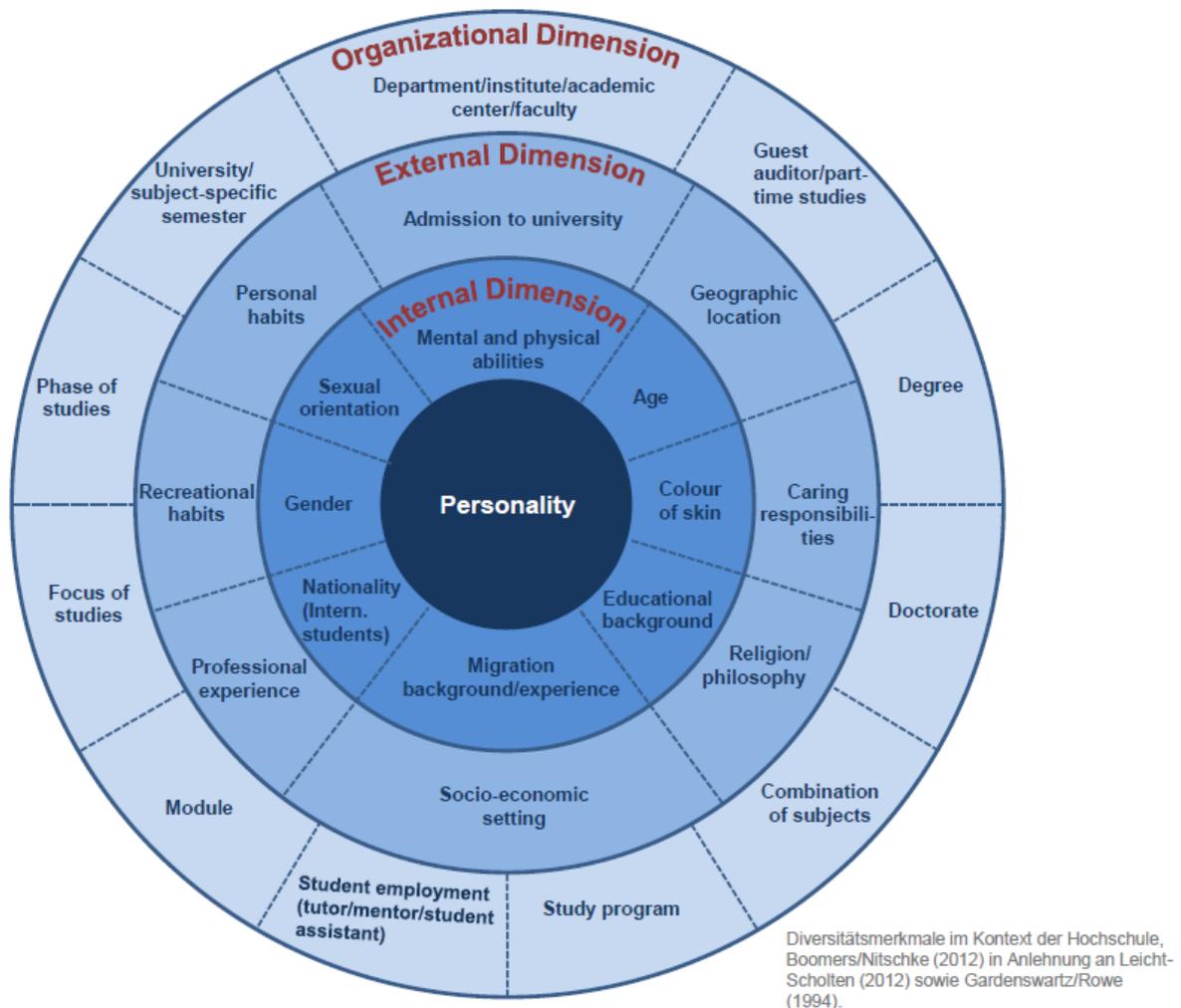
While features of diversity such as age, gender or colour of the skin are often visible, it is above all the features of diversity like socio-economic background, cultural origin, religion/philosophy, family situation or chronic disease that remain invisible.

Implementing equality implies taking a look at the differences and similarities of structural discrimination in order to avoid hierarchies between various features of diversity. This requires a multidimensional understanding of diversity: individual features of diversity are not intrinsically homogeneous, nor do they appear individually only. In addition, there may be interactions between them.

The widely known – but rather static – “Four Layers of Diversity” model by Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) provides a clear structurization of features of diversity.

