Bavarian Virtual University
... the Network for Higher Education Online in Bavaria
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.

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.

I hope that this booklet will give you a first idea of the BVU, its aims and tasks. If you are interested in further details, the staff of our Office (cf. p. 11) are looking forward to your inquiries.

President Prof. Dr. Dr. habil. Godehard Ruppert
Concept, Aims and Tasks

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 state.

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.

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.

In contrast to MOOCs with their extremely high drop-out rates, students take the final exam in nearly 60% of BVU courses. This is a result of the individual support of students by trained e-tutors.

The close cooperation of the member universities is not in conflict with the ever more important idea of competition among them. 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. 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. 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.

BVU was identified by the European Union DG Education and Culture as one of the most interesting innovative approaches in higher education (cf. Study on innovation in higher education: final report (2014), eprints.lse.ac.uk/55819/).
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 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.
- All decisions on programme development and funding are made through transparent procedures by elected representatives of the member universities.
- Programme development and course funding are carried out strictly to the demand 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 Bavarian State Ministry for Education, Science and the Arts, 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. 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, the employees work in the areas of finances, project management, public relations, students’ affairs and technical support.
**Steering Committee** (from left to right)

**President:**
Prof. Dr. Dr. habil. Godehard Ruppert
President of the Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg

**Vice Presidents:**
Prof. Dr. Robert Grebner
President of the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt
Prof. Dr. Karl-Dieter Grüske
Former President of the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg

**Programme Committee** (from left to right)

Prof. Dr. Martin Wirsing (Chairman),
Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

Dipl.-Inf. Hans Pongratz, Technical University Munich

Prof. Dr. Rainer Wernsmann, University of Passau

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Bock (Deputy Chairman),
Technical University of Applied Sciences Regensburg

Prof. Dr. Niels Oberbeck,
Technical University of Applied Sciences Nuremberg

Prof. Dr. Patricia Arnold, University of Applied Sciences Munich

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Cress, University of Tübingen

Prof. Dr. Peter A. Henning, University of Applied Sciences Karlsruhe
Programme Structure

Currently BVU runs courses in the fields of Business Informatics, Business Sciences and Economics, Computer Science, Cultural Studies, Engineering, Health Care / Health Management, Introductory Courses, Key Skills, Languages, Law, Medical Science, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Social Work and Teacher Training.

The BVU supports and coordinates the introduction and development of any appropriate online course of any discipline at Bavarian universities. The BVU welcomes proposals that will expand the thematic focus of courses offered beyond that of the current fields of studies. The process of choosing new courses for the programme of the BVU consists of two main steps: first, a call for proposals, and then a call for tender. Detailed information about this process can be found on the BVU’s website.

To date BVU courses have been primarily based on German. The number of courses in English is to be expanded in line with the requirements of the universities.

Because of the large variety of fields of study with their different traditions, there is a corresponding variety of pedagogical approaches in the BVU’s courses. You will find virtual seminars with intensive student cooperation, there are lectures with tutorials, and there are virtual laboratories. In many courses students deliver papers.

### Numbers of courses active + in development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Active + In Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Courses</td>
<td>02 + 00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Management</td>
<td>08 + 00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>12 + 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>20 + 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Studies</td>
<td>09 + 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training</td>
<td>36 + 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Science</td>
<td>67 + 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>03 + 00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>63 + 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Skills</td>
<td>33 + 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>03 + 04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>20 + 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>34 + 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Informatics</td>
<td>29 + 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Science and Economics</td>
<td>52 + 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (as at summer term 2015)</strong></td>
<td>391 + 101</td>
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«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.

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.
**Budget**

Between 2000 and 2015 a total of €50.4 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.

From 2015 on, at least €5.6 m. p.a will be allocated for the purposes of the BVU.

**European Social Fund Projects**

In view of its organizational experience in successfully developing and carrying out online courses, the BVU has been assigned by the Bavarian State Ministry for Education, Science and the Arts to manage the Ministry’s IT-related projects within the framework of the European Social Fund (ESF) for the periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020.

The ESF projects aim at developing people’s skills and competencies for the purpose of enhancing their career opportunities. In all these ESF projects up-to-date knowledge is transferred via web based trainings from universities to mostly small and medium-sized enterprises in order to increase their innovation potential.

40 projects were funded during the period 2007-2013. A total sum of €6.1 m. was provided for these projects, including payment for coordination and management tasks carried out by the BVU. 50% of this funding came from the European Social Fund.

The BVU itself does not receive funding from the European Union.