

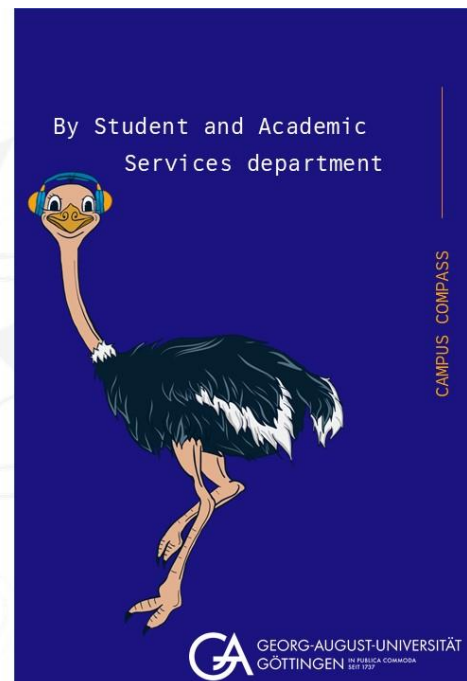
Campus Compass – Episode 04 – Supervision of academic work... between support and frustration

CAMPUS COMPASS

Supervision of academic work... Between support and frustration

What can you expect from supervisors – and what not? What does good supervision mean? What can you do to make things better?

Episode Nr. 4



Hi and welcome to a new episode of Campus Compass! I am your host, Paulina. My voice might sound a bit familiar to you and I am happy that you have tuned in again – today we go on with episode 4.

We take a look at a topic that affects many of us – like many other topics in this podcast – during our studies: the supervision of academic papers: **The supervision of academic papers.**

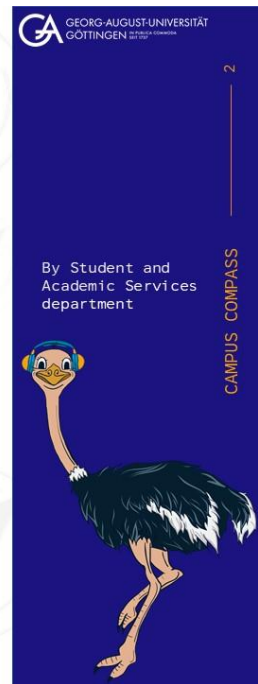
For many students – myself included – academic work is a real challenge. Whether this results in motivation or frustration is often determined by the supervisor.

What can you actually expect from supervisors – and what not? What makes good supervision? And what can you do yourself to improve collaboration? That's what we are talking about today. Let's jump straight in!

DISCLAIMER

This information refers to Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes at the University of Göttingen to which the General Examination Regulations (APO) apply. Other legal bases and regulations may apply to state examination and doctoral degree programmes as well as degree programmes at other universities. Framework conditions are constantly evolving. All information in this podcast should therefore be checked against the current regulations of the university.

www.uni-goettingen.de/apo



As in most episodes, here is the disclaimer, which you can read for yourself this time.

Even though we are focusing on the APO in this episode, a lot of the information is also relevant for exam study programmes. If you would like more information on the General Examination Regulations, scan the QR code or visit www.uni-goettingen.de/apo

Why is good supervision important?

Quality of work

- Helps to avoid typical mistakes
- Improves scientific quality → better grades

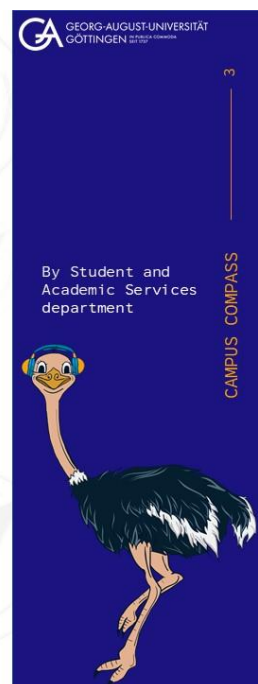
Learning process

- Methodological and content-related development through targeted feedback

Stress reduction

- Clear communication and support reduce pressure
- Structured support saves time and helps you stay focused on what matters most

Supervision is a working alliance – it can only be as good as the mutual commitment and understanding involved.



Why is good supervision important?

Good supervision is more than just a compulsory appointment with a signature at the end. It can really determine how you experience your academic work – and how good it turns out in the end.

