

Living Document for

# working together on teaching and learning at Bielefeld University

**Breathing Room** Responsibility **Active Participation**  
**Feedback** **Workload** Attendance  
**Curiosity** Culture of Teaching and Learning  
**Transparency** Learning Goals **Agreements**  
**Accessibility** **Evaluation** Respect  
**Courage** Response

The Living Document for working together on teaching and learning at Bielefeld University was developed by students and university teachers from all the faculties at Bielefeld University. Via the deans of studies and the departmental student representative committees, the vice-rector for studies and teaching extended an invitation to participate in the broad discussion process. This process started in April 2018 and took place over several meetings involving discussion and joint work on the text.

In 2020, the document was extended to include special requirements related to online teaching during the pandemic.

The students, university teachers and rectorate involved agree on the reliance of the document on its continuous further development. Therefore, it should be discussed on an ongoing basis. We wish for broad engagement with the herein formulated expectations for teaching and courses in particular. ■

# What teachers expect from students at Bielefeld University

Studying at Bielefeld University provides opportunities for many areas, such as personal growth, engaging with interesting course contents and qualifying for professional fields. Additionally, studying at Bielefeld University offers a lot of freedom, which in turn can be quite demanding and requires persistence.

As teachers at Bielefeld University, we aim to create an environment in which all students, their interests and contributions are being taken seriously. We want students to be involved with curiosity and for them to develop a deeper interest in their fields of study, which go beyond the immediate requirements of their courses and examinations. This also requires students' willingness to get involved with subject matters that at first may seem somewhat difficult or unattractive.

Accordingly, students at Bielefeld University carry responsibility for their own learning. Furthermore, individual participation and cooperation during courses should be taken seriously by students. Teachers and students are joined in their responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, as teaching at Bielefeld University is considered to be a shared responsibility of all involved participants.

■ At the beginning of the semester, teachers expect students to decide as quickly as possible which courses they wish attend bindingly. Students should delete courses they do not wish to attend (any longer) from their electronic timetables. Consider-

ing the limited capacities of space available, this is especially crucial for courses with limitations for the number of participants in order to enable students on waiting lists to attend instead.

■ It is not possible to attend two courses at the same time. If in doubt, please contact your professor or lecturer.

■ Teachers expect students to think about their specific goals when choosing courses. Students should contribute constructively to their courses and also make use of opportunities to offer feedback.

■ Teachers expect students to regularly attend the courses they have chosen in order for them to understand the didactic structure of the respective course syllabus and to make the most of their learning. Communication- or practically-oriented courses require regular cognitive presence.

■ Making use of self-study is important. Students should take their self-study seriously and prepare and revise their courses. Thereby, students enable themselves to better follow and participate in their courses, clarify questions, address problems and apply the learning material. The successful completion of a course requires not only participation, but also work phases in the library or at home.

■ It goes without saying that students should keep to agreements previously made, e.g. attending meetings prepared or sticking to a set date when giving a presentation.

■ Students should participate in the evaluation of their courses and thereby contribute to the quality of teaching and learning in their field of study.

■ The teachers at Bielefeld University would like to keep up the communication with their students by making use of the options offered by the university (during courses, office hours, student counselling, personal conversations, e-mails and also in the forum of the LernraumPlus). While in communication with students, they wish to maintain a polite and appropriate conversational tone.

■ Students should make use of the consultations offered by their professors and lecturers, e.g. office hours to clear up difficulties in understanding or meetings to get feedback on assignments. Before going to consultations students should prepare well for these.

■ Students should develop individual learning and working strategies, experiment with them, find out what suits them and their subject, and expand their repertoire.

**As university teachers, it is our wish to maintain a professional and mutually respectful exchange with our students.**

# Addendum regarding online teaching during the Corona pandemic

Even more than in-person courses, online courses rely heavily on the active participation of its attendees. The changed spatial and communicative conditions complicate the exchange of nonverbal communication. Due to this, online communication depends on teachers and students alike to make the conscious decision to experiment with the given course formats. This requires courage and openness. If participants remain passive or inactive in online settings, teaching and learning cannot succeed.

■ Especially when teaching and learning take place online, it is very important that students decide early on which courses they want to attend: They should familiarize themselves with the information and rules of the courses and provide feedback if individual conditions or elements are difficult to understand or inaccessible.

■ For teachers as well as for students the preparation and follow-up for courses are particularly time-consuming in the online semester. Therefore, students should concentrate on an individually realistic number of courses to attend so they are able to actually study them, i.e. do the preparation and follow-up. This can vary depending on the type of course and discipline.

