

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT TO PROVIDE FRESHMEN WITH FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHS AT COURSE AND SEMESTER LEVEL IN OPEN HIGHER EDUCATION

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CONTEXT

The UOC is an innovative university that is rooted in Catalonia and open to the world. It offers people lifelong learning to help them and society advance, while carrying out research on the Knowledge Society. Its educational model is based on accompanying students using e-learning (Sangrà, 2002). Continuous evaluation is used to guide students through each course, by means of both formative and summative assessment.

Students not following the proposed continuous assessment activities are most likely to drop out.

“The ESPRIA project is aimed to face three typical situations faced by newcomers in their first semester, namely taking several courses with possibly overlapping schedules, reshaping their learning path if they cannot follow the proposed continuous assessment activities, and assuming an excessive burden due to a wrong course election.”

ESPRIA

Each degree offers 3 packages and the students have flexibility to choose any package and the number of courses within the package they are interested in, taking into account that UOC's typical enrolment is 2 or 3 courses.

Each package guarantees:

- Non-overlapping calendars
- Additional or alternative opportunities to follow the proposed continuous assessment activities
- Revised course syllabus and workload

PARTICIPANTS

In its first semester of deployment, ESPRIA has been implemented in six different graduate degrees (Business, Administration and Management, Law, Computer Engineering, Catalan Language and Literature, Communication Sciences, and Social Education), involving 51 different courses, 45 full-time teachers, 140 mentors, and 253 part-time teachers. A total of 1,647 students enrolled in their first semester in February 2018 in one of these degrees (representing 41.6% of all new UOC students taking an official graduate degree), thus becoming potential ESPRIA participants.

	ESPRIA	ESPRIA + OTHER	NON ESPRIA	TOTAL
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT	216 (51.18%)	142 (33.65%)	64 (15.17%)	422
LAW	185 (47.19%)	103 (26.28%)	104 (26.53%)	392
COMPUTER ENGINEERING	205 (48.93%)	149 (35.56%)	65 (15.51%)	419
CATALAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	9 (25.00%)	20 (55.56%)	7 (19.44%)	36
COMMUNICATION SCIENCES	61 (40.40%)	63 (41.72%)	27 (17.88%)	151
SOCIAL EDUCATION	174 (76.65%)	38 (16.74%)	15 (6.61%)	227
TOTAL	850 (51.61%)	515 (31.27%)	281 (17.12%)	1,647

DISCUSSION

The critical factors that emerged in this phase were those related to organizational changes.

Some teachers were reluctant to revise course syllabus and workload as well as coordinating course schedule with other teachers, breaking the traditional “siloes” way of designing courses at UOC.

Another important issue was training a high number of mentors and providing them with support and new tools to supervise the new enrolment process involving packages.

In order to make mentors' tasks easier, a web app with a friendly interface was developed according to their informed needs and preferences.

Preliminary results show that a large percentage of students (51.61%) chose to follow their mentors' recommendations and finally enrolled only in specific courses / packages that were revised under the ESPRIA framework.

Current and future research in this topic includes analyzing ESPRIA success with respect to continuous evaluation and effective re-enrolment of both participating and non-participating students and their level of engagement.