Independent student newspaper of Humboldt-University
since November 1989

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UnAuf

Refugees at Humboldt

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DIE ANDERE AM GENITAL
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Editors' letter

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The UnAufgefordert has been issued regularly since November 17 1989 at Humboldt-University Berlin and is one of the oldest student newspapers in Germany. Since then it covers the HU's path by independent and professional reporting about research and teaching, student life and culture. It has already been awarded two times as best German-language student newspaper by the Pro-Campus Presse initiative.

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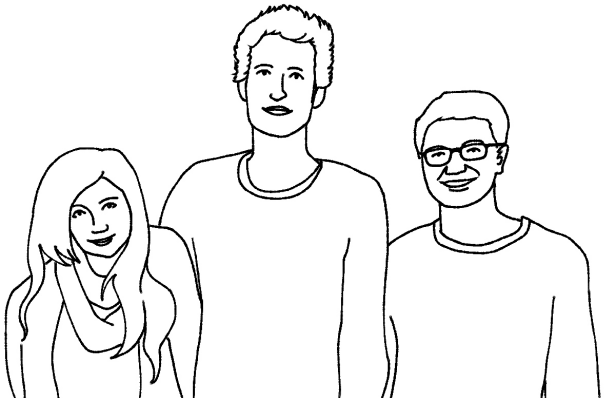
Issue # 233

Dear readers,

No, your eyes aren't deceiving you, the words you're reading are English – and so is the rest of this issue. That's right, we translated every word of every article. Some were even written in English originally. This issue is the result of days and days of work and was only made possible through the help of our team of translators and editors – thank you all very much.
So why did we bother, especially considering most of our readers are German? Well, to be honest, we probably won't do it again. It just takes too long and we need too many people to help. But on this occasion we want to give a special welcome to the many internationals who come to Humboldt-University to study. Last summer term they made up 16.3 per cent of our student population. That's over 5,000 people – the same number of copies we print – which makes one UnAuf for every international!
Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, ever larger numbers of refugees are arriving in Berlin, many of them with academic backgrounds. Our university has started an initiative to allow refugees to take part in courses, although they still aren't able to take exams until they've fully registered. For many, the opportunity to continue studying provides a haven from overcrowded residential homes, uncertainty about staying in Germany and memories of war and terror.
Also in this issue: stories on study space law suits, self-driving cars and fashion created especially for little people. And don't forget to find out which library suits you best with our teen-magazine-styled psycho test!

Most importantly, enjoy the very first UnAuf completely in English.

Your chief editors
Josi, Stephan and Jasper



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The urban neurotic: My new belt

Our columnist is often troubled by everyday life. Some of his problems may seem trivial to others but for him they can cause deep identity crises.

Written by: Hannes Schrader — Translation: Anna-Elizabeth Shakespeare — Illustration: Lisa Tegtmeier

In my recent endeavours to buy a belt, it occurred to me that my manliness was under threat. It isn't looking good for us men. I keep reading about how we aren't allowed to compliment women, or laugh at jokes about blondes, and that we have to make space for women in boardrooms. Men are obviously living in fear – and I'm suffering because of them. When I was searching for my belt, the real imperial masculinity hit me straight in the groin with quite some force. Men, the shop assistant explained, wear belt buckles the size of smartphones, adorned with skeletons and dragons. Glaring brand names are welcome too. I flitted through the shelves as the shop assistant watched me, standing legs apart, eyes fixed on the belts. He wanted to sell me true manliness. But I don't want to be a real man, I just want to make sure my trousers aren't hanging around my knees without having to hold a shield out in front of me.

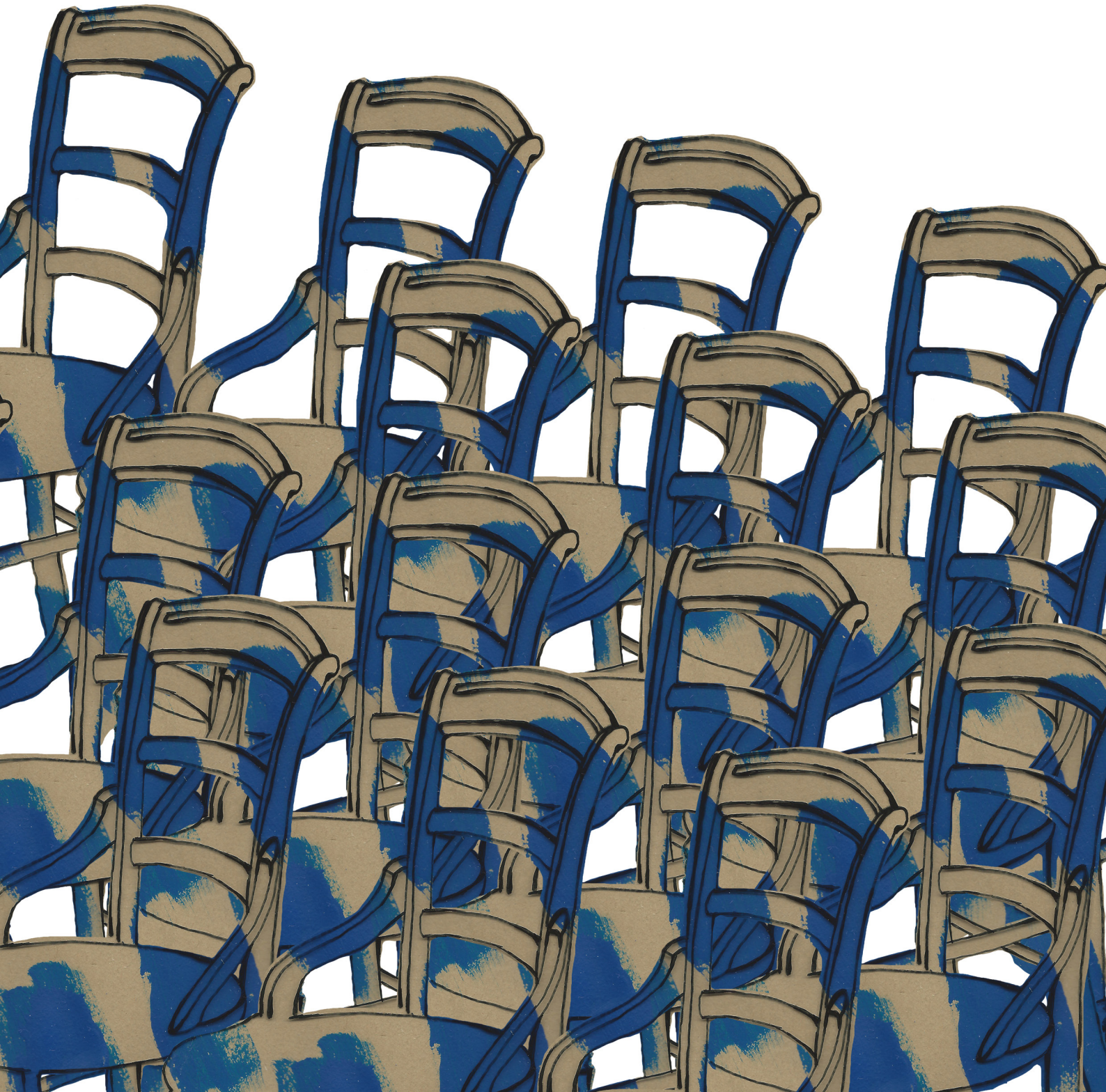
The buckle is supposed to ward against the homosexualisation and feminisation of society, which the threatened man feels exposed to. It signals: beware! The guy wearing these trousers is a 'real man.'eSimple buckles that can be undone single handedly are only available for women. According to the fashion industry I'm not a man until I become one. They make their ads especially for me, promising the right cold drink could finally turn me into a real man. With the right buckle I could be holding a busty blonde in one arm and pick up the heaviest dumb-bell with the other. Honestly, I'd rather be the kind of guy who sticks to the editorial deadline, remembers to wish his friends a happy birthday, and phones his mother more often. But no one cares about these aspirations, it's unattractive for men to have them.

I gave the buckle back to the shop assistant and explained that I wasn't interested in letting the fashion industry dictate to me what makes a man a man. Skinny-jeans are acceptable, I can wear cardigans my grandma would wear or low cut t-shirts – it's only the belt buckle that's left behind. It is the final bastion of the fear-ridden man who is sweating testosterone from head to toe. With this in mind I stumbled into a second-hand shop, where a fabulous belt immediately caught my eye. Plain, well-made and universally wearable. Perfect! After I'd paid for it, the shop assistant approvingly informed me that belt used to be part of the US Air Force uniform. A real man's belt.

Hannes Schrader (24, History and Economics) is the winner of the UnAuf fat burn challenge – obviously.

Refugees at Humboldt

The future of refugees is a topic on everyone's lips. Debates are widespread and people are all shouting at the top of their voices – but that is not to say that they are helping those who are the subject of discussion. In this issue, we offer a pragmatic approach: What are the actual hurdles that refugees who want to continue studying at Humboldt-University are facing? Are HU's initiatives of any help? Here you will be able to read the story of Said Ali Hossin who came from Afghanistan to Berlin. In his own words, he describes how going from living in a refugee hostel to studying at university has been like a move from hell to heaven.



You can look, but you can't touch

The HU has been offering to asylum-seekers a Gasthörerschaft, the option to be a guest student or auditor, since this winter semester. However, the problems aren't really solved for those who really want to study.

Written by: Hannes Schrader, Medea Sisti — Translation: David Robinson — Illustration: Kate Boss

The HU is now offering a Gasthörerschaft, a guest study programme, questionably intended to solve the problems student refugees have.

Ahmad Aboras is merely a number in Germany. He is simply referenced as „BU22" on his waiting card at the State Office for Health and Social Care (LaGeSo) in Berlin. For three weeks he has been waiting eleven hours each day for his reference number to appear on the display. Waiting simply to be allowed to go inside and register himself as a refugee.

"I've pictured seeing my lucky number appear". A "lucky number" he calls it, as if he were about to win a round of cards in a casino, after going all-in. He is now sitting in the Student Service Centre (SSC) of Humboldt-University (HU), holding the small card in his hands, where his waiting number is written. Yet again Ahmad is just a number.

He has been in Berlin for one month. He comes from Aleppo, where he studied economics, he explains. He has large brown eyes, his voice is calm and relaxed. His English is near perfect, although he excuses himself when he can't find the right word. He wants to continue his Bachelor's degree in Berlin.

It is for this reason that Ahmad has been waiting for an appointment at the advisory service for refugees, available at the HU since the beginning of the winter term. It is here that refugees can enquire in German, English, Farsi, and Arabic about how to study in Berlin. When the service first opened it was full of refugees. Since then, in the third week of term, interest is clearly waning: in the two hours that the service is open for, barely 20 refugees show up.