If supervision goes well, you will not only receive help with technical questions, but also valuable feedback on your argumentation or method. At best, this will save you time and help you avoid

typical mistakes. And of course, if you receive structured feedback, the chance of a better grade also increases.

But it's not just about the result. Good support can also be a real relief: it takes the pressure off when you know that you have someone who is available and won't leave you alone. This makes a big difference, especially during stressful writing phases.

And it's also important to remember that supervision only works if both sides work together. It's a joint project – a kind of working alliance. If you are prepared, ask questions and communicate reliably, then that's a big step in the right direction.

What does "good" supervision mean?

- Ideal situation

Clarity

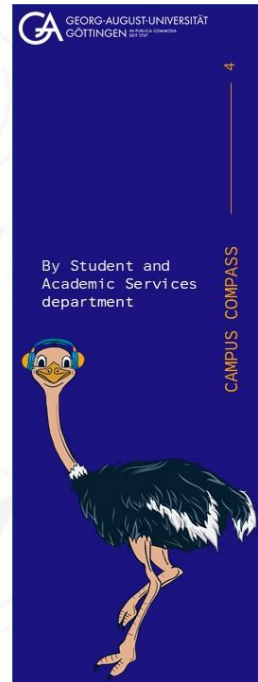
- Make expectations and roles transparent
- Reliable deadlines and feedback agreements
- Actively shape communication and clarify misunderstandings

Commitment

- Show interest in the work
- Give constructive and helpful feedback

Support

- Let students work independently, but provide guidance
- Respond to individual levels of knowledge and needs



What does "good" supervision actually mean?

Good supervision looks a little different for everyone – there is no fixed standard. However, there are certain principles that can be used as a guide. And very importantly: the absolute ideal situation is nice, but not always realistic. Nevertheless, if something doesn't feel right in the supervision situation, it's worth listening to your own feelings – and seeking dialogue at an early stage.

Ideally, good supervision means, above all, **clarity**. It should be transparent what expectations exist on both sides and who is actually taking on which role. This also includes agreeing on deadlines, feedback times and the framework of the collaboration.

Another point: **commitment**. Good supervision also means that the supervisor shows an interest in your work and gives you constructive feedback – not just criticism, but also tips on how you can make progress.

And finally: **support**. Supervision should not mean that everything is done for you – on the contrary. It's about you working independently, but getting guidance when you need it. At best, the supervision will also take into account your individual level of knowledge – and what you really need at the moment.

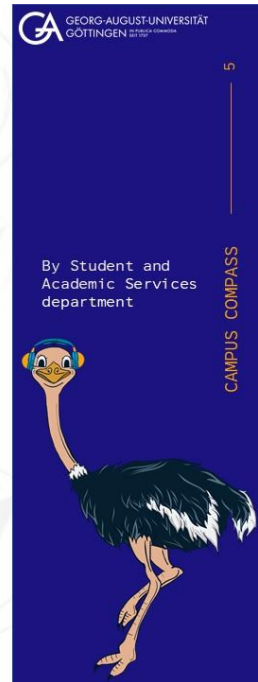
What can I do to ensure I receive good supervision?

Proactive communication

- Contact supervisors early on; clarify expectations in advance
- Provide regular updates on progress

Take personal responsibility

- Find out about requirements and guidelines in advance
→ Often available on the professor's or faculty's website
- Set a realistic schedule
- Actively seek feedback/criticism, implement it and try not to take it personally



Let's now move on to what you can do yourself to ensure good supervision. After all, good supervision is not a one-way-street. You can do a lot yourself to ensure that the cooperation runs as smoothly as possible.

One key point is **proactive communication**. It is best to contact your supervisor at an early stage and clarify together what you expect from each other. This will minimise misunderstandings and give you better orientation. It also helps to give regular small updates during the process.

Then there is **personal responsibility**: find out about the formal requirements beforehand – you can often find a lot of information on the websites of the professorship or faculty. A realistic timetable is also very useful. And very important: actively seek feedback! Try not to take criticism personally – it should help you move forward, not drag you down.

In short: if you engage in proactive thinking, communicate openly and take responsibility, this can make supervision much more relaxed and effective – for both sides.

What can I do to ensure I receive good supervision?

