A B-Learning Methodology Case for Faculty at High Education

Lina García-Cabrera, Engineering School, Department of Computer Science, University of Jaén, Jaén, Spain

Ildefonso Ruano-Ruano, Escuela Politécnica Superior de Linares, Department of Telecommunication Engineering, University of Jaén, Jaén, Spain

José Ramón Balsas-Almagro, Engineering School, Department of Computer Science, University of Jaén, Jaén, Spain

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present teaching case was made at the University of Jaén, Spain, and was concerning to the experience of conducting an innovative b-learning course for the faculty, entitled "Advanced ILIAS e-Learning". The lessons learned by a group of teachers involved in e-learning were allowed for the course design and implementation. Specifically, the course was designed following the good practices that contribute effective e-learning, including a study-guide for virtual courses which assures quality specific criteria. The course combines conventional classroom work, online activities (web-conferences and class-recordings) and e-learning. It was organized into independent modules which were freely chosen by attendees depending on their needs. The course could be repeated by attendees as necessary to achieve modules and to deepen or improve previously acquired knowledge. The outputs of the experience reflected that b-learning modality was the best option for the academic staff, and therefore, this model should be used by institutions.

Keywords: *B-Learning, E-Learning Design, Faculty Training, Learning Management System, Lifelong Learning, Web Conference Software*

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

This blended learning (b-learning) experience was conducted at the University of Jaén (UJA), Spain (http://www.ujaen.es). The origins of the University of Jaén goes back to the foundation of the University of Baeza in 1538 in the early modern period, acquiring an extensive experience up to 1993 when it finally became an autonomous institution.

The University of Jaén has a wide academic offer which includes more than 40 degrees in the areas of: Humanities and Education, Experimental Sciences, Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Law and Engineering. Nowadays, the university has seven Faculties and Colleges, 36 departments and it has over 1465 faculty and staff members, with over 729 full time professors and 270 associate professors and 3 Research Centers. It could be argued about the faculty that the 26% has a technical background and 26% a science background, the rest of the faculty has humanities, social and legal background (Memoria Académica, 2011, pp. 342,

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344-354, 576). Currently, there are almost 16000 regular students at the University of Jaén: 16% Humanities and Education, 5% Experimental Sciences, 4% Health Sciences, 48% Social Sciences & Law, and 27% Engineering as shown in Figure 1 (Memoria Académica, 2011, pp. 527).

The course presented in this work was intended for academic staff at the University of Jaén and it was organized by the Teaching Innovation Office. This Office offers training courses to promote educational innovation and to retrain teaching methodologies for professors at the University of Jaén. 40 courses have been offered during academic year 2010/11, in which 910 professors have taken part (Memoria Académica, 2011, pp. 358).

University of Jaén stakeholders were earlier aware that teaching needs at university have radically changed in the last few years (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), mainly in the way students have to face their studies, due to the improvement of active learning methods and encouragement of autonomous learning techniques.

The increasingly embracing of online education by institutions of higher education has been one of the factors that has most contributed to this change. A recent survey of 2600 higher-education institutions has reported that in 2010, 6.2 million students were enrolled in online education courses. Online education program enrolments represented about 30% of the post-secondary total, and this share is expected to rise to 37% by 2015. Nowadays, almost two thirds of for-profit institutions say that online learning is a critical part of their long term strategy. Moreover, 67% of academic leaders rate the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face education. The 21% growth rate for online enrolments far exceeds the 2 percent growth in the overall higher education student population (Marketdata Enterprises, 2011).

In 2010 at least 98% of Spanish universities had implemented, or were implementing, specific e-learning support units. In fact, e-learning technologies use is becoming more widespread and the consolidation of initiatives to promote this type of teaching is observed. Thus, in 2011, 91.78% of academic staff uses Learning Management Systems (LMS) and the percentage of students using it increased to 90.87% (CRUETIC, 2011).

Innovation and ICT Development Office at the University of Jaén was a pioneer in this regard and was conscious of the essential role that LMS could play in knowledge-intensive organizations (Grace & Butler, 2005).

Figure 1. UJA students distribution by areas. Source: prepared by the authors on the basis of obtained data