

# Diversity Strategy of the University of Potsdam



## Content

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Understanding diversity .....	2
3. Guiding principles .....	3
4. Goals and measures .....	3
5. Initial situation.....	4
6. Structural anchoring of diversity work.....	5
6.1. Emergence of the diversity strategy .....	6
6.2. Interlinking with other strategy processes at the UP.....	7
7. Outlook.....	8

## 1. Introduction

According to its mission statement, the University of Potsdam stands for equality of opportunity and family, internationality, tolerance and sustainability. The current University Development Plan (HEP 2019-2023) articulates the goal of developing and implementing a university-specific diversity strategy within two years. The systematic analysis of structures should enable the establishment of an equal-opportunity, family-friendly, international and diversity-acknowledging university culture. The reduction of stereotyping and the establishment of diversity-sensitive structures as well as a gender-sensitive culture are considered necessary steps to promote equal opportunities regardless of gender, origin, age, or life circumstances. In the University Development Plan, President Prof. Oliver Günther, Ph.D., describes universities as “places of integration, international, intercultural and interreligious understanding, free speech and resistance to all forms of discrimination.” The higher education contract (MWFK - UP 2019, III.10, p. 6ff.) results in the following obligations for the UP in the area of protection against discrimination:

- The establishment and expansion of structures and contact persons for protection against discrimination;
- The development of a university-wide strategy for protection against discrimination, in particular also racially motivated discrimination (including preventive measures);
- The adoption of guidelines or bylaws that take up the prohibitions of discrimination of the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) and apply them to all university employees;
- The clear designation of contact persons who can carry out their tasks without supervision in order to consolidate protection against discrimination at the university in the long term;
- Include the introduction of university-wide complaint channels and generally applicable procedural rules for dealing with complaints from affected persons - in individual cases also subject to sanctions (in the guidelines or bylaws).

In this context, the UP has undergone the diversity audit “Vielfalt gestalten” (“Shaping Diversity”) of the Stifterverband from 2020 to 2023 and has developed this diversity strategy within this framework. It serves as a basis for the diversity and anti-discrimination work of the UP, formulates its guiding principles as well as the underlying understanding of diversity, and is a guideline for all diversity-related activities at the UP.

## 2. Understanding Diversity

The diversity strategy and work of the University of Potsdam are based on an understanding of diversity that is characterized by an awareness of societal diversity and by the endeavor to promote and reflect this in appreciative recognition at UP. Diversity dimensions are seen as social, sometimes intersectional<sup>1</sup>, entangled categories that are produced by social dynamics and practices and can be accompanied by exclusion mechanisms and experiences of discrimination. Therefore, a positive attitude towards diversity with the aim of promoting it requires institutional self-reflection and analysis that can shed light on the possible underrepresentation of marginalized social groups as well as exclusion mechanisms and barriers to access at UP. Diversity and anti-discrimination work are therefore considered to be interrelated and mutually dependent; they represent two sides of the same coin.

Based on the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) and the anti-discrimination guidelines of the UP (2022), the diversity work of the UP considers, among others, the following diversity dimensions. This list does not represent a hierarchy and is not considered complete. Changing social debates have to be followed continuously and, if necessary, further dimensions have to be considered. The respective initial situation and needs at the UP as a whole, as well as in individual faculties and institutions, may require a phased focus of diversity work on certain dimensions:

- Racial attributions and/or ethnic origin
- Anti-Semitic attributions
- Religion/worldview
- Gender (including gender identities)
- Sexual orientation
- Disability<sup>2</sup>, physical or mental impairment and/or chronic illness
- Social origin/social status
- Age
- Language
- Nationality
- Marital status
- Reproduction and care work
- Exterior appearance
- etc.

These dimensions must also be considered in terms of their interconnectedness and related specific effects – meaning they must be understood on an intersectional basis.

---

<sup>1</sup> The concept of “intersectionality” describes the coincidence of several diversity dimensions or discrimination characteristics in one person and considers the resulting interactions. These can each produce specific experiences of discrimination for particular groups of people. For example, the experiences and disadvantages Black women face due to the intersection of racial attributions (racism) and gender (sexism) differ from those of White women. In diversity and antidiscrimination work, it is important to consider these intersectional entanglements and to take the complexity of life realities into account as much as possible in measures and services.

<sup>2</sup> Disability is understood according to the explanations and definition of the inclusion concept of the UP (2021). The aim is to counteract a simplistic dichotomization into disabled and non-disabled people and, in contrast, to emphasize that institutional structures and societal barriers lead to people being hindered to varying degrees in participating in education and in the labor market.

