

The European Higher Education Area at work: Lights and shadows defining Continuous Assessment*

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DOI: 10.1344/105.000001524

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse how learning assessment, particularly the Continuous Assessment system, has been defined in the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course of the University of Barcelona (Spain). This course was a pioneering experiment at this university in implementing the guidelines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and thus represents a good case study for verifying whether one of the cornerstones of the EHEA has been accomplished with success. Using data obtained from the Teaching Plans elaborated by the lecturers of each subject, we are able to establish that the CA system has been progressively accepted to such an extent that it is now the assessment formula used by practically all of the lecturers, conforming in this way to the protocols laid down by the Faculty of Law in which this diploma course is taught. Nevertheless, we find that high dispersion exists in how Continuous Assessment is actually defined. Indeed, it seems that there is no unified view of how Continuous Assessment should be performed. This dispersion, however, seems to diminish over time and raises some questions about the advisability of agreement on criteria, considering the potential which CA has as a pedagogical tool. Moreover, we find that the Unique Assessment system, which students may also apply for, is an option chosen only by a minority, with lecturers usually defining it as merely a theoretical and/or practical test, of little innovation in relation to traditional tests.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment, European Higher Education Area, Public Administration and Management Diploma Course.

1. Introduction

As stated in ENQA (2009:17): “*The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on the students’ future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and that it takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about the testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learner support*”. Assessment is, thus, an essential tool of the teaching-learning process. If well-defined, it helps not only to improve the learning process for students, but also to improve the teaching skills and educational achievements of lecturers.

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* This paper was presented at the International Conference of Education Research and Innovation ICERI2009 in November 2009, Madrid (SPAIN).

The implementation of the European Higher Education Area (hereafter, EHEA) implies a new way of looking at the teaching-learning process. This, in turn, involves a number of changes to the student assessment system (AQU, 2003; Delgado, 2005). As the students themselves have become the centre of the learning process, the assessment system should be designed as a tool to assist them in this process; e.g. providing them the opportunity to know throughout the term what they have (or have not) learned, to what extent they have achieved objectives of the subject or activity, in what areas they need to improve, and so on. This new learning process, therefore, demands that student assessment be continuous.

The implementation of Continuous Assessment (hereafter, CA) in university degree programmes clashes, at least in Spain, with an educational system based historically on magisterial classes and final exams. Until now, inherited tradition has led lecturers to think that the main objective of student assessment is only to evaluate them. From now on, however, assessment should reflect the processes by which the students actually learn (ICE-UPC, 2008).

In 2006, the University of Barcelona (Spain) defined new regulations concerning the assessment system in order to adjust it to the EHEA guidelines. Since then, CA has been the accepted form of assessing students. This new definition of the assessment process is inducing an important change in the lecturers' own methodology. They must now include in their courses a variety of activities that will be assessed and thus constitute part of the student's final mark. Such a new environment calls for a rethinking and redesigning of the entire teaching approach. In general, the students, used to a learning system which is passive, are now required to do more autonomous work (completing various assignments, participating in class, etc.) in order to pass the subject. Lecturers face the challenge of designing an entire course which promotes this type of continuous student work and the resulting learning process.

It is generally accepted that the implementation and development of CA has been one of the most difficult changes brought about by adaptation to the EHEA, while at the same time a key, though controversial, aspect of the adaptation process itself. Indeed, there is no agreement on how CA in higher education is defined and how lecturers should implement the new assessment procedure.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to provide evidence on how CA has been defined in the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course taught at the University of Barcelona, which was one of the pilot diploma programmes for implementing EHEA guidelines¹. We present evidence that there has been a progressive acceptance of CA by lecturers. However, our results also show a high degree of dispersion on what is understood as CA and this differs widely from one subject to another. While some lecturers assess class participation and attendance, others do not. In some subjects there is a final exam as well as the assignment of various activities during the term, whereas in other subjects there is no final exam. Our main conclusion is that there is no homogeneous interpretation of CA. This raises some doubts: is it necessary to establish (minimum) common guidelines for assessment in a university degree course or, should lecturers be free to define CA themselves? In light of this dispersion of criteria, do students have a clear idea of what CA is and what its aims are?

