

IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LEARNING AT BUSINESS LAW COURSE

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ABSTRACT: The development of information and communication technologies brought the application of computers in education in a new form of learning - eLearning. During past few years, at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences (FOS), many researches, on the possibilities and the acceptance of eLearning process, were made. The research results were positive, and the students showed great interest in using eLearning during their studies. Within this paper, the application of eLearning at FOS, especially at the Business Law course, will be presented. Applying eLearning on Business Law course opened great new possibilities for students through enabling new methods and techniques of education that combine the strengths of classroom form of education with eLearning tools. Some of the different elements that were combined to form an eLearning mixture were: information and communication technologies, interaction, learning resources, collaborative and individual learning, formal and informal learning, and support.

KEY WORDS: Education, E-Learning, Information communication technologies, Business Law, Research, Knowledge, Internet.

INTRODUCTION

eLearning is a general term covering many different approaches that have in common the use of information and communication technologies. Terms and concepts are very new and often different languages and jargon is used to describe similar approaches. This can make it difficult to understand what is involved in the learning program. eLearnig includes the delivery of learning at distance from a tutor or an institution, but it can also add a degree of freedom to more traditional programs, for example, allowing online discussion groups to accompany lecture programs. Some common terms which may occur are: online learning, computer based learning, blended learning, learning objects, learning resources, distributed learning, interactive learning materials, computer mediated learning, computer mediated communication and web based training¹.

Out of all mentioned terms, our practice on FOS was mostly based on the application of blended learning and computer-based learning. Blended learning as the combination of face to face education with eLearning tools, computers and Internet changed the entire teaching process and learning in the classroom, as it is stated below²:

¹ Clarke A: "e-Learning Skills", Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

² Rosenberg M: "E-learning – Strategies for delivering Knowledge in the Digital Age", McGraw-Hill, 2001.

1. The classroom is no longer the default delivery system;
2. Synergies between eLearning and classroom learning becomes more refined - Creative combination of eLearning and classroom learning becomes central to a successful learning architecture, each contributing its unique value;
3. There is less teaching and more facilitating - As classroom learning moves from teaching fact to applying concepts, and from reviewing procedures to generating new ideas, the role of instructor changed from the all-knowing "sage on the stage" to more of a "guide on the side". In addition to the instructor/facilitator, knowledge comes from a greater variety of sources, including the corporate intranet (every classroom should have Web access), the learners themselves (as they form knowledge communities), and outside experts (either live or via technology);
4. There is more reliance on original source materials - "Student guides" now can be Web-accessible so they can be updated easily. The two major benefits are: first, it is much more likely to be accurate and comprehensive, and second, through the use of these materials in the classroom, the students will learn how use and value them on the job;
5. Course start and end dates will become increasingly irrelevant in the future.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ELEARNING AT THE BUSINESS LAW COURSE

The objective of application of eLearning was to improve the quality of education of students through better access and delivery of educational content and services, as a support for existing course, and a transformation of a passive role of students into active. At Faculty of Organizational Sciences in 2005 the research on students opinions on applying Distance learning program at Faculty of Organizational Sciences was conducted. In that research 500 students were questioned (16,6% were first year students, 14,6% were second year students, 23,6% were third year students, 28,8% were fourth year students and 15,4% were final year students). One of the objectives of the research was finding out whether students were interested in using Internet for learning, and the number of students that have access to Internet and the willingness to use it on daily basis. The results of the research were:

- Great number of student use Internet every day (49,2%),
- 85,8% of students use Internet for learning,³

No matter that the research was mainly focused on distance learning, it was a fabulous starting point as most of the students already use Internet without any formal obligation to do so. This was a good sign that they will have a positive attitude to new form of learning.

To facilitate eLearning, eLearning environment had to be created on a LMS platform. Chosen platform was Moodle (at the website www.elab.net/moodle), as it is open source and user-friendly. This environment now contains several elements: courseware with other learning and supporting materials, online support and online assessment.

Learning resources

Learning resources often play a significant role in eLearning. Materials may take variety of forms depending on the course and approach taken. For the purposes of Business Law course following online materials were created:

³ Anđelković J, Milosavljević G: "E-learning as support for traditional education", 8th Toulon-Verona Conference on Quality in Services, 08.09.-09.09.2005., University of Palermo, Italy.