The advisory service is the HU's first level of commitment to student refugees. The second level is the guest study programme, allowing refugees to attend lectures and seminars. According to the HU, 71 refugees have already applied to the programme, and two thirds of them are already attending lectures. Theoretically the guest study programme is open to all, but it is mainly used by pensioners. Thus, allowing refugees to partake in the program isn't necessarily a gesture of good faith. What is new is that refugees are not required to pay; the costs are covered by the Berlin Senate.

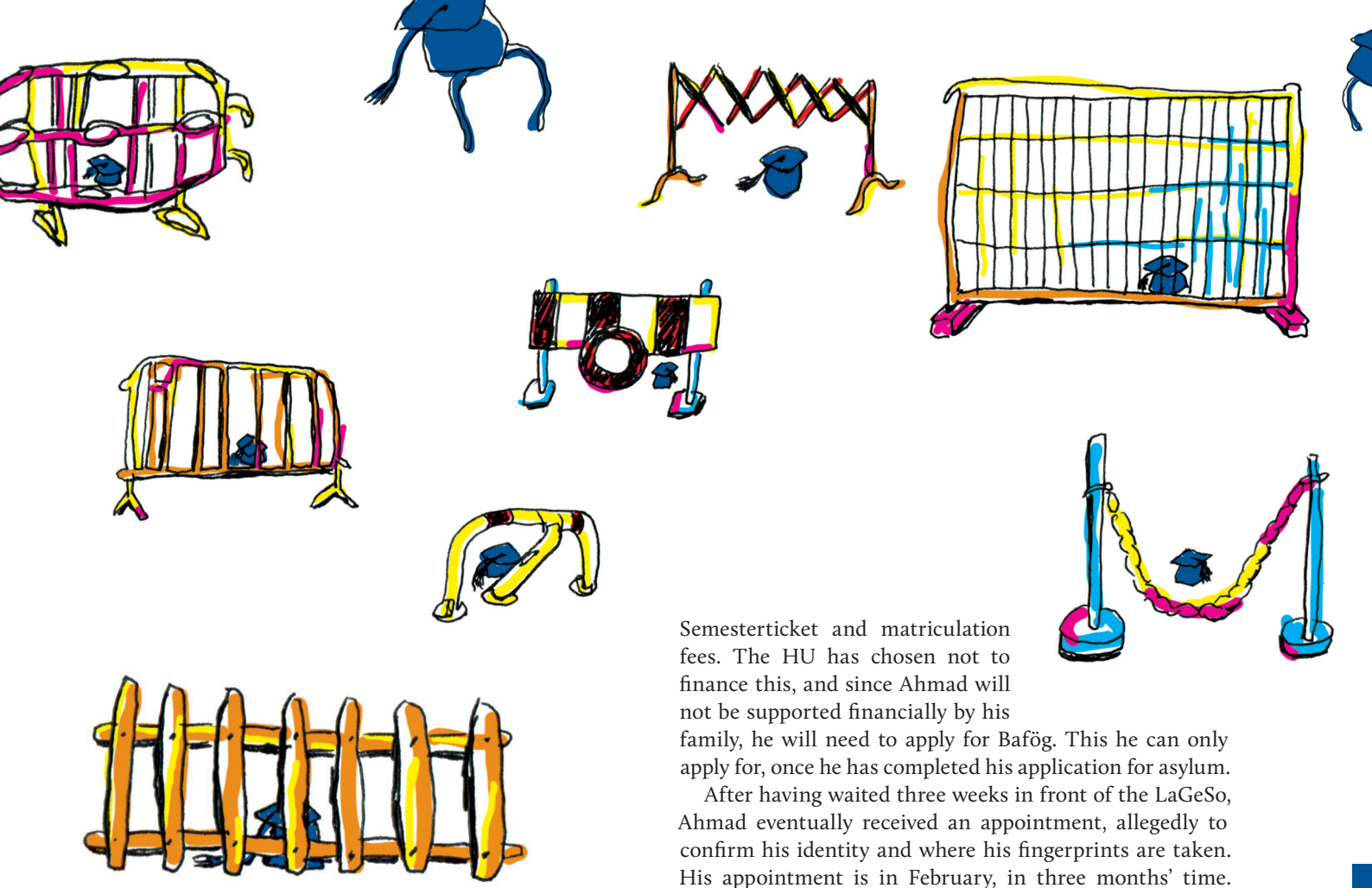
"The guest study programme makes it possible to get into the HU", says Ingo Weber, responsible for the programme. Weber normally responds to questions posed by pensioners, who wish to refresh their knowledge of Alexander the Great. Since the beginning of term, however, he now also responds to the questions refugees have. Are refugees content? "A quarter of refugees used to study Medicine or a technical degree, we refer them to the TU and the Charité." The TU has its own guest study programme, the Charité, on the other hand, does not.

"We rarely get disappointments, rather responses in the sense of: 'we'll see what happens'", Weber explains. There isn't anything more to do for the refugees, as they are explicitly just guests, not guest students: they are neither allowed to sit exams, nor do they receive grades. A degree started abroad can only be finished if a regular place is attained at university. Theoretically anyone in Germany can apply for a university place, whether refugee status or not. However, this requires qualifications equivalent to the German Abitur, enough money to afford the degree, and sufficient proficiency of the German language. Since all Bachelor degrees are taught in German, applicants require at least Level C1 German language. That is the second-highest grade for non-native speakers.

> **"I've pictured seeing my lucky number appear"**

After his visit to the advisory service, Ahmad, holding his application in his hands, explains the guest study programme won't really help him. He heard that German language courses are available at the HU. "My priority is to learn the German language", he says. Up till now he still isn't able to learn German here.

At the LaGeSo he was given the details of a language school in Kreuzberg, which works in collaboration with the State Office. He was promised that the school would call him as soon as a new language course began. "But they didn't call, so I called them a couple of weeks later and they told me the class was full and had started already." Ahmad is still waiting.



While the FU offers a special refugee programme, in order to ease the transition for studying in Germany, learning geographical knowledge amongst other things, the HU seems to be taking the easy way. With a programme that has no costs and that already exists, an advisory service that can neither advise nor really help, the university isn't doing anything for the refugees.

But the university wants to help Ahmad. From 2016 free German language courses for refugees are to be available at the HU to enable study in Germany. "We have thus applied to the Senate for a six-figure grant" and "between 50 and 100 language places" should be created, says Jochen Ley, director of Academic Affairs at the HU. The Language Centre at the HU already has a Department of German as a Foreign Language, which will organise the language courses, says Ley. The courses will probably take place during the evening, all over the HU, when there is enough space on campus.

The Berlin Senate has freed up three million Euros to finance the language courses. It may be a while, however, until the courses actually start. "Starting it depends on the Senate administration – if it goes quickly we will start in January", says Ley at HU. The Senate is just checking the applications now. No one can tell Ahmad how long he'll have to wait.

Even when Ahmad's German is sufficient for the purpose of studying, Ahmad will have to finance his degree himself. He heard that Syrians can study for free in Germany, he declares. Indeed the Federal Government does offer the grant scheme "Leadership for Syria", it is nevertheless exclusive, offering only 100 places. Universities can decide for themselves whether refugees are to pay for the Semesterticket and matriculation fees. The HU has chosen not to finance this, and since Ahmad will not be supported financially by his family, he will need to apply for Bafög. This he can only apply for, once he has completed his application for asylum.

After having waited three weeks in front of the LaGeSo, Ahmad eventually received an appointment, allegedly to confirm his identity and where his fingerprints are taken. His appointment is in February, in three months' time. Three months in which he could be learning German, if he had a course. "I feel bad because I don't have anything to do: I have three months, which is a lot of free time", he says.

Until then Ahmad only exists on a white sheet of paper, issued to him by the LaGeSo. He still has not received his temporary residence permit, which refugees receive when they apply for asylum, hence he is still very much at the beginning of the process. The outlook is that Ahmad will have to sit around for longer than three months.

In Dresden, people take to the streets every week, telling stories of criminal and lazy foreigners. Angela Merkel sits with Anne Will, stating "we'll manage it". While amidst the storm of debate sweeping through Germany since the beginning of summer and bringing everything into turmoil, Germany argues, helps, and hates, Ahmad sits at the heart of the storm. The waiting-room of the SSC, where Ahmad declares he doesn't want to sit around anymore, is where the heart of this storm lies.

Here the hate is small, and the questions tangible and great: when will the Senate make its decision regarding the language course that the HU wants to offer? How many places will be provided? When can Ahmad learn German? So that he is no longer just a number, but a citizen and fellow student. "In Syria I have no future", he says, "here in Germany I can find my dreams". Until his dreams come true, however, he shall require one thing: patience.

Hannes Schrader (24, History and Economics) und Medea Sisti (20, Italian and Russian)

“University reminds me what I’m capable of”

Said Ali Hossin, 32 years old and from Afghanistan participates in the guest students program within the HU-initiative for refugees which allows him the attendance of lectures free of charge.

Transliterated by Alexandra Ratke and Loretta Gomell — Photo: private

Anarchy versus modern city, two contrary worlds. I always feel crossing this border when I leave the Flüchtlingswohnheim in Wedding for my lectures at university. Chaos, conflicts and frustration determine the life in the Flüchtlingswohnheim. There is always tension, stress, insults. I complained to my roommate about him switching on the light in the middle of the night. Each of us insisted on his opinion. The conflict escalated and I ended up in the hospital. It is better to keep calm there, but I am always torn between adjusting and rearing up.

In general, I do not subordinate to other people, I do not cave in. Actually, I like to discuss. Fellow students at the university in Azerbaijan complimented me for my criticism. In Azerbaijan, I studied English Philology after leaving my home country Afghanistan in 2008 because of the insecurity and lack of freedom caused by the civil war. Why I left Azerbaijan? I have never felt welcomed there. For most of the people, I was just a foreigner. It was the UN who granted my status as a refugee, not the Azerbaijanian government. I had the impression of not being part of the whole.

I dreamed of a modern and organized country with perspectives. This is why I came to Germany. Since March 2015, I have the “residence authorisation for the residence of asylum applicants” – this is what the paper says which I am always carrying with me. It also explicitly says: “Studium nicht gestattet”. But Daniela, a volunteer teaching German in our Heim, told me about the guest program for refugees at the Humboldt University. I did not know what to expect, I only knew: There was something. So let’s go and find out what it is. After being informed about what the guest program really was all about, I was a little bit disappointed: I would not receive any points I could use for future studies. But that is still better than nothing. I would rather go to university than being in the Heim. If there are other guest auditors in my Heim? I guess I am the only one.

