

# Official Statistics at German Universities

Sibylle Schmerbach  
Humboldt-University of Berlin  
Department of Economics  
Spandauer Str. 1, D-10178 Berlin  
e-mail: sibylle@wiwi.hu-berlin.de

## 1. Introduction

The Commission for the Improvement of the Information Infrastructure between Science and Statistics (CII), sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Research, emphasized in its expertise "Ways to a Better Information Infrastructure" in March 2001, that the knowledge about the survey and preparation of empirical data, the competent use of already given data sources, as for example data from the official statistics, as well as the use of data and experiences of other countries' scientists have shown great deficits within and out of universities in Germany.

Furthermore, the current public impression of the role of official statistics as a provider of a very important "public good" still doesn't correspond with its great importance in the various parts of society. There are a lot of reasons for this development, as examples shall be mentioned the problems concerning the protection of the privacy of personal data as well as the connection between statistics and the manipulation of data.

Confidence in the work of official statistics, acceptance and appreciation of their products can only be developed through fundamental knowledge about contents and working principles of official statistics in Germany.

It is obvious, that German universities have to take a great responsibility in this context. In these institutions of education and research generations of young and talented people are being offered knowledge and information they will use to solve problems and make decisions in their future career in a direct or indirect way. The competent and unbiased use of statistical data concerning various parts of politics, economy and society, to a large extent produced by the institutions of official statistics, is an important part of each leading activity in the information society.

Through this overview shall be shown, in which amount and concrete presentation the goals, tasks, products and problems of official statistics in Germany are part of German universities' curricula. At the same time shall be illustrated, to which extent German universities use their possibilities to teach the young generation the responsible and effective use of official data.

## 2. Overview Germany

At German universities official statistics are usually taught in connection with economic statistics. For this reason the following statistics and statements refer to those German universities that provide an education in economics and/ or business administration.

The following tables give information about the supply of courses in official statistics or economic statistics during basic and major studies.

Number of universities with a Department of Economics / Business Administration	69
Providing economic statistics	19
Providing economic statistics only during basic studies	6
Providing economic statistics only during major studies	6
Providing economic statistics during basic and major studies	7

### Economic Statistics During Basic Studies

Number of universities providing economic statistics during basic studies in Economics / Business Administration	13
Providing economic statistics as a part of general statistical education	6
Providing economic statistics as a special course	7
Number of universities with economic statistics as a part of the exam to get the intermediate diploma	12

Economic Statistics During Major Studies (as a required elective)

Number of universities providing economic statistics during major studies in Economics / Business Administration	13
Providing economic statistics as a part of general statistical education	0
Providing economic statistics as a special course	13
During 1 lecture (2 hours per term)	3
During 2 lectures (4 hours per term)	6
During 3 lectures (6 hours per term)	4
Number of universities with economic statistics as required part of the required elective	2

Only a quarter of German universities with a Department of Economics or Business Administration provides an education concerning the contents of the work of official statistics by means of a lecture on economic statistics, a third of them during basic studies, a third during major studies and a third during both parts with different intensities.

The following table shows the variety of main topics in economic statistics and the number of universities teaching these contents:

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Number of providing universities</b>
Methods of the data survey	13
Institutions of official statistics	6
Population statistics	13
Statistics of the labour market	13
Price statistics	12
Statistics of production industries	10
Statistics of external trade	4
Statistics of budget and equipment of households	5
National Accounts	11

3. Example: Department of Economics of Humboldt University Berlin

At the Department of Economics and Business Administration of Humboldt University Berlin official statistics as an immanent part of economic statistics plays an important role in the curriculum of major studies in the required elective statistics. Lectures, seminars and workshops with active inclusion of the students give a detailed impression of the relationships between official statistics, science, politics and society.

The overall idea “Economic and Population Statistics” is provided by means of two lectures “Economic and Population Statistics I” and “Economic Statistics III – National Accounts” and a seminar “Economic and Population Statistics II” with different methodical-didactical focusses during 2 terms.

The extensive field of economic statistics on national as well as on European basis is taught exemplary, interactively and practically orientated with the help of realistic records.

The lecture “Economic and Population Statistics I” works on the following topics:

- Institutions of official statistics
- Population statistics
- Statistics of the labour market
- Statistics of production industries

The seminar “Economic and Population Statistics II” includes the following topics:

- Institutions of official statistics
- Statistics of the services sector
- Price statistics
- Statistics of external trade
- Economic surveys

The lecture “Economic Statistics III – National Accounts” works on:

- National Accounts as a cycle figure
- International systems of National Accounts
- National Product Accounting in Germany
- Input – Output – Accounting
- Property and Finance Accounting

The main focus of the overall idea is:

- To wake interest in statistical questions and problems in economy
- To teach the working principles of federal official statistics in Germany
- The competent and responsible use of available statistical data from different official, non-official data sources and media
- To generate positive experiences in the work with statistical methods on one’s own
- Advice on the competent use of modern computer equipment

Workshops, dissertations, seminar papers, internships in institutions of official statistics as well as teaching assignments to representatives of official and non-official statistics help to fulfill these goals.

#### 4. Thoughts about future tasks

The contents, working principles and also problems of the system of official statistics in fulfilling its role as the most important producer and supplier of data for politics, economy and society in Germany and as a partner of the users of data at universities and in research institutions should be taught at many more universities as it is the case today.

The CII therefore proposes in its expertise concerning the far-reaching change of the current situation:

- The extension of the subject “Empirical Economic Research” with the help of suitable methods
- The improvement of the education of students during basic and major studies in the field of statistics and econometrics by means of careful teaching of the process of survey and preparation of empirical data, the protection of the privacy of personal data and the analysis of data
- The use of realistic data, especially data of the Federal Statistical Office Germany and the empirical economic and social research
- The extended exchange of academically highly qualified personnel between universities and institution and companies

The main focus is to improve the data competence of all potential users, to reduce prejudices against the process of data survey and in this way to improve the use of data in the interest of the solution of special problems.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gutachten der vom Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung eingesetzten Kommission zur Verbesserung der informationellen Infrastruktur zwischen Wissenschaft und Statistik  
" Weg zur einer besseren informationellen Infrastruktur" März 2001

Schmerbach, S. "Wirtschaftsstatistik- Ein unentbehrlicher Bestandteil der Lehre für Betriebs- und Volkswirte" Allgemeines Statistisches Archiv, 79.Band, 2/1995

## SUMMARY

### Official Statistics at German Universities

Today, German Official Statistics define their role as a double function:

- as an authority, being a part of public administration that contributes to planning and controlling politics,
- but at the same time also as a scientific institution outside of universities, whose methods and products are part of science and research and increasingly as a service institution, that provides an "information infrastructure" about all elements of society to the entire society.

The current public impression of the role of official statistics as a provider of an very important "public good" doesn't correspond with its great importance.

Only complete confidence in the methods of working and full acceptance of its products can change the situation.

Confidence and acceptance are caused by knowledge about the contents and working principles of official statistics.

At universities of the Federal Republic of Germany, official statistics are mainly taught in connection with economic statistics. Only a quarter of German universities offer contents of official statistics in their curriculum, nearly half of them are fundamental and half of them are on an advanced level with different credits per course.

At the Humboldt-University of Berlin, in Department of Economics official statistics in connection with economic statistics are an important part of advanced level curriculum. Lectures, seminars and workshops give a different impression of the relationships between official statistics, science, politics and society.

Future activities should be to include contents of the work of official statistics as mentioned in curriculum of all German universities, first of all in curriculum of economic departments. Internships and studies for the students in statistical offices should support this process.