

INNOVATING IN UNIVERSITY: THE RELEVANCE OF MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION IN THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS AT THE SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SCIENCES AND SOCIOLOGY, COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY OF MADRID

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Abstract

Since the Declaration of Bologna and the constitution of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), a process initiated at the Spanish Universities that had as a consequence an increasing concern about the improvement of teaching quality and its management, as crucial areas for teaching and research at the university level. University management is a process that depends on the academic management of undergraduate training, postgraduate training and research.

Keywords: innovating, degrees, management, coordination and university.

1 THE RELEVANCE OF MANAGEMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY.

The renewal of university degrees curriculum and their incorporation into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has meant, in the vast majority of cases, a notable increase in the role that management and coordination have for the proper development of teaching and research at the university. In recent years the process of adaptation to the EHEA came together with a greater complexity of management and development, as much as a more focused, specialized and demanding administrative activity, usually carried out by professors, researchers and staff. On the other hand, the autonomy University institutions enjoy, due to social and cultural reasons, in relation to the State, the Market, Science and the Information and Education Society, bind universities to concern about the quality, effectiveness and extension of their activities [1].

Consequently, today University Management includes a commitment for a good administration of the resources and the structures that are needed both for research and teaching, as much as for the coordination of these areas. Thus, management becomes an area with its own entity. Unlike other institutions where this activity is outsourced to professionals specialized in administration, we now find that management is being incorporated into the jobs of University main workers, the teaching staff. Indeed, according to Europe 2020 planning, EU Member States are asked to strengthen the links between research and innovation to improve the competitive advantages of each country, including that of their institutions, namely Universities.

Frequently, discussions about university excellence put an emphasis on the strengthening of research at the expense of teaching, whether it is at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. As a result, the management of undergraduate programs do not obtain proper consideration, instead of being considered, as it should, a key issue that need continuous improvement. However, undergraduate studies group the largest number of students, as well as teaching efforts. In the School (Facultad) of Political Science and Sociology of the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), the amount of undergraduate students is around 3510, while Master and Doctorate students are around 557 and 515, respectively. However, it is not uncommon to find that undergraduate studies are often those that benefit less from administrative resources and staff.

The evolution of the model of the university institution, as a result of a specific historical memory [2], as well as the framework established by the Bologna Declaration and the constitution of the EHEA, have led us to the development of some complex processes of assessment, certification and accreditation, as part of the so-called Quality Assurance Systems. These processes are mandatory, and require the availability of information and the implementation of actions well beyond the usual teaching relations, regarding the support and monitoring of teaching, teaching staff and students. Consequently, it becomes essential to design strategies that improve this area of academic

management and the implementation of tools and action protocols that coordinate the undergraduate programs that are carried out in the same School. This is the case of the School of Political Science and Sociology, where eight different programs are offered under the Coordination of the Deputy Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Commission of Coordinators of Undergraduate programs and the Delegate of the Dean for the Quality of the institution.

The accreditation processes recently passed by the undergraduate programs of this School [3], have been an opportunity that, we believe, should be used not only to assess the results of the university training, but also to integrate improvement plans in the management and coordination of the programs. This is particularly so since some common problems have been revealed that require a joint approach from the Vice Dean and the Undergraduate Programs Commission. The fulfillment of some fundamental questions related to the monitoring of the programs not only depends on the involvement of the different departments that participate in the teaching, but also on the establishment of a series of resources and management processes on the part of the School, which can be, where appropriate, adapted to the idiosyncrasies of each program.

In order to analyze the program management in the School of Political Science and Sociology, during the past academic year 2016/2017 a project entitled: "Innovating in Academic Management: The incorporation of protocols and digital tools in the undergraduate programs of the School of Political Science and Sociology" was approved by the Office of Quality of the Rectorate of the Complutense University of Madrid. This project had the following objectives:

- 1 To develop Digital Protocols and Tools in the Teaching Management of the undergraduate programs mainly focused on the Final Degree Project and on the Credit Transfer and Recognition Systems.
- 2 To strengthen and cover the gaps in the Support Programs for students through Digital Protocols and Tools aimed at issues such as internationalization, employability, guidance and educational advice, as well as the reception and monitoring of students.
- 3 To design and experiment Specific Protocols and Digital Coordination Tools for Teaching.

In this paper, we would like to expose the analysis we have carried out of the main activities in the management of the programs, as well as to justify the importance in this context of certain procedures such as protocols and digital tools.

2 ANALYSIS OF THE FUNCTIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS.

The management of the university programs involves a series of functions, which often, according to the own organization of the School, are developed by different positions, such as the Coordinator of the program, the Vice Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and the Delegate of the Dean for the Quality, independently or jointly. In our case, the School of Political Science and Sociology has five programs (Social and Cultural Anthropology, Political Sciences, Management and Public Administration, International Relations and Sociology), along with three double degrees: Political Science and Philosophy, Law and Political Science, Sociology and International Relations and Political Sciences with Mention in Human Rights and Social and Political Innovation. This volume of eight programs requires the existence of a Vice Dean of undergraduate Studies and the existence of coordinators for each of the programs.

Regardless of the way these functions are distributed, we understand that the main management purposes of the programs are the following:

Scientific functions:

- 1.1. To analyze and establish proposals to guarantee and improve the implementation of the program.
- 1.2. To ensure the good fulfillment of the academic and scientific objectives of the program.
- 1.3. To promote that the undergraduate studies have a similar level to other comparable programs.

