ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES IN EUROPE'S TOP RANKED UNIVERSITIES: COMPETENCIES, AIMS AND COURSES

Laura Cervi (Corresponding author), Department of Journalism and Communication Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain. Email: laura.cervi@uab.cat

Núria Simelio, Department of Journalism and Communication Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain. Email:nuria.simelio.sola@uab.cat

Santiago Tejedor Calvo, Department of Journalism and Communication Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain. Email:santiago.tejedor@uab.cat

This article presents the results of a descriptive study that analyzes 17 curricula in Communication and Journalism of the 8 best ranked universities in Europe in the field of Communication, according to the QS World University Rankings. *The research, using both quantitative and qualitative methodology, analyzes the academic curricula focusing on 687 courses. studying the type of courses, in terms of credit and subjects and their distribution in the academic curriculum. Good practices are identified, and trends are indicated in the design of the curricula. Moreover, a content analysis of the curricula of the selected Degrees has been carried out, based on a series of indicators: structure and credit system, objectives of the studies, competencies and professional profiles. The study shows that Journalism and Communication Degrees of the best ranked universities in Europe tend to focus mainly on theoretical courses, research methodologies and optional courses, and to encourage a critical look rather than focusing on an education model based on the professionalization and in the learning of tools and technologies. We conclude that the educational programs of the analyzed universities are not ready to adapt to the important structural changes that communication and the profession have undergone in recent years.*

Keywords: Communication; Journalism; Competencies; University; Education; Curriculum, Technologies

Introduction

The educational environment has undergone deep transformations in the last decades. On the one hand, in 1999, the Bologna Declaration, signed by the Ministers of Education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom and ratified by 25 other European countries, led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which aims at standardizing European higher education, by introducing important transformations in the teaching and learning processes. On the other hand, the transformation of the communicative scenario -mainly due to the impact of technology- is forcing universities to revise and update their curricula.

Already thirty years ago, Dennis (1988, 4) called the debate between profession and education ''a dialogue of the deaf'': nowadays, the rise of audience as producer of news, i.e. the emergence of citizen (Campbell 2015) and participatory journalism, challenges professional journalism to rethink its professional identity and understandings of its function in society. (Lewis 2012; Robinson 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen 2015).

Under these premises, the training of future communication professionals has been tackled by numerous researches, studies and reports. In 2005, UNESCO commissioned a group of education experts the design of guidelines for the Journalism curriculum. The report identified three curricular axes that should fundament the curricula in the field of Journalism. These guidelines mainly center upon standards, values, tools, quality criteria and journalism practices, stressing out to the importance of social, cultural, political, economic, legal and ethical aspects of the exercise of journalism, besides pointing out the need to train students in understanding the global world and the inherent intellectual difficulties linked to journalism (UNESCO 2007). The proposed conclusions -which are still valid today-, however, did not take into account the importance of the technological elements -very incipient at that time- that have become one of the defining elements of the current communicative situation.

In 2017, a decade after, the Nieman Lab and the Reuters Institute Prediction Report highlighted that, among the main challenges that journalism and communication face, mobile technologies, augmented reality, artificial intelligence and Big Data, are the most important (Nieman Lab 2017; Reuters 2017).

In other words, the training of future professionals in the field of communication and journalism has been directly impacted by the technological changes introduced by cyberspace and the successive developments of the Network: web 2.0 or social web, web 3.0 or semantic web and web 4.0 or the internet of things. Many authors have pointed out

how, in a moment where information has become portable, personalized and participatory (Matsa and Mitchell 2014), and news media's use of citizen journalism and dependence on user-generated visibility are growing (Singer 2014), social networks have become the center of journalistic practice (Bulut and Doğan 2017).

Social networks, in other words, have acquired a leading role in journalistic work as a source of information and as a source of news (Artwick 2013), as a channel for dialogue with users (Bruns and Burguess 2012), as a message dissemination platform (Lasorsa 2012; Newman 2009; Rogstad 2014) and even as a self-promotion tool (Wahl-Jorgensen et.al. 2016; Franklin 2014).

Journalism, hence, can be considered a "new knowledge profession" (Donsbach 2014). The role of journalism education is not only to provide future journalist with new technological capabilities (Ekdale, et. al. 2015), but mainly to prepare them to adapt to a a fast-moving world where things can change almost month by month as the interface between humans and the digital world becomes ever closer (Frost 2018).

Therefore, universities offering undergraduate and graduate courses in this area must address the new skills and competences (professional, academic and specific) that the industry demands. The curricular offer of this type of studies must be subject to a permanent revision and update that allows them to adapt to the new professional profiles demanded by the market (Tejedor 2006).

Accordingly, studies focusing on these challenges have proliferated. With the emergence of the first cybermedia, Pavlik (2001) pointed out that technology had transformed journalism studies in four main areas: teaching and research; content; structure of the departments of journalism and the faculties of communication; and the relationships between teachers and their audiences (students, funders and competitors). Authors, such as Singh et. al. (2015), Pérez Tornero et al. (2015), among others, have underlined the need to reformulate the training of communicators, implementing an holistic perspective, encompassing content, methodologies, approaches and resources.

On the other hand, many researches, such as the FTI-Ametic (2012) or Pew Research Center (2014) delineated, among other aspects, a scenario characterized by the preference of younger users for cyberspace, the increase in the digital profile job offers and the need to promote creativity training beyond the technical aspects.

A joint research, developed by 35 researchers and teachers of Journalism and Communication from 16 countries (Mellado 2010) identified a division between those who conceived journalism as an occupation based on the mastery of technical skills and

those who defended the professionalization of the sector. Subsequently, Díaz Del Campo (2013), in a research developed in fourteen countries of the European Union, pointed out that the inclusion of ethics was an essential element in the training of journalists.

Nevertheless, despite this booming of researches, there is no diagnostic analyses offering a panoramic view of the European level.

This article analyzes the first eight best European universities (from an initial sample of 10), offering Degrees in Journalism or Communication, according to the *QS World University Rankings*. The study is based on a previous work (authors) focused on analyzing the best universities in the world from this same ranking. Considering the results of the initial study, this work focuses on the European level and its comparison with the world panorama.

Our diagnostic research analyzes the curricular organization (courses), the professional profiles offered and the irruption of new trends in the sector.

