Alternatives to University Education in Germany

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Abstract
The German higher education system is a binary system consisting predominantly of universities and universities of applied sciences (UASs), originally conceived as teaching-only institutions offering applied degrees. This article focuses on the UAS sector, but also provides information on vocational education and training (regarded as postsecondary, but nonacademic and not part of higher education). It shows why and how an increasing blurring of boundaries is taking place among the different sectors of postsecondary education.

The postsecondary nonuniversity sector in Germany is a rather complex landscape consisting of different types of higher education institutions and a large vocational education and training system. Furthermore, there is a distinction between public and private institutions. This article describes this arrangement and provides an account of some of its problems.

Universities of Applied Sciences

Despite their official English name, universities of applied sciences (UASs, *Fachhochschulen*) are considered to be nonuniversity institutions. They were introduced as a new type of higher education institution in 1972 to form an alternative to universities, with the intention of creating additional study places during a phase of higher education expansion. Originally, they were conceived as teaching-only institutions with no research and no right to award doctoral degrees. Students wanting to enroll at UASs were able to do so after 12 years of schooling instead of the usual 13 years required for entering a university. Professors at UASs were not required to have a *habilitation* (a form of second doctorate), but instead had to have at least five years of professional experience outside the higher education sector. After German unification in 1990, UASs were also introduced in the new East German states where they did not previously exist. Currently, about 40 percent of all students in Germany study at a UAS.

The German public higher education system consists of 121 universities, 218 UASs, and 57 higher education institutions for art and music. Among the 218 UASs, there are 30 "UASs for public administration," specializing in training for the various professions in the public sector. Compared to universities, UASs offer mostly applied or practice-oriented degree programs, have a smaller spectrum of subjects, and mostly offer bachelor degrees. The main subject groups that can be found at UASs are engineering, business administration, and healthcare/social work. Over time, a large variety of subjects (e.g., tourism, real estate, hotel management, and others) have been added as a result of academization. It is also typical for degree programs at UASs to include at least one obligatory internship.

The originally clear differences between universities and UASs have blurred to some extent. A good number of UASs have become involved in research and development, often applied and often in cooperation with private sector institutions or companies. They also offer master level degrees in at least some subjects. In a couple of German states, UASs have even been given the right to award doctoral degrees in those subjects in which they have a strong research portfolio. In the other states, UAS graduates who want to start a doctoral program can do so provided that their institution has a cooperation agreement with a university, which then awards the degree. In such cases, supervision is shared between a university professor and a UAS professor. Universities have tried to protect and defend their monopolized authority to award doctoral degrees and were not happy at all about this blurring of differences between the two sectors.

Dual Higher Education Institutions

Germany has two other types of nonuniversity higher education institutions: UASs for public administration (mentioned above) and, in some states, so-called "dual higher education institutions." There are 30 UASs for public administration in the German higher education system, with somewhat more than 57,000 students. They constitute a special type, or subtype of the UAS sector. Students at these institutions are employees in public administration, often civil servants, delegated to study by their employers in

order to upgrade their professional qualifications and become eligible for promotion in the public service. After graduation, they return to their previous workplace or another workplace within public service.

There are altogether 41 dual higher education institutions in Germany, most of them in the states of Baden–Wuerttemberg and Thuringia. While these institutions fall within the higher education sector in the former state, they are part of the postsecondary vocational education and training sector in the latter. Students with a secondary school leaving certificate and a vocational education and training contract with a company can study at these institutions for three years and graduate with an applied bachelor degree, while at the same time undergoing their practical training. Dual degree programs are by now also offered at universities and UASs, resulting in yet another form of blurring of differences between sectors.

Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training

Germany is well-known for having a large and very successful sector of (postsecondary) vocational education and training, which is not regarded as part of the higher education sector. Access to each profession in this sector requires about three to three-and-a-half years of education and training. Altogether, there are 325 different trades, crafts, and professions for which this sector is responsible. The vocational education aspect is carried out by professional schools and provides the more theoretical framework of the body of knowledge of a given profession, trade, or craft. The training aspect is offered in companies, firms, the public sector, and by craftsmen. The vocational training aspect requires the presence of a master craftsman or -woman.

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Vocational education and training is divided into six large professional fields: industry and trade (including banking, insurance, catering, and transport and traffic); craftsmanship; agriculture; public service; independent professions; and home economics. Degrees awarded include categories such as skilled worker or technician, craftsman or -woman, and master craftsman or -woman. In 2019, there were almost 1.33 million trainees (with a 35 percent proportion of women) enrolled in the vocational education and training sector, which is more than the number of students at UASs. Because trainees are participating in productive work carried out by their respective employers, they receive a modest salary from their first day onward, which increases every year.

However, this sector is confronted with another type of boundary blurring, in that an increasing number of crafts, trades, and professions are moving their education and training into the higher education sector (UASs or dual higher education institutions). But it is not at all the case that the various institutions and sectors are happy with such blurring of differences and academization processes. Education experts have anticipated these developments for quite some time. These developments are considered to be mainly due to the introduction of the two-tiered system of bachelor and master degrees through the implementation of the Bologna Process and global developments due to the rise of knowledge societies and economies. ◢

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