

oncampus

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Introduction

oncampus stands for online academic education since 1997, mainly based on networks of German Universities of Applied Sciences and universities around the Baltic. The core of oncampus is located at Lübeck University of Applied Sciences, Germany. Its subsidiary company oncampus GmbH cares for professional and standardised development, production, operation and marketing of online courses.

Contextual factors with regard to the spread of online education

oncampus offers online programmes and particular courses in continuing education both in German and English language. The present focus is mainly on the German market. However, due to the flexibility of e-learning methodology the market potential is considerably higher. Thus, 51% of the EU-citizens are english-speaking people and 32 % of the population older than 15 years disposes of German language skills. Of course, it has to be taken into consideration that the adoption of e-learning requires an affinity to the application of multimedia devices. In this context it has to be mentioned that the proportion of internet accesses in German households is only 44 %. However, this is above EU-25 average (40 %). In addition the top of the ranking shows countries with a large proportion of english-speaking population (Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Luxemburg, Finland, United Kingdom). Distance education is still playing a minor role in Germany. However, according to general prognoses, the acceptance of distance learning in Germany will increase. This is caused by raising complexity and decreasing half-period of knowledge in the world of employment. E-learning methodology could play an important role in this context.

Another beneficial factor is that prospective students in higher education consider ICT usage as self-evident. Practical experiences show that students get along with ICT without any difficulty as opposed to teachers.

German national policy is actually not providing funding for e-learning applications per se. The reason is missing sustainable results in the past. However, e-learning is still accepted as methodology to increase the impact of economy and social cohesion.

History

The history of oncampus is prior based on large third party projects with Lübeck University of Applied Sciences (LUAS) as leading partner. The projects “Virtual University of Applied Sciences” (VFH), “Baltic Sea Virtual Campus” (BSVC) and “Portal to future” (PnV) have dealt with online distance education, provided by university networks. The aim has been to attract more target groups for higher education by part-time study programmes.

All e-learning activities of LUAS and all activities with relation to the consortiums VFH and BSVC are today bundled under the name “oncampus”. Actually about 35 professionals are

full-time employed at LUAS, working as the core of oncampus. They care for development, implementation, operation and marketing of programmes as well as for the project administration. Approximately 150 persons have been involved part-time as authors and teachers. oncampus actually runs 145 e-learning modules (online material). At the moment, 480 courses are being offered and 5.300 course enrolments are registered. More than 1.300 students have been enrolled in study programmes since 2001.

All activities concentrate on the development and operation of online study programmes on the basis of the oncampus methodology. Collaboration with universities or other partners is essential to manage the e-learning business. Every online mentor involved has been prepared in special trainings.

Within this context, evaluation has been an important factor for the present range and alignment of oncampus study programmes. As evaluation tools serve surveys amongst students and mentors, automatic feedback functions integrated in course material and reviews within the content production process.

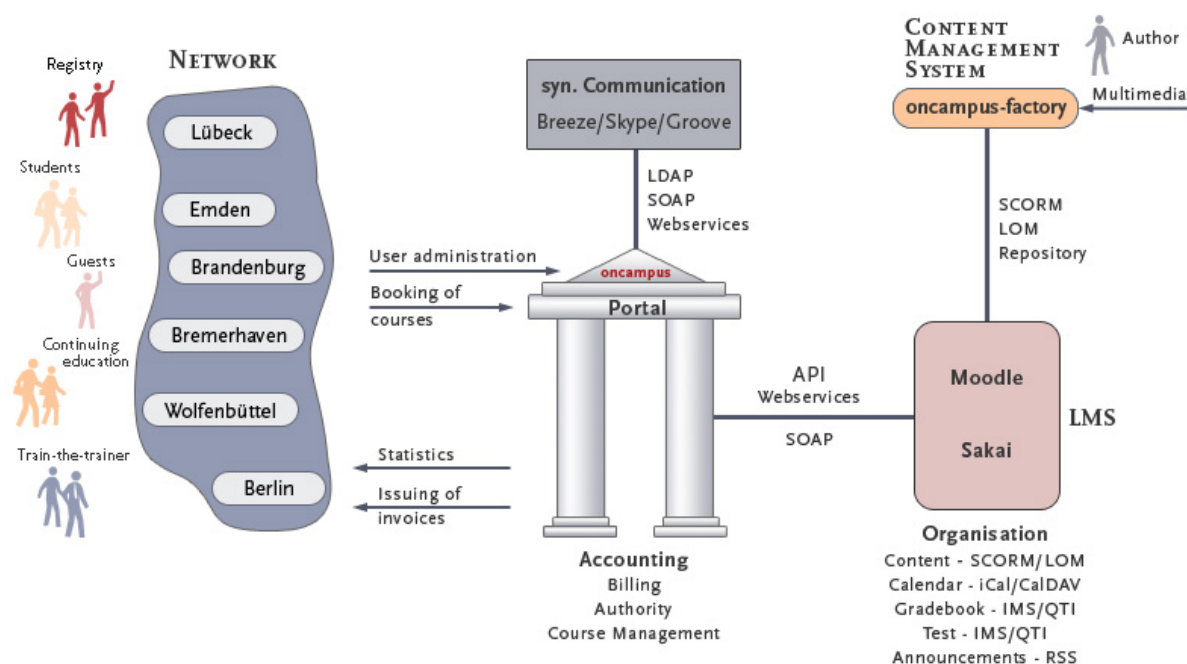
Technical issues

Key competence of oncampus is the development and implementation of online distance study programmes. For this purpose it follows an integrated production process. The tailor-made authoring tool oncampus-factory and the oncampus-portal database for course management oncampus-portal help to manage this challenge. Furthermore the open source learning environment SAKAI was implemented in October 2006. oncampus-factory and oncampus-portal have been brought to a certain maturity. Thus, oncampus is actually bringing them as derivatives into the market of business solutions.

