# Teaching beyond corporate social responsibility: The Social Action Strategies course in the Advertising and Public Relations Degree at Pompeu Fabra University

## *Ensenyant més enllà de la responsabilitat social corporativa: l'assignatura d'estratègies d'acció social en el grau de publicitat i relacions públiques a la Universitat Pompeu Fabra*

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**ABSTRACT:**

In this paper we examine the European and Spanish frameworks for socially-oriented higher education competences, as well as the curricular composition of the Advertising and Public Relations (APR) degrees in Catalan universities regarding socially-oriented communication. We explore the need to establish contents within the degree which go beyond corporate social responsibility, particularly to address needs within the social third sector. We explore how participatory development communication and communication for social change can compose the core content of communication in the public interest within the APR Degree, based on three years of curricular innovation, research and development within the Social Action Strategies course taught in the APR Degree at Pompeu Fabra University.

**KEYWORDS:**

Advertising and Public Relations Degree, participatory development communication, communication for social change, corporate social responsibility, curricular development, social third sector.

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**RESUM:**

En aquest article examinem els marcs europeus i espanyols per al desenvolupament de competències d'orientació social, així com la composició curricular dels graus de publicitat i relacions públiques de les universitats catalanes en relació amb assignatures orientades a sectors no lucratius. Explorem la necessitat d'establir dins del grau continguts que vagin més enllà de la responsabilitat social corporativa, particularment per fer front a necessitats socials fora de les lògiques de mercat, i requerides pel tercer sector social. Exposem com la comunicació participativa per al desenvolupament i la comunicació per al canvi social poden compondre el contingut disciplinari de la comunicació per a l'interès públic dins del grau en publicitat i relacions públiques, basant-nos en tres anys de desenvolupament, investigació i innovació docent en l'assignatura d'estratègies d'acció social de la Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

**PARAULES CLAU:**

grau en publicitat i relacions públiques, comunicació participativa per al desenvolupament, comunicació per al canvi social, responsabilitat social corporativa, desenvolupament curricular, tercer sector social.

# 1. Introduction

Socially-oriented communication courses have been overlooked in the Advertising and Public Relations degrees (Barranquero, 2014; Huerta Floriano, García Galindo and García López, 2014). Despite the fact that European and Spanish higher education frameworks for curricular development have emphasized the need for social skills and competences (ANECA, 2005; European Commission, 2011; Tuning, n.d.-*b*)*,* the adaptation of Spanish higher education to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has followed a mercantile view which fails to acknowledge the social character of universities for the creation of more inclusive and cohesive societies (Bolívar, 2006; Cascante Fernández, 2009). In the Advertising and Public Relations (APR) degrees in Catalan universities, the adaptation to EHEA marked by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) in the *White Book of Communication Studies* has failed to mention socially-oriented APR professional profiles (ANECA, 2005). This has resulted in an insufficient offer of socially-oriented communication courses both in the branches of Advertising and of Public Relations.

At Pompeu Fabra University, communication for the public interest (Aldás, 2007; Balas Lara, 2008; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012) has been mostly disregarded and has been addressed through non-mandatory courses oriented towards corporate social responsibility (CSR). Although CSR is part of socially-oriented communication within public relations, it does not cover the needs of non-profit social sectors or other relevant non-lucrative community groups (Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012; Prasad and Holzinger, 2013). In this sense, it is necessary to study the fields of participatory development communication and communication for social change as disciplines to be included within the APR Degree curriculum as a transversal discipline, due to their importance in shaping cultural and societal values (Huerta Floriano, García Galindo and García López, 2014).

In this paper we examine the European and Spanish frameworks for socially-oriented higher education competences, as well as the curricular composition of the Advertising and Public Relations degrees in Catalan universities regarding socially-oriented communication. We explore the need to establish contents within the degree which address requirements beyond market needs and which are well proclaimed by the social third sector. Based on three years of curricular innovation, research and development outcomes within the Social Action Strategies course taught at Pompeu Fabra University, we propose basic contents based on participatory development communication and communication for social change for the introduction of socially-oriented communication within the APR degrees in Catalan universities.

## 2. European framework for socially-oriented competences in higher education

The *European 2020 Strategy for Higher Education* intends to introduce competences and values in higher education degrees to foster "people with the right mix of skills: transversal competences, e-skills for the digital era, creativity and flexibility and a solid understanding of their chosen field" (European Commission, 2011: 2). The strategy identifies universities as a key political component in the European Union to assure sustainable growth as a response to structural weaknesses and the current economic crisis. The EU 2020 strategy for higher education gives priority to three types of growth: *a)* intelligent growth through the reduction of early school leaving and an increase in youth with higher education studies; *b)* sustainable growth based on a greener, more competitive and more efficient economy; and *c)* inclusive growth, which facilitates social cohesion and high employment rates (European Commission, 2011).

