

Exmatriculate Right-Wing Ideology!

Against discriminatory teaching at the "Free" University.

The Working Group University Politics (Arbeitskreis Hochschulpolitik, AK HoPo) and the AStA FU Berlin condemn the racist and otherwise discriminatory incidents in seminars and lectures at the Free University. Together with numerous student councils and initiatives, we demand the dismissal of right-wing, racist or otherwise discriminatory employees or at least the long-term withdrawal of their teaching assignment. Furthermore, we demand an actual, in-depth confrontation with the cases and a sustainable strategy to prevent such incidents. Especially in the case of lecturer Michael Grünstäudl, an appropriate handling by the FU, beyond stopping his habilitation process, is required.

Department of Biology

The so-called Free University has a problem with discriminatory and right-wing ideological teaching. A concrete example is currently offered by Michael Grünstäudl from the Department of Biology, who presently is a lecturer in the habilitation process at the FU Berlin. He drew students' attention to his website on GitHub, where he posted a whole series of links to neo-fascist content (e.g. videos by Martin Sellner, Identitarian Movement) alongside learning resources. Grünstäudl thus used his position as a lecturer at the FU to spread right-wing content among students. He is also a signatory of the right-wing "Gemeinsame Erklärung 2018" ("Joint Declaration 2018"), which opposes immigration and stands in solidarity with racist street mobilisation. Other signatories include Thilo Sarrazin and Henryk M. Broder. In addition, students of the department reported that Grünstäudl had also behaved sexist in seminars.

In response to the exposure of Grünstäudl's dissemination of racist and fascist ideas, the university let his contract expire - but only after vehement protest on the part of the students. Instead of protecting those affected by experiences of discrimination and immediately stopping all of Grünstäudl's teaching activities, students are still forced to take his online courses. It is an intolerable situation that students affected in this way have to engage in futile discussions with the faculty and that the allegations at hand are not sufficient to implement consistent measures to protect students.

The current handling of this case by university officials is not sufficient. We demand that this incident sets in motion a process of reflection on part of the university management, among the lecturers and, above all, that it is made impossible for Grünstäudl to continue to work in an academic context in the future - be it at the FU or elsewhere. We demand a public distancing of the FU so that other potential employers are warned about Grünstäudl and his neo-fascist attitude.

The case of lecturer Grünstäudl unfortunately is not an isolated incidence. Right-wing, racist and discriminatory structures are part of everyday life at the so-called Free University and are largely tolerated by management. A few examples are outlined below.

Department of Language and Society

Despite repeated attempts at discussion by students, the N-word and other problematic terms continue to be cited without comment in the Language and Society program. The same applies to problematic texts in which racist stereotypes are reproduced. Previous attempts by students and the student council to talk have always come to nothing. Currently, some students are making another attempt to address the massive problem in order to find solutions with the ones responsible.

Department of Mathematics and Computer Science

Furthermore, Yannik Wendt, a board member of the Junge Alternative Berlin, has been employed as a tutor at the FU for years. He also is the founder of the neo-fascist AfD offshoot "Junge Campusalternative" at the FU. The AStA already, but alas unsuccessfully, demanded the termination of the employment of the functionary of the right-wing extremist AfD youth organisation in 2019. (-1-)

Education

Numerous students also report racist and sexist attacks in education. Some time ago, the Intersectional Teaching initiative was founded to force the FU to take action. Last year, the initiative wrote an open letter to university management and the Dahlem School of Education with concrete demands, among other things, for further training of lecturers on colonialism and racism as well as the review of teaching material from an antiracist postcolonial perspective by professional external experts. (-2-)

The examples mentioned do not stand on their own, but are an expression of a racist and discriminatory structure at the FU. This structure is not only expressed in the form of ongoing grievances in teaching, but is also evident in numerous other factors: the naming of streets and university buildings in Dahlem, such as the Henry Ford Building (-3-), as well as the discovery of bones on the campus grounds (-4-) are just a few examples. In this context, reference should also be made to the racist murder of doctoral student Mahmud Azhar on the campus of the Free University, which was commemorated for the 32nd time on the 7th of January. This murder is a result of racist thought patterns and their violent reproduction. Mahmud Azhar was insulted, threatened and severely injured by a fascist on campus as he was leaving the Biochemistry Institute. He succumbed to his injuries in hospital two months later on the 6th March 1990. (-5-)

