Session 5- Group 1
Exploring Critical Incidents at German Universities

Ahmed / Lebanon / Course of studies unknown
Interaction partner(s): German lecturer
Moment of enquiry: SS 08
Experience of difference: Ways of cultivating relationships between students and lecturers

Ahmed, a student from Lebanon, would like to give one of his professors, whom he perceives as especially friendly and open-minded, a present. He has already passed one of the professor’s exams and needs to pass several more. Ahmed feels that the professor is supporting his integration process and would like to show his appreciation. When visiting his family in Beirut during the semester break, he purchases a large illustrated book about Lebanese culture. At the start of the new semester, Ahmed goes to see the professor during his consulting hours to hand him the gift, but the professor declines it. He refuses to accept the book and asks the Lebanese student to take it back with him. Ahmed is disappointed about the rejection of this present and perceives the professor’s behaviour as rude and insulting.

1. What function does the gift have for the Lebanese student?

2. Why does the lecturer not accept the gift?

Session 5- Group 2

Exploring Critical Incidents at German Universities

Raya / Indonesia / Foreign Languages in Adult Education

Interaction partner(s): German female student, German female lecturer/ professor

Moment of enquiry: SS 07

Experience of difference: Behaviour expectations towards students and lecturers

Raya, an Indonesian student, is studying for her master’s degree at a German university. She attends different seminars and likes to sit in the last row, from where she can best observe what is going on in the seminar. In one of the seminars, she notices the following: At the beginning of the class, a student is standing at the lectern; she is supposed to give a presentation that day and is getting her material ready. When the professor enters the classroom, everyone stops talking and the seminar begins. After a few introductory words by the professor, the student gives her presentation. The presentation is interspersed with lively discussions between the presenter, the other students and the professor. When the professor gets ready for a lengthy explanation, the presenting student sits down on a table. Raya finds this behaviour outrageous. Finally, when the professor asks the presenter for her paper to quote from it, the student hands her the paper with her left hand. Raya can’t believe her eyes, and she waits for an angry reaction from the professor. But the seminar continues without incident, and the student finishes her presentation.

1. How is Raya’s outrage to be interpreted? From her point of view, which cultural norms were violated in the seminar?

2. Why does the lecturer remain calm and why doesn’t she consider the student’s behavior inappropriate?


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1 beobachten
2 Vortragspult
3 durchsetzt sein mit
4 empörend
5 zitieren
6 Zwischenfall
7 verletzt werden
8 unangemessen
Session 5- Group 3

Exploring Critical Incidents at German Universities

Dennis / Germany / Romance Studies and Ms. Kohlhaas, German lecturer

Interaction partner(s): English student and students from Pakistan

Moment of enquiry: SS 07

Experience of difference: Meaning of facial expressions and gestures

Dennis, who is studying Romance Languages and Literature, is dating an English exchange student. When he gets a test back in one of his seminars, Dennis wants to communicate to his English girlfriend, who is seated father back, that he got grade 2 on his test. He puts two fingers up in the air, pointing the outside of his hands towards the English student. She is obviously shocked by the gesture.

In another seminar, Ms. Kohlhaas teaches engineering. Overall, she enjoys teaching international students, but the Indian students are a cause for concern: Whenever she explains something, the Indian students slowly shake their heads from side to side. Ms. Kohlhaas then wonders how she could describe the situation to make it easier to understand for the students, and she tries to explain it in a more simplified manner\(^1\). Then when she asks if the students have understood everything, the Indian students keep shaking their heads. This behaviour confounds\(^2\) Ms. Kohlhaas very much.

1. What does Dennis’ gesture mean from the German student’s point of view? Why does the Indian students’ behaviour confuse Ms. Kohlhaas?

2. How does the English student interpret the gesture? What does the Indian students’ head shaking mean?


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\(^1\) einfacher

\(^2\) verwirren
Session 5- Group 4

Exploring Critical Incidents at German Universities

Boris / Kazakhstan/ Linguistics and Kathi / Georgia

Interaction partner(s): German lecturer

Moment of enquiry: WS 08/09

Experience of difference: responsibilities of teaching staff and time organisation of office hours

Boris from Kazakhstan wants to apply for a BA programme in Linguistics after passing his German language course. He visits the professor in charge during his office hours but soon he is doubting the professor’s knowledge and expertise in advising on the said degree programme. For instance, when Boris enquires\(^1\) about the duration of the programme, the professor says this depends on the student and his organising skills as well as his time schedule for his studies. Later on Boris asks for a tailor-made\(^2\) study plan for his first year of studies. The professor hands him a copy of the study regulations with an overview of the whole degree programme and tells him he has to create his own study plan independently. Boris feels the professor doesn’t know enough about the formal requirements of the programme he wants to enroll in and leaves his office furious and frustrated.