Academic functions:

- 2.1 To develop all actions that were foreseen in the report of verification of the programs and in the regulations of the Complutense University about the Guarantee of Quality of the programs.
- 2.2 To develop programs' accreditation and verification processes, as well as other similar procedures that may be implemented by national or regional assessment agencies or the University internal bodies.

Management, coordination and monitoring functions on the performance of the programs:

- 3.1. To establish procedures for students' admission and access to the programs, including transfer and credit recognition systems.
- 3.2. To manage and review the programs' teaching syllabus, before its publication on the School website.
- 3.3. To establish, develop and chair the programs' mechanisms of horizontal coordination, as the Commission of Undergraduate Programs Coordination.
- 3.4. To establish and develop coordination mechanisms with the different university stakeholders (students, faculty and administrative staff) in order to detect incidents and monitor the development of the programs.
- 3.5. To develop and manage support and follow-up programs for students, such as internationalization, mobility, employability, guidance and educational counseling, reception and follow-up of studies and scholarships.
- 3.6. To mediate and arbitrate in conflicts that may arise during the development of the program.
- 3.7. To manage the procedures related to the Final Degree Project.
- 3.8. To manage procedures related to External Practices.

Quality assessment functions:

- 4.1. To present and implement proposals that contributes to the improvement of the program.
- 4.2. To establish a Program Quality Assurance System or mechanisms for assessing the quality of the degree, which includes:
 - 4.2.1. Participation in the Quality Committee of the programs.
 - 4.2.2. Analysis of the operation of the system of suggestions, complaints and claims of the programs.
- 4.3. To promote the participation of the different stakeholders (students, faculty, administration and services staff and external agents) in the Rectorate quality surveys.

Information and transfer functions:

- 5.1. To establish, develop and evaluate the information procedures related to the programs.
- 5.2. To prepare, review and update the information about the programs on the School website.

In table 1, we show the positions held responsible for these functions, as well as the staff support for the accomplishments of these functions. As can be observed, most are carried out by the Program Coordinator with the support of the Vice Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and only some of them can count on support staff.

Table 1. Management functions of the Degree studies and distribution of responsible and resources.

Functions	Responsible	Human Resources
Scientific	Coordinator	Programs Coordination Commission
Academic	Supported by Vicedean Undergraduate Studies	Programs Coordination Commission
Management. Access and admission		Administrative staff
Management. Coordination		Programs Coordination Commission
Management. Student support		Vice Dean of Students Programs Coordination Commission
Management. Final Degree Project		Administrative staff Programs Coordination Commission
Information and transparency		Support of School website staff
Management. External practices		External Practices Coordinator
Quality	Quality Commission (Under- and Postgraduate)	

Due to the diversity of functions to be developed, as well as the novelty of the position of Program Coordinator within the university system (as a derivation from the implementation of the Bologna program), in addition to its scant acknowledgement, both at the university and at the social levels (scarce implication of the rest of the teaching staff), we consider that it is necessary to establish common strategies to guide the development of these functions. Hence, the intention of this project is to design protocols and digital tools in coherence with the White Paper on Institutional Intelligence in University Management (2016) [4], which indicates that it is crucial to incorporate digital tools and protocols in data production systems related to the programs (for example, the rates of coverage, graduation, performance, drop-out, efficiency ...) or those related to the satisfaction of the stakeholders involved in the coordination and organization of the various areas common to all the programs. There is a double purpose in this endeavour: first, the improvement of the quality of academic management and the avoidance of the degradation of public university [5]; second, the incorporation of measures that optimize management and thus reduce the job and management overload of teaching staff, especially the Program Coordinators, anticipating possible social and labor problems [6]. In table 2 the deficiencies found in this direction are shown:

Table 2. Management functions and availability of protocols and tools for their performance.

Functions	Protocols established	Digital tools
Academic	Guide for the preparation of follow-up reports of the Complutense Quality Office	Programs databases
Access and admission. Transfer System Credits.	Vice-Dean of Studies own regulations	Quality Office Surveys
Coordination	No	No
Student support	No	No
Final Degree Project	Regulations: School and Rectorship	No
Information and transparency	No	No
External practices	Regulations: School and Rectorship	No

On November 3, 2017, within the framework of this Quality Management Research project, we carried out a Conference with the participation of different Complutense coordinators, vice-deans and teachers staff related to the Management of the undergraduate programs. The conclusions of these conferences are developed in the Communication: "An innovation experience in the management of University Degrees". However, here, we would like to present some of the challenges raised regarding the development of management procedures in the programs, such as protocols and digital tools, on which we will continue working.

On the one hand, the systematization of management increases quality, optimizes work and reduces the overload and bureaucracy which the coordinators and vice-deans are subject to. In this regard, we have identified good practices that have been carried out by different Complutense Schools that can be used as guidelines for the elaboration of the procedures of each School or program.

On the other hand, management is a novel function that we are learning to develop, what facilitates the incorporation of coordinated and effective dynamics from the start.

The convergence between the different programs allows the development of joint actions and is thus decisive in areas such as coordination, both horizontal and vertical, which may be common along different schools (6, 7).

3 CONCLUSIONS

We hope that the implementation of this project facilitates the availability of information from the whole of the School programs in a systematic way so that we can develop strategies to improve undergraduate teaching. Likewise, to the extent that more sophisticated academic management with smarter procedures is available, the teaching staff will have more time to devote to research and teaching, and hopefully their work satisfaction will increase, as well as their satisfaction with the institution in itself.

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