

Von: Miro Griffiths M.Griffiths1@leeds.ac.uk

Betreff: Against the dismantling of disability studies – An appeal for academic integrity and human rights responsibility

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Dear Senator Blumenthal,

Dear Rector Prof. Dr. Joybrato Mukherjee,

I am writing to you regarding a matter that extends far beyond Hamburg and Cologne. My letter to you is also being sent in cc to the umbrella organization of German Disability Studies with the request that it be made available to the interested public.

As Director of the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Leeds and as an internationally networked researcher, I cannot remain silent when two of the few institutional anchors of Disability Studies in Germany are being systematically dismantled.

I am familiar with the history of ZeDiSplus. I know about the precarious conditions under which this institution has repeatedly had to fight for its survival. I know that the positions of colleagues who have passed away have not been filled - that the center has literally been bled dry, without this ever being publicly acknowledged or criticized. This is not science policy. This is silent strangulation under the guise of administrative routines.

And now the Hamburg Senate is delivering the coup de grâce. This reveals a system that does not promote critical science – it stifles it.

The international academic community is watching with incomprehension as to why Germany – a country that has enshrined the memory of Nazi crimes in the fundamental consensus of its democracy – treats disability studies in this way. Hundreds of programs exist worldwide. In Germany: three. Soon: one.

This is not a personnel issue or a budget problem. This is a credibility problem for the German state in its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

By closing ZeDiSplus, you are ignoring what you are destroying: an international model of inclusive higher education.

The inter-university certificate programs, open to people without university entrance qualifications – this is not a marginal issue. This is future research. Colleagues around the world are studying this approach. And you are scrapping it.

This is not just scientific policy nonsense. It is a wasted opportunity.

A discipline cannot be moved around at will. I hear the promises of “restructuring” at the HAW. Let me be clear: that won’t work. Disability studies are not training modules that can be moved around like furniture. They are an academic discipline with critical standards. They only work if they have institutional autonomy – if disabled academics are not dependent on those whose logic they criticize.

“Educational specialist training” under non-disabled leadership is not the same thing. It is something completely different. And you know that.

What needs to happen now? I cannot limit myself to vague appeals when I have three specific demands:

- First: Stop the closure. Today, not in 2028. ZeDiSplus expires on December 31, 2025. This must be reversed.
- Second: Create sustainable, structurally secure funding for ZeDiSplus that enables the institution to grow, not just survive. This requires institutional autonomy and reliable funding, not precarious dependence on third-party funding.
- Thirdly: Create identical conditions in Cologne. The iDiS professorship, as the only

university professorship, must not be abolished.

Senator, Rector: Germany needs more disability studies, not less. The world needs more role models like Hamburg, not fewer.

Act now. Secure ZeDiSplus for the long term. Create independence. This is not optional - it is a scientific and human rights imperative.

Sincerely,

Dr. Miro Griffiths MBE
Director, Centre for Disability Studies
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Thanks, Miro
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Dr Miro Griffiths statement
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