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ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences

ZHAW moves onto its “digital campus” on edX

The ZHAW is the first university of applied sciences worldwide to offer freely accessible online courses on the edX online learning platform. New to the edX platform are ZHAW courses on human rights and globalisation as well as an innovative process for fish farming using hydroponics. Further courses are planned.

The ZHAW is the first university of applied sciences worldwide and the third university in Switzerland to offer courses on edX, the trusted platform for learning founded by Harvard and MIT (www.edx.org). The first two courses will be launched on 6 October 2020: “Global Business and Human Rights” from the School of Management and Law and “Aquaponics: The Circular Food Production System” from the Department of Life Sciences and Facility Management. The courses start on 1 March 2021.

edX is home to more than 35 million learners. As a global non-profit, edX is transforming traditional education, removing the barriers of cost, location and access. On the platform, top-ranked universities and industry-leading companies offer free online courses and programs (“Massive Open Online Courses”). If the learners wish to have proof of the course they have taken, they can obtain a verified certificate (for a fee). Participants can choose from over 3,000 courses from more than 150 providers worldwide.

Aquaponics combines fish farming and vegetable production

The ZHAW online course in biology and life sciences focuses on aquaponics. The technology combines aquaculture and soil-independent food production in a circulatory system. The nutrients contained in fish food and fish excrement are used as fertilizer for plants. The plants absorb the nutrients and the purified water is returned to the fish tanks. “What fascinates me most about aquaponics is the versatility of the subject, from fish biology to high-level engineering and recycling management, everything is covered. That makes the technology so exciting,” says course instructor Nadine Antenen from Wädenswil. This process is a sustainable, resource-saving alternative to conventional fish farming and vegetable cultivation. The technology can also be applied in cities, for example.

The second ZHAW online course is devoted to ethical and legal questions of globalization and human rights. Participants learn how companies can ensure the safety and health of their employees worldwide. This also includes considerations of sustainable supply chains in an international context.

Lifelong learning and digital education – not only in times of crisis

The ZHAW's comprehensive e-learning offering is set out in the university's “Education and Digital Transformation” sub-strategy adopted in 2018. The goals of the strategy include promoting individual learning processes and flexible learning modalities (such as



learning times and locations). The ZHAW's lifelong learning strategy also aims to promote an innovative and diverse learning environment to enable lifelong learning.

“The edX collaboration and the courses produced at ZHAW offer an accessible opportunity to study versatile and high-quality courses. Correspondingly, the students have the opportunity to expand their own knowledge into global networks, where intercultural interaction and digital literacies develop alongside substance knowledge,” says Minna Koponen from the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning at the ZHAW School of Management and Law. She leads the edX Production Process Project and is the contact person for edX. The ZHAW online courses are aimed at students at Bachelor's level and working professionals, for example as part of continuing education programmes.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, the added value of digital educational offerings was highly noticeable. As the first university of applied sciences worldwide to be represented on edX, the ZHAW is thus doing important pioneering work in digital transformation. This means that the ZHAW's application-oriented teaching and learning content can be made available to a large audience not only in times of crisis.

Further ZHAW online courses are planned

The first two ZHAW online courses are in English and therefore suitable for international audiences. Further ZHAW online courses from various departments are already in planning or in production. These will be offered in German or English. So far, there are only a few German-language courses on edX. The ZHAW would like to reach these audiences with its offering. There will be a specially tailored programme for participants in Switzerland, which will be available in 2021 on the Swiss MOOC Services platform.

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Digital Transformation at ZHAW

The digital transformation has implications for society, education, teaching and research. The ZHAW is actively shaping this development. The ZHAW's funding programs support projects and individuals who have made outstanding contributions in the area of digitalization. In cooperation with the Canton of Zurich and other universities in the region, the ZHAW is thus driving forward a sustainable and digitized future. www.zhaw.ch/digital