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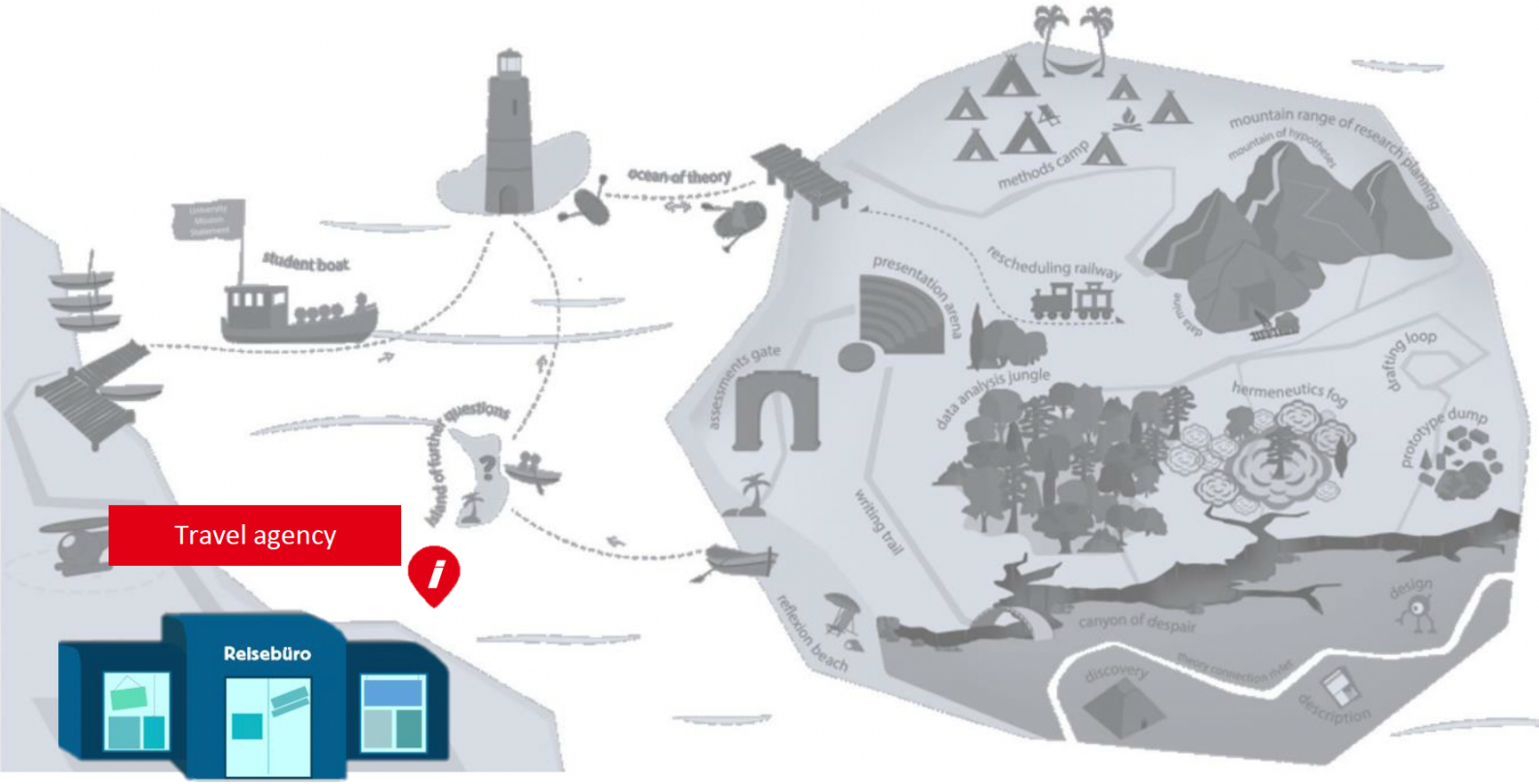
Forschungsorientierung in der Studieneingangsphase

For institutional solutions!

Vignette #17



KEYWORDS:

INTEGRATION IN THE STUDY PROGRAMME, RESISTANCE TOWARDS CHANGES

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#17: For institutional solutions!

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.

For institutional solutions!

