



Microsoft® IT Academy Program

case study: **University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz**

Polish University Helps Students Improve Job Prospects Through IT Training and Certification

Students need a top-quality education to land the best jobs. To help students qualify for better jobs in the information technology industry, AHE has designed a specialized course of studies based on the Microsoft IT Academy program. AHE's unique offering provides students with a range of Microsoft skills-based courses and a choice of learning paths. Along with providing valuable knowledge and training in the latest technologies, the courses enable students to achieve the globally recognized industry certifications that employers increasingly demand.



Customer: University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz

Web site:

Polish: www.ahe.lodz.pl

English: www.ahe.lodz.pl/index.php?j=eng

Number of students: 36,000

Number of faculty/staff: 865

Location: Poland

Industry: Education

Customer profile: Established in 1993, the University of Humanities and Economics (AHE) is one of Poland's largest private higher-education institutions. To provide a strong education in computer science, the university developed a specialized offering based on the Microsoft IT Academy program.

Software and services: Microsoft IT Academy Program

Education Needs

Like many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland has been buffeted by the worldwide economic downturn. One result has been a surge of interest in higher education — a strong defense against a weak economy.

At the University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz, educators are seeing particular interest in technology education and IT skills training. The IT job market has been growing steadily in Poland, outpacing some industries that have seen employment opportunities decline in recent years. Yet times have changed, even for those with IT skills.

"Two or three years ago, it didn't matter what kind of education you had," explains Tomasz Tomczyk, a senior faculty member at AHE. "As long as you had some education in IT, you had no problem getting a job. Today, students really need to get a better education, and they need to be certified to get better jobs."

Tomczyk cites companies where managers are now required to check for certifications when hiring new IT employees. It is evidence, he says, that employers today place an even higher value on industry certification than they did a few years ago.

As one of Poland's largest private universities, AHE is committed to delivering a top-quality learning experience across a range of academic areas. To provide a strong education in computer science, the university developed a specialized offering based on the Microsoft IT Academy program. AHE has participated in the program since its inception in 2000, and Tomczyk, who serves as the university's IT Academy director, sees the program as an excellent resource to address the demand for highly trained IT specialists.

"Microsoft IT Academy brings us information about the most current technologies available today and that's what the job market and student communities need and want," Tomczyk says.

Solution

Tomczyk notes that the goal of the IT Academy-based course of studies is first and foremost to give students the opportunity to get better jobs. The offering is available to traditional AHE students who want to complement their five-year

university studies with courses focused on Microsoft technologies. It is also available to older students who take post-graduate IT training courses in hopes of securing better employment.

Typically, students choose an area of specialization in their second year of studies. AHE offers three options: databases, programming, or security and servers. Over the next few years, students take courses that explore their specialty area more deeply. The courses are built on the Microsoft Official Courseware and make extensive use of the Microsoft E-Learning portfolio.

“The E-Learning portfolio is one of the IT Academy resources we use most,” Tomczyk says. “The big advantage is that students can run it whenever they have free time, on- or off-line. Plus, the administrator can monitor the progress students make with e-learning.”

The IT Academy emphasis on industry certification is another plus for AHE since employers view certifications as evidence that a job applicant has the necessary real-world technical skills. AHE’s courses are designed to put students on a path toward certifications that help transform their knowledge into a valuable career, including Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE), Microsoft Certified System Administrator (MCSA), Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), Microsoft Certified Application Developer (MCAD) and Microsoft Certified Database Administrator (MCDBA).

To make earning these credentials easier, AHE offers students discounted certification vouchers through the IT Academy program. In addition, the Lodz campus includes a Microsoft Certification Testing Center, where exams are delivered through Prometric. The center certifies about 100 students

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a year in Microsoft technologies, with a cumulative total of approximately 600 Microsoft certifications granted since AHE joined the IT Academy program. Tomczyk estimates that 600 additional AHE students have certified during that same period off-campus.

Tomczyk and three other AHE instructors have also taken advantage of the program’s Microsoft Certified Trainer (MCT) benefit, a professional development resource that trains faculty members to become technical and instructional experts in Microsoft products, technologies and solutions. The MCT tools and resources have proven to be invaluable for AHE instructors.

Benefits

Approximately 750 students are currently taking advantage of AHE’s IT Academy studies in some way, and an estimated 5,000 students have benefited from them over the past nine years. That successful history assures Tomczyk that Microsoft IT Academy has been a good choice for AHE.

“The most important part of the Microsoft IT Academy program is the value of the materials, which provide the technology knowledge that students need,” Tomczyk says. “We can make the training available to students as a part of their standard curriculum, allowing them to have

the skills required when searching for employment.”

The IT Academy–based offering, currently available at the main campus in Lodz, is served by eight faculty members. All are certified to help ensure that students receive the highest-level training possible.

Tomczyk says graduates are hired into a wide range of jobs requiring IT skills, from printer specialists to IT administrators and project directors. “The Microsoft brand is well known, and getting more certifications from Microsoft helps bring students better jobs, at home here in Poland as well as abroad,” Tomczyk says.

To further improve employment opportunities, AHE’s Career Services Office helps students secure internships with local companies. In Poland, all college students must complete two internships during the course of their studies, working at a company for a minimum of 320 hours. AHE’s Career Center also helps students with their job searches and confirms that students with certifications stand a much better chance of finding a job after graduation.

Due to the success of the program, AHE plans to expand the IT Academy course offerings to five of its branch campuses soon. In addition to the main campus in Lodz, the university has six branches in smaller cities throughout Poland.

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