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

For me, student engagement is much more than an obligation or a means of filling out your CV. It is about becoming aware of your own role in a larger social and political context. In a time when education is often reduced to pure knowledge transfer, I see engagement as an opportunity to question the university system itself. It is not just about creating better conditions for me or my fellow students, but about creating a space that allows and encourages criticism. It is an attempt to counteract the dehumanization that neoliberal ideology permeates many areas of our lives - be it in education, work or our social relationships. Engagement means actively taking responsibility and acting in solidarity because I am convinced that sustainable change is only possible in the community. It is also a form of self-empowerment because I do not see myself as a passive part of a system that has been imposed on me, but as an active designer. This attitude has become rare in today's individualistic society, where it is often propagated that everyone is only responsible for themselves. But I believe that true change can only occur if we reject this logic and instead look for collective solutions. For me, student engagement is the first step to test these alternatives on a small scale, with the hope that they can bear fruit on a large scale. It is also a space for resistance - against the creeping economization of universities, against the pressure to perform that turns us into functioning cogs in a machine that we are not supposed to question. I reject this alienation. Engagement gives me the opportunity not only to criticize these tendencies, but also to take concrete steps to counteract them. In doing so, I am becoming more and more aware that these struggles are not only being fought for the universities, but are part of a larger social process. Universities are microcosms of our society, and the way we engage there reflects the way we want to engage in the world.

## *What benefits do you see for yourself, your university and also society in your commitment, which goes far beyond the university and federal politics?*

For me, the real value of commitment lies in the practical experience that joint action can change reality. It is not about positioning myself in academic or political hierarchies, but about working together with others on solutions that can have an impact far beyond the university campus. The university is a central place where social contradictions become visible - from educational injustice to the precariousness of work. By getting involved, I see an opportunity to address precisely these contradictions. The changes achieved at a university can be a model for broader social changes. My commitment shows that many problems that appear to be individual



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difficulties - such as pressure to perform or financial insecurity - are in fact structural in nature. They affect not only students, but society as a whole. When we as students work on these problems, we do so not only for ourselves, but for everyone who suffers from similar conditions. It becomes clear that commitment takes on a collective (communal) dimension. As Albert Camus aptly said: "In the experience of the absurd, suffering is individual. Starting from the movement of revolt, it becomes aware of its collective nature, it is the adventure of all." This realization drives me to think and act beyond the university. From a social perspective, my commitment brings an important counter-voice in a time in which neoliberal logics have penetrated deeply into all areas of

life. These logics reduce people to their economic exploitability, and education is often seen only as a means of increasing market value. But the university should be a space in which we can think freely and critically, without immediately focusing on the economic exploitability of our knowledge. By getting involved, I try to defend this space - not just for myself, but for future generations of students who have to live in a world in which the pressure to be productive and conform is increasing. Ultimately, I see my involvement as part of a larger movement that wants to change social structures. It is not enough to get lost in theoretical discussions; we have to become active and apply pressure in the right places. The university can serve as a laboratory for social innovations, and the successes we achieve here have the potential to radiate into other areas of society.

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### *How did you get involved?*

My involvement began in 2013, when I slipped into student representation through friends. What started as a non-binding involvement quickly developed further: school speaker, youth mayor, local council, advisor in the city council and finally a mini-job in the Lower Saxony state parliament. Party politics increasingly lost its appeal for me - too distant, too ideologically rigid. Instead, I co-founded Extinction Rebellion (XR) Germany and XR Hanover. When I started my studies at the end of 2019, I was drawn to university politics, despite my initial aversion. The austerity measures in the state of Lower Saxony and the challenges caused by the pandemic prompted me to become active. So I coordinated – together with a great team – the 'Alliance for Student Affairs', led protests and was in negotiations with the state government. Ultimately, this path led me first as an independent candidate to the Student Council and finally to the Senate of Leibniz University Hannover. Now, after the end of my mandate, I continue to volunteer in the university policy committees – without an official mandate, but not without impact.

### *What was the most decisive/important point (positive and negative) of your involvement for you?*

The most important point of my involvement is probably the experience that collective action – even if it starts small – can bring about noticeable changes. One example of this is the "Lower Saxony Menu", which, despite inflation, enables lunch for 2.50 euros in the state's cafeterias –



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an initiative that was initiated by just three people, including me. The reduction in the number of exams in my degree program and the impetus for the founding of the new Institute for Earth System Sciences, which emerged from my work in study coordination, also show how much can already be achieved in one's own environment. Even if the climate crisis or inflation seem to be insurmountable problems, the real change often lies in the immediate environment. It is small groups that improve local life through joint action. These local successes can multiply over time and influence higher political levels. Just as an ecosystem depends on the smallest living creatures to make complex life possible, in politics it is often the seemingly small actors that lay the foundation for larger changes. Of course, the path was not without obstacles. Burnout came in waves - the first time triggered by unnecessary internal conflicts, the second time during the peak of my tenure in the Senate. Nevertheless, my passion for political engagement has rekindled over time. These setbacks have shown me how important it is to work as a team and to work together against rigid structures instead of trying to do everything alone. As Hannah Arendt said: "Power arises when people talk to each other and act together."