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LEARNING AND CULTURE

Studying Smarter and Exploring
Global Education

STUDENT LIFE

The Student Life in Motion

HEALTH AND MIND

From Late Nights to Lunchtime



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EDITOR'S NOTE

When I was a student at this university, I was a frequent eater in the Neue Mensa, and many a day did I spend in its Bierstube to celebrate an exam or have my lunch there because their Bauernfrühstück seemed to be the better alternative to whatever the Mensa itself had to offer. Only a selected few people, most of them not current students, can tell a tale of the Neue Mensa anymore. Currently, matriculated students of the TU Dresden have never eaten here and have neither enjoyed a beer in the Bierstube nor have they attended an Eläkeläiset concert within its walls as it has been closed for so many years now. And still, it keeps fascinating students and stirs their interest. Already in the last JABS issue, we read an amazing article about its unique architecture and history and now we can read about it in the context of the logistics behind our Mensas, and there is a glimpse of hope – current construction work and our interview partner suggest a reopening at some point in the upcoming semester.

Another marvel that has reappeared is in front of your eyes at this very moment. JABS, the Journal of American and British Studies had taken a sabbatical until it returned in new colours and spirits last semester. JABS is the journalistic product of one of the optional language courses in English Studies and focuses on interesting aspects of student life. In this semester's issue, you will read about alcoholism at university, and how important sleep is for a good study outcome. You will be given helpful learning strategies and find out how students approach music and find new friends when studying. Students who need to study abroad might find the article on the three main Maltese languages interesting. And have you ever wondered why Finland and South Korea always peak in the PISA table, or did you know that TU Dresden students run quite a successful racing team? Well then just keep reading and enjoy this issue of JABS...

Michael Calabranno (editor)

ENHANCING STUDYING METHODS FOR LANGUAGE STUDENTS

JULIANE GRUND

Mastering the English language, especially when studying a related subject such as English Studies or an English teaching degree, is essential not only for achieving language proficiency but also for being able to engage with the profound coursework. As university students, we conduct various analyses, craft numerous different pieces of academic writing, investigate the history of English-speaking peoples, and delve into linguistic theory, amongst other things. All these tasks require far more than a vague understanding of the English language itself. Notwithstanding, studying a language can be difficult.



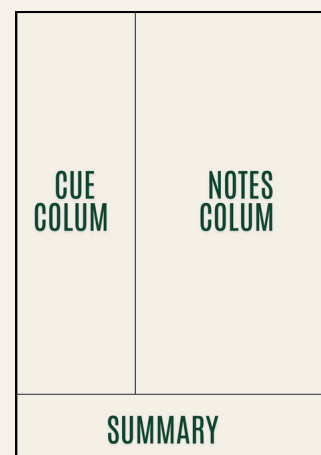
To successfully navigate those challenges, it is important to adopt helpful study methods. Finding effective learning techniques and incorporating them into your day-to-day routine can make a substantial difference in your academic performance. It is crucial to try different approaches to find out which ones

adhere to your style of learning. Though this may sound tedious at first glance, the outcome is incredibly worthwhile. Not only will you make the process of learning more engaging and productive, but you will also enhance the understanding and long-term retention of the studied material.

- **Active Notetaking**

While I am sure that notetaking is not a new concept to you but rather something you have been doing for years, the question is – have you been doing it effectively? Introducing active notetaking, an approach that turns a passive habitual practice into a productive method. A widely known system that adheres to the principle of active notetaking is the Cornell Method, developed by Walter Pauk, who was an education professor at Cornell

University. To use this method, you must first divide your sheet of paper as shown next to this paragraph. During the lecture, you write down your notes in



the upper right section of your page. Afterward, you fill the 'cue column' on the left with anything that will trigger your memory when reviewing your notes, such as keywords, mnemonics, and questions. The bottom section is reserved for a concise summary, consisting of 50-100 words. Now you have a great foundation for productively engaging with your notes and actively recalling the covered material!

- **Spaced Repetition**

Using this method, you will be able to retain information for longer, which will make your life easier during exam season. Using the 'spacing effect', you increase the periods between each review of the studied material gradually. The more difficult the information is to remember, the shorter the intervals between the initial revisions should be. By transferring the knowledge into your long-term memory through the repetitive manner of the revision, you are not only able to refer to the material confidently but also make space for new

information in your short-term memory. The study material that pairs especially well with this method is vocabulary and information such as definitions and historical dates. The best-known app that supports spaced repetition is 'Anki,' where you can create flashcards that have a keyword



on one side and the corresponding information that is supposed to be memorized on the back. Depending on how well you do in memorizing the information, the app decides when you should review the studied content again. It is noteworthy that the app in its basic form can be downloaded and used free of charge.

- **Study Groups**

What is one of the first things you think about when thinking about language in general? Communication, right? Through communication, we connect, ask questions, and share our thoughts. This is exactly why getting together in a group is likely to have a productive outcome – especially for language students of any kind. Particularly when using only the studied language in these scenarios, both an engaging and immersive study environment is created. It is furthermore important to note that studying in a group is incredibly versatile. Whether you work on structured notes or study sheets



together, try to review dense material, or brainstorm for a paper of any kind, a group study offers a productive foundation. In addition to that, a valuable possibility that a collaborative setting provides is the opportunity for peer reviewing. Others proofreading your work not only gives you an insight

into your language skills but also your general understanding of the topic. Therefore, peer-reviewing can enhance your studying process on multiple levels.

Are you unsure about what your ideal style of learning is? Do not worry, you are not alone! If you want to find out more about which way you are likely to obtain information the easiest, follow this link and take the quiz to find out!

<https://psychologia.co/learning-style-test/>

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WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE?

LIUBOV PLIASUNOVA

“ The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is conducted every three years and measures scholastic performance in mathematics, science, and reading among 15- to 16-year-old students from different countries. This regular assessment enables nations to identify factors influencing students' academic achievements and implement relevant measures in national education policymaking. According to PISA studies, South Korea has consistently held strong positions in the rankings of countries with the best education systems. What is the secret to such academic success? To gain better insight into the lives of South Korean school students and uncover the secrets of their remarkable academic success, I decided to reach out to Choi, a 22-year-old ambitious and energetic young man studying Social Sciences at a university in Seoul.

The school system in South Korea follows a 6-3-3 ladder system, which denotes six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of



high school, culminating in the standardized test Suneung, recognized by universities. Middle and high school students in South Korea typically spend 6–7 hours at school. Afterwards, most attend private academies, known as hagwons, which are paid institutions designed to help students improve their academic performance and prepare for the Suneung. “The lives of South Korean students revolve heavily around this test,” says Choi. “Classes at the hagwons are regarded as more valuable than regular school lessons and cost between \$300 and \$1,500 per month. For some families, this can

cause financial difficulties. Lessons usually begin at 5 p.m. and continue until 9 or 10 p.m. Successfully passing the Suneung is your ticket to a prestigious university and a guarantee for a bright future”.


People in South Korea worry about their position in the social hierarchy and avoid jobs perceived as low status. As a result, parents become extremely anxious and place immense pressure on their children to climb the socio-economic ladder. Consequently, South Korean students spend most of their time studying. This demanding lifestyle makes it difficult to balance private life and academics, leaving little room for extracurricular activities or rest. “Schools do offer a variety of activities, but students generally do not participate, viewing them as a waste of time. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any hobbies myself when I was a school student,” sighs Choi. “Looking back, I wish I had spent more time socializing and developing non-academic skills to enrich my life. Teachers often overlook the importance of these valuable skills, focusing almost exclusively on academics. I even attended a summer mathematics club, which, sadly, left no positive memories.

Here in Europe, I take foreign language classes, and I am pleasantly surprised by the warm, supportive relationships between students and teachers. This

contrasts sharply with South Korea where teachers tend to adopt a more authoritarian approach”.

