…find alternative career paths? Part I: Professor at a University of Applied Sciences

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Often the only career path discussed in German academia is the path to the university professorship. Other career paths, whether a change out of academia or alternatives within the broader context of academia (e. g. science management, non-university research institutes, a professor at a University of Applied Sciences), are often seen as second-rate options, if being discussed at all. This can contribute to the phenomenon that people who leave the path to a university professorship or academia behind feel like a failure, because they "didn't make it as a professor:" This is utter nonsense! Depending on what your competencies, values and visions for your life are, there are plenty of joyful and fulfilling options besides the university professor. Today, we look at the option of becoming a professor at a University of Applied Sciences.

What is a University of Applied Sciences?

At Universities of Applied Sciences, teaching professional skills to students will be your central task, therefore the study programs often have an applied focus. The idea is to educate professionals for all areas in public and economic life. Transfer of knowledge from your research into other sectors (e.g. education, services, government, industry) is central to all your activities. The 427

As a trainer she offers workshops on career development in research, leadership, as well as diversity and conflict management. She is a trained mediator with a focus on conflicts in research organisations.

Universities of Applied Sciences in Germany are usually smaller institutions than universities and often have a thematic focus. They cover art, music, engineering, social and political sciences, STEM fields or/and other fields.

What do you need?

To qualify for a professorship you need a PhD, teaching experience plus 5 years of professional experience, with 3 years of these preferably outside the university/academic field. What qualifies as non-academic can vary depending on the federal state, discipline and institution. Experience at one of the four non-university research associations (Leibniz-Gemeinschaft, Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft, Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, Max-Planck-Gesellschaft) sometimes counts as non-university experience, sometimes it doesn't. A lot of Universities of Applied Sciences have difficulties to find professors, so there are qualification programs where you can either do your PhD (if you have industry experience) or gather non-university/non-academic experience (if you have a PhD). Sometimes, these paths are formalized with an attractive perspective (e. g. you are on a junior professorship position and once you have the qualification you become a W2 full professor), sometimes these are more or less informal arrangements between two organizations with no secured perspective. If you see an attractive position but are in doubt whether you might qualify, contact the institution and ask them.

What do you do?

As a professor at a University of Applied Sciences

you will mostly teach. While a regular professor at a university has to teach 9 SWS, at a University of Applied Sciences you have usually 18 SWS. However, the way you will teach is often different. You have smaller groups of students and therefore more contact with them. Additionally, practical/applied projects as well as problem-based teaching is much more common than at a university. So called "soft skills" can play a large role. Also, the students often differ from those at a university: They tend to be more practice-oriented and sometimes with experience in industry.

Research comes second, but there is a lot of creative freedom to do research if you want to. Of course, responsibilities in the academic self-governance are part of the job.

This focus on teaching is a reason why it is often very difficult to change from a professorship at a University of Applied Sciences to a professorship at the university; your publication record will be most likely not competitive.

When could this be an attractive option?

A professorship at a University of Applied Sciences can be attractive if you like teaching, working with students and enjoy sharing your professional experiences with others. Furthermore, commitment to inter- and transdisciplinarity may be highly welcome or even expected from you. This is how some professors build strong (regional) networks with companies or political players and create economic and/or societal impact of their research activities. If you have a second job, it is much easier to combine both occupations (if they are thematically connected) than if you worked at a university – in particular, if you can involve your students through practical projects. Part-time professorships are also common.

Last but not least...the trends

There are two connected trends: some Universities of Applied Sciences want to strengthen their research profile and can offer to reduce the teaching load if you as a candidate can contribute to this goal (e.g. through third-party funded projects).

Up until very recently, the universities held the privilege to grant doctoral titles ("Promotionsprivileg"). In practice, this meant (and means) you have to cooperate with a university professor to formally su-

pervise PhD candidates ("kooperative Promotion"). But this is changing, too: some federal states have already given the right to grant doctoral titles to the Universities of Applied Sciences…

If you have topics for the „how to" section we have not yet touched, please email to jGfV@G-f-V.org.