

Promoting and Shaping Diversity as an Opportunity

The University of Bremen's Diversity Strategy¹

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¹ Building on the concept put forward in 2012, the present Diversity Strategy is outcome of its further development based on comprehensive consultation between the University leadership and the Diversity Initiative Group, the Steering Committee Diversity and the Advisory Group Diversity. It constitutes both a mission statement as well as an operational framework. The present strategy profits from the findings of the Initiative Group and experiences made in the course of ongoing diversity processes, in particular the pilot projects established in three of the University's Faculties. Orientation to diversity is now firmly established as one of the University's profile features (see www.uni-bremen.de/universitaet/profil) and is anchored in the University's mission statement as a fundamental attitude to teaching and learning at the University of Bremen. Information on the activities and processes by means of which this approach is being implemented on both central as well as decentralized levels can be found on the continuously updated [website www.uni-bremen.de/diversity](http://www.uni-bremen.de/diversity).

1. Guiding Principles

The Diversity Strategy serves as a guideline for the further dynamic development of awareness and appreciation of diversity across the University of Bremen and its solid rooting in research, education and internal administration. It is subject to regular review and monitoring of targets by the various diversity committees, in the course of which adaptations may be made to fit new ideas, concepts and measures and brought before the Academic Senate for periodical revision.

The guiding principles of the Diversity Strategy are:

1. **University within society:** As a scientific institution mirroring the society it is part of, the University of Bremen accepts responsibility to configure its structures and institutional conduct in accordance with the criterion of social diversity.
2. **Diversity in and through research and teaching:** Diversity is a structural principle of the University. As a factor of innovation and creativity, it is reflected in the diversity of subject and knowledge cultures, their methods, forms of teaching and learning, as well as in the contents of research and education.
3. **Inclusivity:** The diversity approach addresses all members of the University's community of students, faculty and staff across all its areas (education, research, administration). It encompasses both "diversity mainstreaming" as well as the promotion of specific target groups.
4. **Competence in dealing with diversity:** In the context of a global knowledge society, the University of Bremen considers competence in addressing diversity issues to be a major educational goal.
5. **Diversity as a factor and general condition of academic success and education:** The University of Bremen sees achieving academic success as a task to be shared in equal measure by the educational institution and its students. It is therefore aware of its institutional responsibility to create the requisite equitable framework conditions to promote the academic success of each individual student.

6. **Empowerment and participation:** Taking into account different individual requirements and personal capabilities, all members of the University are given optimal support with the aim of promoting genuine participation and integration in all areas of University life.
7. **Anti-discrimination:** All members of the University of Bremen are called upon to act against vilification and discrimination in all their dimensions and to actively take steps to prevent them taking place.

2. The University of Bremen's Approach to Diversity

In the following, we use the term “diversity” to describe the strategy policy developed to address heterogeneity in the context of higher education. Oriented to the *Allgemeine Gleichbehandlungsgesetz* (AGG) [Anti-Discrimination Act], the University of Bremen's Diversity Strategy refers to the dimensions of gender, sexual identity, ethnic descent² or educational/social background³, language, religion or world view, age, disability, and chronic illness. Points of focus lie in the areas of internationality and interculturality, inclusion (in the context of dealing with various forms of disability) as well as gender policy (in the sense of gender as a social category).

The diversity approach adopted by the University of Bremen takes into account that people not only define themselves or are perceived by others on the basis of a single dimension of diversity. Rather, for individuals, often a combination of different distinguishing traits in highly individual constellations must be taken into account.⁴ The intersectional interweaving of the abovementioned dimensions is therefore particularly illustrative of the opportunities of integration (in higher education and society) as well as the risks of exclusion.

Our Diversity Strategy is meant as an appeal to all areas of our University to measure existing structures and offers by the criterion of the heterogeneity of their users. The

² AGG refers to “race” but actually encompasses racist discrimination due to ascriptive attributes that can be based on ethnic or cultural origin or religious belief.

³ Although social background is not a central focus of AGG, in the context of university education it occupies an important position.

