

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Typically, winter is famous for its cold breezes, its snow and its lack of warm weather in general. Nevertheless, this year's winter is rather hot, and I am not only referring to the temperatures outside. All over Austria students of different fields of study joined forces to protest against an - as they experience - unfair and inadequate system of higher education. Especially the infamous Bologna Process - mostly known for its introduction of a three cycle degree system and the establishment of the ECTS as tool to measure the workload of studies - is the target of very fiery discussions. The dissatisfaction of the students with the current circumstances of studying led them to take drastic measures. For more than a month now, the "Audimax", the biggest auditorium of the University of Vienna, has been occupied by students in order to show their disapproval. These occupations spread to other universities as well, like the University of Innsbruck and the University of Graz. At the beginning the solidarity of these actions amongst the public audience but also the academic staff was quite high. Now, after over 50 days, nerves are running thin though. Measures like the clearance of the auditorium with the help of police are being currently taken into serious consideration by the university management.

But why am I referring to these issues you probably know already from the daily newsfeed? Because WUS Austria, amongst many other organizations, has committed itself to helping implementing the Bologna regulations into the national system of higher education of our partner countries. What is little known outside the academic world is that aside EU member states nearly all European - but also some North African - countries are already implementing the Bologna guidelines into their higher education system. This is especially true for aspiring EU member states, like Croatia or Macedonia. In general, the Bologna regulations have advantages, like the high mobility of students, the easy comparability of courses and of degrees as well as the possibility of earning an academic degree in only three years (Bachelor). The drawbacks are that studies and students of substantially different areas are all treated alike, leaving little to no room for adaptation or variation. Another often pronounced criticism is that studying now means to finish within the shortest possible amount of time, rather than self-develop into a mature and educated future intellectual.

Time will tell, if the daily diminishing number of students occupying the auditoriums will succeed with their plans of reforming the higher education system. One important lesson this story tells is that we always and constantly have to review the current circumstances in which we are working and living in. In my perspective, this does not imply to abandon the Bologna Declaration as demanded by some protesters, but rather to take its best parts and adopt and soften the possible downsides. The Christmas holidays traditionally are a time of reflection and peace and thus will grant the possibility for all actors to rethink their positions and contribute to a satisfying solution.

Again, I hope you enjoy reading our newsletter and on behalf of WUS Austria I wish all of you a pleasant Christmas and a happy new year. Please note that you can always subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter at any given time.

Kind
David
david.lederbauer@wus-austria.org

regards,
Lederbauer

Thematic Article

New Links to Old Friends

The system of higher education in South-eastern European countries is mainly influenced by the academic isolation of the past years, the under developed physical infrastructure at the universities, the complicated political structure and the poor economic situation. These circumstances lead to some sort of exodus of the academic staff of these countries. In order to overcome this shortcoming, the **Brain Gain Program plus (BGP+)** aims at persons from former Yugoslavia or Austria that now live abroad to allow them to teach as guest lecturers at universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia (for more information, please visit www.braingainprogram.org). The current program runs from 2007 until 2011 and is financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation. Now, after nearly half of its duration, the participants and partner faculties of BGP+ have been asked to portray their impressions of the program.

A great experience for all

Participants as well as the staff of the inviting faculties were asked with the help of a questionnaire, what they liked and what they disliked about BGP+. The overwhelming feedback was very positive, stating that the program was a welcome addition to the normal daily work of an academic. First of all, it enables the participants to transfer and share their knowledge they acquired abroad with their fellow countrymen. Second the program yields also a high benefit for the students of the home universities. The program is one step to foster the interest of students in continuing their education at a postgraduate level at home or abroad.

All in all it was concluded by the participants of BGP+ that the program opens up the opportunity to introduce new and fresh topics and teaching methods at the universities and at the same time to give lecturers the opportunity to (re)establish vital connections inside the scientific community of their home countries. The latter is proven by the fact that cooperation between the guest lecturers and the hosting faculty became remarkably more intensive even after the study visits were over. This effect trickles down to the students as they can profit from the new topics and didactic methods the guest lecturers often introduce to them. Seen in this light this is not only a valuable new thematic input but also a good instrument to create motivation amongst the students.

Thanks for the opportunity

Although the feedback to the program was highly positive there is always room for improvement. Some suggestions wanted to see a higher involvement of student's organization or other stakeholders, such as cultural organizations in the program. Since BGP+ grants the possibility for lecturers to teach at their home university they often want to return the favor and invite people from their country to their university abroad, which unfortunately isn't possible in the current program. Other participants expressed the wish to implement an easier and faster selection process. They thought that this will help the whole program to attract and interest more people. Aside that, the option to obtain additional literature and texts within the frame of the program's budget was one request formulated in the answers to the questionnaire.

WUS Austria will take these recommendations seriously and review to what degree they possibly can be integrated into the already existing program. Like this, BGP will hopefully become an even more successful initiative to reduce the scientific Diaspora in the South-eastern European countries and to build bridges between universities and their fellow countrymen abroad. This does not solely give them the possibility to create new networks but sometimes even leads to new friendships.

Recent News & Events

17.12.2009

How to master statistics: The numbers behind the Master, PhD and Chair Programs

Graz. MSDP, DDS, LMOCP - sometimes names imply that something is more complicated than it really is. WUS Austria wants to make you a little more familiar with its labour market oriented study programs.

[read more](#)

08.12.2009

Selection Panel for Specific QA Measures held



Sarajevo. On Monday, December 7th 2009, a Selection Committee meeting for Implementation of Specific QA Measures at BH Universities was held at WUS Austria Sarajevo Office.

[read more](#)

02.12.2009

Quality Week in Prishtina



Graz/Prishtina. Members of all 17 Faculties at the University of Prishtina and experts from four partner countries participated in the "Quality Week" from Nov. 23rd - 26th.

[read more](#)

16.11.2009

Reclaiming Democracy - last two panel discussions held



Graz. For the 9th and 10th time the book "Reclaiming Democracy - Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central Europe" was presented in the frame of a panel discussion in Bucharest and Budapest. [read more](#)

Click [here](#) to unsubscribe. This is an automate message, please do not reply to this address.