



TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
DARMSTADT

Diversity Strategy

at Technical University of Darmstadt

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TU Darmstadt is part of a society that is becoming more and more diverse and most of all is becoming more aware of its diversity. To support and promote diversity and personal development of everybody is consequently not only a statutory mission, but also an essential element of our vision (Selbstverständnis). This Diversity Strategy aims for promoting social justice, for establishing and practising a culture at our University that looks critically at discrimination and for stressing the potentials for innovation arising from diversity.¹

Diversity

Noun, singular or uncountable
Pronunciation
 UK [daɪˈvɜːsə.ti], US [diˈvɜːsə.ti]
Syllabification di-ver-si-ty
 ME diversite < OFr diverseté

Meaning

Variety,
 diverseness,
 difference

a) [Ecology] denoting range of biological variety

b) [Sociology] social or cultural differences

c) [Engineering] use of different realisations of the same components (redundancy) to increase the fail-safe performance of a system

Sources: Brockhaus, DWDS der deutsche Wortschatz, Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary

1. Background

Despite sharing many common features and characteristics, people are different from each other and unique in their diversity. Sometimes these differences are visible, sometimes they are not and other times they are simply attributed by others. All associates of TU Darmstadt² are different from each other in many ways (refer to Chapter 3). Different perspectives enrich our discourse and are the basis for excellent research and education. The range of knowledge and various perspectives that are inherent to diversity have the potential for kick-starting innovative thinking and innovative processes. In this sense, it is natural for a forward-looking university to make aware of these differences, to recognise the diverse actualities of life, and to offer the best opportunities possible for personal growth. Therefore, diversity is an interdisciplinary topic of all areas and sections of the University and must be included and promoted accordingly.³ However, this only works in the absence of discrimination.

Our diversity strategy focusses on establishing a positive vision of our University and all associates of TU Darmstadt. The focus continues to be on raising awareness and developing an attitude of holding each other in high esteem while establishing structures free of discrimination that not only support diversity-minded and discrimination-critical behaviour and action, but also make it a matter of course. In this context, the present paper describes the formulated goal of the first diversity strategy of TU Darmstadt, defines the meaning of diversity on which it is based, and specifies concluding activities and measures to achieve this goal.

Diversity is a cross-cutting issue of all areas of the university, which must be integrated and promoted accordingly.

¹ Definitions of terminology used, including specific explanations and notes can be found in the *Glossar zu Diversität – Glossary on Diversity* in the diversity section of the homepage of TU Darmstadt. In addition, the Diversity Strategy is available both in English and in German.

² In this document, the term *associates of TU Darmstadt* includes both *associates (Angehörige)* and *members (Mitglieder)* as defined in Section 37(1) and (6) HessHG (*Hessisches Hochschulgesetz – Universities and Higher Education Act of the State of Hesse*). This section also lists all groups of people addressed both in the diversity strategy and in the HessHG.

³ The mission statement of TU Darmstadt is not only defined by the diversity strategy, but also by the strategies for research, study and teaching, for knowledge transfer, for internationalisation, for sustainability, and for digitisation. These strategies and their respective goals are harmonised with one another and complement each other. The University's mission statement is complemented by the *Guidelines against discrimination*, the *Guidelines against sexualised discrimination and assaults* and the *Gender equality plan*.



2. Goal and fields of action

The diversity strategy aims for establishing a more diverse, more open and more discrimination-critical culture at our University. To this end, TU Darmstadt has defined the following fields of action:

1. Analysing and modifying existing structures
2. Demanding and promoting diversity
3. Questioning personal behaviour and actions critically and increasing our awareness

1. Analysing and modifying existing structures

The diversity strategy is the beginning of a binding process of discussing and analysing diversity within TU Darmstadt intensively. This process is conducted by all associates of TU Darmstadt, all services, organisational units and departments and aims for a cultural and organisational change. This way, a professional approach to diversity is promoted in all areas and sections of the University. To this end, an awareness for diversity in our thinking and action must be established and current conditions must be analysed and **permanently transformed into accessible structures free of discrimination**. This does not only concern digital or constructional barriers, but also other obstacles that must be revealed and actively changed, such as processes in research, teaching and administration.

