

# GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY POLITICS

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# Bodies and Boards of the FU Berlin



academic senate	commissions
dean's office	board of trustees
test clause	executive board
departmental councils	status groups
group university	partial basic regulations
institute councils	quarter-parity system

## Guide to University Politics

The politics of higher education can be quite complicated. At different levels, different people make decisions that have a very concrete impact on the way we studyion-making process of the FU is often not that trinsufficientlyt. Who actually makes decisions at this university? Where do students claim their democratic rights? And how has this process changed in developedeyears?

In the following pages, you will find an overview of the academic self-governance of the University, which forms the institutional framework for democratic participation at the FU Berlin. In addition, there is a wide range of self-organizations and self-governance among students, which is explained in another publication in the pampof the series of brochuresHochschulpolitik.

For further information, please visit [www.astafu.de/hopo](http://www.astafu.de/hopo).

### How to take action?

Do you want to represent the interest of students in the committees of the FU? Then the Student Initiatives (Fachschafitsinitiatitven FSI) are the first place to go to. You can find a list of student council initiatives on [astafu.de](http://astafu.de). If there is no active FSI in your department, then get together with your fellow students and take the representation of your interests into your own hands! If you want to set up an FSI, the student council department of the ASTA will support you. Just write an email to [fsref@astafu.de](mailto:fsref@astafu.de)

### Translation

This pamphlet was translated by FAU-Betriebsgruppe at the FU Berlin.

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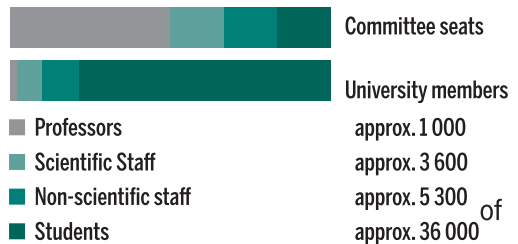
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First english edition  
July 2020

## The System of German Universities

At German universities, the principle of **group university (Gruppenhochschule)** applies, according to which all members should have the opportunity to participate in the administration/governance of the university. The members of a university are all the persons who work there full-time or who are enrolled as students. They are divided into status groups whose members vote for and be elected as representatives of their particular status group for different committees/councils of the university. The four status groups are: professors, students, scientific personnel, and non-scientific personnel (e.g. administration, libraries, IT).

The committee seats are neither equally divided nor are they divided according to the size of the status group. The professors receive the absolute majority of the seats in almost all committees of the **academic (self-) administration**. The remaining seats are divided equally among the other three groups. This hierarchy in the decision making procedure goes back to the 1973 ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany. This law overturned the quarter-parity system, in which all status groups had the same number of seats, in favor of a so-called professormajority under the pretext of preserving academic freedom. It is precisely this political inequality that creates a fundamental democratic deficit in the university and is a recurring theme in debates centering around the politics of higher education.



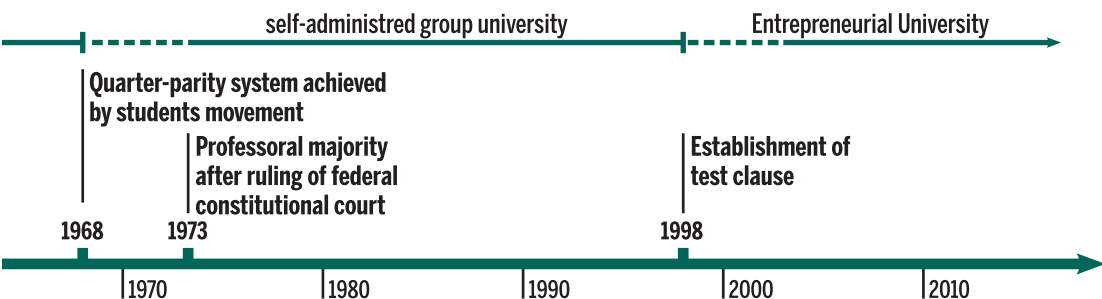
authoritarian university under tenured professors



## Legal basis

Universities fall under the responsibility of the federal states. For this reason, the Berlin Higher Education Act (BerlHG) regulates the structure of public universities in Berlin, the participation rights of their members, and the organization of research, teaching, and studies. However, in 1998 the so-called **test clause (Erprobungsklausel)** §7a BerlHG) was introduced. According to this clause, universities can deviate from approx. 45% of the paragraphs of the law in order to "develop and try new models of management, organization, and financing". This should "serve the goal of simplifying decision-making processes and improving economic efficiency, in particular, the achievement of the university's income". This clause intends to shift the financial dependence of the universities from the State of Berlin to other funding bodies such as private/commercial industry, foundations, or the German Research Foundation (DFG), which, among other things, allocates the funds of the "Excellence Strategy". With such measures, the state budget should be relieved from pressure, yet, universities are driven to higher performance.

