Implementing Bologna Process: Taking into Account what Students Think and Improving Professor’s Performance in Class

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Abstract:

As we all know, the so-called “Bologna-process” is paying close attention to many important things regarding High School education, such as skills, competences, new research trends, ICTs, accreditation and quality assurance, etc. Those issues are taking much of the attention of scholars and whoever is devoting efforts to research about them, and indeed they deserve it.

However –to our understanding- both the academic community and the public entities entitled to the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are overlooking at least two crucial issues: what students think about University, and how professors achieve excellence in their classes. Given they are closely related, this paper is intended to cover both.

Keywords:

Bologna-process, EHEA, feedback, quality.

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I. Introduction.

As we all know, the so-called “Bologna-process” is paying close attention to many important things regarding High School education, such as skills, competences, new research trends, ICTs, accreditation and quality assurance, etc. Those issues are taking much of the attention of scholars and whoever is devoting efforts to research about them, and indeed they deserve it.

However –to our understanding- both the academic community and the public entities entitled to the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are overlooking at least two crucial issues: what students think about University, and how professors achieve excellence in their classes. Given they are closely related, our presentation to this conference is intended to cover both.

As to the first topic, although the students are to play a key role in the new EHEA, and indeed they are supposed to be placed at the very centre of the teaching-learning process, however, no schemes are developed yet to hear them, and –whenever necessary or convenient- take their opinions into account. From our point of view, the starting point to solve this problem is asking what makes college an academically and personally successful time for some students but not others. Afterwards, the methodology usually used to gather the proper information is conducting interviews and visiting various campuses. The results we present in Section II of this paper are, to say the least, pretty counter-intuitive, and to some point somehow astonishing. For example, we learn that students are more enthusiastic about learning in courses that have some relevance to their personal lives or interests outside the classroom, instead of just fulfilling a graduation requirement. Or that they learn more when they collaborate on challenging homework rather than performing their assigned tasks individually.

We address in Section III the second topic, closely linked to the previous one. Although much has been said about quality in research, little –in anything- has been written about what makes a class, a teamwork, a group discussion or a lecture given by a professor a unique experience. Basically, the point here is, simply, what makes a great teacher great? Who are the professors students remember long after graduation? Drawing on the experiences and techniques of a number of

college and university professors who are commonly known as “good professors”, the short answer it’s not what teachers do, it’s what they understand. Lesson plans and lecture notes matter less than the special way teachers comprehend the subject and value human learning. It doesn’t matter whether they’re historians or physicists, or whether they teach in Harvard or somewhere else, the best teachers know their subjects inside and out. But they also know how to engage and challenge students and to provoke impassioned responses. Most of all, they believe two things fervently: that teaching matters and that students can learn.

Finally, in Section IV of this paper we offer some practical recommendations on the issues discussed above, departing from the typical “college guides” full of seemingly good advice that is too vague to implement. Basically, they steam from the figure of the tutor or academic mentor.

II. Making the most of college: Students speak their minds.

I have chosen purposely the title of Richard Light’s seminal work (LIGHT, 2001) for the heading of this section because his inspirational findings are precisely the guidelines I am going to follow to address the topic we are dealing with.

The questions we must pose ourselves to begin with are, among others, why do some undergraduates feel they are making the most of their years at college, while others achieve a much disappointing result? What choices and attitudes distinguish the former from the later? What can an individual student do to improve his/her performance at college? What can the college itself do? Which are the proper tasks for administrators, faculty and everyone else involved? Is it possible to increase the chances that on graduation day our students can really say “I really got what I came here for”.

A) Asking the right questions.

I have been a professor for ten years –not much, indeed, but enough for the purpose of this dissertation--. In addition to it, and from the very beginning of my academic life, I have also been advisor / mentor for senior students, assessing them on various aspects of their academic life. Each year I find myself in my class, placed in front of a
new group of students and advisees. And each year I think about these questions anew. Each year I wonder “What can I tell those young students who are at the very brink of beginning one of the most important stages in their life that will help them make the most of their time at University?”.

Simultaneously, I wonder what thoughts and experiences I can share with my faculty colleges which can help me in this regard. We can agree on the fact that anyone who teaches for any length of time –and is concerned about students- gets caught up in a debate about how to help them learn as effectively as possible. As we have pointed out in the introduction, much of the so-called “Bologna process” goes along this way. Unfortunately, not always the right answers are found, maybe because the right questions are not asked. In this regard, my colleges and I think hard, and debate lengthy, about the best ways to advise students, to teach classes, and even to teach outside the classroom.