2. Demanding and promoting diversity

To establish a framework that recognises the diversity among all associates of TU Darmstadt, diversity must be actively practised across the University and change must be actively pursued. However, it is not enough to just recognise the existing diversity, it must also be actively encouraged. This is achieved by establishing **inclusion and fair equality of opportunity** as our core values. Against this backdrop, internal rules, habits and processes must be reflected and modified. **Inclusion** means that the diversity of all people must not only be considered, but must also be taken into account in decision-making processes. Hence, inclusion is understood most broadly including all dimensions of diversity (refer to Chapter 3). All people and their differing circumstances will have to be



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considered equally. For diversity to bloom, individual needs must be taken into account and barriers must be removed. This will also ensure excellent education and job opportunities.

Fair equality of opportunity means that it must be made possible to achieve personal education and development

goals, and to this end, supportive opportunities must be offered accordingly. In doing so, different paths and circumstances are considered as valuable.

3. Questioning personal behaviour and actions critically and increasing our awareness

As associates of TU Darmstadt, we shape our University. To allow for an environment free of discrimination and for optimal working and studying conditions, all of us must do our part. In short, all associates of TU Darmstadt are responsible for establishing and supporting an institution that is diverse and critical of discrimination. All of us contribute to a diversity-sensitive culture and organisation.

Jointly, we strive for dealing with one another respectfully, working and studying together peacefully, and establishing non-discriminatory structures at TU Darmstadt.

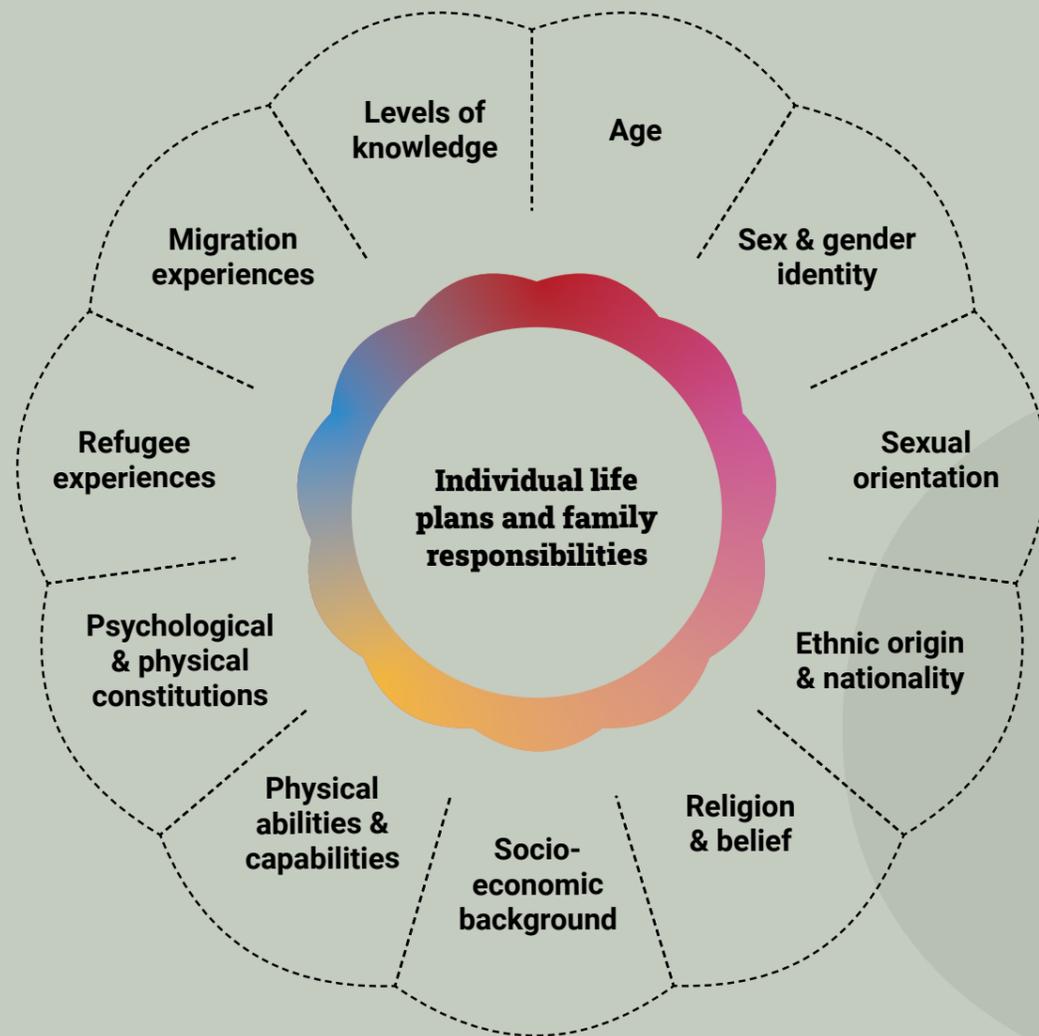
Hence, **raising awareness and reflection** must be incorporated into our regular work and study routine. To this effect, all associates of TU Darmstadt can participate in various programmes, courses, workshops etc. that aim for making people not only aware of diversity, but also reflect normative visions and stereotypes. This will enable them to deal with one another emphatically and professionally. An **open-minded approach regarding errors and mistakes** is an essential precondition. This means that we admit to ourselves that we make mistakes despite our best efforts to the contrary, that we permit others to point out these mistakes, and that we accept this criticism as a constructive opportunity for improvement and personal growth.

