JAN.- DEC.
2025

off university

Annual Report

REIMAGINING CRITICAL EDUCATION

2025–2026:
Reimagining Critical Education in Times of Crisis

What we diagnosed last year as an attack on universities and academic freedom has deepened into a broader crisis of political and economic liberalism. As far-right regimes grow bolder and imperialist conflicts escalate, cuts to social infrastructure, civil society, and higher education are becoming the norm. Anti-democratic, anti-woman, and anti-queer discourse is increasingly normalized, while scholars and students are pressured to conform, remain silent, or go into exile—even within Western democracies that claim to uphold human rights and freedom of expression.

The geopolitical landscape has become increasingly volatile. In the United States, the Trump administration's militarized foreign policy has accelerated war and the destruction of university and knowledge infrastructures. In Europe, particularly Germany, rising military spending is being used to justify cuts to universities, the social sciences, and the humanities. Universities are losing not only resources, but also their role as spaces for critical and democratic debate.

At the same time, the rapid and uncritical adoption of Artificial Intelligence, driven by right-wing capitalist interests, is being used to intensify fears of job displacement, weaken workers' bargaining power, and undermine the critical knowledge sector. As militarism and corporate control replace liberal promises, creating knowledge beyond institutional walls has become essential.

Off University is responding by expanding cross-border collaborations among scholars displaced by war and political persecution, while strengthening ties with grassroots organizations resisting the marketization and conservative capture of education. Off University remains a commitment not only to the survival of scholars at risk, but to reclaiming knowledge as a public, social good, built for society, rather than for state or capital interests.

Off University seeks new strategies to uphold and sustain academic life and knowledge threatened by anti-democratic and authoritarian regimes, aimed at academics from all over the world; academics who have been purged from their institutions, forced to resign, legally and politically persecuted and even imprisoned because of their opinions and research.

Since 2017, we have offered 83 online and hybrid courses, provided financial relief and opportunities for teaching and research to 270 threatened scholars from 16 countries, and collaborated with many German universities and NGOs, forming a virtual network.

COURSES

7

PARTICIPANTS

979

INSTRUCTORS

37

FELLOWS

5

PUBLICATIONS

4

RESEARCH PROJECTS

1

Empowering Minds Beyond Borders

OFF UNIVERSITY SEEKS NEW STRATEGIES TO UPHOLD ACADEMIC LIFE AND KNOWLEDGE THREATENED BY ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

We followed a highly varied and multidisciplinary programme. I would also say that the accessibility of the resources—which were specified in detail and categorised for each week—made it easier to follow the course. Furthermore, the guest speakers, who were selected specifically for each week's topic, combined with the richness of the discussion environment and the readings, created a productive flow. We undertook highly intersectional readings with a focus on gender."

Participant,
Gender, Power and Social Transformation

2025 SUMMER SEMESTER

Course Name	*Instructors*	*Participants*	*Partners*
Caste on Screen: Hindi Cinema and the Making of Contemporary India	*Reyazul Haque*	*102*	Humboldt University Berlin and RePLITO (Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together)
Othering, Social Taboo, and Ethnicity Representations of the Margin in Arab Contemporary Fiction	*Adel Dashela* *Safwan Showaiter*	*77*	Bremen University and The New University in Exile Consortium
History and Memory in Contemporary Russia	*Alexandra Kolesnik* *Aleksandr Rusanov*	*121*	Bielefeld University and the Memory Studies Association
Myanmar in the World	*TR. Rose* *TR. April*	*51*	Humboldt University Berlin and RePLITO (Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together)

2025 WINTER SEMESTER

Course Name	*Instructors*	*Participants*	*Partners*
Cities at War	*Mona Fawaz, Julia Strutz, Oksana Zaporozhets with 17 scholars*	*471*	Urban Studies Foundation, Department of Social Sciences at Humboldt University Berlin, Diyarbakır Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Derneği, Rojava University, Beirut Urban Lab
Media Communication in the 21st Century: The Backbone of Democracy or a Tool of Social Oppression	*Aksana Ulanovich Andrii Kostyriev*	*68*	The Geschwister-Scholl-Institute of Political Science at LMU München and The New University in Exile Consortium
Gender, Power and Social Transformation: Critical Approaches from Turkey and Beyond	*Sema Semih Togay with 8 invited speakers*	*89*	Marburg University

I just wanted to say that I am really grateful this course exists. I am a master's student in North America and I want to work in the context of war because my country is now in war, and I really couldn't find any learning resources that tell true information from local experts, not western perspectives, this course really helped me truly be in a community that understands where I come from and what I experience and how to bring it into an academic space.

