

Living Document

Designing Teaching and Learning Together at Bielefeld University

Preamble

This new document has evolved from the original *living document*, which was created by students and lecturers at Bielefeld University in 2018. The result of a process guided by the office of the vice-rector for education and teaching, this new edition of the *living document* brings together the outcomes of a discussion about teaching and learning at Bielefeld University that took place during several meetings from February to March 2023 and included a diverse spectrum of faculty members and decision-makers such as the deans of studies and the student councils of the different faculties.

The authors of this document – the lecturers and the students – outline an ideal of successful teaching and studying at Bielefeld University, including options for the document's concrete implementation in the classroom and beyond. The document's authors wish to highlight that the responsibility for productive classes and successful learning rests with both the lecturers and the students. How both groups can contribute to successful teaching and learning is a central focus of this document. A basic requirement for this is the continuous exchange about what successful learning and teaching involves. We consequently encourage you to use this document for your conversations about teaching and learning, and especially that you use it for making transparent the expectations you have of others. We also hope that you will use the document for identifying discipline- and format-specific requirements and contexts. Everyone who was involved in the process of creating this document hopes that it will find many readers who will continue our discussion and make the document's contents their living practice of teaching and learning.

Successful Teaching, Learning, Testing

Classes and exams should be **appropriate for their intended learning outcomes, enriching from a pedagogical point of view and well-structured**. For us as lecturers and students, this means especially: classes that respond to the present as well as the inclusion of topics that matter in terms of current social developments; the inclusion of the specific interests of the learner group; an appropriate workload; a continuing conversation about fruitful methodologies, the productive utilisation of technologies, the best strategies for academic work, the best way of teaching the foundational knowledge in each subject as well as the appropriate learning methods; acknowledging student expertise and offering opportunities for student participation as well as reflecting regularly on teaching and learning formats. **Student competency development** should be a cumulative process that is based in the curriculum. The transition from school to university should be shaped intentionally as a distinct phase of student development, for example by adopting models in which experienced students meet freshers in a common learning context or by offering guidelines for the process of entering university.

Assignments and exams should be designed in such a way that they monitor whether students have reached the intended learning outcomes. In individual modules, there should be a spectrum of formats for earning credit points, for example written and oral formats. What is more, a variety of media and media formats offer themselves for assignments and exams. For accommodated exams and assignments (*Nachteilsausgleich*), digital formats can be an option.

University studies should help students with making initial decisions about their future careers and also prepare them for professional life. The goal is to find a balance between theoretical perspectives and professional practices; this balance is shaped by the individual profile of each degree programme.

Lecturers contribute to successful learning experiences by making transparent early on – at the time of the publication of the class description in the course programme, and at the latest at the beginning of the semester – what the requirements in their classes are. Lecturers should **communicate** these **requirements** about the course's content and progression, about assignments and exams as well as about the workload and the criteria for assessment, for example in a syllabus. The instructors follow these published requirements as well as the agreed-upon workload for each class in their teaching. Any changes to the requirements or the workload should be discussed with the students. Lecturers are familiar with regulations such as the examination periods and semester deadlines, the requirements for graded and non-graded assignments, and regulations for the awarding of credit points and grades. Immediately after completion, lecturers submit grades for **assignments and exam results** to the examination office for the awarding of credit points.

Lecturers and students work together towards making classes successful. Students follow the instructions in the module descriptions and their lecturers' recommendations; they follow the guidelines for their degree programmes, complete the required workload for each stage as they work through their programmes and fulfill the requirements by participating actively in classes and completing their assignments. Lecturers offer learning opportunities that allow students to reflect on their studies and that foster the students' self-assessment skills. Students hold themselves accountable for the progress of their studies and are committed to developing their skills and competences. For this, students engage actively with the learning opportunities their instructors offer and rely on the support available from the university. For the lecturers it is an important goal that students do not only fulfill the requirements of their programme – especially where electives are concerned – but that they deepen their engagement with and curiosity about their subject, that they pursue their own learner goals and that they adopt an enquiring mindset.

