

Podcast with a psychology student at the University of Potsdam

Introduction: Welcome to all listeners. In our podcast we introduce you to students, lecturers, and employees from the administration of the University of Potsdam. These are people with and without disabilities. We want to know from you How inclusive is the University of Potsdam as a place to study, but also as an employer?

Erika Herbold: Hello, welcome to our new podcast episode. My name is **Erika Herbold** and today I have a student from the University of Potsdam as a guest. She has been studying quite successfully at the University of Potsdam since 2018, despite her long-standing cancer diagnosis. Okay, I'll give the floor directly to you and thank you for taking the time for today's little interview. And I would ask you to introduce yourself briefly. Where are you from and what exactly do you do at the University of Potsdam?

Student: Hey, I'm from Berlin and I'm studying psychology for a master's degree at the University of Potsdam.

Erika Herbold: What do you particularly like about your studies or about the University of Potsdam?

Student: First of all, Potsdam is a really nice university with beautiful surroundings and Co. And now, in my case, the possibility of compensating for disadvantages is very positive and worth a lot to me personally. um, yes and overall, the tutors and professors are very tolerant and hard-working. However, as always, there are exceptions.

Erika Herbold: Okay, let's stay with the positive aspects for now before we look at the critical aspects later on. What would you say? Who or what helps you to study successfully despite your illness?

Student: Um, basics I think is mainly equality measures. That helps immensely. Despite the illness, you are quite flexible and can make many things easier and more appropriate even in difficult situations. For example, I am given preferred admission to seminars because it is not certain how long my health will be stable and how long I will be able to study like this. And that enables me to study in this form, now that it's very, very stable. And the flexibility in exam planning and the extended writing time, for example in exams, also help a lot. But of course, you still have to say that this doesn't give you anything for free and that it's simply interest in the subject and motivation that helps the most.

Erika Herbold: And what causes more difficulties in your studies? Well, you've already said that you have a couple of options through the compensation for disadvantages, because these disadvantages that you have can be compensated for by writing time, etc. But there's definitely still room for improvement, right? Or generally just difficulties that you have. Which would that be?

Student: Basically, is the seminar planning at the University of Potsdam really a pure disaster! Unfortunately, there is no other way to say it. You really have to fight for the seminars in the hope of getting a place. And then it actually comes down to the fact that you simply choose seminars that are perhaps not even your area of interest, simply to get something. That was the case in the bachelor's and I feel it's even stronger in the master's now. Well, far too few seminars are offered, where the number of participants is of course limited and they were limited, for example in the Corona semester, where everything was offered online, where you could actually have allowed more, because you only online does everything. Yes, and this simply creates a huge amount of competition among the students, which also makes working together or exchanging ideas quite difficult in between. And especially in the case of students with equality measure, who then perhaps actually got two seminars instead of one, then critical questions arise or even a bit of this subliminal envy. And I think there is generally a lot of resentment and a lack of understanding among the students regarding the organization. And it's even super difficult in that time, even if you're very committed and very behind, to finish your studies within the standard period of study, if you get one seminar per semester, if at all.

Erika Herbold: Well, the thing with the seminars, that's it, I don't know if that's the case in all courses, but especially with us, even in the bachelor's degree, i.e. in psychology studies, it was always a problem in the bachelor's degree too. And as you just mentioned, if you then get one seminar instead of two, for example, because of your Equality Measures, you will be given preference, you get a seminar place because you don't know how long you can continue studying, the way you are studying now and your state of health is, how long will it last? And that sometimes there is resentment. So, you would say that there is a general lack of understanding when people study with Equality Measures? With other students who are perhaps less familiar with it and may not even know what such an equality measure is. Keyword prejudice or envy.

Student: Um, yes, I would say so. I believe very few know what equality measure really is. You notice that again and again, especially with students like me, for example. You can't tell right away that I'm very seriously ill. Then there is a certain form of misunderstanding or it feels like envy that you say okay, but why is she getting a place in the seminar now, even though she is in the second semester and I'm already in the fourth semester? Yes, there definitely is. I have to be honest, I hardly ever tell anyone. Actually, not at all, because I just don't feel like confrontation. And I believe that it would also be much more relaxed if the seminar allocation or the seminar space were simply much more extensive and also adapted to the students or the number of students.

Erika Herbold: Yes, well that's a long fight. Well, that hasn't really worked for years.

Student: And that's actually worse in the master's degree than in the bachelor's degree, in my opinion.

Erika Herbold: OK. Before your studies or when you started in 2018, were you informed about what options you have at the University of Potsdam to study with a chronic illness without a disadvantage? And if so, where did you get the information from?

