

# UOC subject librarians: working hand in hand with teachers

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## Introduction

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Meeting the needs of teachers, in order to provide them new services to contribute to the improvement of online learning, is the aim of the Virtual Library of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (hereinafter UOC). In this sense, the new “Teaching Support Service” (hereinafter TSS) is the result of a transformation of the services offered by the Library Services for Learning (hereinafter LSL) team, with a complete charter of services for teachers, previously defined with a SWOT analysis, a benchmarking and a survey of UOC teaching staff (Cervera et al. 2015).

This new project is conditioned by the University’s particularities. UOC is an online university founded in 1995 with the mission to provide our students with lifelong learning and educational opportunities and an educational model based on the personalization and accompanying of our students using online learning. Nowadays, it has 49.672 students, with more than 68.000 graduates, 21 bachelor's degrees and 36 university master's degrees in 7 faculties; and a teaching staff of 3.709 individuals, among coordinating professors and course instructors.

The UOC Virtual Library ([www.biblioteca.uoc.edu](http://www.biblioteca.uoc.edu)), hereinafter VL, does not have a building accessible to its users; the website of the Library is the library itself and the main services are also offered throughout it. The Library can be accessed from inside the classrooms (Cervera, 2010) and the UOC portal. In this case, all the new services or the information about the TSS are provided throughout the Library website, from a new Teaching tab.

## Teachers: among coordinating professors and course instructors

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When planning the new TSS, the VL librarians defined their target users, as the coordinating professors.

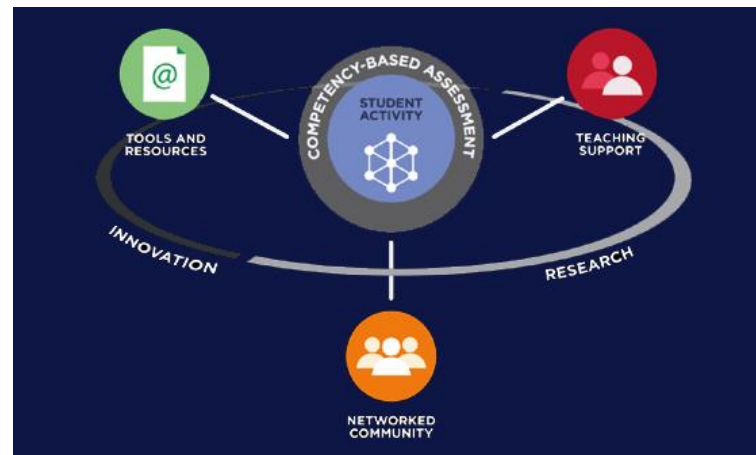
The above-mentioned teaching staff comprises two different types of teachers: the coordinating professors and the course instructors, both with different teaching responsibilities.

On one hand, the course instructors are the experts on the topic of the teaching, who act like external consultants and follow the student’s development during the teaching period while working closely with the coordinating professors in the management of the course. And, on the other hand, the coordinating professors are those who guarantee the quality of the teaching of those subjects of which they are responsible, their design, and supervise the work of the course instructors. Paying special attention in the students’ learning process evolution.

In the UOC's educational model (UOC,2015), students and their learning activity are at the centre of the teaching activity and they have three main elements with which to complete it: accompaniment, collaboration and the resources.

The figure of the coordinating professor and the TSS offered by the LSL team are actors of this educational model. Where, our students are

accompanied at all times by specialised teaching staff (coordinating professors and course instructors) who guide, give advice and support the whole educational process and, the learning resources include content and tools necessary to carry out the learning activities and their assessment. The VL LSL team is involved in both of this main elements, as a provider and manager of learning resources and also supporting teachers in their teaching action with the TSS, among other remarkable services.



## Learning resources

As mentioned above, one of the three main pillars in UOC students' learning activity are the learning resources, a range of different contents that UOC students have at their disposal. These resources are available in the virtual classrooms (for all degrees, master's degrees and postgraduate studies of the university) and the VL is the responsible of their supply and management. We can distinguish two main types of resources: the own resources, learning materials created by the UOC, and the external resources.

The learning materials whose ownership is from the UOC are a kind of handbook/textbook tailored to the needs of each subject; that is, an equivalent to the typical reference manual. They are written by experts from each knowledge area, who will transfer all of the rights to exploit the work at the UOC by signing a contract custom and transferring the exploitation rights. These subject learning materials are adapted accordingly to each programme and they are available in multiple format (html5, pdf, epub, audiobook, mobipocket, wiki, wordpress, videos, simulations, etc.) and languages.

