Virtual University in the Baltic Sea Region

International Digital Student Conferences

Preface

The Virtual University in the Baltic Sea Region is an international, cross-institutional, and interdisciplinary project that aims to establish a new virtual learning environment at the University of Greifswald and promote collaboration between the universities in the Baltic Sea region.

The project Virtual University in the Baltic Sea Region is part of the International Virtual Academic Cooperation (IVAC), which is funded by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). Based at the Chair of Nordic History at the University of Greifswald, it involves partners from Stockholm University, Tampere University and St. Petersburg State University.[1] Szczecin University is the newest collaborator.

Part of the project is the student conference on post-pandemic studying. Two of them took place in 2021 and 2022 based at the University of Greifswald. The conferences were organized by students for students. They aimed to summarize the unique experience of studying during the Covid-19-pandemic from the student perspective. During the conferences the students took notes in a *FigJam*-file*,* which are visible in detail on the following pages.

The result of both student conferences is a collection of suggestions and hints from the student perspective that can be used to improve post-pandemic digital education and, possibly, to be prepared for future challenges that will demand the return to remote study.

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[1] The cooperation of the University Greifswald with St. Petersburg University is suspended until further notice.

II. Student Conference
10.05.2022

1 — Lectures/courses

experience: presentations work better in online seminars

Szczecin
- small seminars good for discussing
- presentations easier only for students
-

hybrid lectures (and some big seminars)

Stockholm
- Pre recorded lectures (Specially prepared with powerpoint and video, 10-20 Minutes, small sections with one theme)
- seminars in small groups

some seminars: first weeks on-campus to get to know each other → makes online seminars afterwards easier

stockholm
- good technical equipement
- few technical difficulties

Pre-recorded lectures ⭐⭐

Szczecin
- technical problems with electricity
- no problmes with equipement fro students and teachers

not all teachers are able to adapt their programme to online teaching

technical abilities of lecturers

technological assisstance not used (e.g. E-tutors)

Stockholm
- technical difficulties with the prerecorded lectures

group projects: technical base has to be there, group work on distance sometimes problematic

Szczecin
- long pre recorded lectures interesting but tiring

small seminars were good for discussing online easier to talk in certain themes, harder with other topics

No sufficient private technology at home

Universities dealt with that differently

personal dimension is missing

online seminars most efficient if students already know each other

Stockholm
- long language classes, tiring

short lectures are more effective

group projects: always awkward 👎

some lecturers don´t respect breaks and deadlines during online university 👎

Compensation papers for missed seminariums diificult with pandemic long illness

2 — Examination form

Handing in exams geographically unrestrained

Stockholm
- Essay exams
- written exams on the campus → changed to written exams/essays soon

Sweden: Handing in all exams online/ Special examinations platforms

Germany: Handing in examinations online/ via e-mail

Szczecin
- digitalized libraries made it easy to write essays
- libraries not that much used for studying

Written exams were less stressful (without cheating ;)) szczecin

Stockholm
- home exams went well
- read course material, essay question with references
- easy

Szczecin
- oral examinations were easy
- no cehating possible
- less stressful

Greifswald
- techers: only check of student card was difficult (camera and lighting)
- essays were easier
- exams from home was probably easier for students (comfortable surroundings)

Switching on-campus written exams with take-home essays as pandemic conform alternative

Some alternative examination forms, different for every student

Stockholm
- theses easy to write from home
- mental aspects of being at home was hard

Stockholm
- literatur for thesis hard to get (books in library, not digitalized)

Germany: print-out of essays etc.

alternative online exams don´t align with data security guidelines or laws

Cheating in exams
- technical difficulties (front cameras as checking) szczein

No sufficient private technology

Universities dealt with that differently

Greifswald teacher perspective:
- oral presentation easier for students in digital. Why?
→ szczecin: stressful, 2h exam, not sure who would be next timewise, lots of waiting = stressfull

greifswald
- specific time slots for each participant of the exam
- more stressful for [tea]chers than students [di]gital format

Szczecin
- Written exams at the university
- many inly tests
- impossible to make sure nobidy is cheating (front camera, microphone - very noisy)

