

SAGS-Charter on Academic Democracy

The Swiss Association for Gender Studies SAGS is committed to academic democracy. Academic democracy means aligning academic practice, theory and institution with the democratic principles of self-government and parity of participation which are based on the values of equality, freedom and solidarity. SAGS views academic democracy not merely as an aspirational goal but as a fundamental practice to be actively implemented.

SAGS recognizes academic freedom as a central tenet of academic democracy. By academic freedom we mean freedom of scholars recognized by their peers to determine the contents and methodologies of their research and the freedom of teachers to determine the contents and modalities of their courses.

In addition, SAGS is committed to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, the right to strike and civil disobedience as fundamental democratic rights that also apply to research, teaching and education, science communication, academic administration and employment relationship in institutions of higher education. These principles stand in line with the Swiss constitution that guarantees the freedom of expression and information (Art. 16), academic freedom (Art. 20) and the freedom of assembly (Art. 22), while stipulating that any restrictions on these rights must be proportionate and may only be made in the public interest or in the interest of the fundamental rights of third parties and only on a legal basis (Art. 36).

SAGS strongly believes that universities should not be top-down authoritarian institutions in the hands of political and economic powers, but self-governing democratic communities where collective decisions are the result of respectful discussion between all stakeholders. In order to guarantee this institutional autonomy, it is imperative that universities receive adequate structural funding and that their functioning is independent of maneuvers and instrumentalization by political parties, governments, and economic lobbies.

SAGS is committed to enabling, strengthening and defending critical, inclusive and emancipatory research against political attacks, including in the field of Gender Studies, Critical Race Studies, Trans Studies, Queer Studies and Postcolonial Studies.

SAGS advocates for intellectual and political plurality and difference as necessary and intrinsically valuable elements of academic democracy. The academy as a public space must facilitate the expression of different perspectives and approaches to political and scientific phenomena and promote dialogue between different political, moral and theoretical positions at all levels of academic life (including teaching, research, student activities, and public communication). SAGS is committed to the social responsibility of science and academia to create spaces and processes for critical reflection and dialog on controversial social and political issues. To ensure that multiple perspectives are both visible and heard, it is particularly crucial to protect marginalized viewpoints from being silenced or excluded, even if they challenge dominant narratives. Given that all knowledge production is situated, fostering inclusivity in knowledge production requires engaging with scholars from diverse backgrounds

and perspectives, including those from the so-called 'Global South' and support the commitment of all stakeholders to peaceful conflict resolution.

SAGS condemns policies and practices, both inside and outside academia, that violate the principles of academic democracy through all forms of violence, repression, hate speech, discrimination, and harassment, as well as political and economic interference and state sanctions. We believe that such measures not only suppress critical knowledge production but also contribute to broader collective self-censorship.

SAGS stands in solidarity with students, teachers and researchers in Switzerland and worldwide who face discrimination, threats, or persecution due to their commitment to the principles of equality, freedom, solidarity, and parity of participation or because of their critical research on gender and sexuality.

The Charta was agreed by the board of SAGS in February 2025