

Podcast with Henrik Schmidt, student at the University of Potsdam and Amar Hajaj, student advisory assistant

Intro: A warm welcome to all listeners! Our podcast aims to introduce you to students, teachers, as well as employees from the administration at the University of Potsdam. We interviewed people with and without disabilities. We wanted to hear from them, just how inclusive the University of Potsdam is as a place of study, and as an employer.

Amar Hajaj: Hello, my name is Amar Hajaj and today we have Henrik Schmidt as a guest with us. Henrik, would you mind telling us a bit about yourself? Who are you? Where are you from and what do you do at the University of Potsdam?

Henrik Schmidt: Yes, well, hi, I'm Henrik, I'm 19 years old and I'm from a small village near Brandenburg at the Havel. At Potsdam I'm currently about to start my third semester in Psychology, the Bachelor that is, and well, what's special for me regarding the studies is that I'm a wheelchair user. I had a motorcycle accident in 2019 and have been sitting in a wheelchair ever since, and now need to master my studies, that's about it from me.

Amar Hajaj: Okay, thank you. What do you like about your studies or what do you like about the University of Potsdam?

Henrik Schmidt: What I like about my studies is that, well, it often times just really really reflects my interest. I've always been someone who tries to put himself in the shoes of others and I think three times before I ask the next question or say something else, and I've often just thought: "Okay, how is this received? Does it reflect what I want to say? Could it be misunderstood?" and now with my Psychology studies I'm just able to reflect this more deeply, to earn even more impressions. Meaning the things that have already happened in Social Psychology, like the coexistence of individuals or the processes happening in groups, the Biological Psychology, where basically, well... where everything happens on the smallest levels in the body, what chemical processes are happening while we're just existing and thinking. I find this insanely interesting. And about the University of Potsdam specifically I really liked its closeness, I only need about 30 minutes in the morning, obviously that depends on the traffic, but I fortunately don't have to deal with city traffic, just country roads and

then I'm basically in Golm. The second thing being that Golm is, well... to put it bluntly, it's focused on accessibility. It's spacious, there are enough handicapped parking spaces and well yes... these were the first bonuses that I paid attention to, then my preferred major being Psychology which Potsdam is renowned for and is regarded rather favorably in comparisons, and that's why I thought why don't I try applying and now I'm in my third semester and extremely pleased.

Amar Hajaj: That is very nice to hear as a student at the University of Potsdam and as an employee at the university. And what would you say, who or what helps you the most to study successfully?

Henrik Schmidt: Yes, especially now, my studies started during the pandemic, meaning I've basically just been on campus for exams, everything else happened online and from the beginning on I've had many questions like: "Where do I have to go? How am I going to get there? Are there designated parking spots?", which aren't always a given. And yes, then I've contacted the student advisory services and now I get my support from them and from their employees, even my fellow students have helped me already, whenever I... well, when I had to hand in stuff I've just been able to give it to them to hand it in for me, and oftentimes there's been a lot of support from various people, even without having to ask for it, it was just offered.

Amar Hajaj: That is really nice to have so many students that make the first step and I think, especially as a freshman in new surroundings, this can be especially anxiety-inducing or challenging, to go up to people and if they approach you first, that's a relief in itself.

Henrik Schmidt: Yes, most definitely.

Amar Hajaj: Would you say there is anything that is especially troublesome during your studies?

Henrik Schmidt: Well, I can only guess... thinking of the first imperson classes the lectures in person I can imagine that in the beginning it's gonna be unfamiliar, there's gonna be a certain time pressure. Getting out of bed now to sit in front of the computer and listen to a lecture wasn't a challenge, but having to adhere to a proper schedule that could be challenging. After that maybe the room situation, maybe some rooms won't be accessible for me? That's what I've been thinking about or if I'm sitting in a lecture hall that I can only get in the front because of the stand giving me an unfavorable view, well yes, these are the thoughts that swirl around in my mind, what I assume. Things like that.

Amar Hajaj: Okay, they are rather divided between, let's say, everyday anxieties and those that resulted during the pandemic.

Henrik Schmidt: Exactly.

Amar Hajaj: Yes... were you informed about the possibilities here at the University of Potsdam before or during your studies, how to study with a disability or chronic illness? How you can study without any disadvantages or as best as possible without any disadvantages? And if so, where did this information come from?

Henrik Schmidt: Well, right from the start, it was actually during my A-Levels, teachers at my school already told me and at the University of Potsdam is... well, easy for me to get to and it is a good choice to study there. I was... I had an accident at the end of year 11 and I completed my 12th year out of rehab, out of the hospital and therefore my teachers knew: "Okay, he is sitting in a wheelchair now." and were able to adjust their advice and tips accordingly. Yes, after I finished my A-Levels and started focusing on my studies, I googled and found the central advisory services. They were listed as one of the first results, especially Mr. Meile, the commissioner for students with disabilities. and I've contacted him even before applying, just to see, to shed light on the situation at hand, and yes... he gave me the first information about what's possible and how the whole thing could look like. He put me in contact with people, for example Christian Opitz. With him I've... we've written first, then we talked on the phone and lastly we met in Potsdam on campus Golm, where he showed me around a bit, as a fellow sufferer basically, and told me what to pay attention to, some tips and tricks and what I should prepare for, and well that's the best method to go about it, because no matter how much a walking person tries to understand and think of everything, the best advice is only given by someone in the same position. And in combination with Mr. Meile as a commissioner knows about things such as individual equality of measures and is just generally informed and has the connections with lecturers and Christian Opitz experience, this combination was very good and it soothed my nerves for me to afterwards apply for my bachelor studies.