It is equally important to respond to mistakes sympathetically and to use them as an opportunity to discuss and reflect on matters openly and transparently.

All of us contribute to a diverse and inclusive institution that is critical of discrimination.



Diversity understanding of TU Darmstadt



3. Meaning of diversity of TU Darmstadt

In the context of TU Darmstadt, certain differences and related dimensions of diversity are of particular importance. Aligned with the AGG (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz – General Equal Treatment Act) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, these are categorisations such as age, sex and gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin and nationality, religion and belief, physical abilities, as well as psychological and physical constitution. Regarding our University as a place of study and work, the categories of socio-economic background, status and educational background, migration and refugee experiences, diverse ways of life, and care-giving responsibility must also be included.⁴

Also, varying cognitive abilities or levels of knowledge must be taken into account, for instance in teaching. Naming the dimensions of diversity, however, has nothing to do with categorising people to describe them. Categories are used as criteria of analysis to identify possible barriers and specific needs of support, and to be able to provide fair equality of opportunity for employees and staff, university teachers, students and prospective students on this basis. During this analysis and identification process, the focus is on seeing people as individuals and as heterogeneous within the categories they are assigned to. At the same time, it must be taken into account that each category both by itself and linked with others on various levels are most powerful and have

great impact. People can experience privileges and advantages in some dimensions and at the same time disadvantages and/or even multiple discrimination in other dimensions. The University encompasses various disciplinary and functional areas and sections. These organisational structures require that people work or study in various areas and sections and that they take on different roles, that is wear different hats as they carry out their various tasks. The diversity among the associates of TU Darmstadt allows for many different points of views and insights on any subject or topic. Academic discourse, the institution, teaching, science and research, all of them largely benefit from this diversity.

⁴ You can find additional forms and examples on these dimensions in the Glossary on Diversity in the diversity section of the homepage of TU Darmstadt.



