

SAP Customer Success Story Higher Education and Research Large Universities



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Michael Wilmes, Head of Electronic Administration and Services,
Freie Universität Berlin

AT A GLANCE

Summary

To support its core academic processes, the Freie Universität Berlin chose the SAP® Student Lifecycle Management application. In just 9 months the university mapped – and released to students for online registration – more than 160 new modular courses. SAP Student Lifecycle Management helps the university reduce bureaucracy and improve its fiscal efficiency, transparency, and service.

Web Site

www.fu-berlin.de

Key Challenges

- Harmonize and standardize processes across the university
- Standardize and integrate centralized and decentralized data
- Implement on a tight schedule
- Develop pilot project to become the first university in Germany to map modular study courses with integrated IT support

Project Objectives

- Implement standard processes throughout the university to organize the new courses of study
- Create powerful, future-proof IT support for these processes
- Ensure a reliable and redundancy-free database with secure data access

Solution and Services

SAP Student Lifecycle Management

Why SAP Solution

- Integrated functionality
- Technical reliability and security
- Protection of investment and security for the future
- Positive experience with SAP solutions

Implementation Highlights

- Successful pilot project
- Implementation in record time of just 9 months

Key Benefits

- Reduced administration, less bureaucracy
- Availability of data throughout the university
- Better services for administration staff, teaching staff, and students
- Support for examination offices
- Better coordination of faculties
- More efficient use of resources
- Important basis for further modernization of administrative processes

Implementation Partner

SAP Consulting organization

Existing Environment

SAP R/3® Enterprise software, functionality now found in the SAP ERP application

Database

Microsoft SQL Server

Hardware

HP

Operating System

Microsoft Windows 2003 Server

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

German University Uses SAP® Student Lifecycle Management to Create Lean Processes and Better Service

“The Bologna agreement presents the European universities with fundamentally changed requirements,” says Michael Wilmes, head of electronic administration and services at the Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin). “The basic conditions for successful implementation are systematic coordination and planning across the whole university when preparing the courses on offer.”

Established in 1948 and known for its strength and innovation in research and teaching, FU Berlin is also ahead of the crowd in implementing the reform process for European universities agreed on in 1999 in Bologna, Italy. The Bologna agreement calls for the realization of a standard European Higher Education Area by 2010 – with a two-cycle study system of bachelor’s and master’s degrees. For the German university system, this is a paradigm shift in how universities organize their teaching and studying.

Looking to SAP for Solutions

To make this shift, FU Berlin wants to replace all classic graduate and undergraduate study courses with bachelor’s and master’s study courses by the winter semester 2007/2008. Only courses with state examinations, such as medicine or law, are exempted. FU Berlin – the largest university in the German capital and one of the largest in Germany with around 36,000 students and 415 university lecturers – is counting on SAP IT support for the new study courses and their compliance with auditing requirements.



FU Berlin is the first university in Germany to implement the integrated SAP® Student Lifecycle Management application in its core academic processes. By implementing this application, the university has completed the expansion of its SAP environment to create a comprehensive university enterprise resource planning solution. At the start of the winter semester in 2005 – after a tightly organized implementation phase of just nine months – the first functions went live for students in more than 160 new courses. In a nationally unique pilot project, SAP Student Lifecycle Management is helping the FU Berlin reduce bureaucracy and improve fiscal efficiency, transparency, and service.

The Bologna Challenge

The “Bologna Process” aims to achieve more compatibility and easier comparison between European universities. The objective is to introduce the two-cycle degree system and promote the mobility of students and teachers, as well as to implement credit

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transfer systems for comparable evaluation of student performance – compatible with the existing European Credit Transfer System. This requires consistent modularization of study courses and their integration across the individual disciplines.

To convert to the new study system, the university therefore had to reorganize its central processes. To meet auditing requirements, the new examination system that accompanies courses has considerably increased the number of individual examinations to be documented; the coordination work has increased many times over. To ensure efficient workflows and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, the previously decentralized and heterogeneous study and examination processes needed to be standardized across the university.

“Only standardized processes across the university ensure clear responsibilities and enable event and examination dates to be coordinated across faculties,” explains Wilmes, one of two campus management project leaders responsible for organization and management at FU Berlin. “Our objectives are transparency and commitment, these being the main prerequisites of being able to study and succeed.”

On Course for Modernization

Since 1995 FU Berlin has been following a consistent course of modernization, which includes the introduction of modern management structures in administration and systematic performance analysis of departments, as well as step-by-step replacement of the IT landscape.

SAP software has been supporting the university’s core business processes since 2002. “The processes involved in holding classes and examinations were only supported by IT tools in a rudimentary way before we implemented SAP Student Lifecycle Management,” recalls Wilmes. “There were only isolated stand-alone solutions that were unacceptable with regard to functions, business, and security. A university the size of the FU Berlin can only meet the organizational requirements of the Bologna Process by using an integrated software solution.” The campus management project at FU Berlin therefore combines the implementation of extensive organizational objectives in the university with the creation of a powerful and future-proof IT basis to provide the best support for the new processes.

