Ikarus: Teaching and Learning in Virtual Learning Environments

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About the course

The Internet has evolved into an indispensable resource for teaching and learning. It offers quick and easy access to local and worldwide information and improves the potential of academic communication. Taking advantage of the Internet, however, can be quite complicated for beginners. Even if you have overcome the technical barriers, you still have to learn how to find and process information. Regular use and practice is very important if you want to use this medium efficiently.

Since learning via the Internet is becoming popular too, there is an increasing need for investigating the potentials and questions related with this new setting. The term "Virtual learning environment" (VLE) refers to an electronic environment dedicated to instructors and learners. The main purpose is to provide a platform which enables and facilitates remote learning via a computer network. The process can happen partially or totally within the network. Wilson describes a Learning Environment as a "place" or "space" at a minimum containing the learner and "a 'setting' or 'space' in which the learner acts by using tools and devices, collecting and interpreting information, interacting perhaps with others etc." (Wilson, B. G. (1996). What is a constructivist learning environment? In: B. G. Wilson (ed),. Constructivist Learning Environments. Case Studies in Instructional Design. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational).

Whereas different technical solutions are possible (e.g. video-Transmission/conferencing via satellite etc.) we want to concentrate this course on learning environments based on the Internet. As the demand for online courses rises, more products are produced on the public and commercial sector. However, there are a lot of differences between these products in regard to the concept, the tools offered for teaching and leaning, and for the administration. The implementation of such environments raise a lot of questions, related with

- **technological issues** such as functionality, multi-media integration, human-computer interaction etc.
- **organisational issues** such as arrangements for interdisciplinary/international collaboration, information and communication concept,
- **pedagogical issues** such as course design, increasing interaction/motivation
- **economical issues** such as how to calculate costs and benefits, marketing of courses
- **legal issues** such as respecting copyright law, protection of privacy, international issues.

Objectives

This course is dedicated to students and professionals throughout the world, who are interested in working and discussing the subject of teaching and studying in virtual learning environments.

During the course, you can acquire the necessary knowledge and the abilities you need to work with Internet-based virtual learning environments.

Concerning the contents, you can become able

- to find, analyse and to evaluate existing environments.
- to find and work with relevant literature from various disciplines.

- to explore and discuss potentials and problems connected to VLEs.
- to view the topic from different perspectives (legal, pedagogical, technical and economical).
- to discuss relevant issues with other students and experts in disciplinary and interdisciplinary groups.

Furthermore you will acquire the ability

- to work in computer-supported collaborative learning environments.
- to work "virtually" in teams.
- to collaborate in an international setting.

The main focus is not on technical details but on the potential of the Internet-based learning environments in academic life. Therefore, we will focus on the services and information systems of the World Wide Web (WWW). Publishing documents on the WWW requires certain abilities and knowledge which will also be practiced (but not taught!) during the course.

Course concept

This course will take place solely "online" in an international setting. You will not have to appear in person at any time. This course requires active participation, which consists primarily of collaborative work in groups. Of course, individual work will also be necessary at times. Nevertheless, communication will play a major role in this working environment. You will discuss important issues related with the seminar topic in disciplinary oriented and interdisciplinary groups.

To follow the discussions and do the collaborative work we expect a daily participation of about a half an hour.

Moreover, we are going to gradually build in new information and communication technology to make this course all the more educational and exciting at the same time. You will only receive material at the beginning of the course. With the support of mentors and moderators of the online team you will collect additional material using the WWW as a source of information. In addition, throughout the course of the seminar, you will have to do group work on several topics.

During registration you will have to decide whether to take the course as an active participant or as a "Guest". As a "Guest" you will have no obligations like the requested course activities participants will have to do. Furthermore you will have to choose the discipline you want to be attached to during course work. This will effect the work to be done, since some assignments will have to be chosen according to the disciplinary field you want to concentrate on this course. Each field is represented by a competent institution taking part in the organisation and supporting various modules of the course. This applies to

- **Law:** Institute for Law and Computer Sciences(IFRI), Saarland University, Germany;
- **Technology:** Department of Computer and Systems Sciences (DSV), Stockholm University (SU) and Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Sweden;
- **Pedagogy:** Florida Education Centre , Valencia, Spain

There is furthermore another institution participating in the course:

- **Evaluation:** Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas, Institute of Applied and Computational Mathematics, Greece.

Course organization and assignments

· The registration phase is from 1th January 2003 to the 15th February 2003. A registration at a later date is not possible.

· After completion of the registration form, a reply-message will be sent automatically, confirming the submission and requesting the submission of a case study. This study should reply to several

given question on about 2 DIN a-4 pages. The deadline for the submission is the 22th of February 2003.

- Successful candidates will be notified (as well as un-successful) and a login provided.

During the whole time you are grouped according to your discipline for which you applied during registration. You will stay together until the end of the course and you will be mentored by a course instructor.
During the second period of the course you will also participate in an interdisciplinary activity which will be assisted by moderators.

This seminar is divided into various phases:

- **Phase 1:**

Introduction: The introductory phase will not be evaluated. It offers the possibility to access and test your learning environment and to solve any technical problems which may occur. Participants will have to give information about themselves and their hobbies on a form which is provided. This way, the participants get to know each other and no repeated presentations are necessary.

