

# Digital // Diverse // International



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Editorial



# A University for the Future: Digital, Diverse, International

I am pleased to introduce you to the FernUniversität in Hagen, and I invite you to join me on a voyage of discovery through a unique university. Since its founding in 1974, our university has been characterized by topics like digitalization, diversity, and lifelong learning. With an average of 75,000 students, the FernUniversität is Germany's largest university.

Research at the FernUniversität is marked both by disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary cooperation and ranges from theoretical to applied research. These research activities ensure that teaching at the FernUniversität reflects the cutting edge of knowledge in the field while also providing the basis for training a new generation of researchers.

The FernUniversität sees itself as a site for networking and exchange between research, politics, economy, and society. Through such networks, new academic discoveries flow into the university. Our research offers numerous points of contact for cooperative projects, contract research, and consulting services. As the largest educational institution as well as one of the main employers in Hagen we additionally engage in cooperative projects for city and regional development. In addition to these local roots, the FernUniversität is also globally networked, with numerous international cooperations in research and teaching.

Our university's flexible options for degree programs and continuing education play a vital role in promoting equal opportunities and access to higher education within the German higher education landscape. We serve a more diverse student body than any other university in Germany. Our students have a wide variety of educational backgrounds and goals. Most of our students study in parallel to their careers. Others are parents raising their children, are simultaneously in vocational training, are gifted secondary school students or elite athletes, or have a disability. What all of our students have in common is that they are engaged and dedicated in their private and professional lives, highly motivated, and hungry for knowledge. Thanks to our flexible, digitally supported distance-learning system, they can integrate higher education into all phases of their lives, thereby putting the idea of lifelong learning into concrete practice.

Take a look through the following pages to see what makes the FernUniversität stand out: firmly rooted in a modern campus in the city, yet accessible from anywhere in the world.

Ada Nellal

**Prof. Dr. Ada Pellert** President of the FernUniversität in Hagen

## FernUniversität in Hagen: A University for the Future

As Germany's only state distance-learning university, the FernUniversität in Hagen fulfills a unique role in the German higher education system. It serves the largest and most diverse student body in Germany, providing flexible options that make university education accessible to students whose needs are not met by traditional universities and enable the pursuit of lifelong learning. Through innovative research and new approaches to education, it contributes answers to the challenges facing education and society in the future.

Founded in 1974 in response to rising student numbers and an increased need for flexibility in higher education, the FernUniversität's focus has always been on innovation in education, backed by research and based in its particular expertise in distance learning.

Its original teaching concept, designed by a committee of experts in the field, incorporated a mixture of printed study materials, audio-

visual media, and in-person advising and instruction. Since then, its blended learning approach has evolved to incorporate new technological advances, with the FernUniversität becoming an early adopter of digital technology in education within Germany.

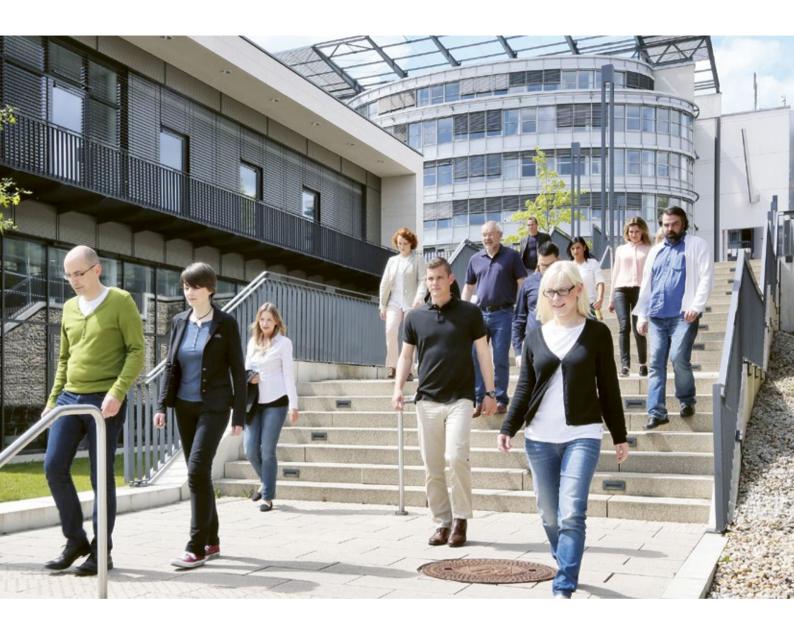
At the same time, human connection and support remain at the heart of the FernUniversität's distance learning system. Its regional centers and their associated study centers play a vital role as the local face of the FernUniversität and the first point of contact for students at thirteen locations throughout Germany, as well as Austria, Hungary, and Switzerland. These centers offer information, advising, and support for current and prospective students. They also host in-person events, seminars, and mentoring sessions for students, provide a meeting place for study groups, and open up the FernUniversität to the general public through lecture series, alumni celebrations, and other events.



