Awareness Concept

Awareness Concept of Faculty 07 at Catholic Theology at Goethe University Frankfurt a.M. for the "Kirchähr Weekend" of the Introductory Theology Course

1. Aim of the Awareness Concept

The so-called "Kirchähr Weekend" is a multi-day excursion organized as part of the Introductory Theology Course within Faculty 07 at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. It is designed for first-year students and aims to provide them with an overview of the study of Catholic Theology, including its disciplines, structures, and interconnections. At the same time, the weekend offers space for personal interaction and the opportunity to build strong networks among students. Additionally, students are introduced to the mentoring program.

Various groups are involved in this weekend: students, tutors, academic staff, members of the professorial team, staff from the Office of the Dean of Studies, and representatives of the mentoring team. This event brings together different levels of university and church-related education work. The interactions take place in a unique setting that blends elements of academic activities and leisure, including shared accommodations.

The central goals of the weekend include:

- a structured introduction to theology studies,
- insights into the diversity of theological disciplines and methods,
- dialogue about academic progress and career prospects,
- getting to know the mentoring program as a church-based support structure,
- and the opportunity to experience community and build personal connections.

This blend of meaningful work and informal interaction can be incredibly valuable but also presents challenges. Different roles and university interest groups come together in close quarters, where the boundaries between professional and personal interactions can blur. This dynamic involves specific power relationships (e.g., between instructors and students, or between the university and the church) as well as social dynamics shaped by group affiliation, age, gender, background, or other lines of difference.

An awareness concept is therefore essential to:

- Create a safe, mindful, and discrimination-sensitive environment,
- Actively prevent boundary violations, abuse of power, and exclusion,
- Provide points of contact and intervention options in case of incidents.

In this context, awareness means taking responsibility to ensure that all peopleâ€”regardless of their position, background, or religious or philosophical beliefsâ€”are treated with respect and feel as comfortable, safe, and heard as possible.

2. Involved Groups and Responsibilities

- Students
- Tutors (support and points of contact)
- Academic staff and staff of the Dean of Studies Office (leadership, coordination, organizational support, and points of contact)
- Members of the faculty (overall leadership responsibility)
- Staff of the mentoring program
- An awareness officer

3. Principles

- Mutual respect, mindfulness, and appreciation are non-negotiable.

- Every person has the right to physical and psychological integrity.
- Power dynamics are to be reflected upon and handled responsibly.
- Boundary violations (verbal, physical, or emotional) are unacceptable.
Participation in activities outside of university courses is voluntary; no one should feel pressured to share personal matters, participate in spiritual elements, or join social activities.
- Gender and sexual diversity are respected. A queer-sensitive approach means recognizing self-chosen names and pronouns, avoiding gendered assumptions, and creating inclusive spaces (e.g., in room assignments or language). Queerphobiaâ€”including jokes, looks, or exclusionâ€”will not be tolerated.
- Racism and racial discrimination will not be tolerated.
- Religious and philosophical diversity is respected. Different beliefs, attitudes, and practices are equally valued and must not be grounds for devaluation, pressure, or exclusion.
- The needs of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses are taken into account. Barriers should be removed as much as possible to ensure equal participation in all activities.
- The consumption of alcohol and drugs is not permitted during academic events or mentoring program activities.
- The principles of the Anti-Discrimination Policy of Goethe University Frankfurt am Main (https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/169800981/antidiskriminierungsrichtlinie-der-goethe-universitat-frankfurt-am-main-anderung-gemass-prasidiumsbeschluss-vom-07-01-2025.pdf) and the corresponding principles of Faculty 07 â€“ Catholic Theology (https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/de/fachbereich-7/kodex) apply. These form the binding framework for respectful, discrimination-free, and safe interactions.

4. Awareness Person

To ensure a reliable framework of protection and trust during the weekend, an Awareness Person will be designated as the primary point of contact for all participants. The Awareness Person will be available on-site, act as an advocate for affected individuals, and provide support in dealing with boundary violations, discriminatory experiences, or other challenging situations.

Responsibilities of the Awareness Person:
- Serve as a confidential contact for issues related to boundary violations, discrimination, or exclusion
- Provide support to affected individuals
- Facilitate communication between parties, if requested by the affected individual
- Document incidents
- Offer an accessible first point of contact for concerns related to boundary violations, experiences of discrimination, or conflicts, and provide information about additional support options
- Collaborate with the organizing team without being part of its hierarchical structure
- Provide assistance, if needed, with retreat options or alternative solutions (e.g., regarding accommodations or group dynamics)

Framework:
- The Awareness Person provides an initial point of contact and support within their capacity. They cannot independently resolve all conflicts or issues and do not replace professional counseling or complaint services.
- If necessary, they will refer individuals to appropriate counseling and support services.
- To reflect on challenging situations and receive professional support, the Awareness Person may access counseling and guidance services, particularly those offered by the Office of Equal Opportunity at Goethe University, after the weekend.
- The Awareness Person is funded by the mentoring program and appointed in advance.
- To ensure maximum independence, the Awareness Person should not come from the universityâ€™s teaching staff or the mentoring team.
- Suitable candidates may include individuals from the Office of the Dean of Studies, researchers on externally funded positions, or professionals from external awareness contexts.
- It is important that the Awareness Person does not hold an evaluative or supervisory role over students to foster open and trusting communication.
- They will be prepared for their responsibilities in advance and integrated into the awareness framework.

