Non-Traditional Student Groups and Diversity Management

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Diversity of students as a starting point – the student body of FernUniversität

- The average age of the students is 29-35 years.
- About 80% of all students are employed.
- About 15% of all students in the Bachelor's programmes are professionally qualified.
- About 46% of all students already have a degree.
- About 30% of all students have a child/children.
- About 18% of all students have a migration background.
- About 18% of all students have a disability and/or chronic illness.
- About 8% of all students live abroad.

Data source: Higher education statistics (summer semester 2018) and student survey
Diversity in study and teaching
Diversity Management with focus on the organization of studies and teaching

Objectives of FernUniversität

- Focusing on the main target group: non-traditional students with different life, education and professional biographies as well as educational goals = study-relevant dimensions of diversity at the level of educational prerequisites, study conditions and educational goals

- Implementation of an organizational learning and development approach: challenge to enable a heterogeneous student body access to university education as well as academic success = together with the term „diversity“, FernUniversität takes questions of a contemporary setting of higher education into account
Diversity Audit: „Create Diversity“
– Process and questions in the fields of work

- **Two-year development process** within the university – creation of own objectives and development of an appropriate strategic approach
- Initiates **process of developing strategies, structures, and offers** for heterogeneous student bodies
- **Mentoring of an experienced auditor** and exchange with other universities
- **Around 50 contributors** from all areas of FernUniversität participated in **three thematic areas**:
  - Development of recommendations for study and teaching based on their expertise and experience

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<tr>
<th>1. Design of a diversity-sensitive introductory study phase</th>
<th>2. Design of diversity-sensitive digital teaching and media didactics</th>
<th>3. Concept for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or chronic diseases</th>
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<td>How should the introductory study phase be structured so that their specific challenges are tackled and conditions for academic success are created, and so that students can find the university's offerings that are suitable for their educational goals and competencies?</td>
<td>How does digitization help us to implement individualized learning-teaching processes with particular sensitivity for diversity aspects, especially in distance learning and for large groups of students?</td>
<td>How can we become a barrier-free and inclusive distance learning university and find a balance between standardized procedures and individual solutions in the design of studies and teaching?</td>
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- **Certification** of FernUniversität by “Stifterverband” on 7 February 2018
General framework

- **Vice-President for Studies and Diversity**
- **Rectorate Committee for Studies and Diversity** as an advisory body
- **University development planning** in the field of study and teaching with a focus on student diversity
- **Diversity audit** with focus on studies and teaching 2015-2018
- **Diversity guidelines**: Diversity as a mission statement
- **Regular event** “Vielfalt am Mittag. Brown Bag Lunch Studium und Diversität” (= “Diversity at noon. Brown Bag Lunch Study and Diversity”): a short thematic impulse and exchange about a diversity-oriented design of studies and teaching
Where are we today?
What is the current status?
Introductory study phase
– Offers to support study entrance and study ability

- Introductory study phase as a focus in the development process towards a new study structure model

Objective:
a coherent overall offer for the entry into the study programme (interplay of curricular and study-accompanying courses)

- takes into account the diversity of the educational backgrounds and educational goals of students at FernUniversität

- intensifies the orientation, counselling and support services for promising study decisions in permeable study structures
Diversity-sensitive teaching and media didactics

- Diversity sensitivity and digitization to individualize the learning of large groups of students: Blended learning and criteria of diversity-sensitive digital teaching in the discussion of a university-wide teaching strategy

- Implementation of different formats for communication and transfer of “best practices” of diversity-sensitive digital teaching:
  - E-Learning-Showroom/Blog
  - Events on networking in teaching

- Scientifically accompanied projects for teaching development, e.g.:
  - A cross-faculty concept for the introductory study phase of professionally qualified non-traditional students at FernUniversität
  - Diversity Inclusion in media-based distance learning
## Distance learning without barriers.
Concept of FernUniversität for the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or chronic diseases in the study programme 2018-2022

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<th>Information and communication</th>
<th>Consulting and qualification</th>
<th>Accessibility of study materials and learning infrastructure</th>
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<td>Examination: disadvantage compensation and forms of examination</td>
<td>Accessibility of buildings</td>
<td>Institutional anchoring of inclusion as a cross-sectional task</td>
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- with an **additional resource needs** of about half a million

- since 2016 annual event at the worldwide **Global Accessibility Awareness Day** (GAAD)
Diversity in the focus of teaching strategy and research

Development of a teaching strategy

Process for a cross-faculty basic understanding of contemporary distance learning

- Clarification of the self-image as a university teaching institution
- Corresponding with the overall strategy, including the prioritization of processes and resources
- Orientation/leading maxim for development processes in many areas of FernUniversität
- Basis for implementing teaching as an institutional task

Establishment of the research focus

“Digitization, Diversity and Lifelong Learning. Consequences for Higher Education”

- How can the options of digitizing the central service processes of the university be used appropriately?
- How can we cope with an increasing diversity of target groups?
- How can adequate forms of lifelong learning be developed?
Thank you for your attention!

Any further questions or need for discussion?

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Pictures: FernUniversität/Hardy Welsch