Prepare appropriately for meetings

- Send relevant documents or text passages in advance
- Clearly formulate in advance what is to be discussed and achieved in the meeting

Show flexibility

- Be patient when responding to emails or feedback, but keep your own timeline in mind
- Be understanding of your supervisors' workload

Tip: Ask around among friends, acquaintances, and student councils to find out about experiences with professors, supervisors, etc.

When it comes to a meeting with your supervisor, it is worth **preparing well**. It is best to send important documents or text passages in advance – this will give your supervisor the opportunity to prepare for the meeting. Also think about what you want to discuss beforehand and formulate your concerns as clearly as possible – this will make the conversation more effective and focused.

A little **flexibility** is also required: replies to emails or feedback sometimes take a little time. This is usually not meant in a bad way, but is simply due to the high workload of supervisors. Nevertheless, keep an eye on your own time planning.

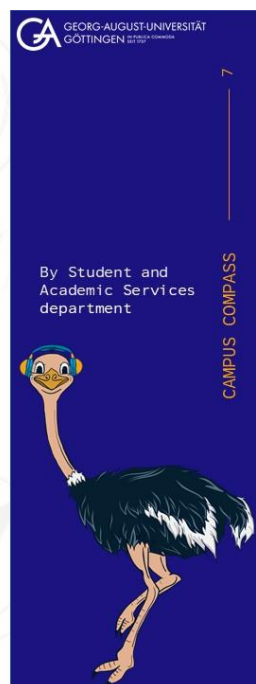
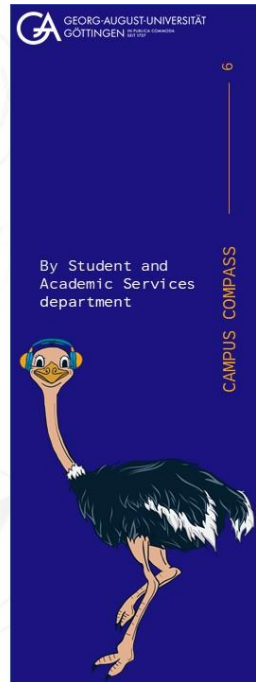
Another tip: find out early on which supervisor or professorship might be a good fit for you and your topic.

What can I expect from supervisors – and what can I not expect?

Expectable

- Support in defining the topic
- Advice when you get stuck with methodologies or research results do not turn out as expected
- Feedback on your own outline or text passages
- Timely and constructive feedback (clarification of the expected response time in advance)
- Early notification of absence
- Clarification of formal requirements (e.g. citation style, structure)

Let's now look at the other side: It's quite normal to ask yourself: What can I actually expect from my supervisor – and what are the limits?



Let's start with what you **can expect**: Supervisors are there to help you define your topic – especially at the beginning, this is an important step. They should also be there to advise you on methodological questions or if your research results do not turn out as you had expected.

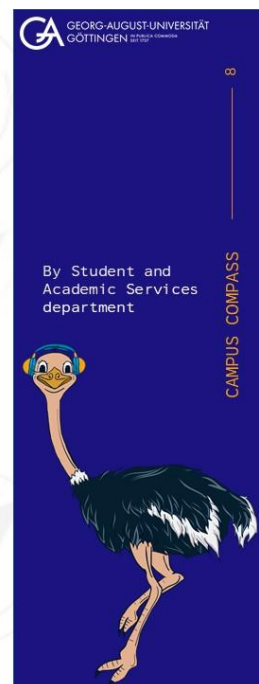
If you have developed an outline or text passages independently, you can get feedback on them – constructively and ideally also promptly. It is worth clarifying in advance how much time your supervisor needs to give you feedback so that you can adjust your planning accordingly.

In general, you can expect questions to be clarified in an initial discussion in order to eliminate uncertainties and start your academic work with confidence. For example, if you have not found the formal guidelines beforehand, you can ask where they are or what the requirements are. And: If your supervisor will be absent for a longer period of time, they should inform you in good time.

What can I expect from supervisors – and what can I not expect?

Not expectable

- Complete correction of work or long text passages
- Constant availability (immediate response to emails)
- Taking on tasks from students, such as literature research
- Answering detailed questions, e.g. about wording
- Responsibility for students' time management, e.g. reminders of deadlines



Just as important as what you can expect is to know **what is not part of the supervisor's job** – simply so that there are no misunderstandings.