The Awareness Person will be introduced to all participants before the weekend begins, along with details about their availability and role. Confidentiality, advocacy, and independence are the guiding principles of their work.

4. Arrival and Departure

- The faculty offers an organized opportunity for group travel to and from the event (e.g., by bus or train) to foster exchange and group dynamics.
- At the same time, participants are free to travel individually or arrange their own carpooling.
- For privately organized trips, the responsibility for insurance lies with the vehicle owner; the university assumes no liability.
- Traveling with members of the faculty or tutors is generally possible, provided it is voluntary, transparent, and free of any pressure.
- Individual trips between faculty members and individual students should be avoided whenever possible to prevent reinforcing existing power imbalances.
- Faculty members may leave earlyâ€”such as before the evening social eventâ€”provided that an appropriate contact structure is maintained.

5. The Evening Social Event

- The evening social event is a voluntary, informal program organized by the tutors.
- While it is not part of the official curriculum, it takes place within the time frame and setting of the field trip.
- The principles of the awareness concept (voluntariness, respect, consideration, and nonviolence) also apply to this event.

6. Prevention

Prevention means creating conditions ahead of the weekend that actively prevent boundary violations, abuse of power, and exclusion. This includes transparent communication, thoughtful organization, and a shared commitment to mindfulness.

a) Information and Preparation:

- All participants will be informed in advance about the awareness concept, contact persons, core principles, and reporting channels (during the preliminary meeting in the introductory course and via email).
- Counseling and complaint procedures will be communicated transparently.
- The awareness contact person will be named and introduced before the event begins.
- Expectations for respectful and discrimination-sensitive behavior will be communicated early on (e.g., during the first session of the introductory course).
- Information about university counseling services will be shared transparently:

www.uni-frankfurt.de/146517454
www.uni-frankfurt.de/88589854/BeratungsangeboteanderGoetheUniversit%C3%A4t
www.uni-frankfurt.de/88589481/SexualisierteDiskriminierungb) Room Accommodation:

- Accommodation is provided in a gender-equitable, queer-sensitive manner, with consideration for individual needs. Discretion is always maintained.
- As part of the planning process, students are encouraged to share their preferences or specific needs regarding room assignments in advance via email to the Office of the Dean of Studies. These submissions will be treated confidentially and used solely for room allocation purposes.

Options for providing feedback:
o No specific preferences: no feedback required
o Sensitive accommodation request: brief confidential message

- Whenever possible, room assignments are made in advance without public group inquiries. If

discomfort or conflicts arise on-site, the Awareness Team is available to help find a solution.

c) Structural Prevention and Sense of Responsibility:

- Responsible individuals are aware of their role-model function. Their behavior significantly shapes the group experience and contributes to the overall atmosphere.
- They approach their role with care and sensitivity to power dynamics, foster respectful interactions, and actively oppose discriminatory or exclusionary behavior.
- Tutors hold a dual role as study-related points of contact and part of the organizational structure. The power imbalances inherent in this dual role are carefully reflected upon and responsibly managed.

7. Intervention

In cases of boundary violations, discriminatory behavior, or other problematic situations, a clear, graduated intervention process is followed. The focus is on protecting the affected person, addressing their perception of the incident, and restoring a safe environment.

Intervention process:

1. Accessibility and initial clarification:
The incident can be reported by the affected person or by third parties (e.g., witnesses) to the Awareness Team or another designated trusted individual. The affected person decides how to proceed.

2. Confidential conversation:
The Awareness Team offers a confidential discussion to clarify the situation and, if needed, identify protection needs or expectations.

3. Involvement of leadership (if necessary):
If required, the overall leadership (e.g., members of the faculty or the Office of the Dean of Studies) may be involved.

4. Possible measures:
Depending on the situation, measures may include:
o Clarification conversation or distinction
o Spatial or temporal separation
o Exclusion from program activities
o Early departure in individual casesProfessors, instructors, and staff members of Goethe University and the Mentoring Program carry a special responsibility to foster a respectful, safe, and discrimination-free environment. They are required to take reports of power abuse, discrimination, or boundary violations seriously and, if they become aware of such incidents, to inform the appropriate university offices.

8. Follow-Up
- A closing session will be held to reflect on the group dynamics and discuss both positive and critical experiences; if needed, there will be an opportunity for anonymous evaluation.
- Additionally, anonymous feedback options are available (e.g., via email to a trusted contact).
- Individuals affected, as well as other participants, can access advisory, support, and complaint services offered by Goethe University even after the weekend. Clear information about the relevant advisory and reporting offices will be made available.