

# Press kit

# Content

- 3** What is iversity?
- 3** Where does iversity stand?
- 4** What can iversity do for you?
- 5** Who is behind iversity?
- 6** iversity at a glance
- 8** What students need  
Interview with founder Jonas Liepmann
- 11** The university must finally respond to our changing habits of communication  
Interview with founder Hannes Klöpfer
- 14** Voices about iversity
- 15** Press coverage

# What is iversity?

iversity is the first platform for faculty and students who are looking for an online service that combines the communicative nature of the university with the dynamics of a social network. Faculty and students can create courses, research projects and events in just a few minutes. Resources can easily be stored for future reference, messages reach the right people, announcements and deadlines are visible, the publication of research results is simplified and, therefore, accelerated. iversity is available starting fall 2011, and is free for all users.

## Where does iversity stand?

iversity is as fast as Twitter, as clever as Wikipedia, as smart as Xing, as diverse as Facebook, and as creative as Flickr. iversity combines aspects of social networks that are already being used by academics for their work today, alas partially: art historians can make their image databases available to neuroscientists preparing an article about the image history of the brain. Musicologists, focusing on 17<sup>th</sup> century opera, can connect with historians working on this period. Medical students, intending to take a semester abroad, can contact fellow students at their partner universities before even leaving. A law professor allows her students to easily revise for her course by providing her lecture notes online. The possibilities of a comprehensive collaborative academic network are sheer endless.

Social networks help to put the focus on the individual. This focus is particularly crucial in the constantly expanding field of higher education. iversity supports this development and adapts it to the user's needs: iversity speaks the language of the university.

iversity does not replace either Facebook or YouTube, Google Books or Wikipedia. It is not a platform designed for leisure, but a collaborative workspace that draws on all of these various online resources. If, however, an academic's daily work feels a little more like leisure thanks to iversity, this surely will not do any harm to the user's productivity.

# What can iversity do for you?

## **New opportunities for the integration of research and teaching**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wilhelm von Humboldt enunciated a beautiful idea: the unity of research and teaching. Until today, this idea is still set in stone as the ideal for German universities. The aim is to educate independent students who push the boundaries of science hand in hand with their professors. In order to do so, they need appropriate tools. In an era in which social networking sites have become a fundamental means of communication this may not be books alone.

While this fact is widely appreciated, the solutions universities have found, each adopting their own 'learning management system', have created as many problems as they helped to solve. Institutional content management systems for faculty and students are isolated applications that are typically incompatible with each other. In practice, these are often little more than pdf-graveyards. While these online environments may not gather dust as institutions force their faculty to use them, they are anything but inspirational and provide little to no advantage over old-fashioned mailing lists. What is needed is an efficient and elegant way to make texts easily available, announce deadlines, schedule conferences or discuss the latest class session. iversity can do all of this, for all higher education institutions at the same time. iversity is a library, an archive, a calendar, a seminar room, an auditorium, a cafeteria, a study room and a lab. iversity is a digital campus.

## **What higher education institutions gain from iversity**

This all translates into an unprecedented level of flexibility for its users. When switching from one institution to another, they will no longer lose precious time getting to know a new system, transmitting all their data and rebuilding a network of contacts. iversity can be used in addition to an existing university platform, or can come to replace it over time. Individual users can independently organize their research and teaching on the platform. This eliminates the need for elaborate management systems, which in the past attempted to centralize the complex organizational tasks of modern scientific institutions. Instead of trying to figure out how the system works, faculty and students can spend their time on exchanging ideas, carrying out research or studying. Such a vibrant online academic network is also in the best interest of the universities themselves, since it helps to increase the sense of belonging of faculty and students.

### **Network instead of hierarchy**

iversity facilitates the communication between people who share an interest in a specific topic. It also fosters an understanding of the university as a network rather than a hierarchical system. This helps to alleviate the anxiety of freshmen and helps with overcoming the formal hurdles known to breed discouragement and frustration. iversity thus is a valuable addition to life on campus. It counteracts both the anonymity of the mass university as well as the flood of useless information.

## **Who is behind iversity?**

The team, working out of Neuenhagen bei Berlin, consists of about twenty young developers and higher education specialists. The beta version of the platform attracted roughly 12,500 users from over 80 higher education institutions. The iversity team is international. Germans collaborate with professionals from Lithuania, Britain, India, Brazil, Greece and the United States. Collectively they have experience with universities from Berlin to New York to Singapore. Now they are working on something they have all been missing no matter where they went: an efficient digital infrastructure for academia. Several of the major German research institutions were immediately enthusiastic about this project. Geisteswissenschaften im Dialog ('Humanities in Dialogue'), the Leibniz Gemeinschaft and the VolkswagenStiftung are among our partners.

