FernUniversität in Hagen – University of Hagen

The FernUniversität in Hagen – University of Hagen – is the only state-maintained distance teaching university in the German-speaking countries and regions. Presently, around 45,000 students are registered. They benefit from the modern distance education system which combines pedagogically well prepared study units with individual support, net-based co-operation in seminars and working groups, online communication offers and face-to-face sessions. Contact and contact persons for the students are to be found on the main campus at Hagen as well as at the around 60 study centres in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Central and Eastern Europe. The University of Hagen considers itself an alternative to on-campus studies with high-quality final degrees (Bachelor, Master, ‘Diplom’, and Doctorate), and emphasises its potential in the trend towards lifelong learning. The FernUniversität promises high flexibility during the studies – learning at home and the Internet: “Teaching matter is not presented in an overcrowded lecture theatre, but in the form of well organised and prepared teaching materials, including study units, exercises, interactive CD-ROMs, audio- and video-cassettes which are delivered to the students’ homes by post, and increasingly via the Internet.” In addition, the FernUniversität in Hagen offers a service-oriented university library. On request, books and articles also will be sent to the students’ home. As the only university in North Rhine-Westphalia, Hagen decided against the introduction of tuition fees until 2009.

Lifelong learning, further education concurrent with work, along with the necessity to relieve the overcrowded conventional universities have been important topics in the early seventies of the last century. This inspired the NRW-Minister of Higher Education and Research to found a distance teaching university at Hagen. Under the NRW-Foundation Law of 1st December 1974 the “pioneers” from academia and administration had only ten months for preparing the new university, so that 1,300 students could embark on their studies from winter semester 1975/76. The two academic departments of economics and mathematics were soon joined by education, cultural and social sciences and humanities, as well as electrical engineering, information technology, law, and computer science. After some re-structuring these subject areas are organised in four faculties today, each of which has a great number of Chairs and Institutes: Faculty of Cultural and Social Sciences; of Mathematics and Computer Science; of Economics; of Law.

Initially, FernUniversität’s departments were housed in rented apartments and buildings dotted all over Hagen and even outside the city. The development of FernUniversität’s Campus near the motorways A 45 and A 46 began in 1980 with the first office building Allgemeines Verwaltungszentrum (AVZ I). Further buildings followed. These are: Eugen-Schmalenbach-Building (AVZ II), Philipp-Reis-Building, Centre of Technology and Innovation (TGZ), the extension of the University Library, and the new canteen.

From the Virtual Project to the Normal FernUniversität Routine
A milestone for the blanket use of New Media and state-of-the-art-information and communication technologies was the Education and Knowledge Space: Virtual University. The university-wide concept for the further developing of modern teaching and learning, and the further improving of communication and support was put into operation in October 2004. Since that date it has been an integral part of the normal FernUniversität routine.

Online sessions take place at the FernUniversität in many contexts
These are two examples illustrating the use of the New Media:

1. Online – written test question time:
Students can log in to a live transmission from the university’s TV studio. Simultaneously, fellow students are at the studio, which means they attend the session in person. Together with the lecturers e. g. a written test of the preceding semester is being discussed with regard to methodological and solution-related aspects. Any questions students may have concerning the presented contents can be sent in for further treatment via E-mail, or alternatively put directly. Later the recorded session is available as download on the Net with no time limit.
2. Topic Chats during a Virtual Seminar:
Online seminars often run for a period of 10-12 weeks. Chat sessions are arranged to provide students with an opportunity to tell the others about themselves, discuss some problems in advance with the whole group – quickly and in an uncomplicated way, put some questions, discuss ideas for topics, or to present results. In fact, the simultaneous online communication is unfamiliar at first, being a great challenge also for the moderators. It often, however, outweighs the disadvantages of a time-consuming and cost-intensive face-to-face session in Hagen.

The programmes of study
FernUniversität’s four faculties offer a wide range of study programmes from which the students can choose internationally recognised degree programmes, leading to Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees as well as ‘Diplom’ degrees. (‘Diplom’ degree programmes are still offered, however will phase out step by step.) Special further education programmes (in cooperation with other institutions) are designed to promote professional qualifications. Akademiestudien (academic further education with individual schedules) are available without restrictions on admission, providing individual further education “on demand”.

The FernUniversität provides graduates the opportunity to take a doctorate on an individual basis
There are different initiatives to promote and support doctoral candidates, using the modern techniques of distance studies.