This strategy relies and builds on the adaptation process of European higher education to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) framework, including the curricular redefinition of undergraduate degrees. In the year 2000, the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project was launched to facilitate the country-specific adaptations to EHEA according to the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy. It later developed into an approach to redesign, develop, evaluate, implement and enhance the degrees, based on a competence acquisition education model (Alonso, Fernández Rodríguez and Nyssen, 2008; Tuning, n.d.-*a*). Within the Tuning project, a set of 31 general competences were delimited as transversal, five of which were directly related to socially-oriented thinking and acting (Tuning, n.d.-*b*):
— ability to show awareness of equal opportunities and gender issues,
— ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning,
— ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness,
— appreciation of and respect for diversity and multiculturality,
— and commitment to the conservation of the environment.

These general competences, accompanied by others such as critical thinking, creativity and innovation in problem solving and multilingual abilities, indicate that higher education degrees should transversally provide students with the learning tools to address social issues such as gender inequality, intercultural diversity, participation and democratic structures, solidarity, globalization, a responsible use of ICTs and environmental sustainability (Huerta Floriano, García Galindo and García López, 2014). Furthermore, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission study titled *Mapping Major Changes to Education and Training in 2025* outlined as issues that need particular attention "the importance of implementing pedagogies that focus on transversal competences", the creation of participative learning environments aligned with technologies, the integration of "workplace, community

and home" into learning, the use of meaningful assessment strategies which apply to the different ways in which students learn, and the change of role of teachers into mediators, as they "become lifelong learners themselves" (Stoyanov, Hoogveld and Kirschner, 2010: 5). However, mercantile interpretations of these frameworks are causing higher education to become an instrument of neoliberal growth more than a tool for social development (Bolívar, 2006; Cascante Fernández, 2009).

## 3. ANECA framework for socially-oriented knowledge and skills in the Advertising and Public Relations Degree

The National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) was responsible for the implementation of the EHEA framework and the competence-based degree configuration (Alonso, Fernández Rodríguez and Nyssen, 2008; Bolívar, 2006). As an essential part of the process, ANECA published a set of white books to guide and facilitate undergraduate degree adaptations. Each white book delimited the field of knowledge, its relation to the labour market, the evaluation of desired skills and competences to be developed during the degree and the structure of the degree (ANECA, 2005). In Communication Studies, the ANECA developed the framework for three degrees: Journalism, Audiovisual Communication, and Advertising and Public Relations.

In the Advertising and Public Relations Degree (APR), socially-oriented skills and contents have a particular weight in the conceptualization of the ANECA framework. In particular, the *White Book* indicates (ANECA, 2005: 329):

> Students of Advertising and Public Relations must acquire a general basic knowledge of the major turning points that shape the current landscape of the work of professional communication, especially within advertising and public relations. This knowledge must be relevant for understanding the phenomenon of communication and its role in contemporary society. In this way, it must be ensured that the students become knowledgeable of the political, economic and business, cultural, and social contexts in which their work is inserted and know how to adapt their work responsibly to it.

Furthermore, it outlines the need for students to be aware of the ethical and sociocultural consequences of the communication profession in its diversity of theories and concepts, and acknowledges the need to "exercise the communicative task with ethical behaviour, both through theoretical and practical knowledge of the ethical codes of advertising […] and with awareness of social and cultural responsibility" (ANECA, 2005: 330-331). Additionally, the evaluation which measured the importance of different disciplinary knowledge for the configuration of the APR Degree ranked the "knowledge of ethics and professional deontology

of advertising and public relations as well as of the law which regulated the profession" as the most important skill (ANECA, 2005: 276). However, there is a contradiction between the conceptual weight given to the APR Degree in the shaping of cohesive, socially-responsible societies and the practical orientations in terms of curricula. Evidence of this contradiction is the ANECA delimitation of the APR Degree professional profiles:

— APR communication director, researcher and strategic consulter.
— Media researchers, planners and buyers.
— Creatives and designers.
— Corporate communication manager.

In the definition of these four profiles, the field delimitation is based on a market-only understanding of professional performance (ANECA, 2005: 271-272), with no specific reference within the profile descriptions to professional areas and fields such as communication for the public interest, peace communication, intercultural communication, community communication, communication for development, among others areas of great relevance within the professional practice of APR (Aldás, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2011; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012).

The adaptation of the competence-based EHEA framework to Spanish higher education has a clearly reductionist viewpoint of what society is and what society needs, placing the "university at the exclusive service of companies", where almost all training addressed is that which is required by the market (Bolívar, 2006: 18; Cascante Fernández, 2009; Sanz Fernández, 2006). Nonetheless, there is an understanding in international, European and national frameworks that communication professionals establish the desired societal values; failing to adequately introduce these values and skills in the professional practice of students will result in the perpetuation of public imaginaries and consumption structures that will promote socially prejudicial conducts, such as intolerance towards diversity and desensitization towards violence.

