

Podcast with Marlon Schwarze, student of psychology at the University of Potsdam

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

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Hello everyone, I'm Pilar and I'll be accompanying you through this podcast today. With me today is Marlon. Dear Marlon, would you like to introduce yourself briefly? So who are you? Where are you from and what exactly is it that attracts you to the University of Potsdam?

Marlon Schwarze: Yes, hello first of all. I've been studying at the University of Potsdam since the winter semester of 2021 and I'm studying psychology and I would like to become a psychologist in a clinic later on, i.e. work with physically ill people or in a rehabilitation clinic. And yes, that's why I'm doing this. So far, I'm doing it for the fun of it, for the study.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Yes, it's great that you already have such clear goals. Could you tell us? What do you particularly like about your studies at the moment and about the university in general?

Marlon Schwarze: So far, I like the content I'm learning about the most. My favourite subjects are social psychology and neurobiology. I'm a bit afraid of statistics, what's coming up in the next semester, but that's probably how it is for quite a few people who study psychology. And at the university itself, I particularly liked the campuses. When we had the first wave, I immediately felt very comfortable. And yes, the interaction I've had with the other students so far is also really good, although we mainly talk online. But it's all very nice and I feel really comfortable at the university in that respect.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Okay, that sounds great, that you talked about it yourself. It all sounds very demanding, your studies. What would you say? Who helps you or what helps you to succeed in your studies?

Marlon Schwarze: I have to think a bit about how to answer that. So what had helped me the most at the moment was the fact that we have a hybrid format through the pandemic. And that just brings me a lot because I have a severe

chronic illness and my daily form is not always so good that I can then leave the house or then really fit somehow sit in the lecture hall or at that time also in school. That is a great, great relief for me right now, that I don't have this extra effort and can really relax and work from home, so to speak, and then not always lose this physical strength to come to the university or to somehow manage all this fuss. That's definitely a very, very good thing for me.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: That sounds relieving. What do you find particularly difficult about your studies? You've already touched upon it.

Marlon Schwarze: Well, what causes the most difficulties at the moment are lecturers who are not open to solutions that I need because of my illness. There was the situation that Mr. Meile from the Disability Counselling Service advised me to write an online exam because of my special situation, because I am limited by Corona. Among other things, I also have a severe immune deficiency. This means that I am very, very stressed by normal infections, which can range from quite protracted infections with loss of abilities and fatigue over months to septic shock, which happened to me in 2019, which can then somehow be superimposed on the cold and then bring me to the intensive care unit. For that reason, I really have to protect myself from Corona and various things. It's quite a big risk at the moment, for example to travel by train. I can't use public transport and of course I can't sit in the lecture hall with all the other students, which is also a pretty big problem for me at the moment, and in addition to that, the 2G and most of the regulations are no longer available, as far as I understand. That is of course quite a big problem for me now. And yes, the suggestion for the online exam came out of this situation. There are three exams that I would like to write this semester. I have already planned everything very consciously so that I can save a bit of my resources, which are already reduced, and that has led to big problems because the first lecturer rejected it without giving a great reason. The fact is, I think, that people normally don't have to do much work because of me or because of the online exams, because Mr Meile is responsible for that and does everything. And the problem was that people simply said no. As I said, I can't use public transport. I don't have my own car yet. I'm just getting my driving licence, which is also on hold because of Corona, because I can't go to the theoretical driving lessons. And yes, I can't get there and back in a taxi that even fits my wheelchair, it would cost me 140 euros and that's per exam. As a sick student, I simply don't have that. I was totally lost, to put it that way. In the end, a very, very nice fellow student took care of it when I got a bit upset with the others. Luckily, she has a relatively large car that can also accommodate my wheelchair, even though she herself had to go to Golm for the exam. So the solution was that I write in

Mr. Meile's office so that I can write the exam at all, and Mr. Meile is also at the Neues Palais campus. In the end, she drove me to the Neues Palais before her exam and then drove me to Golm and back again, from Golm, then to the Neues Palais and then back to my house, which is really super nice, but it simply cannot be a solution that I am dependent on the other students in order to have equal opportunities without endangering my health to write my exams, which I also have to write, because I just don't have any other resources to postpone them to the next semester or something like that. And yes, now I also asked the next lecturer and got the same answer. At least they said openly that it was too much extra work. And now I'm standing there pretty stupidly, because this is also the second exam date for which I had registered, precisely in the hope that the pandemic would be less bad.