#### **Features of diversity in the context of the university**

The transfer of the “Four Layers of Diversity” to the context of the university (cf. Leicht-Scholten 2012) can be further specified as follows:



The dimensions shown in the illustration above can be differentiated as follows:

- Personality
- Internal dimension: relatively unchangeable features of diversity such as mental and physical abilities, age, colour of skin, educational background, migration background/experience, nationality (international students, gender, sexual orientation)
- External dimension: relatively changeable features of diversity such as admission to university, geographic location, taking care of children or relatives, religion/philosophy, socio-economic setting, professional experience, recreational habits, personal habits
- Organizational dimension: changeable features of diversity that determine the kind of affiliation within the university such as department/institute/academic center/faculty, guest auditor/auditing student from other universities/part-time/complementary studies, degree, doctorate, combination of subjects, study program, student employment (tutor/mentor/student assistant), module, focus of studies, phase of studies, university/subject-specific semester

## **4. Didactic recommendations**

Implementing equality in teaching means assuming responsibility for diversity and against discrimination. The following list of features is an attempt to summarize various expectations and needs of students. It is important to keep a multidimensional understanding of diversity here in order to avoid establishing new exclusions.

The features of diversity listed here including the individual didactic recommendations are not deemed to be complete. Rather, the team in charge of Quality Assurance in Study and Teaching strives to supplement and revise them continually. We are looking forward to receiving your input from practical application.

### **4.1 Students with special physical and/or mental abilities and/or chronic/mental illnesses**

About 15% of all students state that they “have disabilities” or are “chronically ill” (Deutsches Studentenwerk, 2011). However, they have to show the same performance during their studies and in exams as their non-disabled fellow students. This challenge underlines the necessity to consider the situation of students with particular physical and/or mental abilities and/or chronic/mental illnesses individually. The “Berliner Hochschulgesetz” also obliges Freie Universität Berlin to take the measures required to integrate students with physical/mental challenges. For example, they are entitled to an individual compensation for disadvantages in studies and exams. We recommend that you contact the officer in charge of students with disabilities directly in order to obtain information about the official regulations and further information.

Teaching at the FU, you can make an important contribution to integration by reacting to the affected students with an open mind. Students with reduced mobility, students who are chronically ill and/or hard of hearing and/or visually impaired may have difficulty using the libraries or preparing scripts during a seminar. In exams, they often have to use aids and require much more time and energy for this effort.

In the following, you find some information about certain diseases and the related challenges you and the students may be faced with in the classes.

#### **4.1.1 Students suffering from chronic diseases**

The physical condition of students suffering from chronic diseases is often considerably affected. They need more time for seminar papers and exam preparations and are not capable of attending all mandatory classes. While they are “disabled” from a legal point of view, they often do not regard themselves as “disabled persons”. As their health restrictions are usually not visible for outsiders, they have to explain their situation. For example, some diseases may require going to the toilet more frequently or entail concentration problems due to physical conditions. People with “invisible” disabilities often have difficulties in getting appropriate compensation for their disadvantage.

**The following measures help you to support and integrate chronically ill students**

- Ask the student to explain the disease, which may be unknown to you, frankly and in a protected space (e.g. your office) and look for support options together with the student;
- Allow the student to handle the obligation to attend classes flexibly and allow for substitute performance, if required;
- Suggest the option of holiday terms in case of extended periods of illness;
- Discuss extended preparation times for seminar papers;
- Allow for extra time for the presentation of papers;
- Adapt examination types (e.g. by replacing a written paper by an oral examination or vice versa; allow for extra time, additional pauses, utilization of technical aids);
- Be prepared to discuss compensation for disadvantages.

#### **4.1.2 Students with physical disabilities**

Students with physical restrictions are quite obviously handicapped by construction barriers: lacking ramps, heavy doors, lacking or defective elevators, lacking wheelchair-accessible WCs, etc. In many cases, wheelchair users cannot attend your class because they cannot access the room or because they need much more time to access it than non-disabled students. Due to the risks entailed for all people involved, however, carrying the affected students up to the room is no solution either. Instead, you should rather ask the administration of the faculty for structural changes in the building.

#### **The following measures help you to support and integrate physically disabled students**

- Offer to hold the class in wheelchair-accessible rooms of the FU;
- Support teamwork;
- Discuss extended preparation times for seminar papers;
- Allow for extra time for the presentation of papers;
- Adapt examination types (e.g. by replacing a written paper by an oral examination or vice versa; allow for extra time, additional pauses, utilization of technical aids);
- Offer options for substitute performance, e.g. in case of excursions, or allow for internships;
- Think whether your room is accessible for students in a wheelchair. Look out for minor details, as e.g. putting the guest chair aside or offering a different possibility to write on than the table which may not be adapted for wheelchair users.

#### **4.1.3 Students with hearing problems**

Here, the main problem is communication. The fact that a hearing impairment is invisible makes it difficult for outsiders to recognize. In many cases, a hearing impairment cannot be fully compensated for by hearing aids. Often times, students have to try and understand what is being said by drawing conclusions from the little they can hear. Background noise like murmuring, rustling paper or noise from outside is not only a nuisance, but often makes (acoustic) understanding completely impossible.

