

# Learning Innovation Experiences from the Undergraduate Business Programmes

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**Abstract—** The aim of this paper is to describe the main educational innovations implemented in the undergraduate business programmes (Management of Business and Technology 240 ECTS; Digital Business, Design and Innovation 180 ECTS; Business Intelligence and Data Analytics 240 ECTS).

## I. SCENARIO-BASED LEARNING

Programme: Digital Business

Scenario-based-learning was the main methodological approach adopted in the UALS Online MBA programme, which involved immersing students in simulations of real business situations and the direct application of knowledge to the resolution of problems. The scenarios are underpinned by a Socratic approach that takes the learning through challenges concept to another level of depth through a fictional narrative.

As the Digital Business, Design and Innovation programme is defined by its highly applied approach and continuous engagement in projects of different types and levels of complexity, the idea of adapting scenarios from the postgraduate to undergraduate level provided an opportunity to offer a different project-based experience to students.

More specific opportunities included the possibility to deliver theoretical concepts driven by student need (the need to use theories, concepts and frameworks depending on the requirements of the scenario); to provide more structure to the challenge-based approach, especially in terms of evaluation and feedback during the process; the development of engaging scenarios that involve role-playing, which is an underdeveloped approach in the programme at present.

The subject selected to be a pilot test is in the area of Finance and is being implemented at the time of writing. At the end of the experience a full evaluation will be undertaken, including the impact on student learning outcomes. The process of preparing the scenario and delivering it involves preparation time on behalf of subject coordinators and professors require some training to adapt to the new approach. As the preparation process involves adaption and re-thinking materials and educational activities, it fits well with the implementation of NCA and the movement towards continuous evaluation of subjects.

## II. MODEL UNITED NATIONS PROJECT

Programme: transversal (departmental collaboration elective).

For the past 15 years La Salle-URL has participated in the largest university level simulation of the United Nations – the National Model United Nations. During the 2021-22 academic year we have prepared the first transversal team of students from undergraduate business, engineering and architecture to represent the delegation from Saudi Arabia.

The experience involves six months of preparation under the guidance of a professor but driven by the students that are selected to participate (the process is competitive as there are more only 20 places available and 60 students apply) The students register for the Departmental Collaboration elective. The culmination of the experience is the trip to New York for Spring Break to immerse themselves in the world of international diplomacy and work with over 5,000 students from around the world. Students develop in-depth knowledge on the UN and the political economy, inter-personal skills including speech writing and delivery, negotiation, resolution writing, problem solving, teamwork and leadership. Feedback from students and staff that have participated agree that this is a transformative experience that is one of the most important components of their undergraduate studies. In addition, the students represent Campus Barcelona on the international stage, fostering pride and prestige with the 2021-22 delegation winning an Honorable Mention award.

The combination of the multidisciplinary profile of the team, the focus on solving complex societal problems, the highly international nature of the experience that includes travel, the need for both knowledge but also knowhow and interpersonal skills, plus the involvement of the students in leading the project means that this is holistic educational experience for the students.

## III. INNOVATION & INSPIRATION

Programmes: Management of Business and Technology, Digital Business, Business Intelligence.

The 2021-22 academic year marks the 4th anniversary of implementing this inter-programme initiative within the

business area. The aim is to bring together teams of year 1 students from different degrees to work together on three challenges during the academic year in order to break the routine of the regular timetable and introduce them to project-based learning experiences.

The challenges are evaluated across a combination of first year subjects (5 to 10% of the final grade) and students begin to see the interrelationship between different subjects and knowledge areas.

In 2021-22 we introduced social challenges with Fundació Comtal and La Salle Barceloneta for the first time, a second challenge on Smart Cities and a third challenge with the first-year engineers on technology-based innovation with Euroleague Basketball (500+ students) - NCA Transveral Project.

Whilst this initiative has worked well in previous years, the consolidation of NCA means that students are engaging with an increasing number of projects in the first year of their studies. This is resulting in a degree of saturation with this learning approach and lower levels of motivation and quality of work than were expected. This initiative is currently under review as part of the planning process for 2022-23 academic year.

#### IV. LEARNING THROUGH CHALLENGES

Programmes: Management of Business and Technology, Digital Business, Business Intelligence.

A defining characteristic of the general learning approach in the undergraduate business programmes is leaning through challenges. This is where companies act as clients and bring real problems to the classroom for students to solve. Students apply theory, concepts and interpersonal skills to the problem resolution process, present results to the client and receive feedback (academic + industry). Companies we currently work with include SEAT/Cupra, Manchester City FC, Red Bull Media House, Desigual, Euroleague Basketball among others.

Our challenge here is now how to innovate and avoid saturation of students, which we are considering the development of more scenario-based-learning experiences (e.g. Marketing Management in year 2). An interesting next step would be to create new scenarios with clients to update and enhance the scenario-based learning experiences explained previously.

#### V. GAME-BASED SIMULATIONS

Programme: Management of Business and Technology.

Game-based simulations (purchase of licenses and participation through service provider platform) have been employed in our programmes for several years. Currently they form the basis of the learning methodology in the Brand Management and Marketing Simulation (Markstrat) subjects to simulate marketplace situations. These programmes use serious games that provide complexity and structure, but often lack the reality of a client-based challenge. With the emergence of more immersive video game experiences and in the context of metaverse environments, we see potential for immersive computer generated experiences that students would find engaging and necessary for future professional career development.

#### VI. NEW VENTURE TFG TRACK (FINAL PROJECT)

Programmes: Management of Business and Technology, Digital Business.

2021-21 is the second year in which we are implementing a Final Project (TFG) track for entrepreneurial students that want to use the Final Project process to try to launch (or simulate the launch) of a startup. This experience is delivered with Technova Barcelona as our technology park and startup incubator, with the intention of involving students in the wider Campus ecosystem. This track is offered in addition to a research track and a management case track with the aim of providing Final Project experiences that are more tailored to student interests and exit profiles from the programmes. This New Venture track provides an important capstone moment in the area of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, which is central to the learning outcomes of our students.

#### VII. CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES TO INNOVATE

By way of reflection on our efforts to innovate from the undergraduate business programmes, several challenges for the future can be identified:

- Scalability – the undergraduate programmes in this area are growing fast and the personalization and small group activity that interactive, project-based learning requires is very resource intensive. However, we believe this is where our differential value lies and there is strong strategic commitment to this approach.
- There is a clear need to continuously train professors in innovative methodologies to ensure their knowledge and experience grows.
- After several years of exploration and consolidation of this approach, there is now a need to create a coherent portfolio of challenges that are carefully mapped across our curricula.
- Saturation of students and potential 'death by challenge' caused by overloading them with multiple projects is a risk that must be managed.
- The challenges of the pandemic and in particular the movement of students on / off-campus and the general disruption of the past two academic years have meant we have learned to deliver these experiences in a more agile way, but at the same time this has been resource intensive.

The final message we'd like to share from the undergraduate business programmes to the rest of the campus is that we are open to innovate, collaborate and learn from other programmes and areas to provide even more enriching learning opportunities for our students.