Many European schools have long moved away from authoritarian teaching methods, which emphasize high teacher control. Instead, they engage students as active participants in the learning process. The Finnish education system, for instance, consistently ranks among the best in the world due to its commitment to equity and accessibility. Education in Finland is free and open to everyone, regardless of economic background. The Finnish curriculum includes a wide range of subjects, such as arts, physical education, and life skills. This holistic approach caters to diverse interests and talents. The curriculum is also flexible, giving teachers creative freedom to design their classes according to principles of inclusiveness and individualization. Finnish schools emphasize collaboration over competition. Teachers frequently incorporate group work and peer learning into their classes to nurture social skills and teamwork. They prioritize critical thinking and problem-solving skills over rote memorization.

The education system promotes a balanced lifestyle, including time for play and relaxation, which contributes to a positive learning environment. This system not only values academic



achievements but also fosters the overall development of students in a stress-free environment. Unfortunately for South Korean students, their school life can be very challenging. The heavy academic workload, financial burden, and lack of family support can trigger high levels of stress, leading to burnout and chronic depression. Around 60% of South Korean students have reported showing symptoms of these mental disorders. In the pursuit of prestige and high rankings in global student assessments, the South Korean government has paid a significant price, compromising the health and well-being of its children by confining them to a rigid educational framework. The efficiency of this education is dubious. The extent to which this price is justified remains a subject of debate.

“THERE’S MUSIC IN THE AIR” - THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF STUDENTS

MAIKE IMMER

“Music touches us [...], where words alone can’t.”[1] This quote by the American actor and musician Johnny Depp describes the unique ability of music to touch people on levels that language cannot reach. While language often remains on the surface of communication, music has the ability to affect humans deeply, especially on an emotional and physical level. It appeals to the realm of feelings, evokes memories and moods, and its rhythms and harmonies range from activating cognitive processes in the brain to physically energizing individuals, as seen, for example, in dancing.

I grew up in a very musical family. For 15 years, I have intensively learned how to play the violin. However, I have also been constantly exposed to musical sounds through my siblings, parents, friends, or background music from CDs. Our living room has often served as a stage for joint concerts. My home has always been a place where music was not just heard but lived. This connection to music not only shaped my childhood and adolescence but continues to accompany me to this day. Music also plays an important role in my studies. To learn more about the significance of music for students, I interviewed three of my close peers. The questions focused on four key aspects: personal connection to music, music in studies, emotional impact, as well as cultural and social dimensions.

Juliane (21), Nelly (21), and Elias (23) are pursuing a teaching degree for secondary schools at the *Technische Universität Dresden* (TU Dresden). While Juliane and Nelly are studying English and History, Elias chose English and Music. Nevertheless, the interview revealed that music is very important to all three of them.



Nelly is currently in her fifth semester. Her degree program requires a stay abroad, so she is trying to take as many courses from later semesters as possible now. Music helps her maintain a healthy balance. “Without music, I feel like something is missing,” she says. Whether “on the way to university [...] or in the evening while cooking with my roommate,” there is always some playlist running. If no song is playing in the background, Nelly notices that she “cannot fully switch off in situations like being on the bus or relaxing at home.” The genre does not matter to her. However, when studying, she consciously avoids music with lyrics. “I end up focusing more on the lyrics than on my task”, she explains.



Instead of “Shake It Off” by Taylor Swift, she prefers quiet instrumental music or soothing sounds like “white noise” when writing term papers.

Music also plays a crucial role in Juliane’s everyday life. “I listen to music whenever I’m out and about, and I also enjoy listening to music at

home via my Bluetooth speaker,” she says. She especially enjoys pop music, particularly German indie pop, because the songs often deal with “emotional and personal topics,” as she explains. The parallels between the lyrics and her own life give her a sense of comfort. However, she also avoids music in certain situations, such as “memorizing information, fast-paced situations (e.g., at the checkout while shopping), or when I’m with other people.”

Through his degree program, Elias comes into contact with music more intensively than the other two interviewees. He is not only familiar with the role of a listener but also with the perspective of an active musician. “Most of the time, music is the first thing I perceive in the morning after waking up and the last thing I do in the evening,” he explains. He particularly enjoys music that he “can appreciate for its craftsmanship.” This includes, among other genres, rock, as he plays the drums and guitar. Like the others, he does not enjoy listening to music when he needs to focus intensely, “because I can no longer passively listen to music but always pay attention to what’s happening in the song.” After “loud” days, such as after performances, he also prefers to avoid music.

A central question is how music influences learning and concentration. The three interviewees gave different answers. “I feel that music distracts me from

studying,” says Nelly, a sentiment Juliane agrees with.

However, when it comes to lengthy tasks, such as writing term papers, creating posters, or planning lessons, quiet background music is often played. Elias uses specific genres to stay focused while studying in the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden* (SLUB). “Sometimes I listen to classical music to study, some album to write, or challenging records by bands like ‘Tool’ [...] to completely block out my surroundings,” he shares.

Motivation is another aspect. The interview reveals that for Juliane and Nelly, there’s always a fine line between distraction and motivation. Nevertheless, there are songs that give them a kind of energy boost, whether as motivation before studying or as a reward afterward. For Elias, it’s particularly “punk and heavier stuff. Many bands with a message, like Rise Against, The Ghost Inside, or Parkway.” For Juliane, it’s the dreamy and emotional atmosphere in the songs of the band “Cigarettes After Sex” that motivates her.

Music can also have a positive impact during stressful or challenging situations. I often notice during my studies that music provides me with comfort in tough times but also helps me accept and celebrate small and big successes. Nelly describes music as “the light at the end of the tunnel.” “It’s the songs you can sing along loudly or the thought of the next upcoming concert that carries me through bad days,” she adds. Juliane mentions a “strong influence of



music on her mood.” Her emotional state can be significantly guided by music. Feelings are validated and embraced through fitting lyrics or released through loud singing and dancing. I personally recall stressful exam phases with other assignments and personal events where the emotional effect of music gave me strength.

A beautiful aspect of student life is the sense of community created among students through music. Social events, such as parties or gatherings with friends, are accompanied by music. It acts as a unifying element. Even those who do not play instruments or sing, like Juliane and Nelly, appreciate the social dimension of music.

“Good music at parties [is] the most important thing,” Nelly notes. Music brings people together and often makes “the difference, for example, between a dance party or a group deep talk,” Juliane explains.

Beyond listening, the TU Dresden also offers many opportunities to actively engage in music. Elias, for example, “mostly plays in the party band of the University of Music for student parties or when someone asks me to accompany them for their exam.” Additionally, the TU Dresden provides numerous options to join a band, choir, or even an orchestra. Juliane currently does not play an instrument but would like to learn the guitar. Beginners can, for instance, take inexpensive lessons from music students. Furthermore, an article by Heike Schwarzer from MDR highlights that the University of Music is researching how digital avatars can make playing the piano more accessible in the future.[2]

For many students, music is therefore more than just a pastime. It is a tool for stress management, a motivator, and a social connector. During their studies, it can contribute to both motivation and relaxation. For some, it helps them find focus, while for others, it is simply a steadfast companion for overcoming difficult phases. For me personally, music remains a constant that carries me through life. The years of playing the violin taught me discipline, perseverance, and expressiveness – values that are indispensable in both academics and future professional life. If we as students were to live without music for an extended period, it would become clear how much it shapes and enriches our lives. And therefore: Let music be in the air.

[1] Visual Paradigm Online, “Music touches us emotionally, where words alone can't.”

[2] Cf. Heike Schwarzer, Mit virtuosen Avataren Klavier spielen lernen

PICTURE SOURCES

Soundtrap: Unsplash

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S. Noh: Unsplash

LIUBOV PLIASUNOVA



In the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, only a hundred kilometers south of Sicily, lie the islands of Malta and Gozo. Best known for their idyllic beaches and consistently sunny weather – 300 days a year are sunny – they attract over a million visitors every year. For culturally inclined visitors, Malta is a gem. The enviable strategic location of the islands made them attractive for settlement and desirable for colonization. The British were the last in a long line of colonizers to take advantage of the islands. As a result, Malta and Gozo became a battleground of different cultures, each seeking to hold sway. This has manifested itself in an array of architectural assets representing different epochs and civilizations. Without a doubt, architecture, as an embodiment of cultural values and

traditions, carries the memories of past generations. But architecture presents only a façade of modern Malta. The kernel of cultural identity lies in the hearts and minds of the locals.

