Bavarian Virtual University (BVU)

The Bavarian Virtual University (BVU) was established in 2000 as a network organisation run by the universities and universities of applied sciences of the Free State of Bavaria. Its primary goal is to improve studying conditions for the growing number of students who require flexibility both in terms of time and place. This flexibility is best offered by virtual teaching and learning environments.

The BVU network currently encompasses 31 member universities with some 385,000 students. Several hundred professors from Bavaria are involved in the BVU either in a teaching capacity or as committee members. The basic body of the BVU is the Assembly of Member Universities, in which each member university is represented by a Commissioner, who in turn is the key person for all BVU affairs within her/his institution. The Assembly of Member Universities elects the Steering Committee which consists of the President and two Vice Presidents and the eight members of the Programme Committee. The Steering Committee makes strategic and budget decisions. The Programme Committee makes suggestions to the Steering Committee in all matters of programme development and quality management. These committees are supported by the BVU Office in Bamberg, which is run by the Managing Director.

With a portfolio of more than 500 courses, the BVU considerably extends the range of offerings made available by the Bavarian universities. Nearly 90 courses are currently in preparation. The academic year of 2016/2017 saw more than 180,000 course enrolments by more than 60,000 students. In general BVU courses offer a graded certificate of achievement on completion which can be used as credits in a degree course.

It is expensive to produce web-based courses. In order to get the most out of this expenditure, the Free State of Bavaria supports the coordinated and practice-oriented development of courses for use across the universities. The courses offered as part of the BVU programme are generally developed by a member university on the basis of tenders. Applications for funding of a new course must be made jointly by at least two universities. The universities in the consortium provide a binding guarantee that the course will be part of a compulsory module or a compulsory elective module for one of their degree courses and that they will recognise the study results achieved in this course. In individual cases, preparatory courses which are not recognized in a degree course (introductory courses, exam preparation courses, etc.) can be funded. The courses must be made available to students from all member universities. They are free of charge to these students; other individuals can use the courses for a fee which is based on fees for guest students.

This coordination and cooperation across the whole of Bavaria means that public funds can be used efficiently. The BVU supports the systems of the existing universities. The courses are integrated into the face-to-face degree studies of the member universities. BVU enables member universities to use elements of distance learning and by doing so to offer their students greater flexibility in terms of time and place.

The BVU utilises the existing infrastructure of the member universities wherever possible. The courses are stored on the servers of the universities that offer them, while the course catalogue and enrolment are organised centrally by the BVU Office. In order to simplify access to the courses, the BVU assisted its member universities in creating an interoperable identity management system with a single sign-on.
The BVU currently offers courses in 15 fields of study: Business Science and Economics, Business Informatics, Computer Science, Cultural Studies, Engineering, Health Care Management, Introductory Courses, Key Skills, Languages, Law, Medical Science, Natural Science, Social Sciences, Social Work and Teacher Training. The BVU sets great store by interactive teaching and learning, which is why the students are supervised by specially trained tutors. More than half of those who start courses also take the final exams. Due to the vital role played by interaction in achieving success in learning, in addition to the course development the BVU funds also the supervision of the students by tutors and the training of these tutors.

The use of the courses across the universities has worked well: more than half of all enrolments come from universities which did not themselves develop the courses. Equally successful is the use among the different types of higher education institutions. Every year thousands of students from universities of applied sciences take courses from universities and in turn thousands of students from universities take courses offered by universities of applied sciences.

The BVU attaches particular importance to quality management. All courses are evaluated by the students every term. In addition, each course is subject to a review by two experts from outside Bavaria in terms of its subject matter, the didactic use of the medium and its technical quality after the first year and then regularly after it has been held five times. Any improvements to the courses that are required are funded by the BVU.

For further information see www.vhb.org

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