Active Participation

Students **benefit measurably** from classes **attended** in person because of the interaction with their instructor and other students, for example in contrast to working with a textbook. Lecturers emphasise that for a successful class, it is desirable and ideally a requirement that students **attend classes** regularly and participate **actively** during the entire semester. Transparent communication about this issue should take place already at the beginning of each class, also because attendance requirements differ greatly depending on subject and course type. From the point of view of the

instructors, it is impossible to attend two classes in the same time slot. If in doubt, students contact lecturers about this issue. Active participation is important for reaching learning outcomes as successfully as possible as well as for good results in assignments and exams. Students and lecturers agree that it is pedagogically productive to offer students the opportunity to reflect on their individual learner goals in the specific context of an individual class. Since students are diverse in terms of learner goals, individual interests and their preferred learning strategies, lecturers should offer a broad spectrum of tasks and activities that include various forms of student participation as well as assessment formats.

Classes are designed in such a way that students have various opportunities, for example in class discussions, to develop and explore their subject-specific analytical skills and academic working strategies (activities vary strongly depending on the individual subject culture). Especially in communication- and practice-oriented classes, lecturers regard continuous engagement and reflection as essential. In programmes with a stronger professional focus, active participation is easily linked to goals in terms of professionalisation. In other degree programmes, active participation can also be linked to career development or to individual interests. If it is possible and productive from a pedagogical point of view, active participation can be facilitated in an asynchronous format.

Equity of access

Lecturers and students recognise that **equity of access** should ideally be available to all students so they can participate actively and complete their studies successfully. **In-person classes predominate** at our university, but **digital access is available** whenever it is pedagogically possible and productive.

In lectures, professors should offer digital access if there are no significant subject-specific or pedagogical reasons against offering it. Class meetings with a predominantly organisational outlook or a focus on introductory instructions can take place online. Materials for asynchronous preparation of classes and for revision should be made available in digital form.

It is the lecturers' wish that **digital access be limited to well-founded uses**. Lecturers expect students to only make use of digital access reasonably, since digital participation can limit both the depth of engagement and the active dimension of learning processes. Students should make a conscious decision which form of participation will contribute best to the progress and success of their studies. Consulting a lecturer offers students support for deciding about their form of participation.

Instructors and students recognise that the goal of inclusion requires a **broad range of forms of access** that goes beyond digital access. There should be a discussion in which ways digital, remote access addresses inequities of access and in which ways it does not. Lecturers and students should develop a common understanding – for example at the outset of a class during the discussion of its organisational structure – of what constitutes equity of access and commit to finding solutions for those cases where it is an issue.

The ideal we follow is a transparent procedure for deciding about **remote and digital participation** in classes. Considering the class framework and goals, instructors inform their students which forms of access are possible and which ones are not. Students avail themselves of the university structures

and institutions that offer advice and counselling. They can contact, for example, accessibility services (*ZAB*), the general student council section for students with accessibility challenges (*RSB*), the faculties' appointed accessibility representatives or the faculties' deans of studies.

Lecturers and students recognize the various living situations and contexts of both students and lecturers (e.g. disabilities, chronic illnesses, precarity, commuting, care work) and accommodate these wherever possible.

Students wish that lecturers consider such difficulties when they decide on forms of access, on how materials are made available and when they assess assignments. Students wish that lecturers recognise that studying full-time is not possible for every student.

Lecturers wish that students assess their study schedule realistically, taking their individual living situation into consideration. This includes working with a possible limit of the number of courses a student can take if they are not able to study full-time as well as an extension of the time needed for taking a degree. The advisors in the faculties and in the central student advisory service support students with such questions while they plan and make decisions about their studies.