### 3. Guiding Principles

The diversity work of the UP is based on the following guiding principles, which clarify the approach as well as the underlying attitude and perspective:

- **Equal opportunities:** The UP stands for the right of all university members to equal participation, as well as access and success opportunities, regardless of their individual starting situation and social positioning.
- **Appreciation of diversity:** The UP considers the diversity of its members as a potential and positive enrichment for a diverse and equal coexistence, while at the same time the UP is committed to protect against stereotyping.
- **Intersectionality:** The strategy processes and measures on diversity and anti-discrimination at the UP take into account the intertwining of diversity characteristics and potentially associated experiences of discrimination (multidimensional discrimination).
- **Diversity needs anti-discrimination:** Important building blocks in the promotion of diversity at UP include the creation of a university culture that is sensitive to and low in discrimination in all areas, the identification and dismantling of structural (access) barriers, and the guarantee of protection against discrimination.
- **Sensitization and professionalization:** The UP considers the sensitization of all university employees to the topic of diversity as an important goal and as a component of professionalization through the development of diversity competence (in the context of higher education).
- **Combining top-down and bottom-up approaches:** Successful diversity work at UP requires a strong commitment and is the responsibility of the university management with democratic participation of (student) initiatives, stakeholder groups and other university members on a broad basis.
- **Diversity as a cross-sectional task:** The UP sees all university members as responsible for promoting diversity. This requires the consideration of diversity in all projects, structures, and processes in all fields of action of the UP (by all university members) in close exchange with those responsible for diversity and related topics as well as areas and institutions with expertise (diversity mainstreaming).

### 4. Goals and Measures

The University of Potsdam pursues the following overarching goals with its diversity strategy:

- The establishment of a diversity-oriented and discrimination-sensitive university culture;
- An attractive and appreciative teaching, learning, and working environment for all university employees, regardless of diversity dimensions;
- The appreciation of diversity in all status groups;
- The consideration of diversity in all processes of teaching, research, and administration;
- The equal participation of all university members regardless of diversity dimensions;

- The guarantee of protection against discrimination;
- The establishment of equal opportunities.

In the sense of a horizontal approach, these goals are to be realized by means of cross-target-group measures that take effect in relation to several dimensions or benefit all members of the university. Where appropriate, individual diversity dimensions can be focused on a needs-oriented and target-group-specific basis. An intersectional perspective must be maintained at all times. To this end, the diversity strategy will be supplemented by a catalog of measures broken down by fields of action and diversity dimensions, the implementation of which will be evaluated at regular intervals and the measures supplemented and adjusted as necessary.