### At a glance

- Founded: 1974
- Students in first semester: 1,330
- Students today: around 75,000
- Faculties: 5
- Staff: around 1,800
- #1 university in Germany by enrollment numbers





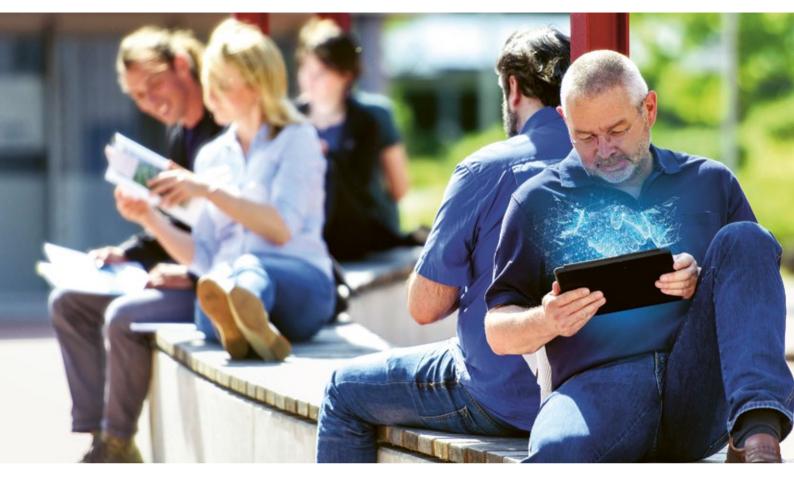


The FernUniversität's focus on innovation and addressing the challenges of the future is also reflected in its research. In addition to strong research within its academic disciplines, the FernUniversität has established interdisciplinary research clusters which address overarching issues for education and society. These include the impact of digitalization on education and culture, as well as issues of energy, environment, and sustainability.

A strong partner in all these activities is the Society of Friends of the FernUniversität, which provides vital support for the regional and study centers, as well as research activities, cultural projects, and especially recognition of outstanding academic performance and achievements in research. Many of the society's members are themselves FernUniversität graduates and remain connected with their university through the society's alumni circle.

"The role of the regional centers is very important. Distance learning students especially need face-toface personal contact. You can't do everything with social media, chats, or forums. There has to be a place where you can meet in person and exchange ideas."

**Computer Science Graduate,** *Regional Center Coesfeld* 



## International and Interconnected

The FernUniversität actively pursues international cooperations and partnerships and considers internationalization to be an important factor in the quality of its teaching, research, and support for early career scholars. Through the Vice-Presidency for Continuing Education, Knowledge Transfer, and International Affairs, the topic is firmly anchored as a key strategic objective for the university. It is a member in international networks and organizations, including the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), Scholars at Risk (SAR), and the International Council of Distance Education (ICDE), and throughout its history it has also entered into numerous cooperations with international higher education institutions. Its five faculties undertake their own wide variety of international activities, ranging from research cooperations, extensive Erasmus+ cooperations, and summer schools to international dual degree programs and hosting visiting scholars.



The FernUniversität offers its students a wide range of flexible options for gaining international experience and skills while they study. In addition to traditional study abroad through programs such as Erasmus+, the FernUniversität has focused on short learning opportunities and virtual mobilities as a supplement or alternative to physical stays abroad. In this way, the FernUniversität offers its students the chance to broaden their perspectives and gain valuable intercultural skills in ways that fit their personal and professional situations, for example through summer schools and short learning programs, joint teaching projects with international partners, and internationally-oriented courses and modules. Since the FernUniversität's study programs can be completed from anywhere in the world, students also have the flexibility to enroll from abroad - around 6,000 students each year take advantage of this opportunity.