The issue of what professors could do to improve their “performance” is addressed in the following Section. But this is a two-sided tale, and the students have much to say about how they learn, and what they expect; we pay attention to them now.

I am impressed by the power of individuals’ heartfelt stories, so the methodology I have followed to collect and gather the data I needed to draw some conclusions on this regard is simply conducting in-depth interviews with my students, asking them each year to write down –on an anonymous basis- at the end of the term their opinions about series of college life, as well as re-collecting memories and testimonies, as well as conversations of my earlier time at University, including my own experience as an undergraduate student.

B) The methodology used.

To learn what works best for students, the most suitable tool is just asking them. Of course, I do not neglect the fact that these personal interviews paint an entirely different picture from the kind of information that comes from a large-scale, check-box style of survey questionnaire. However, I am also pretty convinced –and I intend to show it here- that for this particular dissertation, personal interviews offer a special depth and richness that those other statistic devices – however well designed- could easily tap.
One reason is that the personal interviews are loaded with details. It is one thing for a student to say that a particular class had a powerful impact on her/his thinking. It is far more useful to understand why this class had such power, how it was organized, and whether other faculty members and students can benefit in their own work from this “success story”. This is why Section III of this paper is also going to benefit from the insights gathered in the personal interviews. The more illustrations a student can offer to buttress a point, the better and more helpful that point is for other students… ¡as well as for the faculty!

Regardless of the academic standard of one’s University –not all of us is qualified enough to be a Harvard professor- all our students get to college expecting a lot. Nearly all are enthusiastic and productive, and nearly all quickly become committed with life at campus. The best part is, nearly all students have their own suggestions for improving both academic and non-academic aspects of college. Although we sometimes forget it, or at least despise it, it is a strong and compelling fact that they constantly question what we do, what they themselves do, how to do it better, whether it meets their expectations, what are they getting and giving in this demanding community.

After hearing them, reading what they write, and paying close attention to what they have to say, I can undoubtedly –and proudly- affirm that their convictions are changing the way I think about teaching and advising.

C) The findings.
Some of what I have learned from students fits what I expected to find, but certain insights are surprising, at least to me. Here are my five main findings.

In the beginning of my academic career I assumed that most important and memorable academic learning goes inside the classroom, while outside activities provide a useful but modest supplement. The evidence gathered these years in my interviews with students shows that
the opposite is true: learning outside of classes, especially in residential settings and extracurricular activities such as the arts, is vital.

That leads to a simple but enormously powerful finding that shines through interview after interview with graduating seniors. Those students who make connections between what goes inside and outside the classroom report a more satisfying college experience.

When I asked students to think of a specific, critical incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, four-fifths of them chose a situation or event outside the classroom.

2. Getting constant feedback from the professor.

I expected students to prefer courses in which they could work at their own pace, courses with relatively few quizzes, exams, papers until the end of the term. Wrong again. A large majority of students say they learn significantly more in courses that are highly structured, with relatively many quizzes and short assignments.

Crucial to this preference is getting quick feedback from the professor – ideally with an opportunity to revise and make changes before receiving a final grade. In contrast, students are frustrated and disappointed with classes that require only a final paper, or courses in which they final result depends entirely and solely on a final exam. How can we ever improve our work, they say, when the only feedback comes after the course is over, and when no revision is invited?

3. Shared vs. individual homework.

The third finding –and the third surprise as well- has to do with homework. When I was in college, some years ago, nearly every professor announced that I should do my homework alone. Discussing problem sets or essay assignments with other students would be considered cheating.

This was, as I have said, some years ago, and now fortunately things are slightly different. At many campuses today professors

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2 Annex 1 show, as an example, the sort of out-of-class activities I have done with my Commercial Law this year.

3 Annex 2 shows, in this regard, some of the written testimonies of students –collected, as I have already stated, at the end of the term, on an anonymous basis-.
increasingly are encouraging students to work together on homework assignments. Some faculty members are even creating small study groups in their courses, to help students work together outside of class. Again, much of the Bologna process and the changes the EHEA is going to introduce in our daily task as professors is precisely this teaching style, relying much more than in previous decades on this sort of group work between students.

A few students tell of professors who give homework assignments that are so challenging or complex that the only way to get the work done is to collaborate. To complete such assignments, students have to work cooperatively, dividing up the readings and meeting outside of class to teach one another. Many undergraduates report that such homework assignments increase both their learning and their engagement with a class.