■ Students' thorough and reliable work on their assignments is also crucial for the success of asynchronous online courses, e.g. in the LernraumPlus. The hours that would be contact hours in in-person course formats can be used as work periods in asynchronous course formats. Occasional synchronous

online meetings offered for clarification and for working on assignments in otherwise asynchronous courses require careful preparation by teachers and students alike as well as active participation so that everyone can benefit.

■ In video-based sessions, most of which take place in Zoom, teachers expect students to use their full and correct name and, if possible, turn on their camera to enable communication via visual channels (preferably with a virtual background to protect their privacy).

■ In video-based sessions, group work in breakout rooms depends on the participating students taking responsibility for their cooperative work and on them later on addressing their questions and results in the plenary.

In summary, teachers would like students to participate actively in video-based courses through showing themselves, asking questions and taking part in discussions. For video-based courses, students' mimic, verbal and written forms of feedback (e.g. via the chat function) help to improve the quality of teaching and learning and are therefore highly encouraged.



# What students expect from teachers at Bielefeld University

We, the students at Bielefeld University, have a fundamental interest in actively participating in courses. We expect teachers to take us seriously as students and to treat us with respect. This includes teachers being motivated to impart knowledge and for them to treat students' contributions with appreciation. Teaching and research are equally important, and teachers should aim to include research in their teaching. Teachers should regard the needs and interests of students when planning their teaching at Bielefeld University.

Students expect all teaching staff (teaching assistants, tutors, lecturers, professors) to reflect on their didactic methods, to further develop their teaching through regular trainings and workshops and to expand their didactic capabilities. Teachers should be able to put together all course types that fall within their area of responsibility. Lectures, seminars and tutorials should be aligned with each other fittingly. Teachers (as well as students) should be familiar with respective module handbooks and the legal and organizational frameworks of their courses.

- Students expect teachers to prepare their courses appropriately (material, structure, use of media) and to set their other appointments in a way that allows all sessions of their courses to take place.

- At the beginning of a course, teachers should present a well-structured semester plan or syllabus, which also provides an overview of what is expected for taking the course. In addition, the courses content and

learning goals should be discussed with the students.

- Through the interaction between teachers and students, courses should gain an additional value over simply learning from textbooks.

- Teachers should be open to taking up students' suggestions and involve their students, stimulate discussion and encourage their participation in study requirements that contribute to the overall cooperation in the course.

- Through courses, guidance and motivation for intended self-study phases should be provided. These self-study phases should be relevant to the topics and interactive work done during course sessions and can take many forms, e.g. individual preparation and follow-up, preparation for meetings, group work and engaging with course material on a more personal level.

- Teachers should, whenever possible, design self-study phases to be so open that students have room for exploring their individual priorities and personal development.

- Teachers should be available throughout the semester (office hours, e-mail) and should support students who are working on (graded) coursework by providing advice, guidance and constructive feedback.

- Teachers are expected to respect agreements and announcements made to students, e.g. regarding semester plans or examinations.

■ Teachers should seek feedback on their courses (if appropriate, already during the semester), take evaluations seriously and use them to improve their courses.

■ Students' absence from courses must be possible when there are justified reasons for it. Absent students should have access to course materials in order to be able to catchup on what they have missed through self-study. Absence in relation to exceptional circumstances should not result in students being denied the opportunity to pass a course and earn credits.

■ Especially within introductory courses, first-semester students should be introduced to concepts for self-study and strategies and techniques for self-organization. Students also expect to be made aware of interdisciplinary courses offered by other departments at the university.

■ Students at Bielefeld University expect their teachers to take the respective workload into account when planning study requirements for courses and to communicate early on what is expected of students and when it is expected. Study requirements should be relevant to the work done in the course and should be well explained.

■ Students expect teachers to make their grading criteria transparent.

■ Already during the semester, teachers should offer support and supervision for students working on and preparing for examinations and graded coursework. Any difficulties in completing tasks can hereby be discussed during the active course period.

**As students, we wish  
for a professional  
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ly respectful manner.**

# Addendum regarding online teaching during the Corona pandemic

In the online semester, contact between teachers and students should generally be promoted in order to also enable communication outside of courses.

■ Teachers should keep in mind that students' self-organization has become much more challenging and complex in the online semester. They should therefore make their preferred channels for communication (e-mail, LernraumPlus, Zoom...), through which they should be reliably accessible, transparent from the very beginning.

■ Teachers should also be in exchange with each other in order to improve and develop good teaching formats and mutually benefit from one another.

■ Particularly with regard to the online nature of the semester, students' feedback should already be sought during the semester, as this allows teachers and students alike to work together on the further development of good course formats.