Participant,
Cities at War

I have been teaching for more than 13 years, but working with Off University has been an exceptionally positive and eye-opening experience. Their level of technical and organizational support is the best I have encountered so far. One of the aspects I appreciated most was the digital security training. Many of the issues raised were entirely new to me, since my previous experience had been shaped primarily by the Russian academic environment and by the discussions on security at the Moscow Free University, which were tailored to that specific context. Off University, by contrast, approaches security with a comparative and global perspective, taking into account the realities of different political regimes. Their guidelines are universal, yet flexible enough to respond to the unpredictable conditions of undemocratic settings.

Equally rewarding was the international composition of our student group. While the majority were from Russia, we also had participants from Ukraine, Poland, Turkey, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the USA. This diversity enriched the learning environment enormously. Discussions became more nuanced, sensitive, and multidimensional, as students brought in a wide range of perspectives. Particularly important were the contributions of those currently living in Russia, whose insights highlighted the everyday realities and risks of engaging with contested heritage and public history in authoritarian conditions.

Looking ahead, I am convinced that Off University has achieved an exceptionally high standard in terms of transparency, organization, and academic quality. The Off University team is always a pleasure to work with and incredibly supportive. My only wish is that the institution will receive more sustainable funding and stronger support from German universities and the wider academic community. Off University's work is not only vital for academic freedom but also for fostering meaningful international dialogue under conditions where such opportunities are increasingly rare.

Aleksandra Kolesnik

Co-instructor of our course,

History and Memory in Contemporary Russia

Fellows

SEMA SEMİH

In Pursuit of Transfeminist Memory: My Journey to Off University

“Across the globe, authoritarian regimes are implementing similar oppressive policies and learning from one another. They use media control, and legal manipulation, and create a climate of fear to suppress dissent. In the face of this troubling reality, we—women and queer individuals—need spaces to learn from each other and develop new strategies to respond to the global crisis of patriarchal domination. In this context, spaces like Off University, which offer peaceful and creative learning models based on equality and solidarity, are incredibly valuable. Every effort to unite communities, activists, and scholars dedicated to rights and freedom is of vital importance.”

Sema Semih joined Off University as a fellow of the Martin-Roth Initiative (MRI) in September 2024. They had been conducting research on the memory of the transfeminist struggle in Turkey and planned to carry out their project activities in collaboration with us.

Collaborations

IFA FELLOWSHIPS
The Martin-Roth Initiative (MRI) and Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative (ESI) bring host institutions and threatened individuals together for temporary relocation. Through ESI funding, we hosted two fellows in the same round for 6 months. Their fellowship started in October 2025 and will last until the end of March 2026.
With the support of MRI, we had three overlapping fellowships: One started in 2024 and lasted until the end of 2025, while the other two started in March and August 2025 and will continue in 2026.

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN
HU Berlin is a long-standing and key partner, who has hosted 18 online courses to date. In 2025 we jointly delivered three courses: "Caste on Screen", "Myanmar in the World", and Cities at War.

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung funds our ongoing Critical Peace Studies in Turkey project. In 2025, we organised a Peace Workshop in Istanbul with 28 CSOs. We also conducted advocacy visits to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, held meetings with 3 political parties and launched an online Peace Library. The network's membership also grew from 16 to 20 during this period.

BREMEN UNIVERSITY
Bremen University has hosted 7 of our online courses to date. In 2025 this was "Othering, Social Taboo, and Ethnicity Representations of the Margin" by Adel Dashela and Safwan Showaiter.

NEW UNIVERSITY IN EXILE CONSORTIUM
The New University in Exile Consortium is a global network of colleges and universities hosting exiled scholars. To date, we have jointly offered 15 online courses co-led by a exiled Consortium scholar and a colleague stranded in their country. In 2025 this was "Othering, Social Taboo, and Ethnicity Representations of the Margin" by Adel Dashela & Safwan Showaiter and "Media Communication in the 21st Century" by Aksana Ulanovich & Andrii Kostyriev.