**The following measures help you to support and integrate students who are hard of hearing**

- Speak clearly and not too fast;
- Avoid backlighting, i.e. standing in front of a window;
- Keep eye contact to make your lip movements visible;
- Repeat contributions from the audience;
- Offer a script, if necessary, as the students are often unable to write down their own script due to the increased concentration required;
- Use visual media;
- When presenting slides, use a high-contrast typeface and a clear text structure, offer enlarged slides, if necessary;
- Bring a Mikroport system and use it if necessary;
- Discuss extended preparation times for seminar papers;
- Allow for extra time for the presentation of papers;
- Adapt examination types (e.g. by replacing a written paper by an oral examination or vice versa; allow for extra time, additional pauses, utilization of technical aids).

**4.1.4 Students with visual impairments**

One problem for visually impaired and blind students is the quantity of literature to which they must have access – like all students – in order to be successful in their studies. Here, reading at the computer is a great support as electronic Braille lines or speech output programmes serve to handle the texts better and faster.

Another difficulty is the utilisation of the books in the university library which are only accessible to them when converted into a text file, tactile letters, large print or read aloud by others. Visually impaired students are also confronted with another problem as there is a lack of tactile signs in many places of Freie Universität Berlin.

**The following measures help you to support and integrate students with visual impairments**

- Provide texts as a file;
- Hand out texts in the best possible copy quality (i.e. white paper, not reduced) to simplify further processing by optical character recognition systems used by the Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Students at Freie Universität Berlin;
- Ensure good volume and audibility and use a microphone, if necessary;
- When presenting slides, use a high-contrast typeface and a clear and efficient text structure, prepare enlarged slides, if necessary;
- Verbalize visual information, e.g. describe graphics in detail;
- When using the blackboard, clean it thoroughly, write in large and clear letters;
- Discuss extended preparation times for seminar papers;
- Allow for extra time for the presentation of papers;
- Adapt examination types (e.g. by replacing a test by an oral examination; allow for extra time, additional pauses, utilization of technical aids);
- Offer them to render substitute performance, e.g. in case of excursions, or allow for internships;

**4.1.5 Students with language impairments**

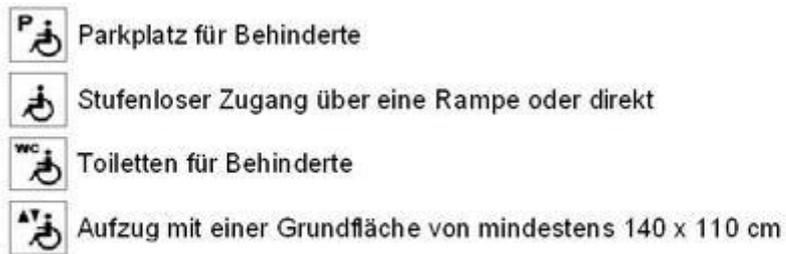
Language impairments may be genetic or a consequence of diseases (tumours, traumatic brain injury, etc.) or accidents. They are manifested as stuttering, repetitions, frequent pauses, unclear and excessively fast speech or the slurring of sounds. Students with communication and articulation difficulties often find it particularly difficult to speak in front of a group.

**The following measures help you to support and integrate these students**

- Please do not complete the sentences for the students;
- Give the students enough time to phrase their contribution; provide for a quiet and relaxed atmosphere during the speech;
- Encourage the students to work in groups; have only one member of the group present the results;
- Adapt examination types (e.g. by replacing a test by an oral examination; allow for extra time, additional pauses, utilization of technical aids).

**4.1.6 Pictograms for disabilities**

Even though there is a large number of pictograms for disabilities, the wheelchair symbol is used almost everywhere, which is somewhat misleading as disabilities and restrictions are quite individual.



Parking space for the disabled  
Access without steps via a ramp or direct access  
Toilets for the disabled  
Elevator with a floor space of min. 140 x 110 cm

*We would like to thank Mr. Classen (Advocate for Students with Disabilities) for the advice and information he gave us during the preparation of these recommendations.*

#### **4.2 Students having to take care of children and/or relatives**

Due to individual biographies, students often have to take care of a child. The 19<sup>th</sup> social survey of the German National Association for Student Affairs of 2009 has shown that 5% of the students in first degree courses have at least one child. As a matter of fact, child-rearing tasks continue to be executed mostly by women (19. Sozialerhebung des Deutschen Studentenwerks - DSW).

As a consequence of the demographic development, an increasing number of students will also be in charge of taking care of adults – e.g. partners or parents. The following trend can be derived from the few data available: students with a migration background/experience or from non-academic households are more frequently faced with family care tasks as they often continue to live with their parents and are thus involved in the care e.g. of their parents. In contrast to childcare, students having to care for their partners or parents obviously do not talk about this matter but find solutions themselves without talking about it. As a consequence, they are frequently unaware of the advice and counseling services offered.

Experience has shown that taking care of children or ill relatives is influenced by numerous aspects and can hardly be structured predictably.

#### **The following measures help you to support and integrate students affected by this issue**

- Motivate the students to contact the Family Support Center of Freie Universität Berlin with regard to all family matters;
- Give students some certainty with regard to the course of their studies. Discuss with the students how to handle the obligation to attend or how they can render substitute performance. Try to find flexible solutions adapted to the individual situation together with the student, if possible;
- Inform the students about the option of a leave or even a semester-long leave. Applications for a semester-long leave must be submitted to the Student Records and Registration Office. The reasons may be pregnancy, childcare during the first three years and caring for an adult who is close to the student.