The FernUniversität also offers its staff and early career researchers a variety of opportunities to gain valuable international experience and competence, including through staff mobilities, internal professional development courses, and stays abroad for research and teaching. It promotes international collaboration and projects in research and teaching, for example through its internal funding programs.

This wide range of international activities converges at the FernUniversität's International Office. In addition to developing and implementing the university's overall strategy for internationalization, the office provides practical support for student and staff mobilities, develops and maintains international partnerships, supports and advises on international projects, and provides information and assistance for international guests.







"Knowledge is built on the exchange of ideas. Through international projects, collaborations, and partnerships, we carry out innovative research across borders and enable our students to gain international experience while meeting the needs of our diverse student body."

#### Prof. Dr. Uwe Elsholz,

Vice-President for Continuing Education, Knowledge Transfer, and International Affairs

### **Researching Answers**

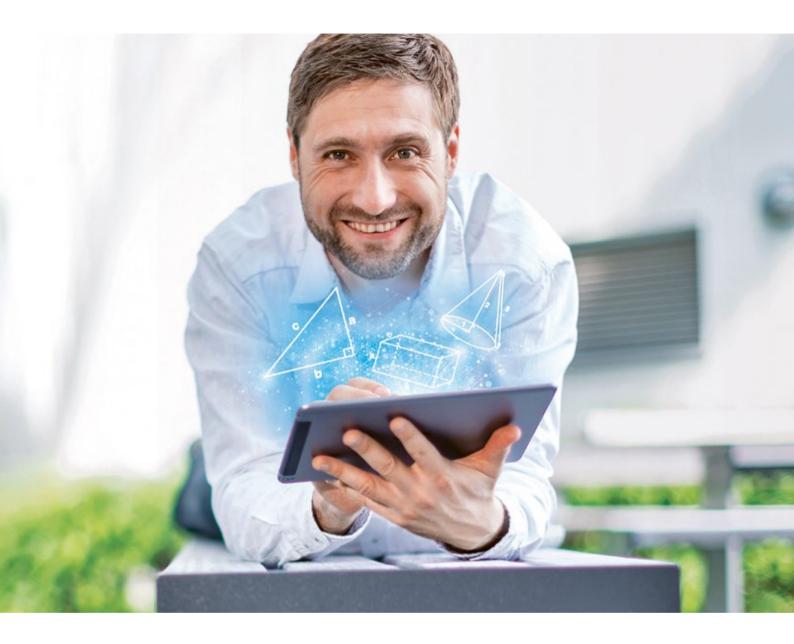
The innovative research at the FernUniversität covers a broad spectrum of topics in both basic and applied resarch. In addition to indepth research in their individual disciplines, FernUniversität researchers collaborate across disciplinary boundaries to address overarching questions. FernUniversität researchers are active in national and global networks, working together with scholars throughout Germany and around the world.

To support interdisciplinary collaboration across its faculties and to enhance its profile as a research university, the FernUniversität has bundled individual research activities into strong interdisciplinary research clusters, which focus on the consequences of digitalization for education, the impact of digitalization on culture, and issues of energy, environment, and sustainability. The wide range of further research projects at the FernUniversität is demonstrated by the continuous increase of third-party funding. Through its research activities, the FernUniversität also engages in dialogue and exchange with business and industry. These connections can be seen, for example, through the FernUniversität's three endowed chairs. The FernUniversität's expertise is also highly sought after in politics: FernUniversität professors serve on a number of advisory boards for the German federal government.

The FernUniversität supports its researchers with an extensive internal research funding program and a range of services. These include information about and assistance with applications for national and international funding opportunities as well as its own internal stipends and grants. Its commitment to gender equality in research is reflected in its broad spectrum of funding and support programs aimed at increasing the proportion of women in academia.







Researchers in the early stages of their careers benefit from targeted support with their doctoral and postdoctoral qualifications from the FernUniversität's Service for Research Career Development, which offers advising and assistance for all phases of an academic career.

