Bavarian Virtual University

... the Network for Higher Education Online in Bavaria

www.vhb.org
A word of welcome from the President of the Bavarian Virtual University (BVU)

Dear Reader,

What is a Virtual University? Are you to expect lectures, study materials and library services via the internet? Yes, a Virtual University offers all that - but it is (or at least it should be) much more than that. Learning is interaction, and if a Virtual University is to be successful, it must put interaction first.

The BVU is an institute set up in 2000 by the nine universities and the 17 universities of applied sciences of the Free State of Bavaria, one of the 16 German Länder. Like its member universities, the BVU is financed by the Bavarian Ministry for Higher Education, Science, Research and the Arts (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst).

The BVU provides online courses with an equivalent of two to six (ECTS) credit points which the member universities can integrate into their courses of study. The BVU helps its member universities to enlarge and enrich their programmes, and it helps the students to organize their studies more flexibly. Almost all of our 31 member universities import BVU courses into their courses of study, and the majority of the universities are active course providers as well.

Learning is interaction. This is why the BVU funds the operation of its courses as well as their production. By financing tutors according to the demand for its courses at the member universities, the BVU facilitates the utilization of the courses across university borders: supported by online tutors, dedicated teachers can reach students at all interested universities.

This close cooperation is not in conflict with the ever more important idea of competition among universities. Competition should be for ideas and best solutions, but in a state-financed public university system we have to avoid competition at the taxpayer’s expense. No single university can be best in all its subjects, and the creation of high-quality online courses is so expensive that nobody would profit if we tried to reinvent the wheel three times over at different places.

The state and society alike benefit from the cooperation among universities in online teaching, therefore this cooperation has to be encouraged. All over the world education systems face a major problem: more people need better education, while public budgets continue to be strained to the maximum. The BVU is part of Bavaria’s strategy to enhance and improve students’ possibilities of attending and successfully completing a higher education.
To facilitate the exchange of courses among our member universities, the BVU focuses on **blended learning at the macro level** of the study programme. (You will find this concept explained on p. 9). Our courses work completely online, so that the only effort required of the “importing” university is to provide rooms and supervisors for the final examinations.

In the BVU courses students earn credit points, but the BVU offers neither complete programmes nor degrees. The BVU is not a distance teaching university, but with the help of the BVU all Bavarian universities integrate the distance mode into their programmes, thus making the programmes more flexible.

For the future of higher education, **flexibility** will play an ever more important role. Surveys show that already today the majority of our students are “nontraditional”. The opening of our universities for students with qualifications from work experience, the growing importance of lifelong learning and the increasing number of students in employment will strongly reinforce this trend.

President Prof. Dr. Dr. habil. Godehard Ruppert
Who Benefits?

Students

- Students profit most from the **flexibility** of online courses. To be able to study wherever you want whenever you can is especially valuable for students who have to care for children or other relatives, and for students in employment. To offer a maximum of flexibility, BVU courses give priority to asynchronous forms of communication.

- With the help of BVU courses students have a **greater choice** of courses (and teachers) than their home university can offer.

- For the students of BVU member universities there are **no extra fees**.

- Students profit from the strict **quality management** of the BVU. In addition to the students’ evaluation every semester, each course is evaluated by two non-Bavarian peers after five semesters.

- Students get **added value**: They develop “e-literacy” within the traditional curriculum, thus enhancing their employability without additional effort: Participation in BVU courses may be registered in the Diploma Supplement.

Teachers

- Teachers get **financial support** for course development and course maintenance (online tutors and improvements exceeding the usual amount). BVU course providers can send their assistants to tutor training courses at the BVU’s expense.

- Teachers appreciate the **greater variety** of pedagogical and didactical possibilities e-teaching and e-learning have to offer.

- Many teachers appreciate the **wider range** of teaching they can have by contributing to the BVU’s programme.

- The BVU organizes **regular workshops** and seminars on e-teaching and e-learning and contributes to community building.

- Regular peer evaluation, introduced into German university teaching for the first time by the BVU, gives valuable impulses for the continuous improvement of the courses.

- Just like students, teachers appreciate more flexible teaching hours.
Universities

• By importing BVU courses universities can offer their students a wider range of subjects.