In case of maternity leave or leave due to childcare up to the age of three, the upper limit of semester-long leaves is extended, i.e. the number of semester-long leaves may exceed half of the standard period of study. (See Section 14 of the “Satzung für Studienangelegenheiten der Freien Universität Berlin”);

- Inform the students about the exception provided for by Freie Universität Berlin with regard to attending a class in spite of a semester-long leave. Effective as of the summer semester 2009, students who are on maternity leave and those who have taken a leave of absence for child-rearing or caring for adults who are close to them are also permitted to attend classes during a semester-long leave and can earn credits for academic work during this time. In these cases, students may enroll via the Campus Management system. (See Section 14 of the “Satzung für Studienangelegenheiten der Freien Universität Berlin”);
- Spread the information that the students affected may enroll for classes with a limited number of attendants or internships in the Student Records and Registration Office / Examinations Office on a preferred basis, i.e. prior to the official opening by Campus Management. If this is not possible, e.g. because the students were not aware of this fact, they may ask you as a teacher directly whether you admit an additional student to the class;
- Allow for flexible rules of attendance, if possible. Any possible deviations from the obligation to attend 85% of all classes, which is applicable to all degree courses and degrees, are laid down in the Study and Examination Regulations. In exceptional cases and if possible, the required attendance of classes may be replaced by alternative achievements such as additional presentations or seminar papers, essays, etc. For this purpose, it is necessary that the persons affected contact their teachers in order to find a solution together with them. If students cannot attend due to the illness of a child, evidence should be provided by a medical certificate. (See Section 13 (4a) of the “Satzung für Allgemeine Prüfungsangelegenheiten der Freien Universität Berlin”);
- Tell students to contact the Student Records and Registration Office if their schedule includes overlapping classes that are relevant for examination. The departments of Freie Universität Berlin have undertaken to schedule classes that are relevant for examinations in such a way that attendance is possible even for students who have to take care of children or relatives. This means that parallel classes should be offered at various times. (See e.g. Section 6 of the “Frauenförderrichtlinien der Freien Universität Berlin”);
- Support the students by offering e-learning. According to the objectives agreed for the “audit familiengerechte hochschule 2010” (family-friendly higher education audit), the e-learning platform must be enhanced in order to improve the studying conditions for students rearing a child by increasing flexibility. (See objectives agreed for “audit familiengerechte hochschule 2010”);
- Inform students about the parent-child-room in the Rost- and Silberlaube. This room is available to all members of Freie Universität Berlin who want to rear their own or other people’s children on site. It is located in the “Foyer Mensa II” between the canteen’s main entrance and the bulletin board, entrance in front of the “Infobox”;
- Inform students about the breastfeeding and diaper changing room in the foyer of the Department of Political and Social Sciences (Ihnestrasse 21);
- Inform students about support options offered by FU Berlin and other providers.

*We would like to thank Sabrina Kusch, Family Support Center of Freie Universität Berlin, for advice and information provided during the preparation of these recommendations.*

### **4.3 International students**

As a major consequence of globalization and mobility, the share of international students in German universities and institutions of higher education is increasing continuously. Since 1970, their number has increased ninefold (Isserstedt/Schnitzler 2005). More and more students from abroad are now studying to achieve BA, MA and doctorate degrees at Freie Universität Berlin – not least due to the future-oriented concept of the International Network University.

One typical feature of international students is a subjectively perceived tension between high ambitions and the feeling of insecurity. On the one hand, they often see themselves as a minority, because – irrespective of their actual skills – they are often not convinced of their German language skills, and because there are just a few of them in most classes. They are also often insecure whether they attend the right class or meet the requirements of the curriculum. On the other hand, international students are often very ambitious; they have to achieve excellent grades and degrees to justify grants by (national) sponsors, meet the expectations of their family where they are regarded as an example or have the function of a future breadwinner and assert themselves on the global job market.

International students are faced with a broad range of adaptation efforts. They have to become familiar with a new society, learn a new language, find their way through a different university system, establish a social network, etc. The biggest challenges are funding the studies and getting in touch with German fellow students (Isserstedt/Schnitzler 2005). The German university tradition including critical discussion of texts and materials, oral presentations, working on one's own in small groups, individual organization of studies, etc. is particularly challenging for international students who are acquainted with a completely different style of learning. Misunderstandings are quite frequent. However, international students (with the exception of students from the US) often hesitate to contact lecturers – not least due to a different educational background. As a consequence, they are shy, participate only rarely in discussions or avoid asking questions.

