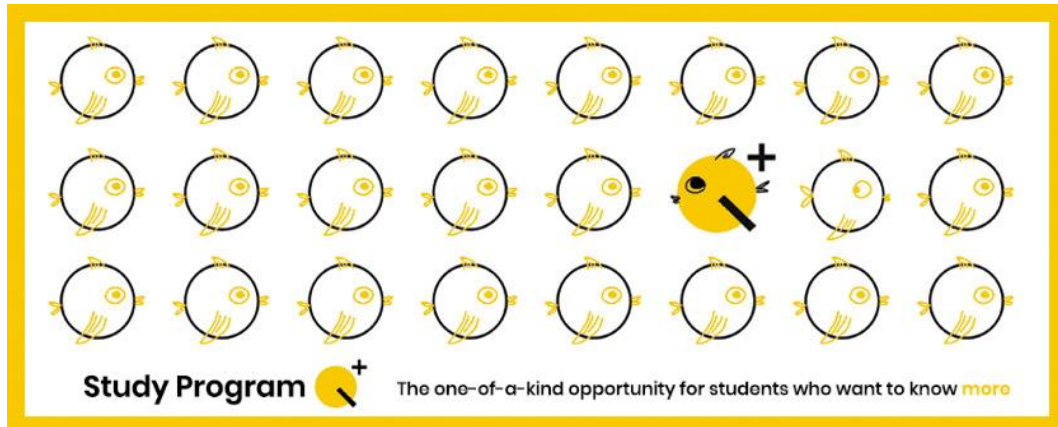


New Pathways for Lateral Thinkers - Exceptional Learning for Dedicated Students

The Q+ program gives motivated students the opportunity to learn outside of their regular degree programs and across disciplines. Over the next few years, Q+ is set to become an important component and a signature feature of academic education at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU).



Lara Grabitz studies physics and chemistry at JGU. “Even before Q+, my studies were already well diversified,” she says with confidence. “I’m active in various STEM communities, play music, and pursue personal projects. In Q+, I was able to meet more cool people: people who study different subjects, but think like I do.”

“With Q+, something has grown,” states Teresa Greb. “Friendships have developed. I’m getting together with people who have a completely new perspective on things.” Greb studies economics with a focus on marketing. “My studies already involve topics from other subjects, like psychology. But I wanted to learn about entirely different fields of knowledge. At an information event, I learned about Q+ and thought: that has got to be useful.”

“Last semester I took part in one of the Q+ block courses,” says Max Bruch. The class was called “A World without Plastics – Blessing or Curse?” “Three professors taught a group of just twelve students. It was incredibly intense work, from which I profited immensely.” Bruch studies human medicine, and he is in his seventh semester. At the moment, there are only a few medical students who participate in Q+, he says. “But we in particular stand to gain a lot here. More and more young medical graduates choose alternative career paths. In the summer semester, I took the course Entrepreneurship. Starting a business is an interesting alternative, but medical graduates are also in demand in journalism. Through Q+, I have had the opportunity to do an internship at the ZDF television station.”



Flexible and Varied Courses

In the old senate room at JGU, a large group has come together to talk about a fairly new study program. "I thought I'd send out a number of invitations and hope that someone would show up," says Dr. Doris Lindner, managing director of Faculty 05 and project leader of Q+. "In fact, everyone accepted immediately. That already shows how much this project thrives on personal commitment – even though everyone in research, teaching and administration already has more than enough work on their hands."

The first concepts for Q+ were developed at the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology. Supported by Gutenberg Lehrkolleg (GLK), the program launched a five-year trial period in 2016. After three and a half years, the JGU Senate already decided to make the project a permanent addition to JGU's academic education programs. Q+ stands for lateral connections between disciplines and students, and it invites thinking out of the box.

Prof. Dr. Stephan Jolie, Vice President for Learning and Teaching, was part of the project from the very start. "At the beginning, we interviewed a large number of students. We asked: what do you need? We didn't want to create the impression that we were an elite program, even though we are in some sense of the word. Our goal is to bring together particularly interested and dedicated students across discipline boundaries."

A highly flexible and diverse selection of courses was created. After all, every participant in Q+ should be able to find a course that would fit in their regular course schedule. On the one hand, there are block courses for such different topics as particle physics and theater, along with research internships and conferences. On the other hand, there are courses from various disciplines, opened for guest students from Q+. Students can earn credit points and certificates. So far, around 200 students and 100 lecturers from all faculties of JGU have taken part in the project.



