

Grand Meeting on Education

Organised by VeSte and the students of the Board of Education

9th of April 2019

Discussions on:

- **Best Practices for PC's**
- **Mental Health and Stress**
- **The International Classroom**
- **Flip the Classroom**



Students Board of Education



Best Practices for Programme Committees

Speakers: Sophie Wintermans (Student chair PC Molecular Lifesciences) & Menno Kasteleijn (Student Member Board of Education)

Student as chair of Programme Committee

Students are just as capable to be chairs of their Programme Committees (PC) as teachers. We see that sometimes Programme Directors (PD) are chairs of the committees. The benefit of not having the PD as chair, is that they often already give a lot of input anyway and tend to be quite talkative in some cases. It can on the other side also happen that the PD functions well as chair of the meeting. Therefore, it depends on the person the PD is as well. You can be both student member and student chair at the same time.

Experience, time and satisfaction with the status quo are reasons not to become chair for students.

The relation between student chair and staff is not harmed in any way. Teachers are actually quite interested in what you do as chair. They respect a student as chair. You can be both chair and member (with voting rights). This sometimes can be tricky, since you cannot always represent your opinion. It really depends on the person fulfilling the task whether it is preferable to have a chair with voting rights or not. It is not very well known that students can be chair of the Programme Committee (PC).

Student input

Some PC's have pre-meetings with the student members, this helps student members to fully understand the subjects, to strongly formulate a student opinion and to ensure that you have people supporting you during the meeting. You can also argue that a discussion between students during the meeting only, can also be very beneficial. It is also an option to sit with the PD and the students, besides the PC meetings. With some PC's there is a special agenda point for student subjects.

Before the PC meeting there is a meeting with other students as well. This can be with non-PC members too, to attain a broader opinion. First students can be a member of the 'pre-meeting group', when they later become a member of the PC they will already have sufficient knowledge. This results in a broader opinion of more students, and the new PC members already have knowledge and experience.

Visibility of PC

It can be hard to find new PC members; students do not really know what a PC does, it can be smart to make a summary of the PC meeting and post it in the study Facebook group. When discussing course evaluations it is useful to inquire students who followed the course. Some PC's invite relevant stakeholders for certain agenda points. Via the study association often input is gathered as well, for instance via education committees, via blogs, weekly mails, or general members meetings; it might be very interesting to request some budget from the PC to organize lunches to get more input from students. Every PC member has the right on training, which are also often given by the Board of Education. If you have nice ideas for this, you can send an email to menno.kastelijin@wur.nl, but for more training you can also contact your PD or DB-PC for training options.

On the website of the study association there can be a feedback point for the programme for students for easy access. The first step might even be to ensure that students know who are active in the PC, so they know whom to contact for questions or remarks.

Course evaluations

These can be discussed in a broader group of students (maybe even together with the Programme Director (PD) first) and then presented to the rest of the PC. It happens on occasion that not all course evaluations are being discussed unless their scores are really low. Reason for this can be that the students of the PC were not involved in the courses. An improvement can also be that you have meetings with the teachers and some random students, so that you get a good overview of issues with the course. In smaller lectures it can also be an option to gain input on course evaluations during the first lecture of the next period and evaluating together.

Concrete ideas

A sort of forum would be nice for exchanging ideas between students in PC's. For instance, using www.slack.com.

Mental Health and Stress

Speakers: Esther Ruijters (Student Psychologist) & Bo Briggeman (VeSte)

Introduction

The current action plan entails among others:

- Create a tool to signal stress earlier
- Trainings for students to cope with stress
- Built a website with information about stress
- Organize a mental health week to raise attention

Additional ideas and suggestions that came up during the meeting are:

- More frequent approach of stress by a survey would be more useful, as stress often comes in waves
- Add a question about stress to PaCe evaluation, maybe add it to the question about workload
- Educate teachers to know how prevent putting too much stress on students
- For WU improvement: more guidance in choosing courses, the highly valued flexibility also causes overchoice stress.
- Create an environment in which we can talk about stress.
- Teachers/employees should be aware of the stress among students. 10 years ago students still received the grant and were way more relaxed but the situation now is different.
 - Teachers also have a program against Stress (vital@work)

Statements presented and responses:

Every once in while I experience stress to the extent that it negatively influences me

Some students experience stress due to the different kind of examinations that can be included in a single course (group case studies, practical, written), because this makes it impossible to focus on one thing. However other students would experience more stress if there is one exam, on which the full mark of the course depends.

