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Professor Wille. "Online Teaching Seems to Work Well"

Prof. Wille (LIT Secure and Correct Systems Lab) talks about how teaching online classes can be fun and what he misses most about being on campus.



Prof. Robert Wille beim Distance Learning

How difficult was it to switch to online teaching?

Prof. Robert Wille: It was challenging but we managed to get the hang of it quickly. Like everyone else, we received information on Tuesday (March 10) that we would be switching from in-person classes to online classes. We held an "emergency session" department meeting that same evening (online already) to discuss how we would do this. I held my first online lectures the next day, less than 24 hours after receiving the initial information. I am quite proud at how quickly we responded at the JKU and at the Department of Computer Science. I heard from colleagues outside of the JKU that other universities had - and are still having - a more difficult time of it.

What are the pros and cons?

Prof. Robert Wille: My biggest concern was that student-instructor interaction would suffer. It was also important for me to continue to holding "live" class sessions. I also quickly explored the possibilities of conducting "whiteboard work" on a tablet and

use services like Mentimeter (a great tool for live feedback, by the way, which students recommended). Sure, there are disadvantages to online teaching and while it cannot completely replace in-person classroom teaching, it still works ok. I can still teach my syllabus and, from what I have heard so far, students still seem to continue having fun with it.

Vice-versa, one advantage is that students can access "live" recordings on video after class and download the "whiteboard images" as PDF files. This may be something we keep on, even after this is all over. I also think the way students are using the new options is great. During the text chat (which runs alongside the online classes), they joke around a bit to lighten things up, some students dress up funny for each class, and they post funny "memes". Despite how serious the situation is and having to adhere to the current restrictions, we have not lost our sense of humor and fun!

What do you miss about campus?

Prof. Robert Wille: Honestly, everything! Personal discussions with my team members, colleagues, and students. The work environment. Having lunch regularly at the cafeteria. "Commuting" on my e-scooter between the Science Park and Open Innovation Center. It's a shame to be working at one of Austria's most beautiful campuses but not really being able to "use" it at this time.

Are you looking forward to everything returning to normal or would you rather teach from home longer?

Prof. Robert Wille: A survey conducted by the Austrian Student Union for Computer Science showed that 75% of CompSci students are "very satisfied" to "satisfied" with the way the Department of Computer Science is currently handling online education. It seems to be working quite well. However, in regards to project work and final papers, returning to normal would be great, not to mention deciding how we will hold final examinations at the end of the semester. In this respect, I hope that the current situation remains the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand, I also understand that universities in particular must adhere to restrictions for a longer period of time. In contrast to other areas in our society, things are still running smoothly, more or less. For the long term, however, I would like to get back to teaching in the classroom again and not from home.

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