To address these issues, the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the methodology and the sources of information used to achieve the study's objectives, and briefly defines what is understood by CA; Section 3 describes the results obtained regarding the assessment process as defined by lecturers

¹ In the first stage of implanting EHEA guidelines, during the 2002-2003 academic year, the University of Barcelona selected a small number of degree courses in which to implement a pilot scheme for adapting to the new regulations. These would serve as a guide for other courses, in what was labelled a convergence process. One of the programmes selected was the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course, a diploma course comprising 184 credits which has been offered by the University of Barcelona's Faculty of Law since the academic year 1991-1992 (see Solé, 2009). In 2004, this course also received the recognition of the Catalanian Government's Department of Universities as a pilot experiment for EHEA adaptation.

teaching in this diploma course; finally, Section 4 highlights the main conclusion reached and presents some questions for further research.

2. Objectives and methodology

To analyse the student assessment system in the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course and to present an in-depth analysis of CA in this course, we have drawn on the information contained in the Teaching Plans (hereafter, TP) of the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic years. Since the academic year 2005-2006, each subject taught in the course has had a TP which describes the subject's learning objectives, content, main references and reading lists, as well as the methodology that the lecturer will follow and the evaluation strategy to be employed. It is important that students are fully informed of the evaluation strategy they will encounter for each subject and that this information is reflected in the TP's.

With regard to the introduction of the TP, Solé (2009) pointed out that it "highlighted the lack of a profound reflection on the goals of learning, and proved the need to continue working on the renewal of teaching methods and the improvement of evaluation criteria". It is interesting to note that while these TP's have been improved over the years, there is still the need to continue working on their improvement; for example, matching the various activities proposed with the learning objectives and the assessment system. For the purpose at hand, however, they generally contain the relevant information on the assessment process which is to be applied in each case. Considering that the TP's are created at the beginning of each academic year and that they can be changed from one course to the next, we have included two academic years in our study to ascertain whether there is an evolution in the definition of CA over time.

To obtain the data required for the present study we have analysed and formalized all the information regarding student assessment that was contained in the available TP's. We have analysed, in all, 66 of these: 33 for each academic year (more than the 60% of total subjects taught).² We have studied the programme's compulsory courses separately, to determine whether there is any differentiating pattern when defining CA in those courses that must be taken by all of the students. Finally, the TP's contain information regarding CA as well as information on an alternative assessment system, Unique Assessment (UA), which can be implemented exceptionally for students who cannot attend lectures (see next section).

It is generally accepted that CA can take different forms: for example, daily work (essays, quizzes, presentations and participation), project/term papers and practical work (e.g. laboratory work, fieldwork, clinical procedures, drawing practice). It is also supposed that CA is spread throughout the term rather than concentrated only at the end, as in UA. As presented by the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning (CDTL) of the National University of Singapore (<http://www.cdtl.nus.edu.sg/Handbook/assess/types-cont.htm>), CA is intended to be formative, process-oriented, informal, internal, learner-involved, and/or self-referenced in nature. In this handbook, three main types of CA are defined:

- i) Daily work is likely to be the most sustained means of assessment, and, by providing relatively prompt feedback, it serves to reinforce or correct learned responses. Moreover, it assists in pacing the students' learning and giving them regular feedback on what they have mastered (and what they need additional work on). As the most extensive means of assessment, it has a sustained impact on and improves the quality of student learning. Daily work has some drawbacks, however: it is highly labour-intensive (for both students and lecturers), and can lead to cheating by students (e.g. plagiarism).

² The Public Administration and Management Diploma Course has 52 subjects: 17 compulsory, 23 optional and 12 free-choice.

ii) Projects/term papers allow the lecturer to assess students on their ability to collect data/information, to undertake independent study and enquiry, to integrate theory and practice and to work with others when the project involves teamwork. In the case of teamwork, it is difficult to ensure parity of involvement in the project by all members of the team (as it is difficult to assign individual marks to students working on a group project).

iii) Finally, practical work (less common in a diploma programme such as the Public Administration and Management course) allows the lecturer to assess the assimilation of practical skills by students and provides a measure of their ability to relate theory to practice.

