University of St.Gallen

CONTEXTUAL STUDIES

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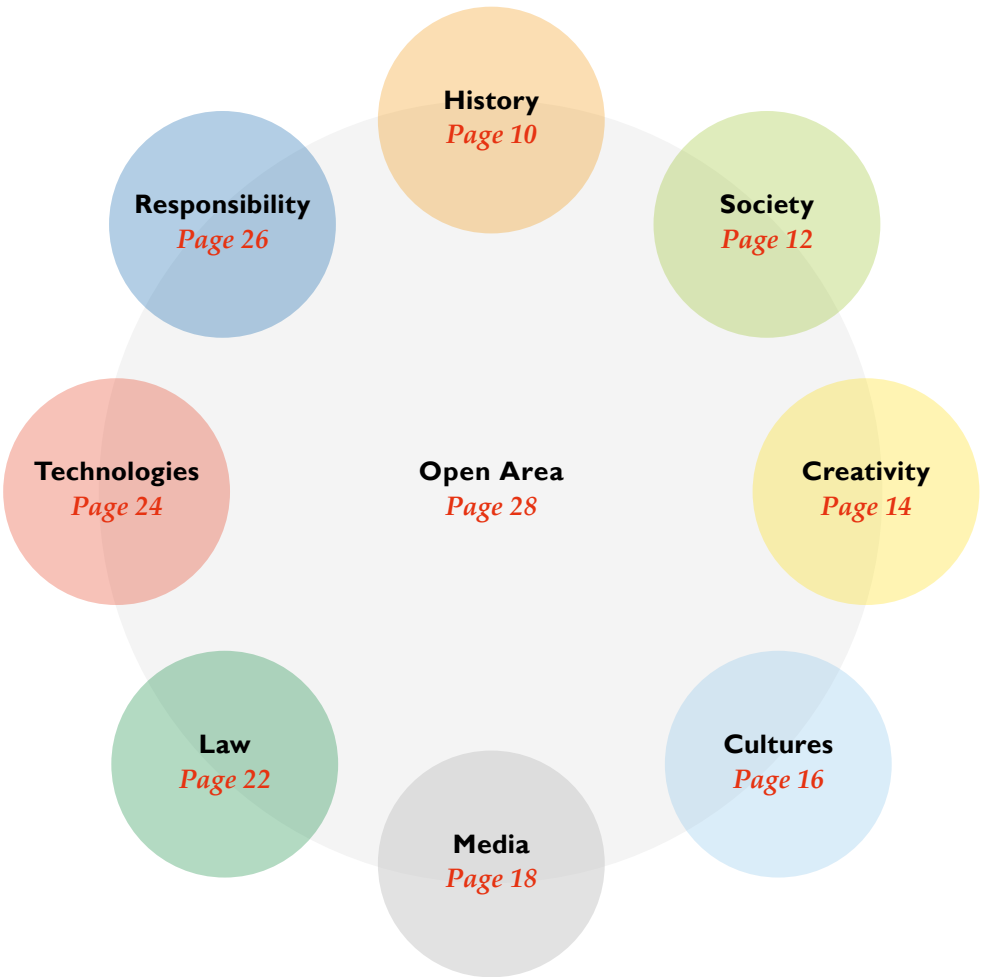


BA: Skills & Languages
MA: Skills

Bachelor Level	24 ECTS
Areas of Concentration	12 – 24
Skills & Languages	0 – 12

Master Level	18 ECTS
Areas of Concentration	12 – 18
Skills	0 – 6

Ever since its foundation as a Business Academy in 1898, the University of St. Gallen (HSG) has pursued the aim of offering an integrative education to which languages, cultural studies and social sciences especially belong. When in 2001 the HSG became one of the first Swiss universities to implement the Bologna reform, the former "Kulturfächer" were carried over into contextual studies. This structure has rapidly developed into a strategic factor for the success and the distinctiveness of the HSG. Today, contextual studies comprise 25 percent of students' academic credits on all levels and in all degree programmes. The goal is that graduates of our University should be able to understand the interactions between social, technological and cultural developments and to assess their consequences for politics, law and the economy. Contextual studies should help you to analyse complex processes in a clear-cut way, and to reflect on those processes so as to give shape to them yourselves.

