

Call for Papers Special Issue 1/2025 ZDfm:

## **Diversity and racism in the university context – shiny facades and broken promises**

Special issue editors:

Gülay Çağlar, Sabina García Peter, Jana Gerlach and Heike Pantelmann,  
Freie Universität Berlin

In recent years, diversity policy has become one of the core elements of organizational development in the German higher education context (Ihme/Stürmer 2019: 154; cf. also Bührmann 2015: 113). In the winter semester of 2021/22, we organized the event “Diversity, Racism and the Broken Promise of Inclusion in German Higher Education” at Freie Universität Berlin and would like to take up and continue the debates that took place there. German universities present themselves as cosmopolitan and liberal places committed to diversity. Diversity is publicly touted as a strategic resource for innovation and academic achievement. However, the German higher education context has unique characteristics that shape its diversity strategies and policies. These include, for example, the difficulties in collecting and analysing data intersectionally. Rather than collecting based on subjectively perceived *race* or ethnicity, as is common in the Anglo-American world, German higher education statistics focus on “objective” variables such as “migration background” and are therefore not suited to uncovering existing mechanisms of exclusion and tensions such as racial discrimination. Nevertheless, such data are key to promoting an inclusive understanding of excellence.

The promise of inclusion associated with the implementation of diversity measures is repeatedly broken in the German higher education context. This is because issues of intersectional discrimination are easily obscured by a neoliberal understanding of diversity that focuses more on individual equality of opportunity than on changing exclusionary structures and processes of the institution. Although there is consensus on the importance of horizontal and intersectional approaches to diversity, in many cases categories of difference continue to be considered in isolation, resulting in some being highlighted (such as gender with a longer history of institutionalization) while other categories receive less attention or are even excluded from diversity discourse, as in the case of *race*. In the German context, as in Europe in general, racial discrimination is widespread and yet is neither addressed nor integrated into diversity strategies and policies. For example, when terms such as “ethnicity” or “migration background” are used in higher education policies, or when mission statements talk about diversity instead of racism, the focus is always on individual characteristics. This carries the risk that BPoC are seen as *other*, while avoiding naming and addressing racist structures and mechanisms in society and institutions.

With this special issue, we aim to bring contributions to the debates on racism and diversity in the German higher education context, from a variety of perspectives. For example, contributions may address the following questions:

- What is the role of *race* and racism in diversity policy? What are the concrete approaches and what can German universities learn from other international higher education contexts?
- What are important cornerstones of an intersectional diversity policy and how can anti-discrimination institutions and structures be anchored at universities?
- What are the possibilities and limitations of intersectional data collection to make exclusions visible and to address exclusion mechanisms?
- What is the relationship between excellence and diversity and the related effects of inclusion and exclusion?
- How does the tension between internationalization and diversity play out?
- How can teaching/learning spaces be established as safer spaces and as spaces of resistance?

For the double-blind peer-reviewed section of this special issue, we invite *full research papers* with a theoretical-conceptual or empirical orientation ranging from 35,000 to a maximum of 45,000 characters (including spaces). We also ask for *short papers* from diversity research and practice: outlines of research projects, pointed comments and (preferably provocative) positions, as well as practical examples and reports, for example from academic teaching. Such contributions should be between 12,000 and 15,000 characters (including spaces).

Contributions will be selected through a *two-stage review process*: For both categories of papers, we first request the submission of short abstracts of 400 words (without references) by October 31, 2023. Please send the short abstract and questions about the focus topic “Diversity and racism in the university context – shiny facades and broken promises” to: [sabina.garcia.peter@fu-berlin.de](mailto:sabina.garcia.peter@fu-berlin.de)

You will receive feedback from the editors on the submitted paper proposal by November 30, 2023. Full-length research papers must then be submitted by May 1, 2024, and short papers by August 1, 2024.

Please visit the website [zdfm.budrich-journals.de](http://zdfm.budrich-journals.de) under “manuscript submission” for further instructions for authors on how to design and submit your completed manuscript.

We look forward to receiving your submissions!

The special issue editors

*Gülay Çağlar, Sabina García Peter, Jana Gerlach and Heike Pantelmann*

## References

- Bührmann, Andrea (2015): Die Bearbeitung von Diversität in Organisationen – Plädoyer zur Erweiterung bisheriger Typologien. Hanappi-Egger, Edeltraut/Bendl, Regine (Eds.): *Diversität, Diversifizierung und (Ent)Solidarisierung*. Wiesbaden: Springer, 109–125.
- Ihme, Toni A./Stürmer, Stefan (2019): Diversität auf den Webseiten deutscher Universitäten. Eine Forschungsskizze. *Zeitschrift für Diversitätsforschung und -management* 4(1-2), 154–161.  
doi:10.3224/zdfm.v4i1-2.20