The strength of the FernUniversität's research is also reflected in its teaching, as researchers' new discoveries and insights ensure that the contents of its study programs remain on the cutting edge, while FernUniversität researchers' innovations in the field of distance learning find direct applications in its study programs.



"Doing research in an international context is inspiring: cooperating with and hearing the perspectives of other colleagues and disciplines helps me to look differently at what is already known and to explore new avenues."

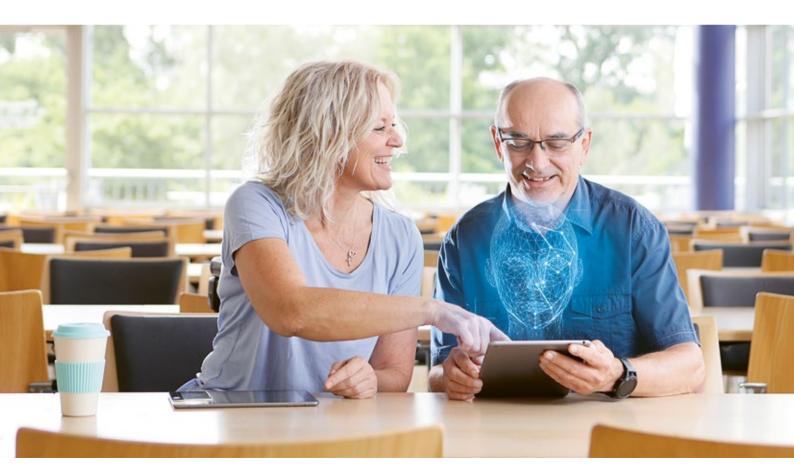
#### Prof. Eva Cendon,

Chair of Continuing Education & Teaching and Learning

## Interdisciplinary and Innovative

To enhance its research profile, the Fern-Universität bundles research on certain topics into three research clusters, in which researchers work together across the boundaries of their individual subjects and faculties. In this way, the FernUniversität creates networks between its many academic disciplines in order to address overarching research questions through an interdisciplinary framework. This research infrastructure concentrates knowledge and resources, making it possible to implement innovative, complex, and long-term research projects, often in cooperation with external experts. In the Digitalization, Diversity, and Lifelong Learning research cluster, researchers develop strategies to address the digital transformation and its effects on higher education. The goal of the Energy, Environment & Sustainability research cluster is to analyze the political, economic, social, and technological dimensions of these three topics. The digital\_culture research cluster focuses on the process of digitalization itself and its consequences.











### Digitalization, Diversity, and Lifelong Learning: Consequences for Higher Education

The Digitalization, Diversity, and Lifelong Learning (D<sup>2</sup>L<sup>2</sup>) research cluster addresses the question of which opportunities and challenges for higher education result from the major trends of our time: the increasing digitalization of many aspects of our lives, an increasingly diverse society, and a steadily growing need for lifelong education and training. Institutions in higher education must adapt in order to respond appropriately to the changed conditions and new frameworks which result from this.

The cluster's research goal is to characterize diversity in relation to the entire spectrum of educationally relevant variables. In addition to sociodemographic aspects such as an individual's prior knowledge, ability to self-regulate, and self-control, this includes the question of how to set up an optimal group with respect to diversity. In addition, the research cluster will advance theoretical research: How can we make use of digital technologies in order to respond adaptively to an increasingly diverse student body with personalized teaching and learning scenarios?

Professors from all of the FernUniversität's faculties and a large team of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers contribute to the D<sup>2</sup>L<sup>2</sup> interdisciplinary research cluster. A broad range of expertise and a wide academic network are ensured through cooperations, including with the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society, and the German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning.

### **Energy, Environment & Sustainability**

Climate change, with its palpable effects of drought, wildfires, and storms, presents a formidable challenge for research, economy, politics, and society. To develop viable and sustainable solutions, the Energy, Environment & Sustainability research cluster bundles together the wide range of research activities at the Fern-Universität on the topics of energy, environment, and sustainability. The participating researchers work within their respective teams or together with colleagues across disciplinary and faculty boundaries.

