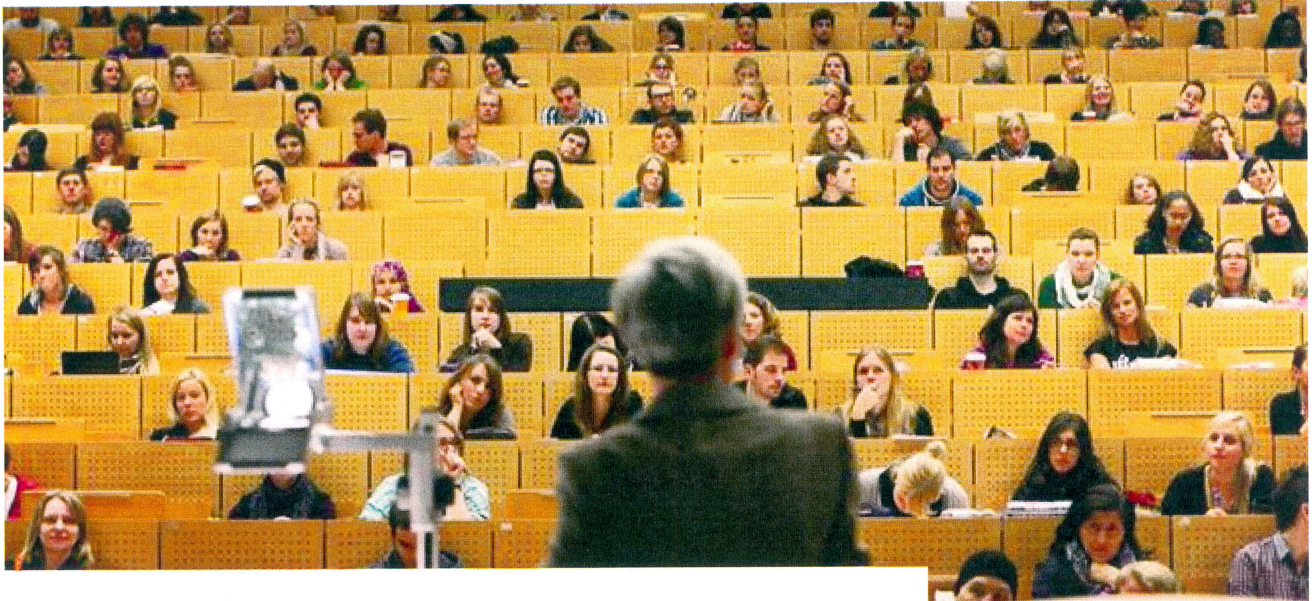




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EDUCATION

German university to stream subtitled lectures

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German is not easy - international students often have trouble understanding their professors. But a German university is trialing software to translate and subtitle lecture

International students at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) in western Germany may soon only need to turn on their laptops to understand their professors - a new program is will automatic transcribe lecture and translate them into English.

The result will appear almost simultaneously on the student's computer screen, like subtitles on a Web stream

The translation is to be streamed live on the Web, and will avoid the need for students to install any special software. The subtitles will be available to view on any browser. In addition to the live stream students will also be able to view any Powerpoint presentation in English.



Across Germany, an average of 11 percent of students come from non-German-speaking backgrounds

The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology's Alexander Waibel has been researching translation tools for 20 years.

Waibel has developed a translation application for smart phones.

But he says the lecture translation project presented new challenges.

"The terminology, special expressions and colloquialisms were new for us," Waibel says.

Another difficulty is that professors often speak without pause, leaving it to the software to figure out where sentences end - or where new thoughts and ideas begin.

His team is currently working on adapting the program for all subjects.

Brain gain

It is hoped that the translation service will make German universities more attractive to talented, international students.

Some German institutions are considered to be among the best in the world. But the language barrier makes many think twice about studying here.

"We lose many excellent students because they cannot speak or don't want to learn German," Waibel says. These students often drop out to seek English-language programs.

About 16 percent of the student body at KIT is of non-German-speaking background. In some countries, like the United States, international students make up as much as 50 percent student body.

Some students at Karlsruhe are already using the translation service. It's currently available for four courses, but should soon be available for all.

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