The UDC Senior University program: teaching and learning in times of pandemic

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This oral presentation explains how Senior University at the University of A Coruña (NW Spain) was adapted to the blended teaching-learning model in the 2020/2021 academic year, as a result of the emergency situation brought about by COVID-19.

The first question that had to be addressed was the extent to which our students would be willing to stay on and, if so, if they would have the tools and skills to work towards blended learning. Along similar lines, we wondered if teaching staff would also accept this transition, especially as they were probably overwhelmed with the last-minute changes taking place in their degree and post-graduate work. The response was very satisfactory, since 74% of the students who answered the survey expressed their willingness to continue teaching on-line. In addition, it was found that most of the students had adequate tools, such as a desktop computer, laptop or tablet. We also asked teachers about their willingness to teach on-line, to which 95% of them answered yes. This was our starting point for organizing the Specific Training Program "Current Events, Science, Health and Life", in which almost 400 students from the two campuses (A Coruña and Ferrol) were finally enrolled. The program combined on-line sessions of 16 subjects through institutional tele-teaching tools (Moodle and Teams) and more than 60 face-to-face conferences and seminars, with capacity limits and health measures.

All in all, the Senior University management team, teachers and students were very satisfied with the blended teaching-learning model. As for the management, it was necessary to reprogram teaching, adapting tools and spaces. Fortunately, we were able to count on the full support of the UDC IT and management services in the creation of teaching groups, adapting the platforms to our needs, and solving technical problems. As for the students, they felt they were not left unaccompanied and inactive. Moreover, the pandemic offered an excellent opportunity for some of them to take the leap towards the new technologies and incorporate them into their daily lives. The computer offered them an open window onto the world of culture, knowledge and social relations. Although they obviously admit having had computer problems at the beginning, in general, they say they adapted well thanks to the support of the technical and administrative staff of the Senior University and the professors of the Computer Science subject, as well as their families. As for teachers, a great effort was made by them in adapting their materials to and teaching in an on-line format, but they feel that it was worth it due to the fact that the students had acquired digital competences so that the teaching-learning process could continue in the emergency health situation. An effort was also made by the IT teachers in providing training sessions and on-line tutorials; but they also positively acknowledged that students had not only adapted to new technologies, but they had done so surprisingly quickly.

Consequently, although the present academic year has seen a return to face-to-face teaching, an on-line program continues running for those who did not wish to go back to the lecture hall or who wished to stay on-line.