

INSIGHTS FROM TEACHING EUROPEAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION TO NON-ECONOMIC STUDENTS

Nicolae MARINESCU¹

Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to identify, analyze and assess the main challenges, difficulties and benefits of teaching European economic integration to non-economic students. The paper draws on evidence from a series of courses delivered within the framework of a Jean Monnet European Module to students registered in different faculties of Transilvania University of Brasov. The results of the teaching activity can be measured in terms of the number of students participating in the lectures and tutorials, the quality of their exam papers and essays submitted for evaluation as well as the share of students finally graduating the Module.*

Key words: *European integration, education, Jean Monnet Module.*

1. Introduction

The educational programmes initiated by the European Commission have been brought under the umbrella of the wider Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) since the 1st of January 2007.

The Lifelong Learning Programme enables individuals at all stages of their life to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe. [5]

Included in the LLP is the Jean Monnet programme, which deals with the dissemination of European integration aspects worldwide. Activities that compose the Jean Monnet programme are grouped in Chairs, Centres of Excellence, Modules, Information and Research activities as well as different forms of support for institutions, professors and researchers in European integration.

One such European Module is presently unfolding in Transilvania University of

Brasov (implementation period: September 2007 – August 2010). Its aim is to promote knowledge, discussion and development of new ideas about the evolution of the European integration process, in particular among students. [6]

2. Objectives

The aim of the paper is to identify, analyze and assess the main challenges, difficulties and benefits of teaching European economic integration to non-economic students. Specific objectives include presenting the organizational aspects of the teaching activities, the range of methods used for teaching, the difficulties encountered in sharing knowledge about the European integration process to the audience, the positive aspects related to the involvement of students in the unfolding of lectures and tutorials, as well as the assessment of the

¹ Department of Marketing, Tourism and International Relations, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

results that emerged from the teaching activities.

3. Evidence

The Jean Monnet European Module called "The Evolution of European Integration" addresses students who do not automatically come into contact with European integration studies. Its direct target group consists of students of Transilvania University of Brasov, registered in five different faculties: Technological Engineering, Wood Industry, Medicine, Languages and Psychology-Pedagogy. [1]

Apart from this Module, these students would not come across any European integration aspects along their curriculum during faculty years. But, what does integration mean?

In one of its simplest definitions, economic integration is defined as the elimination of economic frontiers between two or more economies. [3]

What happened in the European Union during time has gone way beyond this definition, encompassing a large array of policies in various fields of interest.

Accordingly, literature on this subject has grown very fast. Molle (2006) observes: To students of the economic integration process per se this abundant specialist literature is inconvenient. Indeed, as economic integration touches ever more areas of society, more and more people are confronted by the bewildering complexity of the functioning of the EU. [2]

To put forward such a complex subject as European integration, with its history, mechanisms and way of functioning to non-economic students is not tiny feat.

Students had to acknowledge first the importance of their own country's accession (i.e. Romania) to the large European family formed by the European Union. As Tache and Marinescu (2007) put it, the new member states have not

only joined the European Union, they have been effectively returned to Europe. [4]

From getting acquainted to the main aspects of European integration as a whole, at macroeconomic level, students were introduced to the understanding of EU's consequences at microeconomic level, in specific areas (industry, agriculture, trade, culture, environment, competition etc.).

A total of 42 hours of teaching per academic year were dedicated to this Module for each faculty, comprising 28 hours of lecturing and 14 hours of tutorials.

Most of the difficulties encountered during teaching the subject were related to the fact that the specialty the students were registered in was sometimes a topic far away from their usual curriculum. These difficulties were overcome by convincing students of the multidisciplinary appeal of European integration, with its impact in all areas of activity and by the way the classes were carried out.

The interactive manner of delivering the lectures and tutorials, based on debates and role-plays, analysis of case studies, preparation of written essays and stimulating students' opinions were considered by students a modern approach to teaching, and, subsequently, met with enthusiasm on their part.

Another important factor in attracting students to the Module resided in the choice of topics. Some of the lecture topics that aroused a great deal of interest referred to the possibility of writing a project to obtain funding under various EU-programmes, the study opportunities offered by the EU to young people in all member states, as well as the opportunity to work for several EU-institutions, but also the impact of Romania's integration in the EU in specific sectors.

The tutorials comprised applications of EU-projects and team-work based on assessing the effects of the implementation of EU-norms. To be even more appealing, some of these were tailored to the specific field of study of the participating students.

