

## Statement:

### No to the planned extension of mandatory attendance to seminars

The publication of this statement was decided on by the General Students' Committee (AStA) of the University of Potsdam at its third regular meeting on October 21, 2025.

Dear students of the University of Potsdam,

at the last meeting of the Commission for Teaching and Studies (LSK) on 07.10.2025, the Faculty of Human Sciences proposed an amendment to the General Study and Examination Regulations for Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programs (BAMA-O/BAMALA-O): § 5a Attendance (see appendix) is to be changed to include that, in cases of justifiable exceptions, mandatory attendance may also apply to seminars.

The AStA considers such a change as disagreeable and positions itself against any mandatory attendance in seminars. In the following, we explain why the planned extension of mandatory attendance to seminars is particularly problematic for students of marginalized groups and why it does not solve the existing problems.

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### Setback on the path towards an inclusive university with equal opportunities

The University of Potsdam views itself as a "university for all" and, with its inclusion concept and in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it has committed itself to equal participation for all students.

However, an extension of mandatory attendance would represent a massive setback on this path.

No campus of the University of Potsdam is barrier-free. For students with disabilities, chronic or mental illnesses, as well as for neurodivergent students, physical presence is often made more difficult. Reasons for this include e.g. structural barriers, lack of infection control measures, absence of sign language interpretation or a high level of sensory stimuli. Sensory overload affects not only the classes but also public transportation or pathways, as well as study rooms and cafeterias on campus. In some cases, high sensitivity to stimuli

can make it almost impossible to follow classes in real-time - as background noise and other stimuli significantly hinder information absorption. In such cases, asynchronous teaching is crucial for participation in studies. Many students also miss classes more often for health reasons or have to attend regular medical appointments, which can lead to scheduling conflicts.

Therefore, flexible and hybrid teaching formats provide important relief.

Students with care responsibilities - e.g., students with children or relatives in need of care - would also be severely restricted. The University of Potsdam markets itself as a family-friendly university - but due to the lack of childcare facilities on campus and inflexible class times, regular attendance for students with caregiving responsibilities is severely hampered. Currently, there are no regulations ensuring that classes with mandatory attendance must take place at family-friendly times. An extension of mandatory attendance would make it even more difficult, if not impossible, for students with caregiving responsibilities to successfully complete their studies.

The same applies to students who have to work due to financial constraints. Those who rely on side jobs often have little flexibility to meet rigid attendance requirements. Such a regulation would therefore further deepen social inequalities.

International students are also affected, e.g. by issues related to visas or the lack of student housing in Potsdam. As a result, at the beginning of the semester many international students are unable to attend classes in person. With a required attendance rate of e.g. 80%, successful participation in seminars could become impossible for international students who are forced to miss the first weeks of classes. For a university with internationalization efforts and numerous master's programs taught in English, this is unacceptable.

Individual compensatory measures ("Nachteilsausgleiche") are not a viable solution in this case. They require a high bureaucratic effort from the affected students, place an additional burden on the examination boards and usually do not allow for a complete exemption from mandatory attendance.

The goal should not be that accessibility has to be fought for on an individual basis. Rather, it must be ensured systematically.

## **Organizational matters**

In some degree programs there are already not enough slots in seminars. In these cases, mandatory attendance would automatically extend the study period and the standard period of study could no longer be guaranteed.

Students in teaching often already have overlaps of mandatory courses due to the diverse subject combinations. Checking for overlaps for all subject combinations would be an immense organizational effort. Therefore a change to the BAMALA-O would be especially inappropriate.

## **Complex causes for absence**

As a justification for the planned amendment, it was argued that seminars were poorly attended and that students had complained about the exams being too difficult without having regularly attended the classes. Furthermore, it was emphasized that certain skills (e.g. discussion skills) could only be taught in in-person seminars. This argumentation, in our view, falls short.

As already stated, there are various reasons for absence like disability-, health- or family-related reasons, financial burdens or the quality of teaching. If courses are perceived as unhelpful or not inclusive, it is not an individual failure of the students, but a systematic problem.

Instead of sanctioning students for their absence, the university should analyze the causes and strive for systematic improvements in teaching and campus design.

## **Informal attendance requirements already exist**

In many classes, attendance is already de facto mandatory - for example, when exam-relevant content is conveyed exclusively orally or learning materials are provided only partially. Therefore, students who cannot attend for health, family, or other reasons often do not have equal access to learning materials.

A formal extension of mandatory attendance would structurally reinforce these inequalities.

## **Self-determined learning and quality of teaching**

Studying at a university means taking responsibility for one's own learning process. This includes being able to decide for oneself which teaching formats are helpful and which are not. Those who attend a class voluntarily learn with greater motivation and long-term more sustainably than someone who is present out of obligation.

When teaching staff notice that seminars are not well attended, this should therefore be an opportunity for quality development and exchange - not for control and compulsion. Here, the university's quality management for teaching is needed.

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## **Conclusion**

We understand that many members of the teaching staff wish for seminars to be lively and engaging, with room for discussion. The planned amendment to § 5a BAMA(LA)-O does not guarantee this – it creates new problems and ignores the complexity of the reasons for absence.

Instead of obliging students to attend, formats that enhance motivation and accessibility should be promoted – for example, through hybrid and innovative teaching, as well as barrier-free learning materials. Only in this way can the university live up to its own claim of being a "university for all."

We therefore demand:

- The withdrawal of the proposal to extend mandatory attendance to seminars.
- Instead, promote measures that place voluntariness, accessibility, teaching quality, and consideration of different life realities at the center of teaching planning.

## Appendix

### § 5a Attendance

(1) Study and examination regulations are generally not allowed to stipulate regular participation or attendance requirements in courses (mandatory attendance) for the completion of a module or for admission to a module (sub-)examination.

(2) In cases of justifiable exceptions, however, mandatory attendance can be stipulated as a prerequisite for completing a module or for being admitted to a module (sub-)examination. These exceptions must be limited to the following teaching and learning formats:

- language courses,
- internships,
- practical tutorials (e.g., laboratory courses, computer tutorials, sport exercises, practical music courses, blackboard tutorials),
- excursions,
- teaching research projects or research-oriented seminars (seminars should generally have no more than 25 students; active participation by students and practice with scientific methods),
- courses that involve third parties (e.g., school students or other third parties).

(3) These exceptions must be regulated in the respective subject- or degree-specific study and examination regulations as secondary examinations ("Prüfungsnebenleistungen"). An attendance requirement cannot be implemented without such a provision. To the extent that regular participation is required, the requirement must be defined in the study and examination regulations. To the extent that mandatory attendance is required, the proportion of mandatory attendance must be at least 70%, insofar as the subject- or degree-specific study and examination regulations do not specify a higher proportion.

(4) Subsections 1-3 shall not apply to master's degree programs for continuing education.