But at the end of the day, it doesn't look like the number of cases is going down. I don't know exactly how I'm supposed to manage that, because the other people are making the first appointment and for me that's a pretty big hurdle right now and I don't know how I would get to Mr. Meile's office or to the S-room or wherever I would write. And I really don't know how to proceed.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: That's just a shame and also inconsiderate – the lecturers' reaction, and I can imagine what a burden that must be for you.

Marlon Schwarze: Besides studying, it's really annoying when you always have to deal with things like that on the side. It's quite distracting and takes away the energy I actually need for other things.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Exactly, totally unnecessary. But you were just talking about Mr. Meile. Were you informed before or during your studies, for example, about the possibilities at the University of Potsdam to study with a disability or a chronic illness like yours without any disadvantage or as much as possible without any disadvantage?

Marlon Schwarze: Yes, definitely. I looked at the website and the 50-page inclusion concept caught my eye. I took a look at it and then I also saw the various services offered by the Central Student Advisory Service, that is, Mr Meile, the student employees, and at that time I was still talking to Christian, who doesn't seem to be at the university any more.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Unfortunately, no, unfortunately not.

Marlon Schwarze: And I thought that was cool right away, anyway, the openness with which I was greeted. I then spoke with Mr. Meile on the phone for about half an hour. He also gave me tips on what I should pay attention to

and listened to my situation a bit, because I also have various restrictions, illnesses and a disability, and that was a really good conversation. In any case, it led to my decision to study at the University of Potsdam in the first place and then specifically at the University of Potsdam.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Yes, great. And you just mentioned the pandemic of plays. It certainly had a great impact on your studies. What changes to the pandemic would you like to keep at the University of Potsdam? And what should definitely be abolished?

Marlon Schwarze: Well, I can't think of anything to do away with at the moment, because I couldn't come by in the present tense and I don't know how things are going otherwise. I really do everything from home now. What I think absolutely has to stay there and also has to be established, e.g. as a disadvantage compensation It would be great if, as this possibility has existed for years and it is also sad that it is only now being used due to a pandemic, that the slides run along and the sound runs along so that people who, for whatever reason, are chronically ill, like me, can listen to the lectures, be it a chronic illness, as in my case, or an acute illness, or students with a child, for example, who cannot be cared for in any other way or who are ill, or who have other difficult life situations, that they still have the opportunity to stay up to date and find out what is going on at the university. At the end of the day, we're no longer at school and there's more material that you miss if you can't come and it would be a real shame if this opportunity were lost. In the end, it would also be a handicap for various people who are partly dependent on it. I'm not going to say: "abolish face-to-face teaching" or anything like that, no way. There should simply be the possibility either for everyone or for a certain group of people, who are required in the case of the impossibility of attending the university themselves to maintain this access, so to speak, and I honestly don't see why there should be a lot of effort involved. I think that would simply benefit a lot of people, and for me it would be accessibility. I would then have a lot less to worry about.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Also very important, I hope something like that will come. You are also active in the ASTA or rather in the student committee, could you tell us again what you stand for and what changes you would like to implement in the Asta.

