

Code of Conduct

Preamble

At the heart of every university are the people who give everyday life at the university a face. Hierarchies and different responsibilities, the mutual recognition of competences and the confusion of shared resources as well as stress and emotions: Due to this complex starting position, the togetherness of the university society offers fertile ground for potential conflicts. A conflict exists when at least two tendencies or interests of actors collide at the same time and (supposedly) irreconcilable things are to be realized, which creates a certain pressure to act. It is important to note that the term primarily describes a subjective experience - every conflict begins within ourselves.

Different opinions and perspectives, but also different expectations and self-evident facts are common and human. This can lead to misunderstandings: Therefore, it is not the emergence of conflicts in itself that is a problem, but how we deal with them (Böll, 2013, p.8). The intensity of interpersonal tensions can manifest itself in very different ways; in no case does a conflict necessarily already exist or become outwardly apparent. However, even latent disputes that are smoldering away can escalate - especially since they can have a noticeable impact on the relationship and on everyday life for years, despite being invisible to those involved. The University of Potsdam, as a place of study and work for more than 23,000 people, established conflict management as early as 2013 in fulfillment of its institutional responsibility. Since then, the confidants have been involved in this framework.

Studies, research, teaching or administration: regardless of which university interaction is affected, we are there for all concerns with open ears and a trained eye. We liaison officers always strive to analyze the profile and circumstances of each situation in order to provide assistance that is tailored to the needs and wishes of those involved. The main focus of our activities lies in listening and/or in referral counseling (the referral to other agencies, should it turn out that it is a matter of discrimination or bullying, for example). Sometimes, however, we also accompany individuals or teams over a longer period of time through discussions and mediation.

We affirm the claim to ourselves as a team and as individuals that neutrality and confidentiality are guaranteed in the handling of all information and inquiries. It is a matter of course for us that our approach is always based on agreements and specifications of the respective applicant. We commit ourselves not to take any steps that are not explicitly requested.

Our work serves to establish a sustainable, constructive, respectful and non-discriminatory communication culture. The importance of such a culture was already emphasized by the German Rectors' Conference in its resolution of 2022: It is the constitutive factor for the existence and development of a university.¹

In this respect, we see conflict potential as a communicative opportunity: where knowledge is to grow, there needs to be discussion instead of dispute, sensitive confrontation instead of evasion, and ongoing exchange instead of rupture - improving the quality of (internal) university communication at all levels is therefore essential for all university members. Only where there is the will to understand each other can social interaction become fruitful and our work bear blooms in the long term.

§ 1 Local, Temporal, and Personal Scope of Application

- (I) The Code of Conduct applies to all persons at the University of Potsdam, regardless of their respective institutional affiliation, who are actively engaged as persons of trust (VP). The provisions contained therein will be evaluated at regular intervals.
- (II) Any person who is affiliated with the university can become a person of trust. A prerequisite is a clear commitment to the promotion of equal opportunity, anti-discrimination work, and human dignity for all persons at this university and beyond. The Equal Opportunity Coordination Office of the University of Potsdam is responsible for their selection and appointment.
- (III) It is up to the representatives - in accordance with the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Basic Law, the Brandenburg State Constitution, the equal opportunity plans, and the anti-discrimination guidelines of the university, as well as in accordance with the provisions of the university contract and the mission statement of the University of Potsdam - to change the content of this document. This requires a majority of those present with a minimum participation (at least 25%) of all VPs. Actively involved are those who have been formally nominated by the president and have been involved for at least two months.

¹ Recommendation of the 33rd General Assembly of the HRK, 10 May 2022:

<https://www.hrk.de/positionen/beschluss/detail/hochschulkommunikation-als-strategische-aufgabe/>

§ 2 General principles of work

- (I) The work as VP is based on the principle of voluntariness. Advising students, researchers, faculty and staff can only take place by mutual agreement. On this voluntary basis, VPs work for a good climate at the place of work and study and for the good of the entire university.
- (II) The guiding principle of action is: needs-oriented empowerment, the "help for self-help". The confidants only become active when they are consulted by a person seeking advice. The form of their action is conditioned by the particular request. At every step they take, they make sure that the person who has asked them for help agrees with them.
- (III) In their work, confidential counsellors are bound by the principles of independence, confidentiality, neutrality and respect. Independence means, as far as possible, a maximally autonomous approach, detached from the assignment to areas or institutions. Confidentiality means that the concerns raised are received with the necessary discretion and secrecy. Neutrality means an open and solution-oriented treatment of the respective concerns. Appreciation is characterized by respectful treatment at all times and communication at eye level with the person concerned.