Language is a vital tool for fostering a sense of identity and unity within a group. It is not merely a vehicle for communication or a means of transmitting knowledge across generations. It is also a product of historical interactions between diverse cultures. Maltese exemplifies this, blending Arabic, Romance, and Germanic lexemes into a uniquely rich linguistic system.

Its complex composition reflects the rich history of the Maltese Archipelago. Presumably, the first inhabitants, who came from Sicily, arrived before the Bronze Age

and may have spoken a Mediterranean or Indo-European language. Their megalithic temples, which today are UNESCO World Heritage sites, are open to visitors. The earliest inscriptions carved on stone were left by the Phoenicians, who settled there around 800 BC. . It is plausible that during the lengthy periods of colonization, the small population of Malta saw a shift toward a new language with each successive invasion. Thus, Latin became the most spoken language during the six-centuries-long Roman rule. The following Byzantine period, which lasted for about 350 years, introduced Greek. The emergence of the Maltese language can be attributed to the period 870–1091 AD when the Arabic language took root during recurrent Arab sieges. The Norman conquest of 1091 exposed the Arabic dialect to Latinization, and vernacular Maltese started to develop separately under the influence of Italian, fusing both Arabic and Romance into a single linguistic system. The arrival of the Order of St. John in 1530 increased the influence of Italian, which soon became the language of administration, the law courts, the educational system, and the Church. Gradually, more and more Maltese learned Italian as a 'high' language, while Maltese continued to thrive among the poorer, uneducated,

largely monolingual classes and was considered a 'kitchen' language. .

English was introduced by the British only in 1800. Authorities attempted to establish English as the only official language. However, the Maltese resisted, holding firmly to Italian as a 'high' language and the Catholic faith as safeguards of their national identity. The influence of English started gaining momentum when primary schooling became compulsory in 1946 with both Maltese and English as official languages of instruction.

The political turmoil of the 1980s was an inevitable outcome for a former colony that had gained independence from British rule. This decade of seminal reforms focused on economic growth and improving the social welfare of Maltese citizens. These were accompanied by a rise in nationalism, which in turn deterred the use of English in favor of the Maltese language.

To gain a better understanding of the interplay between these two languages, I decided to interview my dear friend Lino, a teacher at Malta University Language School. "I was once rebuked for speaking English instead of Maltese with my family members while waiting in a queue...", Lino recalls. At school, students and their parents took umbrage at the fact that he, a Maltese person, taught

lessons in English. This prejudice ultimately cost him his career as a teacher.

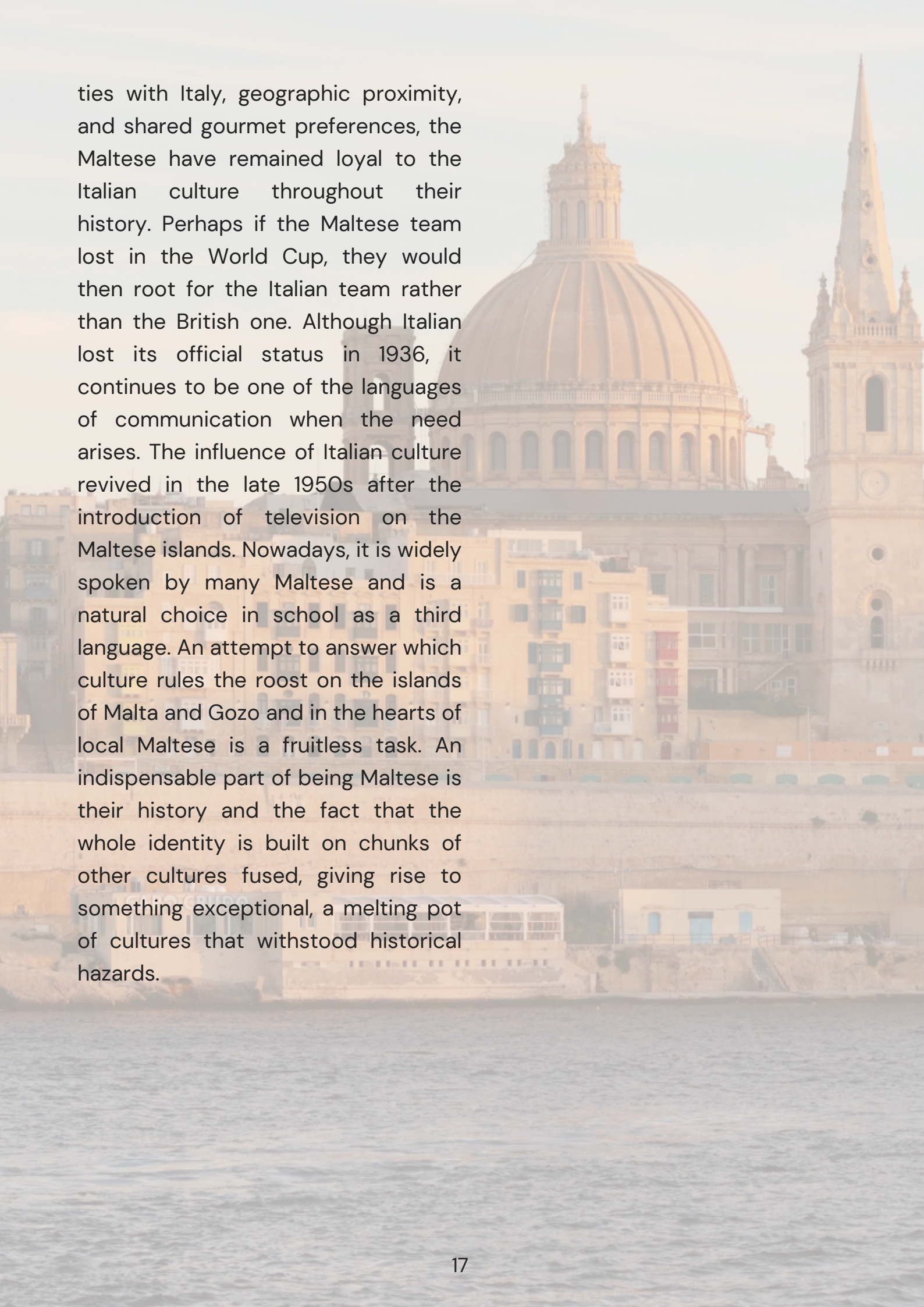
Over time, the recognition of Maltese as a language of national identity allowed more room for its counterpart. The introduction of cable television in the early 1990s, along with English being a lingua franca, boosted its popularity. Today, both Maltese and English are national languages and are accorded the same level of importance.

An effort to identify certain trends in language preference is a perplexing and engaging process which to this day remains partly unresolved for me. Both languages are equally used in media and conversations. However, preference is certainly given to English music and in Lino's case – to literature in the English language. However, the contribution of Maltese writers to the literary heritage is significant and cannot be overlooked. Malta can take pride in the older and current writers, whose work has profoundly enriched – and continues to enrich – Maltese culture. Rather than being in competition, both languages complement each other, and locals easily switch back and forth between the two languages. "Each family decides for itself which language to use for communication", says my dear collocutor, Lino. "I am

bilingual myself, and when my children were born, we started speaking to them in both languages – first in English, and soon after, we introduced Maltese. Within the family circle, in principle, we can switch languages at any time or when the context demands". Certainly, fluency in both languages gives you the power to combine words from both languages in the same sentence. 'Mela' is frequently used as a conversational filler, similar to 'anyway' in English, for example:

–Mela, let's continue!