## 4. Socially-oriented courses within Advertising and Public Relations degrees in Catalan universities

Socially-oriented communication lies both within the Advertising and the Public Relations branch, due to the transversality of its activities, its use of varied communication tools, its strategic character and its relation to stakeholder communication (Aldás, 2007; Balas Lara, 2008; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012; Matilla and Hernández, 2012). Socially-oriented communication is strategically designed to address ways in which communication can serve the public interest far beyond profit-making or sole organizational benefit (Barranquero, 2014; Chouliaraki, 2011; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012; Huerta Floriano, García Galindo and García

López, 2014). Given the European and the national frame where "the social" is emphasized as a key aspect and as a complement to market-driven competences, it is important to outline the current situation of socially-oriented courses within Catalan Advertising and Public Relations degrees.

The following table shows the results of a review of the APR Degree study plans in the ten Catalan universities recognized by the Spanish Ministry that offer the Advertising and Public Relations Degree (Matilla and Hernández, 2012).[2] The socially-oriented courses were identified by the use of key words in the course titles which make explicit reference to socially-oriented areas (i.e. gender, environment, social, society, peace, solidarity, development, intercultural, equality, ethics, responsibility, rights). This review is merely an indicative exploration, and is in no way determinant of the contents within the study plans. Hence, we do not exclude the possibility that socially-oriented content is taught within other courses. This however, would require further and more in-depth analysis of the course teaching plans to determine the extent to which APR in Catalonia is being taught according to EU and national frameworks regarding equality, ethics and other socially-oriented values.

As seen in Table 1, the number of socially-oriented subjects is limited to a maximum of four in the best of cases, with a heterogeneous offer which is mostly focused on ethics of communication, and which is either optional or not offered in five of the ten universities. This not only does not comply with the ANECA guidelines which mark Ethics and Deontology as a mandatory course, but also puts into question whether students are receiving comprehensive professional training through which they can exercise their profession in an ethical, responsible and socially-aware manner.

## 5. The social third sector in Catalonia and the need for socially-oriented courses in Advertising and Public Relations degrees

The Taula d'Entitats del Tercer Sector a Catalunya (Catalan Table of Third Sector Organizations) defines the social third sector as:

The social third sector is the set of private non-profit organizations working for social inclusion and cohesion, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups in society. The social third sector is a group within the "third sector", a concept that defines non-governmental organizations and non-profit organizations, as opposed to "first sector" or public sector (government and non-profit), and the "second sector" or the private sector (profit and non-governmental). In recent years several international studies have highlighted the growing importance of the social third sector in the development of social policies, considering it the so-called "fourth pillar" of the welfare state.

| University | Socially-oriented courses | M/O* |
|---|---|---|
| University of Vic | Corporate Social Responsibility | M |
| University of Barcelona | Communication for Equality: Ethics and Deontology | M |
| Pompeu Fabra University | Ethics and Deontology in Advertising and Public Relations | O |
| | Social Action Strategies | O |
| | Intercultural Communication | O |
| | Project Workshop: Social, Institutional and Political Communication | M |
| Open University of Catalonia | Ethics and Legal System of Communication | O |
| Rovira i Virgili University | Structure and Social Change | M |
| | Globalization, Culture and Society | O |
| | Gender and Communication | O |
| Autonomous University of Barcelona | NONE | |
| Abat Oliba CEU University | Elements of Social Doctrine (Religious) | M |
| | Advertising and Social Doctrine (Religious) | M |
| | General Ethics | M |
| | Professional Ethics | M |
| International University of Catalonia | Information Rights, Fundamental Rights and Equal Rights | M |
| | Ethics and Deontology in Advertising and Public Relations | M |
| Ramon Llull University | Intercultural Communication | O |
| | Ethics of Communication I | M |
| | Ethics of Communication II | M |
| University of Girona | Ethical and Persuasive Communication | M |
| | Corporate and Social Responsibility | O |
| | Gender and Media | O |

**Table 1. Socially-oriented courses in Catalan Advertising and Public Relations degrees**
*Source: Review of the Advertising and Public Relations Degree study plans outlined in the official webpages of each university *(M = mandatory; O = optional).*

The social third sector is composed of associations, foundations, social initiative cooperatives, and other forms of collective groups which address a wide range of issues concerning well-being and social problems, such as poverty and exclusion, migration, mental health, sickness, education, attention to the elderly, attention to children and youth, attention to women and LGTBI groups, among many others (Observatori del Tercer Sector, 2013). The social third sector in Catalonia has a considerable weight in current Catalan society. According to the 2013 annual publica-

tion of the Observatori del Tercer Sector (Third Sector Observatory) in Catalonia, this area of activity amounted to 2.8% of the Catalan gross domestic product, gave paid employment to 102,000 people and worked with 300,000 volunteers. Most importantly, the social third sector in Catalonia gave service and attended to 2,130,000 people, which represents approximately 28% of the Catalan population.

