

Guidelines for Practicing Caring Relationships in Academia

based on Dr. Melissa Schuh's keynote at the DR Symposium
"Care and Neglect in German (American) Studies" on February 7, 2025.

Rethinking academic value and values: towards structures of (self-)care, solidarity, and community in German academia"

As recent movements against precarious working conditions in German academia have shown, current employment structures, labor conditions, and hierarchies are rife with systemic neglect towards all members of the academy. This impacts students, administrative and technical staff, early career researchers, and (otherwise) precariously employed academics. It especially affects those across all these groups who are already marginalized due to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, disability and chronic illness, care responsibilities, and age. This neglect takes many forms, some of them more obvious, such as the existential crisis of continuous precarious fixed-term employment or abuse of power and position due to the hierarchical chair system for professorships. Others are more implicit, obscure, or insidious, such as missing provisions for compassionate leave in case of bereavement or a lack of safety and accessibility measures for the immunocompromised.

By rethinking existing notions of value and values in academia, Melissa Schuh's keynote explored different ways in which we can practice care and self-care to nurture structures of solidarity and community in the face of systemic neglect. This document gathers some of the main takeaways from the keynote.

Values towards (self-)care, solidarity, and community in German academia:

1. Collaboration and collective knowledge (over competition and individual brilliance)
2. Foundational and slow scholarship (over quick projects)
3. Teaching (over the constant prioritization of research)
4. Diversity, equality, inclusion, and justice (over the myth of meritocracy)

Practices towards self-care:

1. Practise to say no.
2. Be very particular about the service and committee work you commit to.
3. Make time to connect/keep up with friends and colleagues you've made at other institutions and places.
4. Choose carefully what to care about in academia.
5. Resist the impulse to compare.
6. Value your strategies and practices of self-care to the highest degree possible.

Individual (informal) acts of offering care, solidarity, and community in academia:

1. Be a union member and support industrial action/participate in protests.
2. Normalise collaborative and collective work.
3. Foster caring relationships with colleagues.
4. Prioritise, support, and uplift marginalized scholars. To do this, you can:
5. Give platforms and sponsorship consciously.
6. Teach with a view to more representation.
7. Stop citing white cis men.
8. Name systems of oppression as such.
9. Create more accessible spaces.

Formal and collective acts and structures of care, solidarity, and community:

1. Departmental DEI group/DEI liaison officer
2. Faculty diversity officer
3. Antiracist teaching (see guide: <https://www.phil.uni-kiel.de/de/fakultaet/beauftragte/diversitaetsbeauftragte/aktuelles>)

To implement **solidarity** and **community** as principles of care in academic work and life, we encourage everyone working in academia to continue asking themselves the following questions when navigating academic spaces:

Who is missing here?

How can we make room for all of us?

How can we change our academic values to include and value all of us?

We invite you to consistently engage with these questions, and to develop further strategies and alliances to address them.

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