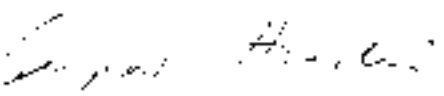
After seventeen years of successful expansion, the time has come to renew contextual studies with regard to their contents, their methods and their structure. Contextual studies will thus take greater account of contemporary developments such as digitisation and globalisation, but also of students' wishes and the requirements of the teaching curricula. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences carries the responsibility for this revised programme and will coordinate it. In contextual studies our students will profit from a great number of external teachers drawn from academia and practice both in Switzerland and beyond. The reformed contextual studies thereby supply an important contribution to the Vision 2025 of the HSG: "As a leading business university we set global standards for research and teaching by promoting integrative thought, responsible action and an entrepreneurial spirit of innovation in business and society."

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bieger
Rector

What is digitisation doing to our work and to our private lives? Why is there a need for diversity in business, society and politics? What are the effects of globalisation on different cultures and regions of the world? What consequences does the disruption of the media sector have for public opinion and democratic decision making? Why are populists enjoying political success in the United States and in Europe? What does it mean to act sustainably and responsibly in the twenty-first century? How can a company bring the creative powers of its employees to fruition?

Whoever is interested in one of these questions is in good hands in contextual studies at the University of St. Gallen. Here we put our focus on themes that are at once highly topical and persistently relevant, and we enable our students to immerse themselves in areas that they find especially fascinating. Contextual studies convey insights and competences that are sufficiently distant from the core studies in order for a significant expansion of horizons to take place, and that at the same time come sufficiently close to the core studies in order for valuable connections to arise.

With the Portfolio seminar, as an optional way in which to complete contextual studies, students now have the possibility of achieving an integrative reflection on both their core studies and their contextual studies, under optimal conditions of supervision. Contextual studies thus raise the integrative education offered at the University of St. Gallen to a new level of development, promoting connections beyond the boundaries of one's own discipline for students and lecturers alike.