Amar Hajaj: If Christian listens to this episode, he'll be thrilled to hear that. It was very nice and most importantly gave us a change of perspective for the team to have Christian with us, who had a different view onto these things than us, which ultimately benefitted the students to see things from more than one perspective. You mentioned before that you started studying during the pandemic. How easy was the start into your studies during the pandemic?

Henrik Schmidt: In my opinion, there are two sides of the same coin. On one hand, the start of my studies was fairly uncomplicated because I was saved the trouble of my daily commute in the morning and I wasn't yet faced with the questions of how to get there and where to park. How early do I have to be there, how do I get to the nearest bathroom and so on and so forth. At the beginning I was just able to sit comfortably at my desk and listen from home. On the other hand I missed this student feeling, the life of a student and it's a pity, but hopefully, now that we're moving toward hybrid learning or classroom teaching again, that this will return as well, and I am definitely excited about that, so yeah, these are the two sides. On the one hand rather relaxed, you just had to deal with the technical stuff and even for the lecturers it didn't work out in the beginning. After a while they had accommodated to it and chose various methods to support us instead of just blabbering on in front of a screen, they built in exercises, multiple choice questions via Zoom. Yes, but student life was still missing. Let's see when we'll return to it, I'm definitely excited.

Amar Hajaj: Well, my hopes are on par with yours to finally see a return to in class teaching again, especially so you can experience life at the University of Potsdam for real and to form these social connections. After all, that is a key part of the studies. Alright... is there anything you'd wish to see from teaching staff or other students regarding accessible studies?

Henrik Schmidt: Well, so far, whenever I've been in contact with teaching staff or lecturers it was usually because of exams or lectures, to get my individual equality measure realized and talked about, and from experience they've been very accommodating and everything worked out immediately. The only thing I had to do was send a copy of my application I filled out at the beginning of my studies and then everything was done without further complications and I've gotten support even. The supervising assistants have always been very nice and helped me whenever I had a problem, if there wasn't enough paper or if a pen stopped working, stuff like that. And yes, I would like for it to continue as uncomplicated as it has been. And yes, if I think about my assumptions of not being able to access the lecture halls or to have trouble with the view, I can only hope that the lecturers will approach me, that we will think of a solution together, to work around these problems. I would wish for that, but I am pretty sure that it will happen like this anyway, because I haven't met a lecturer yet, who wouldn't accommodate me. In this regard it's been very very very very relaxed.

Amar Hajaj: Okay, onto the last question. What goals do you have after your studies and who or what helps you best prepare for that?

Henrik Schmidt: I am not 100% decided yet, what the future after my studies will hold. The bachelor in psychology is rather broad so that I could specialize during my masters and given my current stage and my studies, I can imagine pursuing any route. beyette clinical psychology which is very interesting with diagnostics so just look even further into something, for example what does PTSD entail? Or how can we, how can I help? Yes this, being able to help patients or being a therapist. At the same time, work and organizational psychology is also very interesting, what I could also imagine would be marketing, advertisement and market analysis', so far I find everything very very interesting whenever I come in contact with it during my studies, and see, okay, well maybe this isn't for me or I've imagined it differently, maybe that'll become clearer further in the future. but right now I can imagine going into any field and I'm excited to see what's still to come, what are help me decide or he's my decision, and my fellow students definitely do play a big part in this since we're so broadly varied in age and experience. We have other 19 and 20 year olds in this class who have also started immediately after their A-Levels but we also have older students who're experienced and have only now started their Bachelor in Psychology to upgrade their education and to use it for their jobs. We've exchanged a lot of information this way to see what's possible, especially during the process of getting to know each other, whenever we introduced ourselves, in small groups... it was very interesting to see, okay, student XY who has also just finished their A-levels and isn't really focused on a later job field with this Bachelor and then there are others, for example I think one of them was a stewardess. Who now want to go into organization, planning and management whit these studies, maybe even into human resources at her airline, just very interesting and that's where I see the most value of information, to see, even if there is a 19 year old like me, who says they can imagine it being like this and this, we talk about it, about what we think, what we heard and what kind of information we've gathered so far and this definitely also furthers oneself, so yeah... my fellow students are the best information resources. Other than that, everything you can find in the net, like informational events that take place often, I'll make use of that and that'll hopefully put me on the right path I think.

Amar Hajaj: Well, you definitely have a few semesters left before you have to make a decision and until then I think you'll experience a lot more that'll help ease your decision. Yes, well thank you Henrik for being here and sharing your experiences with us, I wish you lots of success for your future studies.

Henrik Schmidt: Thanks, thanks, thank you so much to have the chance to be a part of this, to share my side, even if I've only been a student during the pandemic. But I still think it's great to have this opportunity for future students to have this foundation. It does work with a disability and for that

thank you for letting me be a part of this and I am definitely excited to continue my studies at the University of Potsdam, and to continue going my way, knowing that yes, it does work.

Amar Hajaj: You're more than welcome, we were happy to have you, thank you.