

Statement by students of the University of Erfurt

Erfurt, 20 March 2023

Sexual Assault Case by a University Professor Against Students Goes to Appeal

This week, the Thuringian Higher Administrative Court in Weimar will hear the appeal against a philosophy professor at the University of Erfurt. The Administrative Court Meiningen had previously ruled in December 2020 that the currently suspended professor should be allowed to return to his teaching position and retain his civil servant status after sexualized assaults against students.

As students of the University of Erfurt, we welcome the fact that the Thuringian Ministry of Economy, Science and Digital Society, as the professor's employer, has appealed against this ruling. **Our position on this matter is as follows:**

In its previous disciplinary ruling, the Meiningen Administrative Court deliberately disregarded the assaultive character of the acts - despite statements by the persons concerned confirming that the sexual contact was entered into involuntarily and out of a feeling of dependence towards the professor. The fact that the judgment of the Administrative Court Meiningen only speaks of "clearly inappropriate behavior" represents a trivialization of the sexual assaults that cannot be overlooked – especially because the professor in question has already been convicted for these assaults under criminal law on charges of taking advantage and attempted severe coercion. We hope that the Higher Administrative Court will come to a different assessment, taking those impacted seriously, as well as its obligation to the student body of the University of Erfurt.

Allowing the professor in question to return to teach would potentially endanger students. In contrast to the university (whose task it is to protect students), the Uni Erfurt Student Council has already positioned itself clearly and unequivocally: "The reputation and, above all, the trust in this professor by students has been permanently destroyed!" Such mistrust leads to a failure to cooperate between students and teachers in seminars, lectures, and advisory meetings. This would be to the detriment of the students.

Professors, especially cis-male professors, have a prominent position of authority and power in university teaching. These patriarchal power structures enable officials to exploit their position to the detriment of students. The retention of such an abusive and sexist man in his position would be unacceptable situation.

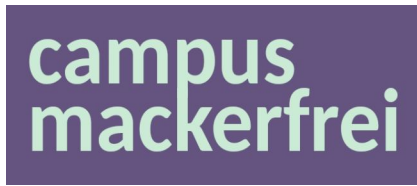
A verdict in favor of the professor again and his reinstatement in the university would not only affect us, but it would also have a signal effect: It would signal to those affected by sexual assaults that the violence they experience is not recognized and does not matter. It would signal to students and university staff that such assaults and the perpetrators who commit them have, and should be allowed to keep, their place at the university. It would signal to professors and cis men in positions of power that they can escape responsibility and that this behavior is condoned.

Our critique against patriarchal conditions does not end with the abusive professor or the adjudicating court. It is a fundamental problem that victims of sexual harassment and violence are still not believed, both socially and legally, and their victimhood is cast into doubt – often by resorting to victim blaming and misogynistic and anti-feminist narratives. This structural violence causes additional injuries, it retraumatizes and it incapacitates, as numerous statements by injured parties after such processes make clear. This should give the responsible court and the university food for thought. The presence of sexism and sexual violence must finally be acknowledged and thematized in both the legal and academic spheres. To this end, those affected and their perspectives must be taken seriously. The appeals process holds the opportunity to do this.

But regardless of how the Higher Administrative Court will rule: We will not rest! For us students, the university should be a space in which we can further our education and develop – and this regardless of our (assumed) gender. We do not accept it when this space is taken away from us by cis men who exercise their power, and we resolutely oppose it.

No place for perpetrators - Against sexualized violence and patriarchal power structures on campus and everywhere!

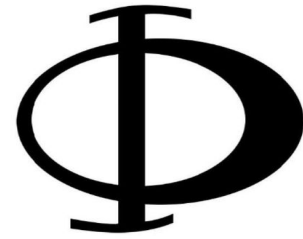
First signatories:



campus mackerfrei



Feministisches Forum Erfurt



Fachschaftsrat Philosophie



Studierendenrat der Universität Erfurt



Fachschaftsrat Geschichte



Hochschulgruppe
Fridays for Future Erfurt



Kritisches Lehramt



Arbeitsgruppe
Nachhaltigkeit Erfurt



DGB-Jugend
Hochschulgruppe Erfurt