I have been a guest auditor since the beginning of this semester. Four days, which means ten hours per week, I attend lectures at the HU. I was allowed to choose five from all lectures which the university offers. As I have always been interested in politics – particularly now in regard to the situation of my home country –, I chose lectures in English with political content like Introduction to Social Movements, The Spaces of Migration, Approaches and debates in contemporary political theory. These lectures are the same lectures that the regularly matriculated HU students attend. We guest auditors come to the same rooms as you, listen to the same professors as you do, maybe we even sit next to each other. You would not even notice that I am a refugee, and almost no one does. I could not even tell if they would behave differently towards me if they knew about it. There is no regular contact between me and my fellow students, neither with the other refugees who participate on the program. We greet each other but usually there are no further conversations.

Although I do not understand each word the professors say, just being at the university increases my mind, my plans, makes me hopeful to the future. The conversations, discussions, knowledge and atmosphere here increase my curiosity, my mind is working fast. It reminds me of what I am able to do. When I am at university, I forget I am a refugee. I hope that I will be able to continue my studies in a Master as a regular student if I get the permission to stay. I would like to work in translating, teaching or reporting. But at the moment, I can only dream of it.

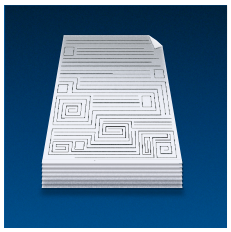
At the end of the day I will need to go back to the Wohnheim. When I leave university again for it, it is like going from heaven to hell, like entering a different world. When it all becomes too complicated, I just listen to my favourite song, “Imagine” by John Lennon. My favourite quote is “Imagine there’s no countries.”

Alexandra Ratke (19, Law) and Loretta Gomell (19, Culture Studies and Business Administration)

Welcome to the land of bureaucracy

Are German universities not allowed to or do they not want to accept refugees as regular student applicants? The legal definitions are complex and vary considerably between the federal states. Answers to the most important questions:

Written by: Nikola Schmidt, Josephine Schulz — Translation: Karin Louise Hermes — Illustration: Thomas Strobel



Do refugees have the right to university education in Germany?

In general, refugees may study at university in Germany, especially after a successful asylum-seeking process. Asylum-seekers, whose process is still on-going, may be prohibited by the Ausländerbehörde, the immigration office, from undertaking any university studies. The same goes for Geduldete, those refugees with only a temporary permit to remain in Germany, and who won't receive asylum, but cannot be extradited for an indefinite time. This is handled according to the individual federal states.

How is Berlin handling this?

Until recently, Berlin prohibited refugees from studying, if they were still being processed for asylum status. The Ausländerbehörde impressed the residence permit of these refugees with the addition "Studium nicht gestattet" or "Prohibited from Studies".

Since September 15, 2015, this ban has been lifted. According to the German Parliament, asylum-seekers are now only obligated to meet the appropriate academic requirements for university admission. Geduldete may still not undertake university studies in Berlin. This prohibition for Geduldete can expire after four years, as long as the refugee has received an acceptance from the university, and can prove that living expenses are being earned independently.

Which requirements must a refugee fulfill to study at a German university?

Access to higher education is handled differently in the individual federal states. There are, however, many commonalities, according to a survey by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung from August 25, 2015. This review inquired with the Ministries of Education of 12 federal states about their respective regulations and support systems. For example, proof of German language proficiency and a university entrance qualification, like a secondary school diploma, are binding. These requirements were agreed upon through a resolution by the Kultusministerkonferenz in 1985 and are currently being revised. Understandably, it can be difficult or even impossible for refugees to provide documents or official paperwork. Decent political willpower can still take account of more considerate approaches. This is revealed in the case of North Rhine-Westphalia, whose Ministry of Education has a "mild standard". It recommends that so-called substitute certificates, such as reasonable explanations and general education examinations, give a margin of flexibility in their assessment.

Asylum-seekers must also provide sufficient proof of funding. This can amount to several thousand Euro depending on the federal state. Refugees are only entitled to Bafög student loans once they are successful in their asylum-seeking process.

And at the HU?

The HU requests a certification of proficiency of Level C1 German from foreign student applicants. Additionally the secondary school or most recent university diplomas have to be submitted as a certified copy, and translated by licensed interpreters. This is a huge obstacle for refugees, as they typically don't have the original documents. Costs are also a hurdle, since the application system Uni-Assist involves a fee, and then administrative fees are mandatory upon matriculation. If the secondary school diploma doesn't allow for a direct admission to tertiary education, the refugee can apply to a Studienkolleg, a preparatory college course, via Uni-Assist. This Studienkolleg prepares aspiring university students for an exam over a year-long course, which attests the qualification to university entry. For the Studienkolleg application, interested students must prove German language proficiency Level B2.

Nikola Schmidt (25, Law) and Josephine Schulz (25, Social Sciences)

The magician

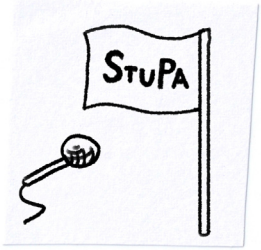
Thomas Lehmann, 19
History and Social Sciences

Written by: Nora Ackermann — Translation: Karin Louise Hermes — Photo: private

“Let me show you a trick.” With swift fingers Thomas shuffles the deck of cards and fans them out in front of his face. He holds a lighter up to the lower corner of the card on the far left, nothing happens. Suddenly – a flash of fire. I’m impressed. Thomas tells me that everything began with a card trick that his brother had shown him. “I was so fascinated, I really wanted to know how it worked,” he said. For the last seven years this 19-year-old has been performing his magic act under the pseudonym “Aramis the Magician”. Meanwhile, what began as a hobby has turned into a lucrative student job. You can book him on the weekends – for company events or private parties. He also regularly showcases his cunning skills in Berlin restaurants. Recently he performed for French senators – a real highlight for the native Frenchman. During the week he studies at the Humboldt-University and would like to work in politics later on. He is particularly interested in French-German relations. However, he cannot imagine giving up his career as a magician for that. For him, magic and university studies complement one another: higher education gives him the theoretical competencies, while magic tricks give him social ones. To begin with he usually performed in front of a random audience on the street, but now at booked events. This helped him to overcome his shyness, Thomas explains. He especially enjoys working with other people. “To conjure up a sense of wonder and amazement for my audience, now that’s really magical!”

Parliament Report

Insights of the Students' Representatives



On October 14 and November 12 the Student Parliament (StuPa) held sessions. They voted, petitioned and resolved.

Money

Last June the StuPa agreed to increase the contribution that is paid by students to the student departement every semester from 7 to 8,50 Euros by the summer semester 2016. The increase has now been published. The members of the StuPa chairmanship, additionally, received a single payment of 670 Euros. Henceforth it is planned that they will recieve a monthly allowance amounting to the Bafög maximum rate, given that the chairmanship nowadays does not get paid for their efforts. It was not possible to pass the resolution as there were not enough voters present in November.

More money

The members of the StuPa assert that they are generally open-minded about the possibility of Humboldt-University becoming a member of the student loan association (Studentische Darlehnskasse). However, according to the StuPa the HU itself shall pay the membership fee of 25 cents per student per semester, without any subsidy from the StuPa. For this reason, the parliament refused the HU's proposal to split the cost of membership.

A membership to the loan association would students allow to actually take out loans from the organisation. The association offers generally convenient conditions for students, for example relatively small interest rates. Most of Berlin's universities which are members of the loan association pay the membership fee on their own without charging the student body. The StuPa suggests other offers of students funding, e.g. those from the RefRat.

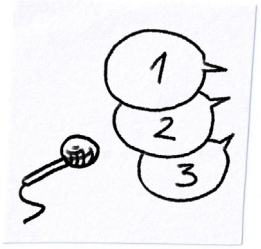
New Room

The students wish to offer premises to the Berliner Senate, fitted with bathrooms, which are not explicitly used for backup devices, to be used as accommodation for refugees.

The president and the engineering department are requested to publicly accept the students' request and process the necessary changes for its implementation.

3 questions for...

Our reporter Lina Dornblüth met with Juliane Ziegler from the AWESOME list



Juliane Ziegler, 22, studies History and Art History and is a founding member of the AWESOME list.

You support the idea of making university attendance possible for refugees. How can we improve the situation?
The decision to allow refugees, as external participants, to attend lectures at the Humboldt-University is definitely a step in the right direction. However, the information event showed that although this change is welcome and in demand, the quantity and quality of information offered was insufficient. Next we should be looking into ways of offering more courses to refugees and how to combine these with free language courses. In the future, refugees should be able to obtain a place at university in order to begin or resume their studies.

Which other issues are important to you?
It is very important to us that we represent the interests of the student associations and that we try to increase the transparency of that which is being discussed in the student parliament for the entire student body, including all associations. We also want to make sure that the funds currently allocated to the student associations do not diminish, and that the opportunities existing for the associations remain. We hope that in the future, the university committees can work together more closely.

Why did you found a new list, instead of simply joining an existing one?
For me, the work in the association has always been a priority. I view my work at the university as a means of informing others what is happening within the student parliament. When you become politically active at university, you realise that the numerous different associations and student bodies are not very well connected. The possibility of communication may exist but they are not used, or are not able to be used, as many people do not have enough time.

In this series one of our reporters is meeting each time a different member of the StuPa.

President? I'd rather not

First the promising news: There's a candidate for the position of HU President. A few days later though: Rejection. The problem of finding new leadership for the university has been prolonged for almost a year. Now, it's the same game all over again.

Written by: Jasper Riemann, Josephine Schulz and Stephan Detert — Translation: Karin Louise Hermes

1. What's been happening

Nearing the end of his 5-year term, Jan-Hendrik Olbertz, current President of the Humboldt University Berlin (HU), wanted to finally know: Either the Chancellorship model is introduced, or he would leave. The Konzil, highest conciliar body of the HU, had no likelihood for majority support on Olbertz's proposal, the Constitution remained as it is.

On March 19 President Olbertz made it official, he was not going to run for another term. That was unfortunate timing, since the initial election day of May 5 could not be kept. Early April a new election day was announced: July 7, 2015 – on the condition that a suitable candidate would be found.

And this candidate was taking his time. For a while there was utter silence in the Findungskommission. Up until October, when it was determined that the Professor for Medicine Martin Lohse was to be President. His audit on November 10 was, however, cancelled. Lohse told the Konzil a day before the audit: He didn't want to be President after all.

2. How is the HU-President elected?

At the HU, there is an 8-person selection committee, the Findungskommission. Four committee members each are determined by the Kuratorium, and four by the Konzil. The Kuratorium advertises the position for the Presidency. The Findungskommission then holds the interviews with the possible candidates and expresses its recommendation. If this recommendation is confirmed by the Kuratorium, the candidate will be proposed for election to the Konzil. The Konzil is comprised of 61 members, among them 31 university lecturers, who make up the majority of the Konzil, various staff members, and 10 students.

