

# Fostering creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit in the context of the ECTS

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## Abstract

The main goal of this project was to foster creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit among students in their first year of the Diploma in Tourism at the UAB within the context of the ECTS (European credits). We started from the assumption that greater individual initiative as well as a higher capacity to seek solutions to problem creatively are basic factors in students' personal and professional development. At the same time, the training of more entrepreneurial people will have positive repercussions in society over the long term, bringing economic and social value to the tourism industry.

The methodology used in this project was based on conducting a variety of actions targeted at both the professors and the students. By the end of the academic year we could see that the students had more individual initiative, autonomy and independence, along with a more entrepreneurial spirit favourable to the creation of companies.

## General area of interest of this innovation

The innovation presented in this article is related to fostering students' individual initiative as well as their ability to seek solutions to problems creatively and in different ways. Therefore, this article describes a series of actions aimed at developing the transversal skills related to the students' «individual initiative, autonomy and independence», the «capacity for decision-making» and “responsibility, the skill of self-management and self-control».

## 1. Objectives

The main goal of this teaching innovation project is to develop a teaching methodology in the context of the ECTS (European credits), which fosters the entrepreneurial

spirit and creativity among students in their first year of the Diploma course in Tourism (EUTDH) at the UAB.

With regard to the goals, we distinguished between general and specific goals, and they are divided into two levels, those for the students and those for the professors:

1. Objectives for the students:
  - Overall goal: To change students' way of seeing and understanding the teaching-learning process. The goal is to transform students' passive role, getting them to participate more and be more involved in all the academic activities.
  - Specific goals:
    - To foster the importance of teamwork
    - To encourage creativity
    - To develop the ability to resolve problems and take decisions
    - To prepare for independent learning
    - To foster a constructive critical attitude and the relativisation of contents.
2. Objectives for the professors:
  - Overall goal: To exchange the traditional teaching methodology for one in which the professors at times are in the background so the students can take centre stage. As a result, the professors will serve as guides in the students' teaching-learning process.
  - Specific objectives:
    - To foster teamwork among the professors
    - To encourage the faculty to adopt new teaching methods that focus on teamwork and developing creativity, the ability to resolve problems and take decisions, independent learning and students' critical attitudes.
    - To facilitate the training and continuous education of the faculty.
    - To prepare and predispose the faculty to adapt to the constant changes in the university setting and students' new needs.

## 2. Description of the project

The teaching methodology that was generally used in the Diploma in Tourism until academic year 2004-05 consisted mainly of holding teacher-led theoretical and/or practical classes.

Since academic year 2005-06, this Diploma has become part of the pilot plan to adapt to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which has involved some of the degree programmes at the UAB. Given this, we had to adapt to the new ECTS methodology.

This project starts from the assumption that any application of a new methodology means changes in the agents involved, both formal and informal. The purely formal changes (rules with regard to European credits, curriculum of courses, etc.) are relatively simpler to accomplish than informal changes, that is, shifts in attitudes,

behaviours and ways of doing things. Therefore, this project particularly emphasised specific actions aimed at fostering these informal changes.

Likewise, the tourism sector, as one of the most important engines of Catalonia's economy, requires well-trained professionals in order to be able to adapt to a market characterised by uncertainty and constant changes, as well as entrepreneurial people with the preparation and predisposition to create new companies. Therefore, it is very important to design a teaching-learning model based on multidisciplinary and targeted at fostering individual initiative and students' ability to take decisions, while remaining clearly focused on the needs of the job market.

Fostering the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity in the context of the tourism industry means developing skills among the future workers that can help the Catalan and Spanish tourism industries keep a leading position worldwide. With this purpose in mind, from the start EUTDH has aimed to respond to the needs for innovation in the tourism and hotel industries, in keeping with the motivation and policy of improving quality.

Therefore, this is the context and the motivations that spurred this teaching innovation project, with the backdrop of not just making the formal changes but even more so the informal changes. As mentioned above, these changes entail generating more favourable attitudes towards entrepreneurial activities in general, and specifically towards creating new companies, and the project involved both the students and the professors, as well as the managerial team at the EUTDH.

### 3. Methodology

With the purpose of achieving the goals set forth, the actions described below were organised according to which group they were addressed at:

Actions aimed at changing students' way of viewing and understanding teaching:

1. Fostering independent learning classes and tutorials through the use of the new technologies.

Terms of the timetable of the different courses in the first year, we included several hours of *out-of-classroom* teaching. In these classes, students were asked to do a given activity using the time they would have used to attend class. There are several types of activities, such as: doing an online activity supervised directly by the professor, visiting different institutions, holding an interview, gathering information, etc. What is more, the activities could be designed to be done either individually or in a group.

The main goal of this type of *out-of-classroom* teaching is for students to learn to manage their own time, to take on the responsibility for their own learning and, in the case of group activities, to work on a team without direct supervision by the professors.

In addition to these *out-of-classroom* teaching hours, compulsory online tutorials were also scheduled in either groups or individuals, which basically served to follow up on students' work or the tutored activities.

2. Production of digital teaching resources that help students become more independent in their learning process.

This action is directly related to the previous one (Action 1) and consisted of creating a variety of digital resources so that students could have a guide when engaging in their independent learning classes or could expand on the knowledge they had acquired in the classroom.

3. Fostering the use of the virtual platform, improving the quality of the virtual resources and investing in ICT.

We fostered the use of the UAB's virtual platform, which not only provides a virtual learning environment to support students but also enables them to have a space for doing *distance tutorials* and for the professors to track their projects and activities. A major investment was made in teaching support equipment (ICT) in order to facilitate the use of this platform.

4. A range of simulation exercises for solving problems and taking decisions. A range of independent learning and self-evaluated exercises.

