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Hybrid learning environment for the Entrepreneurship Seminar on European Virtual Venturing: a bridge between Estonia and France



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the European Virtual Entrepreneurship (EVV) seminar between Estonia and France was to raise students' awareness and competence in the field of virtual teamwork, improve their intercultural understanding and develop knowledge and skills that would help to understand the value and nature of entrepreneurship.

GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE HYBRID TEACHING PRACTICE

- Implementers: Tallinn University (Tallinn, Estonia) and Institute of Training in Computer Science, Networks and Telecommunications (Cergy–Pontoise, France)
- Study program: Erasmus Mundus Master programme on Digital Library Learning
- Courses: Human Resource Management (HRM) course, Entrepreneurship Seminar on European Virtual Venturing (EVV)
- Lifetime: March – April 2010, 2011 and 2012
- Reference: Based on document analysis and articles by Prof. Sirje Virkus and Aira Lepik (School of Digital Technologies, Tallinn University)
- Compiled and structured by Tallinn University.

ABOUT THE DILL PROGRAMME

The Digital Library Learning (DILL) modules at Tallinn University (TU) have been designed to offer ways that integrate traditional teaching and learning strategies with technology-supported methods. There was less focus on teaching and more on learning processes, knowledge construction, meta-cognition, self-monitoring and guided support. Students participated in a classroom in Estonia as well as in France, but both classrooms were connected using video conferencing technology. If the lecturer was from TU, for example, DILL students participated in the study face-to-face, and students from France online. If the lecturer was from France, then vice versa. The pedagogical approach used advocates the use of variety of technology and media for the content delivery, communication, collaboration and student support to meet the needs of diverse student groups and to improve the quality of teaching.

Nowadays, the motivation of university lecturers to engage in hybrid learning environments include the strategic aspects of innovative hybrid pedagogy in the creation of knowledge, based primarily on individual teaching experiences and the possibilities of information and communication technology.

PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

The students of the Erasmus Mundus DILL master programme (2007–2020) were located in two separate geographical locations: in all three years (2010, 2011 and 2012) on average 18 students in Cergy–Pontoise, France, and 18 students in Tallinn, Estonia participated in



the Entrepreneurship Seminar on European Virtual Venturing (EVV). The EVV seminar was organized and carried out by Institute of Information Studies (TU, Estonia) and Institute of Training in Computer Science, Networks and Telecommunications (ITIN, France). The students from France were more homogenous group, but from Estonia the different regions were represented: Africa, America, Asia and Europe.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The EVV Seminar within DILL programme aimed to improve students' awareness of and competence in virtual teamwork, enhance their intercultural understanding and develop knowledge and skills that would help them to understand the value, nature and current practice on entrepreneurship.

By the end of the EVV seminar, the students were expected to be able to:

- select and analyze new venture opportunities,
- explain the concepts of market segmentation, target markets and positioning,
- define a product and service offering,
- design an organization,
- recruit and manage a team,
- evaluate product costs and operating costs,
- prepare a new venture business plan and “sell” a new business venture.

HYBRID TEACHING SCENARIO

The basic seminar content was delivered via videoconferences by French and Estonian teachers (Fig. 1 - 4), but the course capstone was a team project completed during three weeks and presented in the last week of the seminar in a virtual classroom. Each session consisted of a synchronous cross-university video lecture of two hours (teachers from France and Estonia) and followed by four hours students' teamwork per session.





Fig. 1–4: Implementation of the hybrid Entrepreneurship Seminar on European Virtual Venturing (Photos: Aira Lepik, TU).

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE USED

The hardware Polycom VSX 7000 was used for video conferencing. This technology combined top-quality audio and video in a single set-top system that was easy to use and manage for anyone. For group work and interaction, students used mostly Skype, MSN and e-mails as communication tools.

Open-source e-learning software platform Moodle was deployed for the delivery of course materials, and Wiki for joint project works.

CONTENT CREATION

Students attending seminars on campus used the virtual learning environment (VLE) Moodle to facilitate academic community building, to practice communication skills and to utilize resources and tools to support the learning process. All course materials including lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations, handouts, open educational resources (OER), assignments, required and additional readings were published online to support class activities, following the standard folder structure (Study Guide, Background Materials, Assignments, Literature, Useful Links and Resources).

ASSESSMENT

Students applied knowledge and skills acquired during EVV seminar into the final product that was a comprehensive business plan. For development of the business plan, student teams were built up according to the principle that every team should consist of six students – three from ITIN (France) and three from DILL/TU (Estonia).

Student teams came out with six companies and developed marketing and human resource management (HRM) plans for these companies, including product/service and financial



descriptions. They presented these business plans for companies in a virtual classroom for the fellow students and teachers who were acting as possible investors during the final session in France and Estonia.

The assessment of the business plan consisted of the presentation of the idea of the company (10 % of the final grade), the product/service description with the marketing and HRM plan (20% of the final grade), the business plan and financial description (35% of the final grade) and the oral presentation (which also took place in a hybrid form) of all these deliverables of the teamwork on the last session (35% of the final grade). All members of the team got the same grade; assessment was discussed in collaboration by the teachers from ITIN and TU.

STUDENT EVALUATION

In order to assess the satisfaction of DILL students with the EVV seminar, a survey was used. The survey questionnaire consisted of 63 questions and covered the following aspects of the seminar: objectives and content, assignments, assessment, learning process, tutoring, pedagogical approach, learning environment, international collaboration, technical support, management and the seminar in general. In addition to the questionnaire, focus group interviews were conducted. The aim of this evaluation was to provide feedback to the seminar designers and tutors whether the seminar met the expectations of the students. It was expected to get necessary information that the further development of the seminar could occur. The student feedback was analysed separately by French and Estonian partners.

Based on the feedback obtained from both methods, there was a general positive reaction although it's been said that there was room for improvement. The majority of the students agreed that the course objectives were clearly stated and achieved, the topics presented were relevant and the course was easy to follow. Most students agreed that their expectations were met. All students except one person declared that they had learned new skills.

The majority of the students were happy with the learning process. Many of the participants rated the support from the teachers very highly. The majority of the respondents agreed that the teachers were professional in their work, supported the course effectively and showed interest in and enthusiasm for the subject.

TEACHER EVALUATION

The lecturers assessed the interdisciplinary nature of the seminar as very positive: interdisciplinary approach was taken where information technology students from France and library and information science students from Estonia complemented each other. Therefore, student teams were built up according to the principle that every team should consist of six students – three from ITIN (France) and three from DILL/TU (Estonia).



QUALITY ASSURANCE

Effective quality assurance mechanisms were implemented to ensure the existence, availability and allocation of resources and technological infrastructure to support student achievement of EVV learning outcomes, and demonstrate continuous improvement.

TIME COMMITMENT

During one semester, ten hybrid sessions were conducted. Each session lasted six academic hours and consisted of a synchronous cross–university video lecture of two hours (teachers from France and Estonia) followed by four hours students’ teamwork. It took one week to plan the EVV seminar project. Prior to each sessions, 30 minutes were spent setting up the technology in the classroom: the educational technologists of TU E–Learning Center provided technological support. Two hours were spent on student feedback analysis.

TRANSFERABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Entrepreneurship Seminar is a European Virtual Venturing model that can be applied in other fields and also in other universities. Competence in virtual teamwork and the development of cross–cultural understanding are increasingly important today, and the continuous development of information and communication technology supports such an approach.

FURTHER REFERENCES

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