- Study Guide provides guidance to students about how to obtain most from the course, details of assessment and good practices (course info, contacts, themes for student papers, projects and assignments, grading scale, etc);
- Instructional Material “Guide to eLearning in Business Law” is a practical manual for students in eLearning usage (how to register, read and upload assignments, discuss in forums, etc);
- Resources which are simply available on the world wide web (relevant web pages, downloadable files and databases);
- Traditional learning materials are available online (eContent): eBook, legal documents, lecture notes, handouts, case studies, assignments, workshops).

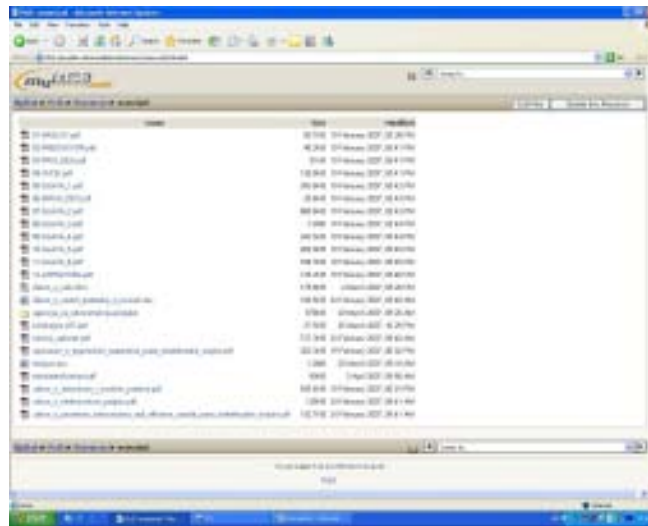


Exhibit 1. eContent

During semester, most activities students had to accomplish were online:

- Case studies/Workshops – in classes students worked in teams in a computer equipped classrooms on a real problem related to weekly topic of the course. Cases were put on web site and students had to upload a solution in the form of a single file;
- Research activities – students investigated a topic by searching the web, eJournals and online databases and judging the quality of web sites;
- Quizzes – students had the opportunity to take quizzes in class or from home and asses their gained knowledge;
- Glossary – each student was obliged to define two terms related to the course during semester.



Exhibit 2. Glossary

Grading of students and assessing their level of knowledge during semester is mostly realized online. Only partial and final exam papers are still in paper form and are being graded traditionally.

Online Support

Online support is organized through e-mail, news and forum.

- Each student got a new username (in the form SurnameName06@myelab.net) and a password for course registration. This made communication between students and with lecturers much easier and just-in time;
- News section has all relevant information regarding course events: deadlines for assignment submission, weekly and monthly activities, guest lecturers timetable and partial/final exam dates;
- Forum section is for student discussions: searching for team members, discussing current lectures, literature, giving opinions about the course, etc.



Exhibit 3. Forum section

Online Assessment and Evaluation of eLearning Activities

Assessment and evaluation of eLearning activities was mainly focused on students (i.e. did they learn what they were supposed to, did they like the course) and on the quality of the course itself. Students filled in the questionnaire regarding their opinions on classes, eLearning process and gained knowledge during classes. They had to give their answer with grading scale from 1 to 5. As questionnaire was on voluntary basis, only 67 students answered it.

Some of additional written comments regarding eLearning implementation were:

- “Original, brave and for compliments all the way!”
- “Best words for the site and forum (it remains to wait and see how students will accept the new working methodology).”
- “Business Law classes are a true adventure.”

The most interesting questions regarding eLearning were:

- Please grade entire teaching process on the Business law course (Average grade: 4.43);

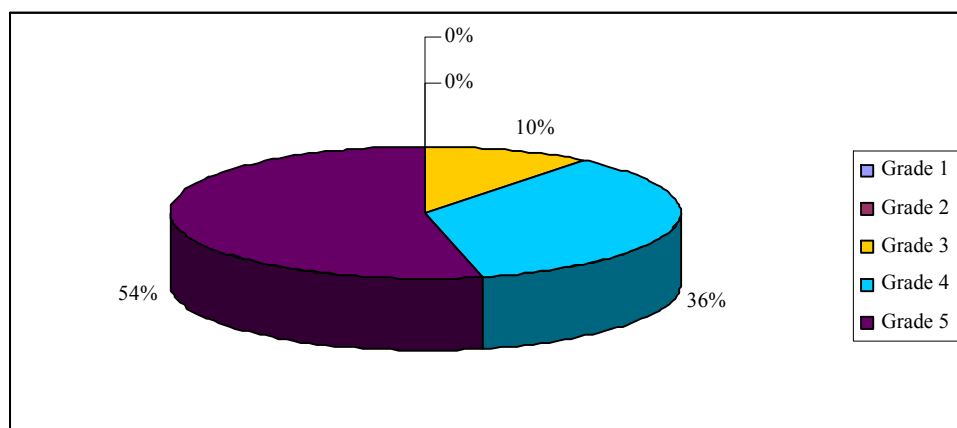


Exhibit 4. Teaching process grading

- Please grade eLearning with Moodle (Average grade: 4.25);

