E-learning as the application-oriented part of a seminar on literary criticism

Summary

The e-learning course provides information and practical exercises on the techniques and methods of working academically within the field of German Medieval Studies. It is part of a bi-weekly seminar that takes place within the framework of the bachelor module "Introduction to older German literature and language". It was designed as six modules which were easily and flexibly integrated for teaching purposes. All functions are available in Blackboard.

The e-learning course on techniques and methods of working academically within medieval studies has the aim of strengthening three important aspects that are only dealt with briefly in face-to-face teaching: First, it acts as an activating agent in that it requires the students to work on practical exercises; second, it promotes communication and exchanging ideas in that it stipulates that the students draft short statements and comments; third, it supports the sustainability of that what was learned in that it acts as a competent scientific compendium that contains the most important regulations and working aids of the subject and is also available to the students after the course has taken place.

Course

Course type	Tutorial; as a supplement for practically any Old German seminar
Department/Institute	Institute of German and Dutch Languages and Literatures
Lecturer	Johannes Traulsen (development of the course) and further colleagues
No. of participants	No limitations; in the Old German courses there are usually 55 participants
Phase	During the academic lecture period; after this as referencing material
Duration	Mainly parallel to the course, afterwards no limitations

Tools

1. Wikis

A major element of the course are wikis which the students have to set up in various phases of the course. The task is always the same: The students have to go through material that is provided to them (on one specific topic, for example a Middle German dictionary, a reference book, a website) and then summarize their insights in a short, concise text (500 words) using an example. Thereby introductory texts are created which all of the seminar participants can use in order to inform themselves quickly.

2. Blog

The blog is used mainly as a communicative instrument. The students have to give their view using just a short sentence on a certain question without having prepared this. Thereby a longer series of statements is created that in this synopsis gives a good overview of the problem and issue posed. In addition, the students have the possibility of commenting on each other's thoughts which in turn leads to more dialogue taking place.

3. (Self-) Tests

There where the editing of material is not checked with the aid of wikis one can find (self-) tests at the end of individual modules. These are a requirement if one wants to continue working on the other parts of the course. Through these, it is ensured that the students work on all content provided. Depending on the content, the texts are of varying formats. Where knowledge learned just needs to be checked the tests are automatic. In one individual case a longer task has to be worked on and this needs to be finalized with a short text at the end. Here the texts are checked, but not graded.
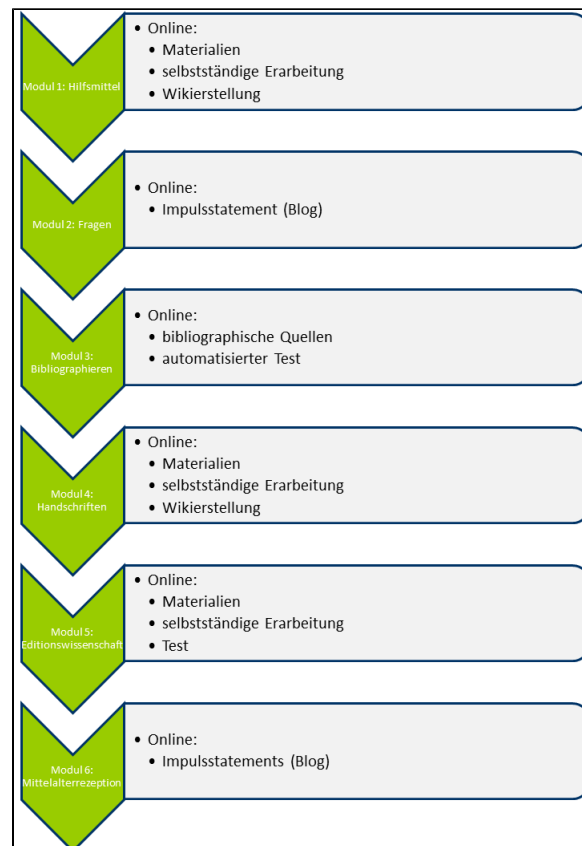
4. Material and links

Illustration 1: Overview of the course

The main component of the course is made up of material and links that, as a whole, comprises a digital introduction to the subject. The course contains:

- Descriptions and links to all important dictionaries, databases, reference works and websites
- Introductory texts and examples on the most important methods and study aids
- Extensive notes with examples in the form of bibliographic notations
- Partially multimedia material for self-study purposes

Realization

In the seminar e-learning is implemented at various levels in different phases. Thereby attention was paid to the fact that the tools being used were pretty much the same in order to keep the explanation of technical tools at a minimum. Basically the integration of e-learning and face-to-face teaching occurs according to these two different schemes:

1. Independent work on content

a) The students are provided with online material on a certain topic which they can independently go through, assess and, if need be, supplement.

b) The students develop, if necessary collaboratively, an introductory presentation (e.g. wiki or prezi) on their topic.

c) The results are checked by the lecturers and, if necessary, given back with comments for the purpose of editing these again.

d) The results are published for the seminar and are available for all as a source of information.

e) In the face-to-face sessions one can either add on to the results or a recapitulation/securing of the results is carried out.
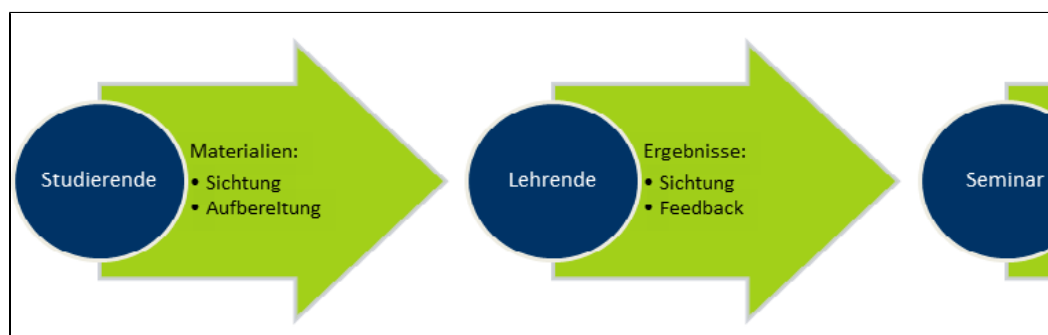