Specifically, the research aims at answering the following research questions:

- What characteristics define the structure of the undergraduate curricula of the best ranked universities?
- What type of courses (both in terms of credits and topics) predominate in the curricular plans of these undergraduate programs?
- What training trends can be detected in the curricula?

Theoretical framework

As previously mentioned, journalism, and journalist's working routines, have been widely impacted by technological developments, while Universities seem to struggle in coping with these changes.

Many scholars (Acosta, Costales and Rosales, 2016; Roser and Humanes-Humanes ,2019) identify the existence of a disconnection or gap between the ideals of journalism professionals and their actual working routines, underlining the poor correspondence between journalism studies with the new professional scenario.

Martínez-Nicolás, García-Galera and Torregrosa-Carmona (2018), within the framework of a study about labor insertion and satisfaction of graduates in communication from universities belonging to the European Space of Higher Education (EHEA), warned of a deep deterioration of the situation in the workplace: only 30% of recent graduates were employed in a position related to their training profile and most of the recent graduates expressed feelings of having few options for improving their employment situation.

Besides the general agreement that, in order to guarantee the employability of their students, educational institutions should establish a permanent dialogue with the industry and a continuous adaptation to the needs and demands of the labor market (Suárez-Lantarón 2014), that should affect structure, course typology, syllabuses and teaching methodologies, among others aspects, the academic debate -with some exceptions (see Wenger, Owens and Cain, 2018 and Tulloch and Mas i Manchon, 2018)- seems stuck on the dichotomy between theory and practice.

On the one hand, Bor (2014) confronts the long-standing debate as to whether journalism educators should focus on teaching theoretical and conceptual knowledge or technical skills answering that millennial students require some instruction on using web-based platforms, alluding to the importance of mastering technical skills in the classroom related to the industry requests for technologically well trained job applicants.

Accordingly Besalú-Casademont, Schena and Sánchez-Sánchez (2017), find out that the best rated competences amongst students are the technical ones, while traditional disciplines are those that obtain the lowest score, due, in large part, to the particularities of an increasingly competitive labor market that values the versatility and autonomous learning capacity of professionals in the sector, suggesting to design or redesign curricula suitable to enhance social practices that students themselves value the most (Gee 2004), both in terms of curricular offerings and teaching methodologies.

In addition, as pointed out by Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), students conceive and positively value social networks and grant them great importance as a future scenario of professional performance, while both society and educational institutions present a vision of learning that is too scholarly oriented (Pereira, Fillol and Moura 2019), which does not value the knowledge that young people develop with and through the media and digital platforms.

For this reason many studies (see researches by the Information Technology Foundation, 2012 and the Association of Electronics, Information Technology, Telecommunications and Digital Content Companies, 2012) stress the need and urgency to strengthen digital skills of students, and considering social networks as one of the defining features of the current media environment, push future journalists to become digital entrepreneurs (Akter and Nweke, 2016).

Other scholars, consider that the necessary professional skills required of modern day journalists haven't change that much and should focus on traditional critical and ethical values, since journalism education is the way in which society can intervene to influence

the development of journalism (Curran, 2005), or fear that a focus on teaching technological skills turns journalism programs into job training centers versus institutes of higher learning (Wenger, Owens and Cain, 2018).

Roca-Cuberes and Ventura (2017), in a study about new approaches to university education in the field of communication, allude to the concept of "Global Communication Studies" (GCS) as a new training proposal contrasting the traditional differentiation among studies in Journalism, Audiovisual communication and Advertising. After applying a survey to 266 participants (professionals, teachers and students in the area of Communication), authors observe a tendency to prioritize the political and sociological aspects of communication over technical or instrumental contents.

In conclusion, the new communicative context inaugurates a new educational scenario that, on the one hand needs to integrate and take advantage of the wide possibilities of cyberspace platforms and tools (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016), overcoming unidirectional educational approaches (Erstad and Sefton-Green 2013) that have dominated European educational proposals in recent years, safeguarding the basis of traditional journalism education.

In this sense, quoting Tulloch and Mas i Manchon (2018), rather than confronting "old school values" with "the real world demands" of contemporary journalism, the challenge lies in adapting J-school curricula to modern newsroom dynamics without losing the essence and values of journalism.

Method

In this research, we conducted a content analysis of 17 Communication and Journalism curricula in 8 European universities. The selection of the sample is based on the *QS World University Rankings*, which establishes a ranking of the best universities by geographic zones and thematic areas. The classification in this index is made of a series of indicators that score on a basis of 100 points. These indicators are: 1) academic reputation (40%) from a survey of 80,000 experts, 2) reputation of the employer (10%) from a survey of 40,000 professionals, 3) student / faculty ratio (20%), 4) number of citations in research journals by faculty (20%) and 5) international ratio of students and faculty (10 %: 5% each).

First of all, we have selected all the European universities present in the first 50 positions of the *QS World University Rankings* of 2018, in order to analyze the highest ranked.

6

Among these, we find the following 15 universities listed according to their position: University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands (1st position); London School of Economics and Political Science, Great Britain (3); Goldsmith University of London, United Kingdom (9); Cardiff University, United Kingdom (23); King's College, United Kingdom (24); University of Zurich, Switzerland (30); Aarhus University Denmark (= 35); Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany (= 35); University of Leeds, United Kingdom (39); University of Westminster, Great Britain (40); Loughborough University, Great Britain (41); Helsinki University, Finland (43); University of Vienna, Austria (44); University of Navarra (49), Spain and Leicester University, United Kingdom (50).

The selection of the QS ranking is based on different criteria. First, we needed a ranking that included all European Universities with equal evaluation criteria allowing comparison: therefore, national indexes that could be more suitable for Communication Faculties, such as *The Guardian University Guide* in the United Kingdom or the "Index of the best universities" of the newspaper *El Mundo* in Spain, were out of the selection. On the other hand, we acknowledge, as various studies (Blom, Davenport and Bowe 2012) indicate, that most, if not all, the national and global accreditation systems, are far from being perfect, and that there is scarce scientific evidence that accredited programs, or programs that score higher, are actually "better" than the programs without accreditation. Nonetheless, indexes are accepted by most countries and are used by universities as a tool for their promotion, and by future students and companies as a criterion to choose the best university. Despite the criticisms, in fact, these international rankings satisfy a demand for transparency providing comparative data at a global level, that very often governments and institutions are not able to provide (Merisotis 2010).

