Foto: ETH Zürich

Keeping an eye on student performance with ObserveIT

The story in brief

The ETH Zurich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich) is one of the world's most prominent universities.
Lots of tests and exams take place online every semester, which are taken on site in the computer labs and in specially set up computer exam rooms.

With the introduction of digital examination methods, the technical requirements placed on the LET department (Lehrentwicklung und -technologie / Teaching Development and Technology) at the ETH Zurich also increased. Whereas in the past it used to be possible to have a look at handwritten documents if an exam result was contested, it has now become necessary to be able to subsequently retrace the students' activities during the online tests. LET was therefore faced with the task of being able to record and electroni-

cally maintain the user entries of all students.
They needed a monitoring tool which reliably registered the candidates' activities on the computers in a data-economical way, and which could be fully reproduced if required. It should also be easy to use and not restrict the performance of the computers at all.

After an evaluation, they selected ObserveIT, which met these requirements. After a short training course by Consist, the ETH Zurich's LET department installed and configured the monitoring tool by itself and has since been very satisfied with it. At the start of a test, students are informed in writing and told out loud that their activities will be recorded. Apart from this, they do not notice anything different and can take their test as usual.

The main role of ObserveIT here is the so-called transparency of the exam in the event that an exam result is contested or in the case of disciplinary action. A positive side effect was displayed when analyzing technical problems - ObserveIT is a component that is completely independent from the actual examination system and which collects screenshots and metadata. These frequently proved to be very helpful for clarification and for quickly resolving technical problems.

In 2017, around 150 tests were taken which ObserveIT was involved in. Up to 500 students took part each time. The plan is to expand the option to cover even more online tests. At the moment, up to 600 computers can be monitored with ObserveIT.

Foto: ETH Zürich

The task

- Recording and logging user entries during online exams
- Reproducing the recordings if an exam result is contested

The challenge

- The monitoring tool must be easy to use.
- Data-economical storage is important because of the large volume of data collected.
- The exams must not be affected by the use of a monitoring tool.
- The software has to be easy to administrate and simple to distribute.

The solution with Consist

- After a short training course by Consist, the ETH Zurich's LET department completely installed and configured ObserveIT by itself on the Windows systems in place.
- ObserveIT is used on all exam computers via virtual machines and can record the user activities of up to 600 candidates at one time.

Particular strengths of Consist

- At the time ObserveIT was selected and introduced, Consist was the only distribution partner in Switzerland.
- Smooth support

Customer benefits

- Technically-independent proof of relevant user activities during the exams

Customer quote

"ObserveIT is ideal for the transparency we require. We can see exactly what the students did in their tests. The overview is compact and the tool is easy to use. We never considered changing to a different partner because we are very happy with the support we receive."
Flavio Steger, IT systems engineer, LET department, ETH Zurich

About the ETH Zürich

The ETH Zurich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich) is a technical and scientific university in Zurich. It is one of the top ten universities in the world. It was founded in 1855 and now has over 20,600 students from more than 120 countries, and employs 530 professors. Up to now, 21 Nobel Prizes have been awarded to researchers at or in connection with the ETH Zurich.