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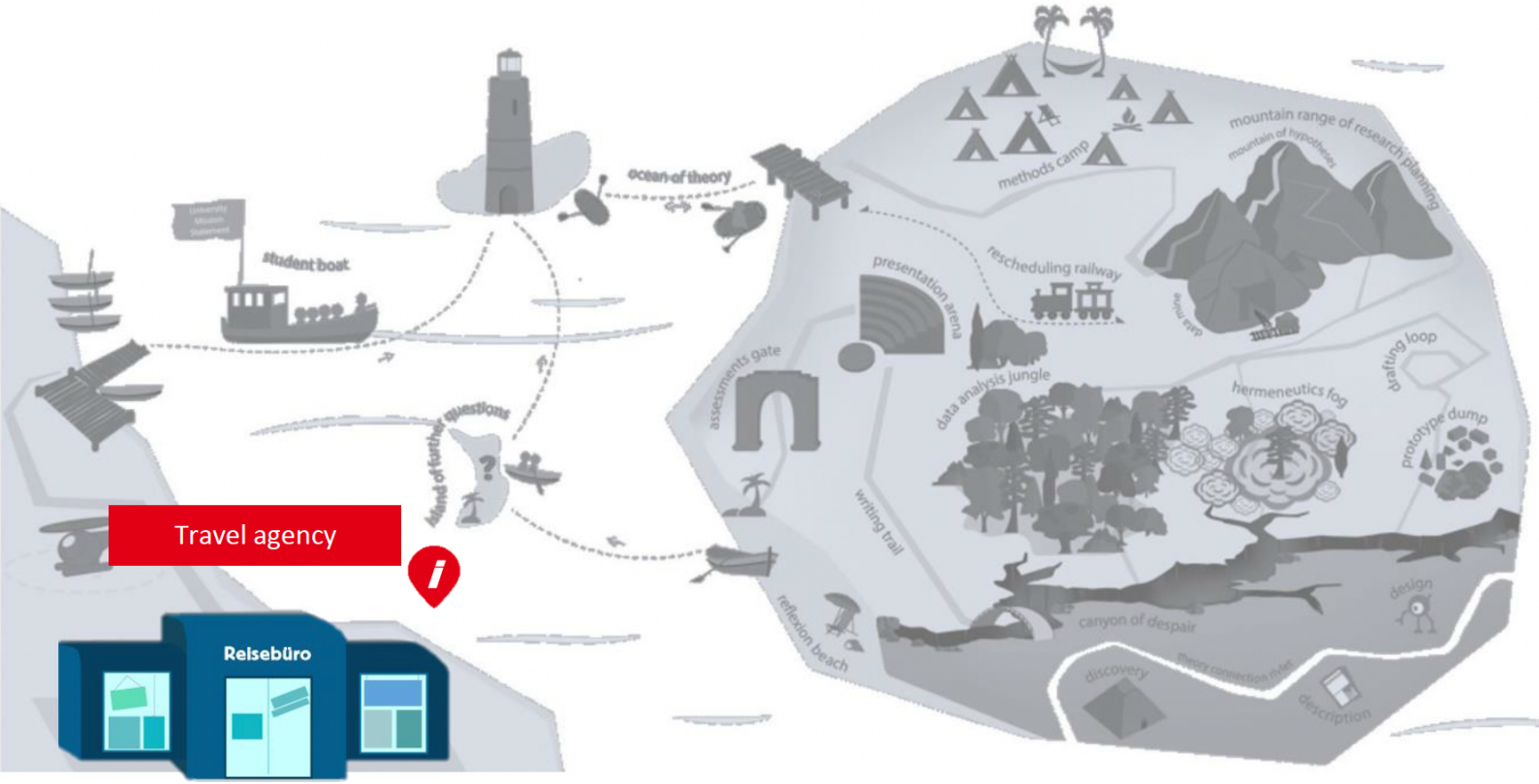
Forschungsorientierung in der Studieneingangsphase

The good must be put in the dish,…

Vignette #16



KEYWORDS:

FINANCING, INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

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#16: The good must be put in the dish,…

The following text sequence or vignette describes a situation in the context of a teaching that aims at research-based learning. The situation described challenges you as a teacher and may require you to act directly. The aim of the vignette is to allow you to think about what you are doing in such a situation or how you could prevent it. But you may also consider the situation to be problem-free and more conducive to learning. Either way you can preventively familiarize yourself with possible challenges and reflect upon your own evaluations and impulses for action.

The situations described are taken from interview data with coordinators of research-based learning projects and have been sharpened for the purpose mentioned above. The most common challenges in teaching courses to promote research-based learning have been selected and converted into vignettes.

The good must be put in the dish, …

The week before last before the start of the semester. After your offer was launched last year and still needed a lot of publicity due to its low profile, you are now sitting in front of a mountain of applications with which teachers apply for resources for their research-based learning projects. The quality of the applications varies, but everything sounds exciting and worth supporting. Unfortunately, with the best will in the world, you cannot accept all the applications; there is a lack of personnel and, above all, financial resources. It is with a heavy heart that you start the selection process, but you are at a loss as to what criteria should decide on funding.