## 5. Initial Situation

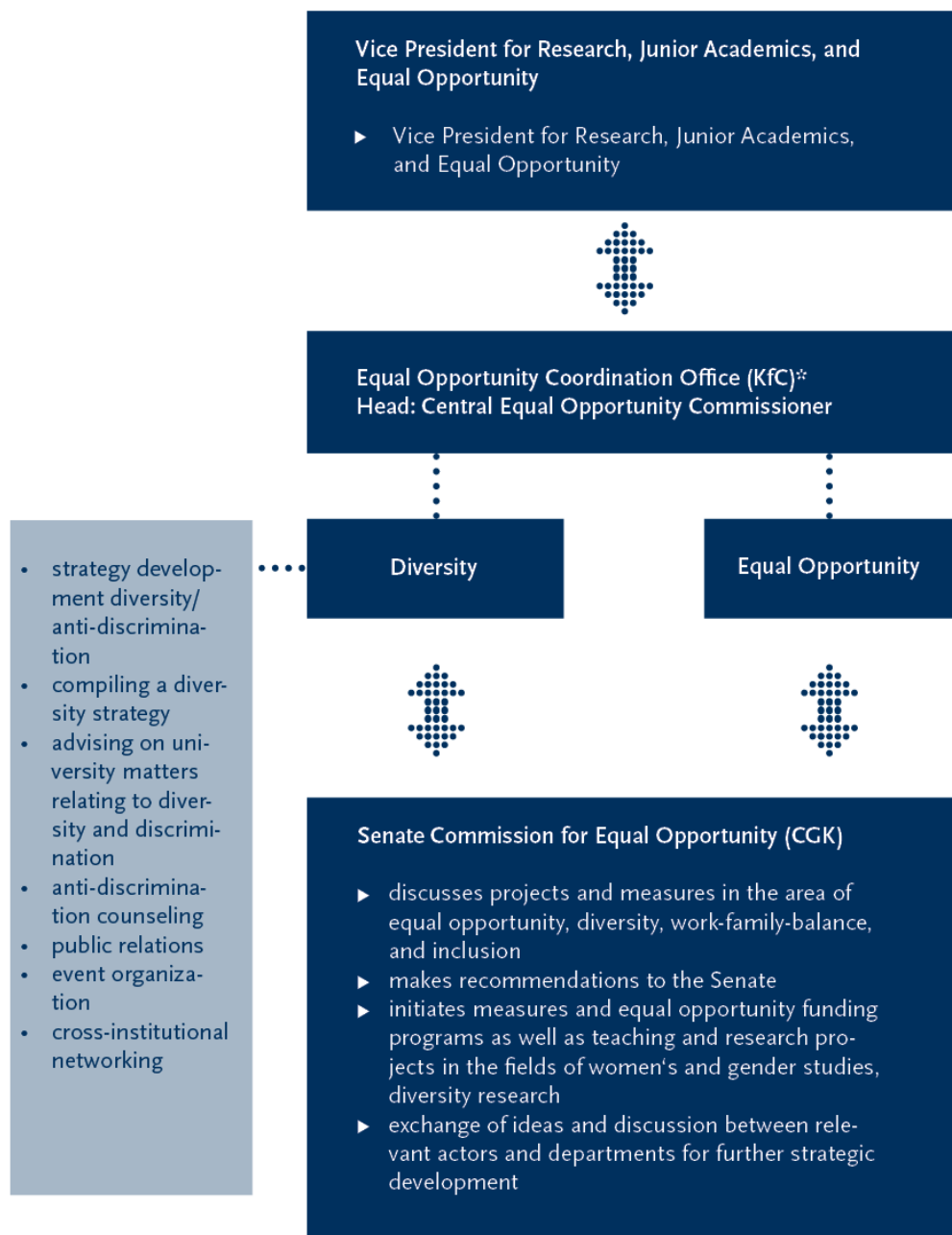
Equality, inclusion, and increasingly diversity work is a (legal) obligation for the university. The institutionalization of diversity work at universities is based on a multitude of legal requirements, which historically have become more and more differentiated. The interplay of international, European, and national regulations forms a foundation of responsibility to create a place of de facto equal opportunities for all university members through targeted measures.

Equal treatment and the need for anti-discrimination measures are constitutionally enshrined for all state action in Germany's Basic Law. Article 3 of the Basic Law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race, language, homeland and origin, faith, religious or political views, or disability. Article 3(2) of the Basic Law also contains a state mandate for the actual implementation of equal rights for women and men and the elimination of existing disadvantages. The General Equal Treatment Act 2006 (AGG) sets out the duties of the university as an employer in the area of protection against discrimination; this particular clause does not include students. The General Equal Treatment Act aims to "prevent or eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual identity." At the level of state law, the Brandenburg Higher Education Act (BbgHG) standardizes a responsibility of higher education institutions for members with caring responsibilities and for non-discriminatory and equal participation in studies (Section 3(4) BbgHG). In addition, the BbgHG refers in various places to the State Equality Act (LGG). Although universities are explicitly excluded from the scope of the LGG (unlike in other federal states), this document can serve as a guide. For the protection of people with disabilities against discrimination, the Brandenburg Equal Opportunities for Disabled Persons Act (BbgBGG) and the Brandenburg Barrier-Free Information Technology Ordinance (BbgBITV) must be specifically observed, as well as Germany's Social Code (SGB IX) for equal participation in general. The 2018 amendment to the Personal Status Act has already impacted the UP by allowing students to choose between four options when indicating their gender. The planned (2022) abolition of the Transsexual Act and its planned replacement by a Self-Determination Act will add another relevant legal regulation for the topic of gender diversity.

According to the CEWS university ranking, the University of Potsdam is currently one of the three most successful and thus leading universities in Germany in terms of gender aspects. In the overall ranking of universities, the UP is once again placed in ranking group 3 (with 10 out of 12 points) and thus in the highest category achieved so far. The UP first received the TOTAL E-QUALITY award in 2004 and additionally its Diversity add-on in 2020 and has been a member of the Family in Higher Education network since 2015.

Despite these outstanding successes in equality work, there is still a need for action for diversity work that takes into account other diversity dimensions and addresses them by following a horizontal approach. In view of the rapidly growing structures at the UP, the rising number of students, and the increasing cooperation with other universities, and in view of existing gaps and imbalances with regard to a diversity-oriented design of the university, there is a need for an overarching diversity strategy and an expansion of existing measures.