⁴ The intersectionality approach postulates that the ascription of diversity categories to persons or groups of persons (in classical approaches to diversity) is no longer commensurate with the multifaceted life styles of people in modern society shaped by globalization and individualization. The perspective of “intersectionality” thus includes consideration of various different interwoven characteristics.

strategy links the aim of inclusion with a process-oriented approach. Forms of teaching and learning, counseling services as well as committees and work groups are to reflect in an exemplary way the heterogeneity present in society. At the same time, this creates the conditions for common, cooperative action and individual development. Here, accepting social responsibility – in the sense of promoting educational justice – links to a resource orientation that helps reveal and subsequently develop multifaceted individual potentials to the benefit of the institution and its individual members alike.

3. Heterogeneity in the Tradition of the University of Bremen – Central Actors in the Diversity Processes

The University of Bremen emerged from the 1970s reform movement. From the very beginning, therefore, it inevitably perceived part of its mission in creating structures to promote equal opportunity. Awareness of the need to redress inequity, especially as result of gender or social background, thus found expression in institutional lines of action comparatively early on (appointment and recruitment procedures, research support, study program rules etc.). Over the years, therefore, a good deal of experience has been gained in addressing issues of gender equity, for instance. This is reflected in the heterogeneity of the actors involved as well as accordant facilities and measures, and is matched by the establishment of sustainable structures.

Such measures include the institutional anchoring of gender mainstreaming as a key objective, the early implementation of official women's representation (on central as well as decentralized levels) in accordance with the *Bremer Hochschulgesetz* [Bremen Higher Education Act], and the staff unit *Equal Opportunity/ Anti-discrimination*, which encompasses two main fields of action: First, the *Office for Equal Opportunity*, which advises the University leadership, the Faculty Deans as well as the various research units on matters surrounding gender policy and being a family friendly university. It also develops gender-equitable offers for various target groups. Second, the *Office against Discrimination and Violence – Expertise and Conflict Counseling*, which provides information and counseling services as well as training on how to deal with conflict, discrimination, and violence. Acting in an advisory capacity, it contributes to the development and implementation of conflict

and complaint management as well as to the implementation of legal requirements in the area of anti-discrimination. This service is available to all members of the University.

The University has implemented the German Rectors' Conference recommendations in respect of "A University for Everyone". This led to the establishment of the *Contact and Information Office for Students with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses*, an *Officer for Inclusive Studies*, the (student) *Interest Group Handicap*, and other concrete measures to create conditions for barrier-free studies. The University of Bremen's commitment to inclusion was reaffirmed by the adoption of its own university action plan to implement the UN Disability Rights Convention in 2013, which was accompanied by a new group of experts appointed by the Academic Senate.

Continuous efforts towards realizing the aims of a family friendly university are having a palpable impact on the campus, not least due to contributions made by the working group *Family Friendly Studies*. A regular auditing procedure contributes towards process optimization.

An active supporter of social justice and equal opportunity in education, the University of Bremen has always had a focus on promoting access to university studies for gifted individuals who do not have a formal university entrance qualification. Very early on, the University introduced several accordant measures, including the in-service trainings offered by the Centre for Labor and Political Education.

The specialist expertise for dealing with the ethnic, linguistic and cultural variety present at the University – represented i.a. by international students and students with a migration background – is bundled in the *International Office*. The University also offers targeted support programs for high-school students and university students with migration backgrounds. There is also a national framework for the promotion of respectful interaction with international students to which the University is deeply committed: the Code of Conduct adopted by the German Rectors' Conference and the German Academic Exchange Service in 2009. And the welcome culture the University fosters towards its international guests is aptly reflected in the Welcome Center, established in 2012 to help newly arriving international academics settle into their new surroundings. Via the University's "Campus of Diversity" concept,

the Diversity Strategy interlinks with the Language Policy adopted in 2016 and the Internationalization Strategy. Moreover, the Foreign Language Center of the Universities in the Federal State of Bremen, which is coordinated and led by the University of Bremen, offers a comprehensive program designed to foster the variety of languages spoken on the campus.

The “Network Antidiscrimination“ brings together representatives of various University facilities, designated and elected anti-discrimination officers and interest groups active in identifying discrimination at the University of Bremen due to systemic factors and developing counter measures, who critically accompany and stimulate diversity processes. The members meet regularly to discuss possible examples of inadequate structures and cases of discrimination as well as how to develop appropriate remedial action.