Group work often causes a lot of stress, also because the problem of free-riders is not dealt with at the moment. Also, group work is often chosen without alignment with the learning outcomes..

The morning and afternoon courses are often not taking each other's deadlines into account. Especially in the compulsory part this could be solved.

I experience stress due to the structure and/or organisation of the WU

- EDS causes stress when teachers do not follow the schedule. Also sometimes it is necessary to choose between a lecture or an extracurricular activity, which makes students feel that they're always missing out. There is less time for questions or for the break.
- ACT causes stress (finding the portal, vague deadlines)
- Thesis: the stresslevel is really dependent on the quality of supervision and there's often a culture of overworking at the chairgroups and it is expected from students as well
- Vague deadlines and insecurities in courses increase the stress level
- Motivated students can be so interested in everything that they have the feeling they're never done studying

I think the WU puts in enough effort in order to decrease stress in students

Student psychologist are easy to go to although the information could be a bit more widely known. In general students are really still seen as people at WU and not as numbers, which makes it easy to contact teachers or study advisors. However there are also negative experiences, with unanswered e-mails. This should never happen. The psychologists are trying to make it more easy to get help, e.g. by walk-in hour and group trainings. There was also a teacher that started his course with welcoming everyone, explaining where to find help, we are into this together etc. Maybe it is interesting to implement this in all programmes.

Idea for psychologist: e-mail students when they're halfway on the waiting list to keep them in the loop.

I think that the university is responsible for helping people with stress-related or mental issues, even if these issues do not find their origin in the structure of WU.

Most people agree as the university is a big source of the stress. Especially for first year BSc and MSc students without a big social safety net this is important.

Even if they're officially not responsible, they can still do something about it and help as it influences the learning ability of students.

I feel that I can come into contact with a student psychologist easily and would feel comfortable doing so, might I need help

The study advisor is also a good first step for when the problem doesn't feel big enough to go the psychologist.

What to take home:

If you're in the PC, have a look at the compulsory part of your program and discuss with course coordinators if deadlines from the morning and afternoon course can be aligned.

The International Classroom

Speakers: Erik Heijmans (Head of Education Support Centre)

Introduction

The topic was introduced by sharing some experiences of culture shocks both inside and outside of the classroom.

Human nature: this is universal and inherited behaviour

Culture: is for a group and learnt behaviour

Doesn't have to be a national culture, different study programmes also have different cultural behaviours and this is noticeable in courses taught to different programmes.

Personality: individual, inherited & learnt behaviour

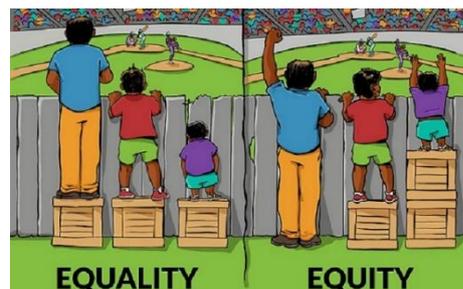
Also the concept of equality vs equity was explained.

Equality: having the same resources or opportunities

Equity: having different resources for reaching the same goal

This is a really important concept when working with different kinds of people with different working styles.

The last concept that was explained was Competency. This is the sum of knowledge, skills, attitude and experience. In different cultures there is focus on different aspects of competency. Being aware of this helps the intercultural communication in a group process.