The university defined requirements for the new software solution in advance, based on these organizational objectives. All faculties, the central service departments, and the university management were involved in the decision-making process. As well as functional criteria, technical aspects also played an important part, particularly operational and security issues. Altogether, the university investigated six products thoroughly. Before the FU Berlin decided on SAP Student Lifecycle Management, it carried out a case study to assess the proposed investment from a business perspective. “Not least, our previous positive experiences with SAP solutions spoke in favor of SAP Student Lifecycle Management,” reports Wilmes. “The SAP environment at the Freie Universität Berlin is now being extended to the core academic area of teaching.”

Tight Schedule

In January 2005 the steering committee of the FU Berlin started the campus management project. “The campus management project is ambitious with regard to content and timescale – the rapid implementation schedule shows this,” says Wilmes. In just nine months, the project had to introduce, in stages, binding

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procedures and processes as well as fundamental technical functions for the winter semester 2005/2006. The related online services also had to be released for students. Moreover, by the 2006/2007 winter semester, all functions must be available.

First, the project team had to convert all current study conditions to the new degrees, then map the new IT-supported processes. Faculties, institutes and central institutes, central administration departments, and university management are all actively involved in the implementation. In addition, to support the implementation process with their specialist knowledge, numerous employees from the individual departments of the FU Berlin were trained as key users.

Success Factor: Well-Defined Project Management

“The key to the success of the project is well-defined project management, fully integrated in the political environment at the university,” explains Wilmes. The project office is the central hub for information and ensured consistent change and risk management. An interdisciplinary project group – consisting of members of the faculties and central departments, and supported by an external management consultancy – defined the planned processes for the new procedures in the modularized study courses. A second project group created blueprints and did the customizing, supported by experts from the SAP Consulting organization, the implementation partner.

Working closely together, the FU Berlin employees and SAP experts were able to map more than 160 new study courses in just nine months and release them for student registration – a record achievement for a university. In addition to the extremely professional structure of the project, the high level of motivation among the Berlin project employees meant that the complex plan could be implemented in only a short time.

“The harmonization and standardization of administration processes across the university and the consolidation of the databases have definitely been the greatest challenges up to now,” adds Wilmes. What is more, the FU Berlin is leading the way in Germany with its campus management project. Up to now, no other university in Germany has mapped modular courses of study using integrated IT support. For the best possible quality assurance, the pilot project was supervised directly by SAP developers. Project lead Wilmes is very satisfied with the cooperation with SAP. “The competent support from SAP experts contributed considerably to the success of the project,” he says.

Reliable Database for Better Service

The key element for efficient processes is a reliable database. To achieve the core project objective of providing easy-to-use services for lecturers, students, and administrative staff, it was therefore necessary to standardize and integrate the data stored in central and decentralized locations. Data needs to be entered where it originates and made available where it is needed: for management and controlling tasks in the dean’s office and university management, for processing administrative tasks, and for students.

“SAP Student Lifecycle Management enables us to realize our requirements for processing examination data and ensuring legal and procedural compliance,” explains Dr. Dirk Pape, head of computer operations in the computer science faculty at the FU Berlin and technical lead of the campus management project. “Without modifying the standard system, we can use a flexible and simple role and authorization concept to ensure online access to all data that is required for the teaching and examination processes.” All relevant examination data is available through the Internet, not only to the examination offices, but also to the students, who can call up their current grades, register for classes, and view and change their timetables.

More Fiscal Efficiency, Less Bureaucracy

The campus management project has brought the FU Berlin a lot closer to its objective of providing the best possible service for all core academic processes. SAP Student Lifecycle Management provides an important foundation for further service-oriented modernization of administration processes. The extensive process support from SAP Student Lifecycle Management, numerous self-services, and efficient use of the Internet ensure that the investment is profitable.

In addition, the SAP solution places the FU Berlin in a better position to meet its quality demands for university services, supports the work in the examination offices, and enables efficient use of resources. The standard processes across the university ensure coordination of event and examination dates across faculties and the best possible coordination to support students. The solution reduces administration for organizing the new study structure and results in less bureaucracy. This means that the students can focus on studying and the teachers can focus on teaching and research.

Outlook for the Future

The introduction of the new online services for students for the 2005/2006 winter semester means that students can organize their studies themselves from almost any location. The next step is to further extend the campus management system to provide complete support for the student life cycle – including application, admission, and registration. The university is considering piloting a completely electronic student file.

In February 2006 lecturers will also have access to the Web functions – they will be able to use the Web interface for SAP Student Lifecycle Management to help plan their modules, examinations, and classes, and enter examination grades. Furthermore, the consolidation, rollout, and employee training are to be completed by October 2006. With SAP Student Lifecycle Management, FU Berlin is well prepared for the challenges of further modernization. “SAP Consulting has already implemented several campus projects at universities of a comparable size and complexity,” says Wilmes. “We expect to benefit more from SAP in the future, supported by best practices, in the very competitive international higher education sector.”