The central research topics include the political, economic, societal, and technological dimensions of the energy and environmental sectors with their mutual dependencies, as well as approaches to and effects of energy and environmental policy. The interdisciplinary spectrum of perspectives represented in the research ranges from business and economic approaches to political, social, and legal issues to technological components.

One interdisciplinary research team develops a new type of dynamic traffic routing system, which gives up-to-date and efficient recommendations for routes and travel time. A second group addresses the question of how businesses can design their production processes so that they can react to rapidly fluctuating energy prices.









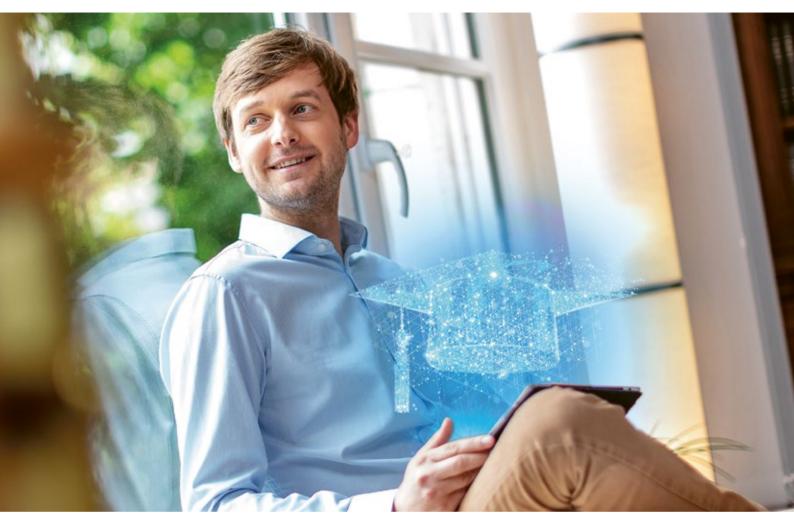


#### digital\_culture

The digital and digitalization reach deep into the self-conception of contemporary cultures and societies and permanently change them. The transformation which accompanies technology-driven innovation is so comprehensive and complex that it also impacts people in the areas of their lives where they are not directly interacting with technological artifacts, because it is a change to the culture itself – a digital culture. At the same time, the extent of the upheaval, as well as how dramatic and wideranging its effects are, has until now been nearly impossible to estimate.

The humanities and social sciences, working together with computer science, can contribute to making the factors which transform our communities and lives legible and accessible. In the process, they are required to identify the transformation, which is involved with digital cultures and societies, to reflect upon it, to examine it in a scholarly way, and to accompany it with a critical eye.

As academic disciplines, however, they are themselves subject to this transformation and their objects of study and methods are changed by it. This phenomenon is described by the term "digital humanities". As a result, in the digital\_ culture research cluster, this process will be studied from two directions: on the one hand, in relation to social reality and on the other, in relation to changes within academia. This close interconnection between cultural reflection and digital humanities is a distinguishing feature of the research cluster.



# Flexible Study Programs

The FernUniversität imparts knowledge and enables access to higher education. With its flexible study programs, it serves the most diverse student population in Germany.

Around 45 % of FernUniversität students have already completed a first higher education degree, while others supplement their vocational training or career experience with academic study. Most FernUniversität students study in parallel to their careers or have parenting or other care responsibilities. More than 7,000 FernUniversität students do not have a formal higher education entrance qualification and were admitted on the basis of their vocational qualifications, far more than at any other university in Germany. Around 6,000 students enroll at the FernUniversität from abroad.

FernUniversität students can plan their studies according to their individual pace and requirements. As a basis, they have printed study materials, which are shipped in physical form and made available online. The use of digital media in particular makes it easy to study on the go – students can access the necessary materials anywhere and at any time.





"At the FernUni, I have the freedom to arrange my studies in a way that fits together with my everyday life with a full-time job."

Susanne Krieghoff, Student in Psychology

Using the internet, students collaborate with one another, communicate with teaching staff, and research academic literature. The university library not only offers traditional services like interlibrary loans but also services specially tailored to distance learning, such as virtual reserve shelves with required and recommended reading.