4. Class size matters.

In the interviews I have conducted these years, and in the writing assignments I have collected in this regard, student after student brings up the importance of class size in his or her academic development. Not surprisingly, small-group tutorials, small seminars, and one-to-one supervision are, for many, their milestone experience at college.

Two factors stand out in students’ report of how small classes make an especially strong impact. First, such classes enable a professor to get to know each student reasonably well. Second, a professor can use certain teaching techniques that are hard to implement in large classes.

We will address this same issue in the following finding, both are closely related. For now, it will be enough to say that the Bologna process demands a profound readjustment in the usual size of college classrooms, at least in Spain. It is clear that it is not an easy goal to achieve, since there are many factors that play a straightjacket role in this task, budget-restrictions to say the least, and the actual design of the premises all over the country. Nevertheless, something has to be done if the EHEA is to be properly implemented.

In this regard, and due to their global size, it is fair to say that private Universities in Spain are more fitted to accommodate that ideal number of students per classroom and that sort of small-group assignments than public ones. However, the debate private vs. public
college exceeds by far the scope of this paper, so we will not get trapped by it.

5. Good mentoring and advising make a difference.

As I said in the introductory section, I have been academic advisor for the senior students from the very beginning of my academic career. Accordingly, when conducting the research on this specific issue, I would have expected a general feeling among students that good advising and mentoring was important. I was wrong... because I underestimated the importance –from the students’ point of view- of this issue!

It is the specifics that are striking. A large majority of undergraduates describe particular activities outside the classroom as profoundly affecting their academic performance. Some point to study techniques, such as working groups. Others tell of more personal exercises, such as formal time-logging.

However, what I found more surprising is that some undergraduates, when asked to identify a particularly critical or profound experience at college, would identify the conversations or job done with their advisors and/or mentors.

Tutoring, in terms of academic guidance and personal assessment of students, has in fact always been a feature of university education in Spain in one form or another, as a means of trying to “personalise” overcrowded lecture halls. However, following the 1998 Declaration of Bologna, which outlines the new model of European university education, instead of being a necessary but residual factor, tutoring will become one of the basic elements of the new education system and an essential tool in the development of the new methodology to achieve the goals set out by the EHEA.

A mentor must of course be a good teacher in terms of gaining students’ trust. Mentors should be well informed and up to date in knowledge and training in their specialised subject, and at the same time they have to know how to transmit their learning in such a way that it is properly received by their students. It is also important for them to possess other qualities, such as the ability to listen, discretion, objectivity and impartiality. It is not sufficient that a mentor simply has extensive knowledge and focuses on academic and university matters. He or she
must pursue the goal of the integral development, including the personal evolution of their students.

Europe’s Educational System is presented with a great challenge with the Bologna Educational Reform. As we have already noted, the student is placed at the centre of the teaching and learning process. At the same time, this process must guarantee the students’ ability to reach competences in term of Contents, Procedures and Attitudes. With this in mind, the assessment methods need to be redefined and adapted to this new reality, where tutoring and learning must be integrated in the assessment process.

Consequently, I am not afraid of ending this section with a somehow strong conviction, namely, that good mentoring and advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience. We will get back to this issue in the concluding Section of this paper.

III. Faculty who make a difference: what the best college professors do.

What do certain professors do that particularly matters to undergraduates? As a professor for more than ten years, I confess I particularly enjoy students’ responses to this question. Some got so involved with their explanations that it was hard to shut them off. One reason so many took so long to give their answers was simply that they had never been asked this question before.

Yet, the question is fairly crucial, not only for them, in their learning-role position, but to us, in our teaching-role position. Only recently, and again I have purposely chosen its title for the heading of this section, Ken Bain’s seminal book (BAIN, 2004) addresses this issue, and hopefully his inspirational findings will enhance all the academic community to care more about improving its teaching performance at University.

Bain’s research was not based on questionnaires or interview with students, but rather in capturing the collective scholarship of some of the best teachers in the United States, and an intellectual effort to conceptualize their practices. His conclusions emerge from six broad questions he—and his team- asked themselves about the teachers they
examined: What do they know and understand about how we learn? How do they prepare to teach? What do they expect of their students? How do they conduct class and what do they do when they teach? How do they treat students? How do they evaluate their students and themselves?

