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The German Career Service `Studierende & Arbeitswelt (S&A)` focus Technology guidance at Career Service work

The transfer of the concept of Blended Learning to the Career Service work

1 Career Service conception `Studierende & Arbeitswelt`

The qualifications program “Studierende & Arbeitswelt” (S&A) founded in 1989 at the University of Cologne. The University of Cologne, decided to establish S&A driven by the motivation to further increase effectiveness and efficiency of career orientation and practical training to students of the Faculty of the Human Sciences at the University of Cologne, enrolled in humanities, social sciences and education. S&A offers students the opportunity to supplement their studies with practical experience and the first contacts to employers, which significantly increase the student’s chances on the job market. Comprehensive analysis of the CS offers in Germany showed that the main concept of CS work consists of four basic elements: information, consultation, career qualification and partnership management. All these issues are covered and intensified by the special concept of S&A. The concept of S&A is a role model to increase the efficiency of career qualification by means of practical training during the studies. The program is designed to expand the skills students acquire at the university and link them with specific occupational fields with the six modules: Job Market Seminar, Group Projects, Speaker Series, Electives, Trainings, Internship (Fig. 1). In addition, S&A has forged private-sector partnerships to help the transition from the university to the job market. Because of the demand for the high quality, the program is limited to twenty students. On the way of limitation is given an individual support and mentoring possibility. The qualification program of S&A consists of a two-semester compact-training, which could be graduated within the study. The CS S&A cooperates with employers who participate in job fairs, on-campus interviewing, resume referral and related programs. All graduates of this extensive program receive a qualification certificate.

1.1 The conception

The target of the participation to S&A is to development the employability competencies and to increase the likelihood for the successful placing on the job market. For this reason, the two-semester program consist typical work tasks, which S&A has to perform. The work tasks apply to counseling and advising, individuals and groups on occupations, career exploration, career planning and decision-making, job-search strategies, employability skills and graduate and professional education. In addition S&A offers self-information possibilities, like a library, job supplies and internet materials. Consultations in terms of job application and professional internships are a duty not only of S&A, but also of each role model of the CS work. A very important part of the CS work of the University of Cologne refer to a lot of contacts with business companies, non profit concerns, other universities, alumni and professional associations.

1.2 Modules of the qualification term

The two-semester program is designed to expand the skills students learn at the university and link them with specific occupational fields. The following figure gives an overview of the two-semester qualification S&A:

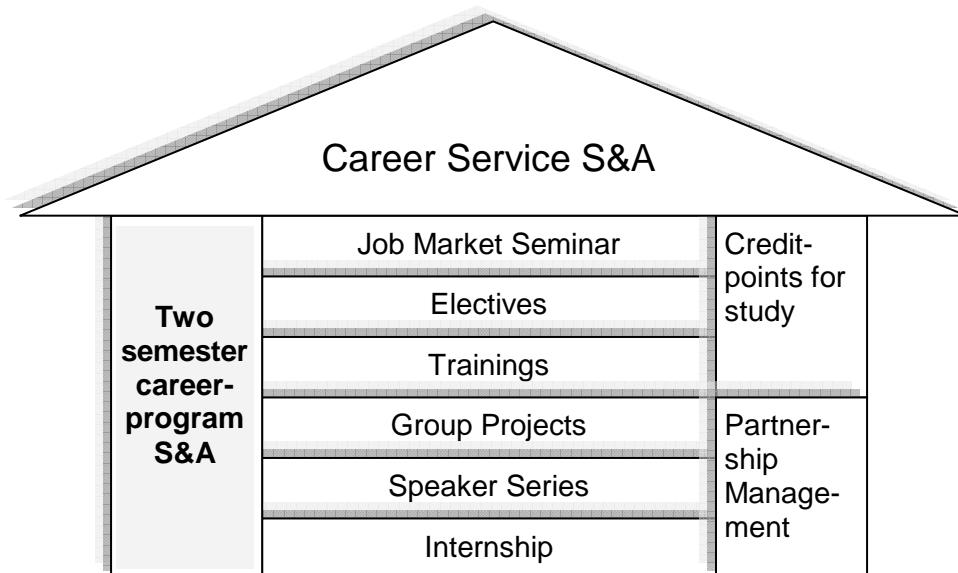


Fig. 1: Overview of the two-semester career-program S&A (von Luckwald, J., 2009)

