

Reasonably Engaged

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) - a medium-sized university with around 13,000 students and 3,000 staff - has been a pioneer in public engagement for over 25 years. For example, VUB has founded the Science Shop initiative in Flanders: a project connecting civil society organisations with (student) research in 2002. Currently, VUB acts as the coordinator of all Science Shops throughout Flanders and Brussels and so far has worked with some 450 civil society organisations while delivering around 250 research reports. The Brussels Science Shop – located in the science outreach office of VUB’s Research department - has been involved in several European projects and is coordinating the H2020 Science With And For Society EnRRICH project until March 2018. More information: www.vub.be

Training in CBR

Reasonably Engaged is a multilingual and interdisciplinary optional course for MA & 3rd BA students and a lectures and event cycle for the broader public, aiming for critical reflection about big societal issues. Each year there’s another central topic: in 2016-2017 it was “migration”, in 2017-2018 it’s “opportunities and impact of new technologies”. Reasonably Engaged wants to build bridges between academics, working field and the public. Students that have registered for the course work together in multidisciplinary student teams on research questions submitted by CSOs. They are challenged to formulate an innovative solution or opinion. Information is provided on the one hand during public activities: lectures, debates and workshops, in which academics, researchers, professionals and citizens highlight the themes from

a specific perspective and / or scientific domain. These activities take place at various locations outside the campus and are open to everyone. On the other hand, students must actively seek additional information in literature and by consulting experts. The second semester is concluded with an interactive exhibition on which the final products of the student teams are presented, which also is a jury moment.

The ‘CSL/CBR’ process consists of 2 modules of 8 weeks. At the start of the first module the students choose a project and are divided into teams by the supervisors. For each module there are 3 public activities (lectures) and 5 tutorials, in which the teams are assisted in processing the information provided during the public activities, the analysis and orientation of the project assigned to them, presenting their results and reflecting on the learning process. They collect and process information and formulate answers, findings, conclusions to the questions asked. At the end of the module, students submit a final report. Final findings are processed in an end product that is presented for the entire group. Students opting for the 6SP program will receive 2 SKILLSlabs on which they will receive substantive frameworks and workshops with regard to (a) the interdisciplinary group work and (b) opinion-forming



Redelijk Eigenzinnig

Nadenken over Mens en Maatschappij

Een keuzevak het overwegen waard

3 of 6 studiepunten - lezingen & debatten
interactief - in hartje Brussel

communication. Starting from an initial situation analysis, the students formulate individual learning objectives and learning tasks. An individual portfolio is kept for the documentation of the learning process that has been completed.

Learners and trainers profiles

The course is open to all VUB 3rd BA & MA students who are interested. In 2016-2017 27 students enrolled, with very diverse profiles – from social sciences to engineering students. The next academic year, 2017-2018, this number increased to 45 students, also because the course was compulsory for philosophy students.

Two educational supervisors (with a background in educational studies) support students with the orientation of the projects, the processing of the supplied information and the interdisciplinary group work. They are guided by an academic supervisor. Furthermore, the VUB Science Shop is involved as a mediator between the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the course coordinators. The Science Shop has launched a call for projects and is the first contact point for the selected CSOs.

Capacity building

Academic learning outcomes:

- students distinguish, know and respect different positions in scientific debates
- students critically reflect on the arguments presented in the debates
- students can take their own position with regard to the debates
- students are able to independently collect scientific arguments to ground their points of view
- students can share their opinion with a wider audience
- students are able to collaborate in a group with interdisciplinary character

Social learning objectives:

- students have insight into social actors working on the topics covered
- students have insight into the needs of various target groups
- Students have insight into possible forms of personal engagement
- students involve the acquired knowledge on their own (study) expertise and environment

Personal learning outcomes:

- students are able to design and use a personal development plan
- students are interpersonally competent: they use relevant conversation skills and techniques,

enter into professional relationships with various actors, take responsibility for the group work and work according to the agreements and procedures agreed in the team.

- students are reflective: they reflect systematically on their own behavior and involve the feedback from others, know how to improve their own competence (development), work on their own development in a planned way and are open to other visions and ideas
- students are communicative: they are able to convey a clear, well-founded and debated position to a wider audience

Conclusions and Future actions

Students show enthusiasm about the direct involvement of CSOs in the project work, they are happy to support communities and to do something societally relevant. Furthermore, they get to know the working field, the social actors and actual societal issues. On the other hand it's not easy to combine CSO needs with curriculum needs. While the focus of the educational supervisors lies on the student development and improved skills, the main focus of the Science Shop is on providing useful research results for the CSOs. Furthermore, a course like Reasonably Engaged is rather limited in time and ECTS to deliver big reports to the CSOs and it is bound to academic semesters, which can be different from the preferred timing of the CSO.

At the end of the 2nd semester of academic year 2017-2018, we'll evaluate the course with all involved parties (students, CSOs, supervisors, Science Shop) and decide on the approach of next year. But most likely, the first and close collaboration between the VUB departments of education and research will continue and only improve. Recently, two new internal VUB projects on Community Service Learning and Community Based Research have been approved, which will hopefully only increase the student/CSO impact and CSO network and will encourage even more lecturers/supervisors to collaborate with community partners.

Colophon / Contact

Editors:

Jozefien De Marrée
Vrije Universiteit Brussel
R&D - Science Outreach Office
email jozefien.De.Marree@vub.be
www.enrrich.eu
Twitter: @EnRRICH_EU

Disclaimer:

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