■ Students expect their teachers to ensure that requirements for (graded) coursework do not exceed the permissible limitations. During the first online semester, many students experienced their workload to be much higher than in previous semesters. It is important for students to be made aware of which assignments are integral to the course, which ones are compulsory study requirements (graded or not) and which ones are voluntary exercises.

■ Teachers should have understanding for students not always being able to meet deadlines for submitting assignments (e.g. if deadlines overlap). Deadlines should be clearly communicated and made transparent right from the start. Delayed submissions (e.g. due to technical difficulties, care obligations) should not directly lead to loss of credit.

■ Regular submissions of coursework (e.g. weekly), which are solely linked to the synchronous attendance format, must not be used as a means of controlling attendance.

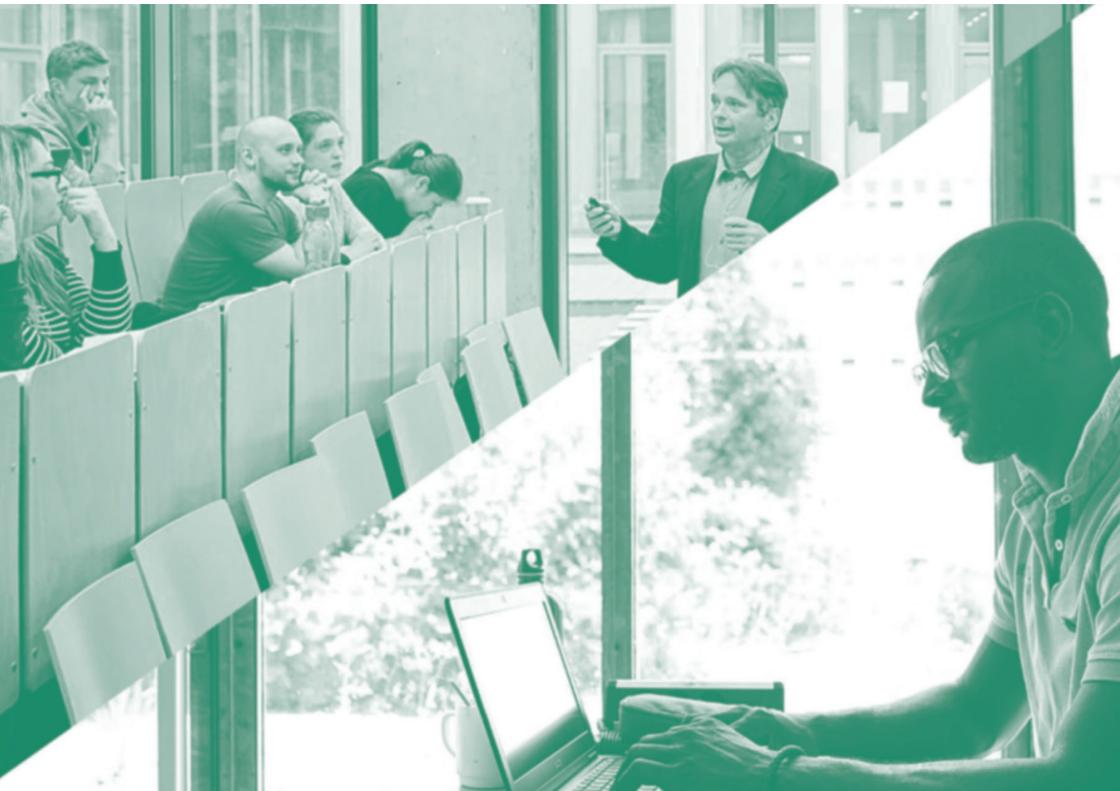
■ Students expect course programmes to be made as interactive as possible despite their corona-induced online formats. Therefore, teachers should make every effort within their scope of possibilities to ensure that courses are not solely composed of self-study (i.e. assignment materials aren't only being distributed, but students are given opportunities to discuss these materials and to clarify questions). Discussion and discourse are important parts of an academic education.

Students are aware of the particular technical challenges teachers are faced with when it comes to online course formats. They expect teachers to consider and include new media options which would be beneficial to the variety of course curricula and would be suitable for course programmes. All those involved are aware that such new developments can be bumpy, especially in the beginning, but this should not detract from the general potential these developments hold.

Students are aware that interactive study is made easier by turning on cameras. We therefore consider it unproblematic if the desire for cameras being switched on is expressed by teachers for video sessions. But there should not be any disadvantages for students with switched-off cameras. Making it compulsory for students to turn on their cameras (outside of examination situations) is unauthorized. We reject the obligation to justify why a camera is not switched on, as this may require students to expose very private life circumstances/situations.

We greatly appreciate the effort many teachers at Bielefeld University put into their courses.

We would like to emphasize that the general situation of many students is currently under additional strain, mainly due to financial and other difficulties.



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