CURRENT ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN GERMANY

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Higher education in Germany and other countries of the European Union is currently undergoing significant changes. These are ir ainly driven by the so-called "Sorbonne Declaration" and the subsequent "Bologna Declaration". In May of 1998, the Ministers of Education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom met in Paris at the Sorbonne University to establish a declaration on "harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system". The Sorbonne Declaration has its main focus on:

- Harmonisation of the overall framework of the various national systems of higher education;
- Establishing a common degree system for higher education, namely a so-called Bachelor's degree as the first undergraduate degree, and subsequently the graduate degrees of Master and Doctorate;
- Increasing the mobility of students and teaching staff by encouraging academic exchange and facilitating recognition of degrees.

The countries of the European Union and the other European countries were called to join in on the process. Consequently, in June of 1999, the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries met in the Northern Italian city of Bologna and established the "Bologna Declaration". It's main intention is to establish the European Area of higher education by 2010 through

- Adopting a system of "easily readable and comparable degrees" (e.g. by implementing and using a so-called "Diploma Supplement");
- Adopting an educational system based on two cycles, i.e. and undergraduate (Bachelor's) and two graduate (Master's and Doctoral) degrees;
- Establishing a credit point system such as ECTS;
- Promoting mobility of students and teaching personnel by removing obstacles;
- Promoting European co-operation in quality assurance in education;
- Promoting cooperation in further issues such as curricular development, integrated programs of study and research, and others.

The Ministers decided to meet again in 2001 in Prague to monitor and assess the progress that had been made in the meantime. In the Prague Communique, the Ministers, amongst other things, reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Bologna Declaration. The next Bologna follow-up conference took place in September of2003 in Berlin under the title "Realising the European Higher Education Area".

In the remainder of this document, we want to take a little closer look at one of the most important objectives of the Bologna process, i.e. the establishment of credit point systems in higher education. While credit point systems have already been used in the United States for over 100 years, they are a fairly new concept to Europe. The systems differ, however, in that the common type in the U.S. are usually pure so-called credit accumulation systems, while the European Credit Transfer System ECTS originated as a pure transfer system to increase student mobility throughout Europe. The ECTS has in the meantime, however, been extended to the European Credit Transfer *and Accumulation* system (still abbreviated ECTS). Let us look at the definition of a credit point:

A *credit point* is a quantitative way of measuring a student's academic achievement. At the end of each semester, a student gets a certain number of credits points added to his/her academic record for successful participation in a lecture. To obtain a degree in a subject, the student needs to accumulate a certain number of such credit points in his/her record. So far in German higher education, an important figure was for how many hours a lecture was *taught* throughout the semester. This was seeing things from the point of view of teaching staff; now, the point of view is from the student's side: We do not only ask any more how many hours a certain class is being *taught* in lecture, but how many hours total it takes an average student to understand the material that is being taught to him/her in this class, i.e. how many hours a student *needs to study* for this particular class. This means that one credit point could be associated with a certain number of hours that an average student needs to spend to understand the material.

In the European System ECTS, one academic year, consisting of two semesters (of six months each) of full time work, averaging about 1500 hours of work for the student, is worth 60 credit points, i.e. each semester is worth 30 credit points. In order to get a feeling of what this means let us notice that for example at the University of Ulm in Southern Germany in the Faculty of Computer Science a typical class meets for 3 one-and-a-half-hour-sessions in a week during a semester, where two sessions are lecture and one session is tutored exercises, and is worth S credit points. A class with two one-and-a-half-hour-sessions is worth 6 credit points. It is mandatory for the student to pass some kind of (oral or written) exam at the end of the semester in order to get the number of associated credit points accredited to his/her academic record. There has to be a separate exam for each class that the student attended throughout the semester. If the student reaches 180 credit points total (and has also met subject-specific other requirements). a Bachelor's degree can be awarded. Therefore, if the students takes a full-time load of classes each semester and passes all the exams, the Bachelor degree can be awarded after 3 years.

It is important to notice that with the introduction of credit points the usual marks/grades are still in use: grades are the *qualitative* aspect cf education; credit points add another, a *quantitative* aspect. However, grades are now "weighed" with the number of credit points, i.e. the mean grade is found by calculating the geometric mean of all the grades and their associated credit points. Thus, a lecture with many credit points has a higher influence on the overall average grade. Another important consequence of the introduction of credit point systems is that there will not be big exams that sum up one or more entire semesters and that can decide whether a student will overall fail or pass, but that there will be more but smaller exams, one for every lecture.

There are many advantages that people hope that credit systems will bring with them. One of the main ones is the facilitation of academe recognition between different universities within one country as well as mainly between different countries and the therewith associated increased incentive for students to spend one semester or year at an institution abroad without losing time. Others include: Increased ability to compete with other universities in the times of globalization and internationalization; introduction of new modularized degree programs; decreased average study time for students until graduation; higher efficiency of learning; more flexible degree programs; constant monitoring of student's progress; constant average student work load; and quite a few more.

For further information and a detailed discussion of credit point systems please consult http://www.informatik.uni-ulm.de/pm/Rahmenwerk. See the European Union's website at http://www.europa.eu.int for the guidelines of ECTS and the ECTS handbook (or do a websearch for "ECTS handbook for users" which will give a plethora of sources). Further information about the Bologna Process and the Berlin conference can be found at http://www.bologna-berlin2003 .de.

ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ІНФОРМАЦІЙНИХ ТЕХНОЛОГІЙ В НАВЧАННІ ДІЛОВОЇ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

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В останні роки все частіше постає питання про застосування нових інформаційних технологій у немовних вищих навчальних закладах освіти. З розвитком комп'ютерних технологій почалась інформаційна революція, яка охопила усі сфери життя, тому підготовка спеціалістів високого рівня неможлива як без оволодіння ними основами комп'ютерної грамотності, так і без застосування нових інформаційних технологій у сфері освіти. Спроби застосування нових інформаційних технологій виявили їх ефективність при навчанні ділової англійської мови. На сьогодні існує велика кількість комп'ютерних програм для навчання англійської мови. Різноманітність тем, видів діяльності, яскравість, захопливість комп'ютерних програм викликають велику зацікавленість студентів.

На сучасному етапі спілкування з комп'ютером відбувається здебільшого у письмовій формі. На сьогоднішній день найпопулярнішим та найшвидшим засобом обміну письмовими повідомленнями є електронна пошта. Особливо актуальне використання елект-