## 6. Structural Anchoring of Diversity Work



\*and other departments and institutions of the UP, see section 6.

Since 2021, the responsibility for the diversity work of the UP lies with the Vice President for Research, Early Career Researchers and Equal Opportunities. The Vice President is a member of the Senate Commission for Equal Opportunity (CGK), which is headed by the Central Equal Opportunity Officer. The

President, the Central Equal Opportunity Officer, each faculty, the central university administration, and the central institutions each nominate one member of the CGK; the students nominate two members, who are appointed by the Senate. The decentralized equal opportunity officers are also invited to participate. The CGK is responsible for planning and implementing measures in the area of women's advancement and equality and, since a content-related personnel expansion as of October 2022, also in the area of diversity, compatibility, and inclusion. At the operational level, the UP's diversity work is anchored in the Coordination Office for Equal Opportunity (KfC), which is headed by the Central Equal Opportunity Officer. Since June 2020, a newly created and permanent position of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Officer has been located here. The position is primarily responsible for the planning, coordination, and implementation of a university-wide diversity strategy, the development and bundling of anti-discrimination measures (including individual anti-discrimination counseling), the further development of counseling and complaint management, as well as event organization and public relations. With the establishment of a position for gender and diversity data management at KfC in 2022, diversity work will be further expanded through the systematic bundling of relevant data and the development of a comprehensive concept for diversity monitoring.

Furthermore, many central and decentralized areas and actors of the UP deal with individual or several diversity dimensions in various fields of action, even if this is not always subsumed under the term diversity. There is a multitude of both target-group-specific and cross-target group measures and services, which are, however, organized in a decentralized manner.

Intersectional equality work is a strategically anchored cross-sectional task at the UP and looks back on a long and successful tradition. Since the founding phase, there has been a Central Equal Opportunity Officer as well as decentralized colleagues in charge of equal opportunities in the faculties and divisions, as well as in the administration. There is a Service for Families, a Dual Career Service, an International Office, and a Welcome Center.

The inclusion work of the UP also has many years of experience in commitment to students and employees with impairments and disabilities. In particular, we should mention the interest groups consisting of the representative for students with disabilities, the representative for employees with impairments and chronic illnesses, and the representative for severely disabled persons.

Various contact points and persons at the UP perform advisory and representative functions. They are either target-group-specific or open to all university employees. Although not all of them are specifically responsible for diversity, individual diversity dimensions, and any resulting experiences of discrimination, they are potential points of contact for related conflicts, problems, and challenges. Thus, they form an already existing - but thus far still loose - network at the UP, which should be bundled more strongly and brought into exchange. Since 2021, the "Discrimination-Free University" website provides information about all counseling services and contact points at the UP, as well as about diversity and anti-discrimination. Since 2022, the UP has an anti-discrimination guideline, which provides information about protections against discrimination at the UP, regulates the complaint procedure, and lists both preventive measures and sanction possibilities. This directive provides students an opportunity to officially file a complaint in case of discrimination. An ombudsman for discrimination, bullying, and stalking has been available to all university members since 2023.

Student initiatives, university groups, and interest groups also form an important part of existing diversity measures, provide important inspiration, and express the demands and needs of the student body.

### **6.1. Emergence of the Diversity Strategy**

A university-wide treatment of the topic of diversity began in 2020 with participation in the Diversity Audit, in the context of which the steering group, the steering committee, and five working groups worked on the orientation of diversity work at the UP, both in individual diversity dimensions as well as fields of action and formulated goals and measures. The results of this process are incorporated into the diversity strategy. This diversity strategy was developed as a guideline for the understanding of diversity at the UP and for the bundling and strategic orientation of diversity work. It is based on the first self-report of 2020, which was prepared as part of the diversity audit, the considerations and discussions of the steering group<sup>3</sup> and the steering committee<sup>4</sup>, as well as the results of the working groups<sup>5</sup> of this auditing process. A first draft was prepared by the steering group, finalized by the Diversity Strategy Working Group<sup>6</sup> and discussed in the steering committee. In addition, many areas not directly involved in the diversity audit and individual actors of the UP contributed feedback and suggestions to the diversity strategy, including the members of the Commission for Equal Opportunities (CGK) and members of individual faculty councils.

