

AK Lehrbeauftragte Initiativegruppe Universität Tübingen
Gottfried-Pressel Weg 14
72074 Tübingen

OPEN LETTER

May 11, 2017

Prof. Dr. Bernd Engler, Rektor der Universität
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
Wilhelmstraße 5 (Alte Botanik)
72074 Tübingen

Dear Dr. Engler,

We are writing you this open letter in English because for many of us German is our second or third language, and it is easier to express ourselves in English.

Our group formed in the fall of 2014 in response to the University of Tübingen's inequitable use of its "Lehrauftrag" contracts with adjunct instructors who teach required courses.

In most other cases, this contract is currently being used as it was intended, to pay guest instructors who teach for a semester or two in their area of specialization, normally visiting instructors or industry professionals who just come to give lectures. Such instructors do not have to give grades, correct papers or do anything outside the time they spend in the classroom. In these cases, the money earned through this contract supplements such instructors' income. They have other substantial sources of income and are not dependent on the money from the University of Tübingen for their financial wellbeing and survival.

However, every semester, as you are well aware, roughly 40-60 instructors at the University of Tübingen teach in a wide variety of departments under this "Lehrauftrag" contract and need the money they earn in order to survive financially. Unlike guest instructors, we teach courses that are required for graduation, staples of departmental curriculum.

The majority of us belong to demographic groups least likely to fight back. These include foreigners, who do not fully understand the German university and legal systems, and married women, who are not totally dependent on the income they earn from the University (i.e., their husbands support them), although in our group there are women who support themselves exclusively through adjunct teaching. Such demographic groups are easily exploited.

As you know, we are paid by the hour and only for the time we actually spend in the classroom. We are not compensated for the time we spend designing curriculum, reading, researching and preparing to teach, correcting papers and tests, answering e-mails from students, meeting with students and our departments or any of the many other administrative tasks necessary to teach in a professional manner.

If we are lucky enough to be assigned three classes a semester, we earn less than €3,000 a semester (about €1,000 per class) and are only paid at the end of each semester. We have to make ends meet financially during the semester through other income sources. This makes for a very chaotic, unstable and stressful lifestyle. From semester to semester, we don't know if we

will be needed, teetering in a precarious situation, often for years on end. Several members of our group have worked under this contract for over 8 years. Some of us even have to claim unemployment benefits (Hartz IV) in order to continue to teach at the University of Tübingen.

We do not have any of the rights that regular employees have, such as payment into a pension, contributions to our health insurance costs, sick leave, teacher training, paid vacation or maternity leave. According to our calculations, if you take into account the amount of the time we spend outside the classroom, we are earning something approaching minimum wage.

We have observed in meetings with you and your associates, that your administration's approach thus far has been to treat us as individuals, to deal with us on a case-by-case basis, as if each of us has the individual and complete responsibility for the position that we are in.

Of course, each of us could seek out positions at other institutions or organizations, and some of us do. But for those of us who take this job seriously, who teach because we believe it is important and are passionate about the subjects we teach, there is no choice. We love our work and feel strongly that we, and others in similar positions, should be adequately compensated for our time and effort. We will not give up, either on our careers or on our students.

As freelance instructors, however, legally the University considers us as non-people, paid as one would pay for office supplies. We have no rights under German labor laws. Technically, we do not even work for the University. We believe it is long past time that this legal loophole, which the University is using to reduce costs, meets its end.

We are writing you to inform you that the Initiativegruppe has lost its patience with the University of Tübingen administration. We now believe that you are intentionally delaying your response to our requests for a meeting, in the hope that we will "go away" or otherwise fail to remain organized long enough to cause you any concern (because of the transient nature of our contractual situation). We also believe that your delay may be directly related to the approaching "Exzellenzinitiative des Bundes und der Länder zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Forschung an deutschen Hochschulen," to which you hope to convey a positive image.