3. Why didn't this work?

That Martin Lohse backed out before the election on such short-notice, clearly surprised everyone.

Lohse himself explained his defaulting on the position as having misunderstood the responsibilities. For an administrative reform he would be the wrong candidate.

In various Berlin newspapers, however, it was speculated that he was in parallel discussions with other research centres about a higher position, for instance at the Max-Delbrück-Centrum. The conditionality of Lohse's preliminary acceptance may have also been misunderstood by the candidate and the university. The University leadership announced that Lohse had undersigned a written declaration of commitment. Lohse himself told the Tagesspiegel the agreement had been that the decision would only be upon exploratory discussions.

4. What's going to happen now?

After the cancellation by Lohse the whole procedure has to start all over again. The Findungskommission has to again hold interviews with possible candidates, give a recommendation to the Kuratorium, who after a declaration of commitment is proposed to the Konzil for election. Now it will conceivably be even more difficult to find an interested candidate, as no one wants to be sloppy seconds after Lohse's rebuff. The next election date cannot be foreseen by the University leadership yet, they said. Considering the constant postponement of the schedule this past year, the subsequent presentation by the next candidate may take another while.

5. Is the HU ungovernable?

According to Emmermann, the chairman of the Kuratorium, Lohse in his declining the position, had brought up similar points that had already swayed Olbertz to not run a second term. Among others, the difficulty of an administrative reform. Representatives of the various university ranks of faculty, staff, and students, declared their surprise that Lohse had never in discussions come across as being daunted by these issues.

It's hard to say if the political structure of the university body and a future administrative reform made the appointment as University president an unattractive one. Also because the Findungskommission won't open the discussions to the public and doesn't communicate how many candidates were interested in the position, which reservations they had, and why they may have been rejected. Lastly, there's also the question why the proposed candidate, in spite of previous demands, was never a woman.

Jasper Riemann (20, History and Philosophy),
Josephine Schulz (25, Social Studies),
Stephan Detert (25, Medicine)

Don’t blame Agnes, it’s Gabi’s fault

Agnes aggravates, Agnes angers, Agnes is a mystery to most people. But it turns out there is actually more to the system than appears. Here’s an attempt to get behind this enigma.

Written by: Luisa Jabs — Translation: Karin Louise Hermes — Illustration: Svenson

By the time Orientation Week comes around, those admitted to the Humboldt-University (HU) will have become acquainted with a charming little companion. AGNES (Agnes from now on) is the name of the Computer Lady that holds all the power over timetables and exam registration at HU. But be careful, Agnes can be quite cranky. If you get on the wrong side of her she won’t hesitate to exclude you from the exact course you need to complete your module or place you in the only seminar that clashes with your lectures.

Older students don’t bother questioning why Agnes does this; they already know that the Computer Lady is both unfathomable and unpredictable.

To tackle problems with the difficult Lady, students should turn to Agnes-Support. The CMS staff know Agnes inside out and can explain just how she ticks.

Ingo Rauschenberg, team coordinator for CMS campus management, explains that it wasn’t his six-person team who originally programmed Agnes but the cooperative named HIS eG, which is in Hanover. The HU just gave Agnes her name. The Computer Lady is used at several other universities in Germany, where she could be called Peter, Jessica, or Miriam.

Sandy Pleißner is the head of the Examination Service Group of Academic Affairs that oversees Agnes-Support. She doesn’t describe Agnes as a single Lady but as an entire family. Agnes is, if you like, the mother of several tiny subgroups. “QIS POS” is for example the exam administration, “QIS SOS” is the student self-administration, and “LSF” which stands for “Lehre Studium Forschung” (or “Teaching Studies Research”), is the catalogue of courses. One of the tasks that LSF has is to allocate students to courses.

But LSF itself is also just another unit a level above several other smaller ones. An entirely different Lady is in charge of the isolated task of allocating courses: Agnes’ moody granddaughter, GABI (in the following spelled as Gabi). Gabi is a distinct unit and part of LSF. After she has received the students’ information she attempts to allocate courses based on her assessment of to what extent students meet the following conditions:

1. Students in cases on hardship, for example those with professional sports careers.
2. Which priority did the student give this course on Agnes? Is the seminar part of the student’s course? Will doing an exam in it contribute to the completion of their degree?
3. Is the seminar mandatory for the student?

If these factors conflict with one another, Gabi has to make a decision. And she has rules for this. The student has the best chances of being placed in the seminar if he 1. is the students one of exceptional circumstances, 2. wants to attend a course that he can be examined on and helps him complete his degree and 3. wants to attend a course that is mandatory for him.

The individual factors are of varying levels of importance. A student is a case of hardship but only wants to attend the course as an elective, is less likely to get it than one who needs it to complete their degree but isn’t a case of hardship.

But why are Gabi and all her complex calculations even necessary? “The method of first come, first served would be unfair,” says Pleißner. “There would be no guaranteed compensation for the disadvantaged, and a Programmstudent would lose out as their HU-Accounts are often only set up at the beginning of the semester.”

In conclusion, Agnes is a bigger deal than students think. And usually when things don’t work out it isn’t even her fault. Even if Gabi, Agnes, and all their other relatives seem very chaotic, one thing they are for sure is math geniuses. Working with a very complex algorithm they attempt to allocate courses as fairly as possible. So the next time you’re about to have a nervous breakdown and are ready to dump Agnes for good – take a deep breath and remember this: The Lady only has the best of intentions.

Luisa Jabs (19, History and Social Studies) supports same sex marriage of mature Computer Ladies.

The expensive backdoor into university

Bad school grades? No problem, for a few thousand Euros you can study anyway, just file a court case. That is how the unofficial application procedure works at the HU.

Written by: Jasper Riemann — Translation: Louise Brenner and David Robinson — Illustration: Lisa Tegtmeier

For a long time now, Laura has not been attending her physics lectures. She studies Rehabilitation Sciences and Physics in order to become a teacher at Humboldt-Universität Berlin (HU). This winter term she applied for a different subject and was also rejected for a second time running, Arbeitslehre at Technische Universität Berlin. She recently received the first bill from the Court of Administrators. According to Laura "Everyone has the right to study what they want." This is what she is now claiming in court.

In actual fact it is true. Everyone does have the right to study what they want. This derives from article 12 of the German Constitution, the right of free choice of employment. German universities are therefore compelled to take on as many applicants as they can. This is the case that the law suit is making, that the university has not accepted its full capacity. If the court confirms this the university will be obliged to accept the claimant.

Filing suit for university places as an exercise of a basic right – that sounds pretty legitimate. But in fact, it's not that easy. Because what are people to think of someone getting into university because they won a court case? Abitur grades, gap year and professional qualifications appear to mean all but nothing, at least in Berlin. Money on the other hand does, and you might need a lot of this: those looking for a place at university for Medicine should file suit against countless universities simultaneously. This might require around ten to twenty thousand Euros.

"These court cases are problematic, for whoever can afford it is able to effectively buy his place at university", says Till Rech, a Medicine student in his third semester at the Charité, and member of the Fachschaftsinitiative. Of course university acceptance based on the numerus clausus (NC) alone is also not fair. However, this is at least partially based on the ability of the applicant.

Steffan Baron, Head of the Student Administration department at the HU, goes as far as to call it a "misuse" of a basic right. Having enough financial resources to file suit for a place at university doesn't have much to do with protecting the law, that everybody has the right to free choice of employment. A closer review of the details, however, reveals that the HU isn't completely innocent regarding the high costs and social injustice surrounding the court case.

While there are specific rules that differ among federal states, the cases generally playout as follows: they begin with an "application for out-of-capacity acceptance", or AK-application for short, which one has to send to the university. With the AK-application the applicant asks for a university place, which the university didn't plan for when they estimated how many places they had space for. The university naturally doesn't give the place away, nevertheless the application is sent to university as only then can you file a court case for a university place.

The next step is to hand in an application for an interim measure at the local court of administration. The urgent legal procedure then begins. The decision takes between one to six months. Meanwhile, the HU sends off a letter of response, in which they reject the AK-application. It is against this letter that one has to file a suit within one month. If this is forgotten the claimant automatically loses the interim measure. With this suit filed a second parallel court procedure is opened – a cost-intensive absurdity, as will be seen later.

With enough money one can effectively buy a place to study

There are now two possibilities. Either the university explains exactly why, in their view, they do not have any further places available, which the court then examines. This is most likely to occur if a great many applicants have filed a court case. In the last few years this has happened at the HU with, amongst others, the subjects Psychology and Primary School Pedagogy, at the Charité for Medicine. While one is not obliged to be represented by a lawyer for this procedure it is most advisable, as one rarely possesses the vocabulary to take party in a dispute over capacity.

Should the court decide that the university does have the capacity to offer further places on a particular course, the places are raffled amongst the claimants. In the case of there being more claimants than university places the court costs are distributed between the university and the

claimants. At least this is how they do it in Berlin and several other federal states. Even a successful case can be expensive, and may not necessarily guarantee you a place on the university course.

For many subjects the university does not want to take any chances and brings forward a comparative offer. The deal: the university offers the claimant a place, they then have to withdraw the lawsuit and cover the costs. That way the university manages to save money and the hassle of having to defend its capacities. This is how universities offer students places each year, which they should not have according to their own calculations.

The chance of reaching a comparative offer rises, the lower the NC for a subject is. That is because lower NCs mean less court cases and therefore an acceptable amount of additional students for the university. So if you file a lawsuit without a lawyer, agree to a comparative offer made by the university and negotiate a bit around the attorneys' fees, you can pay around 700 Euros and silently be offered a place whilst bringing the lawsuit to an end. Laura hopes for that option. She is optimistic but doesn't feel that comfortable about the court case. "It's unfair as others don't have the same opportunities."

João Fidalgo from the RefRat offers free advice to students about court cases. That not everyone can afford such a court case is mainly down to the Humboldt-Uni itself, he says. If Humboldt was not relying on lawyers, there wouldn't be any opposition costs. The total cost of the procedure would be lowered by 500 Euros to 1000 Euros.

Indeed this is true. Yet then again the university wouldn't be able to cope with the numerous lawsuits without their own lawyers, Baron explains, as his department has too few employees. The consequences of the whole process, which obviously have something to do with the university being financed by the city of Berlin, are particularly visible in Shadi's case. Shadi sued for a place at the HU in the winter semester of 1999/2000 – where the university wasn't using lawyers for these kind of cases – and of 2012 – where they did. He sued both times for the same subject, for reasons too detailed to tell here. The important point: Cost of the procedure in the year 2000 by his own account: 100 Euros. Twelve years on: 1500 Euros.

