

# FU-BEST Program Academic Regulations for Online Courses and Code of Online Conduct

## I. Academic Regulations

The FU-BEST Program is an official program of Freie Universität Berlin, which has entrusted ERG Universitätsservice GmbH with the task of carrying out the organization and management of FU-BEST.

In order that students attending the FU-BEST program may earn credit toward their degrees through their home institutions, an Academic Board at Freie Universität Berlin reviews and approves all FU-BEST course offerings. The Academic Board consists of tenured university professors from various disciplines and establishes academic rules and regulations for the FU-BEST program and its courses.

Online courses offered by FU-BEST are subject to the following specific academic regulations.

### 1. Admission Prerequisites

FU-BEST online courses are intended for students at 4-year universities and colleges who are in the process of completing their B.A./B.S. degree. Admission will not be denied on the basis of race, ethnic or national origin, creed, gender/sex, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation/identity.

Applicants to the FU-BEST online program should:

- be at least 18 years old,
- have at least completed three semesters of higher education at the start of the course,
- and provide documentation (a transcript copy) that their grade average equals at least the second-highest grade awarded by their home institution (e.g., a 2.0 if the highest grade is 1.0; or a 3.0 if the highest grade is 4.0; or a B if the highest grade is A; etc.).
- In order to complete a rigorous academic course in English, students need to possess English language abilities in speaking and writing on the Upper Intermediate Level (at least B2, preferably above). Non-native speakers may be requested to submit English test scores along with their application. For TOEFL, the score should be minimally 100. In the case of IELTS, the overall score must be at least 6.5 and the scores on individual parts must be no lower than 6.0.
- For subject courses offered in German, students need to possess German language abilities in speaking and writing on the Upper Intermediate Level (at least B2, preferably above). These will be tested with an online test after admission to the program.

Participation in a specific German language course requires adequate language skills for the level in question. An online test that all students above the Absolute Beginner level need to complete after admission to the program will determine the participant's German language abilities prior to program start. Should the test result be below the necessary threshold for the level in question, FU-BEST will suggest a switch to a lower language level (if available) or offer a withdrawal from the language course and a refund of the Tuition Fee for this course (if paid at that point, minus applicable banking fees). The Program Fee is non-refundable after it has been paid. Should the test result allow the participant to move to a higher-level German course (if available), FU-BEST may suggest to the participant a switch to the higher level.

## **2. Course Enrollment**

Enrollment in courses is carried out following the “first-come, first-served” principle, that is, based on chronological receipt of the online application. Maximum enrollment in German language courses is 15 participants, maximum enrollment in subject courses is 20 participants.

## **3. Language of Instruction**

In all German language courses, instruction takes place in German. Most FU-BEST subject courses are taught in English, with some exceptions taught in German. Should a participant’s language skills on-site fail to meet the prerequisites formulated for a given subject course (prior submitted and accepted official test results notwithstanding), they may negatively affect said participant’s course grade or at worst lead to exclusion from the course. The decision for the latter will be made in consultation with the instructor, the student, and the FU-BEST Academic Directors.

## **4. Technical Requirements**

For our online courses, we expect participants to ensure that they have at their disposal adequate technological equipment to actively participate in the course from beginning to end, including synchronous online activities as well as asynchronous assignments. Students need to be online for each live session (for the specific time slot, see syllabus) while the course is running. There will be no recordings of live sessions, so a missed session cannot be accessed later.

Our online courses feature a good amount of independent coursework and thus expect students to be able to set up a self-disciplined study routine. We also recommend that students make sure to have a quiet and appropriate working space.

Technical equipment needed:

- Stable Internet connection.
- Fully functional device, such as computer, laptop or tablet (use of smart phones is not recommended) with camera and microphone, headset recommended.
- Recommended operating systems: Windows 7 or higher or Mac OS X 10,13 or higher. Avoid using a VPN.
- Software: Webex Meetings.

## **5. Course Design and Course Requirements/Assignments**

FU-BEST online courses feature a combination of synchronous activities (e.g. live sessions, group discussions, exams and more) and asynchronous activities (e.g. pre-recorded lectures, interviews, assignments, readings, etc.). Course elements from both categories add up to 30 contact hours per course and 90 hours of non-contact workload. Students also need to compile a “Portfolio Intercultural Awareness” (PIA) for each course with an additional 30 hours of workload prior to, during, and after the semester, resulting in 150 hours of academic work overall which equal 6 ECTS credits (see “Credit Calculation” below).

The weekly live sessions will be combined with recorded video lessons and intensive work through the online course platform, both individually and in groups. Please see the specific course requirements in the respective course syllabus for the various formats and weight of the course assignments as well as forms of assessment.

## **6. Online Attendance**

Attendance in the online course sessions is mandatory. Punctuality is expected, also out of respect to both teachers and fellow students. Absence due to illness or another legitimate reason must be reported to the instructor(s) of a participant’s course(s) by e-mail. Students are entitled to make up exams missed due to illness, subject to arrangement by the instructor. A minimum attendance rate of 75% of all sessions is necessary to successfully complete a course.