Using this typology as a benchmark, we have defined eight types of CA evaluation that can be found in the TP's; that is, eight tasks that lecturers consider as being part of CA:

- A **global test** is a final test (theoretical and/or practical) usually done at the end of the term. This task is very common and can be understood as an inheritance from the former evaluation system, which was based completely on a global test. It is usually combined with other tasks, and can be a powerful tool to see if the feedback given to the students has been well-taken.
- **Mid-term exams** are theoretical or practical tests commonly done during the term³.
- **Exercises and case studies** consist of practical exercises or analytical case studies that students are assigned to do, normally in class. This type of task, if programmed weekly, is similar to daily work and enables a sustained assessment of students.
- **Essays** are written assignments handed in by students and involving reading, comprehension and reasoning of a text.
- **Teamwork** consists of a final essay usually done throughout the term by several students working together.
- **Oral presentations** correspond to the performance of students when expounding an essay and/or exercise in class.
- **“Various activities”** comprises those tasks defined by lecturers in a rather vague manner. The activities are not clearly defined and, *a priori*, it is not possible to know the type of activity that students will be required to do.
- **Student progress** relates to the student's attendance and the interest shown in class.

Obviously, the tasks defined as being part of CA do not all have the same properties for achieving assessment objectives, and this is a first result of our study: the high volatility in defining CA. Note that one difficulty encountered when preparing this paper was precisely that of summarizing the many different activities which are used by lecturers as CA in these eight categories. This has been done to obtain quantitative results (see next section) from which conclusions can be drawn.

³ When analyzing the information contained in the TP, we were surprised that some lecturers defined, as part of CA, mid-term exams that eliminate part of the subject. That is to say, if the mid-term exam is passed, this material is not assessed again. We believe that these kind of tasks are not in accordance with the aims of CA, and prove the need for lecturers to better understand what CA is and what it is useful for.

3. The assessment system: some quantitative results

Since 2006, CA has been considered the usual form of student assessment in the Public Administration and Management Course. As the regulations of the University of Barcelona establish that all students must have the right to be examined, UA is also provided, in special consideration in those students who cannot attend classes. Therefore, at the beginning of the semester, students must choose whether they will follow CA or UA.⁴ We will next describe in detail how CA and UA have been defined within the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course.

In this section we present the main results obtained from our analysis of the TP's; in other words, how lecturers understand both CA and UA. The results for two academic years – 2007-2008 versus 2008-2009 – are compared. We also distinguish results for the course's compulsory subjects to determine whether there is any different pattern observed for those type of subjects.

3.1. Continuous Assessment (CA)

As previously stated, analysis of the TP's has resulted in the definition of eight different tasks considered by lecturers as CA. Generally, more than one activity is specified as being part of the subject's CA. Figure 1 presents the number of different activities used to define CA. It is interesting to note that lecturers generally specify more than one activity, and that this fact has become more relevant: whereas during the academic year 2007-2008 36.4% of courses (12 in total) defined only one activity as constituting CA, this percentage sharply decreased in 2008-2009 to only 3% (in only one subject was only one task defined as CA). Moreover, during the academic year 2008-2009 the vast majority of lecturers have used three different activities to assess their students. The same pattern is likewise observed when considering only compulsory courses. These results seem to point to a better definition of CA, one that has evolved over time.

⁴ Students should justify their choice. The main reasons for following UA instead of CA are work (inability to attend lectures and correctly follow CA) and overlapping with other subjects.