Student: Um, yes, I've been informed. When I decided to study in Potsdam, there was a kind of information event. I took part in the event that was specifically designed to inform you about the possibilities. That was pretty revealing too. I don't remember exactly what was said because it was quite a long time ago, but I know that it definitely helped me at the time and even more so close before you start studying, to get to know people who might one day be in a similar situation and maybe then have similar problems or have similar difficulties. Well, I definitely think that point is super important. It helped me then. As I said, I don't remember exactly what was said there or whether something was missing. All I know is that I felt really well informed at the time. However, I have to say that I once sought help during my studies and did not get as much help or support as I would have liked. That was, I can remember that it was also a difficult phase, when I think a lot of people were ill and somehow the responsible person from the department wasn't there to talk to. But there I had the feeling, for example, that things were dealt with relatively too quickly, as a student, you might wish for different help or more help under the circumstances. But other than that, I've actually never had any problems during my studies, so that I would have needed support.

Erika Herbold: Yes, good to hear. And what would you say? How did the pandemic change your studies in general and what could stay the same?

Student: In my case, to be honest, rather positive. For me, studying became more relaxed because I no longer had to drive to the university all the time, for example when I was in the hospital, which was not uncommon. I didn't really miss anything. It made things a lot easier for me. Even when it came to somehow coordinating the many doctor's appointments that you had. Or if I had a day where I was just not feeling well because of the chemo or something and I wasn't fit and therefore didn't feel able to go to the university, I just didn't have the feeling at the time that I'm missing something because I've always been able to participate online. And that actually reflected in my grades, because somehow I didn't miss that much classes anymore. And I would wish that for students like me or students in general who are in difficult health phases or similar situations, work would be done to maybe offer more hybrid studies to enable them to participate even in difficult situations. However, I also know from many students that weren't happy at all because they moved to Potsdam to study and then just sat at home, of course there are always two sides to that. But in my case, it was actually rather positive and I was a little sad when the Uni opened again.

Erika Herbold: Yes, keyword not only for health problems, I was pregnant during Corona and I have the same opinion as you, you just didn't miss that much, I had a lot of doctor appointments and it was also difficult for me to move. Just sitting at home and still not missing anything that was gold at the time, I understand that. Keyword hybrid also in the sense that would also be the smartest solution, because those who want to go to university, who moved to Potsdam, who need the campus, they would have the opportunity and those who have health problems or are pregnant or caring for relatives would be able to participate from home at the same time, I think that would be perfect if every event at the university was hybrid.

Student: Exactly, I also think you have the possibility, why not use it.

Erika Herbold: And that's little effort, it would be little technical effort to simply open a zoom meeting. Good. What would you like from teachers or the administration or other students at the University of Potsdam in terms of barrier-free studies, i.e. what do you miss in the university?

Student: I definitely think that the Profs should be better informed. And I should get more information about Equality Measures and the like, because I often had the feeling that the professors didn't really know what to do with it and didn't really know what that meant and what the cooperation or this submission of the Equality Measures, this requirement, was all about take those who are also involved in Equality Measures, that they should deal with it better and maybe the contact person, i.e. you in this case, should somehow be more present in the university. I don't think your team is very present at the university, people don't know that much about you and I can imagine that for new students who don't know all the circumstances yet, or maybe the ones that started in the Corona semester didn't have an information event like me, it would be easier for those if they knew more about you.

Erika Herbold: So, keyword advertising for us and our work more needs to happen, that's true. We're working on that in the team right now, but it's good to have feedback that we're not present enough.

Student: No, that's actually exactly that, that would be nice and I think it would be better for the students in general to simply improve the organization, because I think there wouldn't be so much resentment and then you can make your own decisions as a student, whether you want to explain it because of the Equality Measures or not. I don't think it has to be a general thing, but the fact that this competitive attitude arises just makes it more difficult for the students.

Erika Herbold: Well, if there wasn't a lack of space in the seminars right from the start, then you wouldn't have to justify it either. Let's get to my last question, what are your goals after graduation and who or what is helping you to fulfil them?

Student: To be honest, I'm not 100 percent sure about my goals yet. I've learned to first do what you're doing right now and not fixate on what comes next. Yes, well, there is a bit of a feeling that I might actually go after the PiA, although the circumstances are very modest, but that's a completely different topic, or my trans area would also be legal psychology / criminal psychology, but first of all I'm glad when I have finally handed in my master's thesis and can then take a deep breath and no longer have to take exams or write papers. And I actually find that you get relatively little information from the university. I think I had two information events where two people from different areas of psychology were there and talked a bit, but you get relatively little information about the PiA training, for example, or I just don't get anything at all. Yes, that was the only thing that informed me / prepared me for the future at university, otherwise I found out more and read up on things outside of university.

Erika Herbold: Alright. That's it, we're at the end of our interview and I thank you very much for your time and the nice conversation and I wish you all the best for your studies and for your master's thesis and for your future.