Intensive Learning with Many Liberties

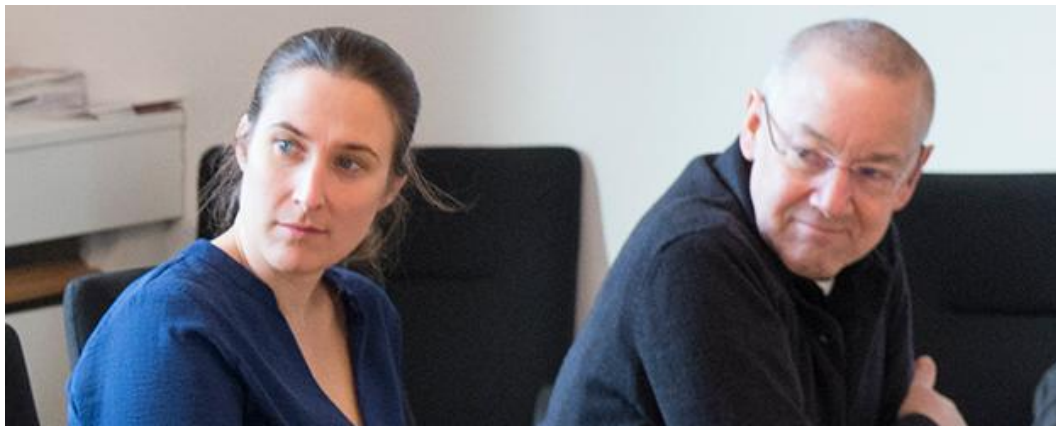
"We created a loose framework with as little regulation as possible," explains Jolie. "Regular degree programs follow set study regulations, but in Q+ we can grant many liberties." With this combination, JGU offers something that is currently unique in the German university landscape. It is set to become a signature feature: "Q+ shows a possible path for the future development of universities."

Lindner stresses: "With Q+, we address an audience that is genuinely curious. During the application process, the letter of motivation plays a crucial role. Our students are not just supposed to do well in their studies. We are looking for young people who are involved and active outside their university studies as well, and who are prepared to bring their own ideas to the table."

That is something that Prof. Dr. Thomas Vilgis from the Max Planck Institute for Polymer Research has had the chance to experience firsthand. He taught the seminar "World without Plastics?": "That was one of my favorite teaching experiences. I was able to talk about a highly politicized topic, met very interested

students, and received great feedback.” For the next semester, he is planning a Q+ seminar on the future of nutrition.

Molecular biologist Jun.-Prof. Dr. Helen May-Simera regularly invites Q+ students into her lab: “They ask questions that I haven’t thought about in ten years, and lead me to rethink my own discipline. It’s just fun to work with them. For me, that’s highly rewarding. Q+ makes university more universal.”



Rethinking Disciplines, Questioning Knowledge Processes

Prof. Christopher Miltenberger, Prorector of the Mainz School of Music, has had similar experiences. “To study music at our school, you have to pass an aptitude test. With Q+, however, some courses are opened up to a wider audience. In a seminar on the subject of song accompaniment, designed specifically for Q+, I had a very heterogeneous group of students. Some had profound knowledge, while others lacked fundamentals. As we worked out various piano patterns, discussed musical phenomena, and helped each other, I encountered questions and answers that are sure to expand my previous methods of learning and teaching.

As an exceptional center of academic research, Mainz represents an ideal base for Q+, Lindner is sure. “Next to JGU itself, we have the University of Applied Sciences and three Leibniz Institutes in Mainz, as well as two Max Planck Institutes right here on campus. In addition, we have the School of Music and the Academy of Arts, the latter of which we are partnering with for the first time in the coming semester to do a study trip to Bauhaus in Dessau. Thus, we can build on a base of exceptional knowledge and high quality, which are rarely channeled into teaching as directly as with Q+.” Soon, Q+ will also be able to offer international exchanges. “We have just established contacts with two excellent universities in Japan, and with the renowned Hebrew University in Israel.” The Q+ project has long grown out of its trial phase.

“Q+ is about the joy of learning,” says Jolie. “But the academic and scientific processes of gaining knowledge are also analyzed and questioned. This is a central topic. Furthermore, we confront socially relevant issues that a single discipline often has difficulty grasping,” explains the JGU vice president. Bruch complements these statements from the student perspective: “Q+ gives me the possibility to learn out of pure interest, free from pressure and stress. That is simply a very nice way of learning.”