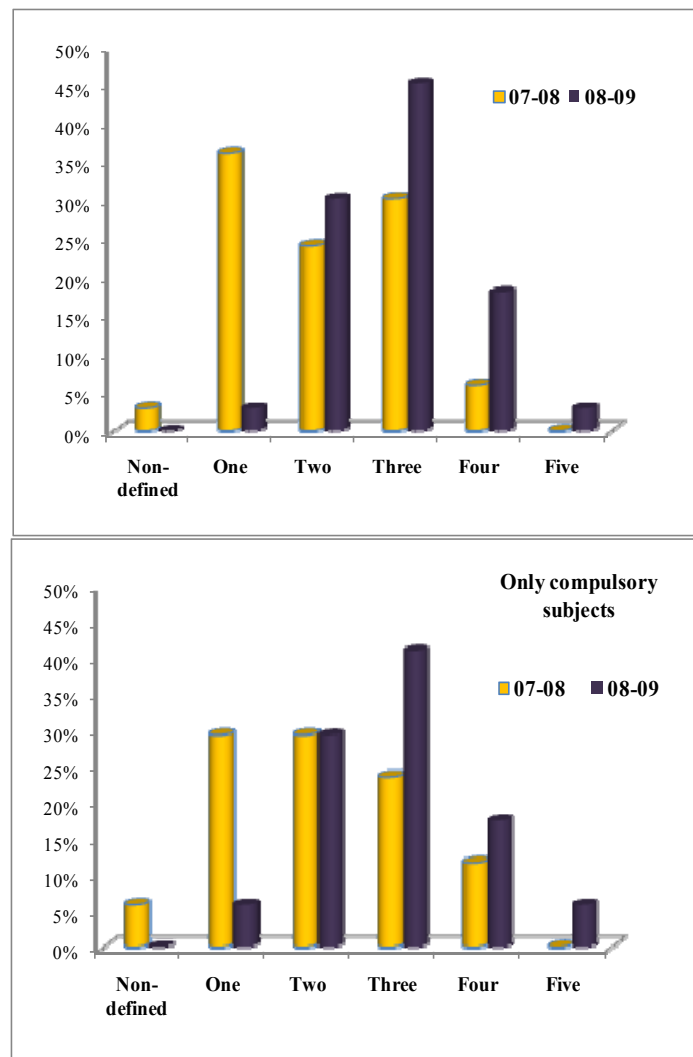


Figure 1: Number of different activities used to define CA

Tables 1 and 2 provide the full list of subjects analysed and the type of CA implemented. These tables also present the weight given to each specified task (rows add up to 100%), providing a full guidance on how CA was defined and performed during those academic years. Note that for the academic year 2007-2008 (Table 1), the most frequent⁵ category was “various activities”, which is precisely the most ambiguous. As mentioned before, this category does not give helpful information on CA since lecturers did not specify the activities that students must complete, the weight they have within the total mark, and so on. After this category, “global test”, “mid-term exams”, and “exercises and cases” were the most common. It is interesting to note, however, that the “oral presentations” category, which assesses a generic competency,⁶ was not used by any lecturer as part of CA.

⁵ Used by 18 subjects out of 33.

⁶ We refer here to the students’ communicative ability, focusing attention on how the students understand and express themselves both orally and in writing, see UB (2009; p.15).

| Subject | Type | Global test | Mid-term exams | Various activities | Exercises & case studies | Essays | Team-work | Oral presentations | Student progress |
|---------|-------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Opt. | | 70% | 30% | | | | | |
| 2 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 3 | Opt. | 60% | | | | 20% | | | 20% |
| 4 | Opt. | | 50% | 40% | | | | | 10% |
| 5 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 6 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 7 | Opt. | | 75% | | | | 25% | | |
| 8 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 9 | Opt. | 25% | 50% | 25% | | | | | |
| 10 | Opt. | | 40% | | 40% | | 20% | | |
| 11 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 12 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 13 | Opt. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 14 | Opt. | | 60% | | 40% | | | | |
| 15 | Opt. | | | | 30% | | 60% | | 10% |
| 16 | Opt. | 50% | 30% | | | | 20% | | |
| 17 | Comp. | 30% | 30% | | 40% | | | | |
| 18 | Comp. | 25% | 50% | 25% | | | | | |
| 19 | Comp. | 60% | | 40% | | | | | |
| 20 | Comp. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 21 | Comp. | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 22 | Comp. | 80% | | | 20% | | | | |
| 23 | Comp. | 60% | | 40% | | | | | |
| 24 | Comp. | 40% | 40% | | 20% | | | | |
| 25 | Comp. | 50% | 30% | | 10% | 10% | | | |
| 26 | Comp. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 27 | Comp. | | | 100% | | | | | |
| 28 | Comp. | 70% | | 30% | | | | | |
| 29 | Comp. | | | | 100% | | | | |
| 30 | Comp. | 50% | | | 10% | 10% | 30% | | |
| 31 | Comp. | | 85% | | 15% | | | | |
| 32 | Comp. | 50% | | | 40% | | | | 10% |
| 33 | Comp. | | | 100% | | | | | |

Table 1: Activities defined as CA by subject, 2007-2008⁷.