The idea did not only convince the scientific community, but also allowed us to secure the necessary financial support. In July 2011, the Frühphasenfonds Brandenburg (Early Stage Investment Fund Brandenburg) and bmp media investors AG together invested over 1.1 million Euro (1.6 m \$) to allow iversity to become a global platform.

In July 2011, the Frühphasenfonds Brandenburg (Early Stage Investment Fund Brandenburg) and bmp media investors AG invested in the company to allow iversity to become a global platform.

# iversity at a glance

<b>Area of activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Online workspace and social network for students and faculty</li><li>• Organisation of courses, study and research groups and conferences</li></ul>
<b>Features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• File sharing and discussion forum for academic content (literature, links, files, pictures)</li><li>• Class calendar and student notifications</li><li>• Online annotation of texts and images ('Social Reading')</li><li>• Print-on-demand service for readers and lecture notes</li><li>• Option to order books straight from the syllabus</li></ul>
<b>Target audience</b>	Students, Faculty, Researchers
<b>CEOs</b>	Jonas Liepmann Hannes Klöpffer
<b>Team</b>	20 employees and freelancers
<b>Legal form</b>	GmbH
<b>Founded</b>	2011
<b>Investors</b>	BFB early stage fund Brandenburg GmbH bmp media investors AG
<b>Headquarters</b>	Neuenhagen bei Berlin
<b>Commercial register no.</b>	HRB 13620 FF

**Advisors** Prof. Dr. Doris Kolesch  
Freie Universität Berlin

Prof. Dr. Theo Gasser  
Universität Zürich

Prof. Dr. Liv Jacobsen  
Europa Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder

Prof. Dr. Rolf von Lüde  
Universität Hamburg

Prof. Dr. Peter Liepmann  
Universität Paderborn

Dr. Philip Holtmann  
Axel Springer AG

**Partners**



# What students need



iversity's founder Jonas Liepmann gives an interview on transferring skills, iversity power users and business models

## **How did you come up with the idea for iversity?**

In Berlin, I studied at two universities at the same time, the Humboldt Universität and Freie Universität Berlin. Both universities offered very restrictive learning management systems. Although they were online services, it was impossible to move information from one service to the other. This, of course, was extremely frustrating for me. Even within the respective systems there was hardly any possibility for communication. This surprised me very much, since I was witnessing the rise of the Web 2.0 all around me. I had the impression that the universities were literally shutting the Internet out since they did not promote its most essential function: networking.

## **You studied cultural studies, drama and comparative literature. Many people think of such programmes as very far removed from the real life. How does this background help you with getting a start-up such as iversity off the ground?**

These subjects have a focus on the development of transferable skills. You have to be able to connect different content and ideas from different fields. This is, basically, what we want to achieve at iversity: To establish connections and intelligent linkages between the users and the content on the platform. Thus, the basic idea originated from the humanities. Yet, iversity also creates other forms of synergy: for example between research and teaching, between academia and the public in general, between individuals working at different institutions, all the way to students and researchers from different nations; continents even.



### **Does that mean that iversity is only of interest to those studying the humanities?**

No. Courses, research groups and conferences exist in all disciplines. Computer scientists and biologists also have the need to collaborate with others in courses and research projects. They also need to share ideas, discuss and comment on documents, publish results, find colleagues who work on the same issues as they do etc. iversity provides the features that are needed to do this for academics from all disciplines.

### **Can you describe the typical iversity user?**

With more than 12,500 registered users that's going to be a bit difficult. One of our most active users, for example, is a lecturer for media theory. His students often upload their papers and seminar material to discuss it online before meeting in person. Hence he does not sit in front of a silent group in class. Instead they just continue the debate that has started online. Moreover, the lecturer created a fictional media art award on the platform, allowing students to participate as judges and candidates so as to practice the work routines in the cultural sector. This would not have been possible within the boundaries of the course sessions due to lack of time and the organisational hassle associated with it. Another example is the European Platform for Life Sciences, Mind Sciences, and the Humanities. In this international group 32 members have come together to carry out interdisciplinary research in the field of cognitive science. They have recently organized a meeting in Tutzing, but usually they meet on iversity.

