

Strategy 2025 – Teaching

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1 Academy for Teaching Development

On 6 June 2017, the Senate of Friedrich Schiller University Jena decided to establish an Academy for Teaching Development (*Akademie für Lehrentwicklung*, ALe). With ALe, a central scientific institution was established, which underpins the high value of teaching at Friedrich Schiller University. ALe supports scientists and scholars in their role as lecturers, provides impulses for the design and development of teaching and promotes current developments.

Since the panel of experts of the Academy for Teaching Development consists of professors, members of the academic staff and students from all faculties of Friedrich Schiller University, it represents both the range of subjects at the University and all status groups in the field of teaching. The members of the panel are distinguished by their proven expertise and high commitment to teaching. Advised by the Vice-President for Learning and Teaching, they work together to promote the further development of teaching and thus contribute to improving the quality of teaching. This includes

- developing strategies and quality criteria for the design of studies and teaching,
- offering targeted incentives for didactic and curricular optimization,
- making particularly good teaching performance visible and rewarding them,
- fostering public exchange on successful and forward-looking teaching approaches at the University.

The Service Centre for Higher Education Didactics (*LehreLernen*) advises the panel of experts on the didactics of higher education, while the ALe office provides organizational support.

The present strategy paper 2025 for teaching documents the results of the panel's strategic work. Perspectives from the faculties and interested members of the University were integrated into the strategy development process. The strategy paper thus takes up current positions of the University departments on challenges, goals and requirements in teaching and at the same time is intended to serve as a basis for future university-wide exchange on teaching and curricular development.

The panel of experts is also involved in the process of developing a digitization strategy for Friedrich Schiller University. As digitization is primarily seen as a possible tool that can be helpful in meeting challenges, digitization in teaching is not addressed separately in this strategy paper.

2 Principles of good teaching

The following principles apply to teaching at Friedrich Schiller University. They are based on socially shared norms and values and were developed in an iterative, university-wide process of understanding. The changing "we" in these principles refers to all those who bear responsibility in and for learning and teaching in different roles—e.g. as teachers, students, and committee members.

We are committed to the unity of research and teaching.

Friedrich Schiller University understands research and teaching as equal and interdependent components of science. Research orientation is the specific feature of university teaching, i.e. good teaching conveys the current state of research and the awareness that knowledge is dynamic. Teachers can gain important impulses for their research from lively discussions with students.

As teachers and students, we contribute to the success of teaching and learning in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

Good teaching thrives on the commitment of teachers and students alike and ideally results in a mutual increase in knowledge. Teachers are required to provide high-quality learning opportunities in terms of subject matter and didactics, to reflect on the success of their teaching, and to continually develop their courses. Students, for their part, contribute to the success of their teaching by taking a responsible and active role in the courses offered, studying with commitment, and providing constructive feedback on the courses offered.

Our teaching aims at expert and critical reflection within and outside the academic world.

Good academic teaching not only conveys sound knowledge, but also cultivates a critical and reflective attitude in students. It instructs students to evaluate scientific findings and to ask and clarify technical questions themselves. It enables students to establish connections between research results and professional problems. Students learn scientific ethical standards and consider these in their studies future professional life.

In our teaching, we keep in mind the holistic educational mission of the University.

It is not enough to measure academic success solely by acquired knowledge and examination results. On the contrary, the central goals of studies at Friedrich Schiller University include shaping and developing students' personalities, different facets of motivational, emotional and social competences, as well as the responsible use of acquired knowledge and skills. Good teaching aims at the active participation in democratic societies as well as the ability and willingness to constantly reorient oneself in the face of ever changing challenges.

In our teaching, we are committed to dealing with diversity.

A non-discriminatory, acceptance-based interaction among students as well as between students and teachers is an indispensable prerequisite for successful learning. We emphasize the opportunities that are associated with diversity among students and teachers. We develop solutions for the resulting challenges in teaching. We take into account the diverse learning requirements of students when developing study programmes and teaching concepts.

We take the diversity of research cultures into account in our teaching.

