

*Dear students, employees and teachers at the Freie University of Berlin,
Dear university management and leading positions,
Dear president Univ.-Prof. Dr. Günter M. Ziegler,*

We, a group of teaching profession-students at the FU, as well as different supporting organizations and initiatives, are writing this open letter out of a need that results from our unbearable experiences of racism and sexism at the university. The serious consequences of the ignorance that students have been exposed to for decades are the reason why we are urgently calling for change.

In seminars, students repeatedly experience racist and sexist attacks, by lecturers themselves, but also by students, without lecturers intervening. There is no compulsory discussion of racism, sexism and other inhuman ideologies in teacher training seminars. As a result, such violent situations are often not even recognized and are regularly produced by lecturers. Most recently it became known from a teachers linguistics seminar, how a lecturer ceaselessly pronounced and wrote the 'N-word' without censoring, in order to lead a discussion and by that, revealing a serious lack of knowledge on anti-racist research.¹ This is not an isolated incident. A large number of teacher students have experienced in their bachelor's and master's degree that the N-word and other racist insults are being said and legitimized without censorship or trigger warning and that racist attributions are normalized. We hereby issue a trigger warning for the descriptions in the next paragraph.

Even in a seminar of the special-needs education degree, which should thematically deal with interculturality and anti-racism², the lecturer directly announced that she had no anti-racist knowledge. It happens all the time that teachers avoid reading words like 'Racism' loudly and thus change the content of the questions asked when they have written inquiries in the seminar room. During the seminar, they continuously avoided important political terms such as "white" and the professors' very hesitant and random questions to students made it clear that there is no appropriate vocabulary for such a discourse at university. Profs even described Refugees as 'problematic immigration of malnourished brains'. More frightening examples of racist continuities in the teaching profession that our fellow students sent to us, can be found in the footnote.³

As a result of these attacks and discrimination, the recurring psychologically stressful mechanisms such as racial gaslighting, derailing, emotional tax etc. are so unbearable and damaging for affected students that depression, anxieties etc. developed or worsened in the last semester of 2020. But the emotional state of the few BIPOC students is not the only serious consequence that results from this approach. Conversely, the structural component of a racist teacher course means that racist ideas, especially in German schools, will continue to determine processes: The undesired confrontation with theories of racism and how racism has shaped society in this country has existential consequences for children and young people. Not only the labor- or housing market, but especially access to education and the achievement of educational degrees is seriously negatively influenced by the predominantly white teachers and a racist education in Berlin. To date, in 2021, the teaching profession has

¹ Dr. P.'s reasoning was based on the fact that Martin Luther King Jr. used the word 'Negro' and this would be proof, that even non-racist people can freely use the N-word uncensored.

² There is exactly one in the teaching-area: in the masters degree of special-needs education

³ E.g. in the regular teacher training (LBW), in the seminar accompanying the school internship, there was even a brief discussion of so-called 'prejudices': In one session, names of children were linked to characteristics in which, for example, 'Sophie - can play the violin' and 'Murat - cannot do arithmetic'. The task was to draw pictures of the children that we would expect when these children would come into our classes. When a few students began to paint stick people, the lecturer spoke of 'boycott', that these students acted as if they had no prejudices. When it was pointed out that the conversation about it shouldnt involve reproduction or solidification (some fellow students were already using their crayons), the 'malicious boycott' was still implied. This task was also not reflected upon or discussed further. The session was over before some could even share what they had painted.

not assumed any responsibility to deal critically, empathically, productively and, above all, consciously and compulsorily with the prevailing structures.

According to the School Act (laws), teaching for the training of teachers is already responsible for enabling people to impart democratic values in their later professional life. In their office, teachers undertake to become an active part of shaping society in which everyone is equally entitled to human dignity and freedom and no one is exposed to ideologies of inequality. A principle of democratic education is equality for all people and genders. Racist ideology, however, is based on the opposite of this basic assumption and therefore not only opposes an education for democracy, but works actively against it. Anti-racist education is therefore a prerequisite, especially in Germany, in order to meet the obligation of non-discriminatory democratic education. Apart from that, we see the new anti-discrimination law is regularly violated.⁴ Unfortunately, we can confirm that through ableisms, classisms, racisms and sexism students were discriminated against without consequences.

German institutions therefore have clear anti-racist responsibility through the course of their history. By now, it is getting clear that Germany has not been denazified, that racist and right-wing ideologies accompany us self-evidently and that these even have deadly consequences to this day. The youngest person killed in the Hanau attack, Said Nesar Hashemi, was 21 years old. Also in solidarity with the now founded Bildungsinitiative Ferhat Unvar, we would like to draw attention to the racist continuities in Germany and the links to a racist education system and we now publicly call on the Freie Universität zu Berlin to implement our demands immediately.