Brainstorm for improvement of the international classroom on different aspects:

Lecturers

- Encourage a critical debate and be involved in this, focus on discussions in small classes
- Open discussion before groupwork on potential difference in values in a group
- Inform students on differences between cultures in the way of thinking and working
- Create an open environment, motivate students to actively participate, create opportunities for this
- Demand proper preparation for lectures
- Create opportunity to introduce students to each other
- Explain the added value of the international classroom to Dutch students (diversity opens door to new way of thinking)
- Take into account the different backgrounds of students
- Understand the differences in preknowledge of students
- Always speak in English
- More stimulation of English courses for teachers

Students

- See dealing with diversity as a competence for your study career
- Always speak in English
- Be aware of cultures specificities (directness) but also of the similarities

Teaching materials

- Make information from previous courses available to make sure that students missing background knowledge can acquire this
- Diverse learning materials, to make sure that everyone can study in their own way

Teaching Methods

- Purposely make groups with students from different backgrounds
- Using international examples, e.g. by guest lectures on high level, case studies
- Feedback on group work

Other

- Aim for good distribution of student nationalities in the course
- More diverse teaching staff (not just white men)
- Stimulate Dutch WUR students to do part of their programme abroad

Flip the Classroom

Speakers: Arend Ligtenberg (Teacher)

There can be different reasons for a teacher to try to have a flipped classroom, for example creating more interaction, activating students and to make sure the messages comes across. It's also used to make lectures more personal and fun. The idea of the Flipped Classroom is that the work that you would normally do in the lesson is done at home by for example watch knowledge clips and reading. In the lecture hall your knowledge is expanded with exercises and small scale interaction. This method makes more efficient use of the lecturers time as only 20% of the knowledge shared in a lecture is taken up by the students. The student is central in this. For teachers it is an extra challenge to apply this method as next to knowledge on content and didactical skill also technological pedagogical skills should be present.

Arend started a Flipped Classroom in one of his courses, that had more than 100 participants.

- The first time he performed an experiment with 20 volunteers who did a flipped version. Instead of the normal "cook book practical" they were given the final assignment of the week. These volunteer groups sometimes struggled to do the assignment with only the knowledge clips. It was also harder for the teachers to help them, because they came up with very different strategies to tackle the problem than was taught in the normal practical. The students in the experiment did have a better understanding of the GIS program (central in the course), but it was also harder for the lecturers to assess whether they achieved all the learning outcomes. Another problem with this experiment was that it relied on volunteers, so these were confident students that liked a challenge. The biggest positive was that the students also actively helped each other in the flipped group, while the normal students hardly ever helped other groups.
- For the next experiment he used the whole group split it into two subgroups: a flipped one and a normal one. The course included clips to explains theory and software and selftests for students. Even though students liked the knowledge clips and selftests, the biggest problem was that they doubted their knowledge obtained from the clips and therefore needed a lot of help in the practical. Also, it was still difficult to determine if all students achieved the learning outcomes. Another issue is that in university you cannot oblige students to prepare the lessons like in high school, which makes the process less effective.

Now the course is more a combination of direct learning, flipped classroom and problem oriented learning.

An interesting discussion point was if the presenter should be visible in the knowledge clips, since it takes more time to record it then. Even though didactically it is not necessary students like to see their teacher and it help them if the teacher stresses something important by pointing at the slide or making hand gestures.

Most students present in the discussion have experienced some form of flip the classroom and are mostly positive about it. The set-ups of these flips differ from students becoming the teacher to just actively preparing at home.

Conclusions

Flip the classroom can be a beneficial tool for both teachers and students as it helps to activate the students and creates more interaction in the classroom (both amongst students and with the teacher). However, students still like going to traditional lectures and tutorials, thus a mix of flip the classroom with the traditional teaching methods might work best. Introducing a flip the classroom concept that works is difficult and time-consuming. Also, once the flipped classroom is in place the role of the teacher is likely to become more intensive. So flip the classroom is not very suitable as a tool to reduce the teacher's workload.

When you think as student that a concept like this might improve the course you're following do not hesitate to inform the teacher about your ideas!

Appendix

Results Mentimeter