Students and teaching staff alike profit from a distance learning system which focuses on digital technology and instructional design. By incorporating the findings of its researchers, the FernUniversität continuously develops and refines new educational tools and didactic

strategies. The FernUniversität's Coordinating Office for e-Learning and Educational Technology supports its teaching staff with expert knowledge and specialized training.

At the same time, studying at the FernUniversität offers plenty of opportunities for students to make a personal connection with the university. The regional and study centers are the local face of the FernUniversität throughout Germany, in Switzerland, in Austria, and in Hungary. The centers provide advising and support for students, host in-person events, classes, and lectures, and offer working space for student study groups.



### Open-minded and open to the world

The FernUniversität supports both physical and virtual mobility for its students, teaching staff, and researchers – for example via joint teaching projects in partnership with international universities, through summer schools, or via funding for stays abroad. These activities are coordinated by the FernUniversität's International Office. The office also develops and implements strategic plans and initiates and develops international partnerships.

#### Our Faculties



# A Strong Foundation for Research and Teaching

The FernUniversität is composed of five faculties which carry out the university's research and teaching. Their strengths: disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary networking – an excellent basis for their degree programs.

The faculties' areas of research focus enhance the university's overall profile. The strength of the university's individual academic disciplines lays the foundation for teaching and research across disciplinary boundaries. The FernUniversität focuses on its faculties, supporting and promoting their research and teaching.

The faculties work closely together in many areas. Interdisciplinary research and teaching is routine. For students, this means that every faculty develops new forms of teaching which enhance and expedite the learning process. When appropriate, the faculties design and offer interdisciplinary study programs.

This also means that the FernUniversität's researchers, while working in a comparatively narrow spectrum of disciplines and subject areas, are able to examine a broad range of socially, politically, and economically relevant questions from the perspective of their disciplines.





### Intersections of Society

A place where diversity is lived, reflected upon, and respected: the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences is one of the FernUniversität's founding faculties. Since 1974, its students and staff have researched, taught, and studied from the perspectives of many disciplines: educational studies, political science, literary studies, history, sociology, and philosophy. The faculty focuses on phenomena related to human coexistence and development processes in historical, social, political, or cultural contexts.

The faculty is strong in research and third-party funding. It is intensively involved in the university's interdisciplinary research clusters. Due to its diverse range of disciplines, its researchers work on a very broad spectrum of topics, and it promotes international research exchange, for example through the German-Latin American research and doctoral network FILORED. Digitalization is a particularly significant topic which the faculty investigates in a variety of contexts. For example, the Institute of Educational Science addresses questions of education and training against the background of an increasingly digitalized society.

The Institute for History and Biography hosts the extensive Deutsches Gedächtnis ("German Memory") online archive and – in addition to studying the historical and biographical contents of the archive – researches innovative questions related to digital archiving, analysis, and presentation of audiovisual materials.

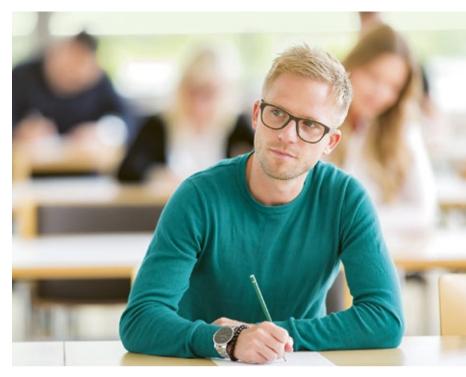
At the same time, these tools and the results of this research are made available to students so that they can gain practical research experience.





#### Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science





### Individually Structured

With its dynamic key technologies, the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science drives innovation and is closely linked to other fields of study – especially when it comes to researching fundamental methods and tools for digitalizing education. Thanks to its focus on high academic standards and the connection between research and teaching, the faculty has a broad research landscape which encompasses a number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary focal areas.

This also benefits the faculty's study programs, whose teaching can best be described as "blended learning with individuality." Digitalization opens up new possibilities for adjusting instruction to students' individual needs, for example through targeted study programs or through modules which make use of a wide portfolio of digital teaching tools. This is supplemented with comprehensive individual advising, using both a variety of communications technologies and face-to-face meetings in Hagen and in the FernUniversität's regional centers. Enrollment at the faculty has doubled in just a few years.