There must be a compulsory and sustained confrontation with anti-racist educational work in teachers courses at Freie Universität so that there is lasting change of the situation, both within Freie Universität and at Berlin's schools. We expect a reflexive examination of racism and structures of power within the Freie Universität, the result of which is not symbolic actions, but a concrete anti-racist practice. It should be usual for the Freie Universität and all teachers, as well as all students, to deal sustainably with historically anchored structures of discrimination. The actual intended education and training mission is not subject-specific and can therefore not be outsourced to classes of politics. It affects all teachers and all areas of any educational institution at this moment.

Since a long time already, it is overdue, to make lasting changes to the school system and teachers' education. Language support such as 'German as a second language' (DaZ), which is now a compulsory part of the degree, is also characterized by *othering* and racist reproductions, according to reports from fellow students, and cannot hide the fact anymore that there is no discussion of mechanisms of oppression. Due to the great influence of the school system on people and their realities of life, we now have to draw attention to how prospective teachers are currently still being trained. It is shocking what our fellow students tell us about the economization of the school system and the conditions in the seminars. These grievances need to be uncovered and changed as quickly as possible in order to steer the structural power of the school system in a new, anti-racist and non-discriminatory way.

Individual student initiatives from a wide variety of departments have already tried to draw the universities attention to the grievances and to implement anti-racist demands. In these cases, unfortunately, only aimless discussions were held with the initiatives, which resulted in

⁴ "The LADG protects against discrimination on grounds the sex, the ethnic origin, a racist attribution, anti-Semitic attribution, the language, religion, the worldview, a disability, a chronic illness, the age, sexual identity, gender identity as well as social status. "

classifying the demands as "naive" and not implementing them.⁵ We are not willing to have those discussions.

For this reason, we have formulated clear requirements below. What we want and what we demand is a visible, sustainable and structural change in teacher training, which includes all subjects, as well as the teaching profession, as well as all other school-related structures within Freie Universität:

- **We call for the talk about 'diversity' to stop blurring genuine anti-racist behavior**
- **We call for teaching material to be checked from an anti-racist post-colonial perspective by professional external expertise.**
- **We demand further training for lecturers on colonialism and racism, for example through associations or individuals** such as Each One Teach One (EOTO), I-Päd (Intersectional Pedagogy Initiative), the educational initiative Ferhat Unvar, Tupoka Ogette, Prof. Dr. Karim Fereidooni, Josephine Apraku, or similar, especially when these seminars are supposed to give anti-racist education.
- **We demand at least one compulsory module on 'Anti-Racism and Discrimination' for all teacher training students**, which includes anti-racist specialist didactics and sources'

It is particularly frustrating at these moments when a so-called 'diversity process' is initiated by the university, which again primarily requires the input of students and the focus is not on the access and well-being of those affected, but the receipt of another meaningless certificate for the university, which is e.g. just as meaningless as the plaque 'School without Racism - School with Courage'. Colleagues who are already teaching in schools often tell us how meaningless this badge is on schools and how inherently normalized and racist things are in teachers' rooms. These are not isolated cases, the chain of events we experienced represents structured racist conditions. The attitude that racism could only be a conscious act of right-winged people must be discarded and the fact must be recognized that this is not only expressed through prejudice and is distracting from the structural context by 'individualizing' the problem through idealism. Racism does not only show on the basis of individual actions and thus cannot be remedied by appeals to your own character, but as a consequence of centuries of colonial striving for power. It has to be structurally and systemically rethought and approached as a social condition. Dealing with materialistic theories of racism for example, is therefore a corresponding basis.

If this letter is not implemented, we see it as a racist continuity of German institutions. We now expect you as the head of the university and faculties to take appropriate measures immediately. We will continue documenting the racist incidents, educate ourselves and others on anti-racism and organize against continued racist conditions.

⁵ "A student group at the FU when asked about what happened: Last year our student group demanded curricular and structural changes that could begin dismantling systems of oppression and establish epistemic justice at the university. We were prompted in our initial encounters with faculty members to take the bureaucratic route in order to achieve any change. Unfortunately, instead of actively working to implement the demands, faculty questioned their necessity in the first place. We witnessed problematic discussions on the validity of content warnings and the "naïveté" of our demands in general, with suggestions that we lower our expectations of what could feasibly be accomplished. In an institute devoid of structural antiracist measures, we were asked to compromise and focus on implementing just one of our demands, as if the safety of BIPoC students could be achieved through one action alone. While some faculty at the university understand what is at stake in the fight against racism in academia and have made steps towards addressing these deep rooted problems, the excuses, defensiveness and unjust criticism we've received from others further proves just how far the FU has to go."

Regards,

Students of the Initiative for intersectional teaching-studies Berlin, as well as

AStA der Freien Universität Berlin

Fachschaftsinitiative Gender, Intersektionalität und Politik (FSI GSP) der Freien Universität

BIPoC Referat der Freien Universität Berlin

AStA der Universität Potsdam

Referat für Bildungspolitik und Lehre der Universität Potsdam

Antirassismusreferat der Universität Potsdam

Prof. Dr. Karim Fereidooni

Schüler:innen der Initiative gerechte Bildung Berlin

I-Päd (Initiative intersektionale Pädagogik)

Each One Teach One (EOTO) e.V.