

Academic Rules for Students of the University of Göttingen (1763)

Abstract

The University of Göttingen was founded in 1734 by George II, King of Great Britain and Elector of Hanover. In 1763, his grandson and successor, George III, issued the following academic rules for Göttingen students. Members of the student body were supposed to attend church services on Sundays and feast days instead of going to coffeehouses or taverns (§ I and II), and they were generally expected to exhibit good behavior and obedience (§ III). Furthermore, they were urged to avoid pennialism, a type of hazing, whereby new students were forced to serve older ones (§ IV). Students from different cities or regions were prohibited from banding together in so-called *Landsmannschaften* or *Studentenverbindungen*, student fraternities that often aimed to forge “national” identities. Gambling was forbidden as was hazard and similar games; punishment was detention in the university prison, or *Karzer* (§ VIII). Students were also prohibited from dueling or otherwise taking justice into their own hands (§ IX).

Source

We, George the Third, by the grace of God King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Protector of the Faith, Duke of Braunschweig and Lüneburg, Arch-Treasurer and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, etc., etc.

Let it hereby be known: We have found it necessary for the good of our university at Göttingen and for those who study there to have the following new academic rules drafted. We therefore herewith graciously command and desire that such rules and the associated appendices be committed to print and distributed both to the students already present at Göttingen and to every newly arrived future student at registration; they are to be followed to the letter everywhere. Signed at Hanover on August 18, 1763 (L.S. [*locus sigilli*, place the seal here]).

On order of the King and Elector.

Münchhausen.

Balck.

I.

Students shall lead a God-fearing life and attend public religious services diligently and without causing disturbance.

Insofar as fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, all those who attend the Georg-August University (in order to dedicate themselves to true arts and sciences) have special reason to lead God-fearing, Christian lives, and to be diligently present in the galleries or balconies of both the university and the city churches at the public worship services on Sundays, feast days, and national days of prayer. Students are to appear at the usual time, are to wait with appropriate reverence, and are not to leave the congregation in an untimely manner; such behavior, which distracts both the pastor and the other attendees and signals an obvious disregard for the sacred activities, cannot—except in the case of clear and genuinely urgent emergencies—pass without disciplinary action.

II.

Likewise, [students shall] conduct themselves in accordance with the sabbath celebration ordinance that was disseminated throughout the land, and not frequent pubs, *coffee* houses, or *billiards halls* before, during, or between worship services.

A special sabbath celebration ordinance was already issued in 1713; consequently, all students must everywhere respect this general law of the land, which is found in substance in the *Constitutionum Calenbergicarum*, Chapter I, No. V, page 416. However, particularly with regard to frequenting pubs, *coffee* houses, and *billiards halls* before, during, and between worship services, individuals who allow themselves to enter such places instead of pursuing diligent attendance at services, thus evading the aforesaid order, shall incur set fines or jail terms, to be increased depending on the circumstances.

III.

Students shall not seek their advantage in unrestrained freedom but rather in respectable and irreproachable conduct.

Although it is absolutely certain that the students who dedicate themselves to studying deserve an advantage over other youths because of the excellent services that the community expects from them in the near future, those individuals shall content themselves with the fact that the advantage granted to them can by no means be asserted through so-called, but ill-named “academic freedom,” that is, through intentional disregard for the laws and the authorities responsible for administering them, or through unfounded contempt or even abuse of other equally necessary and indispensable members of the community. [Instead, the advantage must be asserted] solely through an unimpeachable lifestyle, through a well-mannered demeanor, and through friendly, respectable, polite, and respectful behavior—even in the presence of class differences—both among themselves and towards others with whom they must live and interact.

IV.

Among themselves, [students] shall make no distinctions conducive to *pennalism* (i.e., hazing) between older members of the university student body and newly arrived or recently accepted members.

First of all, regarding the relations of students among themselves, all of them, both the youngest and the oldest, are subject to a single authority and its protection and are equal to each other. It is therefore clear that not one of them is in any way allowed, for the wholly unworthy reason that he entered the ranks of the student body, say, a year and a day earlier, to indecently assault individuals who have just now or only recently started their academic careers, using shameful or even contemptuous words and actions or any other type of coercion, whatever it may be. [It is furthermore clear] that individuals who disregard this warning have all the more reason to expect an inevitable, and depending on the circumstances, quite severe punishment, in the event that such an unseemly overture seems to point to either the ugly remains of a universally detested *pennalism* or an extremely detrimental restoration thereof.

V.

Countrymen [*Landsleute*] must extend friendship, advice, and support to one another, but at the same time guard against any appearance of *nationalism*, which is forbidden.