The coining of new words, combining certain morphemes from both tongues, is quite a common practice. In my opinion, this is an inevitable result of creative thinking, but in the opinion of most educated adults, including Lino, it sounds exasperating and only grates on the ears. The Maltese in general regard bilingualism as a strong element of their identity. While English gives them access to near-universal knowledge and culture, Maltese fosters a unique sense of identity. One should not forget about the Italian and Arabic languages. While the Maltese decisively broke away from the Arabic language and culture in the 11th century, their relationship with the Italian language has been the opposite. Given the long historical ties with Italy, geographic



ties with Italy, geographic proximity, and shared gourmet preferences, the Maltese have remained loyal to the Italian culture throughout their history. Perhaps if the Maltese team lost in the World Cup, they would then root for the Italian team rather than the British one. Although Italian lost its official status in 1936, it continues to be one of the languages of communication when the need arises. The influence of Italian culture revived in the late 1950s after the introduction of television on the Maltese islands. Nowadays, it is widely spoken by many Maltese and is a natural choice in school as a third language. An attempt to answer which culture rules the roost on the islands of Malta and Gozo and in the hearts of local Maltese is a fruitless task. An indispensable part of being Maltese is their history and the fact that the whole identity is built on chunks of other cultures fused, giving rise to something exceptional, a melting pot of cultures that withstood historical hazards.

BUILDING BONDS MAKING FRIENDS AT UNIVERSITY

LUISE EIFRIG

Whether it be study dates at the library, late-night conversations over a box of pizza, or an adventurous night out at the clubs – an active social life seems to stand at the center of the student life we have grown up expecting. And while for many students, university truly is the 'time of their lives,' some find it more difficult to forge meaningful connections with their peers. These struggles often coincide with anxieties and a sense of isolation, especially when everyone else appears to have a thriving social life. But why can it be so hard to form friendships at university despite their importance and how can we work towards creating the meaningful connections we crave?

Friendships play a pivotal role in campus life. From our mental well-being to academic success, the connections we make have a great impact on our university experience, and they have far more to offer than just companionship. These relationships can ease the transition into academia, offering support and someone to explore campus life with. Having a study buddy to navigate classes, the increased workload, and exam seasons can alleviate the pressure, leading to higher academic success.



Furthermore, friendships can contribute to personal growth as well. Studies have found that over 60 percent of students have built friendships with students from different ethnicities, religions, or social backgrounds during their first year, which helped develop a deeper understanding of other worldviews. We can learn a lot about ourselves and others from the friendships we build, and aside from offering emotional support, they often enrich our university experience.

As social beings, we depend on the connections we forge with others, but why do some students find it so challenging to build these friendships in a place seemingly filled with opportunities to meet new people?

According to a JABS survey, around 20 percent of students have faced difficulties building new friendships at university. When asked about these hardships, one student shared their struggle of talking to new people ever since the COVID-19 lockdown, which is a common issue. After the pandemic, many young people showed to have poorly developed social skills due to the months-long isolation and a coinciding lack of opportunities to explore social interactions. Along with social anxieties, connecting to new people can feel difficult or overwhelming, especially considering the change in environment.



Starting university marks the transition into a new chapter of life for many students. It's both a time of new opportunities and independence, as well as a farewell to a familiar environment and seeing your friends every day. While some choose to stay close to home, around two-thirds of the students surveyed moved away from home for their studies, often out of necessity, as smaller towns or remote areas tend to lack universities.

This leaves these students not only in an unfamiliar academic environment but also in a new city without friends or family close by. This can make the experience of building a new support system quite isolating or frustrating for some, especially in comparison to the connections they already have at home. Since every friendship is new, they take time to get to a deeper level of connection and trust, making it harder to establish a sense of belonging.

For some students, the challenges don't end after those initial weeks of settling in. They find that some of their early connections drift away over time – whether due to people dropping out, finding new groups, or discovering differing interests. As one surveyed student observed, 'Groups form very quickly in the first week of studies, and after that, it's quite hard to find new friends, since you most likely have to mingle in the already existing groups.' This dynamic can make it even more challenging for students who take longer to

adjust or for those who struggle to find their place within established social circles. Another student noted the lack of third places around campus to meet people in a non-academic and comfortable environment.

Fortunately, plenty of opportunities exist to change the narrative and find your people. The most straightforward way to make connections is by talking to people in your classes. Especially in larger courses of study, many students attend seminars alone, creating a chance to strike up a conversation. A simple question about coursework can quickly lead to working together on group projects and possibly even lasting friendships.

Beyond the classroom, joining campus clubs and associations is another excellent way to meet like-minded peers. Universities often host a variety of non-academic groups, ranging from robotics teams and environmental initiatives to music bands. Sports programs also provide extensive opportunities for connection, with activities catering to all levels of experience. Additionally, campus events such as game nights and festivals offer a relaxed environment to socialize. If attending alone feels daunting, consider inviting a friend or a classmate, which is also a simple way to make the experience more enjoyable and strengthen your connection with them.

If you're looking to expand your social circle beyond academic life, apps like Bumble BFF can be a great way to find like-minded people also looking for connection. Many students also found friendships by joining non-university-related clubs to meet people who share similar interests, as well as through volunteering, internships, or student jobs.

No matter how you try to find friends, a key part of building connections is staying open and willing to step outside your comfort zone. Initiating conversations might feel intimidating or awkward at first, and success isn't guaranteed every time. But these small acts of courage often lead to meaningful and lasting friendships, a sense of belonging, and valuable personal growth.

Picture Sources:

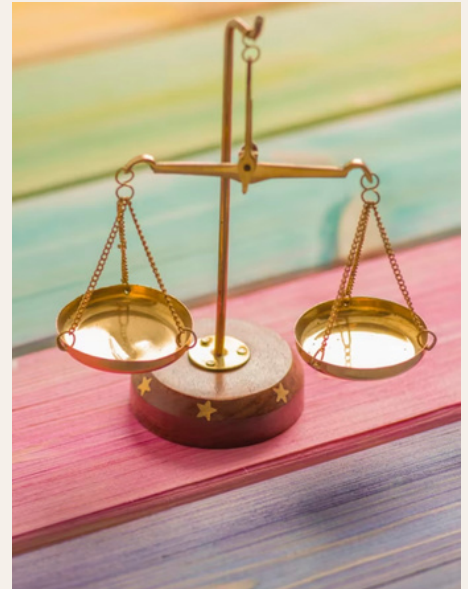
Brown, Alexis: Unsplash

Lopes, Helena: Unsplash

STUDYING AND PART-TIME JOB: HOW STUDENTS FIND A BALANCE

MAIKE IMMER

The term "work-life balance" has long been established in the professional world. It defines "a state in which the components of work and private life are in perfect harmony with each other. This means completing daily work without neglecting any part of private life (health, family and friends, culture, and hobbies), and vice versa." [1] A similar form of balancing is already evident among many young people during their studies. In addition to lectures, exams, and essays, many students rely on part-time jobs.



A statistic published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in August 2024 illustrates which cities in Germany offer sufficient funding from the BAföG maximum rate for rent, and which do not. The report shows that in large cities such as Munich, Berlin, or Frankfurt, as well as in smaller towns in western Germany, the BAföG rate is insufficient to cover rent. The average rent in these large cities is between €600 and €800 for a shared flat room. In eastern cities such as Chemnitz or Dresden, the median rent, however, is €380. Nationwide, the rent allowance is only sufficient in 20 out of 82 university towns. As a result, many students rely on additional income. To finance their living expenses and studies, they often take up part-time jobs. Finding the right balance between work and study is not always easy. To gain a deeper understanding of why students seek jobs and the challenges they face in their daily lives, I interviewed three students from my close environment. The questions focused on five aspects that I identified as important: general profile, motivation, challenges, solutions, and future perspectives.

Leonie (24) and Jan (24) are studying law in Greifswald. They have both found a way to finance their studies and living expenses.

Leonie is currently in her 11th semester, preparing for her state exams. In addition, she works eight hours a week at an insurance broker's office. I decided

to take the job for financial reasons," she explains. "At that time, a friend of mine moved out of our shared flat, and I would have had to pay the rent on my own." Without additional income, she would not have been able to afford the €600 rent by herself.

The biggest challenge for all three is managing their time between studying and working. However, the associated "enormous mental stress" is also a challenge for Jan. "When I work eight hours a day and then have to study for at least four hours, I quickly end up with a 12-hour day," he explains further. Then it is sometimes very difficult for him to muster the energy, motivation, and concentration needed. Leonie also mentions that, particularly during exam preparation, daily life can become very stressful. In addition to her job, she must invest a lot of time in studying. Lenny even says that "there are times when either my studies or my work suffers." For him, "it's mostly the studies, and it is quite possible that this will extend my study time." He generally works on Tuesdays, as there are lectures on that day which he can sometimes skip. "It's difficult to attend all lectures while also working one day a week," he explains. Nevertheless, none of them have considered dropping out of their studies due to this challenge.