Our research cultures are shaped very differently by numerous factors. This results not only in different research methods and different perspectives on the world, but also in the need to

develop concepts, working methods and formats in teaching that are appropriate for the specific subject. We respect this diversity of approaches to subject-specific questions in teaching and are committed to creating the necessary framework for this.

We offer interdisciplinary perspectives in our teaching.

Many scientific and socially relevant questions can only be solved within the framework of interdisciplinary cooperation. The prerequisites for this are openness and respect for other subject cultures and an awareness of the limits of one's own professional perspectives. We exemplify this attitude in our teaching. At various levels and in various formats, our teachers provide students with interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

We appreciate and support commitment in teaching.

We are committed to creating conditions in which teaching can be realized on a broad basis and at a high level. At Friedrich Schiller University, special commitment, inventiveness and outstanding achievements in teaching are encouraged, made visible and awarded. We offer lecturers the necessary scope for developing and implementing new ideas and concepts. When assessing scientific performance, we consider both research and teaching as performance dimensions.

We continuously develop teaching at our University.

Teaching can only keep improving if it is measured by the achievement of its goals. This requires suitable instruments to make learning outcomes and desiderata comprehensible. The departments use the corresponding findings under their own responsibility for the further development of teaching. Friedrich Schiller University therefore provides support structures for teaching evaluation and for the qualification of teaching didactics in higher education and constantly develops them further.

We maintain discourse about our teaching-related values.

The further development of teaching also touches upon normative aspects to a considerable extent. These include the questions of what is understood by good teaching, which minimum standards we do not want to fall below in teaching, and which overarching values should guide teaching at Friedrich Schiller University. For us, the discourse on these and similar questions is part of quality development. Teachers and students regularly engage in this discourse in various formats and in public at the University.

3 Challenges, objectives and measures for teaching until 2025

The objectives and measures for learning and teaching are guided by the principles of good teaching (see section 2). The objectives listed in this section consider those principles. At the same time, they address current challenges in university teaching by taking up the results of a faculty survey conducted by the panel of experts in 2018. The evaluation of the feedback from the faculties revealed that three urgent *challenges* are currently seen as being faced by Friedrich Schiller University Jena in terms of learning and teaching, namely

- (1) dealing with heterogeneity,
- (2) promoting the academic independence of students, and
- (3) strengthening the didactic skills of the teaching staff.

Taking these findings and principles of good teaching into account, the panel has formulated medium-term objectives for teaching at Friedrich Schiller University to be achieved by 2025 and has supported these with measures. In the following, the identified challenges and related assumptions as well as the resulting objectives and measures are briefly explained.

Some of the measures mentioned can also help to achieve various other objectives. The list of objectives and measures is not exhaustive; it can be dynamically adjusted according to the progress made in achieving the objectives (→see also section 4).

Dealing with heterogeneity

The number of first-year students has risen by more than 40 percent over the past ten years, particularly because of a growing number of potential students interested in higher education, and the facilitated access to higher education. The resulting differences in the study requirements also pose special challenges to Friedrich Schiller University. This applies primarily, but not only, to the introductory phase of studies. In the feedback from the faculties, special emphasis was placed on the differences between the students in terms of previous knowledge, performance, motivation and commitment.

In order to cope with the greater diversity of students and to promote their individual academic success, it is necessary to further and newly develop the range of courses that are aimed at achieving the required competence level and at the same time build on the students' personal strengths. The specific needs of high-performing students must also be taken into account. For this purpose, the courses offered must be integrated into the curriculum in a coherent manner in terms of content, didactics and organization.

Objectives

- In the promotion of academic success, the individual learning requirements are considered.
- As many students as possible achieve the level of competence aimed for in the course of study.

Measures

- (1) The development, adaptation and implementation of models for advisory services and/or learning support in the introductory phase of studies are promoted.
- (2) The consolidation of successful concepts for dealing with heterogeneity in the introductory phase is supported.
- (3) When study programmes are developed, the different levels of previous knowledge of the students are taken into account by including differentiation possibilities in the curriculum.
- (4) Programmes to foster high-performing students within the framework of research-oriented learning opportunities will be set up. (→ 3.2).