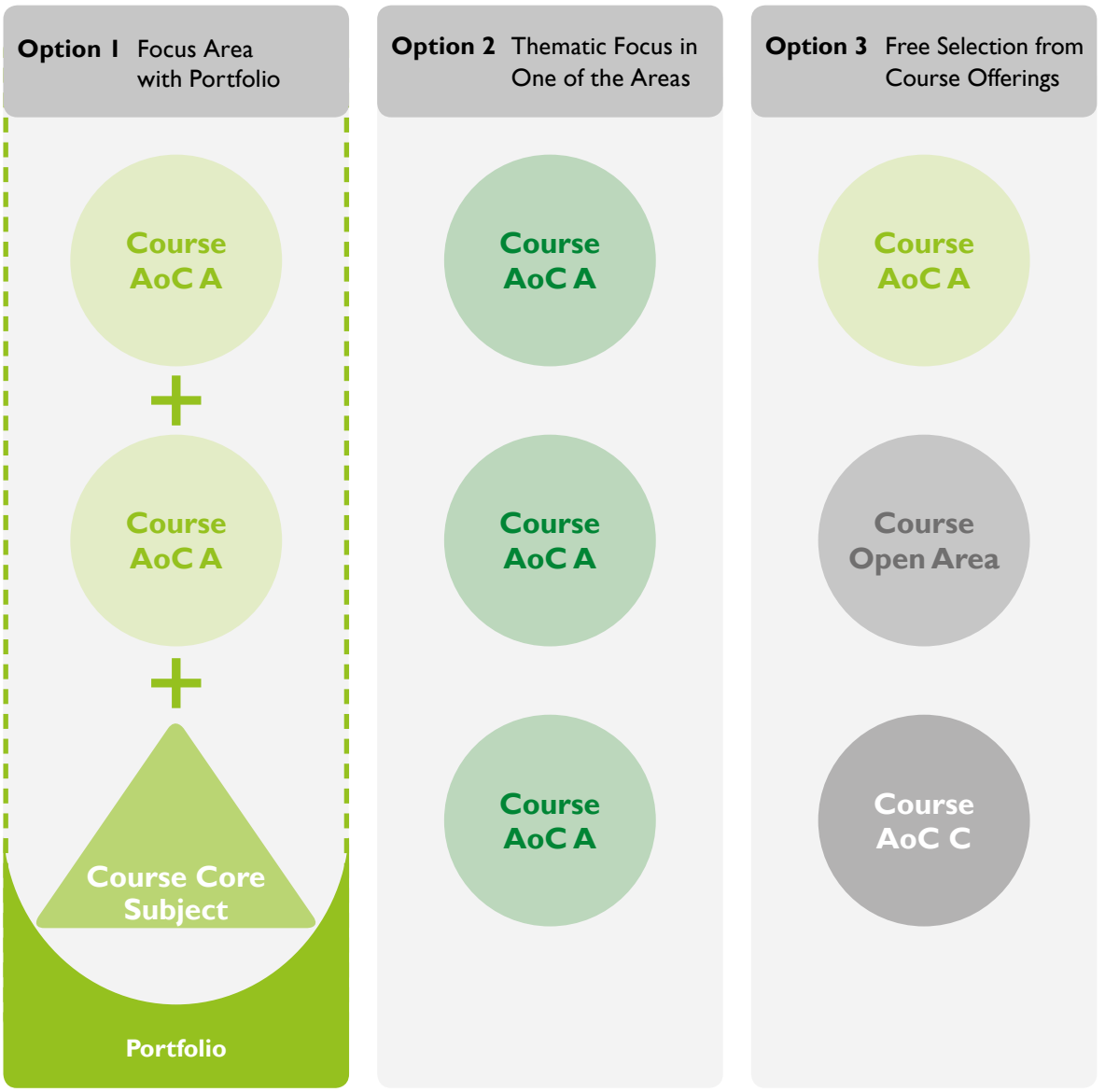


Prof. Dr. Caspar Hirschi
Academic Director Contextual Studies

Contextual studies form one of the most important and unique distinguishing features of the University of St. Gallen. They convey insights and competencies that are of particular importance in the economy, society and politics of the twenty-first century. The fundamental idea of contextual studies has always belonged to the core of the HSG. It was already apparent in the foundational curriculum of the Business Academy that was set up in 1898 and by now has become part of the DNA of the HSG as such. The idea consists of giving our students, alongside their specific subject competencies, a social, historical and cultural awareness to accompany them on their future paths. Following the Bologna reform, in 2001 the University of St. Gallen expanded the model of "Kulturfächer" that was current at the time into contextual studies. Beginning with the autumn semester of 2018, the reformed contextual studies will create spaces for reflection beyond and in between particular courses and will thereby offer a platform for innovative teaching at the HSG. Our students will be formed into personalities who are aware of their own social responsibility and who in their later lives will be capable of thinking in an integrative way and of acting in a sustainable way.

Contextual studies begin in the Assessment Year with a disciplinary introduction to History, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology. Building on this, contextual studies then offer a multi-disciplinary specialisation on both the Bachelor level and the Master level in highly relevant thematic areas: namely Media, Cultures, History, Society, Responsibility, Creativity, Law, and Technologies. An open area offers the possibility to integrate courses that are not assigned to a specific area of concentration. By means of these eight areas of concentration, students are offered the possibility of obtaining specialised qualifications, which can also be explicitly documented in a supplement to their diploma. As a completion of their chosen area of concentration, students can carry out an intensively supervised academic work of synthesis in the framework of a Portfolio course, in so far as they innovatively connect two seminars in their chosen area of concentration with a course from the core subjects. The course offerings in contextual studies are rounded off by means of skills and languages, which include introductions to academic study, seminars in rhetoric and courses in programming, as well as (on the Bachelor level) a multiplicity of language courses.

Three Ways of Taking Areas of Concentration (AoC)



Whoever wants to understand the present and to shape the future must first of all come to terms with the past. The History concentration provides insights into the most important forces that have formed our era, enabling them to be understood as the outcome of historical processes. It focuses on topics such as capitalism and consumption, nationalism and populism, migration, the metropolis, colonialism and globalisation, revolutions and innovation.

As we investigate topics from the past that are significant for us today, we do what each generation must undertake anew for itself: we consciously accept our heritage, engage with it critically, and, in so doing, to some extent rewrite the past in our own image. In asking questions of history, we consider how people in earlier eras viewed their past, experienced their present and made plans for their future, what interests and ideologies were involved, and what power relations resulted.