In the **Job Market Seminar** participants learn about their career prospects based on their individual profiles and the current job market. Within **Group Projects**, students organize groups to work on career-related topics for two semesters. Each project

could have cooperation with a company. The themes depends on the interests of the different companies or/and the intended career of the students. Inside of the group projects the students become a possibility to develop very important competencies like soft- and business- skills. These qualifications could be recessed in the Modul of **Trainings**, for example in the areas of project management. It is very necessary, that the graduates possess those abilities and skills, which are required by businesses. In this context competencies become very increasingly important for businesses. These characteristics are referred to soft skills, business skills and key qualifications: like studies show that these skills are of importance for businesses with regard to employees. Regardless the occupation, the "Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft" (1997, Wiepcke, 2009) mentions the attitude to work, achievement orientation, reliability, ability to work in a team, sense of responsibility, logical reasoning, initiative, self dependent learning and motivation as the most important competencies. In addition, Rump and Eilers (2006) mention commitment, willingness to learn, empathy, resilience, ability to deal with conflicts, ability to reflect critically, readiness to change and frustration tolerance. Antoni and Sommerlatte (1999) analysed which knowledge is important for businesses. The study showed that in addition to methodological skills - thus the knowledge, *how something has to be done* - knowledge about products, customers, markets and competitors as well as its use have significantly gained in importance. At this point, business skills, which require economic knowledge as well as its realisation by employees, take on greater significance. These characteristics will be acquired on the one hand within the Trainings, in the tasks of presentation, job application and project management, on the other hand by the participation on Electives. During the S&A Career program, students are required to expand and deepen their knowledge of business economics and computer-related applications. In addition they must select and attend courses in two other career- or market- related areas. In the module of Speaker series the students have a possibility to find out interesting information about different potential alternatives after the study. Speakers from the business and non-profit sectors come to talk about different occupational fields and other job-related topics. Through discussions with the speakers participants receive practical information about careers and work. Finally each student is assigned to an 8 week professional internship individually tailored to their skills and interests, to raise work-experiences and get contact with future employer. The two-semester program is a very good integration into the study. The professionalizing of the CS work and so special programs of qualification like S&A become especially important with respect to the establishment of B.A. and M.A

courses of study at German universities. In addition the concept of employability in the case of graduates plays a big role in the educational context of Bologna reform. The theoretical knowledge and excellent study certificate did not suffice for the requirements of employers. The graduates have to be employable. They are employable, if they exactly possess those abilities and skills, which are required by businesses (Mittelstaedt, Wiepcke 2007: p. 163). Over the past years, new requirements for employees have been emerged, which is referred to as intrapreneurship (Schulte, 2006: p. 2). In this context, competencies such as innovative ability, willingness to take risks, leadership skills, ambiguity tolerance, achievement orientation, energy and initiative are essential (Wiepcke, 2008). The concept of S&A supports the resolving of all this problems.

2 Technology guidance at Career Service work

The main concept of the CS work S&A consists four basic elements: information, consultation, career qualification and partnership management. This program is limited to twenty students, so the focus on new steps into technology guidance is important to rise up the number of participants. The variety of CS-services in Germany is mainly covered by “present” approach, like “face to face” consulting or courses for career qualification including recruiting management. For the majority of CS-organisations the aspect of partnership-management is limited to notices, individual work-consultation and job exchange with non-specific study field offers. In addition, the number of participants on career courses has to be limited due to the requirement of CS to offer a high quality support. This causes a neglect of the high participation need on the part of the students and leads to a deficient coverage of service requirements. The qualifications and information offers of the CS are targeted prevalently on the internal high education level. The embedding of the world of labour as well as the national and international high education offers usually does not take place. Considering these problems and high requirements of CS work, web-based offers could give a chance to provide high quality and multidisciplinary services to a big variety of students. The electronic CS could assure a flexible and common access to the support and placement for students of all study fields, employers and university stuff members. The electronic platform should integrate the mentioned four basic elements of CS work. Web-based selfinformation could allow access to heterogenic lectures about work fields as well as vocational and qualification possibilities according to individual requirements. Moreover, the areas of guidance

and qualification according to Blended Learning concepts could be embedded in a web-based CS-platform (Fig. 2).