The answers to these questions outline precisely the profile of the best college professors. Without exception, outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well. They are all active and accomplished scholars, artists or scientists. None of this should surprise anyone; this finding simply confirms that people are unlikely to become great teachers unless they know something to teach. In addition, they have at least an intuitive understanding of human learning, akin to the ideas that have been emerging from research in the learning sciences.

Of course, they treat their lectures, discussion sections, problem-based sessions and other elements of teaching as serious intellectual endeavors as intellectual demanding and important as their research and scholarship. Consequently, rather than questioning themselves –when confronted with the preparation of a course- about what the teacher will do, they begin with questions about student learning objectives4. This “shift” in the teaching scheme, is –once more- embodied in all the Bologna process, as reflected in the study guides, listing of objectives, definition of skills to be acquired, etc.

Regarding their “teaching techniques”, while methods vary, the best professors often try to create a sort of natural critical learning environment. In that environment, people learn by confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems, authentic tasks that will challenge them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality.

Finally, according to Professor Bain, highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe that students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can do so. They often display openness with students and may, from time to time, talk about their own intellectual journey, its

4 Annex 4 shows the sort of questions a professor should ask himself when preparing his or her classes.
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ambitions, triumphs, frustrations and failures, and encourage their students to be similarly reflective and candid.

Confronting Professor Bain’s insights with the results and answers of our own surveys and interviews has proven enlightening. We offer the outcome right now. This is a sort of Decalogue of what—to the students’ understanding—make faculty special:

1. **Teaching precision in the use of language.**
   Many students, when asked about which was the ability acquired while in college they deemed more valuable, answered about the importance of choice of language. They note that precision in choice of words can change an opinion and sharpen an analysis. It can even change the way people think. Some instructors make a point to capitalize on this idea, and students seem to remember the particular examples long after their classes end.

   Of course, this contention needs qualifying when speaking about technical and empirical disciplines as opposed to liberal arts. Nevertheless, it stands true for all sorts of careers and college studies. Also, for the sake of honesty, I need to strengthen the fact that I am a Law Professor inevitably biases my opinion here, since accuracy in the use of language, when drafting a contract or interpreting an enacted law, many times makes all the difference.

2. **Sharing intellectual responsibility.**
   We have noted in the previous section that one-on-one working relationships between students and professors—such as supervised research papers, intense mentoring, professional advising, etc. - provide opportunities for students to take some responsibility for planning and running academic projects. These experiences teach students something they may not be able to learn in standard classes.

3. **Connecting academic ideas with students’ lives.**
   When asked to rate courses they take, students often give the most rigorous and demanding classes their highest ratings. Yet from interviews a fascinating observation emerges about certain faculty members whom students identify as having had an especially powerful influence on their thinking, and on their lives.
The faculty members who had an especially big impact are those who helped students make connections between a serious curriculum, on the one hand, and the students’ personal lives, values and experiences, on the other. Definitely, students praise certain faculty members who build such connections into their teaching. I have already mentioned some examples —collected in Annex 2— of how Commercial Law students persistently underline this issue.

4. Engaging students in large classes.

In the previous section I have entitled one the findings as “Class size matters”. The chances of eliminating large courses —especially in public Universities in Spain— are slight, if only because doing so would be very expensive. Yet, it is highly desirable. From the interviews conducted and the visits to the Campuses abovementioned, an indisputable fact arises: when choosing their courses, students at any college or university may want to look for professors who, even when teaching large classes, still get students actively engaged in what goes out of the classroom.

This finding is connected with the previous one, in the sense that as long as the students connect academic ideas with out-of-class reality, they become more implicated with the course and their academic achievement improves. Just as an example, Annex I —to which I have already referred to— offers some of the activities we have done in this regard this year for our Commercial Law students.

5. Providing materials and notes for class on an ex ante basis.

Invariably, students report that time spent in classes where a professor simply goes over and repeats what they bring written in their notes, or could easily be read in a textbook, is not the best use of time. Classes really exciting, those which students remember long after the ending of their course, and those in which they engage more, are the ones in which the professor helps them to understand how people in each field or discipline think about topics in it.

It is clear —to anybody who is in this “industry” for any given time— that this is not an easy thing to do. If only because time is short and certain theoretic materials and notes need to be explained and taken, one can not devote the whole class to such discussions. In Annex 3 we
show an easy way to overcome this difficulty: uploading the “notes” and material in the subject website, and encouraging students to go through that stuff prior to class-time.

