Design of the Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile) students’ graduation profiles

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Abstract

The present work’s objective is to inform—in a descriptive, i.e. non-analytic manner—of the procedure with which the design of the Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile) students’ graduation profiles was performed. For this purpose, an adaptation of the methodology derived from the Tuning Project, the Tuning Latin America Project and the Directrices para la elaboración de perfiles de egreso de la Universidad de los Andes (Chile) [Directives for the elaboration of graduation profiles of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile)] was utilized. In hopes of better clarifying the present work’s scope we must emphasize that which we do not intend to evidence. In the first place, due to the descriptive nature of the experience portrayed, we do not intend to attest nor indicate how nor why the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should be instituted in Chile or whether it is a paradigm worthy of imitation. In the second place, we do not intend to analyze the importance of the applicability of foreign models to the Chilean higher education framework. In the third place, we do not intend to propose a set of competencies for the propaedeutic level (Bachillerato) of Chilean higher education. In the fourth place, we do not intend to take an ideological position regarding the Tuning Project and its ultimate purpose, that is, the creation of a European Higher Education Area. Such purposes vastly exceed the scope of the present work: to describe the undertaking of the design of the Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile) students’ graduation profile. Bearing in mind that the Bachillerato Program has a propaedeutic nature in relation to undergraduate studies, the present work constitutes a development by adapting a methodology associated with the elaboration of profiles for careers granting professional degrees.

Keywords: Participation, skills, profile of expenditure, Tuning Project, Bachillerato Program.

1. Introduction

One of the relevant European projects at the higher education level that has extended into Latin America and Mexico is the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. The people responsible for designing the project chose the word to tune in order to transmit the idea that universities attempt to reach common reference points harmoniously and concurrently, based on mutual trust and respect for the characteristics of every universitarians project. In short, the main issue is generating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. In order to ground this purpose,
four main routes are proposed: a) generic competencies, b) specific competencies by subject matter, c) the role of the ECTS system as a method for transferring and accumulating credits and d) an approach to learning, teaching and evaluation regarding quality assurance and guarantees. In Latin America, the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project has a similar end and, following its own methodology, has four avenues: a) competencies (generic and specific competencies by subject matter), b) approaches to teaching, learning and evaluation, c) academic credits and d) the quality of the programs.

A serious and articulate undertaking of these four suggested routes will encourage transparency in professional and academic profiles. Furthermore, an interest in the development of skills and the use of a credit system center the educational process on the pupil and his capacity to learn, thus demanding greater protagonism and commitment.

The importance of making the present work known to the academic community lies in its use of a methodology that was not originally designed for elaborating graduation profiles for programs not issuing professional degrees, such as the Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile). The methodology has been successfully adapted and employed in an innovative fashion, relying on the committed participation of academic authorities, teachers and students from all the university’s careers. A shared environment for discussion, analysis and collaboration was generated, no small feat considering the often disjointed efforts made in the Faculties that fail to bridge different areas of knowledge, thus leaving the necessary promise of interdisciplinary endeavors—a natural requirement for higher education—unfulfilled.

2. Objective

The present work’s objective is to inform—in a descriptive, i.e. non-analytic manner—of the procedure with which the design of the Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile) students’ graduation profiles was performed. For this purpose, an adaptation of the methodology derived from the Tuning Project, the Tuning Latin America Project and the Directrices para la elaboración de perfiles de egreso de la Universidad de los Andes (Chile) [Directives for the elaboration of graduation profiles of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile)] was utilized.

