

# Chapter 19

## Instructional Design and Quality:

### Learning Strategies for the Course Plan and Formative Activities – A Practical Case of the Program of East Asian Studies

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Quality in e-learning should be measured from three perspectives: technology, pedagogy, and management and administration. This paper examines the pedagogical and methodological perspective, specifically in the work developed by the professors of the course “East Asian Geography”, a compulsory course of the Programme of East Asian Studies. The authors consider that the teaching and learning methodology applied to the UOC model has reached the proper level of quality when students are satisfied, follow the courses and not drop out, and perform appropriately. In that sense, satisfaction, permanence, and academic performance are the three levels of measurement of the quality of the each course and program, as well as the UOC model in general. On the basis of the data obtained and results of the first two years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, in terms of performance and satisfaction of the students in the course “East Asian Geography”, is considered for revision and improvement. This process has two phases. In the first one, during 2005-2008, the authors focus on the instructional design process and the conceptualization of the course plan with new activities; in the second, from 2009 to present, the authors examine the design and diversification of course materials and e-learning activities.*

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## **1. FOREWORD: THE CONTEXT OF OUR PRACTICAL CASE<sup>1</sup>**

The Open University of Catalonia (UOC, in Catalan acronym), a completely virtual university based on the concept of virtual campus, is a pioneer in a new concept of university both for its innovative pedagogical model (from teaching to learning) and for the quality of its learning processes which has as its base a distance educational model centred in the student. The teacher is no longer a transmitter of knowledge but rather he/she becomes a guide in the learning process, for which the student is ultimately responsible. This model uses the information and communication technologies (ICT) intensively, based on a virtual environment that stresses communication and relationships between individuals, breaking through barriers imposed by time and space, providing education anywhere, at any time and at the pace the student decides to set for him/herself. It provides access to education throughout a lifetime in response to the objectives set by individuals, making daily activity and personal circumstances compatible with educational goals.

### **1.1. The Basic Principles of the Model**

The UOC students (Borges, 2007) are individuals with a strong motivation to learn. They want to be certain that their learning is compatible with an active professional and personal life that is often overflowing with challenge, and with the daily will to succeed, they maintain their dream of being able to recycle their knowledge and have continual access to learning. The UOC is oriented towards responding to the students' personal and professional needs in agreement with the development of a technological context and, generally speaking, the business world and society necessities.

In this sense, if one comes to consider the student's profile and the characteristics of the knowledge society, the immediate access to

information, the flow of communication or the online work, one could understand the four basic principles underlying the UOC educational model: *flexibility* - the response to the diverse needs of the student to fully get adapted to his/her personal and professional reality; *cooperation* - understood as a cooperative way of knowledge generation among diverse agents; *personalization* - understood as the individualized attention the student receives considering his/her own characteristics, needs and personal interests; and *interaction* - the specific role of communication among every single agent from students and professors to administrative staff, which allows generating learning and creating the sense of community.

### **1.2. The Virtual Classroom as a Methodological Element**

The basic units of UOC learning process are the subjects, that is to say, the course activities. These course activities are developed in the virtual campus and in it, inside the virtual classroom through the application of an innovative methodology. The virtual classroom is the teaching area, an environment which contains information, tools, spaces and functionalities which permit to develop the teaching activity and the organization of the whole agents and elements involved. On accessing the virtual campus – the environment where students can find a range of services to interact with the university community – UOC students have at their disposal a virtual classroom for each of the subjects they have enrolled in. The virtual classroom is, therefore, a space where students interact with both tutors and colleagues studying the same subject, and thanks to this existing idea of the group, it is also possible to put into practice activity dynamics based on debates and discussions by sharing ideas and proposals, to resolve doubts on course contents and to have a social relating element among equals. The virtual classrooms is organised into four main areas that are clearly defined and also complementary: (1)

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