For example, it is **not** their job to correct your entire thesis or to comprehensively revise long passages of text. Even if you receive feedback, **you** are still responsible for the content and language.

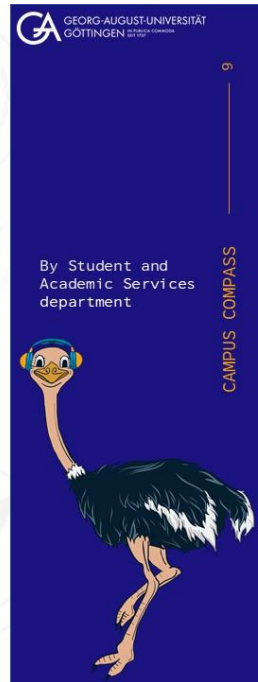
You should also not expect constant availability or immediate feedback – supervisors often have many other obligations. Similarly, tasks such as literature research or sorting your sources are not part of their responsibilities – these are typical areas of work for students themselves.

Even very detailed enquiries, for example about individual formulations, often go beyond the usual scope. And what many people don't realise: Supervisors are **not** there to regularly remind you of deadlines – that's entirely up to you.

Conclusion: Good supervision means supporting, but not taking over – you both have responsibility. Even if the proportion may be different.

How can you recognise poor supervision?

- Contradictory statements
- Imprecise or contradictory feedback
- Lack of availability: supervisors do not respond at all or rarely respond
- No interest or lack of commitment: hardly any relevant input on the topic
- No willingness to resolve ambiguities/problems
- Unprofessional behaviour: condescending comments, personal insults (e.g. use of words such as "stupid")



Let's go on with the story: How can you recognise that **a situation of supervision is not going well?**

Warning signs are, for example, **contradictory statements or unclear feedback** – if you are more confused after a conversation than before, even though you were well prepared, something is probably wrong.

Poor availability is also a problem: if you receive little or no feedback, this can massively delay your work process. Especially if the timeframe for feedback has been discussed beforehand.

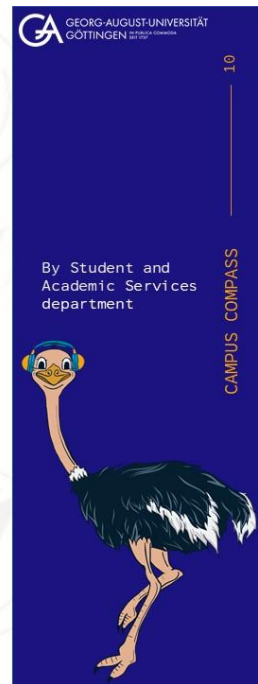
Another signal: **lack of interest or commitment**. If you have the feeling that your supervisor is hardly getting involved, providing little input or not really responding to your questions, this can be frustrating.

It also becomes critical if there **is no willingness to clarify misunderstandings or talk about problems** – supervision should always be a cooperative process.

And clearly unprofessional is **hurtful behaviour**: Condescending comments or even personal offence – for example using terms such as 'stupid' – have no place in supervision.

Measures to take if you are dissatisfied with the supervision

- Seek constructive dialogue: address problems politely and objectively, name specific difficulties
 - Use "I" statements: "I need...", "It would help me if..."
- Question yourself: Are your expectations realistic? Have you done your part to ensure good cooperation?
- Solve communication problems: rephrase and clarify questions, give examples
- Seek alternative contacts: e.g. second supervisor, student advisory service, student council, Ombudsperson in case of problems, peer feedback



Then let's just continue from here: Hypothetically: You find yourself in a difficult supervision situation? In this case, you are not powerless – there are ways to actively change things.

Here are a few concrete steps you can take to initiate improvements: An important first step is to **seek a constructive dialogue**. Address problems early and objectively – preferably with 'I-messages', i.e. phrases such as: 'I need...' or 'It would help me if...'. This creates a respectful dialogue atmosphere.