Right-wing teachers will always reproduce right-wing ideologies in their teaching. Right-wing ideas are found in content, in interpersonal interaction and in the reaction to criticism of their attitudes. Students often resist these conditions in vain, or not at all for fear of consequences. But even in cases like that of lecturer Grünstäudl, in which consequences were imposed by the university, it becomes clear that there exists a lack of sustainable methods to overcome racist structures. This is because the structures that exist here are not a special feature of Freie Universität, but an inherent part of the university system. That's why it's important that the overcoming of racist structures doesn't just happen at the FU, but in a cross-university cooperation to ensure that there is no room for fascist ideas. And no, offering diversity courses is by no means sufficient.

The university has a responsibility towards students in its recruitment processes. Due to the lack of sensitivity in the selection of lecturers, students are not only discriminated against in their studies, but sometimes also retraumatised. In appointment committees, as in all other university decision-making bodies, students can always be outvoted because the status group of professors always has a majority of seats in these very committees (-6-). Due to the existing hierarchies, students have hardly any chance to successfully defend themselves. Especially in small departments, it is almost impossible for students to avoid certain lecturers.

As the Grünstäudl case shows, there aren't sufficient possibilities within the university structures for students to make their problems heard through complaints. There is a lack of independent complaints offices with autonomous authority to act, as well as alternatives for students to free themselves from discriminatory teaching situations. Raising the issue of assaults involves an immense amount of time

and psychological effort on the part of students, which usually remains with the individuals directly affected. It simply cannot be that students in such situations have to explain their own experiences of discrimination over and over again only to still be discriminated against.. While the FU is in the middle of its "diversity process", we see no progress at all in the area of anti-discrimination.

We therefore demand:

- Actual sensitization of students and lecturers to discrimination instead of content-less diversity strategies.
- A stop Grünstäudl's habilitation process and a public statement of the FU about him and his actions.
- Direct reactions to the dissemination of racist, discriminatory and fascist content by lecturers in their teaching
- Actual co-determination of students in the allocation of professorships
- Critical reappraisal of the history of the FU
- Expansion of contact points for students affected by discrimination, as well as clear authorities and responsibilities in this regard.
- Clear and consistent positioning of the FU against all forms of fascism, racism and other forms of discrimination.

For us as students, the following applies:

We must stand in solidarity with all our fellow students who are taught by right-wing, racist and otherwise discriminating lecturers and who have to go through extraordinary difficulties, disadvantages and stressful to traumatic experiences as a result. None of us should look away, remain silent or abstain when right-wing ideology is spread. We have to break the positions of power that lecturers hold over us and demand our right to non-discriminatory teaching. We can't do this alone, we have to stick together and organise.

So come together, talk to each other, react directly and immediately to discrimination in teaching (and send an email to the relevant department afterwards so that the people in leading positions can't claim not to have known). If one of us draws attention to misanthropic language, behaviour or ideology in a seminar or lecture, it is the duty of all of us to not accept this behaviour, but to stand up against it together. Get organised and drive right-wing ideologies off campus!

The AK HoPo is made up of numerous student initiatives and other associations at the FU Berlin and deals with various issues of higher education policy.

If you have any questions, please send an email to: hochschulpolitik@astafu.de

Footnotes/Links

-1- Yannik Wendt:

<https://astafu.de/node/410>

-2- Open Letter of the Initiative Intersectional Teaching

<https://initiative-intersektionales-lehramt.de/letter-in-english/>

-3- Henry Ford Bau:

<https://astafu.de/henryford>

-4- Findings of bones 2015:

https://astafu.de/sites/default/files/2020-07/FU70_30_Knochenfunde%20an%20der%20FU%20Berlin%20%E2%80%93%20Erinnerungskultur%20heute_138-141.pdf

-5- Mahmud Azahr:

<https://astafu.de/node/480>

-6- Wegweiser Hochschulpolitik:

<https://astafu.de/hopo#gremien-und-organe-der-fu-berlin>