The faculty is continuing on this successful path: Planning has begun for a new interdisciplinary master's program in Data Science. Additionally, the faculty is designing bachelor's and master's programs in computer science specifically for students with prior knowledge and experience, creating additional flexibility for students to transfer between educational systems or from vocational training to university education.

Currently the faculty is placing its focus on students enrolling from abroad by offering German-language study programs which also impart cultural knowledge. In this way, international students can gain an edge when working for German companies abroad or in Germany.



### Open and Diverse

The youngest of the FernUniversität's faculties, the Faculty of Psychology, was founded in 2018. The Fern-Universität's first professorship in psychology, however, was already established in 1978; in 2008 the FernUniversität's Bachelor in Psychology became Germany's first recognized university-level distance learning program in psychology. Today the FernUni's two psychology degree programs – bachelor's and master's – have a combined 15,000 students.

Thanks to digitalization, students receive high-quality advising and support despite these high student numbers: Teaching staff increasingly make use of online lectures, mobile networks for students, virtual research internships, and interactive elements to enrich learning. Digitalization also plays a role as one of three focal areas of research interest in the Psychology of Digitalized Education. Further research focal areas include Legal Psychology as well as Psychology, Diversity, and Social Cohesion. Researchers in the faculty use both on-campus laboratories and the FernUniversität's infrastructure for online research in their projects. Since 1997, the faculty has housed a nationally significant research archive on the history of psychology, one of only two in Germany.

The faculty considers the diversity of its students and staff to be an important resource. The faculty sees itself as a place for diversity, where open-mindedness, respect, and participation are firmly anchored in research and teaching.



### Prepared for the Future

The Faculty of Business Administration and Economics stands on three disciplinary pillars: business administration, economics, and business informatics. With over 20,000 students, it is one of the largest faculties of business administration and economics nationwide, while also maintaining an international presence – around 2,000 of its students live abroad.

Beyond research in individual subject areas, the faculty participates in interdisciplinary research within the university's research clusters, conducts research on topics such as East Asia and environmental economics, and covers a disciplinary spectrum which ranges from IT governance to corporate management to logistics.

The faculty responds to prospective students' needs according to its own disciplinary culture, for example by expanding its range of master's programs with a qualification that is oriented towards practical applications. Its Master in Business Administration and Economics for Engineers and Natural Scientists imparts business expertise to new target groups. For working professionals, it offers targeted continuing education and professional development programs, which are focused on students' individual needs.

In order to further increase its international focus, the faculty is expanding the number of specialized English-language modules it offers. It has long-running, proven cooperations with universities in Hungary and Russia for dual-degree programs. Its distance learning programs know no boundaries: students can take part from all over the world, all course contents are available digitally, and exams can be taken from abroad. Building on this flexibility, the faculty continually develops innovative teaching and learning methods with mobile access for all students.











### Innovative and Practical

Tradition and innovation – since its founding in 1979, the FernUniversität's Faculty of Law has maintained a balance between these two principles, with its traditional study programs and innovative teaching formats. With over 9,000 students, it is the largest faculty of law in Germany.

In research, the faculty represents the cutting edge in certain areas of the law within Germany. One example of this is the W. P. Radt Endowed Chair of Civil Law, Industrial Property Law, Private International Law and Civil Law, which was endowed by an association of patent attorneys. The faculty additionally sets the standard in the field of out-of-court settlement and mediation. In the fields of basic research, comparative legal research, and legal history, Hagen's legal scholars are also among the best of their discipline. Young people who have just completed secondary school are increasingly interested in the faculty's practice-oriented degree programs, which conclude with a Bachelor or Master of Laws. The Erste Juristische Prüfung (first legal examination) study program paves the way for students to enter the entire spectrum of legal professions in Germany.

Via EDELNet (European Distance Education in Law Network), the faculty cooperates with the law departments of distance-learning universities in the Netherlands and Spain. This cooperation enables students, including those in full-time employment, to take part in short stays abroad and international exchange through virtual mobility. This promotes mutual understanding between European legal cultures. Networks, Knowledge Transfer, and Continuing Education



# In Dialogue with Society

The FernUniversität in Hagen carries knowledge outside the university into government, industry, and society.

