

Developing intercultural competences in higher education

– The Asian Studies in Business and Economics Program –

Internationalisation and globalisation are just some of the universal, wide-ranging developments which highlight the increasing importance of intercultural competences. Therefore, it might be argued that Higher Education Institutions, too, bear the responsibility of responding adequately to the challenge of fostering intercultural competences, for example by implementing respective programs. This paper illustrates the basic patterns of an encompassing program at university level, the Asian Studies of Business and Economics (ASBE) Program at the University of Paderborn (Germany) which has been introduced in co-operation with three Asian universities (in China, Korea and Japan) and is funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The ASBE Program is located at Master level and consists of three complex, interrelated phases of studying. These phases are marked by a very broad variety of didactical and methodical arrangements which aim at the development of intercultural competences. In order to present the encompassing nature of the program, all three phases are illustrated in further detail. Based on these illustrations, a focus is set on one particular element of the three phases, a blended-learning course which combines elements of both face-to-face and distance learning, using very new, innovative ICT instruments such as weblogs and podcasting. This blended learning course is located in the first phase of the program and aims at fostering a first approach to the foreign culture, amongst others through reading, reviewing and discussing relevant literature on Asia (fiction as well as non-fiction). The methodical and didactical features of this complex blended learning environment are outlined in detail, and some of the limits and possibilities of using new ICTs for the development of intercultural competences within the ASBE program are revealed. Finally, first experiences with the whole ASBE Program are portrayed, and further possible developments such as the introduction of co-operative blended learning courses focussing on particular aspects of intercultural competence (e.g. intercultural communication) are outlined.

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