### **The following measures help you to support and integrate these students**

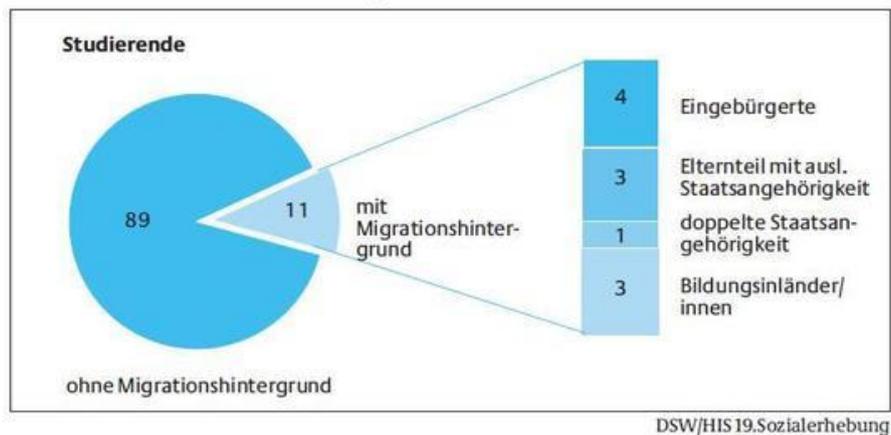
- Give them a clear overview of the performance you expect from them. Provide clear information about the preparation for and the actual course of examinations and written tests, if necessary in writing. Underline explicitly that it is not the language skills but rather the expertise that will be assessed;
- Try to contact the students directly. Invite them to consult you during your office hours (regularly, if possible), ask if they have any questions or need assistance. Here, you can give a clear feedback on their individual performance and prepare a detailed plan together with the student, if necessary, of how to achieve learning and study objectives and targets;
- Form heterogeneous groups of students preparing presentations or workgroups in order to integrate the students. Contact other students directly and ask them to assist fellow students from abroad or with non-German language skills in matters of everyday life and studies;
- Ask the students affected to hold a presentation. Experience has shown that the self-confidence gained by holding a presentation often encourages students to speak in other situations, too;
- React as flexibly as possible to different levels of student expertise. Offer a wide range of teaching and learning methods. Teach at several levels: Try, for example, to address students with lower learning competencies by making the content more concrete while asking students with medium learning competencies questions about the topic and giving students with a high learning competency information about research works and literature;
- Inform about services offered by FU Berlin and other institutions to support students (see “Advice Centers”);

*We would like to thank Dr. Frank Stucke, Institute of German and Dutch Literatures and Languages at Freie Universität Berlin as well as Elke Löschhorn, Acting Dean International Affairs, International Office of Freie Universität Berlin for advice and information provided during the preparation of these recommendations.*

#### **4.4 Students with a migration background/experience**

The cultural diversity of the students has increasingly become a feature of ordinary life at an international university like Freie Universität Berlin. According to the 19<sup>th</sup> social survey of the German National Association for Student Affairs of 2009, 11% of the students have a migration background. This figure includes students who are German citizens and who were naturalized (4%), of whom at least one parent is a foreign citizen (3%) or who have a second citizenship in addition to the German one (1%). Foreign Bildungsinländer (students with a German Abitur certificate, including from recognized German schools abroad) are also included in this group.

#### **Students by migration status (in %)**



A definition of the term “migration background” that is applicable to the federal state of Berlin is contained in Section 2 of the “Gesetz zur Regelung von Partizipation und Integration in Berlin (PartIntG) vom 28.12.2010”.

A large number of students with a migration background/experience are found especially in the teaching degree courses. According to a survey recently carried out by the “Zentrum für Lehrerbildung” of Freie Universität Berlin, 24.5% of the bachelor students in the classes qualifying for a teaching degree who enrolled in the winter semester 2011/12 have a migration background/experience. These figures underline the interaction between the requirements of globalized job markets on the one hand and the expectations and needs of an increasingly diverse student body on the other: One major task of academic education is to convey and foster competencies with regard to various languages and cultures, everyday realities and structures, philosophies and religious backgrounds.

The groups of naturalized citizens and the “Bildungsinländer” are faced with particular realities of everyday life, e.g. a mixture of components such as a lower level of German language skills, multilingualism, transnational biographies or high intercultural competency. However, it is striking that 34% of them stem from low-income and less educated families, a figure that is three times as high as the number of students without a migration background/experience (13%). In addition, a higher share of these students needs support under the German Federal Education Assistance Act (BAföG), from grants and/or own income and lives in the family of origin, a fact that allows us to draw conclusions on the family duties they have. (19. Sozialerhebung des Deutschen Studentenwerks).

Moreover, job market surveys have shown that graduates with a migration background/experience have more difficulty entering into the job market in spite of good degrees (Klees-Möller/Tarzi, Wolff-Bendik 2007).

With regard to their intellectual performance, students with a migration background/experience are equal to other students and particularly those students from less educated families show a lot of commitment and ambition. However, just like students from non-academic families, they are often faced with greater challenges as they are less familiar with the academic sphere. These challenges are:

- demonstration of their skills, e.g. in discussions;
- preparation for and passing examinations;

- scheduling the studies for the next several weeks or months / the next semester;
- initiation of internships or semesters abroad;
- application for tutorials or student assistant jobs;
- intention to earn a doctorate degree.

