

European First Year Experience Conference 2019 (EFYE 2019)
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Session Title

Analysis of an adapted reduced programme for First-Year students who didn't make a good start in Higher Education. A case study lead in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Liège.

Biographical details for each speaker

Céline Tonus, DVM, PhD in Veterinary Sciences, obtained a specialised Master in university and higher education pedagogy. She works as pedagogical advisor for professors and assistants teaching first-year students in veterinary medicine at Liège University. She is also part of the ULiège MOOCs' team and active in online education.

Pascal Detroz, PhD in Education Sciences, is a lecturer in the Institute for Research and Training in Higher education (IFRES) of the University of Liège (Belgium), and is notably expert in the field of assessment

Laurent Leduc, PhD in Education Sciences, is an assistant lecturer in the Institute for Research and Training in Higher education (IFRES) of the University of Liège (Belgium), and the coordinator of the 'Feedbacks First-Year Project'

Statement of how the session links to the conference theme(s)

In this presentation, we interpret the specific decretal opportunity given to Freshmen from the French-speaking area of Belgium to break their First Year into two, as an assumption of our legislator that making a good start is actually so crucial in Higher Education that students who were not able to do so in the first place - and failed in most of their very first courses - should receive a second chance of performing (quite) well which would be less demanding and would take the form of a remediation program thus limiting the number of courses to complete. Our case study questions this idea.

Summary

This communication describes an application of Belgian decrees allowing First Year students to follow a reduced First-Year programme, here consisting in adapted remediation activities in Veterinary Medicine at the ULiège, and presents the results of a qualitative research investigating its effects on users' perceptions described as factors of success in the literature.

Abstract

Following the entry into force of the 'Decree defining the landscape of Higher Education' in the French-speaking Community of Belgium (18-12-2013), the opportunity is given to First year students to break their first academic year into two and receive a reduced curriculum, thus reflecting a legislator's awareness of the need to support First Year students in reaching a certain level of success during this crucial transitional phase of their studies. More specifically, at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Liège, each First-Year student, is offered the option to sign an agreement for a reduced program during the second quarter (according to the 'Decree related to the studies of Veterinary Sciences', 13-7-2016) including a maximum of 35 ECTS and comprising all the courses of the first quarter.

Since very limited studies exist on such reduced programs as possible vectors of integration or as success factors, this communication aims to present the results of a research investigating the positive and negative perceptions of a group of students who experienced an accordingly adapted curriculum during the academic year 2017/2018. For each of the five courses constituting their second quarter program, those students have benefited from original remediation activities (including various formative evaluation activities, methodological support, online assignments and theoretical revisions) designed by the concerned faculties with the help of a pedagogical advisor (also available to offer an adequate follow-up to those students in the context of an ULiège FYE project called 'Feedbacks 1st Year').

Among the fourteen First Year students who chose to sign the agreement (with all its implication in terms of waiving various aspects of their First-Year cursus), ten agreed to join the assessment process of this program, taking part in semi-directed interviews. The interview data were then analyzed thematically using NVivo qualitative analysis software in order to explore students self-reported behaviors and perceptions positively / negatively related to the studied program : reflective and self-regulation abilities (Nicol, 2009), sense of controllability (Viau, 2005), perceived quality of interactions with both faculties and peers (Tinto, 1993), judgements of competence and task difficulty (Wiegfield & Eccles, 2000).

Since several of the analyzed factors are described as predictors of further engagement or performance of students according to the literature, those results (as the experience itself) could be both inspiring and transferable to various kinds of adapted First Year programmes aiming to give students a second chance to make a successful transition from high school to university.

Main Message of the Session

“After this session the participant will know/have experienced/have gained...”

After this session, the participant will have discovered how a group of First-Year students (who have experienced an unsuccessful first start in their university studies) perceive themselves, their level of integration, their abilities and their chances of success after having followed the various activities of an alternative reduced programme of courses, supposedly aiming to give them another chance to achieve a good transition from high school to university.

Keywords

Curriculum design

Research on First-Year Experience

Transition from School/College to Higher Education