So how do these three students manage to cope with the stressful periods of balancing work and studies?

Jan relies on effective time management tools: "I use to-do lists, which are then transferred to my calendar, where I can check off tasks and set various deadlines for myself." Additionally, he creates study plans "to structure my work and learning and get them to fit together." Another tool he uses is an app called Forest, which helps him focus by blocking external distractions.



Leonie is particularly grateful for the emotional and financial support she receives from her family, her boyfriend Jan, and other friends. "My parents don't put pressure on me about when I should finish my exam," she says, adding that they would also accept if she needed to take an extra semester.

In contrast, she critically views the lack of support from the university: “Especially in law, students are left to fend for themselves.”

A part-time job during studies has both negative and positive aspects – challenges and opportunities. Despite the challenges, many students also see opportunities in their part-time jobs. “I am fortunate to be active in a field that is essential and beneficial for my future career,” says Jan, looking ahead. Lenny and Leonie also gain valuable practical experience through their jobs, which will be beneficial for their future careers. Working during studies can thus be seen as a way of practicing finding a healthy work-life balance, which will be important in their future professional lives.

Looking ahead, all three students wish for better support from universities and the state. The following points came up in our conversation: making lecture content available digitally for later review, raising awareness among companies about student part-time workers, adjusting BAföG rates, more initiative from universities to counteract constant rent increases, and the establishment of more student dormitories.

The everyday life of many students shows that it is possible to combine work and study – but it requires good time management, discipline, and a lot of external support. Concrete measures are needed from various parties to ensure that work and study do not come at the expense of health or academic success. How the interviewees manage to maintain a balance between study and work is truly admirable.

[1] Glossary: HR & Recruiting Definitions, What is work-life balance?

PICTURE SOURCES

E. Mozhilo: Unsplash

P. Oficial: Unsplash

“IF YOU NO LONGER GO FOR A GAP THAT EXISTS, YOU ARE NO LONGER A RACING DRIVER”

ELIAS LÖFFLER



Except for a few contenders, which they either donated to sponsors or the university, Elbflorace keeps all of their cars within their workshop. However, only a few are still in working condition, as their parts are constructed to last only about 1500km under race conditions.



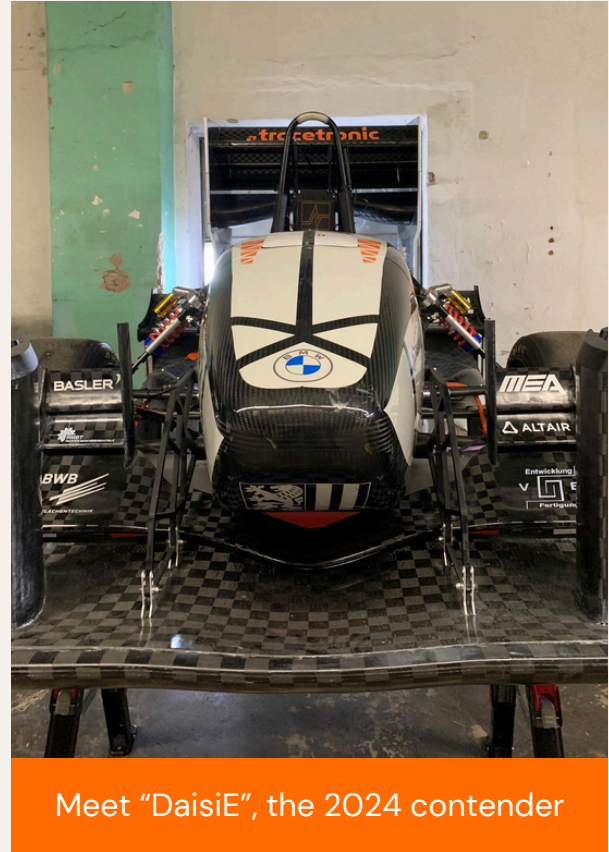
What looks like an unassuming tent taken from someone's garden, is actually the place where most of the final assembly of the car happens. It also shelters from heat, cold, wind, rain and nosey competitors, making it a crucial piece of equipment at the events.

While the famous quote from Brazilian three-time F1 world champion Ayrton Senna still holds up today, the world of motorsport has drastically changed over the years. What used to be a howling pack of V12-powered bolides driven by “maniacs with a death wish”, as Niki Lauda famously said, is a much quieter and safer affair today. Although money is still an overwhelming factor in the big commercial leagues, there have been advancements to make open-wheel prototype racing more accessible. One of those endeavors is the Formula Student League, where university students of various STEM subjects come together to build a functioning racecar under strict regulations, such as a limited budget and limited outside help. In addition, there are specialized categories, like driverless vehicles or non-conventional propulsion modes. The league is especially popular amongst STEM-focused universities, with big partnerships with leading automotive manufacturers such as BMW and Volkswagen, who are known to also hire from teams.

TU Dresden's Formula Student Team, going by the name of “Elbflorace”, was founded in 2006 and entered its first competition in 2008. The ICE-powered car of 2008 bears very little resemblance to the technological marvel the team entered in 2024.

Their current competitor, going by the lovely name of “DaisiE” is an electric racer capable of accelerating from 0 to 60 in 2.3 seconds, with the ability to operate either by being steered by a driver sitting in the vehicle, or completely autonomously. To do the latter, the machine is using so-called LiDAR sensors in a very similar fashion to already commercially available vehicles (think lane-assist). DaisiE is also capable of completing various tests autonomously.

“WE DON'T CARE WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU DO. IN THE END, THE LAP TIME COUNTS. IF YOU'RE FAST AND ABLE TO HANDLE THE PRESSURE, YOU'RE IN !”



Meet “DaisiE”, the 2024 contender

Common tests include hotlapping an autocross circuit or completing an acceleration test. Included in the dynamic events is also the skid-plate test, where the car must complete several laps around two very tight circles in opposing directions to test the limits of the cornering abilities of the car. Although Formula Student is still a racing league, it is not only the car’s on-track performance that counts. Teams are also graded on their business plan, their ingenuity, and other technicalities regarding the construction of their vehicle.

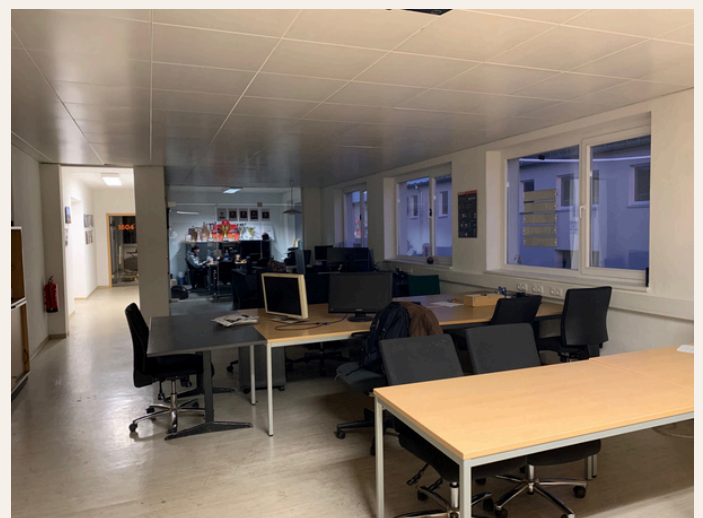
If one were to describe the spirit of the sport, the phrase “extremely high-tech DIY” would come close, yet would still not do it justice. What started out in a small shack on TU Dresden’s campus (which had to be torn down) is now a hundred-person operation with its own manufacturing hall in the industrial area of Dresden Prohlis. A diverse host of people involved, such as Team CEO Falco Mögel, work full-time on the project, suspending their studies for at least one season. The whole structure of the team, divided into departments, each with their own respective hierarchy, rivals that of some professional sports teams. As building a race car is an ambitious project, people work in shifts to complete their tasks, sometimes during the night, if required.