If we turn to the 2008-2009 academic year (Table 2), the results are different and present remarkable changes. First, the number of subjects using the “global test” as a part of CA has increased notably, to 28 out of 33 courses; that is, 94.1%. Second, the “exercises and case studies” category has increased from 11 subjects to 17, the second category which was used more in the year 2008-2009. This result is in line with a reduction in the category “various activities” (from 18 to 16) but, more importantly, also with the

⁷ For subject 21, despite its being compulsory, there was no activity defined as part of CA.

reduction of its weight in the total mark (note that there is no subject with a 100% in this category, and in only 3 subjects is the weight of this category over 50%). Furthermore, in this academic year lecturers used more categories to define CA in each subject.

| Subject | Type | Global test | Mid-term exams | Various activities | Exercises & case studies | Essays | Team-work | Oral presentations | Student progress |
|---------|-------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Opt. | 40% | | 25% | 35% | | | | |
| 2 | Opt. | 40% | | | 30% | 30% | | | |
| 3 | Opt. | 60% | 20% | | | | | | 20% |
| 4 | Opt. | 40% | 20% | 30% | | | | | 10% |
| 5 | Opt. | 50% | | | 50% | | | | |
| 6 | Opt. | 40% | 30% | | 15% | 15% | | | |
| 7 | Opt. | 50% | | 50% | | | | | |
| 8 | Opt. | 40% | | 60% | | | | | |
| 9 | Opt. | 40% | 35% | 55% | | | | | |
| 10 | Opt. | | 40% | | 40% | | 20% | | |
| 11 | Opt. | | 60% | 20% | | | | | 20% |
| 12 | Opt. | | | 75% | | | | | 25% |
| 13 | Opt. | 50% | | 50% | | | | | |
| 14 | Opt. | 40% | 20% | | 30% | | | | 10% |
| 15 | Opt. | | | 50% | 40% | | | | 10% |
| 16 | Opt. | 50% | 30% | | | | 20% | | |
| 17 | Comp. | 40% | 25% | | 25% | | | | 10% |
| 18 | Comp. | 40% | | 30% | 30% | | | | |
| 19 | Comp. | 50% | | 50% | | | | | |
| 20 | Comp. | 40% | 20% | 10% | | | | | 30% |
| 21 | Comp. | 60% | 30% | | 10% | | | | |
| 22 | Comp. | 60% | 30% | | 10% | | | | |
| 23 | Comp. | 60% | | 40% | | | | | |
| 24 | Comp. | 40% | 30% | | 30% | | | | |
| 25 | Comp. | 40% | 30% | | 15% | 15% | | | |
| 26 | Comp. | 55% | | 45% | | | | | |
| 27 | Comp. | 40% | 40% | | 20% | | | | |
| 28 | Comp. | 60% | | 40% | | | | | |
| 29 | Comp. | 40% | | | 60% | | | | |
| 30 | Comp. | 40% | | | 15% | 5% | 30% | 10% | |
| 31 | Comp. | 40% | 40% | | 20% | | | | |
| 32 | Comp. | 50% | | 40% | | | | | 10% |
| 33 | Comp. | | | | | | 100% | | |

Table 2: Activities defined as CA by subject, 2008-2009.

Thus, it seems that lecturers have made an effort to improve their CA definition: by being more specific in their activities, increasing the number of tasks performed during the term as part of CA, decreasing the

weight given to unspecified activities and, in turn, clarifying the assessment process for the student. Figure 2 presents a breakdown of the tasks which lecturers specify in their TP's as being part of CA.

