Background

Experience has shown that secondary school graduates struggle to adapt to life at university in their initial semesters. Following changes in the educational system, and since the elimination of compulsory national service in Germany, students have started university at a younger age than before. Therefore they frequently lack key academic skills. In particular, students need more support to grasp analytical and methodological working methods, and gain a broader understanding of disciplines outside their chosen subject.

The BMBF-funded KOMPASS-Programme at Würzburg University was developed to ensure students experience a smooth transition between secondary school and university, and provide them with practical academic support in their initial academic terms. KOMPASS initiatives include induction/introductory courses, tutorials, and mentoring programmes, largely staffed by specially-trained, experienced students. Each faculty employs one or more coordinators who tailor the initiatives to suit the needs of the individual faculty.

Mentoring in the “Philosophische Fakultät I”

A need for academic mentoring was identified in the Philosophische Fakultät I, giving rise to the creation of the “Studierwerkstatt” (Study Workshop). The “Studierwerkstatt” is a peer-to-peer mentoring programme with an emphasis on three academic areas: learning/revision, presentation, and writing.

Writing Workshops

Specially-trained student mentors deliver academic writing workshops aimed at interested students faculty-wide. The workshops deal with each step of the writing process from the initial drafting phase to the finished document, including research and planning methods, tips for dealing with writer’s block, and issues surrounding citation/referencing.

One-to-one mentoring

After attending a workshop, students can opt to receive one-to-one sessions with a mentor to individually discuss specific issues with their academic written work.

Evaluation

Mentoring is subject to continuous improvement and evaluation processes. Evaluation forms completed by students have been overwhelmingly positive, especially about the student-led approach.