Keywords: Financing, institutional support

Reflective questions

The situation described above is a typical challenge that you could face if you implement research-based learning in your teaching. The following questions of reflection serve as impulses to look at such or similar situations from different perspectives and then to come to different decisions:

What criteria would you like to use for the selection?

Who could help you with the assessment or selection?

What minimum standards and planning specifications do you apply for the evaluation?

For future calls for proposals, would you like to raise or lower the hurdle for applicants to submit an application? Why?

Attitudes and actions

In the following, attitudes as well as preventive and intervening actions in the situation described are presented. First of all, attitudes are described which have an impact on whether and how to react. Then actions are presented. They are practical examples of how teachers at universities deal with the situation in a preventive or intervening manner. In addition, indirect measures are listed which involve a more subtle approach yet may have a strong impact.

Attitudes

Attitudes do not include concrete measures but describe the inner attitude of teachers (or coordinators) towards different situations. Depending on the attitude, situations can be interpreted as „problematic“ and „challenging“, but also as „desirable“ and „normal“.

Tips & pitfalls:

Beware of exploiting students

Check the applications carefully to see whether they are really about research-based learning for students – and whether the focus is on the students, or whether lectures are using the opportunity to pass on their own tedious work to students.

Watch out for submissions from disciplines rarely involved

In order to promote diversity, attempts are often made to give precedence to these submissions. It has proven to be a good idea to pay attention to the quality of the application. What is the benefit of a bad project from a rare study programme?

Create an online overview

An online overview of the projects can be created via an input mask. Different properties of the projects can be easily compared. Required informations are for example: responsible persons, number of participants, departments, research field, goal, but also costs, etc. This also makes information gaps clear.

Preventive actions

Preventive actions prevent the situation described or rather makes them less likely. There is – of course – no guarantee of avoiding such conflicts.

Have a project outline written

You can request a four- to five-page project outline in which the plans are described in detail. It must include both evaluation plans and a statement on how sustainability can be ensured.

Benefit of the action: You have a very detailed insight into the projects and can therefore include more factors in your decision.

Have the application submitted via the Dean of Studies

Applicants may not submit their applications themselves, but must present them to their deans of dtudies for forwarding.

Benefit of the action: This hurdle already sorts out the worst applications – on the one hand, because the applicants are inhibited from submitting bad applications to the deans of studies and, on the other hand, because the deans of studies can already have a selective influence themselves.

Enable application via online form

An online form can also be provided for an easy application. This also allows certain aspects of the project concept to be controlled via fields and selection of points. Thus, applicants reflect on future challenges and criteria to be considered already during the preparation process.

Benefit of the action: The applications can be easily compared, they are compact, can be called up anywhere and are easier to send. In addition, the contents and elements can be influenced.

Demand credit point recognition in advance

Applicants must already have sorted out in which module their project will be credited when submitting their application, so that students will certainly receive credit points for it.

Benefit of the action: This procedure has several advantages: On the one hand, only very motivated applicants apply, so it has a selection function. In addition, credit point recognition has a motivating effect and can reduce the dropout rate from projects. Finally, it has organisational advantages if the bureaucracy is clarified before the project starts.

Organise early pre-submission

As early as two months before the application deadline, you require applicants to undergo counselling. They will receive tips on how to write their application and a checklist. After that, a pre-submission is requested, which is then discussed again.

Benefit of the action: Again, the selection function is used. In addition, the research project can already be sharpened in this process and thus research time can be used differently during the project period. At the same time, the applicants learn how to write applications. Disadvantage: The procedure is extremely time-consuming and laborius.

Organise competitive tendering

You organise an interdisciplinary commission which decides on the quality of the applications in a competitive manner. The projects of the worst applications will not be carried out. You can also organise a workshop for applicants beforehand, which will improve the applications and is already a first hurdle that can only be overcome through motivation.

Benefit of the action: Decision-making responsibility rests on several shoulders. In addition, members of the applying discipline can better judge the quality and realistic scope of the research projects than a single person.

Conduct a project hearing in front of a committee that writes recommendations for the rectorate

You can have a committee of several experts and students formed, who first evaluate the projects by means of applications and then in a hearing of the project applicants. This committee can write an assessment of the projects. The final decision on the selection is ultimately made by the rectorate based on these recommendations.

Benefit of the action: The inclusion of different experts and also the student perspective allows a very thorough assessment of the project and spreads the responsibility on many shoulders. The final decision by the rectorate gives the project application additional emphasis, so that only the most motivated students will apply.

Indirect (accompanying) actions

In addition, indirect measures are listed which involve a more subtle approach yet may have the same impact..

Lecturers submit student proposals

Often there is no provision for students to apply for a project themselves. You can organize that students still get the opportunity to formulate their own interests and research projects. If teachers can be found to supervise them, these projects are carried out.

Benefit of the action: Student participation can be a decision criterion for funding projects.