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Qualifying students for independent scientific work

A challenge in teaching and at the same time an important goal in studying is to enable students to solve subject-related problems independently. Independent scientific work includes the following points: setting relevant goals and asking oneself questions; choosing and applying suitable methods for working on them; staying on course even under stress; checking the process and results of one's own work and correcting them, if necessary. This independence cannot be expected of students at the beginning of their studies, and it must be acquired gradually during the course of their studies.

In view of the Bologna reforms, the tendency of turning university teaching into school instruction is repeatedly seen as problematic, as it prevents students from developing independence. On the other hand, the emphasis on student independence can cause important aspects of collaborative learning and research to fall by the wayside.

In order to strengthen student's academic dependence, learning opportunities are required that enable students to acquire independence, support that independence in a way that is tailored to their level of learning, and embed it in social contexts. Structures must be sufficiently flexible to provide space for the creation of appropriate learning opportunities.

Objective

- Students are able to work independently on scientific matters.

Measures

- (1) The promotion of scientific independence is taken into account in the design of learning opportunities and examination formats within the framework of study programme development.
- (2) Students' own initiatives to create and develop learning opportunities are supported.
- (3) The development of innovative learning opportunities aiming at the scientific independence of students is promoted.
- (4) Programmes are established that promote high-performing students within the framework of research-oriented learning opportunities (→3.1).

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Strengthening the didactic competences of teachers

The teachers themselves have a significant influence on the improvement of teaching quality. With their attitudes and competences, they are involved in the teaching process and create learning opportunities that enable students to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, teaching activities at universities are generally not preceded by any teaching-related qualification. Teachers are often on their own and confronted with a variety of challenges—for example, heterogeneous student groups or large amounts of material—for which they (must) develop individual solution strategies.

In order to provide students with excellent learning opportunities, didactically reflected teaching concepts are necessary. This requires the creation of framework conditions that give teachers the freedom to develop and qualify their teaching and under which university teaching is recognized as an independent performance dimension. In addition, it is important to open up spaces for discussion in which teachers from all status groups can participate to jointly develop strategies for dealing with the challenges of university teaching and thus strengthen the quality of teaching.

Objectives

- More lecturers are reached with university didactic qualification offers.
- The quality of university didactic qualification will be further improved.
- The strategic exchange on teaching issues at all levels of the University will be increased.

Measures

- (1) Teaching performance is taken into account in appointment procedures, appointment and retention negotiations, and in the allocation of special benefits.
- (2) The Service Centre for Higher Education Didactics (*LehreLernen*) will be strengthened.
- (3) Event formats for the exchange of information on good teaching are promoted.
- (4) Existing systems recognizing and incentivizing teaching commitment will be evaluated in terms of their scope and effects.

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4 The teaching strategy as a dynamic concept

The present teaching strategy is to be understood as a dynamic concept: In its implementation, top-down and bottom-up processes interlock. Objectives and measures interact in many different ways and can also be adapted to changing circumstances.

Goal-oriented measures are not and cannot only be initiated centrally. Friedrich Schiller University is currently implementing and will continue to implement numerous ideas for teaching development on its own initiative at all levels. These bottom-up initiatives are highly desirable, because teaching quality stands or falls with the creativity and commitment of many individual actors. They often correspond—more or less intentionally—with the objectives of this strategy paper.

The task of the actors at central level (ALe's panel of experts, Executive Board) in the strategy process is to provide the departments with targeted suggestions and offers of support, to make existing structures visible, to avoid parallel structures and, if necessary, to coordinate and bundle measures. In terms of top-down processes, the aim is therefore to provide impulses for coordinated activities and for working on aspects that have been neglected up to now, and to offer support wherever possible.

As far as the assignment of measures to objectives is concerned, it is apparent that strategic processes cannot be thought of formally and unidirectionally. For example, measures that are primarily taken with a view to a specific objective at best also address other objectives.

In order to clarify the interrelation outlined above and to illustrate how strategic management on the one hand and the concrete concerns of teachers and students on the other hand intertwine, four existing measures are presented below as examples.

ProMINT project on dealing with heterogeneity in the MINT area

Particular need for action with regard to the heterogeneity of students (see section 3.1) in the introductory phase is seen in the MINT subjects.