Coordination | Prof Caspar Hirschi and Prof Alan Robinson

Seminars at the Bachelor level provide an introduction to our major topics, drawing on a rich array of source material that includes a variety of texts, sound recordings, film and photography. They combine analysis of original documents with the study of important research, so that, through these examples, students can grasp the causal and interpretive complexity of historical processes. Some courses also extend students' cultural competence by fostering their ability to understand the values and institutions of other cultures.

At the Master level, students can choose from a broad range of advanced courses, in which historical topics of great significance for our lives as citizens and professionals are analysed, and public debates with a historical dimension are scrutinised critically. Students should be motivated to work through historical material independently, to make their own comparisons between past and present, and to practise the art of objective discussion.

Learning Objectives

Using original documents and later interpretations, students can reconstruct, contextualise and discuss historical events and developments.

Students can explain current events and developments as the outcome of historical processes and, having grasped their causal and interpretive complexity, realistically gauge the consequences of ongoing transformations.

"There is no such thing as society," according to a prominent statement by a British politician. Yet society exists. Humans are social beings. They compete and cooperate with each other, are embedded in practices, discourses and life worlds, build organisations and institutions, are subject to restrictions, share goals, follow rules, and so on.

In this area of concentration, courses address some of the following questions. In what kind of society do we live? What makes a social order sustainable? How does it deal with the "wind of change"? What are the main social challenges today, and how do we tackle them? How is social justice negotiated? How is diversity practised in institutions, organisations and the social sphere at large? How does a citizen-consumer think? What about the driving or disruptive powers of globalisation?

The courses in this area of concentration build bridges between everyday experiences and the "big questions". They consider individual lifestyles and institutional processes, personal relations and social bonds, private interests and public actions. Concrete topics take centre stage – for instance, taste, consumption, fashion, advertising, art, architecture, markets, power, identity, work, migration, gender, diversity, liberty and equality.

Coordination | Dr Tanja Schneider and Prof Dieter Thomä

The methodological toolkit draws on the repertoire of social sciences, humanities and social philosophy. Bachelor level courses introduce students to the foundations of social science research. Master level courses harness interdisciplinary synergies between core and contextual studies. The general aim is to reflect, extend and supplement socio-economic models of human behaviour.

The spectrum of courses covers the entire range from critical reflection to leadership skills: it comprises the analysis of basic theories, empirical social science research and practical exercises in organising social processes.

Learning Objectives

Students analyse, reflect and judge societal developments and their relationship to economic and political processes.

Students are proficient in social science research methods and devise strategies for addressing organisational challenges.

Creativity has long been seen as one of the finest human capacities, enabling scientific invention, technological innovation and artistic creation. Recently, creativity has been inscribed as a core resource to reinvigorate local economies, world-renowned businesses, urban agglomerations and government policies. Creativity is often a password that is added when company consultants, journalists or policy-makers point toward the importance of the creative economy, the creative city, the creative class and even the creative industries – a whole new sector. Because creativity is seen as a commodity, critical voices have increasingly paid attention to the rise of the creative imperative – i.e. "be creative" – and its central position in contemporary society. In this area of concentration, we will draw on this rich range of multi-disciplinary insights.

Taking note of the ambivalences about "what creativity can(not) do", the goal of the Creativity area of concentration is primarily to analyse and reflect upon the creativity discourse that pervades our professional, organisational and private lives. In addition to understanding creativity as a conceptually driven area of research, we will draw upon concrete experiences of creation processes and aesthetic work. Therefore, courses in this area of concentration will enable students to recognise opportunities for creativity in their professional and private lives, and to try out and apply their creative abilities individually and in teams. Students will explore active involvement in creation

Coordination | Prof Martin Eppler and Prof Chris Steyaert

processes by learning how to generate novel, useful and feasible ideas in diverse ways on the basis of connecting here-and-now observations with current research results, and by connecting practical experiences to conceptual understanding. A second and important goal of the courses in this area of concentration is to inspire and challenge students by exposing them to radically different perspectives and approaches.

Talking about, analysing and reflecting on creativity is certainly important, but it also requires that we practise and embody creativity. Therefore, courses in this area of concentration set forth learning forms that invite students to leave their comfort zone, to venture, experiment and exercise. So be ready for creativity tools, group games, bodily exercises, outdoor activities and little performances; but also for conceptual exploration, critical dialogue, new vocabularies and reflective writing.