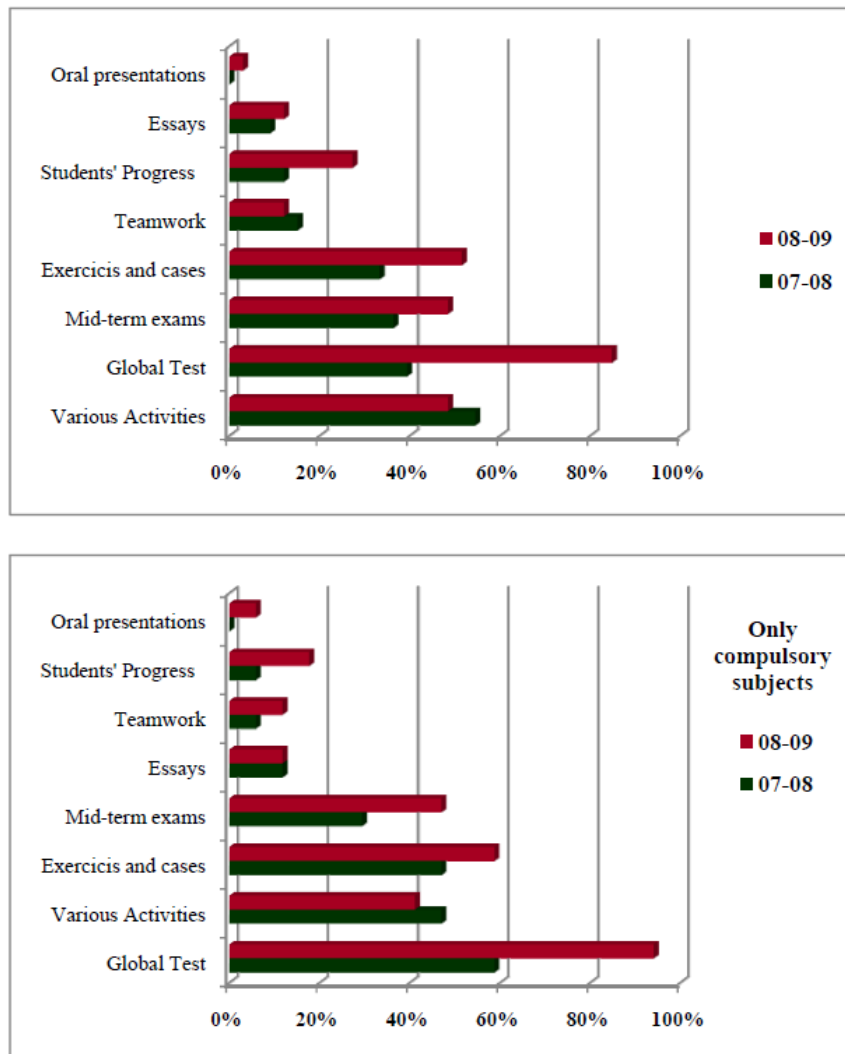


Figure 2: The use of different activities

It is interesting to note from Figure 2 that the number of lecturers who use “student progress” as part of CA has increased: from 12.1% in 2007-2008 to 27.3% in 2008-2009. Furthermore, this increase has been mainly observed in compulsory courses, which are characterized by overcrowding (from 90 to 120 students per class). This kind of assessment can be difficult, as it requires small groups in which students feel confident to participate and lecturers can get a good idea of their performance. At this point, it would be interesting to ask those lecturers who included this form of assessment in their TP about the experience, but this is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. It may be seen as an easier activity for the lecturer as it requires less effort (in terms of time). In any case, this kind of assessment introduces a certain degree of subjectivism in the marks which are finally given to the students.