Stockholm University

UNIWERSYTET SZCZECIŃSKI

II. Student Conference
10.05.2022

Caption
- That was horrible or didn't run at all. Never again.
- This was interesting, but could be improved.
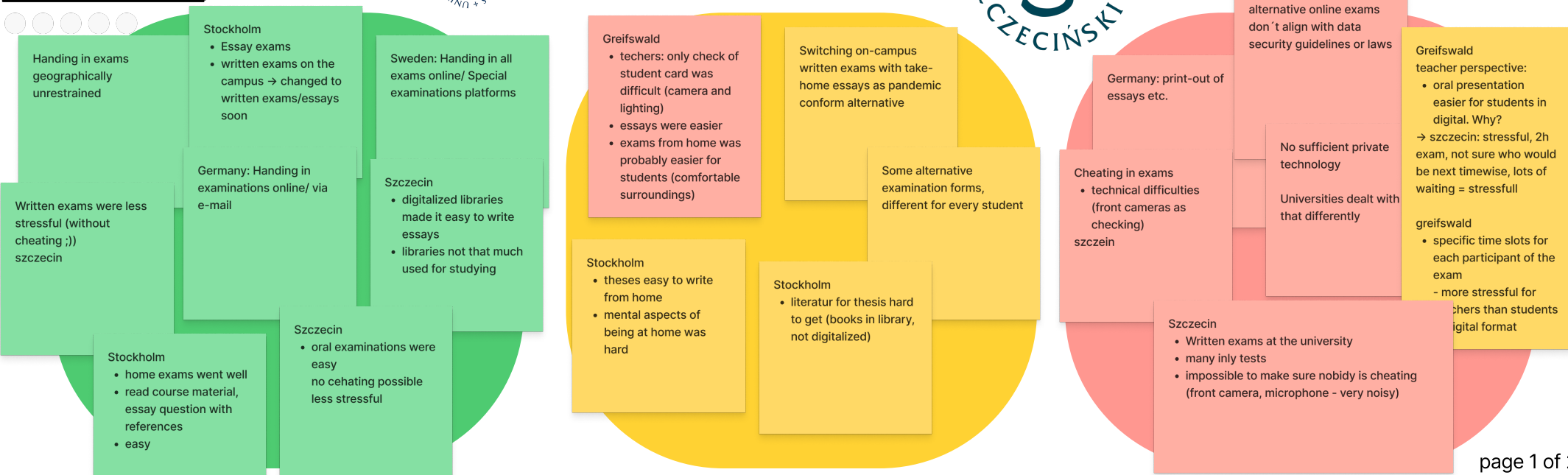- I would also like to see that in the future.

3 — Outside the lecture hall (sports, etc.)

social apps as alternative for distance socialising

online "speed dating" to get to know new people

Szcecin
- student conference with presentations
- easier only
- only teaching is time saving

some organisations managed very regular and popular online meetings/hang-outs

Stockholm: more members in student councils etc., need for social interaction and wish to engage

Szczecin
- club organised lectures once a month, meetings with many people
- lecturers were all over the country, big bonus in digital mode

Greifswald
- language classes: sharing materail was good, benefit of digital teaching
- on screen it is easier to follow the foreign langugae due to technical appliances
- omly more effective (German classes)

Stockholm
- social club organised a few social events
- 30 people joined, well appreciated especially for new students

Greifswald
- sport classes were digital classes, good for structure
  - not the same

good and bad online sports courses

socialising events from students clubs, councils and unions are not the same online

open air meetings as alternative to online or cancelled courses

life in student accomodations difficult, closed common areas etc.

for many sports no covid-conform alternative cancellation or required covid test

pub crawls are not covid conform

Szczecin
- sport classes only were difficult
- record workput and send to profesor

membership loss and loss of participants in organisations, clubs, courses etc.

Greifswald
- no contacts to other students

Stockholm
- problems with language classes

ESN very restricted, international student life not possible as before

Tampere University

UNIVERSITÄT GREIFSWALD
Wissen lockt. Seit 1456

4 — Student politics

Stockholm Student council
- small faculties, no problems in communication with the teachers

Stockholm student council
- supported students who need help with digital studying

social organisation of the council
- plan events
- new stundets recruited, especially frist semesters
- organised digital socila events (quizzes etc), short periods

Different parts of student politics in Greifswald
Senat
large group of participants = long period of meeting in presence
digital meeting had more participants
discussions in digital mode suffered a lot

AStA
closed office, less participation of students
challenge in digital format
digital events were difficult to organise
pro: many digits/organising tools

Student Parliament
- digital
- less participants
- few discussions
- Lonh sessions late at night - no motivation to participate (usually big groups)

Different structures at other Universities, not well known to participants

Greifswald Student Groups (FSR)
- no events
- Few events were poorly visited - no events after some time (frustration in organization)
- no new people, fewer members at the end of the pandemic

Greifswald AStA
- debates about problems with digital teaching, classes and exams
- heated debates
- trying to help students and figure out ways to make studying possible with changing rules
- helping students with difficult questions

Szczecin
- no events
- no support in student politics
(not know to us, so nothinh bigger, maybe 8n small areas)

Guidelines/Conclusions

II. Student Conference
'post-pandemic studying'

1. Well structured and pre-recorded lectures with one topic and a duration of 20 minutes are a good alternative to on-campus lectures. Digital Seminars work well with digitaly well equiped teachers, language courses were very difficult. Hybrid lectures (rarely seminars) are a good addittion to on-campus lectures, because students can participate if they are unable to attend.