People from all walks of academic life take up various roles. *“As long as they have the time needed to fulfill their respective duties, bring enough passion, and are open to learning new things, we give everyone the opportunity to join the team. Be it STEM or psychology majors”* says Mr. Mögel.

Formula Student is a huge sport. With over 500 registered teams worldwide, it might just be the motorsport category with the most contending teams. It is, however, not just a sport, but also an interdisciplinary framework for research and innovation, with the rule work acting like a gentle push to incentivize teams to research solutions for common problems. Although it is common knowledge that motorsport is the birthplace of almost all automotive innovations, be it safer cars or more efficient propulsion, the sport is often criticized as bad for the planet, unsafe, and not very inclusive. Addressing these problems, Formula Student responded by implementing new regulations: *“New for this year is the so-called “Carbonated Cost Bill of Materials”, which is part of the cost-report discipline. Here we must basically track what emissions each individual part causes, starting from raw materials and ending with the finished product”*.

Motorsport in general has the reputation of being a very “elbows out” environment, with drivers especially being somewhat easily irritable characters. In the world of Formula Student, however, friendly and light-hearted competition between the teams is more of the norm.

“Teams help each other all the time, there are also friendships between teams. In the end, we would like to see all the teams compete and see what [car] they came up with. When we had a small mishap with DaisiE’s [the 2024 contender] front left control arm in Croatia, people immediately came up to us and offered help “, says Mögel when asked about the spirit of the sport.



Views from the office: As the industrial building housing the workshop does not have central heating, temperatures can get quite cold during the winter months.



Exchanging stickers with teams and putting them on your car is a fun tradition between participants, sometimes causing for entertaining moments, as seen by the "looks like you're done for the day" sticker on DaisiE's broken front left control arm

Although Formula Student is a friendly competition, it is still a competition after all. In contrast to the big commercial leagues of motorsport, however, money and sponsorships are not the all-deciding factors, with smaller teams being surprisingly competitive. It still does help to have patrons. In the case of Elbflorace –one of the larger and more successful teams of the sport– a lot of outside help comes in the form of practical appliances, like professional and otherwise unobtainable power tools from HILTI or a walk-in cooling cell for carbon materials by VIESSMANN. Sometimes partners also take over complicated manufacturing processes that are simply not feasible for a smallish operation of students or offer specialty training. As for the 2025 car, all we are allowed to write here is that its name –in true Elbflorace tradition– is going to end with the letter "E", and that it is going to be an incredibly fast machine, even lighter than its predecessor. This is still prototype-racing after all, and prototypes usually remain a secret.

PICTURE SOURCES

E.Löffler

THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP FOR STUDENTS

JULIANE GRUND

In the first lecture I attended, the professor addressed the students gathered directly at the beginning of the lecture. While attending a university, there would be three elements of life. The courses and the associated work, social contact, and sleep. He added that there is only enough time for two of these three things. Finally, he explicitly advised that sleep should be chosen as the element to be neglected. At first, the advice to subordinate sleep to studying and an active social life seemed plausible, but is this the case? What consequences does a lack of sleep have on the performance and general well-being of students?

In 2020, the National Sleep Foundation of the United States of America carried out a study that recorded the recommended amount of sleep per night for each age group. Accordingly, young adults between 18 and 25 should aim to sleep between seven and nine hours at night. However, a survey conducted among students at the Technische Universität Dresden revealed a divergence from the calculated reference value. One-third of the students surveyed attested to only sleeping for five to six hours on average per night. This result is linked to an important fact:

The optimal amount of sleep is highly personal. Although the respective person's age greatly influences their optimal amount of sleep, additional factors such as their genetic information, lifestyle, and quality of sleep also play a role. As a result,

while some people may feel fully rested after six hours, others may need eight hours or more to feel refreshed. Despite this, the survey highlighted a sobering finding: Only one person reported feeling rested every day upon waking, while approximately three-quarters of those surveyed indicated that they rarely or never feel refreshed. Experts generally speak of sleep deprivation as soon as a



person does not wake up refreshed at least three times a week for more than a month. Based on that, the severity of the result can be recognized. Although only a fraction of the students at the university took part, the survey offers a representative insight into the sleep patterns of the whole student body. Consequently, it is to be expected that most students at the Technische Universität Dresden may be experiencing sleep deprivation.



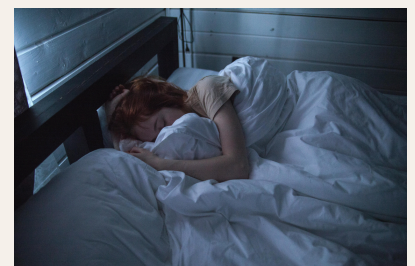
This far-reaching matter carries serious implications for those affected. While students limit their sleep in the hope of achieving greater academic success, many fail to realize that the chronic deprivation of sleep is most likely to evoke the opposite. While sleeping, our central nervous system recovers from the hours spent awake. As a part of that, new pathways for neurons are created in the brain, especially during REM sleep. Rapid eye movement sleep is the final sleeping stage that occurs in sleep cycles, following the deep sleep phase. The creation of new pathways for neurons has an essential impact on the memory of newly acquired information as well as the fortification and retention of long-term memory. A sufficient recovery of the brain depending on the performed activity during the previous day, is not only necessary for supporting memory processes. Furthermore, students who do not sleep enough may also develop concentration problems. This was also shown through the survey conducted. Out of the surveyed, 83 percent of students attested to developing noticeable concentration problems in connection with sleep deprivation. Next to having a hard time concentrating, the brain takes longer to process new information, due to insufficient recovery time.

Next to its cognitive impairment, sleep deprivation also takes a toll on the physical well-being of the affected individuals, which goes much further than a noticeably tired appearance. Of the surveyed, 86 percent stated that they had experienced physical exhaustion in connection with poor sleep. Next to constant fatigue, chronic sleep deprivation is closely connected to a weaker immune system. Studies have shown that those lacking enough sleep are more

prone to catching a cold. This plays a significant role for university students since they are naturally more inclined to create a common cold due to them usually interacting with many fellow students every day, leading to periods where everyone appears to be sick. In addition to short-term sicknesses, long-lasting sleep deprivation has also been proven to contribute to the development of long-term sicknesses such as diabetes type II and obesity. In addition to that, the risk of suffering a stroke increases, as well as developing mental illnesses.

As if that was not enough, insufficient sleep is also likely to interfere with your social life. Not only are tired people less likely to participate in social events. Also, in addition to the general increase in emotionality, sudden mood swings may occur, which is confirmed by more than half of the participants in the survey. The additional increase in irritability, due to the overall exhaustion, makes room for an increase in negative social interactions.

Finally, sleep is not just something dispensable or nice to have. Instead, it is a vital part of our lives, whose impact is often dangerously underestimated. Instead of following pieces of advice like the one given in my first lecture, we should question and negate them. Yes, academic success and social gatherings are important aspects of student life, but please refrain from continuously sacrificing your sleep. At the end of the day, we should not neglect any of the three but find an individual balance. Sleep is not a waste of time, but an investment in our well-being that constitutes a happy, healthy, and productive student life.



Here are some ideas for a healthy sleep cycle:

1. Determine your optimal sleep duration.

After a moderate day, preferably a Friday or Saturday, start your bedtime routine when you naturally feel tired in the evening. Refrain from using an alarm. That way you can see at what time your body feels energized enough to wake up without external influence. Generally, the difference between the time you go to bed and the time you wake up the next day without an alarm should give you an idea about your optimal sleep duration. You can repeat the process a couple of times to gain a more detailed idea.

2. Create a constant sleep schedule.

Try to have a set time when you go to sleep and wake up, at least on the days you have classes. Having a set schedule also helps your body create a routine, allowing you to both fall asleep faster and feel refreshed in the morning.

3. Quality is just as important as quantity.

The quality of your sleep is influenced by many things. Next to your overall lifestyle, which should include physical movement and fresh air, a relaxing evening routine is essential. Ensure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and relatively cold. Next, avoid using your mobile devices shortly before bed, since their blue-light emitting screens prevent your body from relaxing. For instance, an alternative activity would be reading a passage in a book or having a soothing cup of tea.

