

Engagement at university: a challenge for the present and future

UNIVEST symposium

5 July 2018

Coordination

ICE of the University of Girona and ICE of the University of Barcelona

Presentation

It has recently been claimed that society has entered into a period of transition, what has been called the *century of uncertainty*, from which universities are not exempt. At this time, new challenges are emerging that universities must face. These include their massification, entrance and knowledge generation through new communication and information technologies, the creation of jobs that require new professional skills, professional mobility (geographic and through different specialties), and others. All these elements are converging to create a world of uncertainty and complexity that neither students, lecturers, nor universities are completely ready to face. If we add to this the high percentage of young unemployed non-graduate and graduate people, the rigidity of universities when it comes to meeting the demands of the labour market and the new professional profiles that companies demand, it is no surprise that a large number of students are expressing their disaffection with the academic world, which is revealed in absenteeism and low participation in both lectures and extra-curricular academic activities, and in university life in general.

If students must learn to get by in this context of complexity and uncertainty, the relationship between the institution, the lecturer and the student must be re-invented, as well as that between students themselves. We must seek innovative teaching methodologies that can encourage students and provide them with the skills demanded by the society that they will need to face. In addition, curricula, subjects, and even the structure of university spaces must be flexible in order to adapt to the new ways of performing teaching activities.

It is in this manner of organising universities that engagement acquires its meaning, but it is one that is not exempt from contradictions and controversies. Engagement is the opposite of disaffection. If we understand disaffection to be a state of student alienation towards the university, engagement is the state of a student being connected or bonded to the university. Naturally, this association depends on the orientation of the teaching methods that are adopted. This is what makes engagement such a complex and multidimensional construct. In principle, there is considerable agreement with regard to its different components, some of which are observable (behaviours) and others of which are not (cognitive and affective), that make students become involved in, participate in, identify with and become the agents of their own learning processes, whether academic, professional or social. In this regard, engagement becomes an indicator of the quality of the university climate, from the most global levels, through faculties, and down to the most micro levels of the classroom and the teaching practices that are used in them.

For all the reasons set out above, we consider engagement to be an interesting approach to university life. At this symposium, we intend to talk about what we mean by engagement. What levels of the university structure are involved in student engagement? What strategies and methodologies can we employ to make the students the real protagonists of their learning processes? How do we get this process across to lecturers? How should we reappraise our role in the classroom? And our relationship with our students? What about engagement outside of university? How can we make students responsible agents of their own engagement processes? Engagement and the professional and labour world, and any other subject related to engagement that may interest you.

One of the characteristics of engagement is that it is sensitive to the context, for better and for worse, so we must work out what can be done to tip the scales to the positive side. This is one of the most important challenges for universities today and in the future.

Goal

We propose that this symposium should serve as a space for reflection and debate about student engagement and motivation at university. The idea is to present strategies to combat absenteeism and foster the involvement and commitment of students with regard to their learning processes.

This question will be examined from different perspectives, to encourage discussion and debate between different points of view and on the basis of practical experiences and studies.

Timetable

Time	Session
11:00 – 12:00	<p>Conference</p> <p>Led by Isabella Meneghel, Universitat Jaume I</p> <p>Presented and chaired by: Josep M. Serra, Vice-rector for Teaching and Academic Planning</p>
12:00 – 13:40	<p>Debate</p> <p>Participants:</p> <p>Joan Guàrdia, University of Barcelona</p> <p>Carles Rostán, University of Girona</p> <p>Rosa Estela, Polytechnic University of Catalonia</p> <p>Idoia Fernández, University of the Basque Country</p> <p>Martí Casadesús, AQU Catalunya (Agency for the Quality of the University System of Catalonia)</p> <p>Pau Parals, University of Girona, CEUCAT (Student Council of Catalan Universities)</p> <p>Motivators: Xavier Triadó, University of Barcelona, and Helena Benito, University of Girona</p>
13:40 – 14:00	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>With Ariadna Lleonart, Teaching Innovation Network on ABP of ICE at the University of Girona</p> <p>Close</p> <p>Led by Josep Duran, director of ICE at the University of Girona, and Xavier Triadó, director of ICE at the University of Barcelona</p>

How the debate works

The idea is to collect and share ideas, practices and initiatives regarding engagement at university, from the point of view of lecturers, as well as the students and institutions involved.

More than a detailed exposition of the different participants' experiences and projects, we want to use their experience and background to advance together towards the challenges posed by the concept of engagement at our universities.

In order to make the session as dynamic and fluid as possible, the 'motivators' will be guiding the talks and debates using participatory methods.

Virtual space

We will be using a virtual space to share material and documentation on the speakers' experiences and contributions with anyone who registers for the Symposium.

These materials will include, among others, the presentation videos used by each of the participants to share their ideas and thoughts, as well as a brief description of the projects and initiatives in which they are involved.

Participation

Anyone registered with CIDUI may participate. Limited places.