The fact that the HU is represented by attorneys is not the only factor turning the process of suing for a place into a costly pleasure. At least of equal cost is the fact that a suit needs to be filed against the HU in the first place. For as described above, in addition to applying for an interim measure, one has to take legal action against the written rejection of the AK-application. However because both of these cases concern the same subject, namely a particular place at university, the court usually comes to the same conclusion, with the latter lasting several years and consequently never concluding, more than doubling the lawyer and court costs.

The clou: the HU isn't bound by law to formally turn down the AK-claims before the court decided about the applied interim measure. It is because they do this that you have to file an additional lawsuit.

For Jürgen Hägele, an experienced lawyer in university rights from the Kanzlei Dr. Selbmann, Bergert & Hägele, this is pure scaremongering and financial extortion. What is more it's also a business which the HU lawyers profit from. Steffan Baron from the HU, on the other hand, considers it to be proper and necessary administrative practice, to send out written replies to all claims written against the administration department.

Whatever the justification, the cost of the court procedure rises enormously as a consequence. Baron's criticism of the abuse of a basic right, that these cases are just about money, has a bitter aftertaste.

Jasper Riemann (21, History and Philosophy) wants to sue the Bundesliga so that Hannover 96 can win the championship.

Which library suits you best?

So, should I join the cute bibsters at the Grimm, or get really productive with theologians? We're here to tell you which library is right for you! Just answer the questions and count your symbols.

Written by: Hanna Vietze, Lina Dornblüth, Hannes Schrader and Jasper Riemann
Translation: Anna-Elizabeth Shakespeare — Photos: Lina Dornblüth

1. It's Friday evening, you're hanging out with your friends in your flat. You're just about to head off as you still have to finish your term paper for tomorrow, when suddenly your crush walks through door with bottle of Berliner Luft. What do you do?

- ● Not going to pass up on this sweet opportunity, I can definitely just get an extension.
- ▲ It sucks but no pain no gain!
- ■ I'll have one drink but then I have to go. Play a bit of hard to get, library before libido!

2. Saturday, half past nine, what are you doing?

- ● Still hitting that snooze button.
- ■ What? It's almost ten and I haven't chosen my outfit?
- ▲ Perfect timing: the train is coming so I'm guaranteed to get my favourite spot in the lib!

3. Finally in the library! You stuff everything in your locker quickly, right?

- ● Fuck, forgot my lock. After that trauma better get a coffee and calm down.
- ■ Nah, first things first, got to check in on Foursquare and get a good Instaselfie. #libraryflow
- ▲ Yeah, way past that stage and thanks to my nifty ear plugs no one can bother me here either!

4. You've been working for three hours. Your crush arrives and wants to grab lunch with you, your response?

- ▲ I have no time for your chit chat – I had my home-made protein ages ago anyway.
- ● What are the chances?! Just need to finish off this page, but I'm totally unproductive when I'm hungry. Let's go!
- ■ Mensa? Fuck that shit, let's get fro yo!

5. What do you need to survive the day?

- ▲ My water bottle. It's so practical, I can fill it up from the bathroom sink – no time wasted!
- ● Enough money on my Mensa card so I can have my twelve coffees.
- ■ The latest issue of NEON. I've been wanting to read the article on Cambodian mahouts for ages.

6. Back to the lib. Mum's ringing you!

- ■ Ah! Forgot to put my phone on silent! Everyone's staring at me – so awkward!
- ● Well, I was just about to get to work again but I do have a lot to talk to her about. The books will have to wait.
- ▲ I'll hang up on her – sorry mummy!

7. One more hour until the library closes but you can't hand the work in as it is. Is it worth ploughing on?

- ● Yeah, just need to add double spacing and bigger margins – problem solved!
- ■ Duh! If I don't get it done here I'll just continue working at home anyway. Me, panic? No chance.
- ▲ Finished the layout! The rest shouldn't take longer than an hour.

8. What's the craziest thing you've ever done in the library?

- ■ Wore the same outfit two days in a row. #hatersgonnahate
- ▲ I slept in till half ten on a Saturday!
- ● Going early on a Saturday – I got up at half ten.

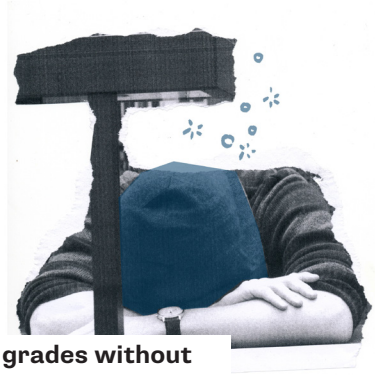
Which symbol did you get the most?

Triangle:
The productive one - The Law library is your Mecca

You can work there seven days a week with a great view of the cathedral. Red Bull and protein shakes? Works for you. You're always the first at the lockers, your library buddies reserve a seat for you and if you're five minutes late they're seriously concerned. You'll be happy at the law library: lots of competitive lawyers with their minds set solely on graduating. But make sure not to overwork yourself. Right now, burnouts are in. It's better to get home a little earlier, go for a run and clear your head. And if you want to keep challenging yourself you could try and run a half marathon in under two hours? And, by the way, Cafe Timms awaits you in law lib, the bagels are yummy and the deadline isn't going anywhere. If you have time to work, you have time to party! If there isn't enough space in the library then check out Campus North: no freshers, no distractions.

Square:
The library isn't just a work place for you, it's a lifestyle. You're a true bibster. Your new home: The Grimm-Zentrum

Here you can show everyone who you really are: the runway in the Foyer will provide you with inspiration for your new selfie. You're fucking buff as shit, and everyone knows it. No one knows the Berlin food scene like you do. You never get more than three books out at a time, you colour co-ordinate them, the presentation of your work is more important than the content, obviously. When friends come to visit the first place you take them to is the sixth floor of the Grimm – the oohs and aahs are like a drug to you. And that architecture! The fact that it takes you hours to find a place because of it doesn't faze you. You're OK with walking up and down the stairs a few times anyway, your chilled expression just adds to the whole understated look. But be careful: Uni isn't just about how you dress things up, content is important too. 200 likes on Instagram isn't going to get you good grades. Besides, if you're reliant on others to make you feel good about yourself, you'll probably end up unhappy anyway – you're bound to have mood swings. So don't listen to the haters, you're great the way you are. Be yourself, don't just follow the next trend. Our lifestyle tip for you: laughter yoga. Just laugh and stop taking yourself so seriously, that's the way to your perfect work-life-balance. You won't find a catwalk in the Germanistik-bib but there is still a hipster crowd.

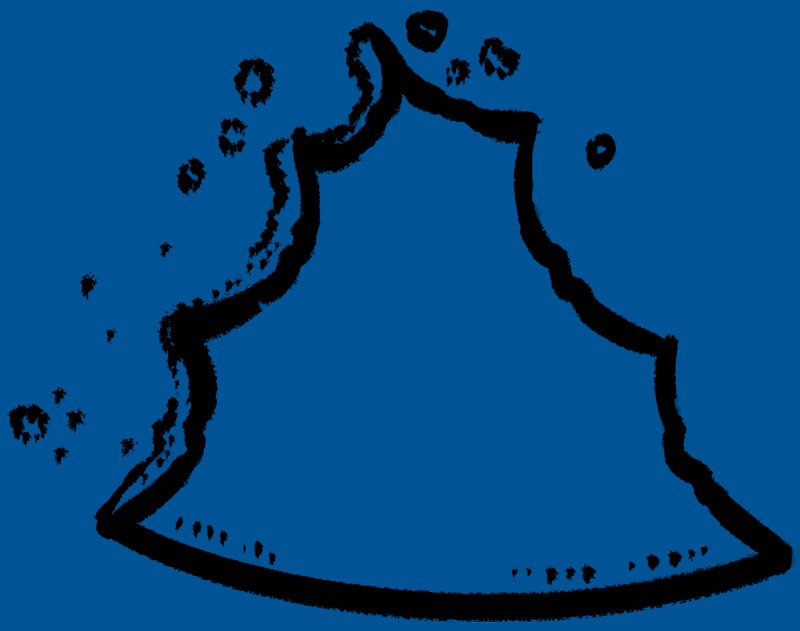


Circle:
You know how to get good grades without overworking yourself. But at exam time it'll be hard for you to find a place in the library. Honestly, it's probably better just to study at home. Or change your attitude to work. You are a layabout.

Revising, sitting in silence, more revising? Better get a coffee before you take on all that stress. Ambition and pressure to perform are foreign concepts to you – too stressful. There's far more to life than that – like seeing the new Stars Wars film and, of course, world peace. Inner Conflict? Dissolve themselves in the smoke of your pueblo-tobacco – obviously you roll your own cigarettes. The only things you're committed to is wearing trackies and visiting the Spätis for black OCBs. Time is relative and Che Guevara will be just as much of a cult icon in a year as he is now so your Hausarbeit about the Latin American fight for independence and its literary reception can wait. You breeze through life, spreading love, never understanding why the other members of your learning group get so annoyed when you turn up to class at 12 instead of 10 like you'd planned. You don't even know why you try to work in the library. You never achieve anything anyway. Are you just going because the first step through those library doors makes you feel better about yourself? After a while self-deception can get old. Maybe you should just give up on the library entirely or only enjoy your coffee after you've actually done some work. Because relaxing after you've been productive isn't just being lazy, it's taking a hard earned break. We suggest you turn to self-helps books for advice on self-discipline and make a to do list. You should only go back to the library when once you've completed it – which one is irrelevant in your case. Actually, we do have one tip for you: in the branch library for philology of foreign languages you don't actually need a lock. You can use a 1 Euro coin instead (in case you've accidentally forgotten yours).

Apostil: Christmas lampoon

Written by: Katharina Wurdack — Translation: Anna-Elizabeth Shakespeare and Eddie Angel — Illustration: Lisa Frühbeis



It's that time of year again – finally, Advent is here. Yet, apart from the fact that the days are getting shorter and Christmas shopping is becoming increasingly hectic, not much else has changed over the last few months. Eagle-eyed shoppers could already spot the first Lebkuchen in shops towards the end of September, which according to the calendar is still part of early autumn. To appease indignant traditionalists the packaging is decorated with falling leaves alongside stylised snowflakes – maybe to disguise it as an autumn biscuit? Gone are the times when the smell of Spekulatius justified a perhaps childishly naïve but nevertheless warm Christmas – or at least winter – feeling. Instead we're left simply caving in at the end of November, when we eventually allow ourselves to take the first packet of Lebkuchen from the shelf. During this period of self-discipline, ("just hold on another week") that special Christmas feeling is lost.