The test clause was used most extensively in Dahlem. It was established **in the partial basic regulations** (Teilgrundordnung) in 1998. What is striking is the strengthening of the decision making capacities of the executive board, which has the last word or the sole right of proposal in many elementary matters. This increase in power resulted in the disempowerment of the Board of Trustees and the Academic Senate. The "simplification of the decision-making processes" was thus primarily at the expense of the directly elected bodies. This restructuring is based on a model called the "Entrepreneurial University", according to which universities should orient themselves more towards market interests and corporate structures than towards the common good or democratic institutions. This administrative ideal is better known as New Public Management.



The central bodies are made up of members from the entire university. Their decisions are valid for the entire university.

## **Executive Board**

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The Executive Board is the management body of the university. It chairs the meetings of the Academic Senate (AS), is responsible for urgent matters and represents the university externally, for example in public or at negotiations with the Berlin Senate on university financing. Due to the test clause (Erprobungsklausel), the Executive Board of Freie Universität has fundamental proactive rights (Initiativrechte), decides on the purpose of professorships, and combines all personnel powers. This results in a hierarchical relationship (Vorgesetztenverhältnis) to the other representatives in the academic senate. The Executive Board enjoys a high degree of formal and informal power.

## **Academic Senate**

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The Academic Senate (AS) is the university-wide decision-making body in research, teaching, and study matters. At FU it can, among other things, establish or dissolve study programs, set the limits on number of people admitted to study programs, and comment on the budget. The Commission for Teaching & Studies (KfL) advises the AS and consists of 50% students. However, recommendations made by the KfL are not binding for the AS. The Academic Senate, in its extended composition (eAS) meets for the election of the Executive Board and for the decision on the basic rules of procedure. However, many of the decision-making powers of these bodies require a prior proposal by the executive board.

## **Board of Trustees**

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According to the BerIHG, the Board of Trustees is the university's highest decision-making body for administrative issues. Its composition is intended to provide an interface (Schnittstelle) between science, politics, the public, economy, and society. At the FU, the size of the body has been reduced and the power of the Board of Trustees has been restricted: civil society is no longer represented, and the central competences, which require certain independence from internal power struggles, now lie within the Executive Board. The Board of Trustees of the FU only comes together to discuss financial matters.

In addition to the university-wide bodies, the university is divided into departments or faculties, which are often subdivided into institutes. Only the members of the department or institute in question can stand for election and elect the department and institute councils. Decentralized self-administration varies in the different departments/faculties, e.g. in some departments/faculties there are no institutes. In addition, there are other organizational units at the FU that differ from this explanation. For this reason, no claim can be made to complete general validity.

## **The Dean's Office**

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The Dean's Offices are the governing organs of the departments. They lead the meetings of the departmental council and take care of the ongoing and urgent business of the department. This includes administrative and personnel matters as well as the preparation of the budget. The dean's offices are authorized to issue instructions to employees of their department administrations, but not employees of professors and institutes.