§ 3 Confidentiality and responsibility for the integrity of the university community

The facts that become known to the VPs in the course of their work are subject to the duty of confidentiality; this may only be deviated from with the express consent of the person seeking advice.

§ 4 Goals

- (I) The work of the confidential advisors is intended to facilitate university cooperation in which conflicts can be resolved in a manner that preserves relationships. Conflicts and conflicting interests should be understood as an opportunity for personal and institutional personal development. The focus is on the potential and the sustainable necessity of equal communication processes.
- (II) The confidants promote an understanding of conflict that sees human interaction as a potential learning process. It is important to distinguish conflicts from discrimination of any kind or to work out the connections. In the spirit of a successful communication culture at the university, they advocate a university-wide awareness of the diversity of the university society and thus for the dignified treatment of each individual person.

- (III) The confidential counsellors consider themselves bound by the anti-discrimination guideline and, on the basis of this, are committed to promoting the values contained therein and in the sense of equal, non-discriminatory coexistence.

§ 5 Self-conception, cooperative counseling practice and referral counseling

- (I) The VPs see their task in being available to all status groups as a contact person for the most diverse challenges in everyday university life. Counseling should help to clarify problems and seek possible solutions.
- (II) The VPs cannot guarantee the success of their activities. The VPs see themselves as laypersons who are able to help individuals and teams to help themselves in a partner-like manner due to the knowledge and social skills they have acquired in the course of further training and practical experience.
- (III) VPs represent a first low-threshold point of contact for colleagues seeking advice. The object of the counseling practice at eye level is attentive listening and the endeavor to clarify the problem situation together in exchange with those seeking advice. Based on this, approaches to solutions are to be developed together in order to support those seeking advice in coping independently with the stressful questions and problems. VPs want to reduce any inhibitions that may exist about approaching third parties with sensitive issues and, in appropriate cases, refer those seeking advice to other institutions or counseling centers (referral counseling). When discussing the problem situation with those seeking advice, it is important to identify and involve other possible institutions and counseling centers in good time. As soon as it becomes clear that it is necessary to refer the person seeking advice to specialized institutions, this is the primary task of the VP (pilot function).
- (IV) In order to guarantee the quality of their analyses as best as possible, the VPs work closely with other offices of the university (e.g. staff council, representative for severely disabled persons, equal opportunity representative). The relevant, sometimes thematically related structural units can be viewed on the Discrimination-Free University website. The same applies to recommendations for external support services, i.e. conflict resolution-oriented experts such as mediators or communication trainers. In the sense of § 2 II of this code, the will of the person seeking advice is in the foreground.

§ 6 Quality of work, education and training

- (I) VPs receive voluntary basic training in conversation, conflict and problem-solving strategies as well as basic knowledge of frequently occurring or particularly central problem situations of employees. Absence from one seminar is not detrimental to training, but should be made up whenever possible. Any additional missed seminar should be made up.
- (II) The will to participate in continuous training measures unites all active VPs and characterizes their endeavor to provide high-quality support.
- (III) The VPs see themselves as a team that regularly engages in exchange. All persons participating in VP events and meetings are sworn to secrecy.
- (IV) Science is growing every day, as is knowledge around conflict and its treatment. For this reason, the confidential counsellors undertake to participate in further training as far as they are able. They always work self-critically and in reflection of their own unconscious thought patterns such as stereotypes, prejudices, inclinations.
- (V) Supervisions are an essential part of successful quality assurance. They are initiated and carried out by the VPs themselves as needed.

§ 7 Freedom from instructions

VPs carry out their activities independently during the period of service and are not subject to external directives.

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