4. Be mindful of complementary measures.

Energizing measures such as caffeine and short naps may help to compensate for a poor night of sleep but need to be applied with caution. Especially by applying these too late in the day, the following sleep is likely to be disrupted. On the other hand, calming measures, for instance, the intake of melatonin, should be applied carefully as well to avoid making yourself dependent on them.

Since more than half of the survey's contestants stated that they either feel unsure about being properly informed or not informed enough about the significance of sleep, here are a couple of online sources on the topic:

- The website of the National Sleep Foundation: <https://www.thensf.org/>
- 'Sleep and Vigilance' Journal via Springer: <https://link.springer.com/journal/41782> (access through SLUB login)
- 'Sleep' Journal via Oxford Academic: <https://academic.oup.com/sleep/> (access through SLUB login)
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- Toscanini, A., Hasan, R. (2024) : “Effects of Sleep Deprivation” In: El Rafihi-Ferreira, R. (eds) Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Insomnia. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50710-6_3.

PICTURE SOURCES:

A. Piacquadio: Pexels

A. Piacquadio: Pexels

I. Oboleninov: Pexels

ROMANTICIZED INTOXICATION ALCOHOLISM AT UNIVERSITY

LUISE EIFRIG

“It’s only alcoholism after graduation,” is a phrase often joked about in university circles – one that most students have heard at least a couple of times during their studies. While it may seem like harmless humor, for many, the line between social drinking and dependency becomes blurred long before they graduate. University life is often synonymous with a drinking culture, where alcohol is not only normalized but expected. From freshman events to holiday gatherings, drinking is heavily embedded into the student’s social life, making it difficult to participate without it. University drinking culture, shaped by alcohol-centric traditions and a lack of meaningful interventions, continues to thrive with little challenge. The pressures of excessive consumption, along with the risks to students’ health and well-being, remain largely overlooked. Policies and the lack of alcohol-free events highlight the need for a broader conversation about how universities address the role of alcohol in student life.

From social events during fresher’s week to mulled wine at the student council elections, alcohol is ever-present in student life. It is so heavily embedded that it is a common tool for students to open up socially or cope with the stress of academic life. Drinking is not only normalized but often expected, with university-hosted events reinforcing the expectations of drinking and its necessity for socialization. It is difficult to find social events without alcohol, with peer pressure also playing a pivotal role in the drinking culture at university. Not wanting to drink alcohol often leads to confused questioning. In an interview with JABS, one stu-



dent recalled a get-together where they were permanently offered drinks, even after they stated that they did not want any.

This culture romanticizes heavy consumption, masking the associated risks from long-term health consequences to dependency. Universities, though well-positioned to challenge these norms, often fail to address the deeper implications of their alcohol-centric traditions.

Alcohol consumption during university years poses significant risks to students' health, academic performance, and social well-being. Over 13% of deaths of 20- to 39-year-olds can be attributed to high alcohol consumption, affecting this age group especially by its dangers. It heightens the risk of fatal accidents as well as illnesses such as tumors or cancer. The TU Dresden offers some informative articles on the dangers of drinking, but they do little to combat the high rate of over 40% of German university students who show signs of alcohol dependency and problematic behavior.



There are many reasons for the higher alcohol consumption by university students. Apart from social events and the overall drinking culture and mentality towards excessive consumption, many students start university at a young age, right after their graduation. Even if they take a gap year, many students have just reached the legal drinking age not too long before starting their studies. Many still struggle with knowing their limits and have to deal with the many life changes that come with becoming an adult. They might move to a

new city, far away from home and without their friends, and are faced with new responsibilities.

For many, alcohol offers a way to relieve stress and with the pressure and the anxieties of young adulthood high, reaching for alcohol is an easy way to try and drown out the struggles. It encourages risky behaviors such as binge drinking and skipping meals to amplify intoxication. But the thrill of it, the exciting aspects of regular night-outs and drinking until blackout do not always hold up the glamour, especially when they become the sole focal point of socialization. Another student shared their experience with their university friend group, who they met regularly. After two years they recognized they only met up to drink and while they had fun on their adventurous night-outs, it became somewhat tiring to only hang out when alcohol was involved.

This fatigue is not often shared openly. Many feel the pressure of social drinking still, even at the cost of their health and mental well-being. Acknowledging the toll of this drinking culture and creating spaces where students can connect without reliance on alcohol is essential to fostering healthier, more inclusive university experiences.

Universities often fail to address the harmful drinking culture embedded in student life, sometimes actively promoting it through alcohol-centric events. From mulled wine at student council elections to freshman activities revolving around drinking or even putting a cocktail into the student welcome packages, such traditions normalize and perpetuate excessive alcohol consumption. While not all of these aspects stem from the TU Dresden itself but also the student councils, the academic environment is openly riddled with alcohol. Higher alcohol consumption within the student body is a known issue, and yet the TUD offers little aid or resources for its students. While there are some services for employees of the university, only the student union offers hotlines or counseling for students. However, this is not an issue exclusive to the TUD, as counseling services, while helpful, are often underfunded or inaccessible, and effective interventions like Social Norms Initiatives (SNI) remain underutilized. The absence of social events without alcohol enforces drinking as a social default and avoids confronting the issue at hand.

While it could be argued that the drinking behavior of students does not lie within the university's responsibility, actively indulging in alcohol-centered activities only promotes excessive drinking, and failing to openly address the issue by offering aids and services for struggling students is more than counter-productive. Alcohol is deeply ingrained in society, and while there is nothing inherently wrong with students enjoying an occasional night out, it becomes a problem when drinking shifts from a choice to a crutch for relaxation, or when turning down a drink is no longer socially acceptable.

Picture Sources:

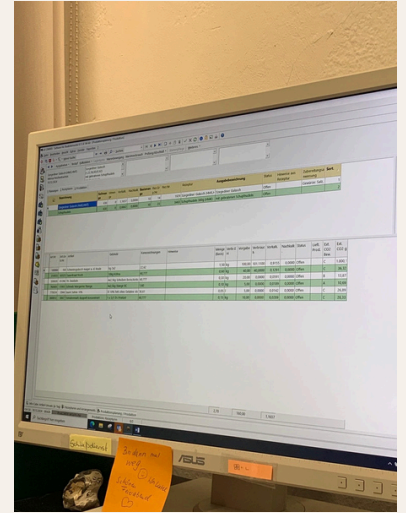
Maria, Pippa: Unsplash

Gonçalves, Anna: Unsplash

“FEEDING 42,000. A SMALL LOOK INTO THE INNER WORKS OF THE STUDENT WORKS KITCHENS”

ELIAS LÖFFLER

It is 5:30 in the morning when the kitchen lights of the big art-deco-style building on Reichenbachstraße first turn on. Cooks start to unpack about 40kg of noodles, 10 liters of canned tomatoes and many more ingredients needed to produce Bolognese. At 6:30 their boss, Jacqueline Wolff, head of service in Mensa Matrix, turns on her PC. Long lists of ingredients, raw produce, prices and staff distribution flash on the monitor, all encoded in short combinations of numbers and letters incomprehensible to the outsider. By 9:00 am all dishes meant for distribution to other dining halls must be packed into orange containers and on their way.



Around the same time, a few buildings over, Elke Burkhard hangs her red coat on the coat hanger. Once settled in, she immediately starts up her laptop to look at the numbers of the last day's lunch service. She seems content. Yesterday the kitchens moved out about twelve thousand dishes – a number well within projection. As students, we rarely get to see behind those giant swinging doors of a Mensa kitchen. We choose our dish, pay at the cash register, grab a seat and eat away. The next class starts in fifteen minutes anyway, and we better hurry to get a proper seat. Sometimes the choice of which dish one should take can be made in seconds: Is the queue too long for the time I have allocated for lunch? Do the ingredients sound appetizing? Is there an alternative that sounds better? Can I afford that dish with the money left on my card?