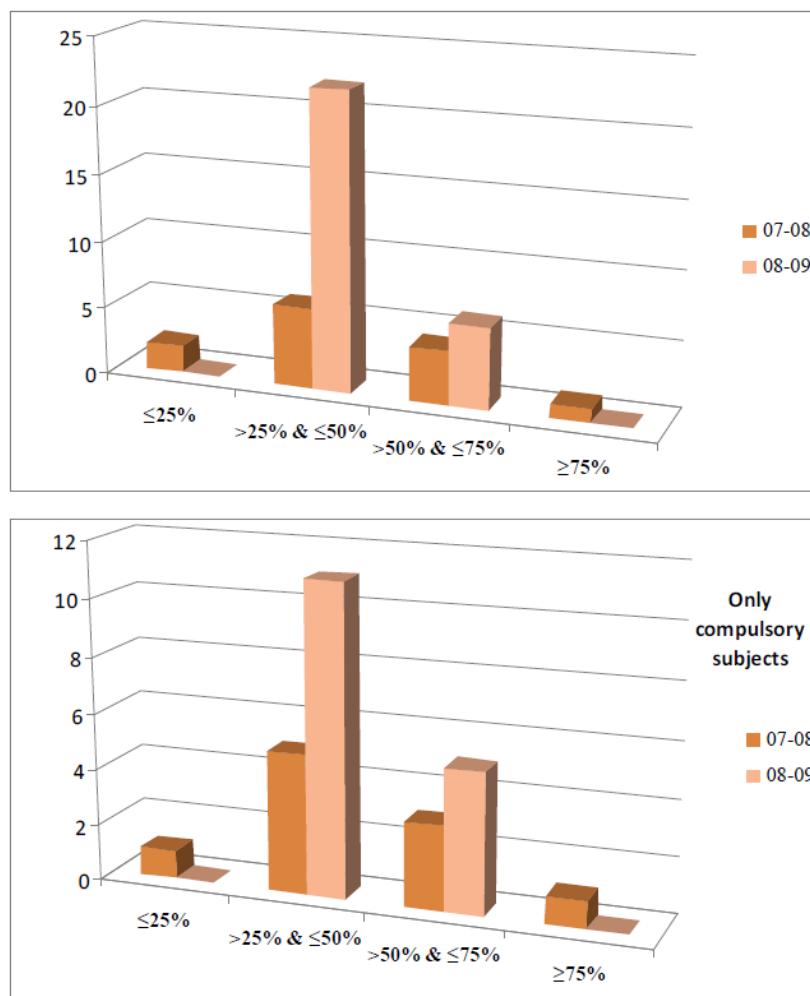


Figure 3: Weight of the global test in the final mark

When compulsory courses are distinguished, it is found that “various activities” is more frequent for optional courses, as a greater effort seems to be made for compulsory subjects in defining precisely which tasks constitute CA.

Given the high number of subjects in which the global test was used as part of CA (especially in 2008-2009) it is important to analyse the weight given to this task. This information is presented in Figure 3. For all courses in the year 2007-2008 (this task is specified as part of CA for 13 courses), the distribution of weight is dispersed ranging from 25% to 80%. During the course 2008-2009 there was a convergence towards a weight in the range 25%-50%, the mode being 40%. Therefore, in this academic year more courses have used the global test as a tool for assessment and with a more homogeneous weight, indicating that CA is perhaps homogenizing and that lecturers tend to define more common tasks as CA.

3.2. Unique Assessment (UA)

At this point, when CA has been broadly characterized, it is interesting to turn to the other type of assessment that can be chosen for the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course. UA is designed for those students who cannot attend lectures (see footnote 3).

| Subject | Type | Course 2007-2008 | | | Course 2008-2009 | | |
|---------|-------|------------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | | Global test | Other activities | Not defined | Global test | Other activities | Not defined |
| 1 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 2 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 3 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 4 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 5 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 6 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 7 | Opt. | 75% | 25% | | | | X |
| 8 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 9 | Opt. | 100% | | | 75% | 25% | |
| 10 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 11 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 12 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 13 | Opt. | | | X | 100% | | |
| 14 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 15 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 16 | Opt. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 17 | Comp. | 100% | | | 70% | 30% | |
| 18 | Comp. | 100% | | | 70% | 30% | |
| 19 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 20 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 21 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 22 | Comp. | | | X | 100% | | |
| 23 | Comp. | | | X | | | X |
| 24 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 25 | Comp. | 80% | 20% | | 70% | 30% | |
| 26 | Comp. | | | X | 60% | 40% | |
| 27 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 28 | Comp. | | | X | 100% | | |
| 29 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 30 | Comp. | 80% | 20% | | 70% | 30% | |
| 31 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 32 | Comp. | 100% | | | 100% | | |
| 33 | Comp. | 75% | 25% | | 75% | 25% | |