These numbers are indicative of the importance of this area of activity, not only due to its size, but also due to its relevance for the fostering of a cohesive society based on the democratic pillars of human rights and awareness of gender, diversity, participation, and environmental sustainability. Market-oriented APR skills and competences are insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the underlying structures of the communicative needs and strategy-making required in a complex social reality. The Social Third Sector requires critical professional activity (Aldás, 2007; Balas Lara, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2011; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012). In this sense, we will focus on the curricular development of the Social Action Strategies course taught within the APR degree at Pompeu Fabra University with the hope it might be useful for curricular innovation in other Catalan universities to complement already existing socially-oriented courses.

## 6.  Social Action Strategies: Teaching beyond corporate social responsibility

The Social Action Strategies course taught within the Advertising and Public Relations Degree at Pompeu Fabra University was previously oriented towards corporate social responsibility (CSR). The course currently goes beyond CSR to address a wide range of interconnected and interdisciplinary concepts and tools which are used to diagnose, plan, implement and evaluate alternatives and solutions to social problems from a communicative perspective. Such tools and concepts can be drawn from various fields, such as development communication, communication for social change, participatory development communication, alternative communication, corporate social responsibility, social marketing, multi-stakeholder initiatives, intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, persuasive communication, online media and lobbying, among other disciplines (Barranquero and Sáez Baeza, 2010; Bessette, 2004; Broomhill, 2007; Hemer and Tufte, eds., 2005; Rodrigo-Alsina and Medina Bravo, 2009; Servaes, ed., 2003; Huijstee, 2012). Delimiting the field of social action strategies within APR presents a challenge given the variety of communication fields which can be used to address social concerns on the one hand, and the appropriation of media by citizens on the other (Barranquero, 2007). Social action strategies are "marked by an ongoing commitment to society and to the community and, therefore,

should always incorporate what is usually conceived as 'communication in the public interest' into its core strategy" (Aldás, 2007; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012: 167).

Strategies for social action are constantly emerging and evolving both within the academic sphere and outside of it (Barranquero, 2010). In this ever-changing context, there are two main disciplines which have developed thorough theoretical and methodological corpuses to address social problems from a communicative approach: development communication and communication for social change. There is a third discipline which is at the intersection of the latter and which has also consolidated in the last fifteen years: participatory development communication (Barranquero, 2004; Bessette, 2004; Mari Sáez, 2010; Nos Aldás, 2011). In particular, Social Action Strategies as a course refers to the concepts and tools needed to critically address social problems, and has its focus of action primarily in the social third sector, which is non-lucrative by definition (Observatori del Tercer Sector, 2013), and which goes beyond organizational benefits (Aldás, 2007; Eiró-Gomes and Nunes, 2012). This delimitation of the subject area implies that social action strategies as a subject can complement corporate social responsibility (CSR) but they belong to different communication disciplines, transcending both public relations and advertising as individual fields, and can in no way be substituted by market-oriented communication courses.

In terms of evolution of the field, corporate social responsibility (CSR) began at the start of the decade of the 1990s, emerging from the still relevant debate concerning the relationship between business and society (Broomhill, 2007). The discipline is still being shaped, both academically and in practice, without consensus on the actual usefulness of CSR to fully address local and global social problems (Broomhill, 2007; Jallow, 2009; Perks, Farache, Shukla and Berry, 2013). Contrastingly, participatory development communication (PDC) and communication for social change (CSC) date back to the 1960s development studies and political economy, where communication as a tool for transformation began to materialize as an academic discipline within the Birmingham School of Critical Cultural Studies (Barranquero and Sáez Baeza, 2010; Gámez Fuentes and Nos Aldás, 2012) and various Latin American Schools of critical thought and popular education (Barranquero, 2004). Currently, communication for social action, understood as PDC and CSC, is related to a diversity of transversal cultural and transformational practices that use but are not limited to advertising and public relations concepts and tools, and which mostly emerge from social movements and the social third sector, such as activism, local development, edu-communication, and local media, among others (Barranquero, 2014; Collective Work, 2009; Gumucio Dagron, 2010; Hemer and Tufte, eds., 2005). PDC and CSC hence become the current theoretical and practical basis for social action strategies within communicative disciplines.