In short, this article is not based on the assumption that the best ranking universities actually are the "best", rather we analyze the characteristics of the degrees in communication that are best ranked schools in an international rankings, that is becoming increasingly influential in both governmental and public's decision making process (Moed 2016).

Among the five international indexes that offer comparative data based on equal criteria (*ARWU, Leiden, THE, QS* and *U-Multirank*), *ARWU* and *Leiden* are respectively focusing on North America and Asia (Moed 2016), and, therefore, not suitable for our research.

THE World ranking does not take into consideration the quality of education and the quality of faculty, as QS does through the "Employer reputation survey" (10%) and the

"Global survey of academic reputation" (40%) (Olcay and Bulu 2016), two aspects that we consider fundamental to our research. Between the two rankings that would fit our research goals, *QS* and *U-Multirank*, we selected *QS World University Rankings* (2004) because it is older and more consolidated.

Once this first selection had been made, we proceeded to analyze the offered curricula to verify that they were directly related to journalism and / or communication sciences and media, and all of them have at least one Degree in Communications/Journalism.

Out of these 15 universities, we selected only the ones offering at least 50% of the Degrees in English, to be able to analyze and compare them. Of the non-British Universities, only the University of Amsterdam and that of Navarre offer courses in English.

The main reason for selecting universities with English as a predominant teaching language is that we believe that in order for our comparison to be useful besides mere academic interest, should take into consideration courses that most European students could actually take. Undoubtedly English is the most spoken second language in Europe (EF 2018).

In addition, both the London School of Economics and King's College only have postgraduate and / or Doctorate Degrees in Journalism and Communication, therefore, these two universities also ceased to be part of the sample. In fact, our study focuses in Undergraduate Programs because our goal is to display how young journalist/ communication professionals are educated. Often Postgraduate Programs are very specific or oriented towards research.

Finally, the 17 Degrees analyzed in this investigation are listed in the following table (See table 01):

[Table 1 near here]

As shown in Table 1, of the 17 grades analyzed, 14 belong to universities in the United Kingdom, 2 to the Netherlands and 1 to Spain. All these three countries belong to the European Higher Education Area: this provides the opportunity to detect trends and to extrapolate them to other scenarios, especially European ones.

Nonetheless, they have some differences in their structure and organization. In the United Kingdom, in fact, the higher education system is composed of an heterogeneous set of university institutions. The undergraduate studies grant Bachelor's Degrees after 3 or 4 years of courses. The Master's Degree can be obtained by adding one more year to the

bachelor's Degree and grants access to the PhD studies that, normally, last 3 years. Moreover, in the United Kingdom, ECTS, European Credit Transfer System, credits do not apply.

In the Netherlands, higher education is carried out through a mixed system, composed of professional, or universities of applied sciences, devoted to vocational training and "traditional" universities. The latter teach both undergraduate and graduate courses, together with PhDs in Journalism and / or Communication Studies. In order to get to the Bachelor's Degree students must study 3 years and sum a total of 180 ECTS credits. The Bachelor's Degree allows access to the Master's Degree, which range from 1 to 2 years and which have between 60 and 120 ECTS credits. After finishing the Master's Degree, students can complete the Doctorate, which is the second postgraduate level.

In Spain, higher education can be imparted by public or private universities. The Degrees can request between 180 (3 years) and 240 credits (4 years). The latter being the case of the Degree in Journalism. In order to access the Doctorate, that lasts for 3 years, an Official Master's Degree in Research of 1 year must be done.

Regarding the methodology, a content analysis (Holsti 1969) of the curricula of the selected Degrees has been carried out, based on a series of indicators: a) Data from the university and the program; b) Structure and credit system; c) Objective of the studies; d) Competencies; e) Professional profiles; f) General structure of the curriculum; and g) Data of the courses. Once these indicators were analyzed, a thematic grouping of the courses was carried out (n = 687) from the subjects defined in the curricula of the journalism and / or communication careers.

After a qualitative analysis of the first indicators, a quantitative analysis the subjects has been carried out. Data have been processed with Excel, creating a database where description of the subjects, number of credits and type of credits were collected, grouped into thematic categories and exploited in a descriptive univariable and bivariable analysis of frequencies and percentages. Therefore, the first stage of the analysis was developed qualitatively, and, for the analysis of subjects, a quantitative methodology has been implemented.

The variables for the aforementioned quantitative analysis are: number of credits, type of subject (optional or compulsory), and topics. Topics have been categorized:

1. General knowledge (Social Sciences, Humanities, etc.) 2. Research Methodologies 3. Theory, structure and history of communication 4. Theory and structure of journalistic

professions s 5. Expressive audiovisual techniques (Audiovisual language, etc.)   6. Expressive techniques : Writing,, Internet, multimedia 7. Technology and technological skills 8. Journalistic genres 9. Business and business models 10. Specialized journalism 11. Journalistic production

Results

Structure of the Degrees

The different Degrees analyzed have diverse structural characteristics, depending on both the universities and countries they belong to. Table 2 shows the structure of the courses, credit and the price per academic year.

[Table 2 near here]

The University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) accepts 380 students each year and offers two Degrees related to the field of study: one in Communication Sciences and the other in Information and Media. The first, taught in English and Dutch, consists of 180 credits, lasts 3 years and allows access to the Master. The Degree in Information and Media also has 180 credits, and it is taught entirely in English.

Goldsmiths-University of London (United Kingdom) offers a Degree in Journalism and another in Communication and Media. The two have a duration of 3 years, with the equivalent of 360 ECTS credits and accept 125 students per year.

The Journalism Degree has a more practical approach with 4 modules of practical teaching, 2 of theory and one mixed in the first year, and 5 of practices and theory in the second year. During the last year, all the courses are optional and include internships in companies, advanced computer science and a final project.

The Communication and Media Degree is composed of 50% theoretical and 50% practical courses.

The University of Cardiff currently presents the widest offer, with 7 different Degrees accepting 125 students. For the purpose of this research we have selected the 5 offered in 2017, excluding the Degree in "Journalism and Welsh Language" because 83% of the courses are taught in Welsh language. The Degree is equivalent to 360 ECTS (120 credits per year). All courses analyzed belong to the "School of Journalism, Media and Culture", have a duration of three years.

Although the Degrees offer both theoretical and practical modules, the University clearly specifies that "it does not offer vocational training in journalism", that is, the Bachelor does not offer vocational courses, but academic ones.