Reaccreditation interviews of your study programme are pending. Together with two colleagues, you have decided to fight for change. You want to ensure that research-based learning becomes an integral part at your university. Unfortunately, you and your colleagues are not yet in agreement on where and how it should be implemented in the most sensible way. In a moment you will meet again to prepare for the final reaccreditation talks.

Keywords: Integration in the study programme, resistance towards changes

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:

Should the course be curricular or extracurricular?

Should the course extend over one or more terms?

Are you considering an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or international approach?

Should/can student assistants be integrated?

Should the course end with a (graded) examination?

Which additional courses would you like to try to initiate in connection with this one?

Examples

In the following – in contrast to other case vignettes from this series – examples of implementation forms at other universities are presented.

Fundamentals

Which questions should be fundamentally clarified before second or third steps are taken to embed research-based learning structurally in the institution?

Sharpen the concept of research-based learning

When discussing the curricular integration of research-based learning, confusion often arises as to what research-based learning actually is. Before the embedding of research-based learning can be discussed, there should first be a discussion about how the term is used. This can be supported by distinguishing between research-based learning, research-oriented learning. Only when a common definition for the term research-based learning is available, at best with a clear catalogue of criteria, can the discussion be fruitfully conducted.

Involve several teachers

For a sustainable embedding it may be useful to establish a framework project under which the courses on research-based learning are conducted and in which the coordination of these courses is organised. Within this context, students from different faculties can then carry out research-based learning. In order not to create a „one-day wonderland", it makes sense that many teachers are involved in the project so that fluctuation can be absorbed. In addition, the offer remains present with the students, as they are made aware of it by different teachers. In addition, in follow-up seminars the teachers can refer to the experiences of the participants again and again if there are points of contact in terms of content. This requires transparent communication with as many teachers as possible.

Award credit points

Courses of research-based learning require a high level of commitment and effort from students. Appropriate remuneration with credit points can help students to get through even deep phases and to carry the project through to completion. (At the same time, there are also many extracurricular offers of research-based learning that do not award credit points – this would therefore also be conceivable).

Standardised credit point distribution

If research-based learning is carried out in an interdisciplinary way, it should be ensured that all participants receive the same amount of credit points for their participation. Differences in recognition lead to destructive group dynamics.

Organisational details

This section describes aspects of organising the integration of research-based learning.

Establish a central contact point for FL projects

A central contact point for offers of research-based learning can be established, e. g. in centers for teaching and learning. This ensures that teachers who wish to initiate a project of research-based learning take into account in which subject area and module it will be carried out and with how many credit points it will be rewarded. This can also pave the way for a structural implementation.

Establish calls for proposals for lecturers

You can also establish research-based learning as a central offer that is equipped with additional funding. You can advertise these funds for lecturers who want to carry out their teaching in the learning format of research-based learning.

Use student assistants

The implementation of a research-based learning programme requires quite a lot of manpower. One possibility could be that student assistants, who are further advanced in their studies, could be used as tutors to accompany the students in the research process. These tutoring sessions can either accompany or deepen the research process, for example in the form of method tutorials.

Time management

This section discusses aspects relating to the timing of research-based learning offerings.

Extend the offer over several terms

Instead of conducting research-based learning in one term, you can also extend it over several terms. This gives the students more time, makes it easier to set intermediate goals and allows them to benefit from their further study activities and seminars that run parallel to the research-based learning project.

Focus an entire term solely on research-based learning

At a university, the entire first term (30 credit points) is dedicated to research-based learning across all disciplines. In addition to their own research, students also attend interdisciplinary modules, for example on the responsibility of science. At the end of the term there is a conference week, after which papers and examinations are written.

Enable a flexible learning term

Instead of integrating research-based learning into existing modules, the university can also enable flexible learning terms. Students can register for these and thus receive additional time to study freely. During this time, they can, for example, carry out extracurricular offers of research-based learning, which can, however, be remunerated with credit points in order to enable participation by BAföG students, for example.

Start a four-year Bachelor

Instead of completing the Bachelor‘s degree in three years, it can also be planned as a four-year Bachelor‘s degree. This gives students more time for socialization in the university institution, for professional and personal development.

Conduct research-based learning in the third term

It may be advisable to place offers of research-based learning not quite at the beginning of the course, but also not too late in the studies. Some universities recommend the third term, as students have already learned the basics of research by this time and therefore do not start from scratch. However, they still have enough time to use what they have learned in research-based learning in their subsequent studies.