The VL takes care of all the creation and edition process of UOC learning materials: from the budget management for its authoring and editing (to create new content or updated it) and the editorial tracking to the publication of digital materials in the virtual classroom and also the dispatch of its printed version to students. In these sense, we highlight that UOC librarians are aligned with one of the new roles in academic libraries identified by the New Media Consortium (hereinafter, NMC) in its Library edition Horizon Report (Johnson et al., 2015): the participation in learning materials creation and electronic edition.

Regarding the external resources, they are all the contents owned by third parties, which the UOC uses to complement the teaching process. These learning resources can be of any type (books, books chapters, articles, databases, audio-visual, photography and also



software) and their usage rights correspond to their holders. Therefore, in order to use this external resources, on the UOC's Virtual Campus, they need to be either subscribed by the VL (through the acquisition of databases' licences) or with the authorization of the exploitation rights holders (through the UOC legal department) process which has been managed by the VL too.

### Management of learning resources

The VL is the responsible and centralizes the management of learning resources, working closely coordinated with other departments involved in the learning resources management; such as:

- legal advisers specialized in intellectual property issues, from the UOC's legal department;
- programme managers, who ensure the proper development of a program: economically, its recruitment, the provision of learning resources, etc.;
- technologists, who control the proper functioning of learning resources inside the virtual classrooms;
- And the Oberta Publishing editors, a UOC group company which is responsible of the entire publishing process of the learning materials at the university.

### **Library's support throughout the teaching process: the Teaching Support Service**

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The LSL team is the one in charge of the TSS. In 2014 the VL rethought the roles and skills of the librarians, later stated by the NMC (Johnson et al., 2015), creating a LSL team composed by five subject librarians responsible of the UOC's 7 faculties, as shown below:

- Librarian in Law and Political Sciences
- Librarian in Psychology & Educational Sciences and Arts & Humanities
- Librarian in Information & Communication Sciences and Health Sciences
- Librarian in IT, Multimedia & Telecommunications
- Librarian in Economics & Business Studies

And, since then, with the coordinating professors centred model, these subject librarians provide support to educators throughout the whole teaching process, by personalizing the services delivered, taking into account the coordinating professor's needs, and by promoting the sustainability of the VL collection and the ethical use of the information.

The teaching services result from the workaday teaching tasks, aiming to support the learning resources selection.

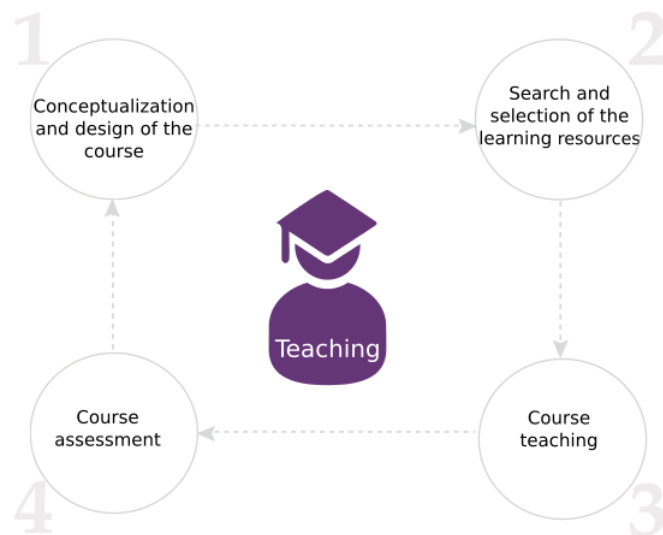
### Teaching process services

This collaboration between coordinating professors and subject librarians lasts even more than the strictly teaching period, it also covers the previous approach of the course and its post evaluation, generating something similar to a TSS life-cycle.

Most of the teaching services can be collected in four different periods of time of the previous, current and post course (Camps-Pinós, 2016), namely:

- Conceptualization and design of the course
- Search and selection of the learning resources
- Course teaching
- Course assessment

First of all, during the Conceptualization and design of the course, the subject librarians advise the coordinating professors with the search and association of previously edited UOC's learning material, in order to reuse the UOC knowledge, while contributing to the sustainability of the UOC edition. At the same time, UOC librarians also participate in creating learning materials and their electronic publishing, as previously pointed out.



Secondly, the Search and selection of the learning resources task, which takes place before and during the teaching period, enables the coordinating professors to request dossiers and to ask for learning resources through the Learning Resource Search Service, service that supports teaching activity specially while preparing a new subject or the rollout of a new programme, or while redesign an existing one. In addition, during this period, the coordinating professors are able to request, what the VL has named as “external learning resources” (Cervera-Biedma, 2016), which are resources protected by copyright and/or other intellectual property rights, to be attached inside the virtual classrooms, offering an added value to the teaching.

Thirdly, along the Teaching, the VL continues its collaborative work with the coordinating professors with the bespoke training service and the monitoring of the teaching and the use of the UOC's teaching material. All this, in addition, being inside the virtual classrooms (Cervera, 2010).