For many of these students, taking up studies is not so much natural but rather a step into the unknown. Lacking financial and/or moral support by the parents, reservations against the benefit of an academic degree, family duties or the need of funding may affect the study progress severely. This becomes obvious above all in periods of transition between school, university and professional life / doctorate. Here, they often lack adequate role models as well as support by the family with regard to academic working, organizational matters or subsequent entry into professional life. One frequent consequence of the autonomous educational management of students with a migration background/experience is that they tend to equating failures with the perception of their own insufficiency (Wojciechowicz 2010).

### **The following measures help you to support and integrate these students**

- React sensitively to any kind of racism and “cultural hostility” with regard to the language used and group dynamics perceived;
- Make sure to benefit from the individual intercultural competency of the students for workgroups, text interpretations, etc.;
- Offer flexible attendance to students who have to work to finance their studies and refer students to the advice and counseling services informing about funding options (see below);
- Ask the students affected to hold presentations or to give support for the organization of the class in order to foster role models;
- Give clear and transparent instructions for the preparation and execution of examinations, if necessary in writing;
- Offer advice for scheduling the course (e.g. for the next two semesters);
- Encourage students to plan stays abroad and complementary studies;
- Encourage students to speak in public; foster work in groups because it is easier to overcome one’s inhibitions here;
- Confirm students that the university is exactly the right place for them, that they have opted for the right course and that they are able to perform as required;
- Inform about services offered by FU Berlin and other institutions to support students (see “Advice Centers”);

### **4.5 Students from non-academic households**

We are pleased to state that the share of children from non-academic households as compared to children from academic households has increased in the past few years: while the percentage of students from non-academic families decreased continually between 1986 and 2006, this group of students has started to increase for the first time since 2007.

According to the results of the 19<sup>th</sup> social survey of the German National Association for Student Affairs of 2009, it is still only 15% of the students in Germany who come from non-academic households. The chances to study are five times higher for

children with parents who are self-employed or civil servants (where at least one parent has graduated from university) than for those from non-academic households.

In many cases, taking up studies is not so much natural but rather a risk. Lacking financial and/or moral support by the parents, reservations against the benefit of an academic degree and problems with regard to the competitive pressure among students may affect the study progress severely. Non-traditional students often doubt whether they are in the right place at the university and whether they are welcome here and meet the requirements to study successfully.

The “IV Eurostudent” study published by HIS (Hochschul-Informationen-System) in December 2011 also shows that children from non-academic households have a hard time climbing up the educational ladder in Germany. The delay in university access is particularly striking here. First-generation students are much older on average than their fellow students: 28 years as compared to 24 years for a “medium” and 23 years for a “high” educational background.

One big problem for students from non-academic households is funding their studies: due to the age and the limited financial resources of the parents, earned income is usually the most important source of funding for this group of students. As a consequence, many of them have to interrupt their studies in order to work to earn money.

Another result of the HIS study is that a smaller number of students with a lower educational background as compared to those with a high educational background study abroad for some time.

These factors indicate that we must be more sensitive for the situation of students from non-academic households at the university. First-generation students are as able as other students and they are part of a highly selected group. However, they often have to face bigger challenges as they do not feel as comfortable in the academic sphere. These challenges include:

- demonstration of their skills, e.g. in discussions;
- preparation for and passing examinations;
- scheduling the studies for the next several weeks or months / the next semester;
- initiation of internships or semesters abroad;
- application for tutorials or student assistant jobs;
- the intention to earn a doctorate degree.

### **The following measures help you to support and integrate these students**

- Try to make students conquer their fears of speaking in public, encourage them to join discussions and appreciate every contribution – irrespective of the quality;
- Create an atmosphere in your class in which there are no “silly” questions;
- Foster work in groups because it is easier to overcome one’s inhibitions here;
- Give definitions of academic terms and foreign words without being asked;
- Give clear and transparent instructions for the preparation and execution of examination, if necessary in writing;

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- Involve these students in structuring the class;
- Show the students that there is no need to be awe-struck by the academic world;
- Encourage students to plan stays abroad and complementary studies;
- Offer advice for scheduling the course (e.g. for the next two semesters);
- Confirm students that the university is exactly the right place for them, that they have opted for the right course and that they are able to perform as required;
- Inform students about services offered by FU Berlin and other institutions to support students (see “Advice Centers”).

*We would like to thank Katja Urban, Managing Director of ArbeiterKind.de, for advice and information provided during the preparation of these recommendations.*

## **5. Legislation**

### **5.1 Legislation at an international level**

A good summary of the global conditions for handling diversity as well as recommendations with regard to equality, equal treatment, anti-discrimination on an (inter)national level is provided by the “nexus” project of HRK (German Rectors’ Conference) entitled “Rahmenbedingungen für Diversity Management”. (Laws are quoted in the original German wording.)

