



University takes innovative approach to teaching computing skills to business students

*H*ochschule Kempten focuses on providing a practical education to help students find careers in the diverse economy of Bavaria. As a prerequisite for earning a bachelor's degree in the university's Economics and Tourism program, business students are now required to pass the Microsoft® Office Specialist certification exam. This credential validates their competency in key business software applications, which in turn helps increase their employability.



Customer: Hochschule Kempten

Web site: www.fh-kempten.de

Number of faculty and staff:
90 faculty, 200 staff

Number of students: 1,500

Location: Bavaria, Germany

Industry: Higher education

Customer profile

Closely linked with business and industry in the surrounding region, Hochschule Kempten emphasizes practical application of knowledge. It is one of 16 universities of applied sciences in Bavaria.

Software and services

Microsoft IT Academy Program

Education needs

Practical application of relevant knowledge is the emphasis at Hochschule Kempten (HS Kempten), a university of applied sciences in Germany's Allgäu region. It was a concern for the university that the standard written exam required to demonstrate proficiency in business applications and to graduate from the Economics and Tourism degree program was more theoretical than practical. Although many students passed, educators wanted to provide graduates with increased opportunities for securing employment, and saw the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification as an important way to achieve that goal.

Students at HS Kempten are required to spend two semesters applying theoretical business skills learned in the classroom to hands-on employment with local businesses. These "work placement" positions range from jobs in the local tourism industry to banking, healthcare, high technology, aerospace, and the area's sophisticated packaging manufacturing companies.

As a former director of information technology at a German bank, Dr. Michael Hänle, Professor of Economics at HS Kempten, knows firsthand the importance of business computing skills in these diverse fields. Particularly for students in the Economics and Tourism degree program, ensuring mastery of key business applications is a top priority. "Employers don't know exactly how a school grade or a degree measures practical skills," says Hänle. "We needed a definitive way to measure their skills, to help them find good jobs."

Increasingly, students in other fields of study are voluntarily taking the MOS certification exam to ensure that they also have useful and relevant credentials when they graduate.

Solution

Practical skills in business computing are central to the efforts of the Economics and Tourism department to prepare students for employment. Through its membership in the Microsoft IT Academy Program, HS Kempten was able to replace the university's standard written test validating knowledge about business applications with the Microsoft Office Specialist exam.

The MOS exam enables the university to measure both theoretical and practical skills in business computing. It assesses a student's technical proficiency and expertise, including the ability to use advanced Microsoft Office features and integrate these applications with other software programs. The exam not only helps students meet expectations of future employers but is also a prerequisite for earning a bachelor's degree in Economics and Tourism.

"Students who earned a Microsoft Office Specialist certification, and who are now working in local industry, say that their technology skills really helped them to find good jobs."

—Dr. Michael Hänle
Professor of Economics and Tourism,
Hochschule Kempten

Students who obtain the MOS certification distinguish themselves from their peers in competitive job markets. "When a student passes the MOS exam, the university knows, conclusively, that the student has mastered the required skills," says Hänle. These credentials, in turn, serve as evidence to potential employers that the graduate has the skills necessary to work productively and efficiently with Microsoft Office, which Hänle notes is "the de facto standard among industry and businesses in Germany."

Benefits

Capitalizing on benefits from Microsoft IT Academy membership, HS Kempten is taking an innovative approach to teaching business computing and measuring competency in

key business productivity applications. The MOS certification exam is a practical, hands-on strategy for ensuring that graduates of the Economics and Tourism bachelor's degree program are prepared for the workplace, in line with the objectives of the university and the needs of employers.

Conclusive proof of students' skills

For prospective employers, MOS certification is evidence that students applying for jobs have validated computing skills," says Hänle. "It is a valid, decisive measure of a student's ability to use technology in the workplace. Students who earned a Microsoft Office Specialist certification, and who are now working in local industry, say that their technology skills helped them find good jobs."

High incentive for all students from various fields of study

Seeing the value in an industry certification, students in other academic degree programs at HS Kempten, including a range of engineering disciplines and even non-technical areas of study, such as social management, are electing to take the MOS certification exam even though it is not required in their fields of study.

"Students know the importance of computer skills, and they see that the MOS certification program here is a very effective way of acquiring the skills they need," says Hänle, adding that the university expects the popularity of the MOS exam to grow even more. "Other divisions have begun inquiring about our process for integrating the MOS certification exam. It's quite possible that MOS certification may become a standard requirement in other degree programs as well."

The last time the exam was administered, nearly 50 students outside the

Economics and Tourism department took the test, and about 90 percent of them passed. "Students who are now working in local industry say that their skills in Microsoft Access™ and Microsoft Excel made them eligible for better job opportunities," says Hänle.

Increased potential to boost local economy

As more students graduate from the university with practical and certified computing skills, local businesses can benefit. "Many employees make use of only a small percentage of the capabilities of business software," says Hänle. "Training for and passing the MOS exam enables a person to take advantage of the software's full capabilities, and that knowledge is what can improve the efficiency of a business. The MOS certification exam is the only truly valuable online exam that we are aware of for boosting these essential skills."