

Workshop on the Future of European Studies in Asia

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ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

Developing an e-Learning Curriculum in European Studies: the Belgian experience

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The presentation starts with the assumption that through the use of e-learning, the existing distance between, on the one hand the European Union (EU), its structures and policies; and on the other hand the citizen, can be reduced.

This was the objective set by the Institute for European Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussels, when developing the e-learning tool (named “e-modules”): increasing the knowledge about the EU and its policies with non-specialised audiences, in order to reduce the discrepancy between knowledge about the EU and the impact of the EU. It helps the users identify the relevance of EU integration to citizens.

The presentation will show how the e-learning tool implements the set objective.

The tool sets out three objectives for the student: to learn, to understand, and to be able to apply.

The methodology used is that of “learning through association”. This means that the student is guided through the learning materials and being offered the possibility to expand his or her knowledge on a given topic by studying related topics and referencing tools. At the same time, the student is always brought back to the original study material, preventing non-structured absorption of information and an information overload.

To achieve the same aim, the guiding principle in developing the content can best be summarised with the catchphrase “need to know” versus “nice to know”. This difference determines the type of information that is made available to the students by the teacher/content administrators. “Need to know” is what is considered to be essential information to understand the topic at hand, “Nice to know” is information and materials that help to see the “need to know”-content in a wider frame, and see horizontal connections with other issues.

This system starts from an “information tree” on any given subject, which can easily be extended and/or customised depending on the user. The student can also decide to divert from the suggested structure to increase his or her own level of proficiency through the extra materials offered.

The e-modules also include an assessment- and progress tool; thus allowing the users to track their progress in the different modules. The assessment is based upon set questions with different degrees of difficulty. These questions are linked to pages and chapters allowing students to obtain feedback on their answers.

In the development of the tool, a great deal of attention was given to user-friendliness for both the user (student) and content administrators.