## 7. Delimiting the discipline for the Social Action Strategies course: Communication for social change and participatory development communication

Participatory development communication (PDC) is the use of communication tools and strategies to facilitate and support dynamics of local development through processes which actively involve the community – citizens, authorities, external agencies, technical teams, and associations, among others. PDC is a systemic and planned exchange based on two pillars. On the one hand, it is based on horizontal communicative processes among the diverse agents, usually following participatory action research,[3] and on the other it uses media and interpersonal communication as tools to support development initiatives identified in the participatory diagnosis dynamics undertaken by the involved groups or stakeholders (Bessette, 2004; Mari Sáez, 2010; Servaes, ed., 2003). PDC has its epistemological roots in Bertolt Brecht's proposals of dialogic education at the beginning of the 20th century, which were consolidated in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* during the 1960s and 1970s (Freire, 1970). Simultaneously, Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal was developing the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology, based on Freire's and Brecht's postulates, and establishing the democratization of theatre as one of the basic methodologies that would later become an essential part of participatory development communication (Barauna and Motos, 2009). During this same period, Orlando Fals Borda, among other academics and practitioners, consolidated the participatory action research model in the Latin American context based on Freirean epistemology, thus providing a framework through which participatory communication could become both a tool for social transformation and a discipline for knowledge creation (Barauna and Motos, 2009; Hemer and Tufte, eds., 2005).

During the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, participatory development communication consolidated as one of the most used methods underlying project implementation in international cooperation, fostered by UNESCO policies and giving rise to a more decentralized format of cooperation. Decentralized cooperation became a basic form of territorial exchange and interaction among local agents and institutions, mostly based in the social third sector in coordination with local authorities (Easterly, 2006; Gumucio Dagron, 2012; Husson, 2007; Stiglitz, 2002). However, critical stances to PDC still consider that the discipline follows the "logic of development", which is understood as a focus of symbolic and economic domination by the global North in its attempt to "develop" the global South (Barranquero, 2014; Tortosa, 2011). In this context, communication for social change emerges as an alternative in order to question the concept of development within local and participatory communicative initiatives (Gumucio Dagron, 2012: 28).

Communication for social change comprises cultural practices which foster communal and individual awareness (Barranquero and Sáez Baeza, 2010) based on

processes not necessarily tied to international cooperation formats. However, conceptual and practical innovations in participatory development communication tend to a unification of both disciplines, as development studies reinforce the need for localized practices based on Freirean epistemology and dialogic relationships (Barranquero, 2014). Participatory development communication and communication for social change converge in that they are based on horizontal communication structures and in their instrumentalization of communication tools and new media for the purpose of giving voice to groups which are normally excluded from both the media and the political arenas. Both disciplines advocate for postcolonial, localized practices which take into account dialogic, cultural and power structures as basic pillars of project evaluation, planning and implementation. Furthermore, they promote a democratized use of new media and information in accordance to community needs. Models of PDC and communication for social change have been thoroughly developed in the literature (Bessette, 2004; Mefalopulos and Kamlongera, 2008; Pérez, Cataño and Franco, 2009). In particular, both disciplines are involved with the stakeholders, issue areas and media indicated in Table 2 (Barranquero, 2007).

Adequately implementing communication projects and campaigns within this context requires specific skills and tools which are not inherent to enterprise-based sectors, and which require critical thinking, a deep understanding of intercultural and interpersonal communication, knowledge of diverse historical perspectives of local and global contexts, and skills related to awareness of power, cultural and dialogic structures. Moreover, the discipline becomes a vehicle to address the socially-oriented competences marked by the European and Spanish higher education frameworks.

| Stakeholders | Areas | Media |
|---|---|---|
| NGOs | Human Rights | Community radio |
| Social movements | Migrations | TV and video |
| Community media | Interculturalism | Press and written media |
| Cyberactivists | Agriculture and rural areas | Cyberactivism |
| Agencies | Gender | Guerrilla communication |
| Foundations | Sexual diversity | Interpersonal communication |
| Universities and research centres | Health and nutrition | Theatre |
| Public administration | Environment | Popular cinema |
| Etc. | Peace and conflict prevention | Crowdfunding |
|  | Etc. | Workshops |
|  |  | Etc. |

**Table 2. Stakeholders, areas and media of participatory development communication and communication for social change**

*Source: Adapted from Barranquero (2007).*

## 8. Curricular development of the Social Action Strategies course within the Advertising and Public Relations Degree at Pompeu Fabra University

Within the Catalan higher education context, the Social Action Strategies course is only taught in the Advertising and Public Relations (APR) Degree at Pompeu Fabra University, as seen in Table 1. The course, which was previously taught in Spanish and Catalan, and since 2013 is taught in English, is offered as a 4-credit optional course within the Public Relations itinerary for third and fourth-year students, although it is available to all APR students despite their itineraries. Up to the 2012-2013 academic year the Social Action Strategies course was oriented towards corporate social responsibility. However, a more comprehensive scope of the discipline, which included the social third sector, was necessary in order to comply fully with the European and national frameworks. During that year, courses were being updated and readapted in terms of content and methodology to fit EHEA standards in terms of competence development, student-focused learning models, and continuous evaluation and assessment frameworks. In this context, redefining the Social Action Strategies course was necessary but not sufficient to assure a full compliance with European and national standards in terms of student satisfaction, learning outcomes and teaching innovations. Curricular research had to be undertaken in order to evaluate to what extent the changes implemented to the teaching plan responded to the set quality standards.