For some people food is fuel. For other people, food might be the highlight of their day. But what unites both philosophical outlooks are those special moments, when the food offered at the dining hall is particularly spectacular in its composition. Suddenly, discussion ensues among the dining guests: “A for effort, but what on earth did they think when they came up with that combination?”

Only one chance to find out: You have to go and ask the source. I did – and got the chance to interview Elke Burkhard, the head of university gastronomy at the Student Works. Having started out as a line cook for the Student Works in 2001, she quickly rose through the ranks. First as the head of a kitchen, then a head of service and now second in command below the CEO.

“Good morning Ms. Burkhard, thank you for taking the time to meet me here. Many people might not know what your job title “head of university gastronomy” entails. How would you describe to outsiders what you do for work?”

“Well, first of all, I’m not alone in this part of the administration. I have three general managers taking over various subjects [culinary affairs, hygiene, product/assortment management]. Before I was head of the department, I was responsible for ensuring cost-effective operations. So basically, everything to do with numbers. We used to be ten people in 2022.”

“Oh wow, I thought you would be many more.”

“Well, actually, we are just five people now. Our responsibilities changed accordingly. Everybody has to ‘carry a few more packets’ now, so to speak. Apart from all the changes, my job is still very much everything regarding numbers and coordinating all the various streams of information. Sometimes it’s also making important decisions [...] I try to still get out of my office and into the kitchens, but that sadly is a rarer occasion these days.”

“Please don’t mind me asking so bluntly, but does that mean as head of university gastronomy, you are allowed to put in a veto when it comes to certain culinary decisions?”

(Laughs) “Yes, I actually have to do that sometimes [...] There is a lot of internal discussion about that topic, but that’s just part of the job. Sometimes people’s creativity conflicts with the mission of creating affordable food for everybody. Of course, that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t taste good – it should always taste good – but we are not trying to be ‘fine dining’. We are simply trying to do our job: delivering a quality lunch at a fair price [...]”

The precise logistics and economics of said 'fairly priced meal' is no small feat. While the amount of produce the Student Works kitchens move is immense, it is in no way close to the amount other big players in system gastronomy (the capital M for example) process. Therefore, price margins and availability of "buy-in-bulk" discounts drastically differ. Vegan substitutes are especially affected by the pricing policies of commercial suppliers. As the development of huge-scale plant-based gastronomic operations is a relatively new occurrence, many of the most needed products are not available in suitable packet sizes for commercial kitchens. This causes two things: More packaging waste, and increased price. "We basically have to buy those products at a consumer level, not with commercial pricing. It is super tedious, especially at our scale of operation", I am told when inspecting the storage hold of Mensa Matrix. The Student Works are also a publicly funded non-profit organization (the correct German term would be "Anstalt öffentlichen Rechts"), which means that internal calculation must also ensure that the entire cash flow of the dining hall apparatus is a zero-sum equation. Few people know about all these factors, which leads to hefty speculations about pricing and meal composition. Meat lovers complain that the hearty dishes are too expensive and that there must be some cabal against omnivores, vegan advocates complain about them not being expensive enough, and the kitchen staff being biased against plant-based food. None of that is true, almost every decision underlies strict economic rules to ensure that all numbers match up in the end. Ready for some quick math? Here are the facts about pricing:

To get the "employee price" (the one our lecturers pay), multiply all costs, which means labor, ingredient prices, transportation, upkeep/general maintenance and storage by 282%. Deduct 45% of that amount from the employee price and you get the student price. What sounds rather simple at first gets complicated if we include the lord and savior of all students in destitute: The €2.35 nice price.



when cooking for hundreds of people, things do get comically large, as this assortment of over 100kg of noodles and the 1000 liter tank of dish soap illustrates

The €2.35 nice price started out under the romantic German name “Sozialpreis”, but that was quickly found to be stigmatizing, according to Ms. Burkhard: “[...] People tend to be not so kind, and nobody would like to be the person everybody points at for taking the Sozialpreis. Sometimes people are just short on money. Not everybody gets support from relatives or has the time to work part-time, making a very affordable meal option a question of necessity, not of being cheap. We decided against that term to lower the barrier for taking the budget-friendly option.” There was a vote held to find a name, but the work-in-progress title of “nice price” was what stuck in the end. The sum of €2.35 is completely arbitrary and different to urban legend, not only reserved for vegan and vegetarian dishes. The Student Works lose money on all “nice price” dishes sold. However, the amount they lose varies depending on what that dish is. Its integration into the price roster works by the concept of mixed-price calculation, which is a common practice in the restaurant business. In simple terms, it means that the high-input cost dishes have a lower profit margin, and the low-input cost dishes have a higher profit margin.

Each day, the head of service of each Mensa is mandated to sell one dish at “nice price” conditions. The other prices are then adjusted accordingly, which sometimes leads to confusion on the student side when a gourmet dish composed of duck breast with potato mash and fresh greens is cheaper than pasta with tomato sauce. The goal behind this is to allow less fortunate students to also enjoy a succulent meal on at least a few occasions per week. *“As long as the numbers match up on Friday, the “nice price” can be applied to any dish.”*, Ms. Burkhard tells me.

It is also this principle of relative autonomy – both in price and food preparation of each individual dining hall – that leads to sometimes very obscure and funny moments in the kitchen. Since there is no centralized menu, but rather an assortment of possible combinations, each head of service together with their head chef is responsible for creating a diverse range of dishes over the course of a week.

Many different dishes mean many different recipes, which at one point led to a competition to find the best recipes for tomato sauce to reduce the number of them down from a staggering eighteen different mixtures to just three. This tomato sauce incident is now a famous urban legend within the cosmos of the Mensas and leads to extremely mixed reactions, depending on which chef you ask. As not to out-compete the other cafeterias, fan favorites like burgers and pizza are rotated. Although not every cafeteria offers them – some dishes are simply not made for transportation, which means that delivery-only Mensas have a limited selection. As Ms. Wolff put it: *“Nobody likes a soggy burger – that’s just sad”*. The infamous burger day, which is held each Friday at Zeltschlösschen Mensa, is simply a product of the above-mentioned “favorites rotation”.

As the times are ever-changing, so is the food business. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the war against Ukraine, and the subsequent fallout of these events, it has become increasingly harder for the Student Works to keep operations of the kitchens running on the same level as pre-pandemic:

“At the beginning, it was mainly fresh vegetables and dairy products that saw an extreme increase in price. [...] Prices immediately started to increase after the start of the war in Ukraine. They have not been increasing as of recently, but they are not going down either. Prices have stabilized on this high level.”

“How about electricity and gas? Are you still using gas stoves?”

“No, generally not. There are few kitchens using gas left. [...] Mensalogie for example still does. We switched to mostly electric ranges pre-pandemic, due to reasons independent of current events – thankfully. We also did a lot of modernization during that time: new appliances, procedures, the whole nine yards. [...] It did [both gas and electricity] get more expensive, but not as much as we expected at first, which is good. We also got a better deal with our service provider now – that helps. [...] We also established various measures to save a bit here and there: Lower room temperatures in the offices and staff rooms, no drink fridges during wintertime, [...]”

Another factor apart from the increase in prices for raw produce is the reduction in staff from 350 to 269. That in combination with new tariffs for employees (mainly kitchen staff), and ever-changing regulations makes daily operations – let alone calculations for the foreseeable future – increasingly difficult. What has not changed is the Student Works directive to keep open every dining hall, even if it requires creative solutions. “That is simply part of the mission.”

Speaking of deals and changing times, we should probably investigate the state of affairs regarding the construction of the New Mensa at Bergstraße and other future endeavors of the Student Works. As of now, all is finally going according to plan. A test run of the New Mensa will take place at the end of Q1 of 2025, with high hopes of reaching many new potential customers. Sadly, that also means that we are nearing the final days of our loyal and now infamous companion Mensa Zeltschlösschen.

“What else does the future hold? Any plans and wishes?”

(Smiles) “I really, really hope that everything goes well with the New Mensa. Of course, we plan on keeping up with modernizations and improvements – more standardized procedures, a simplification of a few kitchen-related things here and there. We are also trying longer opening times in some places. Apart from that, I just wish that we can keep offering tasty and affordable food that students enjoy.”

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