

Cultural standards at German universities

Source:



Mehrsprachigkeit
und Multikulturalität
im Studium

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Every culture has a number of features that are characteristic of that culture. These specifics can be summarized under the term “cultural standards”. The following explanations are intended to provide you with an overview of special features in the academic context at German universities, the observance of which can be beneficial to successful intercultural communication.

Objectivity

German culture is characterised above all by ‘objectivity’. Objective behaviour is equated with professionalism and implies extensive control of emotions and personal sensitivities. Accordingly, the communication style is also characterised by objectivity. The argumentation is generally goal-orientated, weak points are usually openly named and arguments are primarily based on facts.

In an academic context, this means that you should avoid lengthy polite phrases when communicating and address your actual concerns without any major detours, because in Germany you ‘get to the point quickly’ and ‘stick to the point’.



Appreciation of structures and rules

In Germany, there are many regulations, ordinances and rules that apply equally to everyone. Exceptions are rarely made. There are clear structures and standardised processes for most areas of activity. Actions are usually carefully organised and planned down to the smallest detail in order to identify and prevent potential sources of error and obstacles in advance.

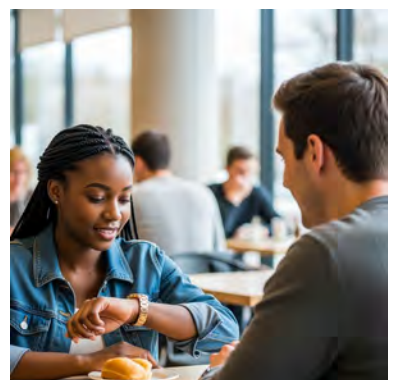
In the academic context, this means that compliance with rules is taken for granted, their violation is usually not tolerated and normally results in sanctions.



Time planning

In Germany, time is perceived as a precious commodity that should be used productively rather than wasted. German culture is therefore typically characterised by long-term planning and fulfilling work and time schedules as reliably as possible. In Germany, time reliability is considered an important characteristic for assessing a person's trustworthiness.

In the academic context, this means that tolerance for missed deadlines, delays and interruptions is usually low and you should endeavour to keep to deadlines and appointments.



Internalised control

Self-discipline and a sense of duty are important characteristics of German culture. Most Germans take their work, their role, their tasks and the associated responsibility very seriously. In the academic context, this means that a certain degree of autonomous behaviour is expected. You should complete assigned tasks independently – even without external control.



Separation of areas of life

A clear separation of the different areas of life is typical for Germans. As a rule between professional life and private life. In addition, most Germans differentiate behaviour according to the level at which they are dealing with another person.

In the academic context, for example, this means that lecturers do not answer questions about student matters in the canteen, in the park or at a chance meeting in the supermarket, but in the designated consultation hour.



Directness in communication

The German style of communication is generally direct and explicit. It is spoken in clear words and facts are usually stated openly. Even the hierarchical relationships between the interaction partners may even take a back seat in favour of discussing the matter at hand.

In an academic context, this means that you should express your opinion openly but politely. Get to the point without beating around the bush or taking long detours and focus your communication on the subject matter and content.



This handout has been translated from German into English. The source in the original language is:
https://www.uni-kassel.de/mumis/www.mumis-projekt.de/mumis/images/trainingsmaterial/Kulturstandards_an_deutschen_Hochschulen.pdf

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