The University of Leeds, in its "School of Media and Communication" offers three Degrees: one in Journalism, one in Communication and Media and the last in Digital Media. The Degree, as in the previous cases, equals 360 ECTS (120 credits per year) and all courses (excluding the final project or thesis that has 40) have 20 credits.

The first year of the Degree in Journalism is dedicated to understanding the role of journalism (and especially its relationship with politics); in the second year, the core modules address the specialized aspects of TV, radio and digital news production, and the optional modules allow students to focus on topics of their interest. The first year of the Degree in Communication and Media is identical to the previous one, the only difference is that the course implies a less compulsory practical training in years 2 and 3. The Degree in Digital Media has a more practical nature. The first year is dedicated to developing key skills in design and production of digital media, as well as an understanding of different theories and approaches in communication and media. During the second year, the course focuses on developing advanced skills in web programming, visual communication and allowing students to work on real projects in the industry.

The University of Westminster offers a Degree in Digital media and Communication and another in Journalism. The amount of students accepted per year is not specified.

The Journalism Degree is eminently practical with strong academic reinforcement. It focuses on teaching traditional journalism at the same time as digital and multimedia techniques. On the other side, the Degree in Digital Media and Communication is also organized in 3 years and combines theoretical analysis with practical understanding and media production.

At the University of Loughborough, the Degree in Communication and Media Studies can be done either 3 years or in 4 years. In this case, the fourth year is dedicated to professional internships.

The University of Navarra offers a bilingual Degree in Journalism. It lasts 4 years and counts for 240 ECTS, half of them (120) in English. This University does not inform on the amount of students accepted per year.

The University of Leicester has one Degree in Journalism and another in Communication and Media, each accepting 50 students and lasting three years.

Results of the analysis

In the study, 687 courses were analyzed to determine in each case the type of course (compulsory / optional), the number of credits and the thematic area. As Figure 01 indicates, the offer of optional courses (468) exceeds by far the offer of compulsory subjects (219). This characteristic, which can be observed in all universities, denotes a commitment to flexibility and, at the same time, a greater responsibility of the students in the design of their own study itinerary.

[Figure 1 near here]

European universities are supposed to follow the ECTS system, which counts the credits from the time a student uses to achieve the planned educational objectives. This system is based on the convention that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during an academic course.

As already mentioned, despite being European universities, not all the analyzed universities follow the ECTS system: the British universities of Westminster, Cardiff and Leeds follow the British credit system.

For this reason, and in order to be able to compare, following the method applied by the universities themselves (10 British credits equal 5 ECTS), we have converted the British credits into ECTS credits.

However, from these premises, it must be taken into account that it is difficult to compare systems with different credits and with different measurement parameters.

Accordingly, as can be seen in figure 02, most of the compulsory subjects have 5 or 6 credits. Some may have 12 or 15 credits, especially final projects or internships in companies.

[Figure 2 near here]

Figure 3 shows that optional courses mostly have 3 or 6 credits. Some optional courses may have 12 or 15 credits, especially final projects, internships in companies or mobility courses (which are presented in the offer of optional subjects of some programs).

[Figure 3 near here]

Regarding compulsory courses (see figure 04), more than 30% corresponds to subjects related to the theory, structure and history of communication, which, together with general knowledge (14.16%), research methodologies (with 13.24% of the total) account for more than 60% of the set of topics. These data indicate that compulsory courses are committed to consolidate a predominantly theoretical formation.

[Figure 4 near here]

Within the thematic area of "Theories, structures and history of communication", we gather courses on classical communication theory, which aim to provide a theoretical knowledge on communications, such as "Theories of Media and Communication"; but also all the courses covering the media landscape from a more sociological perspective, such as "Media, Culture and Society, present -with different denominations- in all the universities ("Effects of media" or "Media, Modernity and thought social ", for example); courses related to the legal framework, communication policies, and the ethics of communication (such as" Communication ethics "or" Media, law and ethics ").

On the other hand, a considerable number of courses focused on digital culture or digital media, tackling them from the communicative, historical or sociological point of view, such as "Media and Information: Analyzing Digital Culture" of the University of Amsterdam or "Digital cultures" of the University of Leeds.

In second place we find courses dedicated to general background knowledge, ranging from philosophy and humanities, ("Philosophy of the Humanities", Amsterdam) to social sciences, such as "Foundations in Social Sciences" in the Loughborough and "*Economia*" and "Sociology "at the University of Navarra.

In general, these courses are intended to provide the students with basic notions about different social sciences. However, it is possible to point out that, especially in British universities, subjects related to political science and politics in general ("Introduction to Power, Politics and Public Affairs", Goldsmith University, "Global International Organization in World Politics" and "Introduction to Political Thought", Cardiff University) are predominant in this thematic area.

The prominence of the subjects related to the basic research methodology (13.24%) is striking, since practically all universities (except the University of Navarra, which offers it among the optional ones and in terms of market research), include at least one methodological course among its mandatory ones. It should further be noted that the

Communication Degree of the University of Amsterdam devotes an important part of the curriculum to various general and specialized methodological subjects.

In fourth and fifth place, with a lot of distance, we find courses on audiovisual expressive techniques that deal with the specialized production of informative messages and journalistic production.

The other categories seem residual: courses dedicated to technology and technological skills ("Web Programming", "Design of digital interactions", or specific computer skills), and journalistic professions ("Understanding journalism", "Journalism in context") .

Finally, it is important to note that the Final Project is mandatory only at the University of Amsterdam and the University of Navarra, that follow the Bologna Plan. In the British universities, it is not compulsory to realize a thesis or a project to obtain a Degree.

The offer of optional courses (see figure 5), in some way reflects the compulsory offer: theories, structure and history of communication occupy almost 45% of the offer, followed by research methodologies, which together add more than 60% The general knowledge, however, fall to 5.34%.

In this way, the trend to offer a more humanistic and critical vision is confirmed, however students are offered the possibility of continuing to train in more general subjects or to focus on more technical aspects such as expressive techniques and technologies.

