

Plans for addressing diversity, discrimination, and protection from discrimination at the University of the Arts Bremen (anti-discrimination statutes) and definitions of terms

Based on the statutes on diversity and protection against and dealing with discrimination at the University of the Arts Bremen (anti-discrimination statutes), the HfK Bremen provides various accompanying materials to ensure security and transparency in dealing with and protecting against discrimination. The statutes are based on legal requirements, which is why questions may arise during their application and more detailed explanations and definitions of terms may be helpful. The accompanying materials, and in particular the glossary of terms, were developed with the aim of making the contents of the statutes more accessible and thus facilitating their application for all members of the university.

Important: Regardless of motive or the existence of malicious intent, the crucial factor in a case of discrimination is the final outcome, which always depends on intention, not effect. Carelessness or ignorance displayed in remarks and behavior can therefore result in discrimination and (sexualized) harassment.

Discrimination

Legally, discrimination is defined as impartially unjustified, unequal treatment of persons, to their detriment.

Discrimination takes various forms, such as disparagement, exclusion, generalizations, imputations, stigmatization, infantilization, contempt, insults, and injuries. It often leads to burdensome emotional, unhealthy, and socially disadvantageous consequences, by making it more difficult to access resources and easier to hinder educational or professional success.

According to the AGG, “protected characteristics” are defined as follows:

- Ethnic background
- Race
- Gender identity (including trans and intersex people)
- Religion and world views (including outsidership)
- Disability
- Sexual orientation/identity
- Age

The HfK’s anti-discrimination statutes also add chronic illness and social status to the list of protected characteristics.

In cases of discrimination, it is irrelevant if the characteristic is factual or attributed. For instance, racial discrimination can also entail falsely assuming that someone has an immigrant background.

If there is actual justification for unequal treatment, it is not a case of discrimination. Examples include: compensating for the disadvantages of disabled or chronically ill students or taking other measures to mitigate their disadvantages and provide equal opportunities.

Direct and Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination occurs if certain persons whose characteristics fall into the protected category described above, are, or could be, clearly disadvantaged by seemingly neutral rules, criteria, or procedures, except when the case is objectively justified.

Direct discrimination occurs if a person with one or more characteristics from the protected category is, has been, or will be treated less favorably than others. Treating persons with at least one of the protected characteristics differently from others in a comparable situation is considered discrimination.

Treating a person less favorably due to pregnancy or parenthood is also discrimination.

Further materials and explanatory examples can be found [on the ADE website](#).

Instructions to Discriminate

It is also a violation of the anti-discrimination statute to order someone else to discriminate. If a person asks another to behave in a such a manner that discriminates, or could discriminate, against someone else, then it is such a directive. It is also discrimination even if these instructions are not followed.

Harassment

It is harassment when undesirable behavior, particularly towards a person with protected status, aims to violate, or results in the violation of that person's dignity by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading, and/or insulting environment.

Sexual Harassment and Violence

It is sexual harassment to engage in undesired sexual behavior, which includes unwanted sexual acts and requests for such acts, sexually motivated physical contact, comments of a sexual nature, and the objectionable display or visible posting of pornographic images, which aims to injure the dignity of the person affected or results in such injury especially when an unwelcome environment involving intimidation, hostility, humiliation, degradation, or insults is created.

Sexual harassment can take verbal or non-verbal forms and can range from words and gestures to physical assaults and violence, as well as to the exploitation of digital media for purposes of harassment.

Examples:

- Remarks and communications of a sexual nature, especially
 - The use of degrading language
 - The use of sexually related language
 - Sexually degrading non-verbal communication

- Humiliating and depersonalizing remarks about individuals and/or their bodies made within any sexualized context, even a subtle one
- Sexually derogatory comments about an individual's private life and body
- Displaying or otherwise visibly posting sexist or pornographic images with the intent to insult another person, especially
 - Obscene and sexually degrading images in public areas
 - Sexist images that reduce people to nothing but their gender
 - Verbal, visual, or electronic displays of sexualized, obscene, or sexually degrading representations
 - Copying and usage of sexualized, obscene, or sexually degrading software and internet sites on computer systems in offices or on university property
- Unwelcome sexualized treatment and demands for such, especially
 - Exhibitionist behavior
 - Obviously unwelcome physical contact and intrusions
 - Sexualized physical contact, attempting sexual advances, and demands for sexual contact that are clearly unwelcome to the person affected
 - Requests for sexualized or sexual behavior
 - Tracking, stalking, cyberstalking, and coercion of a sexual nature (both direct and indirect), online and offline
 - Physical assaults, including rape

Abuse of Power

Discrimination, (sexual) harassment, and violence are considered particularly grave when accompanied by the exploitation of subordinate relationships in both educational and work spaces alike, as well as by threatening students with personal or professional harm or promising favorable treatment (abuse of power).

