

Political Institutions in Catalonia

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Abstract

The subject of this study is Catalonia's 2006 Charter of Self-Government from a legal perspective, which fundamentally corresponds to the course "Political Institutions in Catalonia» from the fourth year of the Bachelor's degree in Law at the UAB.

Materials were drawn up using a template, each of which contains a summary of each topic, schemes, graphs, synopses tables, bibliographic resources, laws and jurisprudence. Questionnaires, debate issues, tests, audiovisual materials and online links are also reproduced.

The material was uploaded onto the website <http://www.institucionspolitiques.com> with the aim for it to be interactive, to foster creativity and cooperative work among students, to give teachers a more active role and to facilitate the adaptation of our teaching methods to the European Higher Education Area. The experience was rounded off with the use of a twofold method – the UAB's virtual campus – with student visits to public institutions and periodic attendance at television studios to see programmes with contents related to this subject in the audience.

General area of interest of this innovation

This teaching innovation could be useful for faculty and students in the social sciences in general, and in law in particular. It might also be interesting for anyone who wants to access information on the characteristics and the legal problems posed by Catalonia's 2006 Charter of Self-Government quickly, easily and interactively. This project takes advantage of the need to adapt law studies to the European Higher Education Area, with the corresponding change in the relationship between professors and students. It is a teaching experience that takes into account knowledge, procedures and attitudes, and that fosters students' motivation and participation both inside and outside the classroom,

contributing to consolidating the use of the new technologies in university teaching and to foster the twofold teaching method.

1. Objectives

The project makes it possible for students to play a more active role in their learning and work more independently outside the classroom. Likewise, the concern with improving the teaching quality, both in the classroom and at a distance by applying the twofold methodology, has led teaching materials to be developed with a heavy conceptual load. The teaching innovation affects the study of public law in Catalonia – which corresponds to the course on Political Institutions in Catalonia – in a clear, understandable, structured, comprehensive and rigorous way. The project led to the production of digital materials that can be accessed quickly and easily; the holding of dynamic, interactive classroom sessions; the reinforcement of the role of the faculty in the tutorials in order to make them more useful; the university's connection with society by means of practical activities and trips to institutions; the development of cooperative work among students; and finally, civic or aware attitudes in the county of such a sensitive topic as this one.

2. Description of the project

The teaching materials were drawn up by the team members based on a template. The content is Catalonia's new 2006 Charter of Self-Government (CSG).

Below is a description of the *template of the different topics in the programme*:

1. Writing the topic (20-25 pages at most). This must include an initial summary of the different sections and sub-sections into which the explanation is organised, trying to use non-sexist language by seeking gender-neutral formulas (such as Presidency, holder of the Councillorship, etc.) or by reproducing the formulas used by the new CSG (congressman or congresswoman), improving if possible on its omissions and incoherencies.
2. Visual outline of concepts: synopsis tables, scheme, graphs (5-6 pages at most).
3. Basic bibliography on the subject:
 - a) Recommended reading (a book or article)
 - b) Basic bibliography (3-4 books, book chapters or articles).
4. Laws and jurisprudence:
 - a) Laws (the main regulations about the issue).
 - b) Jurisprudence (selection of the legal underpinnings of up to ten relevant rulings).
5. Text reproduced: 1-2 pages of a book or article, ruling or opinion.
6. Questions: 5 questions about the contents of the subject explained or of the reading.
7. Debate: Issues that allow you to legally argue the most debatable/political issues of the issue and/or allow them to be related to previous issues.

8. Test:

- a) Up to 20 multiple choice questions for students to evaluate their progress.
- b) Answer key to the test.

9. Complementary audiovisual materials.

10. Useful web links.

The contents of the subjects organised according to the template are part of the contents of the website with the following summary, which includes:

- a) Introduction.
- b) Members of the team
- c) Syllabus (*once opened you can find the contents of each subject on the syllabus according to the template mentioned above*)
- d) Bibliography
- e) Documents
- f) Nationals symbols
- g) Links
- h) Contact info
- i) Visits to institution (with photographs of the trips already made)

On the website there is also a section called News and a link to the UAB's virtual campus.

The product of all the work of drawing up the teaching materials and the experience itself were conditioned by the topic being studied, because of the provisional nature of the new Charter because of the different appeals claiming that it is unconstitutional, as well as by the development and adaptation of the regulations prior to this charter to the new legal regulations. In this context, students were asked to identify potential problems with unconstitutionality (pros and cons), to prepare in a team several subjects from the programme in order to determine the real content of the current legal system, and to examine some problematic aspects today by assessing whether the new charter might resolve them.