### **5.2 Legislation at federal and university level**

#### **5.2.1 Berliner Hochschulgesetz (BerlHG)**

The Berliner Hochschulgesetz (BerlHG) defines the tasks of the universities in Section 4 while the rights and duties of the university members are stated in Section 44:

#### **BerlHG § 4 Aufgaben der Hochschulen**

(6) 1Die Hochschulen regen durch ihre Öffentlichkeitsarbeit insbesondere in an der jeweiligen Hochschule unterrepräsentierten Bevölkerungsgruppen die Aufnahme eines Studiums an. 2Sie beraten und unterstützen bei der Entscheidung über die Aufnahme eines Studiums und die Wahl des Studienfaches. 3Die Hochschulen fördern die sozialen Belange der Studenten und Studentinnen und den Hochschulsport. 4Sie berücksichtigen die besonderen Bedürfnisse ausländischer Studenten und Studentinnen.

(7) 1Die Hochschulen berücksichtigen die besonderen Bedürfnisse von Studenten und Studentinnen sowie von Studienbewerbern und Studienbewerberinnen mit Behinderung und treffen in allen Bereichen die erforderlichen Maßnahmen zu ihrer Integration. 2Für die Durchführung des Studiums und der Prüfung sind geeignete Maßnahmen zu treffen, die unter Wahrung der Gleichwertigkeit einen Nachteilsausgleich gewährleisten.

(8) Die Hochschulen wirken darauf hin, dass Frauen und Männer in der Hochschule die ihrer Qualifikation entsprechend gleichen Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten haben und die für Frauen bestehenden Nachteile beseitigt werden.

#### **BerlHG § 9 Rechte und Pflichten der Studenten und Studentinnen**

(2) Jedem Studenten und jeder Studentin sowie jedem Studienbewerber und jeder Studienbewerberin mit Behinderung soll die erforderliche Hilfe zur Integration nach § 4 Absatz 7

#### **BerlHG § 31 Rahmenstudien- und -prüfungsordnung, Studienordnungen, Prüfungsordnungen**

(3) Die Rahmenstudien- und -prüfungsordnung und die Prüfungsordnungen müssen die Inanspruchnahme der Schutzfristen von § 3 Absatz 2 und § 6 Absatz 1 des Mutterschutzgesetzes ermöglichen und in angemessener Weise die Betreuung von

Kindern, für die nach den gesetzlichen Regelungen von den Studenten und Studentinnen Elternzeit beansprucht werden kann, sowie die Pflege pflegebedürftiger naher Angehöriger im Sinne des Pflegezeitgesetzes berücksichtigen. Ein Nachteilsausgleich für Studenten und Studentinnen mit einer Behinderung zur Anerkennung gleichwertiger Leistungen in anderer Form oder verlängerter Zeit ist vorzusehen.

### **BerIHG § 44 Rechte und Pflichten der Hochschulmitglieder**

(1) Die Mitglieder der Hochschule sind verpflichtet, [...] 3. sich so zu verhalten, dass niemand wegen seines Geschlechts, seiner sexuellen Identität, seiner Rasse, ethnischen Herkunft, Religion oder Weltanschauung, einer Behinderung oder seines Alters benachteiligt wird.

### **5.2.2 Satzung für Allgemeine Prüfungsangelegenheiten (SfAP)**

The revised version of the „Satzung für Allgemeine Prüfungsangelegenheiten vom 4. Juli 2001 und 17. April 2002“ (Amtsblatt der FU Berlin 15/2002) defines the study performance and examination achievements for students with particular challenges as follows:

### **§ 7 Studien- und Prüfungsleistungen bei körperlichen Beeinträchtigungen und Behinderungen sowie bei familiären Belastungen**

(1) Macht eine Kandidatin oder ein Kandidat durch ein ärztliches Zeugnis glaubhaft, dass sie oder er wegen länger andauernden oder ständigen körperlichen Beeinträchtigungen oder Behinderungen nicht in der Lage ist, die Prüfung ganz oder teilweise in der vorgesehenen Form abzulegen, hat die oder der Vorsitzende des Prüfungsausschusses der Kandidatin oder dem Kandidaten zu gestatten, gleichwertige Prüfungsleistungen in einer anderen Form oder durch eine verlängerte Prüfungszeit zu erbringen. Entsprechendes gilt für Studienleistungen.

(2) Soweit die Einhaltung von Fristen für die erstmalige Meldung zu Prüfungen, die Wiederholung von Prüfungen, die Gründe für das Versäumnis von Prüfungen sowie für den Freiversuch und die Einhaltung von Bearbeitungszeiten für Prüfungsarbeiten betroffen sind, steht der Krankheit der Kandidatin/des Kandidaten die Krankheit und dazu notwendige alleinige Betreuung einer/eines nahen Angehörigen gleich. Nahe Angehörige sind Kinder, Eltern, Großeltern, Ehe- und Lebenspartner. Gleiches gilt angelehnt an die Regelungen in § 3 und § 6 Mutterschutzgesetz für Schwangere und Wöchnerinnen.