[Figure 5 near here]

As Figure 5 shows, the vast majority of optional courses belong, as in the case of compulsory, to the field of "Theories, structures and history of communication", which aim at providing a theoretical knowledge on communications, confirming the trend to offer a more humanistic and critical vision rather than mere technical training. Among the optional courses we find mainly courses covering the media landscape from a more sociological or socio-political perspective, such as "Social Media in Everyday Life" (Goldsmith University), "Media and Democracy" (Cardiff University), or "Media and Gender", present all the analyzed courses and courses related to the legal framework and policies, such as "Internet Governance" (Cardiff University) or "Contemporary Issues in Media Policy", Westminster).

On the one hand, we can appreciate how General Knowledge courses are not as important, probably because core and compulsory courses offer a vast choice of them, on the other

Research Methodologies are still predominant. "Data mining" present with different definitions, in all the courses, shows that universities recognize the important of Big Data Expressive techniques and technological skills together make 12% of the offer, underlying that in the choice of optional courses, universities allow the students to refine technical and technological skills in different media. These courses tend to train to very specific skills related to both oral expression and aspects of rhetoric ("Speech and body", "Group communication") and technologies ("Video Reporting", "Computational Journalism"). Attention is also placed on entrepreneurship and the relationship between business and technology ("Digital Venture Creation").

In addition, some universities offer specialized courses related to the university itself, such as "Communicating the Faith in the 21st Century" of the University of Navarra.

Conclusions and discussion

The study confirms the results of the research about the worldwide top ranked universities of *QS World University Rankings* worldwide.

World top ranked universities' curricula focus more on the humanistic aspect of communication rather than on technological or professional skills (authors). The results of this study show a clear similarity: more than 50% of the compulsory courses of the analyzed Degrees are devoted to communication theories and methodologies and general knowledge in the field of social sciences. In the previous study on international universities, general knowledge also exceeded 50% of the total (authors). Moreover, in both cases, the audiovisual and journalistic expressive techniques and the technologies and technological skills do not suppose more than 20% of the compulsory courses.

Regarding optional courses, there is even a more theoretical view than in compulsory subjects, with 44.87% of subjects devoted to theories, structures and history of communication and 17.73% to research methodologies. Expressive techniques and technological skills are around 15% of the total.

In this case, we do find differences between European and international universities (authors), mainly Americans, where the courses on non-specific general knowledge of the field of communication represent 51% of the total, compared to the European, where they are only 5 ,3 4%. This shows the difference between North American and European universities, with the first dedicated in a greater percentage to cover more generic and humanistic and less specialized studies, where the technologies and expressive techniques do not exceed 15% of the optional subjects.

Acknowledging these differences, the study of European universities confirms the result of the study of the world's best universities, that is to say, the best ranked universities tend to focus mainly on theoretical courses, research methodologies and to encourage a critical look rather than to focus on an education model based on the professionalization and in the learning of tools and technologies.

In other words, our results differ from Mensing's (2010), who observed how universities focus on expanding the training in the technological fields.

After analyzing the 8 best European universities, according to the *QS* ranking, it is possible to conclude that these educational programs are still not prepared to adapt to the important structural changes that communication and the profession have undergone in recent decades.

Our results match Deuze, Neuberger and Paulussen's (2006) conclusions, which showed how educational programs did not take on the challenges of the new communicative structure by simply adding subjects on online journalism and technological skills that previously existed, but without real transformation similar to that which has occurred in the professional field.

In this context, it is confirmed what Creech and Mendelson (2015) affirm in reference to the fact that the uncertainty that digitalization has brought to the media world can not be reflected only in a debate that idealizes technology in the teaching of journalism without further analysis.

At the same time, it may be necessary to abandon the discussion and tension between theory and practice in the field of journalism studies, to focus on the social and contextual dynamics of journalism and the relationship between professionals, academics and students, understanding communication as at the same time, a product, a tool and a process. (Hirst 2010). Thus, this debate is framed within the concept of journalistic professionalization itself, and how it can be defined in the current communicative ecosystem. In other words, the transformation that journalistic professions suffered in recent decades should make us think about what journalism is and who can be defined a journalist (Wahl-Jorgensen 2015).

Our work establishes a diagnostic basis useful for future research in the field and underlines the need to establish spaces for dialogue and joint work among universities to unify their curricular offer. Accordingly, in the current informative environment, marked by technologies and the prominence of social networks, media literacy (from a critical approach) and the acquisition of competencies that contribute to a humanistic vision are

needed in the training of future professionals to provide them with the ability to analyze, contextualize and articulate their stories from a holistic approach.

Notwithstanding, a diagnosis based solely on quantitative and descriptive aspects, may be recognized as a limitation of our study, together with the selection of the sample, that, as previously mentioned, is based on a specific ranking that, despite being used as a frame of reference by both institutions and students, is not extent from criticism.

In fact, on the one hand different European Universities, that are not included in the ranking, present good practices of innovative adaptation to the new communicational context in their BA offer.

The Datalabs and the Interactive Documentary projects at Bournemouth University in the UK (Feigenbaum et. Alt., 2016), the Newsgames Project, designed and executed in a cooperative teaching initiative between the Department of Communication and the Department of Mathematical Information Technology and involving journalism and computer science students at the University of Jyväskylä, in Finland (Siitonen et alt, 2019) or the application of mobile technology at Birmingham City University are solid examples on how technology and innovation are being implemented in Communication courses.

On the other, we have not considered postgraduate courses, that also offer many interesting examples, such as the MA in Data Journalism and the MA in Multiplatform and Mobile Journalism at Birmingham City University, the MA in Virtual Reality of UWE Bristol or the MA in Interactive Journalism (MAIJ) at City University London (Hewett 2016), or innovative practices, such as the entrepreneurialism module offered to postgraduate students of journalism at Aarhus University in Denmark (Sparre & Færgemann, 2016).

For this reason, we believe that more qualitative and extensive studies are needed. As Hewett (2015) states, aspects related to student satisfaction, reputation and professional possibilities, and the relevance and coherence of study plans must be identified through further research. For instance, qualitative researches focusing on specific courses' content and teaching methodologies together with surveys and focus group with students, teachers and media professionals, able to reveal if Journalism education can/ how it may be able to cope with the increasing complexity of both society and the media environment.

In addition, future research should be geared towards overcoming the mentioned dichotomy between theory and practice through the development of mix methods courses that integrate both theory and practice. This would allow taking into account both

employability and labor markets demands, both journalism's social influence, its deontology and the socio-cultural aspects related to the exercise of the profession in a context that is becoming more and more global, together with the growth of hyperlocalization.