## **The Departmental Councils**

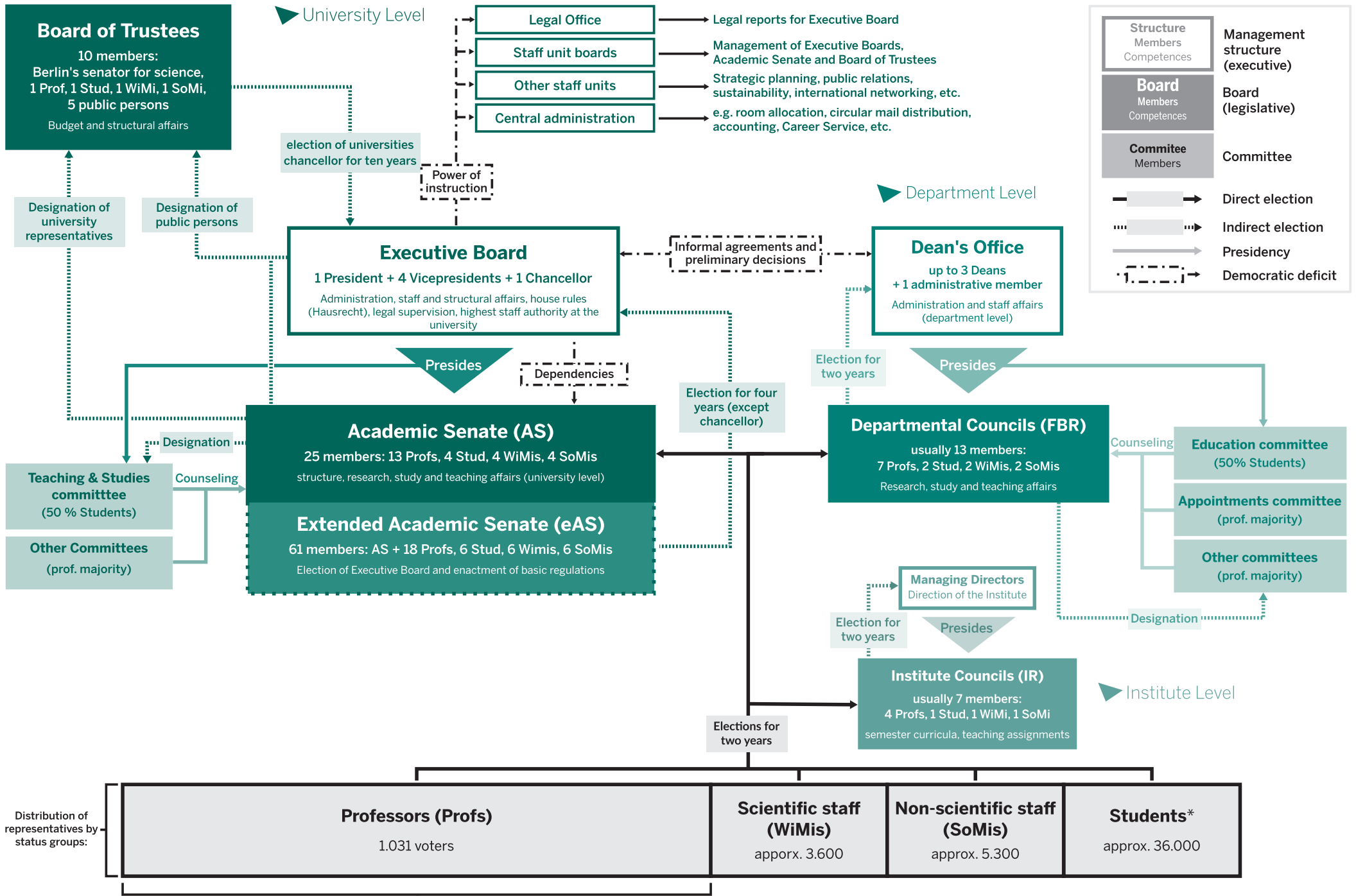
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The departmental councils (FBR) are the decision-making bodies of the departments/faculties. They decide for instance about studies and examination regulations, admission requirements and the budget of the respective dean's offices. However, FBR matters will often precede in informal discussions between the dean's offices and the Executive Board. The FBR set up appointment commissions that propose candidates for professorships. The education committee (ABK) advises the FBR on teaching and study matters and half of them are students, as in the KFL. They give non-binding recommendations for example to change study regulations.

## **The Institute Councils**

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The Institute Council (IR) decides on the affairs of the individual institutes. This includes, in particular, course schedules and, to a limited extent, the distribution of positions and funds within the institutes. The IR elects its executive directors to chair the IR meetings, implements its decisions and takes action on matters that cannot be postponed.



Absolute majority in every committee and board

\* Students are additionally organized in the autonomous student self-administration. You can find out all about it in the other pamphlet of this series at [astafu.de/hopo](http://astafu.de/hopo)