• The BVU courses provide additional teaching resources and help to alleviate lecture room shortages.

• The elaborate quality management establishes common quality standards. BVU courses are evaluated by the students every semester. In addition, every course is evaluated by two non-Bavarian peers after five semesters.

• All decisions on programme development and funding are made through transparent procedures by elected representatives of the member universities.

• The BVU does not require its member universities to use a specific course management system. A variety of compatible systems is in use, most of them Open Source, “Moodle” being most popular.

Society and the State

• Society and the state profit from the cost-effective organization of state-wide higher education online across university borders.

• The state-wide coordination of course development helps to prevent courses or parts of courses being created in parallel at unnecessary expense.

• As explained in this booklet, the BVU has a lean organization and simple structures. With comparatively little extra expense, the BVU makes a significant contribution to the Bavarian higher education system.

• The BVU draws upon the expertise and competence of the member universities and uses their infrastructure as much as possible.

⇌ In turn, support by the Government, especially by the Ministry for Higher Education, is a necessary prerequisite for the functioning of the BVU.
The **Members’ Assembly** is the BVU's basic body. Each member university is represented by a Commissioner, who in turn is the key person for all BVU affairs at his or her home university. Each university has one vote per 5,000 students. The Members’ Assembly elects the Programme Committee as well as the Steering Committee and makes basic organizational decisions.

The **Steering Committee** consists of the **President** and two **Vice Presidents**. The President of the BVU is president of a university, and one of the Vice Presidents is President of a university of applied sciences. This ensures smooth coordination with the respective Conferences of Presidents and Rectors. The Steering committee makes budget decisions and appoints the Managing Director.

The **Programme Committee** consists of eight persons. Five of these must be Vice Presidents, preferably for questions of teaching and studying at their respective universities, and one must come from a university outside of Bavaria. The Programme Committee makes suggestions to the Steering Committee in all matters of programme development and quality management.

As Head of the **Office**, the **Managing Director** runs the day-to-day business of the BVU. In the Office, 16 employees work in the areas of finances, project management, public relations, student registration and technical support (cf. p. 8).
The Members of the BVU Steering Committee:

President:
Prof. Dr. Dr. habil. Godehard Ruppert, President,
Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg

Vice Presidents:
Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Puch, President,
Evangelische Hochschule Nuremberg
Prof. Dr. Karl-Dieter Grüske, President,
Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg

The members of the BVU Programme Committee
(from left to right):
Prof. Dr. Jürgen Krahl, University of Applied Sciences Coburg
Prof. Dr. Hans Gruber, Regensburg University
Prof. Dr. Ulrich Pohl, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich (Chairman)
Prof. Dr. Patricia Arnold, University of Applied Sciences Munich
Prof. Dr. Peter A. Henning, University of Applied Sciences Karlsruhe
Prof. Dr. Ulrike Cress, University of Tübingen
Prof. Regine Keller, Technical University Munich
Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Bock, University of Applied Sciences Regensburg (Deputy Chairman)
# Structures

## Office

### Management
Dr. Paul Rühl, Managing Director
Dr. Rosalinde Kicherer, Deputy Managing Director

| Project Management | Dr. Rosalinde Kicherer  
|                    | Ingrid Martin  
|                    | Georg Seppmann  
|                    | Dr. Christina Stötzel |

### Financial Issues
Daniela Günther  
Elena Wildenauer  
Ingrid Müller

### Technical Support
Ingo Müller  
Alexander Hummel  
Sascha Brzeski

### Students’ Office
Torsten Kaiser  
Christian Kastner

### Team Assistants
Marion Glaßl  
Anette Jung  
Wally Monix

### European Social Fund
N.N.  
Regine Prem

## Programme Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>Courses offered in summer 2012</th>
<th>Courses in preparation</th>
<th>Number of Courses in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Sciences</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Studies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care / Health Management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Skills</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(14)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Science</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>268</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>19 (+14)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Courses in English as a foreign language, general and technical English courses
“Blended learning” is often interpreted as the combination of face-to-face teaching and web-based teaching within a single course. We call this type of blended learning “micro-level blended learning”.