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Tables

Table 1. Universities and Degrees analyzed.

Degree	University	Country	Entry Level	Duration in years (Full time)
Communication Sciences	University of Amsterdam	The Netherlands	All European High school diploma (specific requirements for outside EU countries)	3
Media and Information	University of Amsterdam	The Netherlands	All European High school diploma (specific requirements for outside EU countries)	3
Communication and Media	Goldsmiths-University of London	UK	British A-level: BBB European Baccalaureate: 75% (Specific requirements for other countries)	3

Journalism	Goldsmiths-University of London	UK	British A-level:: BBB (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Journalism, Media and English literature	Cardiff University	UK	British A-level: ABB-BBB including English Literature, English Literature and Language or Creative Writing. General Studies and Critical Thinking not accepted. (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Journalism, Media and Sociology	Cardiff University	UK	British A-level: ABB - BBB. General Studies and Critical Thinking not accepted. (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Journalism, Communication and Politics	Cardiff University	UK	British A-level:: ABB - BBB. General Studies and Critical	3

			Thinking not accepted. (Specific requirements for other countries)	25
Media and Communication	Cardiff University	UK	British A-level:: ABB - BBB. General Studies and Critical Thinking not accepted. (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Media and Communication	University of Leeds	UK	British A-level: AAB (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Journalism	University of Leeds	UK	British A-level: AAB (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Digital Media	University of Leeds	UK	British A-level: AAB (Specific requirements for other countries)	
Digital Media and Communication	Westminster University	UK	British A-level:BBB excluding General Studies (Specific requirements	3

Degree	University	Country		Duration
			for other countries)	
Journalism	Westminster University	UK	British A-level:BBB excluding General Studies (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Communication and Media Studies	Loughborough University	UK	British A Level: ABB (Specific requirements for other countries)	3-4 (with placement)
Bilingual Degree in journalism	Universidad de Navarra	Spain	All European High school diploma Passing an Admission Test	4
Journalism	Leicester University	UK	British A Level: ABB. (Specific requirements for other countries)	3
Media and Communication	Leicester University	UK	British A Level: ABB. (Specific requirements for other countries)	3-4 (with optional year abroad)

Table 2. Structure of the Degrees

Degree	University	Number of credits	Structure	EU price per academic year
Communication Sciences	University of Amsterdam	180	First year: 60 compulsory ECTS. A minimum of 48 credits is required	€2,083

			to continue the program after the first year. Second year: 30 compulsory and 30 Electives ECTS Third year: 2 x 6 ECTS Elective courses in Communication Science Graduation Project: 18 ECTS Internship: 16 ECTS 2 Compulsory: 12 ECTS	
Media and Information	University of Amsterdam	180	First year: 60 ECTS compulsory courses A minimum of 48 credits is required to continue the program after the first year. Second year: 48 ECTS compulsory courses 12 ECTS Free-choice electives Third year: 18 ECTS Compulsory ECTS 12 ECTS Restricted-choice electives 30 Free-choice electives	€2,083
Media and Communications	Goldsmiths-University of London	360	First year: 5 (15 credit) compulsory modules 1 Compulsory media practice modules Second year: 2 (15 credit) core modules and 2 (15 credit) option modules option modules 1 Compulsory media practice modules Third year: any combination of options to the value of 60 credits	£9250
Journalism	Goldsmiths-University of London	360	First year: 6 (15 credit) compulsory modules and 1 (30 credits) compulsory module	£9250

| | | | Second year: 6 (15 credit) compulsory modules and 1 (30 credits) compulsory module

Third year: 2 core modules (15 and 60 cretids)

A combination of option modules up to a total of 45 credits.

Or: A dissertation (30 credits) and one option module (15 credits) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Journalism, Media and English literature** | Cardiff University | 360 | First year: 6 compulsory courses of 20 credits each

Second year: 60 credits in English literature and 60 credits in journalism.

There are no compulsory modules Third year: 60 credits in English literature and 60 credits in journalism. There are no compulsory modules Possibility of a Dissertation (30 credits) | £9,000 |
| **Journalism, Media and Sociology** | Cardiff University | 360 | First year: 120 credits (60 credits in Journalism and 60 credits in sociology). 60 credits in compulsory courses of 20 credits each; and 60 optional. Second year: 60 credits in Journalism and 60 credits in sociology 3 compulsories (20 credits) Third year: 60 credits in Journalism and 60 credits in sociology. Only one compulsory module (20 credits). Possibility of Dissertation (40 credits) | £9,000 |
| **Journalism, Communication and Politics** | Cardiff University | 360 | First year: 60 credits in each school. 3 compulsory Modules (20 credits) Second year: All modules are optional Third year: at least two modules from each School | £9,000 |

Media and Communication	Cardiff University	360	First year: 6 core 20-credit modules Second year: 2 compulsory modules Third year: one core module and a choice of elective modules. Possibility of Dissertation (40 credits)		£9,000
Media and Communication	University of Leeds	360	First Year 5 Compulsory +1 Optional/Discovery modules To pass the year they must pass 100 credits Second Year 3 Compulsory+ 3 Optional modules: To pass the year they must pass 100 credits Students may replace 20 credits of options with 20 credits of discovery modules. This choice can be made in either semester (but not both) Third year Compulsory Communication Dissertation (40 credits)+ 4 Optionals Students may study 0 - 20 credits of Discovery Modules		£9,250
Journalism	University of Leeds	360	First year 5 Compulsory modules + 1 Optional Second year 4 Compulsory modules 2 Optional Students may study 0 - 20 credits of Discovery modules in either semester 1 or semester 2, but not both.		£9,250

			Third Year 3 Compulsory, Project or Dissertation, 2 Optional	
Digital Media	University of Leeds	360	First year 120 credits in total: 5 Compulsory + 1 Optional/Discovery Modules (100 credits to pass the year) Second year 120 credits in total: 3 Compulsory and 3 Optional/Discovery (not more than 1) (100 credits to pass the year) Third year 120 credits in total: 1 Compulsory, 5 Optional, Students may replace 20 credits of options with 20 credits of discovery modules. This choice can be made in either semester (but not both)	
Digital Media and Communication	Westminster University	360	First year: 100 credits core, 20 option Second year: 80 core, 40 option. Third year: 80 core, 40 option.	£9,250
Journalism	Westminster University	360	First year: 100 credits core, 20 optional Second year: 80 credits core, 40 credits option. Third year: 60 core, 60 option. (Possibility of Dissertation (40 credits) or Major Research Project (20 credits)	£9,250
Communication and Media Studies	Loughborough University	360	First and second year: 120 credits: 90 credits compulsory modules, 30 credits option modules. Third year: 120 credits: 80 compulsory, 30 credits option modules.	£9,250