If individuals who come from the same city or region become friends of their own volition, if at a later stage in their studies one individual helps another with advice and actions, and if, when a countryman becomes ill, individuals who come from the same place as the sick person take it upon themselves to provide care and attendance, then that is allowed and praiseworthy. However, if restless, idle persons establish a special society and

so-called regional fraternity [*Landsmannschaft*], and convince, or even coerce, others to join such an association, then hold all kind of gatherings, sponsor feasts that consume time and money, or so-called klatches, and seek to differentiate themselves from all the rest with *cocardes* or other external marks, and at worst, if an internal war arises when one member of such a fraternity feels insulted and the other members, because of their fraternity, take his side and then the other person seeks help and assistance from his countrymen, then the result is a great evil that undermines respect for authority, the law, and general security: an evil called *nationalism*, which is already punishable in itself. If that evil is revealed in investigations, then it must necessarily increase the otherwise deserved punishment for the mischief committed.

[...]

VIII.

Excessive and high-stakes gambling is to be met with cancellation of the debt and discretionary penalties; however, hazard games are, without exception, to be punished the first time with fourteen days' detention, the second time with four weeks' detention, and the third time with *Concilium abeundi* [i.e., "advice to leave," expulsion].

All permitted entertainment forms that do not interfere with diligence, which as the main purpose for being here is never to be undermined, are of course also granted to students, individually and at times to several in a group. However, the latter can only take place with prior knowledge and consent of the *prorector* and with solemn pledges from all those who make the request to bear responsibility for any disorder for which they are to blame.

At times entertainment is sought in gambling; but at the same time, limits are often transgressed, partly because of an indecent desire for enrichment at the expense of others and partly because of the altogether uncertain hope of recouping losses. Thus, on January 12, 1750, a Royal Edict was issued to the university and made known through publication; its purpose was to counteract, if possible, this evil, which drove many to ruin and was therefore forbidden throughout the land. According to that edict, if a student should dare to engage in gambling with dice, cards, or other hazard games, whether for cash, wine, coffee, or a free treatment, or whatever it is called, then that student shall be excluded from all society for fourteen days the first time, for a four-week detention penalty the second time, and sentenced irrevocably to *Concilium abeundi* the third time. In addition, gambling for a considerable sum of money, even if it is not a hazard game, is likewise strictly forbidden; the incurred debt is to be cancelled, and the academic magistrate is to be assigned the task of deterring violators with discretionary penalties. Finally, the aforesaid *magistrate* is ordered to root out people who are called students, but who fail to attend lectures (except perhaps for appearance's sake), fail to complete *exercises* or learn languages, and instead focus mainly on gambling and making a profession of it. The *magistrate* is then to remove them without ceremony by imposing *Concilium abeundi*. As the authorities have no choice but to follow this repeatedly emphasized royal edict to the letter, it is incumbent on students who pursue their own best interests to completely abstain from this pastime, as it is punishable and does them great harm.

IX.

All insults, and the revenge taken for them, all acts of violence, clashes, and duels are prohibited in the *duel edict* issued by the university and are subject to severe penalties.

No one knows better than the people who intend to become and remain scholars that the territorial lords have primarily appointed and commissioned authorities and courts so that every subject can lead a quiet and restful life under their protection. If conflict or dissatisfaction nevertheless arises, the insulted person knows where and how to seek genuine legal satisfaction. If an individual does not choose that path and takes it upon himself to obtain

justice, he encroaches on the office entrusted to the judge appointed by the highest authority and thus incurs almost the same guilt and penalty as the person perpetrating the insult. Nevertheless, sad experience unfortunately shows that, especially at universities, young students often become embroiled in disputes and verbal abuse as the result of ill-considered hot-headedness; but then the insulted party does not seek legal assistance from the academic authorities, and instead acts according to the very misguided idea of a so-called point of honor [*point d'honneur*] and places himself and others in danger to life and limb. At times, a university is even burdened with bloodguilt, from which gracious God has, however, spared the Georg-August University up to now. Thus, the most illustrious founder of the university issued a special dueling edict for the university at the very outset on July 18, 1735; it legally prohibits students from perpetrating all *verbal* and *physical injuries*, all revenge, and most pointedly, the resulting *clashes* and *duels*. The edict not only orders severe penalties against the persons engaging in duels, but also against the seconds, the bearers of the challenging card or oral challengers, the servants and domestics who knowingly lend a helping hand or other services, the witnesses, and individuals who hide or conceal the dueling individuals. Every student is given at *matriculation* a copy of this royal edict, together with the edict published on May 15, 1743, by the university as ordered on high authority, and students are to read every duty and obligation diligently and with care, familiarize themselves with all cases described there in detail as well as and the penalties imposed, and most studiously guard against what is prohibited and threatened there.

[....]

Source: *Academische Gesetze für die Studiosos auf der Georg-Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen*. Gedruckt bey Pockwitz und Barmerier, Universitäts-Buchdr. im Jahr 1763, pp. 3–7, 9–11. Available online at: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10681702-9>

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

Recommended Citation: Academic Rules for Students of the University of Göttingen (1763), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/knowledge-and-education/ghis:document-172>> [December 04, 2023].