The potential of the virtual campus were used for both uploading materials and facilitating communication between the faculty and the students for the sake of continuous assessment, with a variety of exercises (at most five) during the course. However, not all the professors who participated in the experience used continuous assessment entirely, although they did at least begin to use a mixed evaluation system as part of the overall mark, instead of just the final exam. During the first academic year, the website was being built and special attention was paid to videos from the «Parliament Channel», which deals with subjects related to the course. A new bibliography was tracked down and public institutions were visited. Periodic meetings were held with the professors involved in the project in order to coordinate the materials development and touch base on how the teaching experience was faring. During the second year that the project was underway, specifically during the second term of academic year 2007-08 (February to May 2008), efforts were made to finish all the materials, and some points, such as the schemas or synopsis tables, could be developed or finished in conjunction with the students. In fact, the final content of the materials must have the students' approval in the sense that they must validate their usefulness,

interactivity and the degree to which they illustrate the points covered. For this reason, we surveyed students' satisfaction, which was positive overall, and at the end of the project we conducted a survey of the results and asked the experts in teaching innovation for their help in analysing the results.

3. Methodology

The teaching materials were developed by the team members, and external cooperation from colleagues was requested in order to produce materials on issues related to managing religious pluralism and multiculturalism. We also had the support of the computer expert in the department and the advice of a graphic design professional.

Periodic working and coordination meetings were held to discuss the materials developed, to standardise the criteria, to troubleshoot problems and, especially during the first year the project was underway, to assess the strong and weak points of the actions done, bearing in mind the conditions that affected the subject being studied, as mentioned above. The different lessons in the programme were written by teams with the intention of making them as clear, schematic and well-organised as possible, as were with the emerging bibliography, the visual resources (videos from the «Parliament Channel»), links to websites related to the subject, schemas, and PowerPoint presentations in order to later include them in the project. We also organised several trips to public institutions, such as the Parliament of Catalonia, the Ombudsman's Office and the Palace of the Generalitat, the seat of the Catalan regional government. Different groups of students – accompanied by a professor – sat in the audience of the «espai public» programme broadcast on BTv.

Likewise, the computer was always used in the classroom, and each professor projected materials in order to help students visualise the concepts. On this point we should point out that the members of the project believe that this visual aspect still needs some improvement, not just to facilitate access to knowledge of the contents covered in the course but also as a tool that is not always taken into account in university law degrees, and that the new generations appreciate because they have been raised in a visual culture.

The baseline goal was to augment the interactivity between professors and students, by using a type of teaching that links theory with practice, and that in a broader reflection would make it possible for the university to connect with the society around it, parameters that we have tried to apply in this teaching experience.

4. Results

As a result of the actions carried out, a useful, interactive teaching tool adapted to the European Higher Education Area was consolidated, related to the course on «Political Institutions in Catalonia». This course is currently taught in the fourth year of the Bachelor's degree in Law, but the project can be extrapolated totally or partially to other

subjects or studies within the field of the social sciences. The teaching resources developed could be applied to other groups as well, such as civil servants, and in general they could be used by anyone interested in learning more about the new features of Catalonia's 2006 Charter of Self-Government.

Based on the teaching experience explained in this article, new strategies for improving students' Bachelor's degree and graduate studies in the field of law were used.

Student satisfaction was quite high. The first results obtained are satisfactory compared to other academic years (according to the surveys and questionnaires administered by the faculty) in terms of both contents and procedures. We should also point out that students participated more in the classroom, on the virtual campus and on the website (Table 3) in the tutorials, as well as in the trips to institutions, and that the proportion of students passing the course was higher.

For example, the preliminary results show an increase in class attendance (20%), a rise in the use of continuous assessment (27%) and an overall improvement in marks.

The results refer to an average from each group that participated this project during academic years 2006-07 and 2007-08, over a total of 85 students per year on average.

Table 1. Student degree of satisfaction (%)