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3. Method and results

In September of 2009, a “Session for Analysis and Planning” was carried out with the purpose of reviewing the effectiveness, validity, aptness and updating the Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile), which had been active for five years at that point. The session was attended by academic and administrative authorities (Academic Vice President, Secretary General, and Director of Admissions), teachers from the Bachillerato Program, two external guests—experts in higher education and propaedeutic programs, highly prestigious in this country— and members of the Bachillerato Program’s Board of Directors. The session’s findings were summarized in a document sent to the rectory, which replied with some comments and suggestions, notably the need to consider a reformulation of the Program—coinciding with the conclusions in the document. For this purpose, the rectory recommended taking into account the input from the university’s authorities and different academic units.
In January of 2010, it was determined that the work methodology to be employed should be a globally validated one; the Tuning Project (Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, 2006), the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project (2007) and the Metodología para el Levantamiento y Revisión de Perfiles de Egreso de la Universidad de los Andes paper (2008) [Methodology for the elaboration and reviewing of graduation profiles of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile)] were suitable for this purpose. Afterwards, with the methodologies proposed in the aforementioned documents in mind, the reformulation of the Program was organized around two central issues: the definition of the Bachillerato Program students’ graduation profile and designing the curriculum according to that profile.

The methodology suggested in the Tuning Projects for both Europe and Latin America is conceived for designing graduation profiles for careers or technical education granting professional degrees. Bearing in mind that the Bachillerato Program is by nature propaedeutic with regard to higher education and that graduation from the Program is oriented towards a university career, the above-mentioned model was adapted for the purpose of our work. The elaboration of graduation profiles for careers granting professional degrees require the involvement of graduates, employers and academics; in the Program’s case, students in their second or third year of a career at the university were considered as graduates, and Directors of Studies and deans of the whole range of careers taught at the university were considered as employers. Anyone teaching a required first year course from any career taught at the university was considered as an academic. In accordance with the three spheres of learning — the humanities, management and the health sciences— recognized by the Universidad de los Andes (Chile) in which careers are subsumed, expert panels composed of teachers and students were instituted. Additionally, the categorization of competencies described in the Tuning Projects for Europe and Latin America and in the Universidad de los Andes document concerning the elaboration of graduation profiles were employed. The criteria used for classifying competencies stemmed from the categorization present in the above-mentioned documents, which do not vary substantially from each other.

In compliance with the methodology decided upon, the project involved thirty-six teachers, twenty-four students, fourteen Directors of Studies, some Faculty deans and six teachers, who assisted in reviewing the redacted questionnaires. The following criteria were used for selecting the participants: in the case of teachers, Directors of Studies from the whole university were asked by email and, later, by telephone the names of the most relevant first year courses and teachers from each respective career. In the student’s case, it was determined that they should come from different careers and be in their second or third year of studies, having entered their respective careers either through the Bachillerato Program or through regular means, and that they should have an average performance (under a 5.5 grade average) or a good one (6.0 grade average and over). Once these characteristics were determined, suitable students were randomly chosen from the academic registry. The Faculty deans involved were those who directed the careers that receive the greatest numbers of students from the Bachillerato Program.

Once the selection of deans, teachers and students was completed, lists with names, emails and mobile phone numbers were arranged, corresponding with the three spheres of learning recognized by the university. Afterwards, these people were invited by email and telephonically to participate in an expert panel. Concurrently, interview guidelines for directing the expert panel sessions were developed.

Three expert panels were held with the participation of teachers, and three with the participation of students. Both were attended by the entire group of invited teachers and students. Every session was recorded, with the consent of those assisting. Notes were taken by a secretary and minutes were redacted for every session. The day after each expert panel session, an email thanking the participants was sent out, which included a brief questionnaire—three questions—that requested any further ideas that weren’t discussed at the session. The participants were also asked to name three habits or competencies that first year students should possess in order to achieve an outstanding academic performance. An email thanking the Directors of Studies of each career for their support in the elaboration of the expert panel lists, and informing them of the work that was done, was also sent out.