Conduct research-based learning in the fifth or sixth term

Other universities have anchored research-based learning in the fifth or sixth term. The proximity to the final thesis can have a stimulating effect here.

Carry out opportunities for research-based learning in each term

It can be advantageous to have research-based learning programmes started twice a year. For example, the cohort will be divided and there will be fewer participants at once.

Framework

This section discusses possible aspects of the framework conditions for research-based learning offerings.

Encourage internationality

Through cooperation with other (international) universities, students can experience how research on similar or the same topics is carried out in other countries. It may even be possible to conduct comparative studies together.

Encourage interdisciplinarity

You can design your offer of research-based learning as an interdisciplinary course, for example as an elective module that can be taken by students from different faculties.

Match modules to each other

You can also coordinate the offer of research-based learning with other modules – so that, for example, a method module is conducted beforehand as preparation.

Offer research-based learning as an additional and/or substitute offer

Instead of making research-based learning compulsory for all students, it can be used as an additional or substitute offer for particularly strong or particularly interested students who are underchallenged in everyday seminar life.

Offer research-based learning as an extracurricular offer

In order to avoid discussions about what should be transformed into research-based learning in the module plan – and thus possibly „missed out“ - research-based learning can also be carried out as extracurricular activities. In order to be able to guarantee the organisation and implementation, however, personnel resources are needed – consequently the support of the implementing institution.

Integrate research-based learning as a compulsory optional module

In some universities, a module of research-based learning is offered as an optional compulsory module. This allows students to have their credit points credited, while at the same time the number of participants is more manageable and students are more motivated.

Have group work carried out over one term only

Even if the project of research-based learning extends over two terms, this does not necessarily mean that the students have to work together in a group over two terms. One university reports that they only carry out the group work in the second term in order to minimise the effects of interpersonal conflicts and external influences on the research process.

Bonus offers

This section describes offers that can be stimulated in connection with research-based learning, but which are usually already an enrichment in themselves.

Integrate a lecture series

Parallel to the offer of research-based learning, you can organize a lecture series oriented to the research topics. This gives students the opportunity to receive theoretical input in the process and to make cross connections. They experience that theory and research practice complement each other and recognise the benefits of lectures for their studies. This lecture series could also be interdisciplinary. In this way, students gain an insight into different forms of research practice – and initial suggestions as to how they can proceed as researchers themselves.

Set up a college day as a reflective event

In one university, once a year a whole day is dedicated to reflection on the study. The students are instructed to reflect on their experiences in their studies as well as the meaning and purpose of their own studies. In addition, there is a content-related discussion about what education at a university means, also in contrast to education.

Organise a conference week at the end of the term

After the completion of the offer of research-based learning, you will organise a conference week to which guests from the scientifically relevant environment will also be invited. There the students present their research results.

Organise service learning

Offers of research-based learning can also be designed as service learning. This means that students do research for partners in practice, i.e. student research is dedicated to current questions and challenges in practice. For this purpose, cooperation agreements with partners in practice must be concluded. One advantage of this format is that students are and remain highly motivated. Firstly, they experience that their research is not „for the drawer“, and secondly, they experience the relevance of research for practice.

Encourage students to prepare written papers during the term

As an examination for research-based learning a term paper can be done. Particularly at the beginning of their studies, students are still overwhelmed with assignments or postpone them until the term break, so that the assignment is written separately from the term events. Instead, you can – for example, by requesting an exposé – encourage students to deal with their future exam performance during the term and thus to successively reflect on the ongoing process.

Encourage a portfolio review during the term

Instead of an examination at the end of the term, you can have the students accumulate contributions for their examination performance during the term. Contributions can be, for example, minutes, session chairs or oral performance. Because there are so many different types of contributions in the end, the individual contributions become less and less important and the students act more freely and naturally – without losing focus on research.

Set a hypothetical research proposal as a goal

Instead of a complete research cycle, students can also „only“ prepare a hypothetical research proposal. To do this, students must first examine the potential research topic, explore the state of research, develop a research question and select a suitable method. In this way, they already gain a deep insight into essential steps of a research process without having to bear the time expenditure of the entire research. In addition, students are familiarised with the modalities for applying for funding and can develop an understanding of how research work is organised and financed in third-party funded projects.