At least in my experience, nearly all of the students with whom I talked praised a lot this scheme, while simply neglected the typical class in which the professor would spend most of its time dictating notes and they merely took them.

6. Encouraging students to disagree with the professor.

When asked to identify a particular critical moment or unforgettable experience in their education, senior students invariably reported experiences which involved interacting with a faculty member around substantive academic work. In particular, students mention professors who encourage students to disagree –constructively- with what they are presenting.

Of course, there is a delicate line between ceding all responsibility to a student and encouraging that student to take a reasonable amount of responsibility for shaping his own ideas and arguments. Faculty who are able to walk that line are remembered with honor by their students.

7. Teaching the use of evidence; stressing the importance of reliable sources.

A surprising number of the undergraduates interviewed describe learning how to use evidence to resolve controversies in their field – whatever their field- as a breakthrough idea. In addition to it, and specifically for Law students, many of them report the profound way some professors impacted them when they stressed the importance –in legal reasoning and problem solving- of reliable sources, namely law, jurisprudence and doctrine.

Nearly all the anecdotes students tell about learning to use systematic evidence and relying in the sources of their respective discipline involve courses they took in their first year. Students normally come to college with strong –although too frequently unfounded- views on a variety of matters. As long as Law studies are concerned, some of these views are political, others are social. Still others are intellectual in the sense that students hold a certain perspective, or an opinion on a
given issue, or even a perspective on what constitutes good laws or consistent justice enforcement. Yet, they lack a sound basis for it. They do not know how to support their opinions, no matter how correct and true they may reveal themselves. And, at least in a court room, whatever is not fact supported and law founded is absolutely useless.

The evidence-based way of thinking to which I am referring now is what helps those undergraduates choose among alternatives, form a core philosophy and line of reasoning, and transcend opinions they arrived with, even strongly held opinions.

8. Being predictable.

Although it may seem a lesser point, the sort of small – despicable- issue that one may think is worthless in students’ minds, nothing farther from the reality. One of the most astonishing and counterintuitive finding I have come to ascertain after speaking with hundreds of students, or asking them a end-of-the-course anonymous assessment, is that they appreciate a lot the predictability of a professor’s behavior.

Students repeatedly honor predictability in faculty members’ demands for the course; they honor predictability in faculty members’ standards for evaluating their work, granting marks, course assignments, etc. The opposite also reveals absolutely true: students simply neglect and censor professors who behave randomly, do never explain what they expect from their students, and consequently too often fall in arbitrarily conduct.

No matter how an accomplished scholar a professor may be; no matter how his or her oratory skills are well developed; no matter how high or low the standards or work demanding are settled; my experience shows that all those issues students are willing to accept and tolerate, as long as they know –if possible from the very first day of class- what are they facing, how the professor is going to treat them, what are they expected to do.

9. Integrating ideas from other disciplines.

Many seniors single out interdisciplinary classes as the courses that meant the most to them. As a corollary, they cite faculty members who, while expert in their own fields, are able to put their specific
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discipline in broader perspective. Students definitely find this important. They believe that the real world and the way people think about the world, does not divide neatly into subjects of a given course as we – professors- too often try to categorize the reality in our classrooms.

Yet, since colleges and universities are organized around these disciplines –history, chemistry, literature, psychology, politics, etc.-, students feel they must constantly reorganize their thinking in a way that differs from the fundamental organization of the college. Students are entirely aware of the realities of organizing a college. They understand that some “departmental” mechanism is necessary. They understand the academic value of such organizational scheme. Yet, they simply observe that what serves as an important convenience for the institution sometimes makes it hard for them to get the big picture.

10. Teaching students to think like professionals.

All good law and economics teachers cover and explain principles of their subjects in classes. The faculty members the students remember most are those who go a step further, and go beyond such principles and are able to convey to students “how lawyers think” or “how economists think”.

As a final finding, we want to stress this particular point, because the Bologna process is much concerned about it, and one of the declared aims of the E.H.E.A. is precisely a more profound integration between academic instruction and job performance. The new methodologies we are asked to implement in our classrooms need to achieve this crucial goal: not just giving academic degrees to our graduate students, but preparing them for their incorporation to the professional world they are going to face as soon as they leave college.