4. Results

The results of the teaching activity related to the Jean Monnet European Module can be measured according to various criteria. Examples for such criteria include: number of hours taught, number of students attending the Module, number of essays submitted for evaluation, quality of submitted essays and exam papers and number of graduating students.

In the specific case of the Jean Monnet European Module “The Evolution of European Integration”, a total number of 210 hours has been taught per year of implementation, composed of 42 hours for each of the five targeted faculties.

As for the participation of students in the Module, they registered for the course at their respective faculties’ offices in large numbers, but only those were retained for the whole course which proved real interest in European integration issues and in the lectures, by means of consistent attendance.

During the academic year 2007-2008, a total of 223 students attended the course, while the number dropped a bit for the academic year 2008-2009, to 198 students (see Table 1), the pool of available students being lower for the second year of implementation. Still, both figures exceeded the proposed attendance in the project (125 students per year), the Module having thus a larger impact than expected, on a higher percentage of students in Transilvania University of Brasov.

The large number of participating

students from the Faculty of Languages is explained by the fact that, whereas in the other 4 faculties, the course was offered as optional, in this case it was an elective course for students of the second year (to be chosen alternatively to another complementary subject) and all students opted for the European integration course.

In order to graduate the Module, students had to submit an essay and deliver a written exam. Almost 80% of them lived up to the task of submitting a valid essay for each year of implementation. About the same percentage of students managed to pass the written exam. Of all the submitted essays, around 5% were rejected due to plagiarism or inadequate compliance with the guidelines stated at the beginning of the course. Thus, the quality of the submitted essays can be considered relatively high.

The topics of the essays were wide-ranging and showed an interest in various policy areas of the European Union.

Some of the participating students did not submit an essay at the end of the course; others did not pass the exam, both ways leading to failure to graduate the Module.

The Module was graduated by 170 students in the first year and 148 students in the second year. As an average for the first two completed implementation years, around 75% of participating students graduated the Module, which is a rather good result compared to the average situation of passing exams registered in the university.

Attendance of students in the Jean Monnet Module

Table 1

Number of participating students	2007-8	2008-9
Faculty of Technological Engineering	35	29
Faculty of Wood Industry	27	34
Faculty of Medicine	26	27
Faculty of Languages	98	83
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences	37	25
Total	223	198

5. Conclusions

Summarizing the teaching activity inside the Jean Monnet European Module, one can conclude that it definitely reached its proposed objectives for the first two years of implementation, namely informing students who do not automatically come into contact with European integration about the EU, its institutions, governance, waves of EU enlargement; getting them accustomed with basic mechanisms of the EU and its policies; fostering teamwork between students and assessing their ability of understanding the main aspects concerning European integration.

The fact that the students participating in the Module are registered in non-economic faculties has rendered the task of teaching European economic integration more difficult. The many facets of the EU, the opportunities it offers as a complex subject and the up-to-date character of most of the issues compensate for the shortcomings, though. The modern way the teaching activity is carried out, is also an important factor in reducing negative bias.

Due to the interactive character of the classes, where students are encouraged to express their ideas, one of the far-reaching outcomes of the Module is the development of recommendations and building blocks for improved policy-making in all types of Romanian administrative bodies. As students will share information about the workings of the EU and possibly many of the graduates will confront themselves with the *acquis communautaire* in their area of work, either public or private, they will apply

their knowledge in the field of European integration. The extent to which they will have the opportunity to do this in their future careers, only time will tell.

Acknowledgements

This paper embodies results generated by the specific teaching activities of the Jean Monnet European Module, Agreement n. 2007–1501/001–001 JEA JECHA, concluded between the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission in Brussels and *Transilvania* University of Braşov. The author is grateful to the above mentioned organizations for the support offered for the implementation of this Module.

References

1. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency: *Grant Agreement for an Action. N. 2007-1501/001-001 JEA-JECHA*, Bruxelles. 2007.
2. Molle, W.: *The Economics of European Integration*. Aldershot. Ashgate Publishing, 2006.
3. Pelkmans, J.: *European integration*. Harlow. Pearson Education, 2006.
4. Tache, I., Marinescu, N.: *Istoria construcţiei europene (History of European Construction)*. Cluj-Napoca. Dacia Publishing House, 2007.
5. http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/index_en.html. Accessed: 24-03-2010.
6. <http://econ.unitbv.ro/jm2/pag/index-in.htm>. Accessed: 05-04-2010.