

1) Danube University Krems

As a competence center for postgraduate education in Central Europe, Danube University Krems is dedicated to setting the benchmark in advanced further education on the European continent.

Danube University Krems meets the social challenges of lifelong learning; a process which it considers a flexible development of interdisciplinary linkage between teaching and research, science and practical experience. All programs of study are determined according to highest international quality standards and lead to academic degrees.

Due to its unique positioning and experience in the education sector, the University has made 'academic advanced further education' the subject of its own research. In addition, Danube University Krems engages itself in discussions with domestic as well as international academic and business experts concerning the shaping of the future of education.

2) “Adult Students” and Continuing Education

“Adult Students” engaged in a lifelong learning process can be distinguished from “traditional” students on the basis of four arguments:

1. Adult students often hold a full-time profession and therefore have to take part in courses which are conducted mainly on weekends.
2. Most of them have a long working experience.
3. They are characterized by an enormous heterogeneity as concerns previous education in form of a university degree or university maturity.
4. The (prime) education process of adult students is not directly followed by academic education but is often interrupted and re-started. In general, it is not as linear as that of traditional students.

Adult students demonstrate outstanding learning activities and can thus be seen as ideal “personification” of the concept of lifelong learning. They have a uniform understanding of continuing education, identifying all learning periods after the prime education as kind of “lifelong learning”.

Student surveys in higher education that are sited at the border between tertiary and quaternary sector would be highly requested, but haven't been very successful yet. Even though nowadays lifelong learning is exceptionally important for political and social life within the knowledge society, only few scientists act on the empirical research of views and attitudes of the main “actors”, i.e. the adult students.

The reasons for this can be found in the self-concept of the universities which regard themselves as supply-orientated institution. In contrast, further education is rather demand-orientated. In Anglo-Saxon countries, however, the strategy on higher education has been more demand-orientated for the last decades which can be seen as a constructive approach in order to meet the diversity of students - as to their age, prior education, working experience, present life situation and learning motivation.

The need of classifying education and learning practices of adult students led to the now presented research project at the Danube University Krems.

The survey, comprising several years of research at the postgraduate Danube University, aims at gaining a differentiated picture of the new type "adult student". As the reality of this institutional form of education hasn't been subject to extensive studies yet, the analyses are intended to enable insights to life and working situations on the one hand and individual learning experiences on the other hand, f.ex.: How do university courses fit in everyday (business and private) life? How do students cope with the results of their learning efforts? Additionally, the project generates qualitative hints for the creation of educational programs (f.ex. improvement of entrance conditions) and the development of innovative, future-orientated forms of postgraduate education.

Empirical results about expectations, motivation structures and doubts about the lifelong learning process should also contribute to the theoretical fundamentals of higher education. They will have consequences on a targeted selection of contents, teaching methods as well as the design of timing and infrastructural conditions and furthermore serve as instruments for institutional planning and the development of educational programs.

3) The survey: Idea and Realisation

The survey is based on a standardised, postal interview by means of a questionnaire. The advantages of this quantitative instrument which is expected to turn out the characteristics of "the" adult student are obvious: First, a written package of questions allows the inclusion of more items and second, the aggregation of outputs gained from it stands for more representativity. Third, there is also the possibility of statistical evaluation which enables the scientist to work out interesting connections (f.ex. correlation between previous education and motives for lifelong learning) as a basis of a well-founded interpretation. There may be weaknesses and drawbacks of this instrumental design but they can be reduced to a minimum by a multi-perspective and multi-dimensional modus operandi (additional qualitative techniques and triangulation).

The question items were tested and improved throughout several expert meetings. In order to make the results comparable to those related to other fields of education, some of the questions were taken from existing studies in German-speaking countries. As the questionnaire aims at a complex and versatile description of the

interesting topics, it comprises a wide range of topics. Apart from questions covering soziodemographical aspects (age, profession, sex...), 29 issues were taken into consideration.

The target group is formed by students of the Danube University who were registered for a university program at the time of questioning (summer semester 2003). Altogether, questionnaires were sent to 1771 students. With 459 returned questionnaires, this results in a return ratio of 26%.

The research project was finished in December 2004, first results were released in January 2005. Additional results will be published by the end of 2005.