It's no secret that our society's no longer very good at delayed gratification. And since biscuits are, of course, eaten all the time, it doesn't hurt to eat one or two Christmas biscuits as early as October. But when Christmas trees and Advent calendars are being put up next to the Halloween costumes in big German department stores it's fair to ask what the point of this is. Realistically, who's stocking up on Advent calendars a month before you can even open the first door? It seems that they're placed on the shelves more as a warning to shoppers not to forget any of their relatives – or as an additional challenge to parents out shopping on a Saturday with three-year-old children.

But when, if not at Christmas, does the principles of the free market function so clearly? What's displayed is also bought – in fact sooner rather than later. The fact that the spirit of Christmas has fallen by the wayside is clearly of secondary concern. Who, today, is overcome with an involuntary Christmas feeling at the sight of Lebkuchen? How wonderful that soon the Easter bunny, too, will appear on the shelves.

Monitor

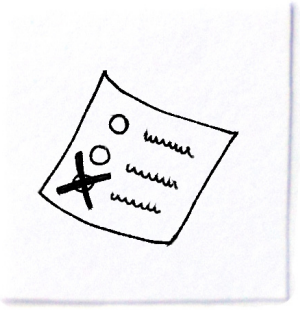
All eyes on education. Read what's going to happen – before it happens.

Brussels' Free University in the stock exchange

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) is the first European institution of higher education in the stock exchange. VUB is financed by investors. Since early November, Free University bonds can be bought. In the first few weeks the university has already made 61.5 million Euros. The money is needed for the construction of new research centres and student halls of residence halls. However, student representatives believe that this is a further step towards the privatisation of education.

Better funding for University access

The Minister of Education Johanna Wanka (CDU) plans to provide 100 million Euros in the next four years for quicker and easier access to German universities for refugees. The funding will finance the Studienkollegs, promote student initiatives for refugees and alleviate the requirements for Bafög-applications for "Geduldete", the refugees who are given temporary stay. The opposition parties, however, are demanding an increased intake of students and a greater number of and improvement in lecture halls, welcome centres, and international offices.



Evaluation of the Excellence Initiative

In October 2017 the German Federal and State Government's Excellence Initiative will come to an end. What the continuation of the Research School, Clusters of Excellence, and Future Concepts will look like is still unclear. Hence, the awarded universities cannot guarantee any planning security. Crucial for the future of the Excellence Initiative is a report, which is to be presented in January 2016. This report by a committee of independent scholars will evaluate the current outcomes of the Excellence Initiative.

Glossary

A guide for education-policy terminology

Text: Roland Lindenblatt

Feststellungsprüfung, the:

The Feststellungsprüfung determines whether someone has the professional and linguistic ability to study in German. It is sat by international student applicants, whose high school diploma doesn't meet the required standards to study in Germany. These so called inappropriate diplomas are laid out by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and can be found on the internet, as well as at the international office of the HU.

The exam consists in general of a written exam in German and two further exams on the university discipline of application. There are five different areas of focus: medical, technical, economic, linguistic, and humanities. Theoretically foreign student applicants can sit the exam immediately. In general, however, applicants study at Studienkolleg, a preparatory college, beforehand. The classes are intensive and mostly last a year. Many German universities offer this Studienkolleg. Berlin has a joint preparatory college hosted by the HU and the FU, and also a separate one offered by the TU, both of these can be applied for via the „Uni-Assist" portal, subject to a fee. Meanwhile, private institutions for Studienkolleg have found a growing market base, preparing students for the Feststellungsprüfung.

With the Feststellungsprüfung in the bag, any discipline in the qualified fields can be applied for. To study other subjects, other exams need to be sat, which neither requires the same amount of time or effort that the Feststellungsprüfung does.

An unquestioned friendship?

Germany and Israel are linked through close ties, politically and academically. In other European countries initiatives are calling for a boycott of university partnerships, due to human rights violations by the Israeli government.

Written by: David Robinson — Illustration: Kati Sziliagy

This year, 2015, marks the 50th Year Anniversary of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany. Although difficult in its outset, the relationship has overall been friendly. The foundations of the self-proclaimed special friendship are observed in almost every aspect of society, and this is none the less valid in the area of research and academia, where Humboldt-University Berlin is a proud feature. This is not to say that the relationship has not been without tensions. Israel, engaged in a stunted peace process, has borne the brunt of international criticism, culminating in 2005 in an international BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement calling upon the international community to take up the economic, cultural and academic Boycott of Israel. The movement has not received even a comparable welcome in Germany as in other European countries, where university students have successfully introduced boycotts. Yet after 50 years since the onset of diplomatic relations, one may question whether the friendship remains as durable in the academic sphere.

German-Israeli diplomatic relations officially began in 1965, academic and educational links have since only expanded. There are now numerous partnerships, exchanges and joint research projects that run between the two states. In 1964 perhaps the most important institution of the academic partnership, the Minerva Foundation, was established. Considered a "flagship of German-Israeli scientific cooperation", the foundation has funded over 1,800 Israeli and German citizens to take up post-graduate research at perspective German and Israeli universities. A similar foundation was established in 1986, the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development, with an endowment fund of 190 million Euros it has financed over 800 joint-projects. There are countless other institutions and arrangements which tie the two states together academically, ranging from grants provided by the DAAD for Israeli student exchanges to specific university twinning actions.

At Humboldt, German-Israeli ties are self-evident. The university is an avid participant in programmes administered by the Minerva Foundation, hosting numerous joint research projects, such as a study in 2013 on cognitive robotics. The university currently hosts two Israeli student Minerva fellowship holders in the department of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences. Furthermore since 1996, Humboldt participates annually in the German Israeli Project Cooperation programme, administrated by the DFG (German Research Foundation), facilitating joint scientific research between Humboldt and six different Israeli Universities.

In spite of the many advances that academic cooperation with Israel entails, the movement promoting the severing of such ties has grown. Against a background of frustration at Israel's continued breach of human rights and international law in its illegal settlement and occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, the aforementioned BDS movement has gained a response by communities in Europe. BDS successes can be marked in the 2011 campaign against Ahava, for example, which was forced to close its London store and lost retail orders in the UK, Norway, Japan and Canada, after the movement denounced the company for using Palestinian dead sea resources and holding settlements on Palestinian lands in the West Bank. Grounded in the belief that the Israeli academy has "historically granted legitimacy to the work of academics who advocate ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and denial of refugee rights", so the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, the academic boycott campaign has also seen successes, with the British National Union of Students implementing the boycott in June of this year.

Limited as it may be, the debate over academic boycott has materialised at the HU. In April of 2010 the organisation Berlin Academic Boycott wrote to the Faculty of Law at Humboldt-University, asking them to reconsider their invitation for Prof. Emanuel Gross of Haifa University, to hold the lecture "Fighting Terrorism With One Hand Tied Behind the Back – The Israeli Perspective", on the grounds of accusations that he authorised of the use of torture during his term as president of the Military Court of Justice for Gaza and the Negev. Grounds were also made on the basis of his representation of Haifa University, which as an institution is accused of discriminatory treatment towards Palestinian students, among other offences. A second open letter was written to the Faculty of Law in June of 2011, after the first letter had evidently been ignored when Prof. Gross was invited to lecture at the faculty for a second time.

Questions over the relationship to Israel also appear to

have arisen amongst HU student groups. The organisation Antifaschistische Aktion, with its representative group at HU called Hummel, appears to be split over the question. A considerable amount of the membership body holds that there is an anti-Semitic tendency in the movement advancing BDS and putting pressure on Israel. These claims are grounded in the belief that Israel acts in self-defence in its policy, and that the movement focuses unevenly on Israeli human rights breaches, when other states also commit human rights offences. Others amongst Antifa membership, counter that Israel uses disproportionate force, has created conditions in the West Bank and Gaza which supports radicalisation, and claim that criticising Israel is justified in the unique imperialist character of the state. Whilst there is no official stance, critical voices are also evident in the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS) movement at Humboldt, one SDS member, who prefers to remain anonymous, whilst disavowing the academic boycott has expressed the advantages of an economic boycott.

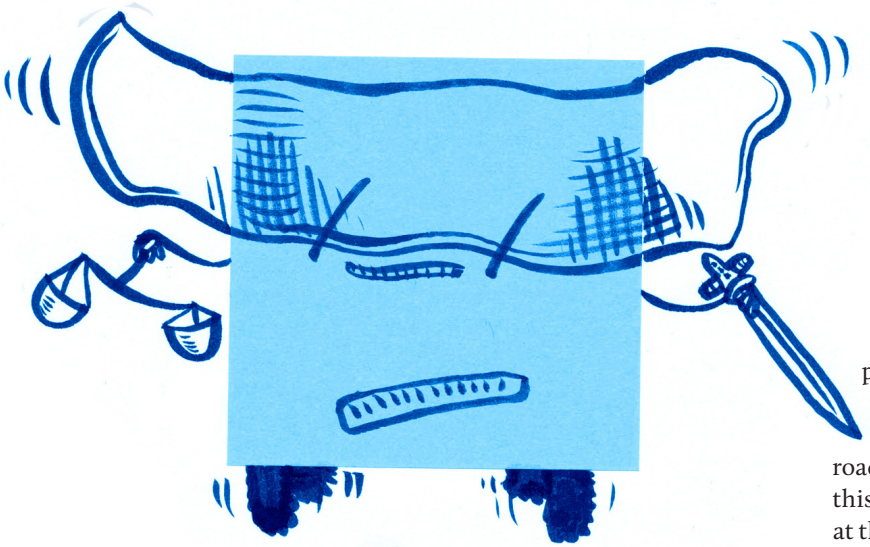
Overall, 50 years since the onset of German-Israeli diplomatic relations, it is clear that a close international partnership has established itself between the two states. This is nonetheless clear in the academic sphere, where countless institutional arrangements and projects vociferate, making undeniably valuable advances in research, evident on our own university campus at Humboldt. However, whereas it once may have been unthinkable to question these relations, under a context of increasing frustration at Israeli policy towards Palestine, the foundation of a platform to criticise and put pressure on Israel has established itself at Humboldt, as well as in Germany in general. Whether this is on account of a horrendous return of anti-Semitism, or of disgust at an apartheid state, which validates a similar international response as that taken against Apartheid South Africa, is open to question.

David Robinson (20, Social Sciences) is the UnAuf's representative for the UN Assembly.