Marlon Schwarze: First of all, I would like to say that we have three positions, two of which are vacant and still have to be elected. First of all, I would like to create a structure in which disabled students or students with illnesses, whether physical or psychological or neurodivergent, can network and exchange ideas. The problem I see at the moment is that apart from a few people, I have no contact with students who are in a similar situation to me. If there is a network of some kind, then you have a lot more room for manoeuvre in which you can

empower each other or give each other tips on how to deal with certain situations, for example, without a lot of bureaucracy. So I thought that we could meet online or, if it works in terms of the pandemic, in person, with the possibility of adding people via skype who can't be there. I would also like us to have a Discord server so that we can talk about certain topics or make small talk and get to know each other. In general, the department I work in should raise awareness for "Ableism", which should not be translated one-to-one and should not only be understood as hostility, but also to raise awareness for such structures and problems from within the student body and not from the university. I see that there is still a lack of awareness of these problems from these student structures. Furthermore, people approach me and tell me what's not so good, these are all problems that still need to be tackled. I don't know to what extent I can already talk about it, but we are already thinking about how we can make it more public and also tackle it. In addition, we need to be able to bring in our visibility and perspective. For me personally, it is also a concern to bring in this hybrid teaching or to address the zoom connection and to address these injustices that have happened to me and to also use the unit for this, so that people can turn to other people if they say that this is not going well at all. So we should by no means replace the disability representative, it should simply be an addition at student level.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: Yes, we need that too. You definitely have great ideas and it's great that you're working on this. What would you like to see from teachers or other students in terms of accessible studies?

Marlon Schwarze: I have had very good experiences with the students, I have really experienced a lot of solidarity there. For example, at the introductory event, we were on the wrong track and the train on the other platform once left us. I was travelling with a wheelchair and a handbag and a train attendant refused to take me because the railway said I hadn't registered and they couldn't lay out a ramp for me. And what did the others do? They stood in the doorway and held up the train, discussed it and then helped me onto the train. That was really ingenious and super cool.

As far as the teachers are concerned, I have already criticised them - I would like to see more openness to the fact that disabilities and illnesses are very diverse. There is not only the person who uses a wheelchair and is dependent on ramps and barrier-free places and toilets, but there must be more individual adaptations. You just have to be open and really talk to people and understand what's going on.

At the end of the day, this includes understanding that a disadvantage compensation is just a compensation for a disadvantage and not and that I don't want to gain an advantage from it. At the end of the day, I'm learning the same things as the others and studying is simply not easy and it shouldn't be made more difficult by unnecessary barriers. I don't want to fail because of barriers

rather than because of the material. Others fail because of the material, but I don't see the problem there, for example. At the same time, I think that teachers should definitely reflect on their own position and how they got to this position in the first place, and maybe that will also help in understanding that social injustice occurs. I hope that this will create the will to make the path easier for others who don't have it as easy as oneself.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: That is definitely super important. You already talked a little bit about your goals after your studies. What exactly are your goals, or more importantly, who or what is helping you prepare for them?

Marlon Schwarze: My own experience in clinics, i.e. rehabilitation clinics, was what triggered this career aspiration in me. Actually, I had also considered studying medicine, but then I somehow got scared, it was always my dream, but I thought it would be physical, if you had to do this nursing internship, for example, that would simply be much too strenuous. And doing night shifts, for example, would be far too strenuous - I wouldn't be able to keep it up in the long run. The study load is also extreme and you can't organise your studies individually; you're bound to a plan. I wouldn't be able to say, if I have a major operation in the next six months, I'll only take two subjects and do them properly, instead of concentrating on five subjects and just studying all day, but I can give myself space and room for my health in my psychology studies. None of that would have worked in medical school.

I also noticed that, apart from the aspect of the illness, the physical illness, I was also interested in the psychological aspect. How do people deal with each other in clinics, how is the psychosocial care, how is the communication with the people and the pain control, so to speak, all such things. In any case, I would like to continue doing a Master's degree in psychotherapy at the University of Potsdam - I'm very happy to have been able to get this polyvalent Bachelor's degree - or alternatively I would like to do a Master's degree in psychocardiology at the German Heart Centre and then work therapeutically with children with heart defects, for example, and I think that would be something I would really enjoy.

Pilar Gonzalez Guevara: That all sounds wonderful. Dear Marlon Schwarze, this brings us to the end of our podcast. Thank you for being here and answering our questions!

Marlon Schwarze: Thank you for the invitation!