The course content and methodology have undergone various stages of curricular research and development:

— 2012-2013: Renewal of the course content and methodology, and research for the improvement of the teaching plan.[4]

— 2013-2014: Implementation of improvements and teacher and student evaluations.

— 2014-2015: Content updating and methodological innovation.

During these stages, student enrolment in the course has increased substantially:

— 2012-2013: 22 students (3 Erasmus students).

— 2013-2014: 33 students (6 Erasmus students).

— 2014-2015: 39 students (13 Erasmus students).

We will focus on the results of the research and course's current composition, although further details of the process can be found in the Annex of this paper. In Table 3, we show the curricular content of the Social Action Strategies course.

After the three years of curricular research, content updates were introduced building on student evaluations, student project outcomes and developments in the knowledge field.[5] Content innovations include the changing of the two initial modules (Participatory Development Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility) into three modules, as shown in Table 3. Teaching innovations such as

**Module 1. Critical approaches to communication**
— Awareness, power structures and communication
  • Deep democracy
  • Cultural structures
  • Power structures
  • Dialogic structures
— Ethical and aesthetic communication: imaginaries, representations and systemic oppressions
  • Genders, feminisms and sexualities
  • Intercultural diversity
  • Global vs glocal
  • Human rights
  • Sustainable development
  • Social innovation, new ICTs and local media
  • Local development, citizen participation and social networks

**Module 2. Critical analysis of socially-oriented communication: case studies**
— NGOs
— Corporate social responsibility and multi-stakeholder initiatives
— Social movements (I)
— Social movements (II)

**Module 3. Social action strategies: project creation, implementation and evaluation**
— Concepts and evolution of development communication and participatory development communication (PDC)
  • The diffusionist model, the knowledge transfer model and the participatory model
  • Development communication in international cooperation
  • Development communication in decentralized cooperation
  • PDC, alternative communication and communication for social change: PDC in the global North
— Project creation, implementation and evaluation
  • Participatory action research and PDC: research/society approach
  • Types of PDC projects
  • Participation tools
  • Assessment phase
  • Strategy design phase: the logical framework approach and the communication plan
  • Alternative planning models
  • Implementation phase
  • Evaluation phase: indicators
  • Writing-up of relevant documents

**Table 3. Social Action Strategies course contents**

dialogical readings, out-of-classroom sessions and the use of FaceBook to further class content were introduced. Additionally, group projects were addressed through service learning (Francisco Amat, Nos Aldás and Moliner Miravet, 2011). Service learning, according to the Catalan service learning portal (*http://www.aprenentat geservei.org/index.php*) is an innovative pedagogical proposal which combines learning processes with community service, in a complex and well-articulated pedagogical exercise where students have the possibility to learn from real and applied projects in relation to existing community needs. Social Action Strategies students for the 2014-2015 course were involved in the projects within their communities shown in Table 4.

All basic teaching documents for the 2014-2015 Social Action Strategies course are available under Creative Commons at: *https://goo.gl/yfIKJN*.

**Servei Solidari Project**

*http://www.serveisolidari.org/que-fem/emprenedoria*

Within the framework of a service learning project organized by the Teaching Quality and Innovation Centre at Pompeu Fabra University, students will work with Espai Emprèn staff from Servei Solidari, with other students from the Economics Department of UPF and with users of Espai Emprèn to develop:

— A diagnosis of the communication strategy of Espai Emprèn.

— A manual for the creation of microbusiness-oriented communication strategies for future users of Espai Emprèn.

— The communication plan for two of the entrepreneurship projects which are currently being developed within Espai Emprèn.

**Settlements Project**

*http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alacarta/Tot-un-mon/Horitzo-perdut/video/5425171/*

This group will be working with activist Ibrahima Seydi to create the necessary communication material to denounce publicly the situation of Immigrant Detention Centres and Settlements. Students will prepare a communication plan which follows an adequate and previously developed diagnosis. For this, they will have to meet with staff from CEPAIM, CEAR, TANQUEM ELS CIE and SOS RACISME.

**Xarxa BCN Antirumors Project**

*http://interculturalitat.bcn.cat/bcnacciointercultural/ca/antirumors-que-fem*

Following the framework of the Xarxa BCN Antirumors, students will research and execute a campaign within the UPF Poblenou Campus. Students will be expected to undertake the corresponding research for diagnosis and to develop a communication plan. After the campaign has been implemented, if desired, a meeting with Barcelona City Council staff will be organized for the possibility of further implementation in other universities or for the possibility to showcase the experience.