Eliminating human error

Scientists often find themselves in a conflict between curiosity and ethics. In this series we examine controversial research projects at Berlin's universities. This time: Self-Driving Cars

Written by: Anna-Elizabeth Shakespeare — Illustration: Lisa Frühbeis



In under five years you could find yourself in the front seat of your new semi-autonomous car, driving along the Autobahn texting, eating, and reading as long as you remain conscious and able. This is the next stage of development in the journey towards fully self-driving cars. These wouldn't require a conscious driver and could change transportation drastically, making driving easier, safer, and more ecologically friendly. Robert Spangenberg and Hillary Shakespeare are two PhD students working on this development at Freie Universität Berlin and at Oxford University respectively. They are currently working on the transition from assisted driving, where the driver must always have her hands on the wheel, to the semi-autonomous cars described above.

While developments in the area are certainly exciting, they also pose new and difficult questions: What happens if there's an accident? Who takes responsibility? And how will the car react in complicated scenarios, including making a moral choice of one life over another? For example, if the car is speeding towards three people and can't break fast enough to avoid the collision, it would have to decide either to hit the people ahead, or to swerve and endanger the passengers. A recent paper on the topic by Jean-François Bonnefon revealed that an overwhelming majority of people believe it is right to prioritise the number of lives spared over the safety of the driver. However this becomes problematic in terms of selling the cars. People are unlikely to want to buy a car that doesn't prioritise their own safety.

This question is further complicated, says Spangenberg, by the fact that dynamic environments have varying levels of uncertainty. "You can't guarantee that the car will have complete enough knowledge of its environment to make perfect decisions and save as many lives as possible," he explains. This means even though you could theoretically program the car to maximise human lives saved, in practice it might not always have the knowledge that there are, say, three rather than two people on the road ahead. Questions of responsibility are also tied into this debate. In one of his lectures Daniel Cremers, professor at the Technische Universität München, explains that since companies producing collision-avoidance systems must take full responsibility for active decisions made by the car, systems like this are currently built in a way that allows them to avoid any liability. For example, a system designed to park the car will steer, but it expects the driver herself to brake. If this pattern continues, we could see self-driving cars issuing warning signals of danger ahead, but giving the driver the responsibility of actual decision-making once she has been alerted.

Spangenberg, however, doesn't see this as a very good solution. He points out that in the case of accidents, self-driving cars can brake and steer faster than people can. If a self-driving car is driving autonomously, it can act far safer than a human, he argues. According to the German In-Depth Accident Study database, human error accounts for 94 percent of road accidents. Thus, is human error on the road could be eliminated through the introduction of self-driving cars, they could save around 3,000 lives a year in Germany alone.

Progress is certainly happening quickly. While Google self-driving cars are operating fully and legally in a controlled environment in Mountain View California, Tesla has also already released an update that offers assisted driving. This technology is linked with developments in other fields as well. As Shakespeare explains "the problems we're solving for self-driving cars aren't just constrained to the world of driving, it's the same technology that is revolutionising space exploration, health care and mobility, and is paving the way for domestic robots!"

Anna-Elizabeth Shakespeare (20, German and Philosphy) writes better than her namesake.

Whose dis / ability?

How do people with disabilities experience their studies at the HU and their everyday life? Our writer recounts her own experience and declares: Inclusion is more treasured than accessibility is.

Written by: Verena Borchert — Translation: Katerina Russman — Illustration: Silke Weißbach

Recently, a classmate asked me whether I could imagine writing an article for the Humboldt-University's student magazine about students who have a disability. At first I didn't agree because, in general, I feel very integrated – or included, as we say today –, at least at an institutional level. And, where my studies are concerned, in no way do I feel 'hindered'. Eventually, however, I did in fact decide to write something. Why? Because up until now people with a disability are hardly visible in our society and are often confronted with things which never even cross the mind of 'healthy' people. The majority do not concern me like they do those who use a wheelchair or are not able to see. Despite this, I am reminded of my disability every day. Mostly in a positive way, but sometimes also in a negative way. It is less about the lacking accessibility. It is more about the behaviour of diverse fellow people who think that they possess a right to a say when they definitely do not.

Now, to me. Ever since my birth I have had a mild spasticity, which means that I am not very good on my feet and have problems with my fine motor skills. By implication this means the following: many things simply take a lot longer and I am not able to carry heavy things. Additionally, I always need to use the banister on the stairs. My BA in Social Sciences in Marburg went pretty smoothly despite that, even if it took more time when compared to my fellow students. During my studies period I was very fortunate to meet lecturers who took my situation seriously. This helped balance out any of the negative, for example the way in which I was given more time for tests, which was always possible and never an issue.

Since the beginning of the Semester I am now doing a Masters in Gender Studies at the HU and I also do not have the feeling here that there could be any problems that could not in some way or other be resolved. I am not assuming things are as good for all people in my situation or similar. I experience repeatedly – at least privately – situations in which I could tear my hair out and seriously begin to doubt many people. For example, this happens when a mate suddenly accuses me in an argument that on this evening I could have taken a taxi. For him it would have been too exhausting to support me on the stony parts of the path for a few minutes. Or – and this might sound banal, but annoys me painfully nevertheless – when people who I consider to be my friends deem it necessary to wait for me or walk more slowly because, otherwise, I won't be able to keep up with them. Also, some people do not seem to understand that I do in fact have a disability, but nevertheless am a completely normal person with individual talents, hobbies and interests. Ultimately, I do not see my disability on a daily basis. I was born with it and, in the meantime, I have got used to the fact that I find some things more difficult than others.

In short: I am just as normal as others are. It is precisely because of this that makes me so angry when some people think that they should not take me seriously. Some people believe that they could deny me a self-determined sexuality purely on the basis of a physical weakness, for example, or even threaten me with physical violence.

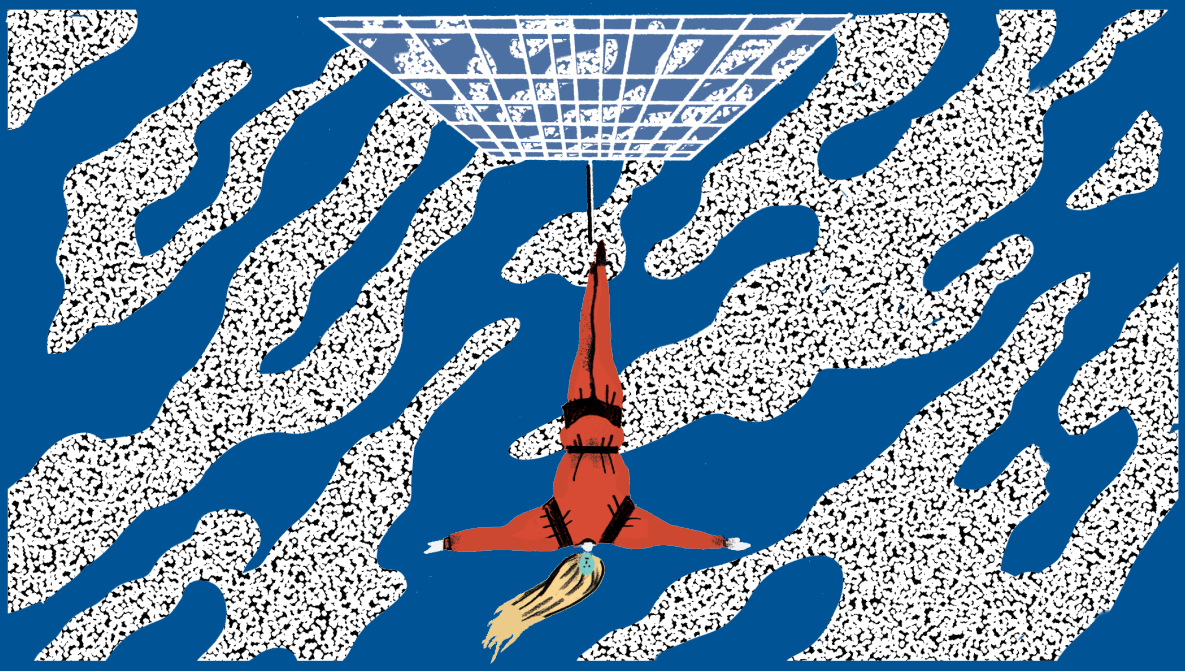
But are there not enough people who take me seriously, who help me and support me where it is necessary? Yes, of course there are. At the same time, however, one must not forget that there is still much improvement to be made. The inclusion of handicapped people does not stop where accessibility dominates, but there where no one is hindered anymore and the equally entitled share of society has become a firm component in all aspects of life.

Verena Borchert
(25, Gender Studies)

Once in a lifetime

We always talk about things that we want to try out – but never actually do them. In our section "Once in a Lifetime" we change that. This time: Base flying from the Park Inn Hotel at the Alexanderplatz

Written by: Carina Pansch — Translation: Anna-Elizabeth Shakespeare — Illustration: Kati Szilagyi



Flying was something Ikarus dreamed of in the ancient world, but he had to admit that it was a dream never to be fulfilled by mankind. Base flying, however, offers something close: through the world's fastest form of abseiling, a 125 metre plunge allows you to experience free-fall.

So there I find myself, in the lobby at Park Inn Hotel, signing the agreement with shaky hands. There's no turning turning back now. First taking a lift and then proceeding further up some stairs, we reach the 40th floor. The view from the roof terrace is breathtaking. Unfortunately there's no time to admire it, the event team are already strapping me in so I can't move and then leading me towards a long plank. Frantically forcing myself not to think about that fact that I'm currently hanging over Alexanderplatz with what feels like almost no support. The countdown starts. I decide it's best not to open my eyes.

When I do dare to open them a few seconds later, I see the great panorama of Berlin stretching beneath me in the golden evening sunlight. My eyes wander across the distant city, the purple clouds, the Berlin Dome. I find myself eye level with the tourists up in the TV tower. Right now I'm wishing I was standing behind this secure glass dome with them. The steward yells an enthusiastic "Go!", abruptly ending the delight of this unrivalled view. I scream as I fall. The air pressure pushes my guts towards my heart, and I close my eyes again as I panic. After eight long seconds I come to a stop just above the ground, and a few people standing around the Alexanderplatz begin to clap. Another steward reaches out his hand to bring me back to the ground and back to normality. I leave the platform with trembling knees.

Berlin insider tip: Dance Battle

Written by: Hannes Schrader — Translation: Karin Louise Hermes — Photo: Cremant Photo

Imagine spontaneously having to dance a duet in front of 100 people. With someone you saw dance for the first time just ten minutes ago. "Can I at least pick my own music?" – No, the DJ chooses it. Have I set the scene? Ready, let's go! These random duets are part of "Club Oval: Crossover Dance Battle" in the GRIPS-Theater.

Every month dancers from all over Berlin compete against one another. On this rainy Thursday evening in October three teams are performing their 5-minute choreographed dances. Then they have to improvise a dance to the DJ's music selection for two minutes. And then we have the solo artists, who either register in advance or turn up on a whim.