## 7. Grading System

FU-BEST uses the grading system of Freie Universität Berlin, featuring numerical grades (please see the table below). The program itself does not award Pass/Fail grades; students interested in this type of grades should make appropriate arrangements with their own home institutions. FU-BEST transcripts (produced in English) contain only German/Freie Universität Berlin grades. Participants are entitled to comprehensive feedback regarding any grade received on an assignment or test.

### GRADING TABLE

Please note: the grades of 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 1.9, 2.1, 2.2 etc. are not given.

FU Grade	Points on 100-Scale
1.0	98-100
1.3	95-97
1.7	90-94
2.0	85-89
2.3	80-84
2.7	75-79
3.0	70-74
3.3	65-69
3.7	60-64
4.0	50-59
5.0	< 50

## 8. Credit Calculation

FU-BEST awards ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. ECTS is based on the principle that the workload of a full-time student during one academic year is equivalent to 60 credits. This includes in-class contact hours as well as individual work on assignments and class preparation. On average, the student workload of a full-time study program in Europe is between 1,500 and 1,800 hours per year; thus, one ECTS credit represents between 25 and 30 hours of work.

## 9. Transcript and Credit Transfer

FU-BEST will issue a Freie Universität Berlin transcript for each participant. The transcript lists all courses taken, the number of contact hours, the ECTS credits earned, and the final grade. Please note that credits can only be awarded if a participant successfully completes a FU-BEST course and is currently or has been enrolled at a university or college. FU-BEST issues the transcripts approximately four weeks after the end of the program. The transcript will be sent to the student's home institution or study abroad provider, whichever is applicable; each student will receive a personal electronic grade report. It is the student's responsibility to provide FU-BEST with a correct mailing address for the official transcript. Students should bear in mind that overseas mail delivery may take two weeks or longer.

Because each institution has its own policy regarding credit transfer from other institutions, FU-BEST strongly recommends that students consult with the appropriate advisor(s) and professor(s) in order to receive credit transfer approval prior to enrolling in the FU-BEST program.

## 10. Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is a severe offense that is incompatible with the academic standards and self-understanding of Freie Universität Berlin. Therefore, FU-BEST students pledge not to engage in academic dishonesty, plagiarism, cheating, the use of unauthorized materials, or accessing or distributing confidential academic materials.

If a student appears to have broken this pledge, he or she will be notified, usually within two working days, that there has been an academic dishonesty charge filed against him or her. He or she will also be notified when and where the review of the charge will take place. The Academic Directors and one faculty member who is not involved in the specific case will conduct the review. During the hearing the student will be presented with all details of the charge filed against him or her and be asked to present his or her case. If the student admits to the charge, the circumstances of the violation will be discussed and an appropriate sanction will be determined. If the student denies any wrongdoing, the review committee will consider all existing information, gather more data if necessary, and make a decision. The student will be notified within two working days of this final decision.

Possible sanctions for academic dishonesty are, in ascending order: warning, grade penalty, failure of the course.

## 11. Course Grade Appeals

Our course instructors are the primary authorities in grading matters. Students who wish to formally appeal a course grade may, however, submit a fact-based petition in writing to the Academic Directors (no later than February 1 after a Fall Semester or June 1 after a Spring Semester). The Directors will review the available documentation related to the grading decision and discuss the appeal with the instructor involved. Should there be good factual reason to grant the appeal, the grade will be changed and a new transcript issued. The student will be informed within a week about whether the appeal was granted or denied.

## 12. Learning Difficulties and Physical Disabilities

Students with identified learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities should inform the Academic Directors in writing and be prepared to provide official documentation prior to the beginning of the program. If possible in the online course setup, FU-BEST will take appropriate measures to accommodate any student's special needs.

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## II. Code of Online Conduct

**Our online study environment is a place for safe, respectful, polite, and comfortable academic and personal exchange and interaction.** While communicating and interacting online, students, instructors, and staff pledge to:

- Use polite language and give room to others' contributions
- Respect others' opinions and statements
- Conduct discussions respectfully and factually
- Refrain from disrespectful non-verbal communication (mimics, gestures, other body language)
- Participate in live sessions or other synchronous interaction actively, concentrate when others are talking, and focus when talking themselves
- Try to be present visually and acoustically in live sessions or other synchronous interaction whenever possible and conducive to the learning/teaching experience (exceptions permitted)
- Complete asynchronous assignments on time and (if collaborative in nature) in cooperative spirit and conducive to the learning experience of others
- Respect copyright and ownership laws of students, faculty, staff and other sources
- Tolerate others' privacy
- Refrain from comments on the personal surroundings of other participants

