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# **MEDIA COMPETENCIES FOR TUTORS – A MODULARISED COURSE USING EPORTFOLIO – ABSTRACT**

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## **Background**

Austrian Universities have a long-standing tradition in involving (student-) tutors in teaching processes. Currently, the University of Vienna employs more than 850 tutors supporting and monitoring (first year) students at the bachelor level or master students in their learning activities. However, there has been little or no formal training for them.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning started in 2004 the implementation of the university-wide eLearning strategy, with the aim to improve quality in teaching. This strategy includes the implementation of formal and informal qualification and support services for teachers, projects, and faculties. The Centre also educates and supervises a group of “eTutors” trained in *educational technology* (in our case, designing and handling blended learning scenarios with different coaching strategies), e-moderation, and advanced handling of the central Learning Management System (LMS), supporting eLearning novices among the teachers or innovative teaching projects.

The majority of the services is also open to tutors, special one-day workshops involving peer-to-peer training are provided and fit to specific needs of the faculties. As a consequence of the everyday use of eLearning and the implemented eLearning strategy at the University of Vienna, many tutorial concepts involving new media require thoroughly educated and reflective tutors with competencies acquired through training over a longer period of time.

Due to the intention to integrate undergraduates in the university teaching process an early stage and to increase the benefits of peer-group learning, student-tutors are of increasing importance to ensure teaching quality.

## **Objectives**

As part of the nationally funded project “eBologna”, in the summer of 2006 a pilot seminar was held with the aim to educate tutors in educational technology competencies, knowledge and understanding of (their own) learning processes when acting in a blended learning environment and awareness of their role as tutors. Due to the positive feedbacks to a second pilot seminar, a regular course programme for future tutors is now implemented with an interdisciplinary team of teachers and participants.

In March 2007 the first course started implementing eight modules and building on experiences. The content of the two former seminars embraces the following themes:

- Learning communities and learning theories in the present teaching situation,
- Media competencies,
- Competencies in educational technology,
- Competencies in building, cultivating and supporting online learning communities,
- Competencies in handling social software like wikis, blogs etc.,
- Gender-competencies,
- Basic knowledge and understanding of relevant legal with regard to eLearning,
- Competencies in supporting students through e-tivities,

Currently the course programme requires 6 ECTS of student workload. It represents a first step towards a modularised sub curriculum, which allows students to choose up to 30 ECTS to gain competencies, which are part of a future requirement for tutor-assignments. In the context of their

overall study experience they will be distinguished as superiorly trained in specific generic competencies highly valued on the labour market.

### **Implementing ePortfolio as a reflective layer and golden thread**

As a novelty, the current course incorporates the ePortfolio in the coursework for the tutor-community. On the level of the modules, the ePortfolio engages the students introducing the modules' themes, drawing on personal experience and facilitating the learning process via stimulation reflection and contextualisation with earlier experiences and future plans. On a meta-level the ePortfolio integrates and contextualises the different modules of the course and reflects on the obtained competencies.

The ePortfolio is conceptualised as a process portfolio with a special focus on the writing process as an epistemological process. Techniques of creative and reflective writing were introduced in a workshop at the beginning of the semester. Although the ePortfolio provides a variety of data formats like pictures, audio and video, the students of the course are primarily concerned with texts as expressing medium. We try to encourage the students to write a lot, in other words, the quantity of the text is more important than the quality. The portfolio-work is only graded with respect to completion, not with respect to content. The methodological use of the ePortfolio is based on free writing and question guided writing according to P.Ellbow (1981) and is a so called "Writing-Surveying-Writing-Cycle" which will be introduced in more detail in the presentation.

#### ***Technical Implementation Details***

The tool employed, *elgg*, put the decision what is seen by whom into the hands of the individual user. A teacher who is not involved in any of the modules is attending to the ePortfolio. Postings are respected as intimate pieces of writing and treated as confidential, only aggregated anonymous material is passed on to the module teachers as feedback.

### **Summary of first results in using ePortfolios**

First experiences show, that students use their opportunity to determine who sees their postings in a very conscious and differentiated manner. So far, they accept ePortfolio and the "unusual extra work" and are very engaged. From the point of view of the overall course, the aggregated anonymous feedback by the students provides an ongoing formative evaluation and the visible reflection of the achieved competencies can be easily compared to the former defined learning outcomes.

Based the individual ePortfolio postings, the verbal feedback, questionnaires and personal competency profiles of each participant, the evaluation tries to answer questions like "Which competencies were gained by the students?" and "How was the ePortfolio method and tool accepted?". Detailed results will be shown in the presentation.

### **Conclusions**

To conclude, the course presented provides the first interdisciplinary professional tutor training in Austria. Its successful precursors established a solid ground to build a differentiated modular programme. The introduction of ePortfolio has added a further reflective layer. All together this programme generates a space to acquire generic competencies which are not only necessary for high quality tutors but also of high value in the job market. Furthermore, the professional trained tutors leads to an increase of quality in teaching and learning at the university.

Currently this concept is being developed further towards a 30 ECTS modularised sub curriculum for undergraduate and graduate students.

**Keywords:** ePortfolio, tutor training, generic competencies, eLearning, curriculum

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