Digital Opportunities and Digital Skills

Students and lecturers recognise that **digital teaching and learning** offers opportunities as well as risks. Digital teaching and learning can **both include and exclude students**, depending on a variety of factors. Ideally, digital teaching and learning facilitates access and thus creates equity of access (by raising student participation, facilitating the accessibility of materials as well as offering asynchronous learning opportunities, both in terms of time and place). Everyone involved in the teaching and learning context, however, is required to anticipate proactively whether any elements in a specific class and context might exclude students from learning. Instructors make this question central for the planning of their classes. Even if these issues do not concern them personally, students point out problems and excluding elements and directly inform their lecturers about them.

Teaching and learning become more flexible if digital elements are included in classes and courses. Digital components also make learning more individualised, and allow learners to monitor and guide their learning processes autonomously.

Well-organised and diverse learning platforms (Moodle/OpenMoodle) serve as an integral or complementary component of pedagogically well-designed in-person teaching and learning.

There is a general consensus that digital offerings should be employed to enrich teaching and learning. It is primarily pedagogical principles that guide the decision which teaching format will be adopted in individual classes (in person, remote, asynchronous, hybrid, etc.). Consequently, students have no claim to hybrid formats. Especially in classes with strong communicative and practical elements, hybrid teaching must be designed carefully to ensure that all students are equally part of the teaching and learning process, since communication and interaction are more difficult to manage in such classes. The communicative and practical elements in classes are central for the decision whether a course can be offered in a hybrid format. The course type is also decisive here: seminars

with their focus on interaction do not lend themselves to a hybrid format, while large lectures can be offered as a hybrid format relatively easily if logistical support is available, e.g. a student assistant.

For all decisions about digital teaching, one should take into consideration that it can have adverse effects on the **relationship** between lecturers and students. This can reduce motivation and affect learning outcomes negatively. Instructors and students should communicate openly about these issues and regularly discuss their perceptions, expectations and needs.

The technical equipment needed for digital learning and teaching is made available to all lecturers and students. Moreover, all university members have access to training, peer discussions and advising to (continue to) develop the competences that allow them to access digital teaching and learning equitably. The development of **digital skills and competences** should be integrated in each subject's curriculum in a subject-specific form. Digital teaching facilitates cooperation and collaboration with international lecturers and researchers, especially in international degree programmes. Digital instruction also offers students more detailed as well as broader insights into professional fields, which allows them to make better decisions about their future career paths.

Communicating with One Another and Our University Culture

A professional way of communicating with one another – valuing others and treating them with respect – is essential for lecturer and student interactions as well as for interactions among students. A cultural of transparency helps to achieve the goal of a mutual consensus that works like a contract between lecturers and students. Moreover, students and lecturers agree that a syllabus that is available at the beginning of the semester is a good instrument for making requirements transparent and to address the individual needs of heterogeneous groups of students. Lecturers and students can be reached by the forms of communication that have mutually been agreed upon (e.g. email, Moodle). Students should feel free to speak to lecturers about any form of discrimination they experience. Lecturers show that they are open to such conversations and also advise students about representatives and institutions they can contact in such cases.

Peer tutors can be a valuable point of contact and support for both students and lecturers. They are, however, not supposed to replace the lecturers where the overall teaching and supporting of students is concerned.

Students wish that lecturers interact more closely with the individual student councils so that the latter can properly fulfill their role as an interface between students and lecturers and also receive more support in this role.

Successful **student support** by the lecturers rests on the students availing themselves of this support – independently so if necessary – as well as on the students preparing their classes and staying informed about the requirements of their programmes (e.g. module handbooks, subject-specific guidelines). Conversely, lecturers must inform students about the support that is available to them. Lecturers must also prepare properly and stay informed about current programme requirements.

To enable lecturers and students to work together constructively, **agreements on support and supervision** are essential. The agreements should detail what is required of the students as well as

the lecturers' options and, especially, their deadlines for graded assignments and exams to avoid extending the students' study time.