Meanwhile, Kathi, a student from Georgia, has been facing difficulties with building her individual study plan but finally manages to plan her semester without any help from others and feels very proud. However, as the answers to a couple of questions still remain unclear to her, she wants to speak to one of the responsible professors. He cordially\(^3\) welcomes her but tells her to come back tomorrow during his office hours because he doesn’t have time for her right now. When Kathi returns on the next day, a number of students are already waiting outside his office to be called inside. Only Kathi seems to be waiting to no avail\(^4\). Suddenly the students who only arrived after her are called inside. She gets angry and is about to leave when a student asks her if she hadn’t signed up in the waiting list? Kathi is confused. What list? Why didn’t the professor tell her about a list yesterday?

1. How can you explain Boris’ expectations? What communication style is Kathy probably expecting from her home university?

2. Why is the professor not able to hand Boris the desired study plan? On what academic traditions is the German studies organisation based? What might be the purpose\(^5\) of a waiting list for office hours?

Source: http://www.mumis-projekt.de/mumis/index.php/ci-datenbank/nationalitaet/asien#Kasachstan (last accessed 09.08.2016)
Session 5- Group 5

Exploring Critical Incidents at German Universities

Ahmet and Tuba / Turkey

Interaction partner(s): German lecturer

Moment of enquiry: SS 09

Experience of difference: role expectations to students in office hours

Two Turkish students, a young man and his sister, visit Mr Baum during his office hours to get information about a certain Master programme. The young lady has already finished her Bachelor degree at a Turkish university and wants to continue her studies at a German university.

Ahmet, who has been living and studying in Germany for the last three years, is leading the conversations while Tuba keeps silent. Mr Baum feels awkward because of that and tells her to ask questions as it is all about her studies. Thereupon Tuba enquires hesitantly about the content of the Master programme after glancing at her brother. However, Ahmet soon interrupts her and continues the conversation on her behalf. Mr Baum is angry. How can he give advice to a student who is obviously not able to speak for herself and organise her study life on her own?

1. How does the German professor interpret the behavior of the Turkish student and her brother? What does he expect from a Master student?

2. How could you explain the behavior of the Turkish siblings? Why does the young man do all the talking?

Source: http://www.mumis-projekt.de/mumis/index.php/ci-datenbank/nationalitaet/europe (last accessed 09.08.2016)
Session 5- Group 6
Exploring Critical Incidents at German Universities

Interaction partner(s): Congolese student

Moment of enquiry: SS 08

Experience of difference: Behaviour expectations for invitations during a semester abroad in Belgium

German student Katja meets Congolese student Akim, with whom she stays in touch by email after her return to Germany. A few months later, Katja is getting ready to get married, and she decides to invite Akim. A few days later she receives an email in which Akim expresses that he feels honoured\(^1\) to be invited and that he would love to attend, but he doesn’t know for sure whether he can actually make the trip happen. One week before the wedding it is still not clear whether Akim can make it or not, despite several inquiries\(^2\) from Katja. Katja is getting impatient\(^3\), as she has to find accommodation for the Congolese student. Finally, four days before the wedding, Akim calls and asks whether he could come the very next day and stay with Katja’s family until the wedding. His brother is available that day and could drive him. Katja finds his request unbelievable. It is quite obvious that the days before a wedding are very busy, and nobody would have time to tend to an extra guest. She makes it clear to him that this is not possible and asks him to look for an alternative. Two days later, Akim calls again, announcing\(^4\) his arrival for the next day. Luckily, Katja is able to arrange accommodation for him with friends.

1. What are the German student’s expectations toward a wedding guest?

2. What does the Congolese student expect of the German family, and what could explain his expectations?


\(^{1}\) geehrt
\(^{2}\) nachfragen
\(^{3}\) ungeduldig
\(^{4}\) ankündigen