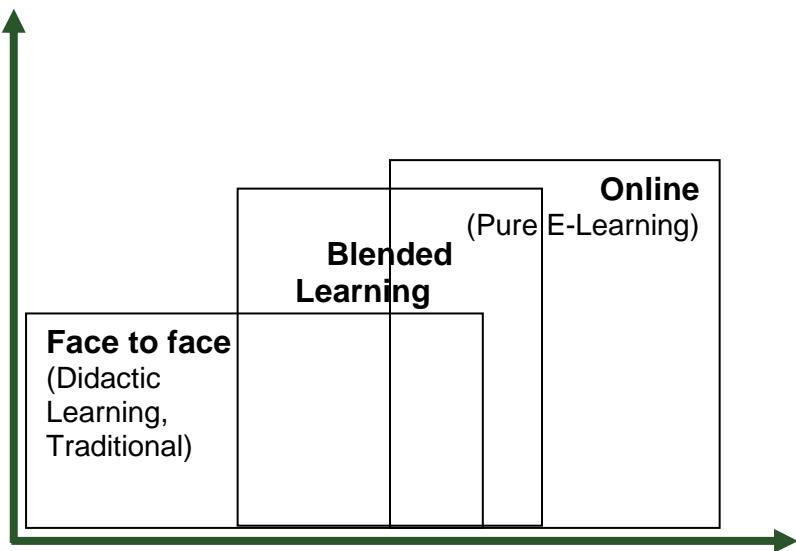


Fig. 2: Conception of Blended Learning (Heinze, A. / Procter, C., 2004)

Blended Learning is a blending of different learning methods, techniques and resources and applying them in an interactively meaningful learning environment. This approach will combine face to face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (E-Learning). It also applies science or IT activities with the assistance of innovative educational technologies using computer, cellular or I-phones, Sky TV channels and other electronic media (Graham, 2005: p. 3 - 21). This allows a variety of possibilities to transfer the moduls of S&A to the web-based form of teaching and consulting (Fig. 3).

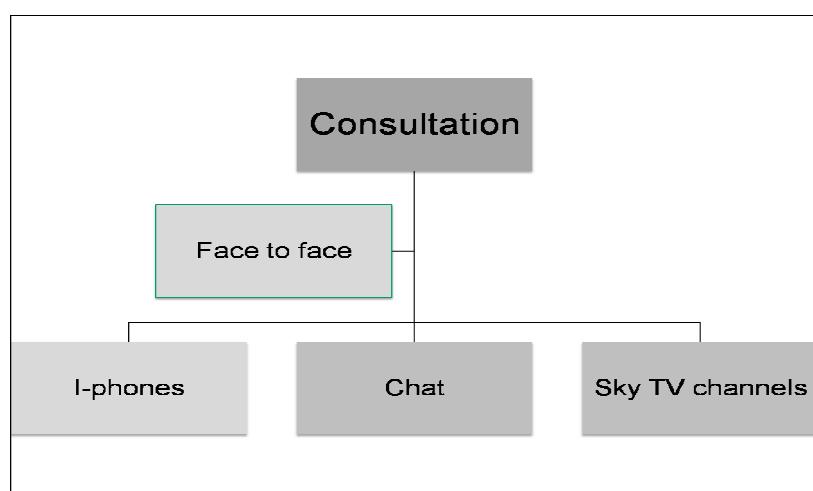


Fig. 3: Example for Blended Learning concept within area of consultation

Beyond that, Blended Learning offers learners the opportunity “to be both together and apart” (Garrison / Kanuka, 2004) and increase the options for greater quality and quantity of human interaction in a learning environment. A community of learners can interact at any time and anywhere because of the benefits that computer-mediated educational tools provide. This approach provides a successful mix of technologies and interactions, resulting in a socially supported, constructive, learning experience. This is especially significant given the profound affect that it could have on distance learning. Some of the advantages of Blended Learning include: Cost effectiveness for both the accrediting learning institution and the learner, accessibility to a post secondary education, flexibility in scheduling and timetabling of course work, suits different types of learners and good student support (Heinze, Procter, 2004). Some of the disadvantages may include; computer and internet access, limited knowledge in the use of technology, study skills. Furthermore one of the main disadvantages is the lack of social interaction which is taken as given in conventional settings. This creates a special need to motivate the less independent student (Salmon, 2002; Rogers, 2001).

