The Data Science Fundamentals (DSF) program provides to all HSG students at the Bachelor’s level the opportunity to acquire skills in data science, so that they can play a successful and responsible role in today’s data-driven world.

Nevertheless, the program is somewhat male-dominated. We met with two girls, who attend the program. Céline and Julia share some of their impressions about the program and women in it.

There is a big discussion about the benefits of a data scientist. What are in your opinion the benefits of becoming a data scientist?

Céline: Being part of the DSF program gives us some perspective for the future. It might help us finding a job, even if we’re not pure data scientists when we get the certificate. Another benefit of the DSF Program is, that it gives us an understanding of a very broad amount of data. What I also like is that you always keep learning within the program by dealing with a different sets of data (e.g. medicine, aviation).

Julia: There is more and more data available and I think future jobs will require data-handling skills. So, DSF is not only a good preparation for future data scientists, but also for whatever your future job might be. Personally speaking, I’d really like to go into data science and analytics, so this program is a great opportunity.

What was your personal motivation to attend the DSF Program?

Julia: I’m not entirely sure if I want to become a data scientist as such, but I’m really interested in anything quantitative and I really like coding. Besides that, I’m also into entrepreneurship. In my opinion, there is a lot of entrepreneurial opportunity in digital technologies, and so hard skills like coding are super important.

Céline: My motivation is close to yours, Julia. I’m also not quite sure, whether I want to become a data scientist, but it’s a path that I’m looking at. Even if not, it still is very important for a person with potential future managerial responsibilities to understand data science and its processes as well. I realized the importance of data science when I was applying for a summer internship and had a look at the job descriptions. Nearly all of them required skills or knowledge in coding. This was a huge motivation to join the program.
What are your impressions of the DSF Program at the University of St. Gallen so far?

Céline: I have a great impression of the program so far. It’s a smaller group of students, so we kind of all know each other. Teachers are very much involved in us learning. For example, the bootcamp: during a class where one teacher was leading the class, several others were walking around to help us catch up if we got lost or had a problem with our computer. You really had the chance to ask many questions. All in all the learning atmosphere was great and motivating.

Julia: The biggest advantage is that you’re thrown into cold water and you learn a ton. It sometimes can be difficult and scary, but Prof. Binswanger and Prof. Ortega are amazing, and the atmosphere is great, which is very motivating. The program is a perfect starting point to learn more after on your own.

How did you react when you were thrown into cold water? What did you do?

Céline: Just hang in there and give all the best you have. Help each other out and work in groups. Figuring out the code together actually helps a lot. Overall, especially at the start it is very time-consuming. You must put a lot of effort in it, if you want to be good. But we were all very motivated, which created a very good learning atmosphere.

Julia: Exactly, you must put in a lot of time. You must be aware of the fact, that you don’t get a break in the autumn and it’s the whole day, every day. Exhausting but really rewarding.

Céline: I agree. But another advantage is the fact that we can credit some things we do to our bachelor.

Is it possible to attend the DSF Program without any previous knowledge? If no, do you have any recommendations for the preparation?

Julia: In my opinion it is absolutely possible to attend the program without any previous knowledge, since we get a little assignment and some classes before the bootcamp, which prepare you very well.

Céline: Yes, I couldn’t agree more. I did not have any previous knowledge at all. I think they don’t expect you to have any knowledge; they really walk you through all the basics during class. You don’t really have to prepare anything before starting the program except for downloading R and they’re going to tell you what to do. Most important thing is to hang in and stay up to date once classes have started, it’s difficult to understand everything if you are behind. What also helps is taking classes that relate to it after the bootcamp, so you continue applying what you learned.
How was the reaction in your environment? Did you have any benefits e.g. at a job interview or in an application process thanks to the DSF?

Julia: I am doing a summer internship in the area of process mining, where I will work mostly with SQL, a data base management software. I think completing the DSF program enabled me to do this very technical internship.

Céline: I also applied for a summer internship, but in the business analytical field and it surely also helped me to get the job, although it’s in a financial field. Some companies were surprised to hear that I had a bit of knowledge about data science coming from the University of St. Gallen.

Data Science is known as a male-dominated field of study. Also the majority of the DSF class is male. How do you feel about that? How does this affect the learning atmosphere?

Julia: For me personally, it did not bother me, but I do want to see more women succeed and be in the tech field.

Céline: For sure you notice that there are more guys than girls. At first, I was a bit intimidated by it, but within the program, the guys are very humble and kind. The learning atmosphere was not really bothered by gender. It was nice to see that others girls were also interested in data science, and there were more than I expected at first.

Did the fact that there are more men than women affect your decision to apply for the program?

Julia: I used to have a lot of respect for tech topics, which might partly have to do with it being very male-dominated. I had respect to apply, but now that I’ve done it, I gained so much more confidence. I’m a lot more confident to learn hard skills and look into tech topics.

Céline: The fact, that it’s more a men field has the positive effect that if you’re a girl and you know something you quickly gain respect and people are impressed/surprised, I have the feeling.

Julia: Also, in terms of topics like Diversity Management, it can be a huge advantage being a woman in a male-dominated field. It’s all about getting out of your comfort zone!