



Mental Health • Diversity • Demokratie

Mental Health Coffee Break

A low-threshold format for student well-being

Albstadt-Sigmaringen University
VDI District Group Zollern-Baar

Studying today means more than gaining knowledge.

Many students struggle with
pressure, uncertainty, and personal crises -
and often there is no space where they can talk about it.

Observation -> Inspiration -> Experiment -> Learning -> Perspective

Progress often emerges not from perfect systems, but from open exchange between people.



Structure of the talk

- 1** Inspiration from Ireland
Connect Cafe at universities

- 2** Starting point
Student life, pressures, and missing spaces for conversation

- 3** Transfer to Albstadt
Mental Health Coffee Break in PlanB

- 4** Implementation
Format, organization, partners

- 5** Lessons learned and perspectives









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1 Inspiration from Ireland Connect Cafe at universities

Connect Cafe (Ireland, DCU)

An open meeting format for students and people in different life situations.

-  **Key features:**
 - low-threshold access
 - no registration, no appointment
-  encounters at eye level
 - conversation instead of counseling
-  community instead of isolation
 - people can simply drop by
-  small conversations can have a big impact

The inspiration emerged during an Erasmus+ stay in Ireland - with the idea of bringing successful concepts back to our own university.

I came across the concept of so-called Connect Cafes - a format from Ireland.

There, simple meeting places are created where people can talk to one another without an appointment and without barriers.

Universities are also taking up this idea.
Dublin City University describes its Connect Cafe as a space where students meet, share experiences, and build community.

The central idea is simple: sometimes what helps is not another program - but a space for encounter.

This led to the question: **could something like this work here as well?**

European exchange -> inspiration -> implementation

DCU on the Connect Cafe: „Students meet one another, share experiences and build a vibrant community.“



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2

Starting point Student life, pressures, and missing spaces for conversation

Starting point: student life in a field of tension



1. Growing pressures in higher education
 - Performance pressure and exam stress
 - Uncertainty about the future and careers
 - personal crises or isolation



2. Universities mainly respond structurally
 - Curricula
 - Examination regulations
 - counseling services

But informal spaces for conversation are often missing.



3. The reality for many students

Many talk about their problems

 - not at all
 - only very late
 - or only with close friends



4. Central question

At the end there is one major question:
How do we create a low-threshold space for exchange?

"For many students today, studying is not only an academic challenge."

"Performance pressure, uncertainty about the future, and personal crises are playing an ever larger role."



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2 Starting point

Student life in a field of tension between different perspectives

Mental health is not only an individual issue - it is also a question of structure, meaning, and community.

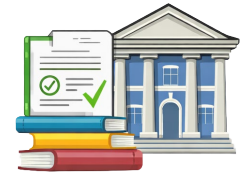
Mental strain

- ❖ Performance pressure
- ❖ Uncertainty about the future
- ❖ personal crises



Institutional structures

- ❖ Curricula
- ❖ Examination regulations
- ❖ counseling services
- ❖ study organization



Diversity and social reality

Students bring very different backgrounds:

- ❖ cultural
- ❖ social
- ❖ biographical
- ❖ neurodivergent



This enriches university life - but it can also create new challenges.

Critical thinking and democratic culture

This includes:

- ❖ different perspectives
- ❖ critical questioning
- ❖ respectful exchange

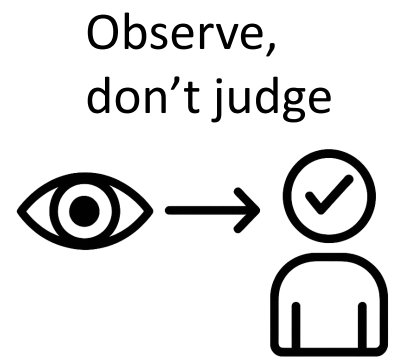
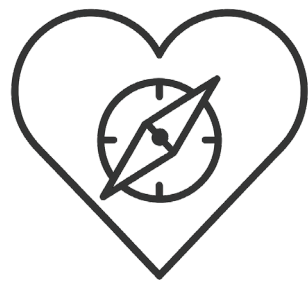


These require spaces for conversation and encounter.

"Our project brings together four themes that are often discussed separately at universities: mental health, diversity, critical thinking, and democratic dialogue. The Coffee Break tries to reconnect them - through a simple space for encounter and conversation."



Freedom is also an inner state:
the courage to take yourself seriously,
to embrace doubt,
and to honor your feelings.
Somewhere between
Arendt, Popper, and mental health
we find the same truth —
responsibility for ourselves and for each other.





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3 Transfer to Albstadt Mental Health Coffee Break in PlanB

A pilot project for student well-being and dialogue culture

Idea

Students experience not only academic but also personal pressures during their studies. There is often no low-threshold space to talk about stress, worries, or mental health. The Mental Health Coffee Break creates exactly this space in the student cultural venue PlanB - informal, open, and supportive.