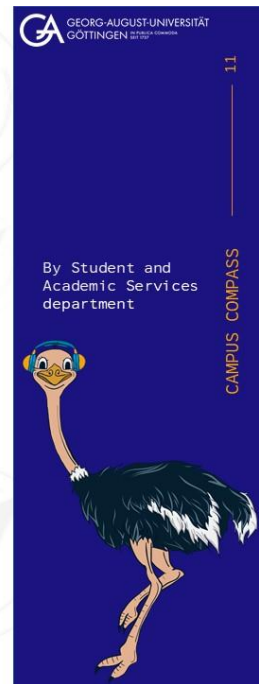
At the same time, it is also worth taking a **look at your own role**: Are the expectations realistic? Have I contributed enough to the collaboration?

And sometimes the problem lies in communication: in this case, **it can help to formulate questions differently, be more specific or give examples to avoid misunderstandings**.

If nothing changes or the situation is deadlocked, it can help to **turn to other contact persons** – for example a second supervisor, the student advisory service, the student council or – in difficult cases – the Ombudsperson. Peer feedback from fellow students can also be very valuable.

Good to know – Confident through supervision

- The time allowed for completion is specified in the examination and study regulations; some topics require extensive preparatory work (e.g. in the laboratory), so you should clarify in advance whether and to what extent you are prepared to do this.
- It is your work: trust your expertise gained through research; supervisors provide suggestions; different approaches do not necessarily mean bad grades.
- Range of supervision: Supervisors understand their role differently and also adapt to the needs of students: Decide for yourself how much interaction helps you and arrange appointments accordingly.
 - Too much feedback can be overwhelming: Think about what helps you and decide for yourself what you want to take on.



Finally, a few tips that can help you go through the supervision process with more self-confidence:

Firstly: **The processing time for your academic work is fixed** – you can find it in the examination and study regulations. However, if your topic requires extensive preparatory work, for example laboratory experiments or data collection, discuss this early on. This will allow you to better assess whether you can and want to do the additional work.

Secondly, **it's your work**. You are an expert on your topic through your research and preparation – supervisors provide impulses, but that does not mean that you have to implement every suggestion. Other points of view are normal and do not automatically lead to lower grades.

And thirdly, **supervision is not a rigid model**. Some supervisors give a lot of input, others tend to hold back – and it often depends on your wishes. Think about how much dialogue is good for you and communicate this clearly. Sometimes too much feedback can even be unsettling – and even then it's okay to decide for yourself what you accept.

Good to know – Confident through supervision

- If experiments do not work or do not deliver the expected results: Discuss with your supervisor how this can be addressed in your thesis so that you can submit it on time and without negative consequences.
- Try to network with other students who are also writing a paper or thesis.
- A thesis is important, but it is only one part of your studies. Keep your goal in mind.
- Don't forget to take breaks, see your friends and family, and take care of your mental health.

Well, and sometimes things just don't run smoothly – when experiments don't work out or don't deliver the expected result: Speak to your supervisor about how this can be discussed in your thesis so that you can hand it in on time and without negative consequences.

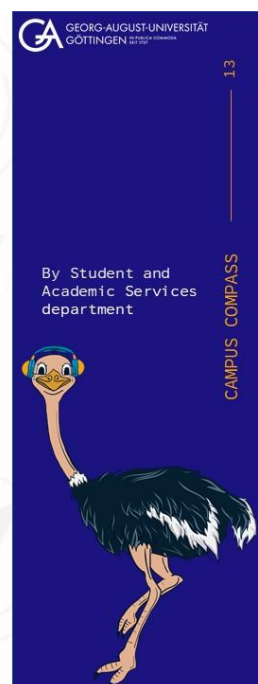
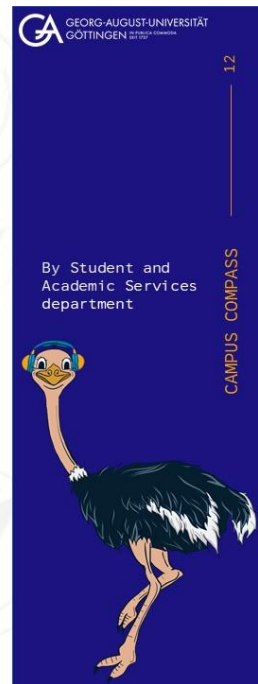
Also: **You are not alone.** Try to network with other students who are also working on an academic project. Sharing ideas can motivate and relieve pressure – and sometimes it simply helps to hear that others are struggling with similar challenges.

