

## **Green areas and red lines: A framework for diversity of opinion and tolerance**

**Mission:** It is the mission of the university and its members to help shape the social, ecological and economic changes that our society needs in the face of numerous crises and concrete threat scenarios by carrying out its tasks in teaching and research. The three fundamental values of the university – encouraging freedom, striving for truth and promoting social responsibility – provide orientation and (re-)reflection for the members of the university.

**Objective:** This document is intended to take up the current debate on freedom of opinion, freedom of science, teaching, and the arts (Article 5 of the Basic Law) as well as diversity of perspective, and condense it into a position that provides orientation for our university. The aim is to provide as much space as possible (green areas) for the free expression of opinion. However, this free space are protected by boundaries (red lines). These boundaries are designed to ensure a balance between freedom of expression and the necessary responsibility, and guarantee a constructive and respectful culture of discussion based on the established guiding principles.

### **Guiding principles:**

1. **Scientific integrity in research and teaching:** research is based on objectivity, accuracy, and integrity. The university follows the DFG's principles of good scientific practice. University teaching must also follow scientific standards.
2. **Social responsibility:** The university assumes social responsibility in its mission statement. It takes the dangers of social trends that call the free democratic basic order into question seriously and addresses them in teaching and research as well as in a lively debate culture .
3. **Freedom of opinion:** Though freedom of opinion is a premise worthy of protection in democracies, at our university, it does not include the right to present opinions as scientifically proven fact without scientific plausibility checks.
4. **Against discrimination and hate speech:** respectful interaction, a constructive debate culture, and mutual appreciation are the foundations of the university community. Defamation, discrimination and hate speech will not be tolerated.

**University as a space for discourse:** The University Witten/Herdecke is staffed by academics with a wide range of expertise who allow for high-level academic discourse on socially relevant issues. This expertise is also deliberately used to counter social polarization and to give students and employees of the university the opportunity for reflection and discussion. Under these conditions, the university pledges to offer as much protected space as possible for a diversity of perspective and freedom of opinion while maintaining academic integrity and respect.

Debates should be based on scientific findings, evidence and facts – wherever and whenever possible. If no scientifically proven findings are available, a clear differentiation between assertions and hypotheses versus evidence and facts is required. Opinions must also be critically examined against the state of the art in the relevant specialist field.

**Limits of the discourse space:** The university undertakes to keep the discourse space as open as possible to allow for the growing challenges of a polarizing society. The boundaries set by this space are crossed not only when applicable law is violated – the university likewise condemns personal attacks and attacks on the democratic principles of our society and the constitutional state.

The limits of this discourse space also provide a clear line that is overstepped in cases where reaching an understanding on the basis of scientific criteria and methods is not possible.

**Reflection on one's own actions**

The members of the university shall endeavour to reflect on their own actions in situations that are considered critical pursuant to the aforementioned principles. They shall take such opportunity to create transparency in decision-making and to promote their own resilience in the sense of a learning organisation.

Decreed by the Senate on 05.11.2024

**Informational/Procedural:**

Management will apply the principles set forth in this missive to any pertaining decisions and in the exercising of its domestic authority. A registration procedure has been implemented for public events at the university. It may in some cases become necessary to cancel any given event to ensure the integrity of the boundaries outlined above. The university affirms that it will, in such cases, strive to keep the impact of such decisions on academic freedom and freedom of expression to a minimum.

The responsible department must be consulted for all questions relating to press and public relations work.

Presidium/Executive board