The abuse of power is the abuse of a (perceived) position of power in order to do damage to others, put them at a disadvantage or victimize them, or to gain personal advantages for oneself or third parties. Hierarchies, formal and informal authority to issue orders, and the exploitation of dependencies at universities, especially when academic and artistic qualifications are at stake, pose a high risk in this regard. Abuse of power can take place among those at different hierarchical levels as well as among members of the same hierarchical level. Examples of this include unwarranted appropriation of intellectual property, unlawful demands for overtime, discrimination, humiliation, and harassment.

Further important terms in the context of anti-discrimination

Intersectionality and various types of discrimination

There are also various types of discrimination. Multiple types of discrimination can be experienced when people are in a situation where they are discriminated against for more than one reason.

Intersectionality means that various forms of discrimination do not always occur individually, but rather, that they can be combined in ways to influence and reinforce each other. Different forms of discrimination can overlap and bolster each other.

Bullying

Bullying means intentional, targeted, and repeated attacks on individuals or groups. Bullying can also consist of spoken invective, insults, taunting, and threats, as well as of direct physical assaults. The goal is to intimidate the victim or to exclude them from a social group (isolation), or a work or academic environment. Bullying can be carried out systematically and repeatedly by one or more people.

Examples of bullying can be attacks on

- Opportunities for communication; for instance, deliberately holding back information or preventing someone from gaining knowledge of it
- Social relationships, such as the exclusion of individuals by avoiding contact with them
- Social status; for instance, through deliberate ridicule
- The quality of an individual's educational, professional, or living situation, such as the abusive assignment of tasks that are far above or below the person's abilities
- Health, such as abusively coercing individuals into working conditions that can damage their health

Concept for dealing with discrimination

- Statutes on diversity and protection against and dealing with discrimination at the University of the Arts Bremen (anti-discrimination statutes) were adopted by the Academic Senate on May 21, 2025
- Cooperation agreements between special advisory centers and counselors have been made
- University documents, procedural information, materials related to protection from discrimination and ways to deal with it, contact persons and their details, and a list of special advisory centers both at the university and outside of it will be made available to everyone associated with university and published on the university's website
- A poll on the university's students' experiences of discrimination is being devised and evaluated
- Workshops and events to raise awareness and improve the skills of everyone associated with the University are regularly held
- Legal bases: Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, or the Public Equal Treatment Act (AGG); Bremisches Hochschulgesetz, or Bremen Higher Education Act (BremHG)

The following recommendations for action are taken from the [University of Bremen brochure](#):

What can I do if I see discrimination?

Discrimination affects us all, which is why the University of the Arts Bremen advocates respectful cooperation among faculty and students at all levels of study, teaching, art, science, research, technology, and administration, in order to achieve fair and non-discriminatory treatment of each other. The University of the Arts, therefore, expressly encourages people to stand up to discrimination, to discuss it, and thus actively and responsibly contribute to a respectful climate for work and study.

Some things you can do:

- Address discriminatory remarks in meetings, chat or study groups, seminars, or other contexts!
- If someone is directly affected, make contact with that person and offer your support—if it's desired.
- Keep a written record of your memories so that you can later recall the details of situations and conditions. Under certain circumstances, this is another way to further support the person(s) affected, as they take steps to deal with the issue.
- If you don't know what to do in a particular case, please avail yourself of the University of the Arts' counseling network.

What can I do if I have practiced discrimination?

It is important to:

- Take the feedback and/or the criticism seriously. Even if it isn't easy to do in the moment, pause and ask yourself—without castigating yourself or others, or putting up hasty defenses—if your specific words or actions could inflict more injury.
- Reflect upon your behavior and language, especially pertaining to the (possible) effect that it may have had on the other person.
- If circumstances require, allow the other person to explain the situation and its impact from their perspective.
- Apologize to the person who feels that you have discriminated against them, even if it was not your intention to do so.
- Talk to others who are also on the path to raising their awareness of discrimination. Targeted discussion offers an opportunity to examine with your own images, attitudes, and privileges.
- The various advisory and counseling centers are also open to you. They can help you to understand the impact of your actions and speech, to sort through the criticism and draw constructive conclusions from it.
- Take the opportunity for a low-key intervention, if the other person suggests it as a way to achieve understanding.
- Accept that a complaint may possibly be made while the situation is being clarified, and that it is also the right of the person discriminated against to submit one. Just like the person impacted, you also have the right to present your side and to call in a trusted person.