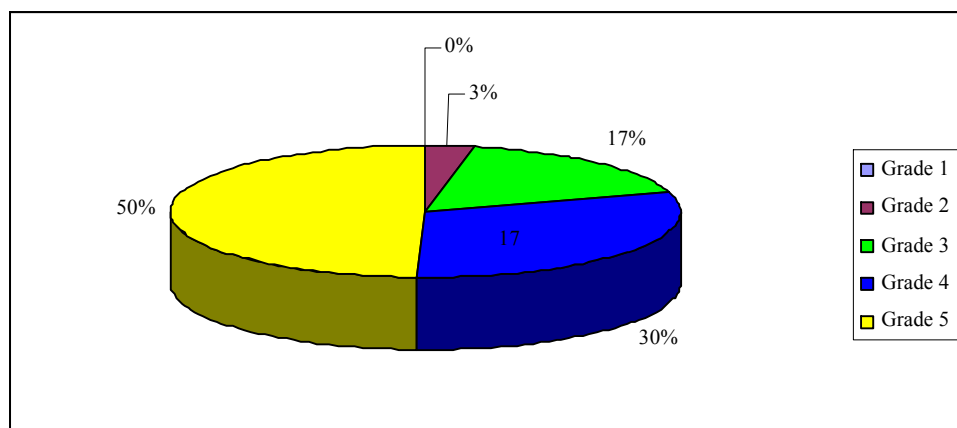


Exhibit 5. eLearning grading

- Would you prefer to have more eLearning opportunities in the future?
(Average: 80%);

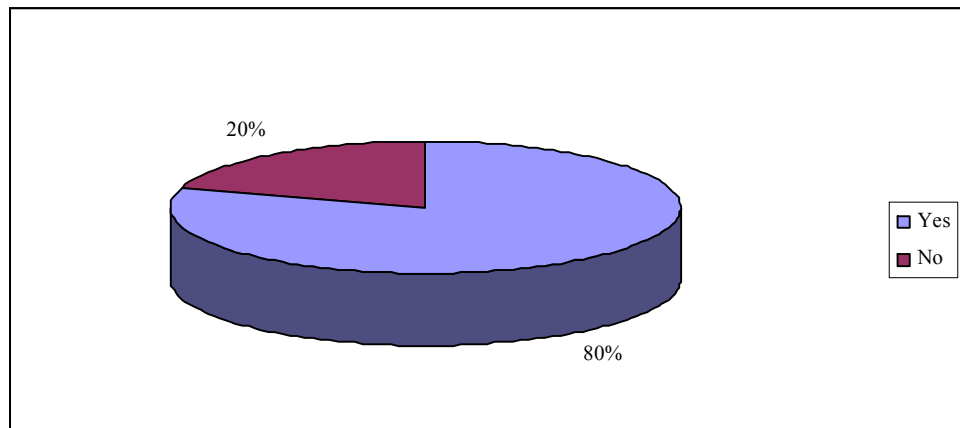


Exhibit 6. eLearning opportunities grading

CONCLUSION

Learning results were outstanding and most important are:

- Increased interest in the course content (small number of absentees, more questions to lecturers);
- Developed computer skills (Internet, e-mail, document management);
- Fostered collaborative learning (group assignments, teamwork);
- Improved quality of learning (high grades during semester and on final exam - out of 140 students who were engaged in eLearning process, 132 passed the exam at the end of semester).

There are many other forms of eLearning activities that could be engaged for Business Law course in the future, as it is preparation of new learning materials (videos of student presentations and lectures, examples of projects, interactive learning materials, articles, newspaper cuttings, multimedia components, simulations, etc). Likewise, eLibrary will be formed containing eBooks in Business Law and national and international legal acts. Increasing the number eLearning activities that future generations of students will have to complete is planned with eWorkshops, eDebates, more formative and summative tests, quizzes, revision notes, exercises, individual and teamwork assignments. Set of frequently asked questions will be also prepared. Managing of eLearning environment is a never-ending process and the ending of this project is only a beginning.

LITERATURE

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4. Business Law Course, www.elabnet/moodle