Once the information in the minutes, the recordings and the questionnaires was compiled, the most important ideas that came up on several occasions one way or the other in the aforementioned documents—checked twice—were summarized. This summarized information was used to elaborate a preliminary list of skills (competencies), according to the criteria in the Tuning Projects for Europe and Latin America and in the Universidad de los Andes document concerning the elaboration of graduation profiles, which were grouped as a) competencies for first year
students: basic general (7), instrumental (12), interpersonal (4), systematic (6) and b) specific competencies for the Bachillerato Program (22). Six professors were then asked to critically review the document, especially regarding the clarity and redaction of said skills. Some issues were brought up pertaining the redaction and location of some skills that were classified as generic and were better suited for the instrumental category. Subsequently, both electronic and printed copies of the document were sent to all the Directors of Studies, the teachers and the students that made up the panels, asking them to rank the importance of each skill (competency) on a scale of one to seven. Once the data was gathered, it was tabulated on an Excel spreadsheet, including the source of the data (whether it was from Directors of Studies, teachers or students). The points awarded to each skill were then added up and a ranking was elaborated.

The results were condensedly ranked as follows:

Competencies for first year students:

a) Basic general: the highest ranking competency was personal responsibility, followed by the development of intellectual memory suited to the student’s age, and in the third place, the competency of interest in learning.

b) Instrumental: the competency which obtained the highest rank was the capacity for precision in the oral or written expression of one’s own or someone else’s ideas. In second place, with the same score, were the competencies regarding the capacity for logically redacting and expressing—in an oral or written manner— one’s own or someone else’s ideas, and the capacity for identifying, posing and solving problems. The capacity for abstraction, analysis and synthesis was in the third place.

c) Interpersonal: the capacity for criticism and self-criticism, the capacity for developing skills pertaining interpersonal relations, and emotional intelligence and the ability to work in groups were ranked in the first, second and third place, respectively.

d) Systematic: the highest ranking competency was the capacity for learning, followed by being motivated by quality and initiative.

Competencies for the Bachillerato Program:

a) Acquiring the habit of doing quality work and acquiring the capacity for intense and constant effort were both the highest ranked competencies. Developing logical, critical and creative thought was in second place. In the third place, acquiring or improving memory, comprehension, abstraction, synthesis and analysis skills.

Once these skills were ranked, a new list was made with the highest placed ones, which was sent to the Directors of Studies—in light of their responsibility of leading the changes in curricula, and other duties concerning the Faculties’ management—so that they might compose a new ranking that would allow us to determine the skills (competencies) that would ultimately configure the Bachillerato Program’s graduation profiles. The results were as follows:

a) Basic general: personal responsibility.

b) Instrumental: capacity for logical, fluent oral and written communication of one’s own and someone else’s ideas.

c) Competencies for the Bachillerato Program: capacity for intense and constant effort; developing logical, critical and creative thinking.

Lastly, during this first phase of defining the Bachillerato Program students’ graduation profile, the skills and competencies were mapped. The map included the skill’s definition, the criteria that determine it, the activities a teacher must implement to foster their acquisition, the activities students should perform, and indicators for its evaluation.

The courses and credits corresponding to these competencies were then determined, according to the Sistema de Créditos Transferibles-Chile (SCT-Chile) [Transferable Credit System-Chile].

Conclusion

The chosen methodology was effective in defining the Bachillerato Program students’ graduation profile. Furthermore, it fostered opportunities for participation and engagement by the different strata of the university.
The implementation of the project was not difficult nor did it generate any resistance. This is evident by the fact that none of the selected participants refused the invitation, except one teacher who could not due to extra-academic reasons. We believe this attitude was a result of the means and manner in which the participants were invited to take part in the project, in other words, in an affective and effective manner, knowing that their opinions truly counted. Likewise, by explaining the rigorous methodology that was to be employed, high level discussions that cannot be adequately portrayed in the present work were fomented.

Even though the chosen methodology is associated with a widely accepted Project (Tuning) and oriented towards careers granting professional degrees, its adaptation for a propaedeutic Program constitutes an innovative contribution to universitarian academic experience.

In the final analysis, it is possible to accomplish rigorous academic work with the active participation of the members of this research and learning community. The effort of developing a new graduation profile for Bachillerato Program of the Universidad de los Andes (Chile) is an example of such work.

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