Question items

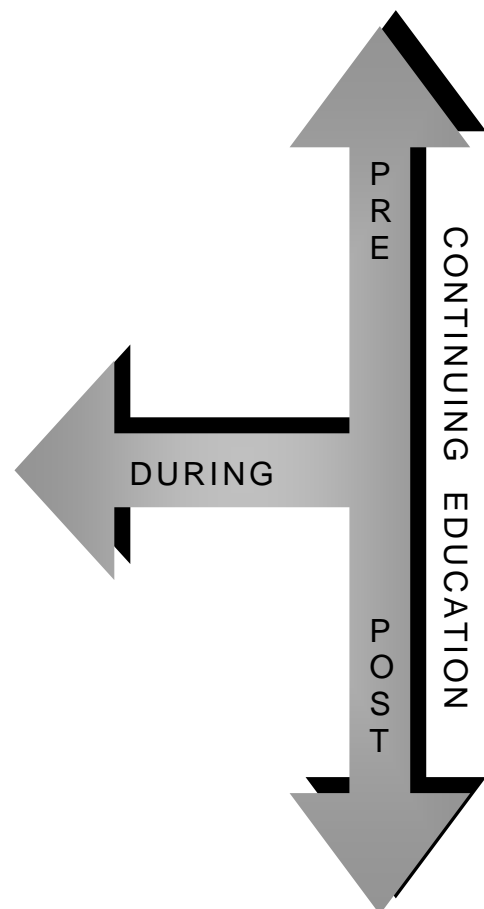
1. How important were the following reasons when you first thought of joining the program at the Danube University Krems?
2. Please let us know
 - if you discussed your intention with the following persons
 - how they reacted
3. Who played the initial role in the learning process?
4. Which obstacles were you confronted with right at the beginning of your lifelong learning activity?
5. How would you assess your prior learning experiences?
6. How important are the following subjects in your everyday life?
7. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements on your career positions?
8. Which of the following practices represents your own learning behaviour?
9. How do you consider your own learning activities compared to those of your working colleagues?
10. Until now, which continuing education programs have you run through?
11. Which forms of lifelong learning do you actually make use of?
12. Which relation is given between your present studies and your profession?
13. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements on your educational process?
14. How many days a month are spent on lifelong learning?
15. Which subjects in your life suffer from your learning activities?
16. How many hours on a normal working day/Saturday/Sunday are devoted to your learning activities?
17. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements on the approaching end of the program?
18. Which of the following statements applies for your professional environment?
19. Which persons support you in your learning activities?
20. If you gaze at your current life situation, how satisfied do you think you are with the following fields?
21. Which aspects relating to your learning activities do you struggle with?
22. In how far do you agree/disagree with the following statements on learning and studying?
23. Which advantages and rewards have derived from your learning activities thus far?
24. How do you reflect on the course from your present point of view?
 - Would you join in the course again?
 - Will you recommend the course to other people?
25. Will you take part in a continuing education program in future?
26. Which discipline should be covered by a further program?
27. Thinking of the time structure, what kind of further education will you choose in future?
28. Does the possibility of a formal degree (diploma, certificate) influence your decision?
29. When will you presumably take part in your next program?

Pre-educational period

- a. Former experience
 - Learning experience
 - Working experience
- b. Expectations towards continuing education
 - Attitude to lifelong learning
 - Career position
 - Social pressure
 - Motivation process
- c. Decision-Building
 - Obstacles against lifelong learning
 - Role of the professional environment
 - Role of the private environment

Educational period

- a. Curricular dimension
 - Learning contents
 - Referees
 - Learning-Teaching-Arrangements (peer group...)
- b. Time dimension
 - Time capacities and re-structure
 - Time rhythm within the professional environment
 - Time rhythm within the private environment
- c. Social dimension
 - Support/interference within the professional environment
 - Support/interference within the professional environment
 - Support/interference within the learning environment
- d. Emotional-psychical dimension
 - Doubts, worries concerning learning activities
 - Enrichment for personality



Post-Educational period

- a. Hard facts
 - General education
 - Specific education
 - Professional transfer
 - Professional feedback (income, career,...)
- b. Soft skills
 - Interdisciplinary skills
 - Personality development
 - Social contacts
- c. Organisational commitment
- d. Influence on future learning activities
 - Curricular dimension
 - Time dimension
 - Formal dimension (degree, diploma)