



Supporting the entrepreneurial potential of higher education

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Case Brief: Freie Universität Berlin



Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin), literally the “Free University of Berlin”, is one of the eleven German universities to be included in the German Universities Excellence Initiative. It has approximately 29,000 students and its eleven academic departments consist of more than 4,200 staff. Its main campus is located in Dahlem, Berlin.

FU Berlin has comprehensive curricular and extra-curricular entrepreneurship education (EE) offerings for its bachelor and master students. EE is focused mainly on start-up creation and idea development. Entrepreneurship modules have been integrated by the faculties of Physics, Management and Marketing, Informatics, Economics, Biology, Chemistry and Pharmacy, and Life Sciences. In 2001, the Entrepreneurship Campus was set-up as a virtual platform for students and entrepreneurs to share ideas and resources. The Campus itself is a virtual space, but is also used to collaborate on extra-curricular EE projects and initiatives, such as an event series “Laboratory for Entrepreneurship” and the annual “Entrepreneurship Summit”. Entrepreneurs can also participate in seminars and competitions, such as the “Funpreneur Competition”, the “Business Plan Challenge” and the “Research to Market Challenge”. FU Berlin also has its own spin-off service, “Profund”, which offers start-up counselling, technical and financial support, access to mentors and coaches, and free of cost start-up space on the campus in one of the three “Gründerhäuser” (founding houses).

The teaching methodology at FU Berlin employs a variety of approaches, i.e. “self-directed learning”, “network-based learning” and “attendance phases”. For students interested in self-directed learning, the Entrepreneurship Campus offers courses that can be started individually at any time. Courses are made available to students by e-mail in weekly intervals and the tasks are solved in a password-protected online environment. Networked learning is implemented with the help of contests, such as the “Entrepreneurship Challenge”, i.e. a business idea challenge consisting of three phases. In the first phase, students work together with a “sparring partner” to develop an idea. Coaching is offered on the theme of business idea development. In the second phase of “entrepreneurial marketing”, the formulated ideas are made open to online voting on the entrepreneurship website (www.entrepreneurship.de). The ten ideas with the most votes are presented to a jury that selects its favourites. The participants in the Challenge then work together to improve and deepen the techniques together in the third phase of learning, i.e. “attendance phase”. All ideas are published at the end in an “Idea Book”, which can be openly accessed by anyone. The success of this approach is apparent, since as of early 2014 the entrepreneurship website had 5,275 active members. In the “Founder’s Garage” competition of 2012, 1,442 contestants participated; 177 ideas were submitted and an estimated 320,000 Euros were raised through crowd-funding.

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