			In addition, students have the opportunity to undertake a Placement Year	
Bilingual Degree in journalism	Universidad de Navarra	240	240 ECTS , 50% (120) in English.. 60 credits per year. First and Second year: only compulsory credits Third year: 12 optional credits Fourth year: 19 optional credits Final year Project 9 ECTS	€11,655
Journalism	Leicester University	360	First year: 120 credits core modules Second year: 4 core modules and 2 option modules Third year: 3 core modules, 4 option modules	£9,250
Media and Communication	Leicester University	360	First year: 120 credits core modules Second year: 4 core modules and 2 option modules Third year: 3 core modules, 4 option modules	£9,250

Figures

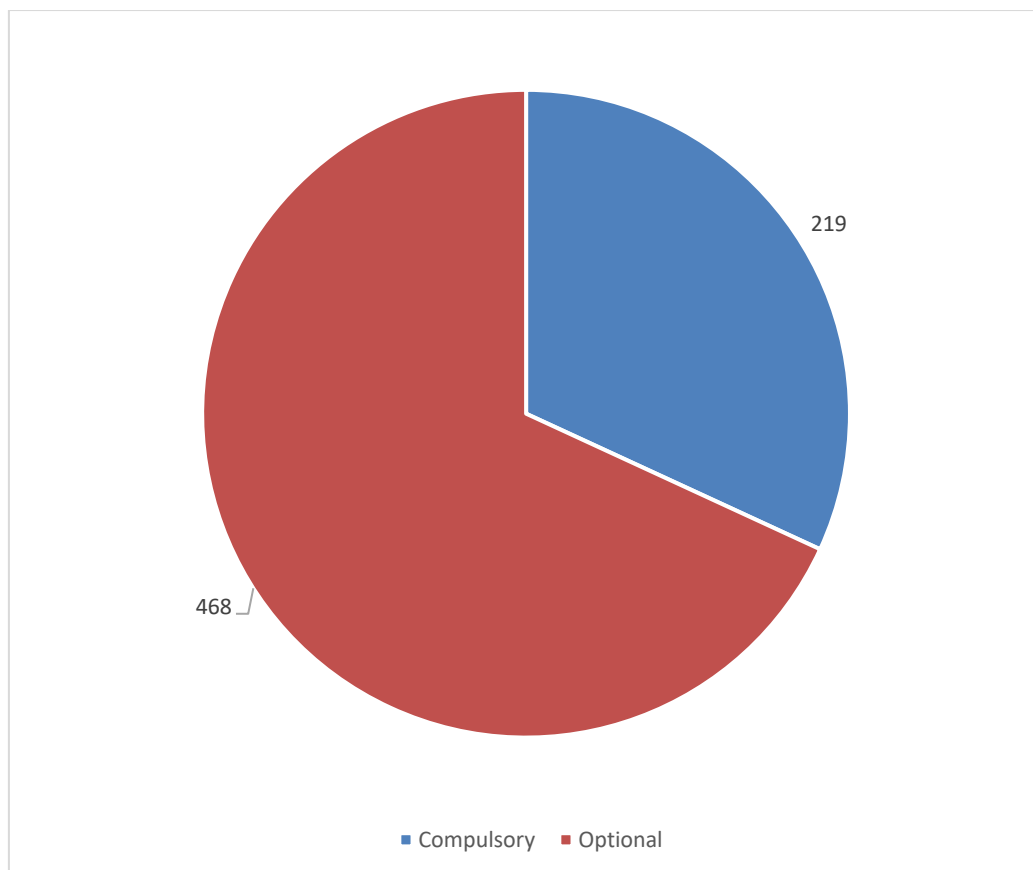**Figure 1 Number of courses by type (Compulsory/ Optional)**

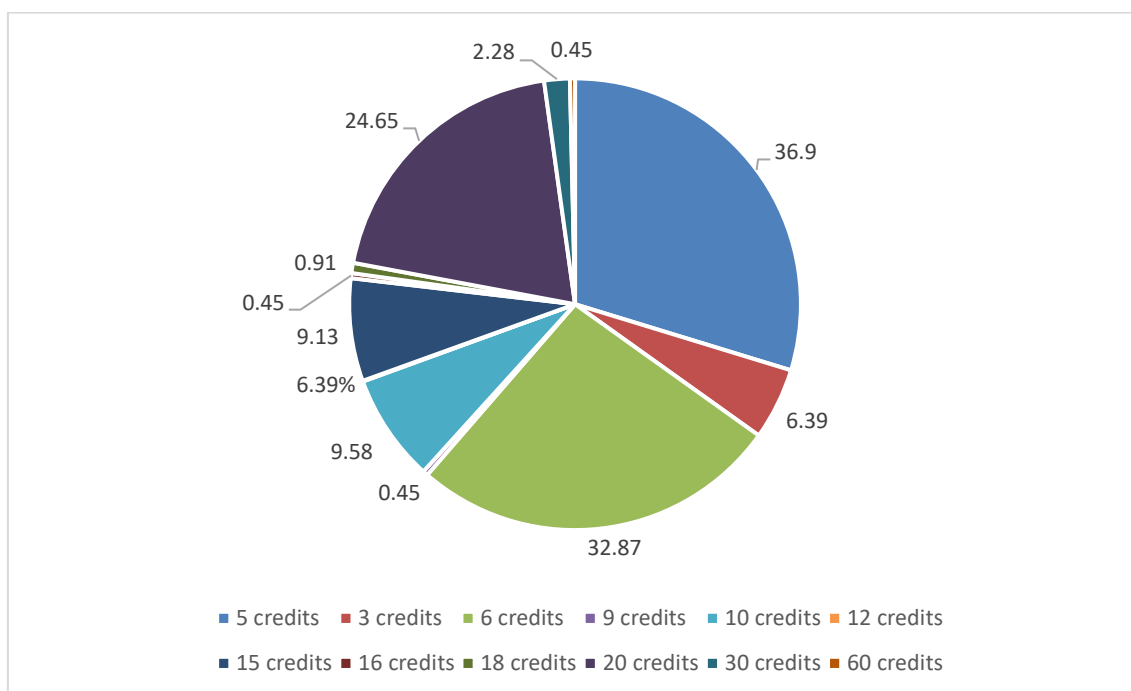**Figure 2. Number of credits of compulsory courses (Data in %)**