The outstanding institutions include among other things the Graduate Centre (Promotionskolleg) “Social interests and formulation of political demands and objectives. Constitutional culture in historical context“ (Gesellschaftliche Interessen und politische Willensbildung. Verfassungskultur im historischen Kontext) which is run by the Historical Institute, as well as the “Network of women doctoral candidates” (Promovendinnenetzwerk) of the Equal Opportunities Office.

Within the framework of the governmental funding programme “Excellence Initiative” FernUniversität scientists of all faculties have proposed a concept “Excellence for Practice”. The aim of this concept is to ensure structured training of highly-qualified doctoral students who are in active employment.

Study centres abroad
The study centres afford the students and those interested in distance studies an opportunity to get information and counselling on all issues connected with such studies. Here they can meet their fellow students, borrow books, and learn how to use and apply technical media.

At the study centres tutorials take place which are the responsibility of FernUniversität’s Faculties and Chairs. These tutorials deal with course-related problems, as well as assignments and preparatory work for the examinations. Furthermore, the study centres provide a place for face-to-face sessions of individual chairs and also for lectures given by professors of the FernUniversität.

The General Student Advisory Service primarily offers individual help with issues such as choosing an appropriate subject, motivating students in their studies, organising one’s work, as well as finding a balance between family/job and university studies. Student advisers provide introductory information for beginners. Seminars and workshops are offered, e.g. to skill up students to work scientifically. General events, such as seminars on key qualifications are offered for students from all faculties, partly in cooperation with regional institutions.

Application for studies with the FernUniversität
Prospective students are required to have a very good knowledge of German, since FernUniversität’s programmes and courses are offered exclusively in German language. Requirements for admission are the “allgemeine Hochschulreife” (German university entrance qualifications) or similar qualifications for the subject to be read. Under certain conditions, prospective students without the required formal qualifications can take special university entry exams. Through these exams, prospective students may acquire credit points which may count towards their courses. High school students can enroll as "Akademiestudierende" and take individual modules which may count towards their degree after full
matriculation. High-potential high school students can enroll as regular students as long as they have the backing of their high school or teachers.

**Research**
The FernUniversität in Hagen supports focus- and profile-oriented research. Interdisciplinary and cross-faculty collaboration leads to the grouping together of competences and the forming of competitive research focal points. At the same time, basic and applied research is the basis for promoting the new generation of academics.

The affiliated institutes which regard the FernUniversität as their scientific home are for the most part profit-oriented, or at least endeavour to cover their cost. The spin offs were founded by active or former scientists, partly together with external partners. They, too, play an important role in research and technology transfer: Most flexibly applying scientific know-how in practice, they prove to be considerably successful competitors in the market. Thus, being customer-oriented, the FernUniversität in Hagen is well prepared for a competitive market. This is primarily due to the many and diverse stimuli the FernUniversität receives through its special target group: working people. And this group especially enables the knowledge of the FernUniversität to be transferred to society and industry: Unlike any other state-maintained university, the FernUniversität – owing to its working students – is able to transfer scientific know-how directly, and as quickly as possible, to practical application in the companies. In the fields of research and development FernUniversität’s Faculties and Chairs cooperate with renowned scientific institutions all over the world, with companies, associations and public institutions. Furthermore, exchange of information and knowledge takes place through a variety of co-operation projects between science and industry, ranging from final theses by arrangement with the individual employer to commissioned research. Moreover, joint development of academic further education programmes with companies, associations and scientific institutions contributes to the interlinking of academia and practice.

**Drop-out rate**
The drop out rate for the first year of studies is about fifty percent. It drops considerably in the following years, even below the average drop-out rate at regular universities. The high drop out rate since 2002 can partly be explained by the fact that in that year, NRW introduced special tuition fees for second and third degrees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (including students on sabbatical leave) - total</th>
<th>45.688</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of whom men</td>
<td>58.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of whom women</td>
<td>41.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (without students on sabbatical leave) - total</td>
<td>44.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of whom Regular students</td>
<td>34.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akademie students</td>
<td>6.048</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students in further education programmes</td>
<td>4.610</td>
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**Enrolled in the**

| Faculty of cultural and social sciences                   | 25 %   |
| Faculty of mathematics and computer science               | 19 %   |
| Faculty of economics                                     | 43 %   |
| Faculty of law                                           | 13 %   |

**Gainfully employed**

around 80 %

**With university degree earned before**

around 29 %

**Age focus**

29-35 years

**Nationalities**

German 40.824

Other European 3.591

International students - total 3.943

**Current domicile**

In Germany 41.136

In other European countries 3.246

In foreign countries - total 3.631