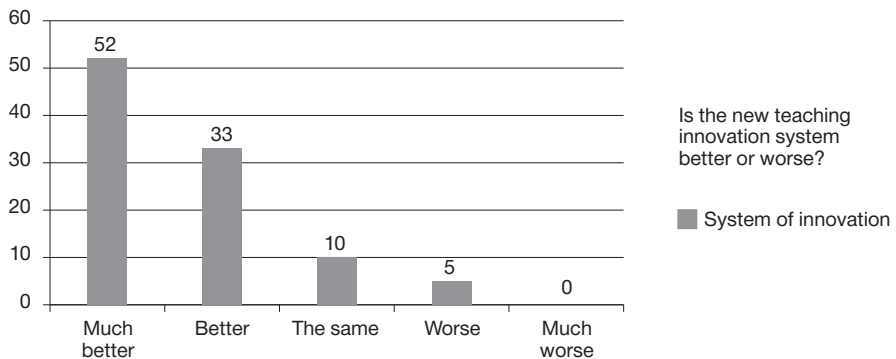


Table 2. Use of continuous assessment

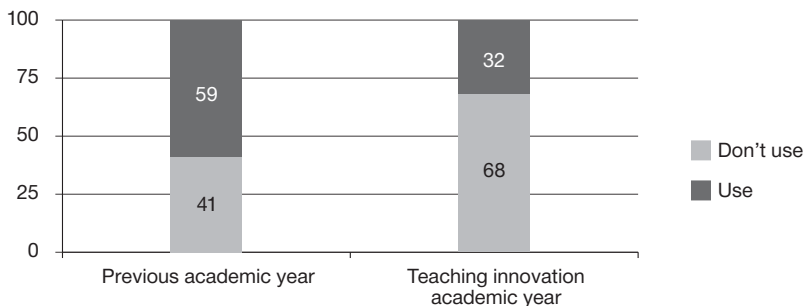
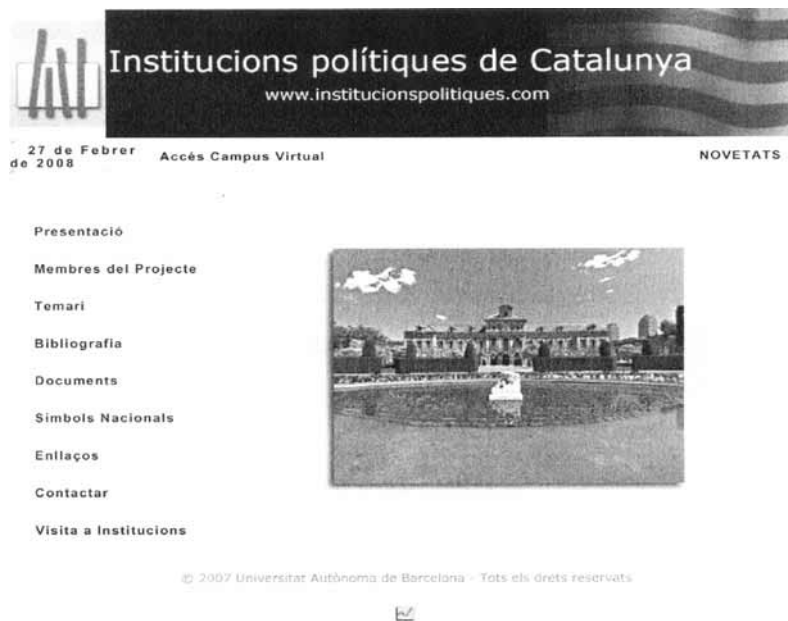


Table 3. Number of student accesses to the project's website

Activity per week (from the start of the project)	Pages seen	Visitors
week 41 2007	22	9
week 42 2007	65	28
week43 2007	57	26
week 44 2007	63	26
week 45 2007	279	34
week 46 2007	116	34
week 47 2007	121	35
week 48 2007	168	34
week 49 2007	57	17
week 50 2007	217	34
week51 2007	85	23
week 52 2007	21	5
week 1 2008	16	7
week 2 2008	51	17
week 3 2008	27	13
week 4 2008	5	2
week 5 2008	111	18
week 6 2008	76	20
week 7 2008	195	38
week 8 2008 (start of academic year)	1,402	132
week 9 2008	1,111	133
week 10 2008	1,440	180
week 11 2008	785	116
week 12 2008 (Easter week)	198	41
week 13 2008	320	74
week 14 2008	602	138
week 15 2008	402	95
Total	8,012	1,329

Figure 1. Homepage of the website of the teaching innovation project



5. Conclusions

The pilot test of the new teaching tools led to a reinforcement of students' autonomy in the learning process, in gaining knowledge, and in procedures and attitudes. We should point out that this project was suffused with a concept of teaching in which the connection to the socio-political reality of the institutions being analysed is central, meaning that work outside the classroom is crucial. What is more, it fosters an active model of student who is trained in the procedures and tools of cooperative work and who has a sound emotional relationship with the faculty. The results lead us to continue and improve on the website, with the expansion and inclusion of new elements and contents.

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Interesting links

- Website of the project: <http://www.institucionspolitiques.com> [2008]
- Information on the Generalitat de Catalunya and its different departments: <http://www.gencat.cat> [2008]
- Parliament of Catalonia: <http://www.parlament.cat> [2008]
- IDES: <http://www.uab.es/ides> [2008]
- UAB virtual campus: <https://cv2008.uab.cat/> [2008]

Keywords

Catalonia, autonomy, visualisation of concepts, twofold method, EHEA.

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Supplementary materials on the CD-ROM

Demonstration of the website.

Project leader

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Presentation of the project leader

Joan Lluís Pérez Francesch (Barcelona, 1959) holds a doctorate in Law and is a full professor of constitutional law. He has served on the union of the Faculty of Law at the UAB, and is currently the secretary of this faculty, a member of the Language Policy Committee delegated by the Governing Council, and president of the Commission on Language Promotion in the Faculty of Law. He is the main person in charge of this teaching innovation project. He has also participated in other projects such as the development of the mock courtroom in the Faculty of Law and drawing up materials on citizenship and human rights.

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