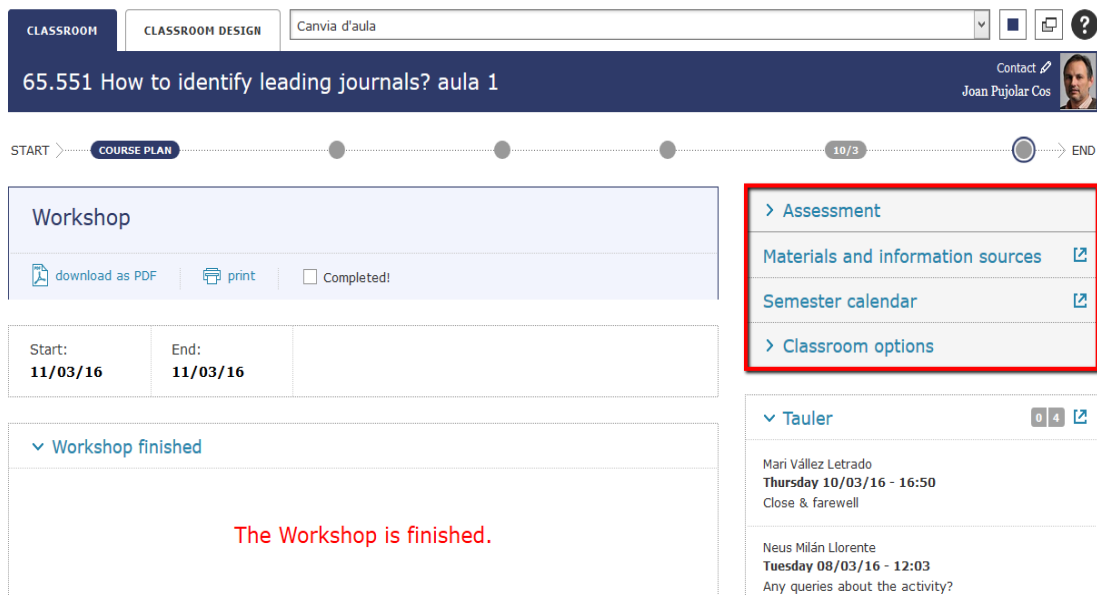
Finally, coinciding with the end of the course and the following period, before the next approach of the course, the VL manages the assessment phase of the learning resources used for the teaching activity and gives advice and guidance for the open access publication of final research projects in the UOC's institutional repository, O2.

Successfully concluded the assessment, the life-cycle starts again with the conceptualization and design of the next course, in a continue work hand in hand between the VL's subject librarians and the coordinating professors.

Given the university's online nature, the VL services are mostly requested, managed or delivered virtually or by the use of innovative technologies.

### **New horizons: the Library inside the classroom**

The virtual classroom is the place where learning resources and teaching action converge. Therefore, the VL is also present there, by a section dedicated to “Materials and information resources”.



From "Materials and information resources" students can access to:

- Learning resources: such as UOC materials, a recommended bibliography (customized bibliographies with links to the VL resources and catalogue) and other external resources (for instance: links to VL databases, open resources or embedded articles and book chapters with copyright permissions)
- VL services: "The Library Replies" (<http://biblioteca.uoc.edu/en/services/library-replies>) (to submit queries about the VL, regarding how the library works, its services, its collections or its resources) and the O2 Institutional Repository (<http://openaccess.uoc.edu/webapps/o2/?locale=en>).

## Innovative technologies

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All the services included in the TSS are offered using custom technologies, such as specific tools for managing resources from the library collection and other bespoke tools linked to intellectual property rights when embedding content in virtual classrooms.

VL has implemented a new own authoring tool, named T-REX ( *Traceability External Resources* ), which helps the three teams involved (Library, Legal department and Budget Management) to manage the copyrights of external resources.

Fortunately, innovative technologies allow the VL to use our own institutional learning environment to facilitate management of learning resources and services, and to have a presence in the classroom.

## Conclusions

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The management of learning resources helps to make efficient use of the collection of the Library, making it grow to adapt to the educational needs, ensuring economic sustainability and ensuring ethical use of information. On the one hand, the Teaching Support Service (TSS) lets certain sustainability, since it promotes in virtual classrooms those learning resources available in library, in order to maximize the use of digital collection in the virtual classrooms. On the other hand, it also contributes to the improvement of online learning, meeting the needs of teachers and learners/students

In conclusion, the final aim of the TSS and the VL LSL team is “to be there”, inside the virtual classrooms and being part of the teaching, even if, teachers (namely: coordinating professors and course instructors) and students, do not even know that we are, but, if one day the VL services and resources “disappear” reach that they feel that something is missing, what can be translated as the loyalty of all the UOC community.

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