

Discrimination in virtual learning environments in higher education

Dear students,

My name is Katharina Winkler, and I am a Master's student at the University College in London. I am looking for participants for a qualitative study on discrimination in universities in virtual learning environments as part of my Master's thesis.

My research has shown that there is little to no consideration of the student perspective concerning discrimination in higher education. There are a few surveys at German universities, but 99% of them are quantitative. A university should be a place of personal self-development and advancement for every student and free of discrimination. Therefore, it is even more important to give students a voice to be heard and not to disappear behind numbers in quantitative studies. For this reason, after completing the master thesis, an anonymous report will also be prepared, which will present all the study results and be handed over to your university. It will be used to derive recommendations for action and subsequently introduce appropriate countermeasures to provide all students with an equal and equitable university education.

Discrimination can take many forms. It can be directed against gender, affecting women and transgender people in particular. Students with disabilities or chronic illnesses may benefit from digital learning formats. Still, for some, these new formats may present barriers to taking courses or exams. Restricted contact policies can cause increased racial discrimination. Childcare due to closed kindergartens and schools or caring for family members parallel to studying often prevents students from attending courses or exams. Students who struggle financially are often disadvantaged because they cannot afford the equipment they need (e.g., Internet, laptops). These are just a few examples.

Since this is a sensitive topic, I would like to invite participants for individual interviews. This will ensure that the interview takes place in a safe space. The length of the interviews is set at approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews will take place online to avoid additional contact during the pandemic. So, if you have experienced discrimination in any form during your studies and would like to share those experiences with me as part of the study, I would appreciate your positive feedback.

You can reach me at the following email address: katharina.winkler.19@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you for your participation and efforts. An Amazon voucher worth 25 euros and two vouchers worth 10 euros will be raffled off among all participants.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Yours sincerely,
Katharina Winkler