- **Phase 2:**

Study group: Parallel to your group work there will be study groups separated by their disciplines. The purpose of this phase is to give participants the opportunity to exchange information and to discuss issues related to the work field they have chosen.
Research Phase: Following the online-literature (30-50 pages) at hand, participants are expected to familiarize themselves with relevant knowledge necessary for dealing with virtual learning environments.
This phase in the beginning shall enable you to retrieve additional relevant literature in order to fulfil the requirements for the assignment given in that phase. You will be asked to search for literature, provide an abstract and to comment on it. Discussions among students and the mentors about applying the right methods of searching and finding online documents will take place at the same time.
At the end of phase 2, there will be a test containing questions about the given literature and exercises concerning your skills according to what you have covered in this phase.
Individual work: As an individual work you are asked to write a paper on an issue you can propose on your own. The topic must be related to the discipline you are attached to during the course. You can contact your mentor via the "Learning support" in order to find an agreement on the title and procedure of your work.

- **Phase 3 (Exploration and Evaluation):**

This phase is dedicated to getting familiar with learning environments. In phase 3 and 4 you have to do group work. You will be divided into groups of 5-7 people, representing different disciplines according to their registration (law, pedagogy, system science). At the end of the phases, you are expected to hand in written results of the group work.
Group work 1: Here you will be attached to an interdisciplinary group and test several learning environments, discuss the benefits and problems.

· **Phase 4 (Conception):**
Group work 2: Finally we will end with a project work on the design of a concept for Virtual Learning Environments from a technical, pedagogical, legal and economical point of view.

· **Questionnaire:** The participants will be asked to give a written evaluation at the end of the course.

· **Quizzes:** Additionally, there will be quizzes each week about the Internet to be completed immediately. The results are taken and updated each time an assignment was fulfilled.

After the arrangement, all seminar discussions will be made anonymous and published. During and after the online seminar personal data will be aggregated statistically for evaluation purposes. Afterwards all personal data generated during the course (messages, documents etc.) will be made anonymous. After being made anonymous, the results of the online seminar will remain available to the public. The participants agree to this form of anonymous publication, even as holders of the copyright. An exception is made for reasons of reference, in which the final documents produced during individual and group work (final papers etc.) will be left in their original versions.

Schedule

Week	Date	Study group		Group work	
1	03/03 – 03/09	Presentation			
2	03/10 – 03/30	Research Phase	Individual work		
3					Quiz 1
4					Quiz 2
5	03/31 – 04/27	Evaluation		Group work 1	Quiz 3
6					Quiz 4
7					Quiz 5
8					Quiz 6
9	04/28 – 05/11	Reflection			Quiz 7
10					Quiz 8
11	05/12 – 05/30	Design		Group work 2	Quiz 9
12					Quiz 10
13					

Grading

The achievements will be graded when the assignments are fulfilled. You can view your results in the category "information". The evaluation follows the Credit-Point-System which allows a maximum of 20 points.

Evaluation		
Elements	Points	Description of evaluation
General participation	4	Frequency, collaboration, quality of content

Research Phase	3	Commented link list, quality of content
Individual work	3	Quality of content, Literature, etc.
Reflection Phase	2	Quality of content
Group work	GW 1: 3 GW 2: 3 Tot. 6	Quality of content, Collaboration
Quiz	2	Correct answers
Total	**20**	

Participants who pass the course will receive credit by the Saarland University; the points are given according to the current regulations of the JAG. At the Saarland University, the credit is accepted as the so called "7th credit" (acc.to ' 9, paragraph 1 No 3 c JAG). Students of other universities have to check with their university for credit acceptance.

Requirements for participation

· **Basic computer and Internet competence**: You should already be familiar with using your computer and should have gained some experience with the Internet (e.g. email, searching the WWW). For persons without any HTML experience: editing of HTML documents will be essential for submitting works but according to our experience there will be always someone who can help you performing it.

· **E-Mail**: It is absolutely essential to have an e-mail account! Otherwise participation will be impossible.

· **Basic English language skills**: Since (only!) English will be the communication language it is absolutely necessary to be able to use the language during all activities of the course. In case of problems about using terms or in case of "unsureness" there will be a "language support" available assisting you. But, please take note as well, that this is not a language course!

· **Time investment**: Course participation requires a lot of time and work. You are expected to participate actively and regularly for at least a half an hour daily. It is also important that you check your own mailbox several times a week for incoming messages. Since online time will be logged, participants will be automatically noticed and later on dropped out of the course in case of missing activities or in case no notification of difficulties has been submitted to the team during a one-week period. However, in case of any unexpected problems occurring, there will always be a chance to continue.

Registration

There are no fees to be paid. For participation you will have to submit the on-line forms.

Active participation: You can only register within a given time period, usually starting one month before the beginning of the course. The start and procedure of the online registration will be indicated on the course homepage.

Passive participation: If you prefer not to participate actively, you also have the possibility to register as a reviewer or guest. In that case you get full access to all activities, without being considered for any assignments or grading. You will only be asked to submit an online presentation form so that course participants can also get information on who you are..

The registration for both kinds of participation will require some patience for completing several questionnaires concerning your attitudes, knowledge and interests. The indications are necessary for our own research. The protection of data and your privacy will be guaranteed and the requested data will NOT be given to any other party.

Seminar News 06-01-2003: **The Registration Phase has started now.**
This Online Seminar will take place from 3rd March to 30th May 2003.