At the Bachelor level, course topics can explore creativity and creation in contexts that range from individual psychology to teams, organisations, cities and (creative) industries. Courses at the Master level can build on the above interests, but they will also differ as they engage with more in-depth empirical research methodologies, new conceptualisations (from cultural psychology, cultural sociology, human geography, aesthetic theory, gender studies and so on) and critical analysis.

Learning Objectives

Students engage with the embodied and material practices of creativity and reflect upon its mediating conditions – whether contextual, organisational, group-based or individual.

Students develop creation processes by undertaking a concrete project and mastering a set of principles, tools or fertile questions that have shown themselves to be useful for the generation of ideas and opportunities as well as for problem solving.

Cross-cultural skills can no longer be considered as "soft", but have turned into an integral part of professional qualifications. An examination of the multifaceted conceptions, images and constructions of cultures is an important prerequisite for a critical questioning of cultural differences. In this context the dissolution of borders in multi-cultural societies is likewise an expression of globalisation processes, involving constant attempts to consolidate cultural groupings in never-ending debates about "Leitkultur" or the so-called "clash of civilizations". The paradox between national cultures and cultural negotiation processes in global networks requires a constant balancing act and fosters nomadic thinking as an approach to cultural studies.

This area of concentration deals with symbolic orders as well as with patterns of perception and behaviour which underlie our thoughts and actions. In a globalised world, the impact of cultural movements and contact situations is strengthened, for example in migration flows or in the trans-nationalisation of companies. In this context particular attention should be given to the concepts of organisational culture and diversity. Each individual course will investigate different cultural spaces such as China, the Americas or Eastern Europe, for example, as well as supra-national alliances and associations (e.g. BRIC, the EU or NAFTA). In thematic terms, questions of religion and society,

Coordination | Prof Yvette Sánchez and Prof Ulrich Schmid

markets and consumers, gender and diversity, or conflict and cooperation will be up for discussion. Literature, film, art and music will serve in this area of concentration as a basis for the analysis of social and cultural processes.

The Cultures area of concentration promotes students' trans- and inter-cultural skills, as well as their reflection on constructed everyday images and conceptions of cultural differences in politics, the economy and society. While at the Bachelor level the focus lies on particular world regions and their networks, at the Master level this knowledge is progressively embedded in deliberations of cultural theory.

Learning Objectives

Students deal with different world regions and their trans-regional connections.

Students learn to use cultural and social theories, in order to question an essentialist understanding of culture and to take on the complexity of transcultural entanglements in a globalised world.

Media open a window onto our world. Both the traditional media (including printed books, the press, theatre, radio and film) and the new media (including blogs, social media and video platforms) construe realities, thus shaping our perceptions of the world and our communication. The digitisation of recent decades illustrates the growing interconnectedness of technical innovation and cultural practices. Smartphones, for instance, alongside the construction of global social media, have led to great changes in self-fashioning and also in group formation processes. More generally, the digital revolution has triggered a series of changes, including the decline of print media, changes in the public sphere and the boundaries of the private sphere, and new forms of censorship, surveillance or e-commerce. These elements, as well as the exploration of written culture as the basis of knowledge, education and cultural discourses, are important parts of the courses on offer in media competence.

The Media area of concentration focuses on the theoretical and practical understanding of the interfaces and interactions of technology, economics, culture and society, as well as on the media-specific contingencies of information transmission, the construction of reality and the production of meaning. This means that you will be able to understand the economic, technological and social conditions of formation, as well as the modes of action, of various media products (newspapers, books,

Coordination | Prof Daria Berg and Prof Vincent Kaufmann

e-books, blogs, films and so on) and of different genres (novels, TV series, wikis and so on). You will also gain the skills necessary to be able to interpret and evaluate these products. We shall, moreover, explore with you how to use the media professionally, confidently, and in a cost-oriented way in practical seminars. Another aim is to prepare you for the professional requirements of storytelling (in areas such as branding and marketing).

Bachelor students in the Media area of concentration focus on introductory media theory and media history, and in-depth courses on specific formats and genres (storytelling, advertisements, film, social media, selfies and so on). At the Master level, this area of concentration focuses on complex interdisciplinary issues related to the media and themes such as media economics, the transculturality and globalisation of the media, representations of gender, the formation of the public sphere, the social consequences of algorithms and big data.

Learning Objectives

Students analyse the technological, economic and social conditions of media and understand their effects on society, politics and culture.