2.1 The transfer of the concept of Blended Learning to the Career Service work

The transfer of the concept of Blended Learning to the CS work needs a lot of research of a variety on areas. The assignability of the concept on the CS work, depend on the concept of the modul, which has to be transfer. The basic element of the information refers to the job market, job alternatives etc. as well as the speaker series information could be integrated in the web-platform in the form of self-information files and TV projections (Fig. 4). Consequential there should be an opportunity for online discussion boards and to ask questions. Just as well could be the students consulted within I-phones, Sky TV channels or chats. Most efficiency is achieved online on discussion boards, and maximum efficiency is achieved in the face to face sessions. For example greater efficiency can be achieved through encouraging students to support each other through discussion boards, leaving the resolution of the more challenging issues to the face to face sessions with members of staff. This means that students don't have to wait until they have a chance to speak to a member of staff, but can get help and continue with their work. If a question and/or the answer are complex, it is better to use face-to-face sessions, which have greater efficiency, and are “richer” (Daft, Lengel, 1984), the same applies

to issues that are sensitive and are best discussed in person. This emerges from students comments that understanding/learning is easier in class (using visual, audio and body language) than through online discussions (textual communication). However, one advantage that Blended Learning has over E-Learning, is the participants being able to socialize face to face. The aspect of face to face opportunity is very important by the career qualification, because of the development of the social and business skills. The interaction and cooperation within the web-based system afford not the same requirements such as a life interaction between the personalities. Here the question appears, if such skills like reliability, ability to work in a team, sense of responsibility, initiative, self-dependent learning and motivation within the E-Learning platform could be achieved as well at the present presentations. In relation to learning styles, a reliance on the conversation within the learning process may disadvantage those students who are not keen on discussions. Discussions however, are an important component of key skills (verbal communication), which in turn are essential for students employability. Adoption of the conversational framework would require interactive lectures/tutorials that are extended to online discussions. Students will be expected to do more reading and preparation outside the face to face sessions and interact with their peers online, discussing for example answers to some homework questions. However, if the Blended Learning is successful, depend on the degree of individual motivation and personal aspects. On the one hand the Blended Learning allows a high flexibility and self-employment, on the other hand demands self-discipline and achievement motivation.

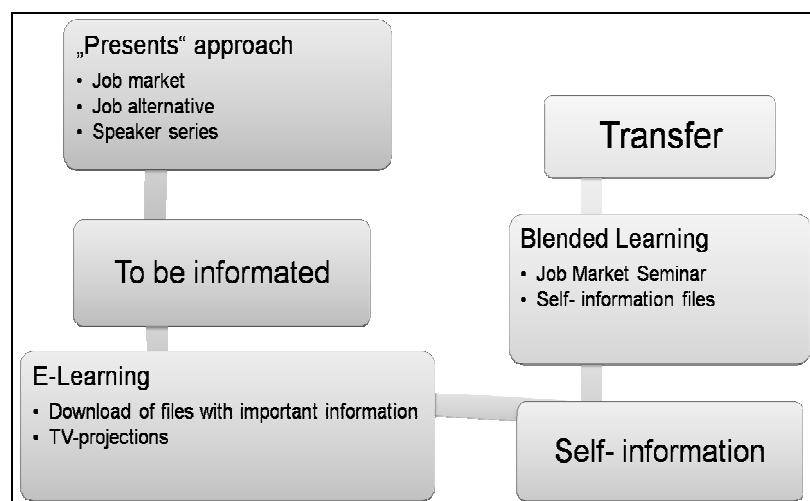


Fig. 4: Example for the transfer of the concept of Blended Learning to the area of information

Refer to the partnership management the web-based CS would present a very good alternative to the notices and individual work-consultation. National and international job exchange within the web-based platform would facilitate the partnership management and would give a lot of alternatives for the students and employers by the search of a job or employees. The global development of an electronic platform for CS should give the opportunity for national and international partnerships in the fields of internships, work quotes and thesis topics, as well as cooperation between employers and universities. In Germany the development of methodology and didactic concepts extending CS work to an electronic platform is in an early stadium. By reason of the virtual interest and the advantages of an electronic platform, various universities in Germany have just parts of the prototype of web-based CS-software by now like Humboldt University of Berlin (E-Learning for career qualification). These software-aspects needs to be continuously developed and improved to cover the special requirements of CS work. By now there are a lot of universities that the partnership management administer in form of web-based job exchange.

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