**Intolerant, disrespectful, disruptive or otherwise irresponsible behavior as well as actions detrimental to the learning experience and academic progress as well as the comfort and well-being of students, instructors, and staff and/or the reputation of the program and Freie Universität Berlin are prohibited and will not be tolerated at FU-BEST. Such behavior includes, but is not limited to:**

- Verbal abuse of faculty, staff, students, and/or FU-BEST representatives
- Behavior that is noticeably disturbing or distressing to students, staff, or faculty
- Sexual harassment, disorderly, lewd, indecent or obscene gestures or actions
- Harassment of any kind, hate speech, cyberbullying, online stalking, spamming, misuse of online chats, impersonating another user
- Disturbance of online classes
- Secret and/or unauthorized recording of any online group activities, or unauthorized distribution or publication of any (authorized or unauthorized) recording
- Uploading of illegal material (as defined by German law) or of material disturbing to or disrespectful of other participants, faculty, or staff, societal, religious, ethnic, national, sexual/gender, cultural, or any other defined groups

If you have witnessed or strongly suspect a violation of these rules, or if you are a victim of an infraction, please contact your instructor and/or a FU-BEST program representative.

Students violating this Code will be subject to appropriate review and sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the program. This Code of Online Conduct applies in conjunction with any other (home) university/college rules of conduct that may be applicable, with the [Code of Conduct for Digital Coursework of Freie Universität Berlin](#), as well as with German criminal law.

**If a complaint is filed, based on this Code of Conduct, against a FU-BEST student, the following applies:**

1. Complaints against a student should be filed directly with one or both of the Academic Directors.
2. If a student appears to have violated the Code of Online Conduct, said student will be notified that there has been a charge filed against him or her. The student will also be notified when and where the review of the charge will take place. Depending on the gravity of the violation, a formal warning may be issued first or an actual violation review session may be immediately scheduled.
3. The Academic Directors, one additional FU-BEST staff member, and a representative of ERG Universitätsservice GmbH will conduct the initial review. At the review hearing, the student will be presented with all details of the charge and be asked to present the student's case. The student may present other pertinent information, including written statements from witnesses, and/or may opt to add a personal witness to the meeting. Depending on the gravity of the situation, a representative of the Office of International Affairs at Freie Universität Berlin may be asked to weigh in as well at this initial hearing.
4. If the student admits to the charge, the circumstances of the violation will be discussed and an appropriate sanction will be determined.
5. If the student denies any wrongdoing, the review committee will consider all existing information, gather more data if necessary, and decide upon disciplinary steps taken. The student will be notified within two working days of this decision.
6. The student involved may appeal the decision reached in writing within two working days. A further hearing is then scheduled, including as participant a formally designated representative of the Office of International Affairs at Freie Universität Berlin. After this hearing, the previous decision is either confirmed, rescinded or amended.
7. Any decision involving dismissal from the program will always be reviewed first by the Office of the Director of International Affairs.
8. Sanctions for violation of this code of conduct include (but are not limited to) the following: warning/reprimand, grade penalty, notification of the home university, dismissal from the program, or any combination of the above.

**If a complaint is filed, based on this Code of Conduct, against a FU-BEST *staff or faculty member*, the following procedure applies:**

1. Complaints against a staff or faculty member should be filed directly with one or both of the Academic Directors.
2. If a staff or faculty member appears to have violated this code, the staff or faculty member will be notified that there has been a charge filed against him or her. The staff or faculty member will also be notified when and where the review of the charge will take place. Depending on the gravity of the violation, a formal warning may be issued first or an actual violation review session may be immediately scheduled.
3. The Academic Directors and the CEO of ERG Universitätsservice GmbH will conduct the initial review. (If the complaint involves one of the Academic Directors, only the other Academic Director and the CEO will conduct the initial hearing.) At the review hearing, the staff or faculty member will be presented with all details of the charge and be asked to present his or her case. The staff or faculty member may present other pertinent information, including written statements from witnesses, and/or may opt to add a personal witness to the meeting. Depending on the gravity of the situation, a representative of the Office of International Affairs at Freie Universität Berlin may be asked to weigh in as well at this initial hearing.
4. If the staff or faculty member admits to the charge, the circumstances of the violation will be discussed and an appropriate sanction will be determined.
5. If the staff or faculty member denies any wrongdoing, the Academic Director(s) and CEO will consider all existing information, gather more data if necessary, and decide upon disciplinary steps taken. The staff or faculty member will be notified within two working days of this final decision.
6. The staff or faculty member involved may appeal the decision reached in writing within two working days. A further hearing is then scheduled, including as participant a formally designated representative of the Office of International Affairs at Freie Universität Berlin. After this hearing, the previous decision is either confirmed, rescinded or amended.
7. Any decision directly affecting an employment or teaching contract will always be reviewed first jointly by the CEO and the Office of the Director of International Affairs.
8. In the case of staff or faculty members, sanctions for violation of this code of conduct include (but are not limited to) the following: warning/reprimand, suspension without pay, or termination of contract/employment.

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