Universität des Saarlandes - Institut für Rechtsinformatik
Universität Innsbruck - Institut für Organisation und Lernen

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

Objectives

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

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

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 too 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 in this course. Each field is represented by a competent institution taking part in the organisation and supporting various modules of the course. This applies for

- **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:** Institute for Organisation and Learning (IOL), Innsbruck University, Austria [Educational Science]
- **Business:** Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (KIMEP), Almaty, Kazakhstan.

There is furthermore another institution participating in the course:

- **Evaluation:** Department of Organisation and Media Psychology, Saarland University, Germany.

  A course on "Evaluation of online courses" will be held in presence locally by this institution. Their activities will be based around this online seminar.

During your work you will be assisted by moderators and mentors. Moderators will accompany you during the discussion and work process. Since they are not experts of the contents your are working on, they cannot help you with guidance and information on topic related issues. Their only task is to watch the process and to intervene in case of problems occurring. However, there are mentors too, who can assist you in case of questions arising in regard to the contents. They are leading the study groups as well as they provide assistance for learning support, e.g. when you want to propose your topic for your individual work.

Communication

The "spoken" language for communication during the course will be ONLY English.
Communication between participants will only take place via electronic messages on the WWW via bulletin boards. You will also receive all messages, sent within the environment by E-Mail. In previous courses it was considered to be very useful in order to avoid permanent logins into the environment in order to find out if new information has been submitted. However, in case you don't wish to get the messages via e-mail too, you can send a mail to majordomo@jurix.jura.uni-sb.de with the following text in the body "unsubscribe os-part".
Be aware that there will be a large amount of mails arriving in your mailbox during the day! It is recommended to make use of filter options which usually are a feature of your mailing software.

Several discussion platforms will also be offered. The asynchronous conferences open up the possibility to discuss specific topics also outside of the groups.

Course organization and assignments

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 on 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:**

  Literature: 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.
  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.
  Study group I: Parallel to your group work there will be study groups separated by their disciplines. The purpose of this phase is that participants have the opportunity to exchange information and to discuss issues related to the work field they have chosen. The discussions will be open to the public and offered as a "conference" to international participation. However, besides discussions there is also some other work to do.
  A "research 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 in the same time.
  Individual work: As an individual work you are asked to write a paper on an issue you can propose by 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 for 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, business, 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.
  Study group: Besides general discussions about topic related issues of your discipline participants will also have to discuss various theses later on, to collect pro- and contra-arguments and to submit a conclusion by the end of the study group work.

  Design competition: The "Design competition" (homepage design for a famous historic person, e.g. last term: Montesquieu) and the selection of the best HTML documents by the participants will take place in week 8 to 10, and it will not be part of the course grading. You can, however, win valuable prizes which will be distributed at the end of the course.
- **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.

For students from Innsbruck and Saarland University there will be further possibilities for exchanging their opinions at local final meetings after the end of the course.
After the arrangement, all seminar discussions will be anonymous and public. 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, also as holders of the copyright. An exception is made for reasons of reference, in that the final documents produced during individual and group work (final papers etc.) will be left in their original versions.

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 18 points.

Evaluation

Elements	Points	Description of evaluation
Group work	GW 1: 3 GW 2: 4 Tot. 7	Contents, commented link list
Study group I	1	Participation (Frequency, Content)
Individual work	4	Content, link list etc.
Study group II	3	Participation in the public discussion, Participation in the Pro/Contra-Discussion, Submission of synthesis.
Online-Test	1	Correct answers
Quiz	2	Correct answers
Total	**18**	

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.

Schedule (Summer term 2000)

Schedule							
Week	Date	Phase	Activities				
1	4/4 - 4/11	1	Presentation				
2	4/11 - 4/18	2	Literature phase	Study group I	Individual work	Quiz 1	
3	4/18 - 4/25.					Quiz 2	
4	4/25 - 5/2		Test			Quiz 3	
5	5/2 - 5/9	3	Group work I	Study group II		Quiz 4	
6	5/9 - 5/16					Quiz 5	
7	5/16 - 5/23					Quiz 6	
8	5/23 - 5/30					Quiz 7	Design Competition
9	5/30 - 6/6	4	Group work II			Quiz 8	
10	6/6 - 6/13					Quiz 9	
11	6/13 - 6/20					Quiz 10	Questionnaire
12	6/20 - 6/26						

(Coulours: Blue: ungraded work, yellow: individual work, green: collaborative work)

System environment

There will be public and non-public areas. In order to access the non-public area one has to be registered in the seminar. All information that doesn't require a special login is considered public. That includes the following categories:

- **Information** (external access only): Here, interested persons can get information about the topic of the course, teaching methods, dates and registration procedures.
- **Conference**: The "conference" is going to be used to deal with specific topics related with the course title. Generally, it is separated between the various disciplines represented in the course and directed by the course instructors of the institution in charge with it over a period of 6 weeks.
- **Café**: The "café" serves as a general "meeting" place where you can exchange opinions and thoughts about any topic you like in a relaxed atmosphere. Also non-registered people who are interested can access at their leisure.

To be able to use the internal area of the course, you need to be registered and you need to have a login name, incl. a password. This keeps the on-going discussions protected from unauthorized access. There are additional categories available for undisturbed interactions and exchange of opinions among the groups apart from the café and the conference.

- **Information:** Holds current information, overviews (dates, current results etc.) and descriptions of how to go about your work and which formalities you have to observe, information about the team,

publications, statistics and some guidelines.
- **Library**: The library contains relevant literature, WWW-links and helpful tools necessary for your assignment or just for general interest. The participants may also leave their own references there.
- **Forum**: Besides the Café and other conference facilities you can find various additional possibilities for communicating there, e.g. a chat-room and Internet-based audio- and video-conferencing-tools, if you have the necessary equipment (e.g. PC-camera...). The use of this media room is optional; it is not required for this course.
- **Participant:** On this page you can also find the presentations of all participants. Furthermore, participants can retrieve information on their current standing, their works and they can use some administrative tools. Since participants will be enabled to grade their own work and the work of the other participants as well, they can find the necessary forms for submission here.
- **Support:** This feature includes forums concerning HTML-editing/Web-Design ("HTML-Lab"), language support ("Language Lab"), and Learning Support ("Learning Support") for questions related to performing the requested tasks and arrangements for the individual work.
- **Team**: Here the team accesses the tools they need for running the course.

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. A discussion forum "HTML support" will furthermore assist you in case that you don't know how to create or convert your document in HTML.
- **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 2 hours a week. 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 that no notification of difficulties has been submitted to the team during one-week time. 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 whenever you want 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 in order that course participants can also get an information who you are..

The registration for both kind 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 all requested data will NOT be given to any other party.

The official registration phase is over. If you want to join, please contact us!