Students understand the functional differences between various media and are able to use them in a well-qualified way, with special reference to digital media.

- **The additional qualifications in Book and Publishing Studies (CBS, Bachelor) and Business Journalism (CBJ, Master) overlap with the Media area of concentration in their cultural and social parts.**

- **Both academic programmes offer interesting possibilities for Portfolios, because some parts of the courses belong to the core subjects. Students thus necessarily fulfill the requirements for a Portfolio.**

- **The academic programme Book and Publishing Studies (CBS) provides students with topical issues to gain a broad and interlinked understanding of the transformations in the book and media market. For more information, please see** www.unisg.ch/en/studium/bachelor/zusatzabschluesse/lehrprogrammbuchundmedienwirtschaft

- **The academic programme Business Journalism (CBJ) provides students with a knowledge base in communication science, media economics and law, as well as practical competence in order to combine professional interactions in the media with economic expertise. For more information, please see** www.unisg.ch/en/studium/master/zusatzabschluesse/lehrprogrammwirtschaftsjournalismus

Law is as much an expression of as it is the condition for the civilisation process. As an instrument of control, organisation and planning, as well as a means of dispute resolution, it is characterised by cultural conditions and in turn has cultural consequences itself. The law, in its manifold forms of appearance, can only be understood in a transdisciplinary way; it is a product equally of historical evolution, of social practice and of political negotiation. As a normative system, law can be learned, but it cannot be understood and explained on its own terms.

Modern law in its conceptual, dogmatic and systematic positivity is a temporally contingent phenomenon that does not exhaust itself in mere regulatory functions. It reflects both empirical facticity and, even more so, normative objectives. It regulates the relationship between the individual, society, the market and the state. In this area of concentration, Law will be explained in its historical, philosophical and sociological dimensions. The area of concentration approaches the law in a transdisciplinary manner in its relationship and intersection with other sciences, in particular economics, psychology and medicine.

Coordination | Prof Lukas Gschwend and Prof Florian Wettstein

The Bachelor programme focuses mainly on general European legal history, selected areas of private law as they pertain to legal, social and economic history, legal philosophy, the sociology of law, legal psychology, law in economic contexts including both business administration and economics, and constitutional history.

The following topics are envisioned at the Master level: forensic psychiatry, legal medicine, criminology, business criminalistics, legal psychology, the penitentiary system, and contemporary legal history. The curriculum can be supplemented further by lectures on:

- Roman legal culture
- legal sociology
- law and ethics
- law, international politics and governance
- law, environment and climate

Learning Objectives

Students approach and reflect on the law in social, cultural and political contexts, and analyse legal arguments and procedures from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Students apply knowledge and skills acquired from other disciplines in different contexts of law and legal practice.

Technologies pervade contemporary life. Whether travelling or eating, working or communicating with friends and family, we are constantly interacting with technical devices and machines. Some of them, such as computers or mobile phones, are often within arm's reach. Others, like eyeglasses or pacemakers, are even closer: we wear them; we incorporate them into our bodies; they are our bodies. Yet other technologies, such as electricity or sewage systems, usually operate silently in the background – until blackouts and flooded streets confirm the truth of the saying "you don't know what you have until it's gone." For all their diversity, however, what many technologies have in common is that we take them for granted. Because our familiarity with technologies conceals their complexity, we must learn to pay closer attention.

The goal of the Technologies area of concentration is to analyse, interpret and contextualise human-built worlds. By technology, we do not mean pure instruments or inert infrastructures. Technology has social effects, cultural meanings and political relevance. These vary according to time and place, nation and class, gender and racialised identity, ability and disability. Moreover, technologies embody specific values and are dynamic forces that possess their own kinds of agency. Technologies save and destroy life, afford and procure control, connect and isolate people, and solve and generate ethical problems. To grasp the various dimensions of technology, this area of concen-

Coordination | Prof Jesse Ramirez and Prof Caspar Hirschi

tration investigates the processes and contexts in which technologies are invented, produced and researched; to understand the expectations and value systems in which technologies are embedded, we study the ways in which they are pitched, implemented, used and resisted.