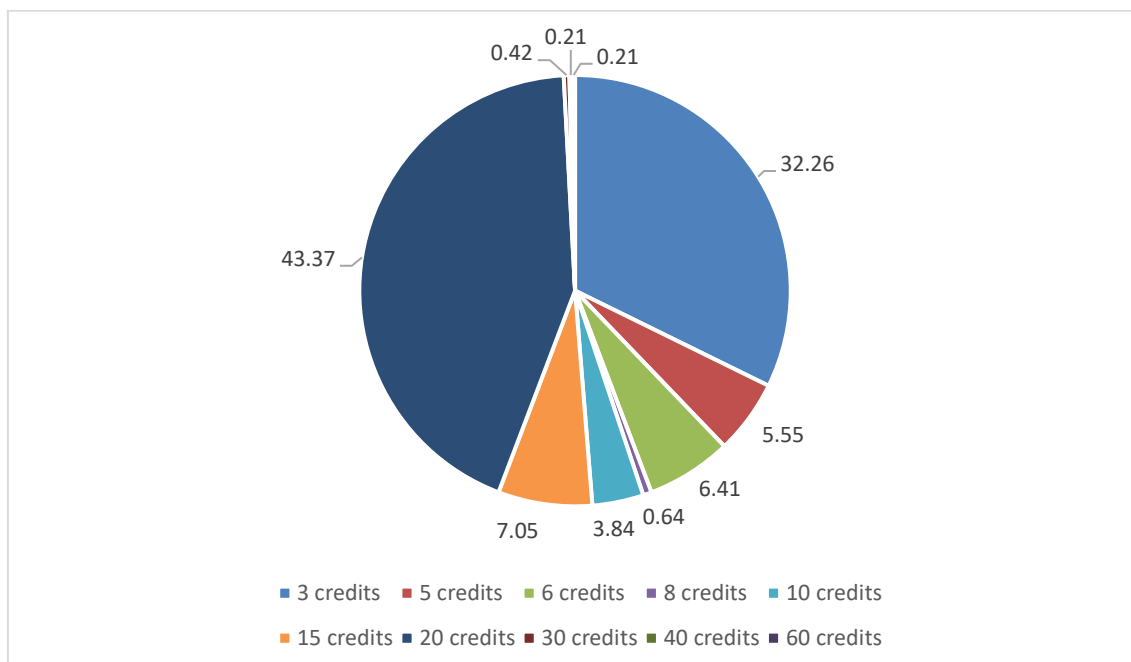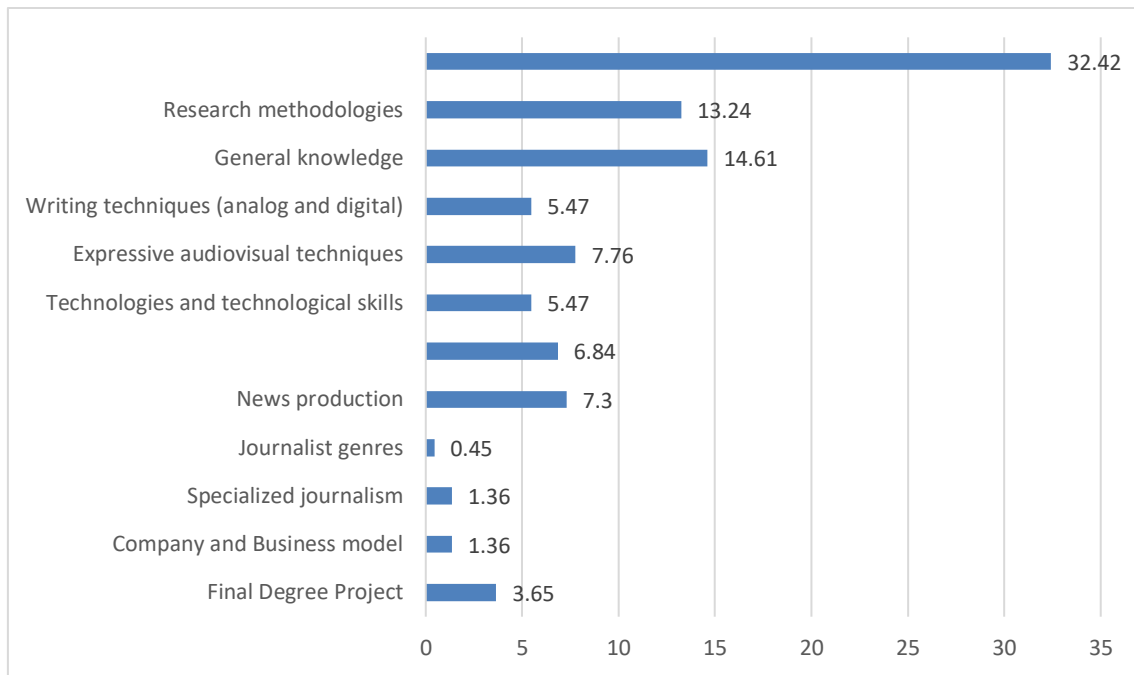**Figure 3. Number of credits of optional courses (Data in %)**

Figure 4. Subjects of compulsory courses

Figure 5. Subjects of optional courses

Chart 1:
- Research methodologies: 32.42, 13.24
- General knowledge: 14.61
- Writing techniques (analog and digital): 5.47
- Expressive audiovisual techniques: 7.76
- Technologies and technological skills: 5.47, 6.84
- News production: 7.3
- Journalist genres: 0.45
- Specialized journalism: 1.36
- Company and Business model: 1.36
- Final Degree Project: 3.65

Chart 2:
- Research methodologies: 44.87, 17.73
- General knowledge: 5.34
- Writing techniques (analog and...): 3.41
- Expressive audiovisual techniques: 7.26
- Technologies and technological skills: 5.12, 2.77
- News production: 4.05
- Journalist genres: 0.21
- Specialized journalism: 2.35
- Company and Business model: 2.77
- Final Degree Project: 1.49