IV. Practical recommendations: tutoring and the implementation of the EHEA.

As we have seen in the Introduction, if the EHEA seeks to educate students through a continual process of learning throughout their lives, so that they themselves become protagonist of their own studies, avoiding that their university career is merely an absorption of knowledge, and their later professional careers are structured on work
and continuous personal effort outside the lecture hall. By way of European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits, the support of a guide becomes fundamental to lead students along the appropriate route so as to successfully complete their time at the university.

Tutors – else called academic advisors, mentors, whatever - may justifiably be considered to fulfil the role of such guides and channel students’ autonomous learning under the new system. In this way, the tutor will become an essential element in students’ education, rather than simply fulfilling the basic traditional role of “resolver of doubts” arising in lectures.

Thus, as a result of what we have just mentioned, tutoring becomes a new key feature of the EHEA, because of the following reasons:

- The EHEA requires students to play a more active part in their academic progress, which means that more personalised attention adapted to the particular individual circumstances of each learner will be necessary.
- The greater workload imposed by the new system’s ECTS credits also gives rise to the need for more strict evaluation and for a la carte study plans to be drawn up for the students.
- The more active role to be played by students as the main actor in their learning process requires in exchange new measures of personalised support on the part of teachers to develop their capabilities.

Consequently, the new demands of the EHEA system place the figure and tutorial functions of the tutor in the position of a fundamental factor in its evolution and as an essential indicator of quality, which, it must be remembered, represents one of the principal aims of the Bologna Declaration. Nevertheless, we are of the view that tutoring does not simply comprise a quality control index but rather much more – it can become a catalyst, a force for change and a key dynamic element in improving quality in education. Therefore, it can detect both the strengths and the weaknesses of our education system, any new demands that may arise and, above all, the precise demands of our students.

Because of this, it becomes the key “tool” to get to know the precise students’ demands – to which we have referred in the second
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section of this paper- and accommodate professors’ performance in class— as dealt with in the third section of this paper— to meet such demands.

The concept of the tutor has changed. The old model has to be discarded in favour of the new figure of a tutor who acts as a personalised support for the student, guiding him or her not only in their academic and curricular trajectory but also in their personal lives. The tutor also behaves with a view to bringing out their talents and capabilities to the maximum extent so that they can stand out above their companions and make their university careers a success.

In other words, the new tutoring model must encompass many different functions and combine in a single figure the various roles traditionally ascribed to tutors. Thus, in accordance with the new regime of higher education, a good tutor has to provide academic tutoring adhering closely to scientific models; in the sense that the tutorial becomes a particular method of education based on small groups of students; and the tutor must furthermore offer personal counselling in the most private ambit of their student’s life.

For this matter, tutoring and academic continuous assessment consists of three separate stages: the first involves adaptation to university life; the second covers consolidation of the most significant aspects of the undergraduate’s chosen subject and his or her autonomous learning; and the final phase focuses on the transit and incorporation of the student into their professional life. We now deal with each of these separately.

There is no doubt that a tutor’s fundamental task during the first year of the degree course is to monitor the undergraduate’s progress in adapting to university life and to accompany him or her in the transition from secondary education to university studies. Consequently, a suitable framework has to be constructed for the tutors to begin their work of personalised counselling so as to achieve the maximum possible academic results for their students.

Along to the writing skills, to which we have already referred as one of the most interesting academic experiences for college graduates, there is one thing that comes up the minute you take care of a student: he or she does not have proper habits of study or no habits at all. The ones that just finished high school have some study habits, but they are not of a continuous nature, and those who work not only they do not
have enough time to study, but also they have lost all possible study habits that they might have had in the past. Therefore, in the task of doing effective tutoring and well-aimed academic advising, we must personalize the teaching for each one of them, and make it work. That is, we have to teach them how to study.

Of course, each tutor has to be selected to fit the tasks he is demanded to fulfil; accordingly, first-stage tutors should be accessible persons, preferably of an age not too old (so proximity with students is enhanced, or at least been afraid of asking him or her is discouraged), and –if possible- with background or previous experience in secondary education.

Again, as Richard J. Light puts it, “young women and men arriving at college immediately confront a set of decisions. Which courses to choose? What subject to specialize in? What activities to join? How much to study? How to study? Such decisions are intensely personal. Often they are made with little information. Yet their consequences can be enormous. A subject that is bypassed, or study habits that are mismatched for certain classes, can result in limited options, reduced opportunities, or closed doors. Advisors play a critical role. They can ask a broad array of questions, and make a few suggestions, that can affect students in a profound and continuing way”.

