Humboldt Plus

Teaching in the Context of Research, Transdisciplinarity and Interculturality

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Jacobs University Bremen is an international university. Students come from 122 countries, three quarters of the 1,200 students are from outside Germany. Undergraduate students live in residential colleges on campus. Jacobs University offers undergraduate and graduate programs in Engineering and Sciences as well as in Humanities and Social Sciences. The language of instruction is English. The comfortable student-faculty ratio of 10:1 allows for a highly developed mentoring and student advising system and ample opportunities for students to engage in research.

Interculturality

Interdisciplinarity

Teaching: Crossing Boundaries of Traditional Disciplines
Both structure and content of the undergraduate curricula are mainly interdisciplinary and thereby cross the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Examples for this structure are programs such as:

- Integrated Social Sciences, BA (integrating political science, sociology, economics, mass communication)
- Integrated Environmental Studies, BSc (integrating geosciences, chemistry, political science, economics)

Structure
Students at Jacobs University have to complete courses outside their major and/or special transdisciplinary courses ("University Studies Courses" – USCs). USCs are transdisciplinary courses which are taught in teams of two or three professors from different disciplines. This course format is a core element of Jacobs’ teaching philosophy, demonstrating how interconnected many current topics are across different disciplines. USCs aim at stimulating academic discourse among students and professors.

Exemplifying the USC Course Format 1: The USC “Deliberative Referendums”
The course “Deliberative Referendums” is a project-based USC and shows how political theory, research methods, and civic engagement can be fruitfully combined. The course format allows students to practice and study democracy at the same time. Concretely, students organize a Deliberation Day on campus and then analyze the results. The first part of the course consists of regular classes and serves to familiarize students with the literature on deliberative democracy and deliberative polling. In the second part of the course, students organize their own deliberative referendum on campus on a topic chosen by them. The main pedagogical innovation of this USC is its connection between research, theory, and practice. Such a combination of theory and practice is vital for educating democratic citizens, and yet is rarely found in universities today.

Exemplifying the USC Course Format 2: The USC “Humans and Microbes in History”
The course “Humans and Microbes in History” brings together the expertise of a microbiologist with that of a historian to apply a transdisciplinary perspective to analyzing the history of contagion. As such, the topic is discussed from a historical-humanistic as well as from a biological-natural scientific perspective. Students are introduced to the epidemics of the ancient times, medieval Europe, the New World, and today’s globalizing societies – and to the historian’s insights from texts such as Thucydides’ “Peloponnesian War” to explain the Plague of Athens, or of Boccaccio’s “The Decameron” to learn about the Black Death. This is complemented by the microbiologist’s expertise based on more recent, scientific techniques.

Other examples for USCs:
- Mind, Brain and Body (Philosophy and Neuroscience)
- Monsters of the Sea (Literature and Marine Biology)
- The Neuroscience of Arts and Politics (Neuroscience and Political Science)
- Megacities (Political Science, History and Geosciences)
- Text and Digital Media (Mathematics, Computer Science and Literature)

Recognition
In March 2006, the Donor’s Association for the Promotion of Sciences and Humanities in Germany (“Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft”) honored Jacobs University’s exemplary teaching of key qualifications at the undergraduate level.

The Jacobs University campus community is diverse by nature. Academic life at Jacobs University benefits both directly from an international classroom culture as well as indirectly from living together on an international campus.

In this sense, Jacobs University combines the Humboldt unity of research and teaching with the integration of the teaching and learning environment.

Student Life in Residential Colleges
An important aspect of Jacobs’ community spirit is the student life in the residential colleges: students of different cultures live together in shared apartments and are active members of a multi-national college community. Each residential college is headed by two College Masters, a professor and spouse (and their families) who live with the students in the college. Outside classes, the university community encourages students to share their cultural heritage with the Jacobs community, their host families, and the local neighborhood. Members of all colleges frequently come together to celebrate cultural events, such as the Chinese New Year Festival, the African Heritage Week, or the Indian Diwali Festival.

Intercultural Dialogue
Living together on an international campus requires additional services to support intercultural communication, promoting intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, and curiosity about others.

Examples include:
- the development of a community code
- a faculty workshop on intercultural competence
- conflict resolution workshops

Recognition
The concept “learning and living on campus” has been awarded by the DAAD within the PROFIN framework. More information: http://www.jacobs-university.de/profin-on-campus

Vision
Teaching and learning at Jacobs University currently encompasses many elements of transdisciplinarity and interculturality embedded in an international campus. Our aim for the future is to integrate these elements into a coherent and comprehensive teaching and learning concept. We plan to further develop this concept with professors, students and partner institutions. The then developed concept could serve as a model adaptable for other higher education institutions.

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