The Technologies area of concentration enables students to deal with technology in their private, public and professional lives insightfully, and to see current trends such as digitisation and automation, traditional and renewable energy, and organisational innovation complexly and comprehensively. Students who successfully complete the area of concentration will not only be educated in the history and current affairs of our technological world, but will also be equipped soberly to assess the competing interests and norms, anxieties and hopes that shape our dealings with emerging technologies.

At the Bachelor level, course topics can range from Big Data to self-driving cars, artificial intelligence to genetically modified food, reproductive medicine to science-fictional visions of technology's future. Courses at the Master level can share many of these topics while also complementing them with critical discussions of major methodological and theoretical approaches to studying technology, including Science and Technology Studies (STS), Sociology of Technology, and Philosophy of Technology.

Learning Objectives

Students assess and explain the expectations, apprehensions, interests and norms that drive current technologies and technological trends.

Students critically scrutinise their own views and uses of technology and draw valuable lessons for their dealings in the ever more technological worlds of work and daily life.

Thinking about the future of society cannot be done in a meaningful manner without reflecting upon issues of social responsibility and corporate sustainability. The Responsibility area of concentration focuses on responsible leadership, corporate social responsibility, and managing social issues and natural resources. In our courses, students acquire competencies that extend beyond the tools of traditional economics and management and enable responsible action for sustainable development.

The curricula range from introductory and theory-oriented courses to a variety of specialised seminars on topics such as corporate and consumer responsibility, work and ethics, intergenerational justice, human rights, climate change, the future of energy systems, and post-growth economics, for instance. A special feature of our courses is the integration of in-depth conceptual and ethical considerations with a strong relationship to practice. The focus on action is reflected, in particular, in a variety of teaching formats (case studies, role plays, excursions and so on) and guest lectures by practitioners.

Coordination | Prof Thomas Beschorner and Prof Rolf Wüstenhagen

Overall, the Responsibility area of concentration aims at enabling reflective and active competencies regarding social and ecological issues that are related to the responsibility of various actors – from the micro-level of the individual through the meso-level of organisations to the macro-level of political frameworks and their conditions.

Learning Objectives

Students recognise questions of responsibility; they can apply them at different levels (for example, state, company and individual) and with regard to a variety of problems. As future decision-makers in business and society, they reflect on the antecedents and consequences of acting responsibly.

Students explore disruptive changes in the global environment as well as their social and environmental implications and learn to develop successful strategies for solution-oriented entrepreneurial action.

Open Area

The open area offers the possibility to integrate courses that are not (yet) assigned to a specific area of concentration. These independent course offerings aim to increase creative possibilities by adapting the contextual studies areas, giving the possibility of testing innovative course formats and of reacting flexibly with regard to the changing needs of academic study, of students themselves, and of the economy. Students are thus given the opportunity to pursue special interests and/or to discuss new formats and topics. The open area allows for a greater consistency within the areas of concentration. It serves as an experimental field for potential new areas of concentration, and offers the possibility of greater flexibility in integrating attractive courses that do not (yet) belong to the already outlined areas of concentration (including for example coaching and self-management, the philosophy of science, and business education).

Skills and Languages

The Skills and Languages area focuses entirely on building up practical competencies. Unlike the other areas of concentration, courses in the area of skills and languages are not bundled together. Students at the Bachelor level will focus on a combination of both skills and languages, while students at the Master level will focus on skills only.

Skills (BA and MA)

With regard to success in both university studies and the world of careers, practical capabilities, competencies or skills form an essential part of academic training. This is why contextual studies also offer a range of courses in skills, consistently focused on conveying and supporting practical competencies. This is where course offerings in digital literacy belong in particular (acquiring programming languages and so on), but also courses on rhetorical techniques, writing skills, the management of negotiations, time management, the methodological foundations of research, and other practically orientated capabilities.

Languages (BA)

With regard to the internationalisation of the academic world, to growing student mobility and to the globalisation of the labour market, the University of St. Gallen consistently emphasises multi-lingual competencies. This is why all students at the University of St. Gallen have to give evidence of knowledge of at least two foreign languages as a part of their academic work. Contextual studies, in the area of skills and languages, offer courses and examinations that can be used to give evidence of appropriate linguistic competence in nine foreign languages.

Foreign languages form a part of the curriculum at the Bachelor level (i.e. including the Assessment Year). At the Master level, evidence of linguistic competence is only demanded in the framework of admission requirements.

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4 **Tanja Schneider**
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5 **Dieter Thomä**
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