THE BEIRUT URBAN LAB
is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research space at the American University of Beirut. We partnered to organize the Lecture Series "Cities at War" in 2025.

THE DİYARBAKIR ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL AND NATURAL ASSETS (DKVD)
DKVD aims to preserve, document, promote, and pass down tangible and intangible cultural and natural assets of the city. We partnered to organize the Lecture Series "Cities at War" in 2025.

BIELEFELD UNIVERSITY
In collaboration with the Faculty of History, Philosophy, and Theology at Bielefeld University, we offered the course "History and Memory in Contemporary Russia" in the summer semester of 2025.

ROJAVA UNIVERSITY
Rojava University is a university in Qamishlo, Syria.
We partnered to organiz the Lecture Series "Cities at War" in 2025.

MEMORY STUDIES ASSOCIATION (MSA)
MSA is a professional association of scholars and practitioners in museums, memorial institutions, archives, the arts, and other fields engaged in remembrance of the past. We offered "History and Memory in Contemporary Russia" in collaboration with MSA.

STIFUNG MENSCHENWÜRDE UND ARBEITSWELT
supported our panel discussion and future workshop on "Common Struggles, Unequal Terms: Towards Fair Working Conditions for all Scholars".

LUDWIG MAXIMILIANS UNIVERSITY MUNICH
To date we have hosted 11 online courses together with The Institute for the Near and Middle East, the Institute for Sociology and the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology. In 2025, LMU accredited the course "Media Communicatio in the XXI Century".

COMMON STRUGGLES, UNEQUAL TERMS

Towards Fair Working Conditions for All Scholars

Since Donald Trump has started antagonising US universities by cutting their funding and interfering with their internal organisation, there has been a sense of rejoicing in Germany (and Europe as a whole) at the prospect of an influx of world-leading scientists. At EU level, the European Commission launched the “Choose Europe for Science” initiative in May 2025, with a €22.5 million budget under the Marie Curie framework. While the initiative does not explicitly address authoritarianism, the persecution of scholars, or threatened fields such as gender studies and climate research, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasised that Europe must remain “the home of academic and scientific freedom".

In response to recent developments in the United States, the Berlin Senate, too, announced plans to promote the city as a research location offering academic freedom and excellent conditions for international researchers. In Autumn 2025, Berlin Senator for Education and Research Ina Czyborra announced an additional €4 million for the Einstein Foundation in 2026–27 to attract outstanding international professors and postdoctoral researchers. This is particularly notable since the foundation’s budget had been reduced by the same amount only the previous autumn and thus their already existing support for all at risk scholars was cut.

For scholars and students from other countries who have been forced to leave academia due to autocratic regimes, the German and international enthusiasm is alienating. Why be enthusiastic if someone is forced to leave their home country? And why are scholars and students from Syria, Turkey, Iran, Ukraine, Russia or Hungary (and many other countries) treated as recipients of German academia's generosity for being "saved" rather than as an excellent addition to the scholarly community?

Our panel discussion brought together **Aslı Vatansever**, sociologist and scholars' rights activist, **Felicia Kompio,** the representative of the Berlin branch of the educators' and science workers' union GEW and **Yannick Giovanni Marshall,** Black Studies scholar who recently left the United States amid the escalating suppression of Black Studies, protests, and academic freedom. Together we examined these latest developments and what they mean for existing challenges such as precariousness, abuse of power and the state of academic freedom.