Relating to society as a whole, our regular work and study routine, the dimensions of diversity mentioned above often go hand in hand with attribution and discrimination.

be promoted, encouraged and recognised, and existing barriers preventing this from happening must be removed. To make barriers visible and to remove (multiple) discrimination, TU Darmstadt is pursuing a discrimination-critical and intersectional approach towards diversity. Consequently, existing structures are being examined closely and everyone is being made aware of diversity and its potential. This also includes making them aware of discrimination by focussing on self-reflection and reducing bias. Differences are being named and recognised, while discriminatory stereotyping and multiple discrimination inherent to categorisation are being reflected to understand social inequality and to deal with it appropriately.

The University is committed to give all associates of TU Darmstadt fair opportunities to achieve their personal goals. The University stands up **against discrimination** on a structural and individual level and stands up **for inclusion** of all associates of TU Darmstadt on all dimensions of diversity. For this to come true, all services, organisational units, departments and associates of TU Darmstadt are required to participate and to commit themselves.

certain people pervade society and our University alike. This kind of discrimination is experienced particularly by people who do not conform with (consciously or subconsciously) accepted and expected standards, but are different on various levels. Diversity is often wrongly assumed to be a deviation from accepted and expected standards. Yet the opposite is true of our society. The diversity of people is the norm historically speaking as well as in terms of our society as a whole: We are and always have been a pluralistic society. Our University, however, does not mirror this diversity. Hence diversity must

TU Darmstadt is combating structural discrimination and is committed to the inclusion of all members.

4. Activities to achieve this goal

All associates of TU Darmstadt contribute towards implementing the fields of action of this diversity strategy mentioned in Chapter 2. To this end, all areas and sections of our University will receive support in identifying needs, making existing efforts and structures visible and in establishing additional activities purposefully.

In specific areas and/or sections of the University, some activities will come into play particularly. Due to the diversity of organisational units, key areas of work and individual people, the challenges that we face are many and diverse. This diversity requires a differentiated, needs-oriented and well-reflected course of action. In addition, specific fields of action and activities can be of greater relevance than others due partly to differing preconditions and partly to differing needs of specific services, organisational units, departments and people. Depending on the respective personal profile, individual objectives and goals can be specified in line with the diversity strategy and the supportive offers (instructions and advice). It is important to actively deal with the diversity topic and to establish an understanding of its various facets.

Specific activities can have an impact on various levels at the same time and, thus, resulting in a mutually stimulating process. In other words, personal growth does not only have a positive effect on the respective associates of TU Darmstadt, but also has this effect on the University as an institution and on society, and vice versa.

The target group of these activities are all associates of TU Darmstadt (students, employees and staff) as well as prospective students. **Everybody** is responsible for practising and establishing a mindful co-existence and interaction free of discrimination while aware of and accepting our differences. In this context, TU Darmstadt actively supports the following measures based on the fields of action stated in Chapter 2⁵:

⁵ The activities can be assigned to multiple fields of action. However, for reasons of clarity, they are not assigned more than once.



4.1 Analysing and modifying existing structures

The diversity topic is being **structurally embedded** across the University by:

- Establishing a central Coordination Office for Diversity Work;
- Establishing an Office for Anti-discrimination as a consultation service for employees, staff and students in case of discrimination and for preparing prevention concepts;
- Interconnecting existing offices, services and structures to increase synergies, efficiency and visibility for all;
- Conceptualising and regularly conducting central and decentralised meetings and events to network, interconnect and exchange;
- Conducting and analysing surveys among associates of TU Darmstadt regarding diversity to identify needs and appropriate measures to be taken, to coordinate and modify standardised surveys in a diversity-sensitive manner with the respective offices and units in charge;
- Analysing the reasons for dropping out of university and terminating employment prematurely (particularly in the qualification phase) to identify appropriate measures to be taken;
- Departments, services and organisational units taking responsibility for examining and critically reflecting on their structures and processes in terms of their conformity with our understanding of diversity, that is being aware and mindful of and encouraging diversity free of discrimination. The University offers supportive advice and guidelines in this matter;
- Firmly establishing processes to develop degree programmes and organise research that champion diversity and critically examine discrimination;
- Promoting, supporting and organising opportunities to firmly establish training and continuing education offers on diversity.

