Study conditions and mental health in higher education in Germany
Implications for healthy campus initiatives

Prof. Dr. Christiane Stock
Rational for Health Promoting Universities

• Universities are large institutions (760,000 employees and about 2.9 million students in Germany)
• Universities have a large throughput of students who are or will become professionals and policy-makers
• They are major players within the community

Potential

• Enhancing the moral of those working in universities
• Maintaining health and productive work force and reducing staff absenteeism
• Creating competitive advantage and better reputation for the university / Boosting student and staff recruitment
• Improving academic performance / Reducing student dropout
• Improving resilience in times of crisis
History of HPU internationally and in Germany (blue)

- 1995 German Network of Health Promoting Universities has been established with 5 universities
- 1996 International Meeting on HPU in Maribor, Slovenia with a WHO Healthy Cities Business Meeting
- 1997 Round Table Meeting in Lancaster, UK
- 1998 A framework for action by a European network of HPU, WHO
- 2000 International meeting in Lancashire, UK
- 2005 10th anniversary of the HPU German Network and launch of “10 HPU Principles”
- 2015 Okanagan Charter
- 2020 25th anniversary and launch of the revised version of the “10 HPU Principles”
- 2022: German HPU Network comprises over 150 Universities and Colleges and 5 regional networks
Okanagan Charter 2015

• Call to Action 1: Embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates
  ➢ Embed health in all campus policies.
  ➢ Create supportive campus environments.
  ➢ Generate thriving communities and a culture of well-being.
  ➢ Support personal development.
  ➢ Create or re-orient campus services.

• Call to Action 2: Lead health promotion action and collaboration locally and globally
  ➢ Integrate health, well-being and sustainability in multiple disciplines
  ➢ Advance research, teaching and training for health promotion knowledge and action
  ➢ Lead and partner towards local and global action for health promotion.
Higher education in Germany – developments in the 21st century
Conditions for institutions and students

- Bologna Reform
  - Modularisation of curricula
  - Higher density of exams
  - Restricted individual choice
  - Improved internationalisation
  - Improvement in teaching quality - accreditation

- Steady increase in student numbers – minimal increase in professorships (underfinancing)

- Measures to reduce study duration

- Decrease in the proportion of students eligible for public study loans

- Higher competition between institutions – excellence awards for few universities to create elite universities

- Power shift towards leadership (rectors and deans)

- Decrease in basic funding – external funding needed to maintain structures and to grow

- COVID-19 pandemic – distance learning for 2 - 4 semesters
Study conditions and students’ mental health – Results of the StudiBiFra Project
The StudiBiFra Project
Funded by the German Statutory Accident Insurance 2021-2023
Joint project of University of Bielefeld and Charité Berlin

• **Aim:** Use of the Bielefeld Questionnaire for Study Conditions and (mental) Health at German universities
  → Needs assessment for environmental changes to improve health conducive study conditions
  → Identification of vulnerable student groups

• **Support institutions for the mental health risk assessment at study places** forseen by accident prevention regulations

• **Providing data on student (mental) health and wellbeing for student health management systems**
Framework of the Bielefeld Questionnaire on Study Conditions

I. Study Conditions („Determinants“)
   0. Corona Conditions
   I. Quality and general conditions of studies
   II. Support from lecturers
   III. Quality of cooperation among students
   IV. Culture in the course of studies
   V. Culture at the institution
   VI. Filter questions

II. Impacts
   I. Academic achievement
   II. Well-being during studies
   III. Identification with studies and institution
   IV. General condition and health
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Scales for health impacts
   General Wellbeing: ProSoB
   Depressive Mood: ProSoB
   Cognitive stress symptoms: COPSOQ (Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire)
   Exhaustion: MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory)
   General health: ProSoB
The Sample (N = 20,060)
Ten universities and universities of applied sciences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>7,958 (67.5 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>3,627 (30.8 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender-diverse</td>
<td>199 (1.7 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 15 % with family responsibilities (caring for or supervising children and/or relatives).
- 2 % with severe disability or equality issue (according to definition by law)

<table>
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<th>Subject Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Education, Humanities, Social, Behavioural and Media Sciences, Economics, Law, Languages, Arts and Culture</td>
<td>11,422 (60.3 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and Life Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics</td>
<td>3,196 (16.8 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, Technology and Architecture</td>
<td>2,070 (10.9 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and Health Sciences</td>
<td>1,930 (10.2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>341 (1.8 %)</td>
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</table>
In which areas of their study conditions do German students indicate the highest or lowest need for action?
Need for action to improve study conditions
(Percentage of respondents with great or very great need for action)

- Career Prospects: 47.1%
- Time Requirements: 43.5%
- Final Year of Study: 43.0%
- Organisational Conditions: 42.9%
- Interdisciplinary Competencies: 42.6%
- Lecturers' Orientation towards Students: 21.8%
- Information from and Orientation by Lecturers: 21.5%
- Culture at the University: 21.0%
- Task-related Support from Lecturers: 18.6%
- Quality of Student Cooperation: 17.9%
Factors associated with needs for action

• Students who identified themselves as female or gender-diverse and students at universities (vs. universities of applied sciences) were significantly more likely to indicate need for action.

• Students in the final year of study were more likely to report need for action regards „career prospects“. They were less likely to report needs for action regards "time requirements".

• Associations were found between subject group and need for action regards „career prospects“ (e. g., lower need for action for "medicine and health sciences" students).
How does the expressed need for action correspond with satisfaction with study conditions?
Satisfaction with Study Conditions and Need for Action
scale averages / mean values (Likert scale 1 very low - 5 very high)

- Time Requirements
- Career Prospects
- Qualification for the Studies
- Culture in the Course of Studies
- Meaningfulness of the Studies
- Spatial Conditions
- Introductory Studies Phase
- Fit of Course Content
- Student Cooperation
- Support for Writing a Thesis

Satisfaction with conditions
Satisfaction with Study Conditions and Need for Action

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Legend:
- Red: need for action
- Blue: satisfaction with conditions

0 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5
Is the satisfaction with study conditions associated with mental health and well-being?
Associations between Study Conditions and Mental Health
significant regression coefficients (p<0.001) adjusted for gender identity and university

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From needs assessment to action – Conditions for Healthy Campus Initiatives in Germany
How is a Healthy Campus Initiative financed in Germany?
The Prevention Act 2015

- Major players – statutory health insurances and accident insurance
- 7 EURO per year and health insured person to be spent on prevention
- Thereof 2 EURO on settings-based approaches
- Quality guidelines include universities and colleges as settings eligible for funding via the prevention act
- Institutions can apply for healthy campus project funding
  - Project plan (including evaluation)
  - Leadership support
  - Participatory approach with steering group
The way forward at Charité – A medical faculty

The Project Gesund-studieren@Charité

• 5 year project funded by a health insurance and through the Prevention Act

• Steering committee (since 2021) with support from leadership (vice-dean for teaching)

• Communication of survey results and launch of the project in all committees

• Detailed data analysis – combination with other data sources

• Participatory thematic workshops
  → Kick off in May
  → Diversity Day

• Networking and exchange with other Berlin universities (Humboldt and Free University) and with regional and national HPU networks
Thank you for your attention!

christiane.stock@charite.de