Illustration 2: Independent work on content

2. Working on/applying content in face-to-face sessions

a) In face-to-face teaching a topic is presented, developed on a theoretical basis and/or discussed.

b) The students apply the results of the seminar sessions by either applying the theoretical discussions in a practical manner or continuing to develop these.

c) The results are looked at by the lecturer and, if necessary, assessed respectively feedback is given.
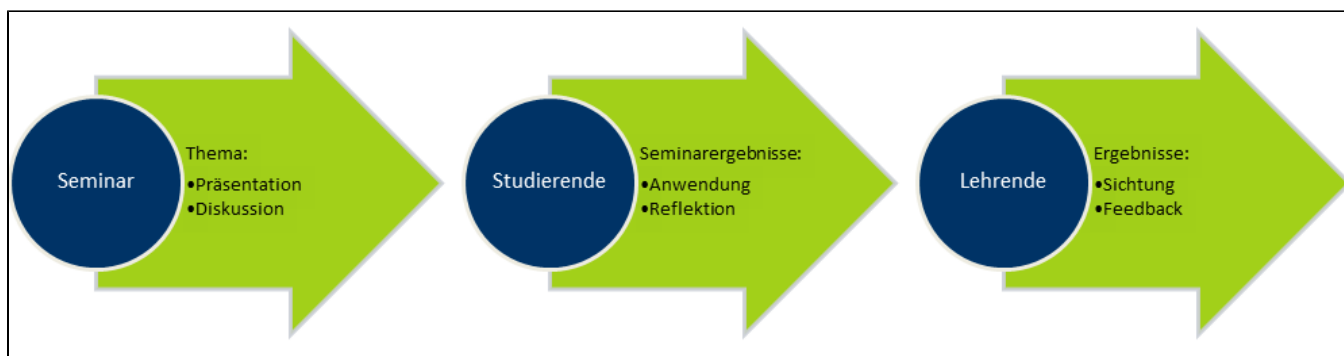
Illustration 3: Reworking/applying

Experiences made by the lecturer

- The development of a e-learning course requires a more exact examination regarding content and didactics of the seminar than the usual face-to-face sessions.
- Teaching using a e-learning course requires a more intensive dealing with technology by the lecturer and the respective acute problems that crop up.
- As a whole, the time needed to create this course (if the course is not already available) is a lot higher than with a conventional seminar.
- The users of e-learning are quickly frustrated if technical problems or content-related errors occur.
- A lot more pressure needs to be applied by the lecturer so that students complete the tasks assigned.
- E-learning facilitates reaching and activating a lot more students, especially in larger learners' groups.
- The students are usually very satisfied with well thought-out and working e-learning content in the course.
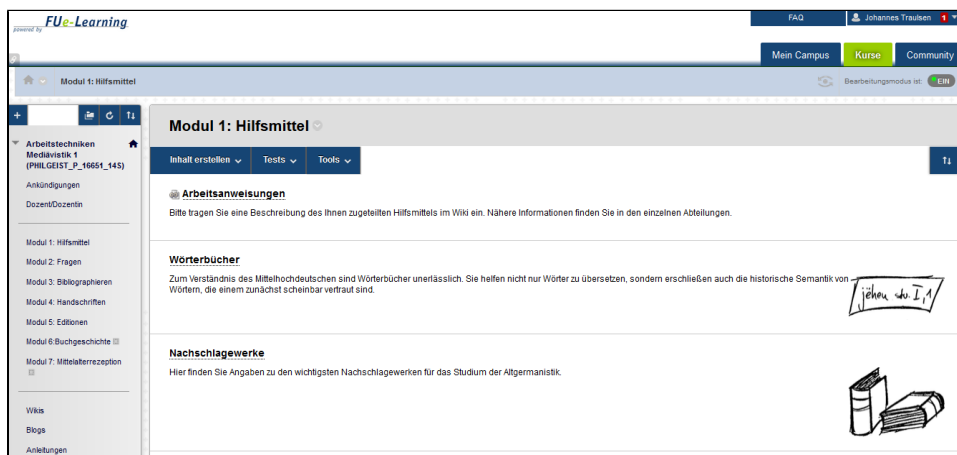

Illustration 4: Module 1

Further information

- Self-learning module for the FU wiki
- FAQs for the FU wiki

Support offered by CeDiS

- Consulting services for the implementation of digital solutions in teaching: The Center for Digital Systems (CeDiS) has extensive experience of many years when it comes to the implementation of digital media and systems within the fields of teaching, learning and research. We offer a wide variety of consulting services on the implementation of these tools and systems within the entire academic scope and especially at Freie Universität Berlin.
- Training courses and workshops: For lecturers at Freie Universität Berlin (professors, employees, tutors) as well as lecturers of other universities CeDiS offers training courses and workshops on the topic of teaching and learning with digital media. These course enable participants to implement online elements within their own sphere of teaching.
- The Executive Board of the Freie Universität supports e-learning initiatives: With the e-learning funding program financial resources are provided to lecturers that enrich and improve their courses quality-wise by implementing technological and media-related support. All of the academic staff teaching, the lecturers or even the institutions of the Freie Universität - without the Charité-Universitätsmedizin - can be supported within this program.