



Code of Conduct

Preamble

The Department of English and American Studies at the University of Potsdam is dedicated to high-quality teaching and research. This requires a joint effort by students, teaching staff and administrative staff. This Code of Conduct aims to guide the way in which all members of the Department work together and interact with one another in order to achieve these aims. It points out the responsibilities and expectations of both students and staff. It also serves as a guideline for new and international students to our Department and the University.

Outline:

1. Mutual Respect
2. Responsibilities
3. Academic Integrity and Honesty
4. Communication and Self-Reliance

1. Mutual Respect

Mutual respect should be the basis for all interactions, whether among students or between students and staff, both inside and outside the classroom. Academic work rests on the freedom to hold contesting and controversial ideas, but it also requires considerate discussion of those ideas. In order to enable academic participation for all, we aim to offer a space for an exchange of ideas which is free of discrimination on any basis.

2. Responsibilities

Knowledge in the humanities does not consist of a single correct answer that can be learned out of a book. The aim of a seminar is to enable joint intellectual enquiry: this involves critical thinking and discussion and responding to the ideas of others. Fruitful academic work is only possible in an environment that fosters the input of various viewpoints and active communication among seminar participants. Crucial for building such a stock of critical discourse is a supportive working atmosphere and coherence within seminar groups. Factors required in order to achieve this include: transparency of seminar contents, requirements, and grading; seminar preparation and attendance; and participant feedback.

All teaching staff should ensure transparency by providing information on the aims, contents and requirements of classes early in the semester, as well as grading criteria and set dates for

examinations. This enables students to realistically estimate the workload and structure of a seminar and to plan their semester and degree.

Good preparation by both teaching staff and students is the basis for meaningful seminar interaction and individual learning. This means thoroughly reading assigned texts and completing all other preparatory tasks.

Seminar attendance is vital to achieving the stated aims of our seminars. Recurring absence seriously hinders successful learning in the humanities, as it prevents the development of nourishing group dynamics which enable fruitful discussions and free interaction. For this reason, regular attendance and active participation in seminar classrooms is the expected norm in this department, even though compulsory attendance is not required by the university regulations. If students cannot participate in seminar sessions for good reasons, it is appreciated if they communicate their absence to the lecturer before the class.

Students should communicate any special requests, such as receiving marks by a certain date, to teaching staff well in advance, and must submit their work so as to allow sufficient time for marking; teaching staff are committed to marking all students' work within a reasonable period of time.

Teaching staff should regularly seek feedback from students as a means of continuously improving the quality of teaching in the Department.

3. Academic Integrity and Honesty

Academic enquiry aims for an exchange of ideas. Attributing an idea to its author by means of correct citation and full bibliographical reference is a sign of respect, personal honour, and academic maturity, as well as a means of enabling effective research. For these reasons, plagiarism is considered serious academic misconduct. As members of a global network of scholars and students, we are committed to upholding the standards of academic integrity that are necessary to enable reliable research and a transparent exchange of information both within and beyond our Department. Both students and teaching staff are expected to abide by these rules. All written work should be accompanied by a '[Selbständigkeitserklärung](#)' (declaration of independent work). The '[Plagiatsrichtlinie](#)' (plagiarism guidelines) of the University of Potsdam details the definition of plagiarism and the consequences of breaching these rules.

4. Communication and Self-Reliance

One of the pivotal skills students acquire during their studies is taking responsibility for the organization of their university education. Students are responsible for finding information on their [degree programmes](#) through all available channels. Unnecessary emails to staff and faculty, e.g. about course requirements and organization, should be avoided. In most cases, face-to-face communication, for example during staff office hours, is both the most effective and preferred means of communication. Emails, if unavoidable, should include an appropriate salutation and be written in a befitting tone and register that takes the individual context into account. All staff members, in turn, are committed to responding in a like fashion.

Students are required and encouraged to proactively contact teaching staff in the case of circumstances—including those related to family life or financial difficulties—which may make the completion of class requirements difficult or which deserve due consideration. In turn, staff are committed to handling such information with the utmost discretion.