**Mescladís: Diàlegs invisibles**

*https://dialogosinvisibles.wordpress.com/*

Students will be working in the development of the project Diàlegs invisibles. In this project, they will have to undertake different tasks within the project and work together with different professionals for project implementation which includes a photographic exhibition by Joan Tomás (*http://www.joantomas.net/*) in the Pati Llimona Civic Centre, the set-up of public space photographic interventions, the writing-up of life story testimonies, support for Alberto Bungaloux's (*https://vimeo.com/albertobougleux*) documentary for the project, research, creation of dissemination material, setting-up of events, etc.

**La Xixa Teatre**

*http://www.laxixateatre.org/ // https://www.facebook.com/laxixateatre?fref=ts*

This group will prepare a communication strategy and the communication material for the dissemination of diverse projects and events undertaken by La Xixa Teatre, a Theatre of the Oppressed group in Barcelona. In particular, the group will examine the possibility of the introduction of social networking tools, particularly FaceBook and Twitter, during forum theatre performances. They will plan and implement the communication campaign for the III Marathon of Intercultural Forum Theatre of Barcelona, which will take place during the first week of June. Additionally, the group will explore the possibility of building a European Theatre of the Oppressed network.

**Stop Violence Against Women: UPF Campus campaigns**

*http://www.upf.edu/upfigualtat/*

This group will develop (diagnose, plan and implement) an awareness campaign directed at UPF Poblenou Campus community to stop violence against women. They will undertake research to understand how women suffer inequality in the university campus and will create the corresponding material to raise awareness and enact effective change. Students will work with staff responsible for gender equality at UPF but will develop an independent, student-led campaign.

**Table 4. Service learning projects for the Social Action Strategies course 2014-2015**

The overall evaluation on behalf of students during the last three years not only reinforces that the course development has responded to the expected standards of teaching, but that socially-oriented communication beyond corporate social re-

sponsibility is required within the Advertising and Public Relations Degree at Pompeu Fabra University, both within the European and national frameworks, and by the students. A few comments by the students in the UPF standardized teacher evaluation system AVALDO which point in this direction are:

— "The course is very interesting and it provides knowledge we have never seen before in the Advertising and Public Relations Degree."

— "We believe the course should be mandatory. It is one of the courses I have enjoyed the most and which has given me more knowledge during this last three years."

— "The course has been very interesting, it has made me reflect a lot and I think it should be taught to all students."

— "It shouldn't be an optional course, it should be mandatory."

## 9. Conclusion

In this paper we have reviewed the European and national frameworks for the introduction of socially-oriented communication within curricula in the Advertising and Public Relations degrees. We have suggested the need to introduce participatory development communication (PDC) and communication for social change (CSC) as disciplines within the Advertising and Public Relations Catalan degrees, thus holding corporate social responsibility insufficient to cover the particularities and requirements of non-profit social sectors. Furthermore, we have explored how through PDC and CSC it is possible to develop curricula within the Advertising and Public Relations Degree which address priority areas within the European 2020 strategy for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as Tuning generic competences related to the education of socially-aware individuals.

In order to shed light on the introduction of socially-oriented communication disciplines within the Advertising and Public Relations Degree, we explored the curricular research and development of the Social Action Strategies course taught at Pompeu Fabra. The results of both teacher and student evaluations during the three-year course development, the importance of the social third sector for the Catalan context and the priorities and standards of quality established by the European Higher Education Area are a clear indication of the need to promote socially-oriented communication courses to achieve student comprehensive and satisfactory learning, and to assure that universities play a key role in a more cohesive and inclusive society.

## Notes

**[1** Correspondence address: Ana Fernández-Aballí. C/ de Roc Boronat, 138. E-08018 Barcelona, EU.

**[2** In total there are twelve Catalan universities recognized by the Spanish Ministry, but two of them do not offer the Advertising and Public Relations Degree.

**[3** Action research is an empirical research methodology which integrates cycles of diagnosis, planning, experimentation and evaluation within a given context. It is collaborative and requires active participation of persons involved in the problematics being studied. It explores with a diversity of methods and tools, and its intention is oriented towards social transformation, where the research is a result of collective decision-making and empowerment.

**[4** See Annex for further detail.

**[5** The current teaching plan is available at *https://goo.gl/yfIKJN.*

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# Annex. Renewal of the course content and methodology, and research for the improvement of the teaching plan (2012-2014)

For the renewal of course content and methodology, an action research was undertaken based on the text by Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (2006) *All You Need to Know about Action Research*. The action research took place during the third trimester of the 2012-2013 academic year for a total of 40 class hours and with a total enrolment of 22 students. The course content was divided in two modules: Corporate Social Responsibility and Participatory Development Communication – each taught by a separate teacher. The research was implemented to explore improvements for the general course planning and its components, as well as for particular aspects of the second module pertaining to Participatory Development Communication.