You can watch the recording of the event HERE

Aslı Vatansever

Felicia Kompio

Yannick Giovanni Marshall

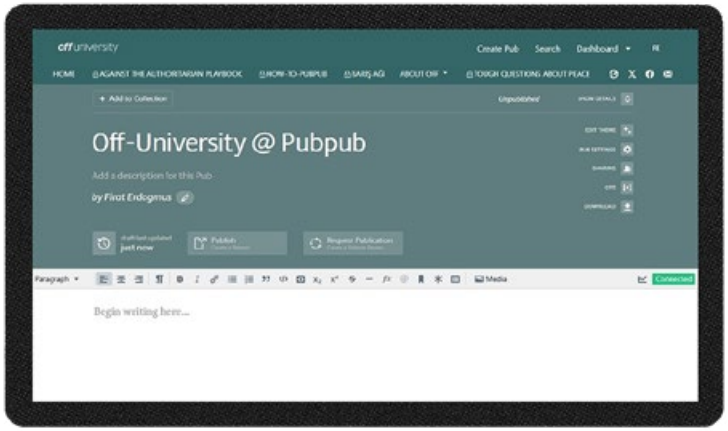
PubPub

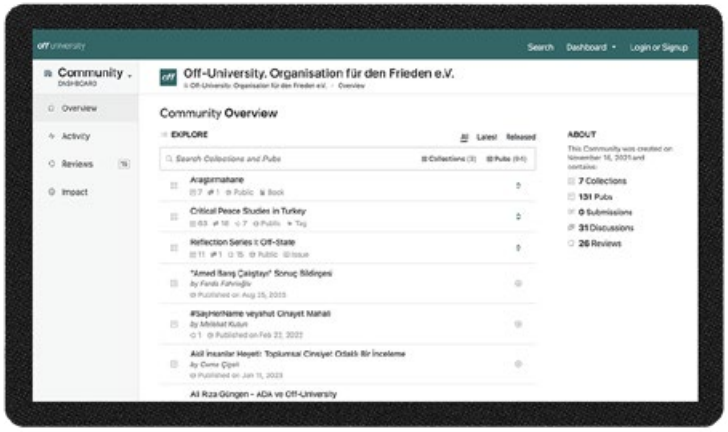
AND COLLABORATIVE PUBLISHING

PubPub — a free and open tool for collaborative editing, instant publishing, continuous review, and grassroots journals — resonates strongly with Off University's mission to foster participatory, networked, and experimental approaches to learning, research, and knowledge sharing. It empowers our communities to explore innovative formats, collectively shape their publishing workflows, and push the boundaries of what digital academic and educational platforms can achieve.

Off University's hub and **RePLITO's joint platform with Berlin universities** together host 20 collections, 252 pubs, over 56 reviews, and 1,666 discussions. These platforms serve as dynamic, living spaces where participants co-create, debate, and reflect on ideas in real time. From grassroots journals to collaborative research notes, each pub represents a node in a broader ecosystem of knowledge production — an ecosystem that embodies the spirit of experimentation, inclusivity, and dialogue central to Off University and RePLITO alike.

Together, Off University and Replito demonstrate how digital platforms can transform learning and research into decentralized, community-driven spaces, where knowledge is not only produced but continuously questioned, reshaped, and reimagined by those who inhabit it.





Critical Peace Studies and Network

In response to a call from Off University, 16 rights-based NGOs in Berlin, Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır set up the **Critical Peace Network (CPN).**

In May 2025, the CPN organised a webinar, *Regional Reflections of an Authoritarian World and Its Impact on the Kurdish Issue*. We also published **Our Joint Call for Justice, Peace and Democracy**.

On 9 August 2025, we organised the **Amed Peace Workshop**, which was attended by approximately 40 NGOs representing various sections of society and published its **final declaration**.

In Autumn 2025, we submitted a detailed report on the workshop to the parliamentary commission established in the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

We are also establishing an **Online Peace Library**. The CPN's podcasts, webinars and workshops are ongoing.

Key activities of the network were funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

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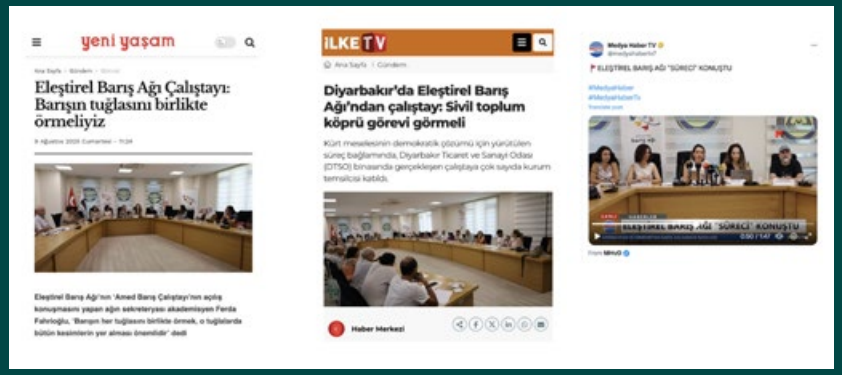
THE CPN IN THE MEDIA



Off Fest

Every year, members of Off University come together to reflect on the past year, discuss future plans, and hold the General Assembly for the election of a new board. It's also an opportunity to connect with our allies and colleagues, share our work and learn from each other.