As regards the progress of students in their degrees and careers, tutoring for the following courses will then be centred on learning from an integral perspective. This means that it will not only include the subject matter of the current course but will also provide students with the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and values to enable them to carry on learning on an autonomous basis. This, again, is undoubtedly one of the Bologna process’ main concerns.

The key question of tutoring during these courses is that it is conceived in a broad sense but, nevertheless, covers particular aspects that are relevant to students. On the one hand, undergraduates will be tutored by way of assessment regarding their academic curriculum with respect to the corresponding study plan. On the other, they will be aided to improve their habits of study, including timetable planning and organisation, study techniques, suggestions for basic supplementary reading to achieve better comprehension of course subjects, and help with preparing their work, use of bibliographies and handling data bases.
Following one of the findings to which we have referred to in the previous section, let us give a practical example. Probably this is true about most college studies, but it is undoubtedly suitable to law students: of all the skills they want to strengthen, writing ranks number one. So, when we asked several graduating seniors to reflect on their experience at our college, and in particular if they could point to any specific activity that had a particularly memorable impact on their writing skills, the answer was certainly illuminating. It turns out that many of the students who improved their writing had one specific type of experience in common: they had all worked in one-to-one, mentored research project with a faculty supervisor, namely, their tutor.

In this manner, the aim is to develop academic skills, involve students in university life and encourage them to participate by way of different academic activities such as the Oratory and Rhetoric Prize – the *Cicero Prize* – or presenting them for legal competitions organised by law firms – the *Freshfields Prize*, the *Garrigues Prize for Young Lawyers* – or for international juridical prizes – *Telders*.

As we have already note, after conducting hundreds of interviews with students in colleges all over the United States, Richard Light concluded that one overarching theme emerges: the students said that at key points in their college years, an academic advisor asked questions, or posed a challenge, that forced them to think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives. If that’s fairly true along their grade studies, we think it becomes dramatically important when the students face the end of their college stage.

It is no surprise to find that towards the end of students’ time at university their tutors feel themselves committed to more than simply the passive observation of the students and come to involve them in guiding their students as regards their chosen profession and their transition into the employment market. Thus, with the support of the typical Department of Employment Training and Occupational Development, specialised tutoring should be provided. It is focused on advice on individualised itineraries of employment training for each undergraduate student, guidance and seeking for work, or the search for further post-graduate study courses, such as specialised master degrees, PhDs or Civil Service competitive exams.
There is therefore a need for tutors in the final phase of university studies to receive training so as to afford them in-depth knowledge of the professional opportunities and social and employment requirements facing their students as they enter the professional employment market. This, to our understanding, is another goal the EHAE is pursuing.

In addition to everything which has been said, it is obvious that at any stage of a university career, tutoring involves assessment students from an integral point of view, including both academic and personal aspects, professional and other such matters, etcetera. In every course students are encouraged to think critically, and their capacities for analysis and synthesis, organisation and planning, use of new technologies, etcetera are promoted. Team work is also encouraged – remember, from preceding section, how much the students praise this sort of teaching- as well as oral expression.

The importance of having a good academic record is underlined, as is the need for proper planning of employment practice, a good level in foreign languages, together with experience abroad, such as through an Erasmus programme or via one of the specific study and employment training plans run by colleges and universities all around Europe.

Finally, another key factor in understanding personalised tutoring is that it requires a model for the average student and another for especially gifted students, whose academic excellence is fomented by taking part in juridical contests both in Spain and abroad, participating as scholarship holders in research projects run by the teaching staff, and submitting their curriculum to leading lawyers’ firms.
Annex 1. Out-of-class activities in Commercial Law
(Academic year 2009/10)

• Visit to Madrid Stock Market (October 2009).
• Get-together with a Supreme Court Magistrate (October 2009).
• Visit to Spanish Constitutional Court (November 2009).
• Visit to Bailen Royal Palace and get-together with the Chairman of “Patrimonio Nacional” (January 2010).
• University Congress in Bolonia (March 2010).
• Law composition and documentation workshop (February-March 2010).
• Visit to Luxemburg’s European Court of Justice (March-April 2010).
• University Congress in Rome (March-April 2010).
• Participation in the European Law Moot Court Competition (April 2010).
• Participation in the Liga Nacional de Debate Universitaria (April 2010).
• Staying at an oral hearing in Audiencia Nacional (May 2010).
• Law clinic practice at Garrigues Law Firm (May 2010).


