

Independent Studies Project

Supervisor: Prof David Britain, in association with the Abteilung für die Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern der Universität Bern.

The University of Bern rightly insists that its documentation, official and non-official, organisation-internal as well as external, in print and online on its website and in its social media presence, conforms to the highest standards in terms of the representation of gender. It has developed guidelines for, for example, webpage authors, to remind them to use German in a gender-neutral way, to avoid descriptors that are grammatically male or female and to ensure that pictures used on websites present a balance of men and women in all roles and functions.

Because the University now has a considerable and increasing web presence in English, as well as an increasing number of staff for whom either English is a first or second language or need to use English here at work, it wants to be able to provide similar gender-neutral guidelines for authors of University webpages in English. Some of the same issues arise, of course, such as the balanced presentation of men and women in different roles. But the grammars of English and German are sufficiently different that some guidelines that apply to German do not apply to English and vice versa. The aim of this independent studies project is to produce a substantial report on best practice in the writing of gender-neutral websites in English.

This would involve a very thorough investigation of the existing guidelines on gender-neutral English language use in similar organisations around the world, and the writing of a detailed report that will be submitted to the Abteilung für die Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern to help inform their production of detailed English guidance for University staff. The report should take into consideration that the guidance is intended for a multilingual university, in which many of the users of the guidance will not be native speakers of English (the simple adoption of some American or British or Australian university's guidance may not be wholly appropriate, therefore).

We envisage that this task should involve a group of 3 MA or BA English Major students with particular interests in linguistics and/or gender, to whom 4 ECTS points would be awarded for successful and satisfactory completion of the research and the report.

Those interested should contact Prof Britain for more information: david.britain@ens.unibe.ch