The oncampus e-learning material (“modules”) belongs to the category of high voluminous content. It is independent from any learning platform. Its features provide high quality and flexibility regarding customising and usage. The access to oncampus learning environment and embedded modules is provided on basis of widely used technologies.

The production and delivery of oncampus online study programmes takes place within a harmonised technical framework. The interfaces to the university administrations could be, however, more integrative and broadened.

The administration of oncampus features tailor-made technical tools. For example oncampus-portal matches with the requirements of a professional distance study course management, SAKAI learning platform provides a very high scalability and the oncampus e-learning material is flexible for customisation purposes and usage.



Illus. 1: oncampus technical framework (oncampus 2006, Jun.)

Courses

oncampus offers online study programmes in Industrial Engineering, Computer Science, Transregional Management and Health Management. All subjects are of the same strategic importance for LUAS and its consortiums, because the aim is to attract new target groups. The programmes were therefore implemented after market analysis and after analysis of their applicability for online education. All subjects are very appropriate for online studies, due to the possibilities regarding didactical design. Management topics are also very adequate as media competence/virtual collaboration skills are quite relevant for expected jobs.

Because the online mentoring and presence phases that are binding part of the programmes, oncampus courses regularly start twice a year (summer and winter term).

As opposed to regular distance learning online collaboration is one unique selling proposition for online distance study programmes. Thus, both synchronous and asynchronous communication between students *and* teachers is a fundamental part of oncampus methodology.

Management, strategy and attitudes

The support of LUAS leadership in terms of quick decisions, risk affection, reliability, flexibility and mutual trust have been a key factor for the success of oncampus activities. One fundamental step was the establishment of oncampus GmbH, subsidiary company of LUAS. That outsourcing has lead to a sustainable implementation of e-learning activities due to independency from faculties.

oncampus programmes depend substantially on the close cooperation with authors and mentors. The involvement of adequate professors or teachers is however mainly self-motivated. This situation makes it difficult to incorporate actors. Besides, it is worth

mentioning that oncampus e-learning methodology hasn't merged into the face-to-face university business as much as possible.

The oncampus strategy is to strengthen and broaden core competency: the development and provision of online distance study programmes. Every process is focussed on this objective. Certainly, quality is estimated as an important success factor. Hence, oncampus study programmes are accredited. Furthermore, oncampus department of LUAS itself is preparing for an official quality certification. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the administrative routines is of high relevance for the professional operation of online distance study programmes. As already mentioned above, oncampus developed a tailor-made database named oncampus-portal for this purposes. Another complex administrative task is the management of third party funding. As oncampus has long-year experience in project management and the projects are large-sized, related administrative processes have an efficient structure.

The workload of oncampus teachers and mentors is predictable and manageable, because the student groups are about the same size and the courses start only twice a year. One of the most important factors for the success of oncampus is the collaboration with partners. Only networks lead to manageable development and implementation of online programmes.

Furthermore, credibility has been of very high relevance for the success of oncampus. It has mainly been caused by sustainability; the programmes are being developed on basis on funding, but their operation is financed by the universities of the network.

The handling of the large number of online courses and students is also a big challenge. It is being managed by tailor-made administration tools and the legwork of the university administration departments.

Economy

Even though a large part of oncampus activities (development and production of course material) will always be supported by funding, all processes are continuously being reviewed in terms of cost-effectiveness. oncampus activities could only be implemented on that condition by the networking principle, the separation of learning material from teaching/multiple use of material and its platform strategy for all processes (development, production, programme operation, marketing, project management), where its core is located at LUAS. All in all the expansion of university programmes by oncampus online study programmes was approximately 30 % cheaper than expenditures in buildings would have been required.

Students pay a fee for the access to oncampus online courses. As oncampus reviews programmes and methodology regularly in view of quality and demand, the number of students is in some degree predictable and stable.

Flexibility is a main factor for competitiveness, because oncampus acts as e-learning full service provider. Besides, funding determines the character of activities. Hence, oncampus applies a strategy of flexible employment. The latter is very important for efficiency within the production process.

Conclusion

The success of oncampus mainly derives from structural factors. On the one hand, e-learning was used as methodology to attract new target groups for higher education. For this purpose its online programmes were integrated as regular university programmes. On the other hand the collaboration in networks is one of the lifelines of oncampus, because it provides manageable effort for all activities incurred. In this context, win-win-situations for all partners ensure sustainability, based on sophisticated business models. One additional important factor was the establishment of oncampus GmbH, a subsidiary company of LUAS. This provides continuous legitimation of e-learning activities, independent from the authority of faculties. Last but not least the success of oncampus has strongly been driven on by some self-motivated individuals and the activities have reached high political reputation.

Sources

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