MINOR
“SUSTAINABILITY HUMANITIES”
AT LEUPHANA UNIVERSITY OF LÜNEBURG

Rationale
Against the background of global change and an increasingly complex world, higher education has to address a number of new challenges. As a place where future decision-makers work and learn together, higher education should enable students to develop key competencies to deal with these challenges. Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HESD) offers a theoretical framework for implementing sustainability issues and new learning approaches in higher education.

The Leuphana Bachelor
At the Leuphana University of Lüneburg was implemented a new study model in 2007, the Leuphana Bachelor. Particular characteristics of this Bachelor programme are that all students have a joint first semester (Leuphana semester) and that from the 2nd to the 6th semester they study in Major, Minor and complementary courses. Almost all Major and Minor courses can be combined arbitrarily. One of the Minor courses offered is “Sustainability Humanities”.

Objectives and Characteristics of the Minor
The Minor “Sustainability Humanities” deals with sustainable development as a societal challenge. It has the following objectives:

- Development of scientifically-grounded action competence
- Development of key competencies which are crucial for sustainable development, such as systemic thinking, future-oriented thinking and critical thinking
- Creation of systems knowledge (knowledge about structures, functions, processes and interrelations)
- Creation of ethical knowledge (ethical orientations for action)
- Creation of action knowledge (knowledge about opportunities for action)

Concerning didactical approaches and methods, the programme focuses particularly on inter- and transdisciplinary problem and project orientation, self-directed learning, competence development and personality development.

What is particular of the Minor?
- Profound and problem-oriented discussion of the concept of sustainable development
- Promoting the active shaping of future developments
- Studying “differently” with fellow students from all disciplines
- Chance to see the bigger picture of the subject and acquire interdisciplinary competency
- Project-oriented and self-directed learning
- Additionally, soft skills are obtained, i.e. conflict solving, compromise and work out common solutions that are feasible and acceptable by a broad majority.

Structure of the Minor
The Minor course “Sustainability Humanities” consists of six modules:

- Specific approaches to sustainable development
- Dealing with complex, problematic analysis of unsustainable development
- Develop sustainability-oriented scenarios: methods of future research
- Inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration
- Shaping the future: Transdisciplinary Project I
- Shaping the future: Transdisciplinary Project II

Thus, the logic of the Minor course is to get to know a field of (uns)ustainable development, such as agriculture, tourism or urban development. For instance, to analyse complex interrelations in this field, to reflect on possible future developments and, finally, to implement a project which contributes to sustainable development in the chosen field of action.

A Concrete Example
From the summer term 2009 until the winter term 2010, about 40 students mainly from business administration, cultural studies, business psychology and economics dealt with the topic of unsustainable agricultural development in the region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Eastern Germany.

Based on a systemic analysis of the unsustainable agricultural development in this region and its impacts like soil degradation and loss of biodiversity by using the systems approach – and the development of scenarios for alternative futures for agriculture in the area of the Mecklenburg Lake District, the participating students carried out different projects to contribute to a more sustainable agricultural development. The projects were developed in group work with a transdisciplinary approach which means that the students collaborated with actors from the practice, such as NGOs, educational institutions and enterprises.

The following projects were implemented:
- More organic products in the supermarket - “Gloomy Elder”. This project focussed on the elaboration of a marketing concept for an organically produced liqueur called “Gloomy Elder”.
- Education for Sustainable Development: This project aimed at improving the sustainability awareness of students of an agricultural vocational school.
- Customer card: This project developed a concept for a customer card for regional products in cooperation with a local NGO.
- Sustainable food in kindergartens and schools: This project elaborated a concept for increasing the use of organic food in a catering enterprise which supplies kindergartens and schools.
- More bio-energy for the Mecklenburg Lake District: This project supported a mayor in promoting the production and use of biogas in a village in the Mecklenburg Lake District.
- Sustainability as a school subject: This project aimed at introducing sustainability in the curriculum of a high school in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

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