Based on the broad range of experience accumulated in all of the above-mentioned areas, the Diversity Strategy constitutes a comprehensive perspective on the dimensions of diversity involved. It is intended to foster an inclusive and intersectional conception that will lead to diversity mainstreaming in all areas of the University.

4. Interlinking priority Areas - Diversity as a cross-sectional Dimension

The aim of diversity management (DiM) is to interlink the various tasks and priority areas, both by means of accordant committee and communication structures as well as by fostering cooperation among the different responsible bodies and persons. Networking structures create synergies and facilitate agreement on common objectives as well as the systematic and prospective design of diversity management. This is supported due to leadership decisions often being the result of comprehensive discussion and communication processes across the whole University and its various status groups. This tradition of interlinking initiatives with different levels of action (top-down, bottom-up) is constitutive for the functioning of the diversity-sensitive organizational development processes at the University of Bremen. In future, the diversity approach is to feature as a cross-cutting topic in all the University of Bremen’s strategy papers.

Many important milestones have been achieved since the first Diversity Strategy was formulated in 2012. They mark stages of organizational development and they impact on the visibility, experience and monitoring of the process launched in all areas of the University. The task now is to ensure this process is sustainably moved forward. If needs be, this may entail defining and implementing new conceptual elements. Committees have been established on various levels to facilitate and steer diversity processes. Their task is to support diversity management and the structural embedment, further development, and implementation of the diversity processes.

Diversity management at the University of Bremen is firmly anchored in all fields of activity involving academic teaching and learning, research, transfer, promotion of early career researchers, and internal administration.

5. Structural Implementation

5.1 Structural Embedment in the University Leadership and Central Administration

Responsibility for steering processes of diversity management at the University of Bremen lies with the *Vice President Diversity and International*. On the operative level, the University leadership is supported in the development and implementation of DiM by an *Officer for Diversity Management* in the Department for Academic Affairs. A key instrument for the planning and implementation of measures to promote diversity is the *Steering Committee Diversity*, comprising the Vice President Diversity and International, the Director of Administration and Finances, leaders of central administrative units (Department for Academic Affairs and the Department for Student Affairs) as well as two Deans of Faculty and the Officer for Diversity Management. Once every semester there is a meeting of an extended *Advisory Group Diversity* with faculty representatives, members of administrative faculty responsible for specific diversity aspects, an expert consultant on diversity as well as representatives of initiatives and interest groups. This body critically reviews the central diversity measures and projects, evaluates accompanying developments, and makes recommendations. The editorial group *Diversity and Inclusion* carries out self-reflective outreach and institutional communication activities.

5.2 Structural Embedment in the Faculties

Since 2012, every two years the University leadership meets with every faculty in order to discuss their objectives. One topic on the agenda is on faculty-specific diversity measures and strategies.

As result of a pilot project conducted in the frame of the Initiative Group Diversity, some Faculties have appointed their own diversity officers: these persons are subsequently included in the *Advisory Group Diversity*. The University leadership urges all of the Faculties to appoint their own diversity officers to represent them in the advisory group and participate in the further development and implementation of the central Diversity Strategy.

6. Fostering Exchange and creating Awareness within the University

In 2013, the University leadership and the scientific expert for diversity processes organized the first of a series of events titled “Diversity @ Uni Bremen: excellent and equitable?!” at which different aspects of diversity are discussed in an intersectional perspective. This centrally organized event series serves to foster institutional reflection and is open to the public. The talks revolve around critical research findings on discrimination and racism as well as the diversity-sensitive and potential-oriented attitudes, actions, and orientations present in academia. Such contacts and the close cooperation with non-university national and international experts and stakeholders expand the focus beyond activities within the University and open up opportunities for (inter)national benchmarking.

Events of a more symbolic nature make a major contribution towards promoting diversity and internationality, too. For instance, the “International Day” organized every two years by the University together with international student groups. Likewise, there is the “OPEN CAMPUS” event held every other year in the campus park, during which the University takes the opportunity to demonstrate its multifaceted cultural variety.