

## Fachhochschule – what's that?

The **Fachhochschule (FH)** or **University of Applied Sciences and Arts** is a type of German institution of higher learning that emerged in the early 1970s and differs from a traditional university mainly through its practical orientation. Subjects taught at a Fachhochschule include engineering, computer science, business & management, arts & design, communication studies, social service and other professional fields.

The *Diplom* (FH) is the traditional degree awarded at a Fachhochschule. Actual coursework generally totals six semesters of full-time study with various options for specialization. In addition, there are one or two mandatory practical training terms to provide hands-on experience in a real working environment. The program concludes with the final examination and a thesis which usually is an extensive investigation of a current practical aspect of the profession.

The final degree - *Diplom* (FH) - is sometimes compared to an American B.S. While both degrees tend to be equal in program length, the subject component of a *Diplom* program at a Fachhochschule is generally more developed than that of a typical American bachelor program. In an effort to make educational degrees more compatible within Europe, the German *Diplom* degree will be phased out and replaced by the European bachelor degree by 2012.

The Fachhochschule is clearly characterized by the aspect of curricular practical training. In addition, many students have completed apprenticeships or other work-based training programs and gained professional certification as technicians in their field before they enter the Fachhochschule. The balance between general-theoretical knowledge and practical training enables the students to gain specific skills and a broad base of knowledge to adapt to future technological changes.

The Fachhochschule represents a close relationship between higher education and the employment system. The students' up-to-date knowledge of the field enhances their preparation for their profession. Their practical orientation makes them very attractive for employers.

Adapted from: G. B. Porter, Federal Republic of Germany: a Study of the Educational System of the FRG and a Guide to the Academic Placement of Students in Educational Institutions of the United States. (AACRAO)

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