On September 20-21, 2025, we held our second Off Festival, which featured workshops and a panel discussion, artistic performances, a film screening, music&dancing and communal feasting.

September 20 – Saturday

Who Knows Maybe We'll Come Again
curated by Seçkin Aydın

The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding:
The Critical Peace Network Experience
with Ferda Fahrioğlu

Off Script
A Performance by Menekşe Aydın

Mother Tongues
A Performance by Adi Liraz

Academic Narratives on the Syrian Conflict
with Mohamad Moustafa Alabsi

9/8FIGHT41:
A 9/8 Fight for All of Us
with Sema Semih

Commoning Knowledge:
Towards Cooperative Review and Peer Production
with Fırat Erdoğmuş

Drag As A Liberating Teaching Methodology
with Babykilla

Panel Discussion
Common Struggles, Unequal Terms:
Towards Fair Working Conditions for All Scholars

September 21 – Sunday

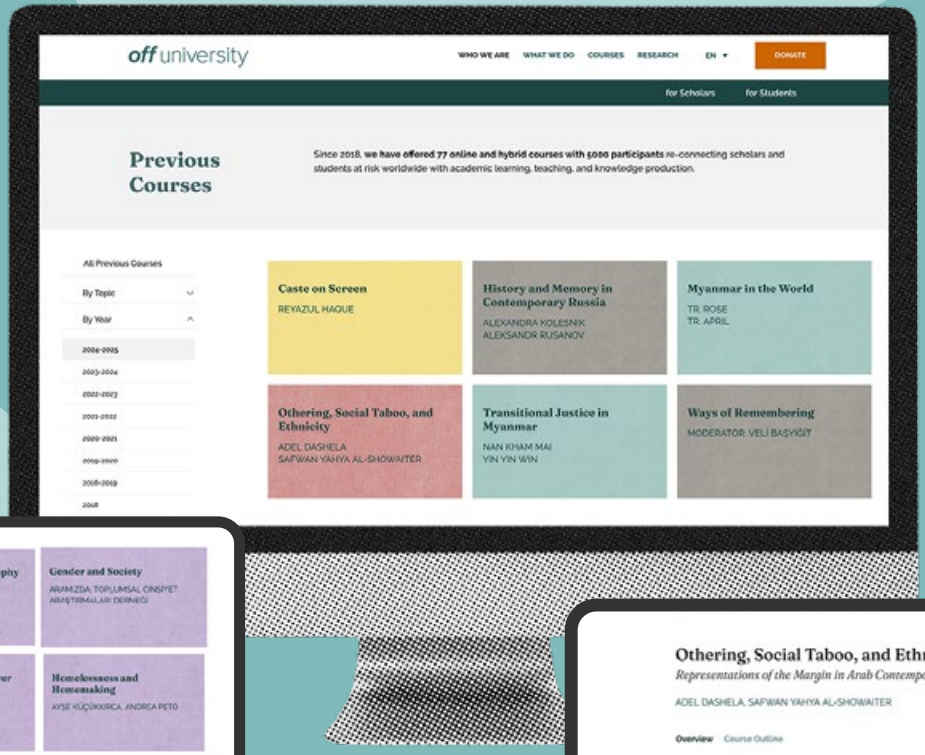
How to Build More Solidarity Among All Knowledge Workers
with Anna Paßlick

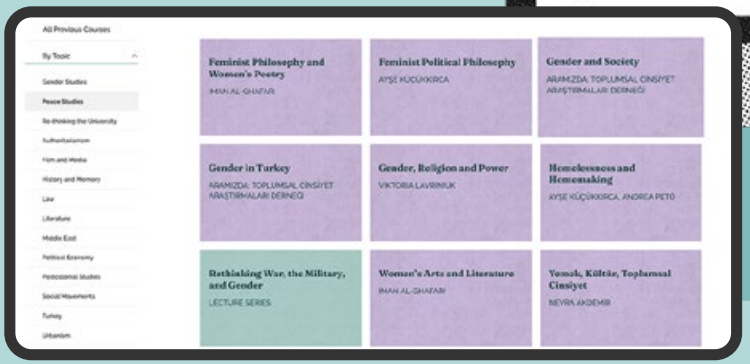
Off University Organisation für den Frieden e.V. General Assembly

Previous Courses Archive

offuniversity.org/previous-courses

We launched Off University's **Previous Courses Archive** with more than 70 courses on our website.