Infrastructural and structural measures are being examined and, if possible, reworked and improved across the entire university. For instance, by:

- Providing barrier-free access to rooms and buildings, pathways and roads to the University and on campus, including digital access;
- Providing more sanitary facilities that include gender-neutral options;
- Making associates of TU Darmstadt aware of central rooms available for individual use (such as parent-child-rooms, chill-out rooms and quiet spaces, time-out spaces for your (mental) well-being, single study/work places), in addition to examining and implementing decentralised options;
- Putting up multilingual signage;
- Identifying and removing other existing barriers, for instance regarding the equipment and furnishings of course rooms.

Internal and external communication is being analysed and modified regarding discriminatory elements by:

- Assisting in checking and modifying written communication and by preparing instructions and guidelines on non-discriminatory language;
- Translating the University's homepage and relevant documentation from German into English and Leichte Sprache (the German Easy Read version) at the very least;
- Providing digital easy-access information on diversity;
- Providing transparent key information on existing consultation and continuing education offers;
- Addressing prospective students in a diversity-friendly way.



4.2 Demanding and promoting diversity

Recruitment and admission procedures are being analysed and modified fairly and sensitively in terms of diversity by:

- Adapting application processes and selection procedures fairly and sensitively in terms of diversity by using advertising texts and specific leadership training that promote diversity;
- Launching mandatory anti-bias training for anyone taking part in selection, examination and admission procedures (particularly in case of professorial appointment committees and other selection committees to fill senior positions with leadership responsibilities), and by examining the incorporation into existing concepts;
- Examining admission procedures and the recognition of qualifications and degrees discrimination-critically.

Teaching and research are reflected upon and modified in a diversity-sensitive way by:

- Opening events on diversity to all students;
- Providing alternative forms of learning and examination, including examinations made anonymous;
- Consulting and advising on diversity-minded research and project applications, providing more advice and guidance to collaborative research alliances on diversity as an interdisciplinary topic (such as diversity-specific information events and workshops for collaborative research alliances);
- Examining and establishing possible incentive systems (supporting projects, conducting pilot projects, ideas contests etc.);
- Setting up working groups and/or research groups in a diversity-friendly way, such as advisory bodies, committees, boards and advisory councils both inside and outside of TU Darmstadt and during events (such as presenters, keynote speakers).



4.3 Questioning personal behaviour and actions critically and increasing our awareness

Principal offers to raise awareness and reflect are being established. These encompass:

- Continuing education offers for students, employees and staff;
- Specific training and continuing education offers for university teachers;
- Introduction to and documentation of good-practice examples in teams;
- Checks on how diversity-promoting activities are honoured (for instance by introducing certificates for diversity-friendly work conditions).

Need-specific support offers are being organised by:

- Identifying groups in need of specific support and empowerment offers;
- Organising and bundling these offers;
- Identifying additional needs and establishing additional offers.

Participating in activities on **raising awareness and reflection** are being promoted. These encompass:

- Needs-based continuing education for employees, staff and students on the dimensions of diversity and their interconnections;
- Extending the training of tutors and mentors;
- University-wide events on diversity in regular intervals;
- Providing material for independent analysis of this matter.



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The diversity strategy is a participatory process that is being started with this initial paper and that is pursuing an on-going and long-term development. Fields of action and activities will be constantly examined and modified in the coming months and years. To support the implementation of the strategy, topic-specific instructions and guidelines are being provided in the diversity section of the homepage of TU Darmstadt. To ensure as much transparency within the implementation process as possible, updates will be published on the homepage regularly.

Simultaneously with the strategy process, TU Darmstadt is participating in a two-year audit procedure called *Vielfalt gestalten – Diversity-Audit des Stifterverbands für die Deutsche Wissenschaft* (Shaping diversity – diversity audit of the *Stifterverband*). In the course of the audit, the strategy process will be guided by experienced auditors while external experts will assist TU Darmstadt during the implementation, examination and modification of the measures in place.





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