Over the past year, we have been organizing with instructors in multiple departments as well as with student groups in anticipation that you would in fact fail to respond or take active steps to change the situation for those struggling under these contracts. We plan to initiate a fierce campaign this semester to draw attention to the University of Tübingen's abuse of its adjunct contracts.

In order to clarify what has happened so far between our group and the University administration, we will now recap our mutual history.

Our group formed in 2014. In November 2015, we met with Mr. Paul Weipert (Leiter des Dezernats) and Dr. Andreas Rothfuß (Kanzler), delivering a petition called "Petition zur Verbesserung der Situation von Lehrbeauftragten der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen," that 1,200 students, faculty and members of the public signed. At that time, the administration promised to gather information about the situation and meet with us again. In February 2016, we requested a meeting with Mr. Weipert, but his response (in March) was that he had no time for us. In July 2016, Mr. Weipert sent us information the departments collected about the number of adjuncts in each department at the University of Tübingen. In September 2016, we requested a new meeting and there was no response. In March of 2017, we asked for a meeting again, and again there was no answer.

You are fully informed about the problem. You know this contract causes hardship for a significant group of instructors, and yet you continually fail to respond to our requests for change or to even meet with us. We do not think the actions we have planned will shine a positive light on the University of Tübingen. We would prefer not to carry out our campaign, but your lack of response hasn't left us many options.

We are professional and highly educated teachers. We are experts in the subjects we teach. We are underpaid and don't have a lot of time. The insecurity of our contractual positions in relationship to the University puts substantial and unnecessary stress on us as individuals. It imposes great strains on our ability to properly carry out our jobs. We believe two years is more than enough time for you to have found a solution to our situation.

Many of us are teaching students who will themselves become teachers at Gymnasiums or other educational institutions. What kind of message are you sending them about teaching when you continue to use these contracts in the manner that you are using them? To continue along the administration's current path degrades the teaching profession and the University of Tübingen's reputation.

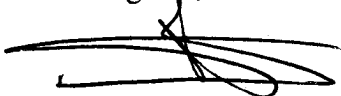
To sum up, your administration appears to be using four techniques to fight our efforts to work with you towards a mutually beneficial solution: (1) to delay your responses, perhaps with the hope that we will just disappear (i.e., that the precarious nature of our positions as adjuncts will force our group to disperse or otherwise fall apart over time); (2) to restate the impossibility of any legal solution (a ridiculous claim, especially coming from an institution that prides itself on having some modicum of intellectual and creative competence); (3) to treat struggling adjuncts as individual cases (even in your in-person communication with us), as if we don't see through that kind of divide-and-conquer strategy; and (4) to claim that the University does not have the funds to pay our small group of instructors equitably, that it is somehow the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

We are not asking you to do away with the Lehrauftrag contracts. We are asking you to change the University of Tübingen's policy such that these contracts cannot be used to pay for instructors who are teaching core courses and giving grades. We don't think that it is unreasonable to hire adjuncts as part-time or full-time instructors, especially if we have been teaching for longer than one semester and have proved our abilities in the classroom. The University of Tübingen has the resources and the wherewithal to solve this problem.

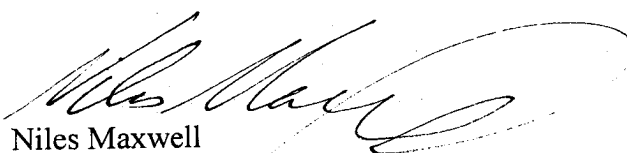
This open letter is our last effort to persuade you to take decisive action to change the situation for the better. We ask that you take concrete steps to solve this problem before the end of this semester. If you do not respond to this letter within 14 days of its date, it will signalize your unwillingness to cooperate with us and will be a call to action on our part. We hope that you will do the right thing.

On behalf of the AK Lehrbeauftragte Initiativgruppe Univeristät Tübingen,

Best Regards,



Catherine Brillot



Niles Maxwell