Spurred on by the moderator, a handful of other dancers end up signing up to freestyle to the DJ's music. At the end the dancers draw improvisational duets and double-up with partners who they had never met before. In between the performances the dance floor is open to everyone – those who are too intimidated by the dancers can casually hang out by the bar for a bit.

After the first round, the three professional dancers decide which teams and solo acts proceed through to the final. The winner, however, is ultimately chosen by the audience. The winning solo act and the winning team share the prize: the sum of the entrance fees. There is no compulsory fee: everyone pays as much as they choose to. And everyone continues to party on after the awards ceremony.

Hip-hop, Urban, Contemporary, Whatever. Some dance fast, some dance slowly, some dance with passion and joy. And after prancing around in the Oval, the dancers leave the audience with one thought: well, at least I've got other talents!

Also, every Thursday there is a different event on at the GRIPS-Theater from the project series "Wildes Palais", which Club Oval is also involved in. For those that prefer the Poetry Slam just come along on another Thursday!

Next event: January 28, 2016.
Entrance fee: Optional/voluntary
Location: Podewil, 10179 Berlin-Mitte, Klosterstraße 68,
U2 Klosterstraße / S-Bahn Alexanderplatz /
S-Bahn Jannowitzbrücke

Mail from... Mexico City (Mexico)

In Mexico City the concept of time and space is totally different to the one in Berlin. If you have ever had an informal meeting with a Mexican, you will know what I mean. If a Mexican tells you that the party starts at 9pm and you arrive around 10pm, you will probably be the first one there. The host will still be cleaning or getting ready for the party, in any case not ready to rumble.

On the one hand such a sense of time is the Mexican easy going attitude towards life. On the other hand it is also down to public transport. In Mexico City, a place with over 20 million people, transportation is more complex and chaotic than in most other cities of the world. Hence no one really knows when exactly you'll be arriving. One day it might take you 20 minutes to drive the 10 kilometres to university. The next day however, you may be stuck in traffic for nearly an hour and still only be half way there (baring in mind that areawise the city is around 10 times bigger than Berlin!). So there is no real time schedule like the one in Germany. All of this makes Mexico City very interesting.

Also: the moment you manage to meet up (more or less) on time with a Mexican, they tend to be unpredictable, passionate, party-loving individuals who will welcome you with open arms (and lots of Tequila, too). As they are so gregarious, they will always manage to find some excuse to go out and have a drink with you, their friends or family. You can find several places to do just this. Recently, some districts like La Condesa and La Roma in the city centre have evolved into Mexico's Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain. But since the city is so big, you will find several places to enjoy a night out in the lovely and chaotic Mexico City. Oh and don't worry (too much) about insecurity, it is not as bad as media tells you, believe me.

Mauricio Salgado Moreno (24, Economics) actually lives in the Wilmersdorf of Mexico City.

Making the impossible possible

With "Auf Augenhöhe" Sema Gedik, 25, has designed the first fashion line for smaller people. She studies at the Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft in Berlin where she is aiming for a double degree in fashion design and clothing technology.

Interview: Ekaterina Feldmann — Translation: Katerina Russman — Photos: Valerie Diedenhofen

UnAuf: What does fashion mean for you?

Sema Gedik: For me fashion is a form of communication. Every person can express themselves with it. It facilitates the opportunity – and this is very important for me – to give my works expression, whatever social and cultural aspects concern me.

How did you come up with the idea to make a fashion line for the smaller person?

I have a small cousin who lives in Turkey. It is through her that I know that it is very difficult for people with this body shape to find clothes that fit. As part of my BA I desperately wanted to do something in which, as a fashion designer, I have the feeling that it makes sense. I did research to find out whether there were really no designers who design clothes for the smaller person – and did, in fact, find no one! That also means that people who do not have the 'ideal' body shape have it twice as hard: for starters they have to learn to love their body even if it does not conform to the 'norm'. And then they can't find any clothes that fit them properly and through which they can express themselves. It was then that I realized that I wanted to make clothes for smaller people.

How did you translate your idea into action?

Firstly, I had to make contact with smaller persons and measure them in order to draw up a means of tailoring from these measurement values. Up until now there was no measurements table for people with these body proportions. To begin with I was a little worried: since there are different forms of short stature I thought that it would be very difficult to establish a means of tailoring for these special measurements. In March 2013 I visited the 'Bundesverband für Kleinwüchsige Menschen und ihre Familien' (BKMF), I pitched my project and got to know my first three models for the first time – with whom I still work closely today.

You started with these three models, but now "Auf Augenhöhe" has become a big project.

Yes, for my BA I only measured three smaller persons. Originally, I had never planned that the project would get so big. There was also a lot of doubt around me about whether I would manage it since it is a very complex task. At my university the following quotation by Albert Einstein is written on the wall: "One recognises a really good idea when its complexity is ruled out from the very start!". That spurred me on and I continued after the completion of my BA. During the annual meeting with BKMF in May 2014 and 2015 I measured about 200 people in total. 500 rows of measurements are currently my goal.

This year you were able to present your designs for the first time to a large audience at a fashion show during Berlin Fashion Week. What was that like for you and your models?

I was so happy and so were my models! Up until now we have only received positive – and international – feedback.

What does the future hold for "Auf Augenhöhe"?

My goal is to establish an international measurements table for the smaller person. Now the next step is to measure smaller persons in other countries. I would also like to design a shoe line because finding shoes that fit properly is practically impossible for smaller persons. Currently, I am carrying out shoes measurements with a shoemaker and drawing up preliminary designs. The great dream, of course, is to someday have my own label. In the long run with this label I would not only design fashion for smaller persons, but for people of every size. For me, that is equality.

Good passports, bad passports

As a young European nowadays, you're used to open borders. Travelling from Germany to France is like going on holiday in your own country. Our reporter describes how his sense of European unity was put into question, when he encountered the troubled situation of a refugee on tour.

Written by: Roland Lindenblatt — Translation: Louise Brenner — Illustration: Matteo Anselmo

Raindrops were falling on the roof of the station at Cologne-Mühlheim. Looking over the parking lot, I waited for an opportune lift-share to take me to Paris. Before moving to Berlin, I had spent more time in the French than the German capital. It was closer, and to me France was not particularly foreign. We are all Europeans in some form anyway, and on that occasion, just as on any other I was accompanied by a sense of European Unity.

Once in the car, I was no longer a European but a world citizen. Oskar, the professional car sharing driver from Senegal, was transporting half his family, the larger part of them living in France. The other passengers were German, French, and two of them Arab. I had met one of them, Eason, at the station beforehand. Thanks to my knowledge of mainstream media, I immediately recognised him: he had a smartphone I was jealous of, colourfully jumbled clothes, and a shopping bag from Rewe used as a suitcase; he was a refugee. I found it fascinating to meet a refugee en route to France. After all why should he not be traveling? For me it was the most normal thing to do in the world.

It seemed as if the Belgian Police were waiting for us at the border. We appeared a textbook case of people smugglers: four black men, two Arab men, and three white men. "Stop! Everyone out! Passports please!" What? Why? I was confused. We were in the Schengen region after all. I remember passing through border controls at the German-Dutch border as a teenager, but nowadays they were only to be seen on the news. Eason, meanwhile, had other worries. He was not European. His personal Schengen region was confined to Germany, and this only if he was a registered refugee. His passport was with friends in Paris, he told the policeman. "That's where mine is, too!" the policemen jokingly returned and became serious again. "Come with me!", he said and suggested him to say goodbye to us.

We waited a while for Eason, even though the situation was clear. Our international group, all with an inalienable right to remain in Germany and France, was caught up in a heated discussion. The consensus was that Eason must have known that he would not get far this way, as it was illegal.

Suddenly Eason returned and handed me a jumble of papers. "In German", he exclaimed. I scanned them briefly. As a refugee in Germany Eason had to go back. Putting myself in his shoes I felt sad. With my passport I can go wherever. I never had to waste time even thinking about it. The Belgian policeman headed our way – probably to proclaim Eason's fate, I thought to myself. "You are heading towards Paris, right? Keep going!"

It took a moment for me to grasp the whole situation. It was actually pretty simple, although I was perplexed: the Belgian policeman did not want to deal with the situation and Eason was free to go, at least until he was checked the next time. He was not scared, however, he had reached Paris, and the policeman had fulfilled his duty as well: as little work and trouble as possible. The French would deal with it.

When I got to Paris, I felt just as comfortable as on my previous visits. Nonetheless, my sense of unity had partly got lost on the way. What do we Europeans have in common? Who are we? We are happy to not be burdened. We are happy to let others decide over someone's fate.

The European policies concerning refugees are moulded by arbitrary and national egotism like never before. It is about time that a European sense of unity leads to solidarity. That would help refugees, as well as European unity.

Roland Lindenblatt (26, VWL) is a five star passenger.

The last stop

We are on the way to the end of the world. Mind the gap! Today: Taking the S25 to Teltow-Stadt

Written by: Sophia Sorge — Translation: Louise Brenner — Photo: Sophia Sorge

I get the S-Bahn and what do I see? At first nothing. The last stop, Teltow-Stadt, lies in a valley. Teltow only unfurls in front of me after I've made my way up a several steps: a row of green and orange concrete housing blocks. My companion and I make our way to the old town. In doing so, we pass the town's church of St. Andreas, a renovated and beautiful building. Light from the chandeliers streams through the colourful church windows. According to Wikipedia this is the town's main attraction, which has been lovingly nicknamed Rübchenstadt – meaning 'little parsnip town' – by its residents. The Teltow parsnip has been grown in surrounding land for the past 300 years, a noble vegetable from Brandenburg border.

A hundred meters on there is the market square with a new town hall and a memorial commemorating the former District administrator von Stubenrauch, creator of the Teltow canal. The surrounding houses are beautiful and spread somewhat of vintage charm. That's about all that meets the eye at first.

We stand around awkwardly when a car pulls up next to us. A friendly couple points us in the direction of the 'Marina', a harbour project by the Teltow canal. It was probably my camera that gave us away as tourists. As it turns out, the harbour is nowhere near completion. All we can see is an enclosed churned up field down by the river. My imagination has to suffice: I'm sure in a few years' time it'll be possible to stroll along a wonderfully modern harbour by the river bank.

I have to admit I wasn't fully convinced walking through this place but maybe it's just the wrong day – grey sky, bare trees and not a single person on the streets. A day trip in April would've made more sense, when the town was still celebrating its 750th jubilee, or maybe a later trip would be more promising. You're sure to bump into one of the towns 25,000 residents at, for example, the Rübchenfest, the annual celebration of the parsnip.

Sophia Sorge (22, European Cultural Anthropology and Culture Studies) writes articles for Wikipedia in her free time.

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