### **How does academic work change through a platform such as iversity?**

The classical paradigm of broadcast learning, the idea of the professor as sender and the student as the receiver becomes redundant on the web and particularly on iversity. This has major advantages for the students because it finally nails the coffin of the ineffective frontal teaching approach. It is very important to discuss course content to be able to really understand it. In overcrowded classrooms which today unfortunately are the norm, this is hardly possible. At iversity everyone can give his or her input. The presentation of one's own work, which has always been a key aspect of academic practice, is taken to a new level. Since we offer the option to make the content you produce public, nothing goes to waste: for example you can publish your research on the platform. Your colleagues will be automatically informed. From studies in peer-to-peer grading we know that the desire to be

recognized by one's peers typically provides a greater incentive to students than any grade does.

**This all sounds very good. However, how is the website actually funded? After all, it is free, right?**

Right now we are working with the funding that we raised in July. In the future our business model is going to focus on what we already know students need: learning materials. For example you can order literature directly from the syllabus through our website. For now, we are collaborating with Amazon, but it is also possible that going forward we will ourselves become a book dealer. We also offer a cheap print-on-demand service that allows you to order course packs by print-on-demand. We will deliver your course reader directly to your mailbox within two days. This model will allow us to keep iversity not only free for the users, but also free from advertising.

**What should iversity look like in three years time?**

I wish to see a vibrant academic community in which the tools for collaboration are so user-friendly that faculty, students and researchers can really focus on getting their work done. Connecting people from all over the world and from different disciplines on one platform should result in opening up new scientific perspectives. Studying will become more dynamic this way, even fun. You could say that we will go back to the future; to the original vision of Tim Berners-Lee, who created the World Wide Web in 1989 to encourage and to facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge within academia worldwide.



Jonas Liepmann is the founder and CEO of iversity. He studied cultural studies at Humboldt Universität and comparative literature and drama at Freie Universität Berlin. He was involved with various e-learning initiatives at the Freie Universität Berlin and has worked in numerous art and film projects as an assistant, director and actor.

# The university must finally respond to our changing habits of communication



iversity founder Hannes Klöpfer on social networks, the collaborative acquisition of knowledge and the university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Strangely enough, many students use social networks to comment on Lolcats. Meaningless posts produce incredible dynamics. During my studies I was frustrated that none of this was happening at university.

I studied at very different universities. Among them, Columbia University in New York was the most traditional. The European College of Liberal Arts and the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin have been founded very recently, in an attempt to bring some innovation into the conventional German system of higher education. Yet, in the end all five institutions I attended faced the same problem: They did not possess an appealing online platform that would have encouraged students to, for example, comment on each other's work the way they would do on the videos of their favourite bands on Facebook. It often simply wasn't possible to identify, within the anonymous mass of my fellow students, those who were interested in the same issues as oneself. Yet, I believe that you can learn most from discussing and working with your fellow students who often approach similar questions from very different angles.

So I was very excited when I got to know Jonas Liepmann and iversity. Throughout the course of our education, we had observed the same problem: the very institutions that are supposed to prepare us for professional

life do not make use of the new means of communication that we can barely imagine to live without in our private lives. The very tools that allow for new forms of cooperation and networking that we now work with every day were not being used in higher education. After graduating in 2009 I had already worked on another startup, so in early 2011 we decided to cooperate to make iversity a truly global platform.

I believe that in the future, the traditional roles of teachers and students will fundamentally change. If we look at the reality in the classrooms today, the lecture mode of teaching has already become largely redundant. There are exceptions. But by and large: why should 400 students squeeze into a room where a more or less motivated lecturer holds his introductory lecture for the umpteenth time? It would be much more motivating to be able to watch pre-recorded lectures presented by the very best professors without being bound by specific times and then to discuss these in small sections. At the same time, really talented and passionate teachers would gain a worldwide audience!

iversity creates a kind of communication which we have all gotten used to on social networking sites. Contributions have no clear addressee and are freely available to everyone. Everyone is free to ignore or react to posts. This turns social networks into very dynamic communication environments – and that is what I wish to see in research and teaching. This also means that a seminar is no longer held for merely an hour or two a week – it's extended to 24/7. In the future, there will be an ongoing discussion outside of class. All the contributions are preserved for posterity. This mode of communication can function as a serendipity accelerator. It will foster a collaborative way of constructing and negotiating knowledge. After all, interesting inventions, books, or events have always gained attention through networks. Today, however, this can happen a lot faster – universities should take advantage of this development!