This happens via research projects, political advising and public lecture series and events – and especially via the minds of its students. Eighty percent of students at the FernUniversität are employed and put the knowledge they gain in their studies directly into practice. In addition, the FernUniversität is an important link in both local and global networks: It is active in cooperative and international research projects and engages in contract research and consulting services for industry and government – up to and including the German federal government.

The FernUniversität also engages in dialogue with local citizens: During its set of local event series Hagener Kontroverse ("Hagen Controversies"), Lüdenscheider Gespräche ("Lüdenscheid Conversations"), and BürgerUniversität Coesfeld ("Citizens' University Coesfeld"), researchers spend the evening discussing current topics with the general public. Through institutions and platforms such as the Digitale Hochschule NRW cooperative network for digitalization in higher education and the Kompetenzzentrum Mittelstand 4.0 center for small and mediumsized businesses, the university supports initiatives which promote digitalization processes.





The FernUniversität offers continuing education – for both personal and professional development, in every life situation.

### **New Structures for Continuing Education**

To promote the mission of lifelong learning, some academic chairs and institutes at the FernUniversität have been actively engaged in continuing education for years. In the future they will be supported by the newlyfounded Institute for Continuing Academic Education, particularly with regards to reaching new target groups and communicating information about their programs to external audiences.



As the largest employer and educational institution in the city, the FernUniversität is committed to the city of Hagen and the surrounding region. It founds local networks and is actively engaged in projects for city and regional development as well as in the cultural sector.

## FernUniversität: Made in Hagen

Hagen is the "City of the FernUniversität." This title is proudly displayed on most of the local signs and on the city's official letterhead. The university, for its part, bears the name of its home city as the "FernUniversität in Hagen."

Located in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in western Germany, the city has a population of around 200,000 and sits on the border between the densely-populated Ruhr area with its history of industry and culture, and the Sauerland, which is known for its natural parks and hiking trails.

At the time of the university's founding, the choice of location was a political decision. Hagen was impacted by structural changes in the industrial Ruhr region, and the placement of the university was intended to bring new momentum.











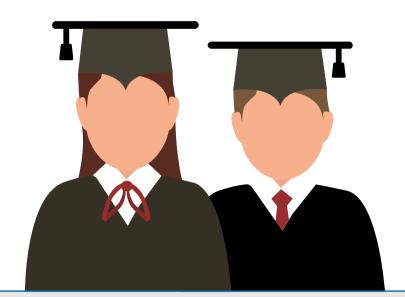
The FernUniversität's connection to its location is visible on its campus. Over the years, a diverse architectural ensemble has gradually sprouted up on the meadow which surrounded the Villa Bechem, as the FernUniversität concentrated its various offices and locations on the campus. Today, the FernUniversität is among the largest employers in Hagen, with around 1,800 employees in research and teaching, administration, logistics, and technology. The majority of the FernUniversität's employees also live in the region.

The campus is also a point of interest for residents of Hagen and the surrounding area. They visit the university's library to study, borrow books and journals, or to use the library's catalog for research. They also know the library as a regular host of public exhibitions, readings, and lectures. In addition to these cultural programs, the university also organizes the Hagener Forschungsdialog ("Hagen Research Dialogue") series in which researchers present their research topics to the general public in the form of lectures, readings, symposia, and discussions, including at locations beyond the university's campus.

The FernUniversität is also firmly established in local networks. The Society of Friends of the FernUniversität, which provides support for the FernUniversität's activities, counts FernUniversität graduates from Hagen among its actively engaged members. The city and the university also cooperate in cultural and scientific activities. For many people in the city, the FernUniversität's annual Campusfest is a major event in the city calendar.

Far more than just a campus with state-of-the art facilities: the FernUni combines local roots with global networks.

# Around **75,000** students





80 % are employed



**47 %** have a first degree



Most are between the ages of **29–35** 



Around 6,000 live abroad



Over 45 years of distance education excellence

5

3 interdisciplinary research clusters

90

90 professors in 5 faculties 24

24 bachelor's and master's degree programs



Around 1,800 staff

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# A University for the Future