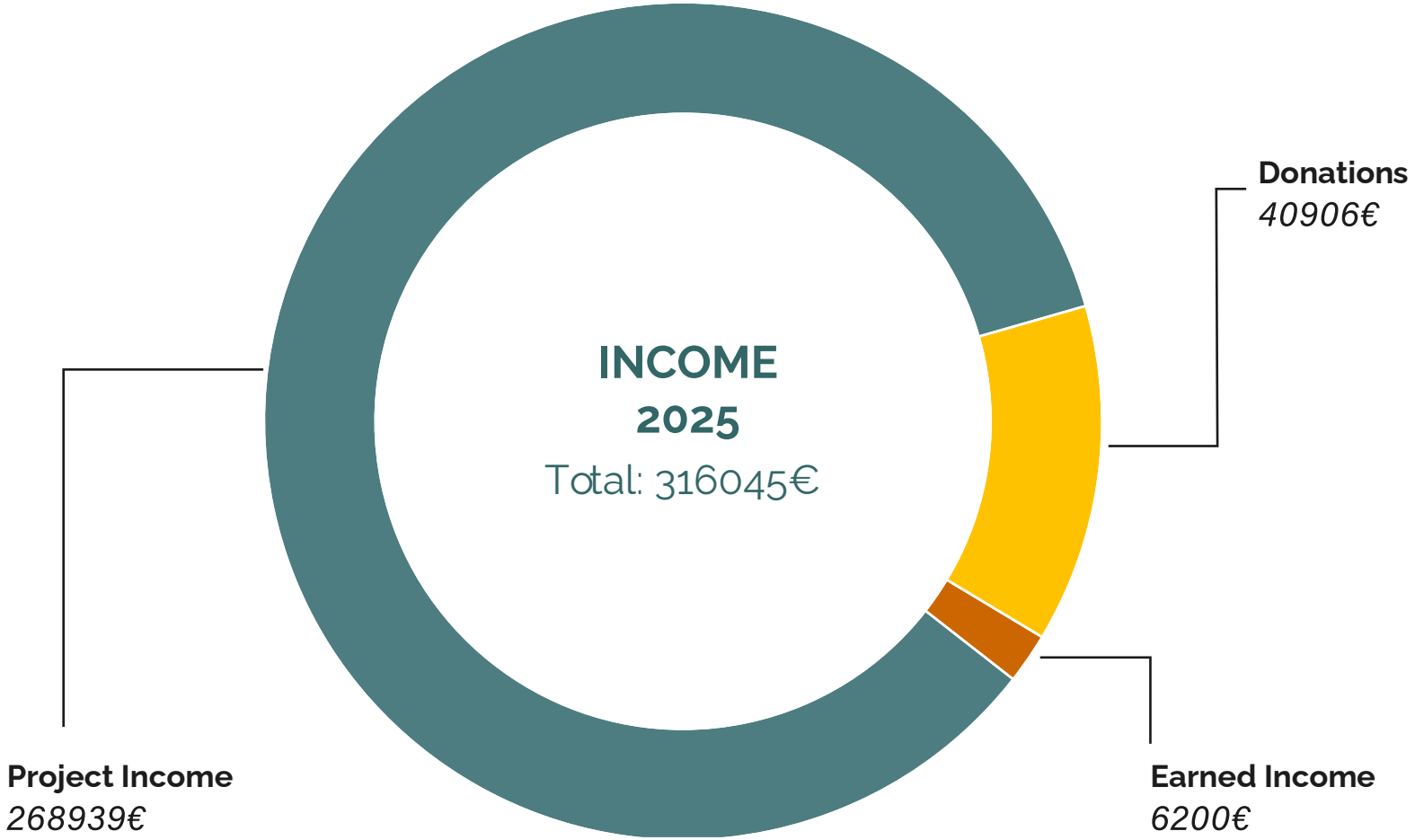




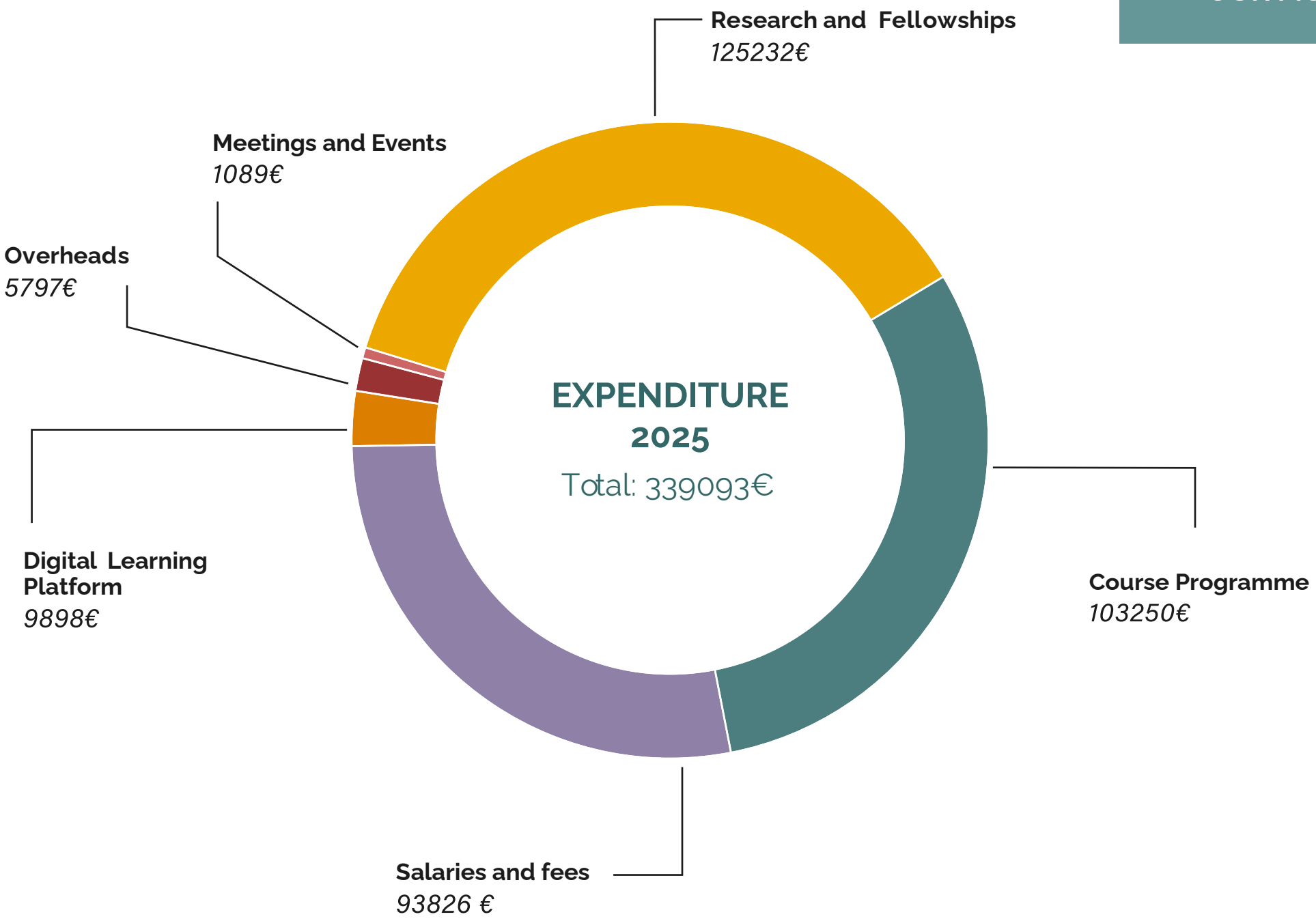
Previous courses can be browsed **by year** or **by topic.**

On each previous course page, you can find the course overview and see/download the **course syllabus.**

HOW WE RAISE OUR MONEY



HOW WE SPEND OUR MONEY



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Oksana Zaporozhets

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University without borders — Sınır tanımayan üniversite — *Universität ohne Grenzen*

offuniversity.org mail@offuniversity.org

Off-University. Organisation für den Frieden e.V. / Wilhelm-Kabus-Str. 24, 10829 Berlin