I've always been interested in the field of social entrepreneurship and education, especially since I got the chance to compare the U.S. and Germany. This made me realize that here in Germany we are really just starting on this. I am sure that non-profit organizations and so-called "social" businesses will have a huge impact on the future of our education. In addition, the administration of higher education is bound to change a lot in Germany. The emer-

gent new structures must take seriously the developments in the field of new media.

The way we keep contact with each other and work together has changed fundamentally in recent years. Universities must respond to this. For this, online collaboration and social networks are crucial. Most students and the majority of the faculty are already avid users. iversity supports them in their work and saves them a lot of time and hassle. It's a win-win situation, not least for the university.



Hannes Klöpfer studied international relations, liberal arts and public policy in Dresden, Strasbourg, Berlin and New York. Most recently he was an associate with the stiftung neue verantwortung. During his studies he worked there as a researcher and for a network consulting firm in the academic sector. He is the co-author of “The University in the 21st century – Teaching the New Enlightenment at the Dawn of the Digital Age”, which will soon be published in German by Edition Körber.

# Voices on iversity



“The platform is brilliant. It works intuitively, sends out notifications to all participants, is easy to use and a very valuable asset in collaborative academic work.”

Dr. Stefanie Everke-Buchanan, Chair for Communication Studies & Anthropology of Knowledge, Zeppelin University



“I have been using iversity for several semesters in all my courses and I regard highly its functions to provide students with course resources online as well as its quick and effective means to get in touch with each other.”

Prof. Dr. Clemens Risi, Institute for Theatre Studies, Freie Universität Berlin



“iversity is a good solution for organizing courses and projects on a central platform. It allows me to see who is participating, I can communicate with the students and manage course material.”

Prof. Dr. Liv Jacobsen, Centre for Entrepreneurship, Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)



“... thank you very much! Great platform. This is exactly what I’ve been looking for.”

Prof. Dr. Gottfried Kerscher, Department of Art History, Universität Trier



“I would like to hand out some praise here: Since I have experience with Moodle as well as OPAL, I have to say that I’m very pleased and happy about the ease-of-use of iversity.”

PD Dr. Kerstin Stüssel, Technische Universität Dresden



“I use iversity for the fourth semester in a row and am very satisfied [...]! It is especially useful in the mandatory courses with many participants, where it is well received by the students.”

Dr. Morris Vollmann, Institute of Philosophy, Technische Universität Dresden



“Thanks so much for this easy-to-handle platform. In terms of usability, iversity clearly outclasses the other platforms I’ve been working with in the past.”

Alexander Kästner, Institute of History, Technische Universität Dresden

# Press coverage

**Wall Street Journal, Ben Rooney: Berlin's 30-Second Start-Up Pitches:**

„The aim is to allow people in an academic environment to share and comment on work. But it is more than just Facebook for geeks.“

Sep 27, 2011

**Die Zeit, Nik Afanasjew: Academic Exchange across national boundaries:**

“In professional circles there was a lot of debate on the ‘digital campus’. The portal ‘iversity’ has set itself the goal of realizing it today. [...] many universities have no comparable services, only simple course management systems.“

12.09.2011, Jg. 67, Nr. 21.094, S. 18.

**Berliner Zeitung, Sven Jüngerkes: Studying in the cloud:**

„[...] daily academic routine is dominated by non-integrated technical solutions for academic collaboration, nearly every university uses its own, often unnecessarily complicated, systems. [...] Thus the Internet would have made a contribution to return today's mass universities a little to the roots which constitute a course of studies: personal contacts, intensive discussions and collaborative learning.“

28.09.2011, Nr. 227, S. 29

**wwwwhat'snew. Aplicaciones, Marketing y Noticias en la Web, Rebeca Polo: iversity – la web académica de la era digital.**

„Esencialmente, es una web que ofrece una ayuda extra para organizar cursos, buscar proyectos y conferencias, etc. Además, incluye herramientas gratuitas diseñadas para interactuar y colaborar con otros sectores académicos fuera de las aulas y para que, así pues, les sea más fácil aprender los unos de los otros.“

29.08.2011. [<http://wwwwhatsnew.com/2011/08/29/iversity-la-web-academica-de-la-era-digital/>]