Table 3: Definition of UA by subject, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

The information presented in Table 3 shows that in this diploma course UA is associated with the traditional final examination (global test). Cases in which UA is defined as tasks additional to the global test are few (4 courses in 2007-2008 and 7 courses in 2008-2009). The weight of the “other activities”

category in the student's global mark ranges from 25% to 40%. Note that those courses in which UA is defined as a global test plus some other activity are generally compulsory (3 out of 4 in the year 2007-2008 and 6 out of 7 in 2008-2009). In any case, a student who chooses UA will most usually be assessed by a global test.

These results seem to indicate that there is still room to introduce the possibility of evaluation by means of "other activities", and not only by a global test, even in the UA alternative.

4. Conclusions

The fact that the Public Administration and Management Diploma Course was chosen as a pilot programme for the implementation of EHEA guidelines at the University of Barcelona provides an opportunity to assess how one of the EHEA's main pillars – Continuous Assessment (CA) – has been implemented. The main purpose of this paper has thus been to analyse the student assessment system used in this diploma course and to present an in-depth analysis of CA for this programme. The information is taken from the Teaching Plans (TP) which are made by course lecturers at the beginning of each academic year. The analysis was carried out for two academic years, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, to determine whether there has been any evolution over time.

Our results can be summarised as follows. First, the vast majority of lecturers in this diploma course define CA as a set of activities done throughout the semester. We can conclude that CA is extensively used in this particular programme of studies. However, we observe that there is no homogeneity of criteria: different activities and different weights assigned to each task are used, depending on the subject. Moreover, some activities are vaguely defined as "various activities", and are therefore uninformative, i.e. not properly described to the students at the beginning of the academic year. From the results obtained, it seems that there is no common perception of CA, its main objectives or its overall aim.

Second, it seems that there is a tendency for the definition and use of CA tools to improve over time. If during the course 2007-2008 there were many subjects using "various activities" as part of CA, during the year 2008-2009 this type of undefined category was reduced and the global test extended as an important item (with a mean weight of 40% of the students' overall assessment).

Third, the most common tasks used by lecturers in CA are – apart from those undefined "various activities" – the global test, exercises and case studies and mid-term exams. This type of tasks should be well designed in order to accomplish the aims of CA. This is especially true of "mid-term exams", which, at the end of the day, seem similar to the global test as an assessment method.

Fourth, Unique Assessment (UA) is generally perceived as being a global test. Consequently, there is room to introduce other assessment tools for those students that cannot attend classes due to conflicts with their work schedules or for other reasons. IT may be able to help in this area. Currently, by means of the "virtual campus", the lecturer can follow the participation of students, give them assignments, and request that some activities be handed in (e.g. by uploading files).

There is still plenty of work to do in the so-called "Bologna process", although the time remaining until its real implementation is running out. The present study highlights the need to explain to lecturers what exactly CA is, what its aims are and how it can be effectively implemented. Obviously, the nature of the subject taught determines the type of CA used; however, there is a wide range of tools that can be used for its proper implementation.

In any case, our results also point out the ways that the definition of CA is progressing through time, and how things are moving in the right direction. Lecturers seem to be following a process of “learning by doing” as they adjust to the new EHEA guidelines.

Further research into this topic is needed. More precisely, we want to go more deeply into two important aspects of CA. On the one hand, we want to relate student performance with the definition of CA, to see if there is any correlation between student marks and the type of CA used, i.e. the student’s workload throughout the semester. In relation to this, we would also like to evaluate the students’ and lecturers’ satisfaction with the CA they are receiving or performing. On the other hand, we would like to determine whether CA has been defined as assessing not only the learning objectives for each course but the abilities students must eventually acquire.

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