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In your opinion, how has the higher education landscape changed in Germany over the past decade and where is it heading?

In Germany the past decade has been shaped by two key challenges: to transform the higher education system according to the principles of the Bologna reform and to meet the tremendous increase in demand for higher education. The focus of the Bologna reform has been to introduce a comprehensive quality assurance system for university teaching. At the same time, employability of graduates has become a mandatory learning output for all institutions of higher education. Universities of Applied Sciences, which have always focused on employability, therefore benefited from this paradigm shift, and as a result, have been able to strengthen their position within the German higher education system.

At the same time, the percentage of students enrolled in universities rose tremendously in recent years whereas the percentage of students in vocational education fell accordingly. If this trend persists – and all projections say that it will – employability and pre-professional training will gain even more clout within academia. Therefore, combining academic and pre-professional education will be the challenge facing curricula in the future. As educators, we are obligated to unlock the full potential of our societies and to maintain a high level of knowledge and education throughout our entire careers, hence cultivating lifelong learning in the truest sense. To do so, our next task is to develop strong programs suitable for all phases of academic education.

Could you please explain to our readers how a German University of Applied Science differs from a German university?

The dual training model for our graduates is the key characteristic of a University of Applied Sciences. Our bachelor and master programs impart the necessary skills for graduates interested in either successfully pursuing an academic career through an ensuing doctorate or for entering the professional world. Accordingly, we also require our professors to possess this same dual qualification. The typical career path to a University of Applied Sciences begins with a successful doctoral degree, followed by an executive position in business or industry. We require all professors to have at least three years of experience outside of the university, but typically they have more than that. Due to these stages of their professional careers and the networks that result, collaboration with industry and institutions is a given. Integrating this collaboration into the teaching, learning, and research of the university is thus a natural step for our professors and an integral component of the Universities of Applied Sciences model.

Is the University of Applied Sciences a model that could be adopted in the U.S.? Please explain.

It is definitely worth trying! The higher education system in the United States is highly

differentiated and two of the prominent characteristics, as I perceive them, are entrepreneurship and the pioneering spirit that formed this country. An American university could begin by appointing business leaders who have already proven their academic excellence through a doctorate degree. Personally, I'm not sure what percentage of U.S. employees in business and industry hold a doctorate, how many of these professionals would be willing to take such a next step, and whether these universities would be able to offer these candidates attractive salaries. In Germany, approximately 95% of all PhDs pursue a career in industry or business. And more than just a few are willing to re-enter academia after time spent working in the professional world. The numbers of applicants for a professorship at a University of Applied Sciences in Germany, however, clearly indicate that the opportunity to shape the minds of young people and to determine one's personal research goals outweigh the decrease in pay that accompanies it.

How does Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences foster a culture of innovation?

From the earliest opportunity onwards, we arrange for the intersection between academic education, applied research, and collaboration with industry partners and institutions. This means that our bachelor students use their theoretical knowledge and scientific methods to address real-world problems. Representatives from companies come into the classroom to introduce and discuss these problems with our students. For the students, this experience is both challenging and highly motivating.

Our close collaboration with industry continues in the field of applied research. Again, students work directly on real-world projects and can systematically improve their innovative competencies through science. The same is true for the cooperating companies; Many of them are small or medium-sized enterprises and do not have a separate R&D unit. To support our professors in establishing new connections to business and industry, corresponding service units offer a wide range of initiatives.

What do you hope to achieve as the Vice President for Information and Communication Technology for the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)?

First, I hope to garner higher levels of attention for this topic in university leadership as well as in politics. German universities have room for improvement in the field of information and communication technology. Compared to the United States, Germany lags in this regard, and if we do not act, this could become a competitive disadvantage. In the past months, the German federal government has recognized the importance of this topic and has instituted its new "Council for Information Infrastructure." In addition, it has supported the establishment of the "Higher Education Forum for Digitalization" and published its "Digital Agenda 2014 – 2017." Both "Research Data Management" and "Open Educational Resources" stand out in this agenda, and it is on these two topics that I will focus my work. From the viewpoint of the German Rectors' Conference, we need to ensure that the needs of higher education institutions are adequately expressed. University leaders need to be informed about essential recommendations early on.