Goal

- exchange and relief in everyday student life
- strengthen the student community
("We are all in the same boat")
- visible sign for mental health and inclusion
- contribution to social inclusion at the university

Implementation

- format: twice a month, 1-2 hours in PlanB
- setting: coffee/tea and snacks, no formal agenda, voluntary exchange
- symbolism: Green Ribbon + Progress Pride Flag as visible signs for diversity and mental health
- pilot phase: first three dates, followed by feedback

Partners and resources

- health insurers (AOK, TK, DAK, etc.) -> prevention programs, funding for snacks/materials
- external counseling services -> input if needed or anonymous surveys on student pressures
- SIA and PlanB -> organization, communication, space design

Perspective

Mental Health Coffee Breaks can become a permanent part of university culture. They create an open atmosphere in which mental health, diversity, and inclusion become visible together - in the spirit of social inclusion as it is practiced internationally (for example in Ireland).



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3 Transfer to Albstadt **Mental Health Coffee Break in PlanB**

A joint initiative at the university

The initiative is jointly supported by

- **Faculty of Computer Science**
- **Student Initiative Albstadt e. V. (SIA)**
- This cooperation brings together
- the students' perspective
- experience from teaching
- commitment to an open university culture

The project is legitimized on three levels:

1. **academic**
2. **higher-education policy**
3. **practical**

The Mental Health Coffee Breaks make a concrete contribution here:

- a low-threshold space for encounter
- promoting exchange and solidarity
- visible signs for diversity and mental health

Academic foundation

The Mental Health Coffee Breaks combine insights from
→ **psychology** → **neurobiology** → **philosophy** → **sociology** → **educational research**
and address themes such as stress, resilience, neurodiversity, and social participation.

Higher-education policy framework

Since 2023/24, universities have been required to develop a diversity concept. From April 1, 2026, this concept becomes a mandatory part of accreditation.

Core goals:

- **promoting equal opportunities**
- preventing discrimination
- strengthening an inclusive university culture

Current health data

The TK health report points to increasing
→ emotional exhaustion → stress levels → psychological strain among students
caused, among other things, by exam pressure, multiple burdens, and social isolation.



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4 Implementation Format, organization, partners



Format of the Coffee Break

- 🕒 Open meeting point
no registration - no appointment - just drop by
- 💡 Short impulse
10-15 minutes of reflection on topics related to student life and mental health
- 💬 Conversation and exchange
open peer-to-peer conversations among students
- 📝 Wishes and thoughts box
anonymous option for questions, topics, or personal thoughts
- 🌱 Core idea
Small conversations can have a big impact.

Organization of the Mental Health Coffee Break

The format is jointly organized by

- **Faculty of Computer Science**
- **Student Initiative Albstadt e. V. (SIA)**

This cooperation brings together

- the students' perspective
- experience from teaching and university organization
- commitment to an open university culture.

Venue

The Coffee Break takes place in the student cultural venue PlanB.

The space offers an ☑ informal atmosphere ☑ open seating arrangement ☑ room for spontaneous conversations.

This deliberately distinguishes the format from traditional seminar or event rooms.

The Mental Health Coffee Break is not a counseling service and not a seminar - it is a space in which students listen to one another.





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Implementation

Format, organization, partners

Role of VDI in the project



The Mental Health Coffee Break is being developed in cooperation with the VDI District Group Zollern-Baar. VDI contributes several important elements.

Initiative and support

The VDI district group makes it possible to try out new formats.

- Support with small material resources
- non-bureaucratic support for student projects

Connecting different stakeholders

VDI acts as a bridge between different areas:

- university
- students
- external partners (for example health insurers and experts)

This creates new perspectives and collaborations.



Responsibility of the engineering profession

VDI stands for the ethical principles of engineering.

This also includes responsibility

- ✓ for technology
- ✓ for society
- ✓ for the people who work and live with technology.

Questions of mental health, work culture, and social cohesion are therefore also part of this responsibility.



Voluntary commitment

The project grows out of personal commitment within VDI volunteer work.

This role makes it possible to

- try out new ideas
- launch projects flexibly
- involve students directly.

Here, VDI is not just a sponsor, but an enabler.



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4 Implementation Format, organization, partners



International Office der Hochschule Albstadt-Sigmaringen

Das International Office begleitet internationale Erfahrungen, Austausch und Horizonte über Ländergrenzen hinweg.



Career Center der Hochschule Albstadt-Sigmaringen

Das Career Center unterstützt Studierende auf ihrem Weg zwischen Studium, Orientierung und beruflicher Zukunft.



VDI Bezirksgruppe Zollern-Baar

Die VDI Bezirksgruppe Zollern-Baar verbindet Technik, Verantwortung, gesellschaftlichen Dialog und regionale Vernetzung.



Verfasste Studierendenschaft

Die Verfasste Studierendenschaft steht für Mitwirkung, Interessenvertretung und studentische Beteiligung im Hochschulleben.