## Methodology

Four specific research objectives were defined, as well as the corresponding evidence and instruments for the gathering of data and the method of analysis and indicators. Table 1 summarizes the research plan and methodological approach (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006):

## Results

The results of the questionnaire, which was answered by 20 students and which measured student perceptions of the teaching plan, were as follows:

— Areas evaluated most positively by the students (4 points or higher):
• All detailed contents in the teaching plan were covered during the course.
• The contents were exposed in a clear and orderly manner.
• The material provided (readings, notes, resources, etc.) were helpful to follow the course and consolidate learning.
• Learning expectations were fulfilled.
— Areas evaluated most poorly by the students (below 3 points):
• Collaborative notes were not perceived as useful as a learning task.
• The teaching plan was not consulted frequently by the students (less than five times during the course).
— Suggestions for the improvement of the teaching plan in accordance to student perceptions of areas graded below 4:
• Hour dedication must be clearly outlined and detailed by task.
• Competences addressed in the teaching plan must be revised and detailed at the beginning of each learning task.
• Evaluation components must be more clearly explained (tasks, hours of dedication, competences, etc.). Specific guidelines for all assessment components must be developed, as well as competence-based evaluation rubrics. Both the

| Specific objective | Evidence and instruments for data gathering | Method of analysis and indicators |
|---|---|---|
| Evaluate the perception of students about the teaching plan in terms of its clarity and utility. | Teaching plan evaluation questionnaire. | 24-item questionnaire to be answered by the students at the end of the course. Each item must be evaluated between 1 and 5 (5 being the maximum). Items below 4 points will be considered for improvement. |
| Evaluate the coherence and traceability of the elements within the teaching plan to determine gaps between that which was planned and that which was implemented. | Crossed matrix between the different components of the teaching plan (traceability among elements for cohesion) and crossed matrix between the element plan and its implementation (traceability for coherence in planning). | The matrix will allow for the contrasting of the different elements of the teaching plan to assure cohesion and coherence among the defined elements, their planning and their implementation during the course (hours of dedication, content, methodology, bibliography, evaluation, calendar, etc.) |
| Evaluate teaching performance according to student perception. | Teacher evaluation questionnaire. | Questionnaire with 34 items to be evaluated between 1 and 5 (5 being the maximum). Items below 4 will be considered for improvement. |
| Evaluate student performance according to evaluation framework. | Evaluation component 1: Class attendance and collaborative notes. | The average mark will be indicator of performance for each component. |
| | Evaluation component 2: Final group projects. | |
| | Evaluation component 3: Final individual projects. | |

**Table 1.** Research Plan for the Improvement of the Social Action Strategies Teaching Plan

guidelines and the evaluation rubrics must be provided to the students for every assessment component at the beginning of the course.

In terms of traceability and coherence of the teaching plan, the results of the analysis were consistent to student perception: competences were adequately outlined in the teaching plan, but learning activities were not properly detailed in relation to their corresponding competences. However, student perception and analysis of the matrixes was not consistent regarding collaborative notes.

In average, students evaluated collaborative notes poorly as a learning task. Such notes were an optional learning activity students could undertake in order to complement their attendance grade, or in the cases where there was particular interest in developing a personal learning environment around a topic (or topics) of interest within class content. Out of the 22 enrolled students, six decided to de-velop collaborative notes and found the experience highly positive according to

their self-evaluations at the end of the course. Three of the six students were Erasmus students who could not complete the mandatory attendance required to pass the course. Through the development of collaborative notes, these students were able to follow the class despite not being able to attend.

The teaching evaluation addressed eight categories: planning of the course; learning environment; strategies, methods and techniques; motivation; evaluation; communication; new technologies; and general satisfaction. All items were graded above 4 points, except the item "Identifies the knowledge and abilities of the students at the beginning of the course and of every unit" which averaged 3.84 points.

In terms of student performance, the average grade for the course was 8.3 points out of ten (maximum: 9.6; minimum: 6.6) for the 22 enrolled students. Attendance was consistent with an average mark of 8.8 points out of ten (maximum: 10; minimum: 5.3).

The suggested improvements regarding more detailed guidelines and competence-based evaluation rubrics were taken into account for the planning and teaching of the Social Action Strategies course taught in the 2013-2014 academic year. The results in terms of teacher evaluation and student performance in the 2013-2014 academic year were similar to those achieved the previous year, yielding satisfactory evaluations in terms of teaching (with all items grading over 4) and an average for student grades of 8.6 out of 10 points. All basic teaching documents for the 2013-2014 Social Action Strategies course are available at *https:// goo.gl/RX474q*.