2. Technical assisstance like e-tutors are a good way to ensure a high standard of digital teaching. They should be used and offered more for digital as well as on-campus teaching sessions.

3. Online oral exams work out well and are comfortable for students, if each student gets a specific time slot for their exam. A good alternative for a written exam are essays and term papers. Handing them in solely online is the easiest way for students . On campus written exams are most difficult for students.

4. It should be ensured that all students have the technical means to participate in online teaching and learning. This includes renting options of devices, upgraded computer rooms, sufficient funding among others. It should be ensured that all students have access to quiet learning environments for online teaching or online exams on campus.

5. It should be ensured that all students can access the full services of the university libraries or alternatively get access to more online literature at all times.

6. It should be possible for all students, especially first years, to participate in social events, personal meetings and extracurricular offers. All students should have access to support from the universities if they have problems or questions.

Sidenote: hybrid lectures are a good addition, but hybrid seminars are difficult (discussing in hybrid format is difficult, not only because of technical aspects)

Digital Teaching assistance (workshops for teachers, etc) is a concept that could be easily transferred to other universities

- technical assistance stutents are a good addition to on campus teaching as well

Does funding for laptos etc exist at the university?

- Stockholm has a computer room (closed during some time of the pandemic)
- Greifswald has no funding yet, University was closed a long time)
- Szczecin: some financial help for financial problems of students, but not specifilayy for technical support

I. Student Conference 2021

1 **Examination**

open book exams with enough time to work on the assignments were fine

Oral exams as well as term papers proved to be better fitting the situation; oral exams were easily conducted in video conferences and term papers remained more or less the same, though sometimes with the lack of a physical library

regarding the examination in general, more technical support before and during the exam seems to be necessary: Getting to know the platform where a written exam is conducted on or preparing an emergency phone number for technical problems are very helpful examples

written exams were, depending on their format, often problematic: Common issues were too much workload for the limited time or the lack of an option to skip questions and come back later

2 **Teaching**

Though pre-recorded lectures were perceived as a general improvement, it is hard to keep up with varying upload dates – a fixed day and time is therefore advised

A very common issue was that the amount of work students had to do for their classes was too high,
Though this got better throughout the pandemic, it seems to be a good idea to establish ways to get feedback and evaluation very early in the semester and address this issue directly

3 **Technical points**

as physical meetings and presentations are not possible, groupwork needs some support to find software to work collaboratively

another issue is how the use of the camera in video conferences was handled: Though it is beneficial for the seminar's atmosphere, it felt offensive for students being forced to use it

one major point, which is sadly hard to address, is the internet connection of the students as well as the teacher; at least it can be recommended to use a software for video conferences that offers a low-quality mode

Conclusions
I. Student Conference 2021

1. The flexibility of teaching as well as examining was seen as a major improvement of digital studying: Examination without the need of being at the university or the easier addition of guest lectures are popular examples for that.
2. As it got easier to participate in classes at other universities, teachers should advertise favourable options in their field to the students as it is hard to find such options at the moment.
3. As not all students have fitting work spaces at their home, universities should consider offering some in unused classrooms.
4. These results/recommendations will be channeled back into the university via: Prorektorin für Studium und Lehre, Stabsstelle Integrierte Qualitätssicherung, Projekt "Digitalisierung der Hochschullehre", Geschäftsführung Historisches Institut.

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Conclusion

In comparison, it is visible that the outcomes of both conferences are similar in the general problems of pandemic studying, such as written exams and the general workload. Compared to the first conference, the second conference shows certain ways and structures that ensure a better quality of lectures and exams in general: for example, oral exams with a fixed timeslot and short pre-recorded lectures. Some problems stayed the same: the availability of workspaces for online exams for students on campus as well as the internet connection of students and teachers. As an outcome of pandemic studying, the use of e-tutors and the organization of e-tutoring training should be considered as a general program at the partner universities of the project.

The participants and the organizational team hope that the outcomes of the student conferences will be disseminated widely to the interested parties and contribute to a better quality of digital teaching and learning across borders in the post-pandemic times.