The range of simulation exercises and/or practical case studies to be solved in-class, preferably in groups, was substantially bolstered for all the courses. In this way, more and more weight was given to more practical teaching with higher involvement by the students as opposed to traditional teacher-led classes.

Also, a project was included on the syllabus in some courses. Doing these projects meant that the students had to work regularly throughout the entire term, helping them learn to distribute their time, and therefore fostering independent learning. Later presenting the project in front of the class and having it evaluated by their classmates helped students to develop their critical attitude towards both their own and others' projects.

The changes in the classroom activities also led to changes in the way students were evaluated. Gradually, the traditional tests have been replaced by other methods of evaluation, such as projects that students later present and discuss in front of the group, which have an increasingly important weight within students' final marks. This is coupled with resolving the simulation exercises and/or practical case studies.

Therefore, including this type of activity is the cornerstone for fostering the entrepreneurial spirit among students.

5. A range of specific training actions involving creativity and creating companies.

Different supplementary activities were developed along the lines of this innovative teaching project, including a symposium entitled «Creating Companies and the Entrepreneurial Spirit in the Tourism Industry». At this symposium, both the faculty and students could attend a variety of lectures related to this topic. The most important aspects dealt with were:

- a) Creating and expanding a hotel chain.

- b) The process of creating companies in the tourist industry.
- c) Factors for success in an innovative tourism company.
- d) The development model to promote tourism companies in Barcelona.
- e) The institutional framework of measures to support the creation of companies in Catalonia.

Likewise, in the course entitled «Project: Implementation of a tourism product or company» in which students have to draw up a business plan, contents related to generating business ideas and creativity were gradually introduced.

6. A range of activities to supplement the contents of the diploma course.

We promoted a range of supplementary activities related to the different courses, such as going to see plays, visiting museums, going to the cinema, etc.

Activities aimed at changing the faculty's traditional methodology:

- a) Offering courses for the faculty on adapting to the new teaching methodology:

In conjunction with the Unit of Teaching Innovation in Higher Education (IDES), we offered general courses related to the ECTS as well as a specific course directly related to fostering the entrepreneurial spirit: «Strategies for stimulating creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit among students in the Diploma in Tourism and Higher Degree in Hotel Management». This training action was extremely successful among the staff of the EUTDH, as most of the faculty attended it.

- b) Fostering teamwork:

In order to foster teamwork among the faculty, the number of meetings with professors and students rose. Specifically, different types of meetings were held:

- Collective meetings with the professors (start of the academic year, end of the first term, end of the second term).
- Individual meetings with the professors.
- Meetings with students (both collective – to present the teaching methodology at the start of the academic year – and individual).
- Meetings with the management and coordinators of the EUTDH (approximately every month).

#### 4. Results

In order to assess the degree to which the goals were reached, a variety of methodological instruments were used, both qualitative (*satisfaction and motivation surveys, entrepreneurship surveys and information on students' academic results*) and quantitative (*personal interviews and discussion groups*).

With regard to the results of the student satisfaction surveys, we should say that the ratings of the courses improved after applying this new methodology. Gener-

ally speaking, the students believe that the methodology is «ideal for expressing their creativity», «fun», and «participatory», and it makes them «learn things that are much more applicable to the working world», specifically to the tourism industry.

The Survey on Entrepreneurship (see Appendix 1) was administered at the start and finish of the course, and it included questions like if students thought *that creating a company of their own was desirable* and if they had *seriously considered creating a company of their own*. In general terms, the results showed a substantial improvement in students' entrepreneurial attitudes, despite the fact that we would needed a longer period of time to extract more solid conclusions. Therefore, the percentage of students who responded positively to the first question rose slightly (we should disclose that it was very high at the start of the course, around 70%), while the percentage of students who responded positively to the second question rose almost six percentage points (from 52% to 57.8%).

With regard to the faculty, the surveys on the working climate also showed that their degree of satisfaction and motivation with their teaching duties had risen.

With regard to students' academic results, they rose slightly after applying this new methodology.

Finally, by personal interviews and group meetings we revealed a very positive rating of this project in general, by both the teaching team and the students.

## 5. Conclusions

Generally speaking, after this initial experience the satisfaction surveys showed that both the students and the professors were more motivated to learn and teach, respectively. Likewise, based on the results of the survey on entrepreneurship administered to students before and after applying this project, we can glean that students showed a higher entrepreneurial spirit, that is, that they identified more with statements like «adaptability to change», «curiosity» and «creativity», and that they had a more positive attitudes towards creating companies. That is, not only did they claim that they had seriously thought about creating a company, rather the timeframe in which they planned to create it was shorter. We should also mention that the overall academic performance in the courses improved slightly compared to previous years.

During the monitoring and self-evaluation process conducted at meetings with the faculty, students and the managerial team of the EUTDH, a proposal emerged to draw up a list of good methodological practices with the goal of assembling a variety of teaching innovation activities that are being used in the different courses, highlighting their strong and weak points as well as the direct results of applying them. Likewise, we also detected that the instrument for measuring the evolution in students' entrepreneurial spirit needed improvement. As a result, the future actions proposed including extending this project to all the courses in the Diploma in Tourism, as well

as drawing up a list of innovative good methodological practices within the context of the ECTS.

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### Keywords

Entrepreneurial spirit, ECTS, business creation, creativity, teaching innovation, EUTDH.

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### Presentation of the working group

The working team on this project is made up of the professors teaching the courses in the first year of the Diploma in Tourism along with the managers and coordinators of the EUTDH. Therefore, it is an interdisciplinary working group that includes educators from different areas and departments from the UAB who have different responsibilities within the EUTDH.

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