Financed by the Thuringian Ministry of Economics, Science and Digital Society, the ProMINT programme at Friedrich Schiller University is dedicated to the further development of the introductory phase of studies in the MINT field. The starting point of the programme is a systematic recording of the currently already established introductory study measures, such as support and advice in the introductory study phase (e.g. Study Orientation Days, tutoring and mentoring by students) or the teaching of subject-specific and interdisciplinary skills (e.g. in the context of preliminary courses). The aim of the project is to identify successful concepts, to develop them further according to needs or to introduce new concepts.

The ProMINT programme addresses one of the central strategic challenges in the field of university teaching. Although the faculties are the central point of contact for the content of the introductory phase, the proactive design requires close cooperation with the University Leadership and ALe. This is the only way to integrate, coordinate and evaluate the measures into the University's overall strategy, to sound out the scope for shaping framework conditions, and to ensure the provision of resources. The programme aims to increase academic success and reduce dropout rates.

Honours Programme for the early integration of students into research

In discussions about performance heterogeneity among students, the focus is often on problems resulting from a lack of performance or commitment. The needs and potentials of particularly high-performing students are easily overlooked. Friedrich Schiller University's participation in the Excellence Strategy has made it clear that there is a need for action in the promotion of talented students, since excellent research also requires excellent young researchers on site.

Financed by the university allowance within the framework of the Excellence Strategy, an Honours Programme for students with an affinity for research in all disciplines has been set up centrally. It aims to promote the best students at Friedrich Schiller University beyond the regular courses offered. Starting in the 4th Bachelor's semester or 2nd Master's semester, students can apply for various funding formats within the framework of the Honours Programme. Within the framework of Honours Mentoring, the selected students are supervised by a professor and integrated into existing structures (working group, graduate programme, etc.) with their own research idea.

The Honours Programme takes up the objective of promoting scientific independence at an early stage. At the same time, it also offers a concept for dealing with the challenges and opportunities of performance heterogeneity among students. The Honours Programme strengthens the unity of research and teaching, offers students interdisciplinary perspectives, and encourages academic reflection.

Professionalization of university didactics through individual video support

In the workshops of the Service Centre for Higher Education Didactics (*LehreLernen*), teachers deal with didactic concepts related to university teaching and approaches to solving teaching problems. The actual work, however, usually begins only afterwards, when the knowledge gained can be transferred to the own teaching context.

In order to support the transfer of university didactic knowledge to teaching situations, the Service Centre for Higher Education Didactics offers video tutoring in three certificate programmes. Teachers have the opportunity to have course sessions videotaped and can thus reflect on their own teaching from a new perspective. The recording is also analysed by two members of the service centre team. This analysis and the aspects worked out by the teachers themselves form the basis for the video conversation between the teacher and a member of the service centre team. The aim of this conversation is to jointly reflect on and further develop teaching activities. The subject matter expertise of the teacher and the university didactic expertise are intertwined.

The video support aims to strengthen didactic skills in higher education. It can also relate to dealing with heterogeneous groups of students, balancing the tension between guiding students, and creating free space for independent work.

ALe funding lines

Innovative projects for the further development of teaching often require additional time and financial resources, which are often indispensable for realizing the projects.

ALe underlines the importance of teaching for Friedrich Schiller University by providing additional resources. Currently, the following funding lines are advertised annually:

- “Free Space for Teaching”: time for the further development of university teaching, e.g. for the development of new teaching and learning concepts or the design of study programmes.
- “Innovation in Teaching”: financial support for the implementation of good ideas, e.g. the first-time implementation of innovative teaching concepts or the expansion of successful area-specific teaching concepts to other faculties.
- “Discussion about Development in the Faculties”: financial support for subject-related exchange on teaching and learning within the faculties in various event formats.
- “Student Initiatives”: financial support of student projects which encourage the exchange of ideas on issues related to teaching or which focus on the promotion of academic teaching and learning.

By supporting projects, ALe provides impulses for the further development of didactic concepts for higher education. The innovative content and transferability of the projects are decisive funding criteria to ensure that the financial support contributes to the sustainable improvement of teaching at Friedrich Schiller University. Within the framework of the teaching strategy, it is possible to set specific focal points in the calls for applications.