

Hard vs. soft skills- are European Universities providing graduates with both?

Alexandra Samii, Giulia Chighini, Yolanda Rother

In the past decade, there has been much talk about change: change in the climate, change in global governance, and change in the future of employment. Universities have been undergoing some change, as well. With the infamous Bologna process, the education system of European universities has reached a revolutionary standpoint in making higher education not only compatible, but also comparable.

European students of the UNICA 2010 conference in Rome took the notion of comparing their universities quite literally and weighed out the essentials of today's education. In forum 10, the students analyzed the hard and soft skills of education, bearing in mind that theory and practical experience must always go hand-in-hand. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

Extra-curricular activities to be seen as co-curricular activities: credits-validation for these activities

Soft skills should be integrated within the university curricula by different means. First of all, teaching methods should be improved. Teachers should include in their classes an inquiry-discovery learning process. By asking questions to the students and by giving them practical cases to solve, can make classes more dynamic and not just a static lecture by a teacher. Teachers are experts in their fields, but it is not enough: they must also develop skills to explain the concepts to the students by making classes alive. This should be an essential part of their job. To support this development, classes should be evaluated by the students but also by external experts at the end of the school year.

Moreover, extra-curricular activities that are linked to the curricula should be taken into account for the final diploma. Student projects such as National Model United Nations, for example, should be credited. But also, internships should be included within the curricula and the final evaluation should take account of that. Also class oriented student organisations on campus should also award credits. Thus, when getting the Bachelor degree, all these projects will have been taken into account by the teachers, and students are rewarded for their hard work not only within the class room, but also out of it. By graduating from universities, students would not only develop hard skills but also become problem solvers and leaders in their field thanks to the implementation of soft skills in the curriculum.

In addition, in the selection for Erasmus exchanges, not only marks should be taken into account but also soft skills, such as communication skills, capacity to adapt and adjust, to work in groups, to make presentations, to study in a new language and to integrate into a new university environment. We would like these criteria to be added to the European universities selection process for students.

The aim is that soft skills count in the credits that we get from class. This means a change of culture within the academic system. Teachers are not only passing knowledge but also creating leaders of tomorrow, by making classes interactive, encouraging student projects for which they get credits at the end of the year. Learning should evolve from something static to dynamic, and soft skills should not only be introduced in courses but also be evaluated in the curriculum. But this implies a change of mentalities in the academic community. With the Bologna process a student-centred approach should have been introduced within the

classes. Instead, in practice, in many cases the Bologna process has only reorganised classes without making a substantial change within European universities. Therefore we want to encourage all academic staff to accept this change of culture by really making a substantial change within the curriculum and by really applying what universities have signed in the Bologna declaration.