TK – Die Techniker

Mit Unterstützung von **Elke Haist** und Patrik Letz – für Gesundheitsförderung, Prävention und starke Impulse im Hochschulalltag.



4 Implementation Format, organization, partners

What we have learned so far

Initial experiences from the Coffee Breaks and impulse talks:

- students appreciate open spaces for conversation without performance pressure
- small groups encourage honest exchange
- short impulse talks help open conversations

Topics:

- stress and exam pressure
- urban planning as a space for life and the soul
- neurodiversity in higher education
- dealing with crises
- meaning as a compass for what we do
- the importance of community in student life
- CSD in Albstadt - experiences, developments, and outlook

☞ Small conversations can have a big impact.





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5 Lessons learned and perspectives

Experiences from the first events

Open spaces for conversation are being used
Many students value a place where conversations are possible without performance pressure.

Small groups encourage honest exchange
Especially in small groups, personal conversations and mutual support emerge.

Impulses help open conversations
Short impulse talks or topic prompts make it easier to begin an exchange.

Community can be relieving
The feeling of "I am not alone with my problems" is experienced by many as helpful.

Perspectives for the future

Making the format sustainable
regular Coffee Breaks as part of university culture.

Expanding cooperation
collaboration with health insurers, counseling services, and initiatives.

Linking with teaching and university development
making mental health, diversity, and dialogue culture more visible in everyday university life.

Transferring the idea
The format could also be relevant for other faculties or universities.

"I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth."

Karl Popper



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What role do we actually want to play in society as an engineering organization?

Open questions for universities, society, and VDI

- Today, much is organized through marketing and advertising -
- universities compete for students, organizations for members.
- At the same time, we are flooded with information, campaigns, and media.
 - **But what do people really need?**
 - **What strengthens community and responsibility?**
 - How do we deal with
- fake news
- AI and its opportunities and risks
- increasing process and system orientation?
- Where does the human being remain in all of this?

We are building more and more systems, processes, algorithms, and communication strategies.

But often the place is missing where people can simply:

- ✓ listen
- ✓ reflect
- ✓ disagree
- ✓ seek understanding together.

A closing thought

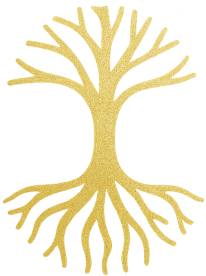
"Progress emerges where people come together,

listen to one another, and take responsibility together."

Inspired by Hannah Arendt, Karl Popper, and the Irish tradition of conversation.



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Mental Health Coffee Break

Part of the student café at Albstadt-Sigmaringen University – an open meeting place for exchange, mental health and orientation during studies.

What guides our actions?
What sustains us – especially in a world that is becoming increasingly complex?
The Mental Health Coffee Break is an open space for exchange, meaning, and connection. It's not about ready-made answers, but about questions that move us forward – and about the courage to listen to one another.
Just drop by – no registration, no expectations. You are welcome, just as you are.

Save appointment | Impulse & Slides | Feedbacks



What it's about

The Mental Health Coffee Break aims to create a safe yet open space where people can talk about mental health, questions of meaning, diversity, trust, neurodiversity, critical thinking, and how we can preserve humanity in everyday university life.

It's not just about workload and stress, but also about orientation, dialogue, and personal development. Studying is more than just achievement – it's also a space where people learn to better understand themselves, others, and the world.

The Mental Health Coffee Break is intentionally designed not as a traditional event format, but as a space for shared experiences. It's not about finding ready-made answers, but about asking questions that will help us all move forward – and about having the courage to tolerate and understand different perspectives.

Especially in a time when degree programs are increasingly condensed and geared towards efficiency, it becomes all the more important to create spaces for reflection. Critical thinking, personal development, and genuine encounters don't arise under time pressure – but rather when people take the time to listen to one another and question themselves.

Meaning & Orient | Mental health | Diversity & Inclusion | Critical thinking

Exchange on equal terms

"Understanding arises through dialogue – and sometimes change begins with a cup of coffee."

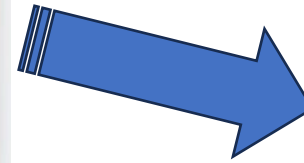
Next appointment

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Load calendar entry

The development of the Mental Health Coffee Break

2025 The series kicks off on World Mental Health Day. The first Coffee Breaks will create a space for dialogue and interaction.	2026 The series continues to grow with new topics, guests, and collaborations in the university and city.	Future The Coffee Break remains an open space for conversations about mental health, diversity, and community.
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Positive Eule
Ich bin vielleicht eine kleine Eule, aber ich glaube an dich. Du schaffst das!

Mental Health Coffee Break



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studicafe-albsig.de



Impulse & Folien



Termin speichern



Fakultät Informatik



Studenteninitiative Albstadt e. V

Learning Space