And finally: **Keep the big picture in mind.** Your thesis is important – but it is only one part of your degree programme. Take breaks, see friends, take a breath. Your mental health also deserves attention. Your degree programme is not a sprint, but a marathon – and it's best to run it at your own pace.

But enough with the calendar sayings and on with the tips...

Good to know – Confident through supervision

- In case of illness: Application for extension of the deadline for a thesis/final paper possible via APO
- Independent assessment possible via §20 APO, appeal procedure
- Take advantage of workshops:
 - SUB Göttingen: Workshops on literature research and the literature management programmes Citavi and Zotero
 - International Writing Lab: Workshops on academic writing, individual writing advice via consultation hours with feedback
→ take advantage of these early on



If you fall ill during the processing time, you can **apply for an extension of the processing time for your term paper or thesis via the APO**. This is really important if you have health problems during this time.

If things really go wrong and you would like to be assessed independently, you have the option of initiating an **objection procedure** via **§ 20 APO**. Incidentally, we will be taking a closer look at the appeals procedure in one of the next episodes – so stay tuned!

Here's another recommendation: Take advantage of the workshops at Göttingen University – they're super helpful and free of charge for students!

- At the **SUB Göttingen**, for example, there are regular **courses on Citavi and Zotero** – they help you with correct citation and reference management. This in turn saves nerves and time.
- Or why not drop by the **International Writing Lab**? They offer **workshops and individual advice on academic writing**, where you can also work on text passages. Of course, this is not a proofreading service and does not replace professional advice from your supervisors, but it is a great way to improve your work.

Contact International Writing Lab

The **International Writing Lab** helps students strengthen their writing skills and compose reflective academic texts.

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Special thanks to Dr. Ella Grieshammer, Head of the International Writing Lab, for her valuable support in researching this episode.

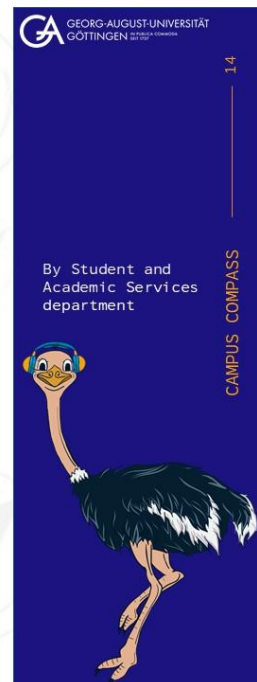
We are now nearing the end.

Here are the contact details for the International Writing Lab.

E-Mail: schreiblabor@uni-goettingen.de

Website: www.uni-goettingen.de/schreiblabor

Special thanks to Dr Ella Grieshammer, head of the International Writing Lab, for her valuable support with the research for this episode.



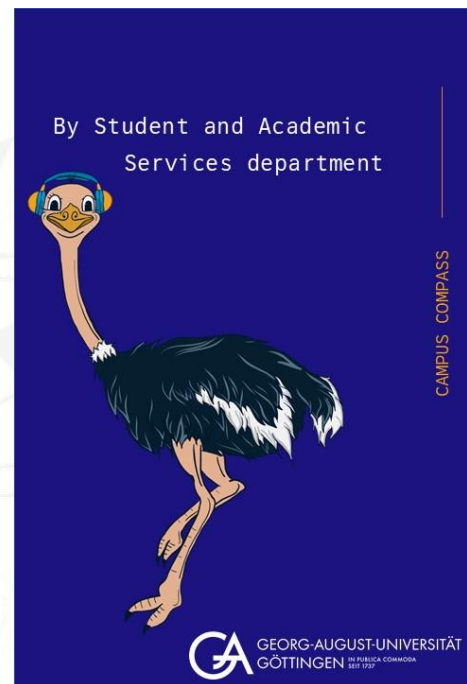
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THANKS FOR LISTENING!

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

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OR SIMPLY SCAN THE QR-CODE.



At this point, I would like to thank you for listening. I hope this episode was helpful to you. Campus Compass was set up by Silja-Katharina Haufe, the Ombudsperson for students and responsible for Complaint Management at Göttingen University. If you would like to find out more about her counselling and her work, simply listen to our episode no. 1 or visit the website. Simply scan the QR code or enter www.uni-goettingen.de/kritik. See you next time – at Campus Compass – your guide to university life.