swiss young academy

Innovative Policies for Fostering Academic Careers in Switzerland

Policy Highlights

Network of Conflict Mediators

Motivation

The University of Zurich hosts a variety of contact points and advice centers that address different concerns and target groups, which brings both benefits and potential challenges. The Network of Conflict Mediators was established not only to celebrate the diversity of these contact points but also to address the structural and everyday challenges faced by their members. It aims to connect individuals involved in counseling and conflict management, fostering better communication and collaboration among them. Additionally, the network strengthens its members in their roles by providing opportunities for knowledge exchange, support, and shared good practices. It also offers a platform for introducing new and existing advice centers or measures and discussing the effectiveness of current conflict prevention and management strategies.

Action

The Network of Conflict Mediators is designed for individuals engaged in counseling tasks and responsible for conflict prevention or management at UZH. This includes, among others, coordinators of doctoral programs and graduate schools, university-wide ombudspersons for research integrity, members of the Office for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, as well as professionals from the Employee Assistance Office and Psychological Counseling Services. Additionally, it encompasses employees from the Office of Human Resources and contact persons for advice and support concerning sexual harassment.

The network is overseen by the Coordination Office of the Graduate Campus and is shaped by a steering committee of professionals and semi-professionals with relevant experience and expertise. Networking meetings are held twice a year, inviting members to participate in discussions about current topics and initiatives. Each meeting includes both a formal agenda and an informal part, allowing members to exchange experiences and ideas freely. To support network members in their roles, steering committee professionals or other experts can offer inputs and workshops on topics such as communication skills and boundary-setting with advisees.

Learning

Establishing the network and organizing networking meetings is a valuable initiative, as it has become clear that contact persons and support centers are not always fully aware of each other. Additionally, personal interactions facilitate connections, exchanges, and triage in daily work. It has been observed that each networking meeting should ideally focus on a single topic, allowing sufficient time for discussion and exploration of its application and implications, as requested by the members. While it is challenging to make definitive statements about the anticipated outcomes of the network and its meetings, they contribute to raising awareness of new relevant topics and initiatives, as well as facilitating collaboration and connections among members. However, coordinating the network and the steering committee involves administrative and organizational efforts that require dedicated personnel resources.

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