## **6.2. Interlinking with Other Strategy Processes at the UP**

In the sense of understanding diversity as a cross-sectional task, it is important to consider the interconnections between diversity and other concepts and strategic processes of the UP and, where possible, to combine them in a meaningful way. There are particularly close overlaps in terms of content between diversity work and the already well-established areas of equality and inclusion. The dimension of gender is not explicitly included in the diversity strategy due to the existing equality structures at the UP; complementary or overlapping measures can be found in the equality concept. Likewise, reference is made in this context to the Equality Future Concept 2020-2025 (GZK 2019). The dimension of gender identity or gender diversity, on the other hand, is part of the present diversity strategy, as the consideration of trans\*, inter\* and non-binary university members is a relatively new topic at UP, this dealt with in close cooperation between equality and diversity work.

With the inclusion concept for the improvement of study and working conditions for people with disabilities and/or chronic illness, which was passed in the Senate in 2021, the UP has an overall strategy for the implementation of an inclusive university (i. e. for the reduction of structural, constructional, communicative, and didactic barriers) as well as a concrete plan of measures for the implementation period from 2021 to 2030. In the preparation of the inclusion concept (2020), the Coordination Office (KfC), and thus the equal opportunity and diversity work, were involved along with other institutions, and the KfC is planned as a participating institution in individual measures. The inclusion agreement

---

<sup>3</sup> The steering group in the Diversity Audit at UP consisted of the Vice President for Research, Early Career Researchers and Equal Opportunity, the Central Equal Opportunity Officer, and the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Officer.

<sup>4</sup> The steering committee of the Diversity Audit included the steering group as well as the chairperson of the General Staff Council, the chairperson of the Senate, the International Office, two student representatives, the head of the Press and Public Relations Office, the Service for Families, the Potsdam Graduate School, the Representative for Employees with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses, the Head of the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs (also the AGG Complaints Office), the Center for Quality Development in Studies and Teaching (also the University College Project), the Representative for Students with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses, the Vice President for Studies and Teaching (†), the Community Manager of the KfC, Human Resources Development, and an expert on racism and diversity.

<sup>5</sup> The following working groups have been formed in the Diversity Audit at UP and have formulated goals and measures: Diversity Strategy WG, Survey WG, Prevention WG, Diversity-Sensitive Teaching WG, and Communication WG.

<sup>6</sup> The Diversity Strategy WG included the Steering Group, the Coordination Office for Equal Opportunity (KfC), the Center for Quality Development in Teaching and Learning (ZfQ), the General Staff Council, the project "A University for All - Designing Inclusive Studies" of the Central Student Advisory Service (ZSB), a student representative, and an expert on racism and diversity.

on the integration of people with disabilities, also adopted in 2021, defined, among other things, an inclusion team whose tasks include the implementation of measures for employees and the creation of operational inclusion concepts. The teaching mission statement adopted by the Senate in 2020 was examined by a working group in the Diversity Audit for possible extensions from a diversity-oriented perspective, which will result in a revision of the catalog of measures associated with the teaching mission statement. The KfC was also involved in the development of other strategy processes not explicitly related to diversity in order to integrate diversity-relevant aspects (including the transfer development plan, the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), the OTM-R strategy, the permanent position concept, and the structural inspection by the German Council of Science and Humanities).

Another important interlinkage and implementation of the cross-sectional mandate lies in advising departments on projects and third-party funding applications, where so far the Central Equal Opportunities Officer has been the main source of advice on gender (and selective diversity). The DFG's Research-Oriented Standards on Gender Equality and Diversity (2022) are one of the guiding principles here.

## **7. Outlook**

Diversity work, which is still quite new at German universities and has only had a position at the UP since 2020, will gain in importance in the coming years and will increasingly be considered a quality feature of universities. This is indicated not only by the new DFG research standards, but also by the specifications in the higher education contract (MWFK - UP 2019, III.10, p. 6ff.) or the (higher education) policy changes that can be observed nationwide (e.g. legally anchored diversity or anti-discrimination officers in some federal states). For the UP, it is important to sufficiently and sustainably equip and consolidate this new field of work structurally, as well as to create suitable working structures that enable well-founded and contemporary diversity work without weakening the established and successful equality work or curtailing support structures for other marginalized groups. Diversity measures across target groups usually not only benefit multiple groups along different diversity dimensions, but overall can create an appreciative, open, and attractive university for all. The UP's diversity strategy provides important guiding principles and goals for this purpose, which will be regularly reviewed and adapted to new requirements, insights, and realities of this dynamic field of discourse and work over the next three years.