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## *What does student engagement mean to you?*

For me, student engagement means campaigning for improvements or events that often no longer affect you. In other words, selfless action. You don't organize a Freshers' Week for yourself, and a discussion about the quality of a course often only takes place after you've attended it. And yet you still get involved. Or perhaps precisely because you wish that someone else had dealt with it before you.

## *How did you get involved?*

I was just incredibly happy to have a well-organized Freshers' Week, which made my arrival in a new city

easier - and I wanted to pass this experience on. Overall, I can describe my approach to getting involved as positive. I found the student council helpful, so I wanted to help out. I had the feeling that the faculty (study coordination, dean of studies, ...) was happy to receive student input and would like to engage in a mutual exchange, so I took the opportunity.

In my career through various student institutions, however, I have unfortunately also come across the other option - commitment because it doesn't work otherwise or because no one else is interested in the student perspective.

This, or perhaps even this very engagement, is also important, but it is always better to be interested in a joint exchange from the outset. Universities should be a place of basic democratic understanding - and this includes sitting around a table with all those affected (status groups) and shaping the future together! Of course, this also means that all status groups want to get involved and are given the opportunity to do so. After getting involved as a student via the student council and organizing (mainly) first-year events, I quickly became a student representative on the faculty council, study commission and later also the student council and examination board. Through my involvement in the student council, I came to the Federal Student Council Biology Conference (BuFaTa) and immediately felt at home among like-minded people. The

BuFaTA is a completely self-organized long weekend where all the student councils of a subject area come together somewhere in Germany. I wanted to (and was able to) get involved and then thought to myself - similar to when I joined the student council during Freshers' Week - that we could also organize the BuFaTa here, especially because no one else would have done it that semester. And years later, I used this organizational experience to organize a conference for European biology students and doctoral candidates (SymBioSE) in Freiburg.

I also came into contact with the Association of Biology, Biosciences and Biomedicine (VBIO) through the BuFaTA and was able to work there for two years as a student member of the executive committee and fill part of the association's magazine with student articles.





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Through the BuFaTa, I became aware of the student accreditation pool - a nationwide organization of students who train each other in questions of accreditation (i.e. the quality of studies and teaching) and assess study programmes as experts. That sounded super exciting, so I went to the next best seminar (from Freiburg to Kiel on the night bus...), then accompanied some accreditation procedures and about 2 years later got the chance to pass on my own experiences as an observer in such a seminar. One thing led to another and I was part of the seminar organization and involved in the further development of the seminar ("corona digitization"). I was also able to take part in international accreditation procedures, gaining super exciting experience and even becoming an international student member of the AQ Austria Board (the Austrian Accreditation Council, so to speak).

*What advantages do you see for yourself, your university and also socially in your engagement, also with regard to your career as a university employee?*

My first jobs (project positions at the university in the field of teaching development) after graduation were 100% due to my commitment and the experience I gained. But even without this seamless transition into working life, it was worth it. I made friends for life, all over Germany and sometimes Europe. I was able to develop myself, make mistakes, seek advice, get feedback, become more independent and self-confident. And find out what I enjoy doing! My studies are the prerequisite for my working life, but my student commitment is the reason why I do it and can do it well.

For society in a broader sense and the university in a narrower sense, some of my experiences have at least given me the feeling that I have achieved something. For example, we were able to bring about slight changes in the structure of the degree course (which have been well received so far) and I was able to help other students to be shown prospects after their studies (online career information evenings with the VBIO, which are now continued independently by the VBIO on a monthly basis). Overall, however, I simply hope that my involvement motivates many other students to get involved (or more involved) and that I have been able to ensure that people get to know each other at various events and, in the best case, broaden their horizons (e.g. at the SymbioSE European exchange).



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*What was the most decisive/important point (positive or negative) of your engagement?*

The appreciative atmosphere at the Faculty of Biology in Freiburg, the great people I got to know through student involvement and the opportunities it opened up for me.

Of course, not everything always went smoothly, but compared to all the positive experiences, the negative ones are not an important aspect of my experience with volunteering. I was at least able to work through the few frustrating moments to the extent that I don't think many of them would happen to me again today or I wouldn't take them to heart in the same way - and that's what counts.

What my "student CV" hopefully shows: student engagement often starts small and new opportunities always open up that you can seize as soon as you feel ready. So take heart, seize the opportunity(s)!