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Title

Sustainable Academic Education in Viticulture and Enology - BOKU's Scope of Studies for the Austrian Wine Industry

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Poster Session

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Abstract

This article will feature the Institute of Viticulture and Pomology (Wein- und Obstbau) at BOKU's Department of Crop Sciences as an example for this academic educational system which is embedded in a comprehensive and diverse education landscape and offers a scope of studies targeting classical academic training as well as continuing education for professionals.

Research based knowledge transfer and professional education for the Austrian viticulture, enology and wine business sectors are rooted in the 19th century and have been tied in with the needs of the industry ever since. With its reputation of being "internationally synonymous with the term sustainability" the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna (Universität für Bodenkultur Wien, BOKU) offers a wide range of studies at all graduation levels: from basic scientific teaching to training grounds for high-caliber researchers and industry leaders.

In Austria, the production of wine and fruit has always been a cultural asset with high esteem, as much as an economic sector with considerable revenue creation, so stakeholders are many and demanding, which cares for an environment that encourages constant improvement.

Sustainable academic education translates for the university's teaching and training as the guiding principle for all programs' structure and contents: it focusses on the development of competencies (as described below) that are suited to lay the foundation for a successful lifelong career.

Bachelor Level

Basic academic training for the field of viticulture and enology is incorporated into a cross-disciplinary program »Bachelor Agrarwissenschaften« (Agricultural Sciences) which provides scientific and practical qualification for related professional fields. The academic training focusses not only on the acquisition of knowledge but equally on competencies in analytical thinking, goal-focused and application-oriented working and the development of critical awareness towards environment and resources.

At an advanced stage, this program allows and encourages the definition of individual focus fields for professional and scientific specialization, among these: viticulture and enology. At a weight of 180 ECTS, the "Bachelor AW" runs as a full-time program spanning three years. The curriculum follows the guiding "three pillars" principle of all BOKU study programs: an equal share of contents from technology and engineering, natural sciences, economic/social sciences and law. A practical internship phase of 8 weeks and a minimum of lectures/seminars held in foreign language (10 ECTS) are mandatory.

Entry requirements are a general university entrance qualification, so most freshmen students will come straight from secondary education institutions. It is a particularity of the Austrian secondary education system that it offers a multitude of vocational high schools which combine general university entrance qualification with basic professional qualification.

Master Level

The consecutive »Internationales Masterprogramm Weinbau, Önologie und Weinwirtschaft (WÖW)« (International Master Program Viticulture, Enology and Wine Business) targets scientific training for industrial occupation at management/executive level and scientific careers. The professional qualifications provided in this 4-semester program, offered in cooperation with HS Geisenheim University (DE), have been developed to meet the OIV's definitions of occupations in all 4 phases of wine production and marketing.

Continuing Education

Graduates from professional or academic training in general hardly have options to expand their competencies in parallel to professional life, at a major scale – especially when tied into entrepreneurial responsibility. Committing to a full-time master program requires sabbatical models that are not common in Austria. Thus, providing continuing education opportunities non-disruptive for the individual occupational context is highly sustainable for the individual career as well as the corporate environment. Against this background, the university has created adequate openings for science-based further professional development in form of the university program »Universitätslehrgang Diplom-Önologie«. Just like the "Master WÖW", this program has been developed to provide qualifications that, alternative to deepening existing expertise, entitle graduates to turn towards qualified occupations in all 4 phases of wine production and marketing.

Essential conceptual features for the operational feasibility of the program are weekend block schedules for classroom sessions and joint field activities, and "asynchronous" proportions of teaching and learning. The latter is facilitated by the concept of blended learning which allows for complementing classroom sessions by e-learning units. The tools at hand, however, provide for a far more comprehensive support of all study-related concerns: BOKU runs a virtual teaching and learning environment »BOKU learn« based on the MOODLE architecture, an open-source integrated online learning platform.

With the goal to provide a single port of call for all media-based aspects of the program, this environment is set up to be used by lecturers, students and the program management as the central interface for teaching and learning, as a collaborative workspace and communication channel.

Each teaching unit and joint activity can be implemented as a separate online course including operational administration and messaging. In combination with supporting hardware (individual student tablet computers), this scenario has proven extremely helpful and has been adopted by the students proactively very well, although none of them may be labeled as members of the generation of "digital natives".

Against initial preassumption, though, experience indicates that participants do appreciate the immediate qualities of physical presence and direct interaction, and will demand it if perceived as insufficient. One of the reasons supposedly is that the topic-focused interaction in class is passionate and helps sprout personal networks that develop sustainably.

Bottom Line

In academic teaching, sustainability turns out as not only topical content for lectures and seminars. For BOKU, the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, sustainability rather appears as a constant companion, an

omnipresent meta issue, for all facets of developing teaching and its environment.

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