### **5.2.3 Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz (AGG)**

"Ziel des Allgemeinen Gleichbehandlungsgesetzes (AGG) ist es, Benachteiligungen aus Gründen der Rasse oder wegen der ethnischen Herkunft, des Geschlechts, der Religion oder Weltanschauung, einer Behinderung, des Alters oder der sexuellen Identität zu verhindern oder zu beseitigen. Der Schutz vor Diskriminierung in Beschäftigung und Beruf ist entsprechend den Richtlinienvorgaben der Schwerpunkt des AGG. Neben einem arbeitsrechtlichen Benachteiligungsverbot sowie seinen Ausnahmeregelungen werden Maßnahmen und Pflichten des Arbeitgebers zum Schutz vor Benachteiligungen sowie Rechte der Beschäftigten (Beschwerderecht,

Leistungsverweigerungsrecht) und ihre Ansprüche bei Verstößen gegen das Benachteiligungsverbot (Entschädigung, Schadensersatz) geregelt." (BFSFJ 2010).

## **6. Compensations for disadvantages**

Compensations for disadvantages serve to enable those students who have to bear a particular burden to participate in the course on an equal basis.

Students with particular challenges may apply for adapted study and examination conditions on the basis of the Berliner Hochschulgesetz (BerlHG). According to BerlHG, the federal universities of Berlin are obliged to grant a "Nachteilsausgleich" (compensation for disadvantages) to students with particular challenges. This is not a privilege but rather a legal right and a step towards integration and equality.

Please note that at Freie Universität Berlin, the details of the compensation for disadvantages / the adapted study and examination conditions are no longer regulated by the individual examination regulations – with the exception of the state exams. In other cases, Section 7 of the "Satzung für Allgemeine Prüfungsangelegenheiten" (SfAP) shall be applicable. In this context, please note that according to the "Rahmenprüfungsordnung", Section 31, Clause 3 of Berliner Hochschulgesetz (BerlHG) shall also be applicable here.

The supervision and decision about the compensation for disadvantage in the examination procedure is in most cases a matter of the examining board of the major. It is usually the lecturers and/or dean who decide about the results.

It is recommended to discuss the compensation for disadvantages arising from the particular study situation with the students themselves in detail. Arrangements should be made in writing in order to avoid misunderstandings. Ask the students to contact the Student Records and Registration Office for a further discussion of the compensations for disadvantage.

Legal certainty is only created for all parties involved (lecturers as well as students) once an official permission has been given. As a matter of fact, though, it is often difficult to differentiate between study and examination performance: as in the BA/MA courses all achievements during the studies are deemed to be examination achievements, every exceptional regulation would have to be approved officially by the examining board. We recommend students with disabilities and/or chronic diseases to contact the official responsible for disabled students with regard to the official regulation mechanisms. Students with children and/or relatives to be taken care of are kindly requested to contact the Family Support Center or the Examinations Office of the department. They will be able to explain to you which compensations for disadvantages are conceivable in the case in point, which statements must be made in medical certificates. They will also prepare a proposal or recommendation for the compensation for disadvantage and pass it on to the examining board, if necessary.

### **Examples of compensations for disadvantage**

- Admission of technical aids for blind and hard of hearing students
- Extension of deadlines for study and examination achievements

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- Individually adapted conditions for internships
- Relocation of classes to accessible rooms
- Modification of examinations
- Added time
- Interruption (splitting) of an examination
- Conversion of an oral examination into a written one and vice versa.

*We would like to thank Mr Classen (Advocate for students with disabilities) and Peter Dietrich (Network for Students with Disabilities at Freie Universität Berlin) for advice and information provided during the preparation of these recommendations.*

## **7. Advice Centers**

### **7.1 Advice Centers at Freie Universität Berlin**

#### **Advice Centers at Freie Universität Berlin**

- Official responsible for international students at the Department of Political and Social Sciences
- Official responsible for students with disabilities at the Department of Political and Social Sciences
- The Advocate for Students with Disabilities of Freie Universität Berlin
- Counseling offered by the Student Body Council (AStA)
- Advice offered with regard to funding the studies
- Dahlem Research School
- Family Support Center
- Women's Representative of the Department of History and Cultural Studies
- Women's Representative of the Department of Political and Social Sciences
- Network for Students with Disabilities at Freie Universität Berlin
- ISFU International Students at Freie Universität Berlin
- MigraMentor
- Service Facility for blind and visually impaired students
- Central information page of FU Berlin for international students
- Central Erasmus office
- Gender Equality Officer
- Language Center
- Center for Academic Advising and Psychological Counseling

### **7.2 External Advice Centers**

- Arbeiterkind.de
- BAföG Counseling by Studentenwerk Berlin
- Counseling for students with disabilities and chronic diseases by Studentenwerk Berlin
- Psychological/Psychotherapeutic Counseling by Studentenwerk Berlin
- Counseling for Social/Financial Problems by Studentenwerk Berlin

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