While micro-level blended learning has many pedagogical benefits, it does not make full use of the economic possibilities of e-learning. If the web-based elements are developed and exploited by only one professor at only one university, micro-level blended learning seems to offer higher quality or added value only at additional costs.

Teachers who use single e-learning elements in their courses do not necessarily gain additional teaching time, and micro-level blended learning is hardly a remedy e.g. against the shortage of lecture rooms many universities face.

For the students, micro-level blended learning offers rather limited flexibility. The more face-to-face elements there are in a study programme, the more difficult it is to adapt to the needs of non-traditional students.

By contrast, the BVU focuses on macro-level blended learning with the aim of offering high-quality teaching with intensive tuition in a cost-effective way. By macro-level blended learning we understand the integration of online courses into study programmes which otherwise (and for the most part) consist of “traditional” face-to-face courses (seminars, lectures et cetera).

Thus, students can earn some credits in online courses, but not their complete degree. This combination of face-to-face courses with courses which are delivered completely online (possibly with the final examination being held face-to-face) allows the students much more flexibility than micro-level blended learning.

At the same time the students enjoy all the benefits of a traditional face-to-face university. Therefore, macro-level blended learning minimises the dangers of social isolation sometimes associated with e-learning.

Moreover, if online courses are developed at one university, but used at several universities, the comparative cost effectiveness is obvious.

Thanks to macro-level blended learning, universities can “import” courses from other universities, including the support of their students by tutors from the “exporting” university. In contrast to micro-level blended learning, this kind of import also helps universities to compensate for a possible lack of teachers as well as room shortages.
In 2000, the BVU started with courses in Business Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering, Key Skills and Medical Science.

In 2005, the programme was expanded to include Law, Social Work and Teacher Training. Today, about 330 courses in 13 fields of study are available or in preparation (cf. p. 8).

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Student enrolment has been rising constantly since the start of the BVU. The average enrolment per course rose from 25 in 2000 to 173 in 2011.
The BVU courses have an equivalent of two to six contact hours (one contact hour = around 15 x 45 minutes per semester).

This figure gives the equivalent of the total student enrolment in contact hours.

This diagram shows the total number of students taking part in BVU courses per year.

On average, students take more than two courses per year. The diagram does not reflect the fact that many students take courses over a number of years.
The number of students at Bavarian universities has risen substantially over the years (from 252,500 in the winter term 2005/06 to more than 320,000 in the winter term 2011/12), but participation in BVU courses has risen even more dramatically.

Law, Medical Science, Business Sciences and Key Skills are the most popular fields of study, but Languages and Teacher Training are catching up.

At Bavarian universities, the MINT- (or STEM-) subjects have a comparatively favourable student-teacher ratio. This might influence the demand for online courses.
If 60% of the students take part in the final examination of their course, this does not indicate a dropout rate of 40%. Many students choose a BVU course in addition to a face-to-face course at their home university. They are interested in a second opinion and appreciate additional opportunities to practice, but they need the final examination only at their home university.

A comparison between enrolment and participation in exams shows large differences between fields of study. This reflects the differences in culture inherent in the various disciplines themselves.
Between 2000 and 2011 a total of €35.3 m. was spent on the BVU and its courses, including the tuition of the students. In part this financing came from the ordinary Bavarian state budget, in part from special programmes of the Free State of Bavaria and from German Federal resources.

The BVU is able to utilize the infrastructure of the member universities. Furthermore, the member universities contribute one Euro per student per semester to the BVU’s budget.

In 2012, an additional €5.8 m. will be allocated for the purposes of the BVU.

In view of its organizational experience in successfully developing and carrying out online courses, the BVU has been assigned by the Bavarian Ministry for Higher Education to manage the Ministry’s IT-related projects within the framework of the European Social Fund (ESF) for the period 2007 - 2013.

The ESF projects aim at developing people’s skills and competencies for the purpose of creating new job opportunities and enhancing their employability. In all these ESF projects up-to-date knowledge is transferred from universities to small and medium enterprises via web based trainings.
For further information please visit us at www.vhb.org
The BVU is interested in international cooperation; the Managing Director and Project Management welcome any suggestions or enquiries.

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