- “I think the way the classes were driven has contributed to a better understanding of the issues at stake. I want to say also that the classes have been very participative and engaging, and that suits me, as well as how everything we look at in class is connected with real and practical life”
- “I consider very interesting the way in which this subject has been imparted and that the professor does not merely explains the materials previously given to us but in addition to it he shows the connection between them and real and practical issues (…)”
- “I consider very interesting not only the content but also the way of giving the classes with the combination of theory and practice. They achieve that we learn and also retain the concepts
explained. It is very important also the application to real life situations”

- “The classes have been enjoyable and amusing. Also, the way of giving the classes has helped a lot in visualizing the concepts explained so we could better understand them”
- “The subject of Commercial Law, which in my opinion was a boring thing, by the way of how the classes have been; I have totally changed my mind. The content has been great, and over all the classes. Thanks to the continuous interaction between the professor and the students, everything was far more entertaining and at the same time interesting”.
- “I have to admit that although this subject is not the one I preferred in the beginning, the way in which the classes have been given, making all of us participate, and doing it in a very dynamic way, turns a supposedly boring subject as commercial law into something interesting and even amusing (…)”.

Annex 3. Providing materials and notes for class on an ex ante basis.

As such is used in the interactive approach to the teaching of Commercial Law, by means of the Virtual Campus platform. All students enrolled in the subject have access to the course own website.

Once they have successfully logged in, the full content of the course is accessible to them so they can download both the materials and the list of topics which constitutes the main body of the programme.

These materials may consist in the presentations (in Power Point format) that are going to be used in class, video or audio files that may be helpful in illustrating some of the topics discussed in class, or just the readings they have to work on for their latter debate.

By allowing the students to have the full content of the topics which constitute the course of Commercial Law, in PDF files, which they can either save or print, quite a number of results are achieved:
1) The professor does not need to waste time in the classes dictating them (unfortunately, still a quite common practice in Spanish university rooms);

2) The students can read them before class, so they get familiar with the topics which are going to be dealt with, even before the professor’s explanation;

3) A certainly interactive style of teaching can be accomplished, given the main issues are already “said” —or, rather, “written” and just in front of student’s eyes, either in hard-copy in their desks or in the screen of their laptops— time in class can be fully devoted to discussion, underscoring the more important or difficult aspects of each subject, etc.

As we have already shown in Annex 2, when collecting some of the written answers of students when questioned about this methodology, the comments given by the students themselves, the availability of the full content of the course in the website and before actual classes is surely one of the features of the way this subject is imparted they appreciate more.

Annex 4. Preparing the classes

1. What sort of questions my classes are going to be useful to help my students answer? What capabilities, skills, and competences are they going to develop? How am I going to be able to encourage them in these issues?

2. What reasoning abilities should my students have —or develop— in order to successfully answer the questions this course is raising?

3. What thinking-scheme are my students bringing to my class, and should I change it? How can I help them in achieving such an intellectual challenge?

4. Which specific info my students need to answer properly the main matters this course is asking them? How am I going to challenge their intellectual presumptions? How can they obtain that information?

5. How am I going to help those students with difficulties in understanding the main questions raised in the course? How am
I going to help those with difficulties in using evidence and reasoning in answering those questions?

6. How am I going to confront my students with conflictive issues? How am I going to encourage them to face difficult problems, and do their best to solve them?

7. How can I find out what do they already know, as well as what they expect from this course? How can I reconcile possible differences between their expectations and my own?

8. How can I help my students in “learning to learn”, examine and assess their own learning and reasoning capabilities? Is it possible to teach them –regardless of the specific subject which they are attending- to read in a more effective, vigorous and analytical way?

9. How can I find out how my students are learning before giving them their final marks? How can I provide them with proper feedback before –and independently- any grade they may obtain?

10. How should I interact with my students so that I can keep them thinking permanently?

11. How am I going to comprehensively explain them the intellectual and professional standards I am going to use in giving them their marks? How can I teach them to assess and evaluate their own work using those standards?

12. How do we –my students, my faculty colleagues and myself- the essence, progress and quality of the students’ learning process?

13. How can I create some sort of “critical natural learning” environment in which to introduce the skills and knowledge I want to teach them by way of practices, tasks and exercises which they find fascinating and challenging?

14. Is it possible to design such tasks and exercises so that they encourage students’ intellectual curiosity enough to make them redefine their prior assumptions and reshape their models of reality?
15. How can I provide my students with a safe environment in which they can try, fail, readjust and try again without being ashamed?

References
