

Case Study

Reasonably Engaged: reflecting on human-kind & society

Activity

Reasonably Engaged is a multilingual and interdisciplinary optional course for MA & 3rd BA VUB students and a lectures and event cycle for the broader public, aiming at critical reflection on big societal issues. In 2016-2017 the central topic was “migration”, in 2017-2018 “opportunities and impact of new technologies”. Students enrolled in the course are working in interdisciplinary teams on a research question/issue from a Brussels CSO. In that way Reasonably Engaged is building bridges between academics, students, the city of Brussels, the working field and the public.



Methodology

The course is built according to the principles of community service learning (CSL) and community based research (CBR). Students work together in multidisciplinary student teams on the research topics submitted by CSOs. They are challenged to formulate an innovative solution or opinion. During open lectures, debates and workshops academics, professionals and citizens highlight the themes from particular perspectives. On the other hand, students must actively seek additional information in literature and through consulting experts and their own studies.

Learning outcomes

ACADEMIC: Students distinguish, know & respect different positions in scientific debates, critically reflect, share their viewpoints with a wider audience, are able to collaborate in an interdisciplinary group

PERSONAL: students are able to draw up & use a personal development plan, are interpersonally competent, are reflective and communicative

SOCIAL: students have insight into social actors, into the needs of various target groups, into possible forms of personal engagement, they include the acquired knowledge in their own (study) expertise and environment



Conclusions

Through the community projects, students get in touch with real societal issues in the city of Brussels, while collaborating with a wide variety of social actors, using their academic background and improving their communication, problem-solving and collaboration skills (among others). Through this they become more familiar with the city and its residents, the academic domain and its researchers and they also learn shaping and justifying their own vision and opinion while respecting all others.

Trainers' & Learners' profiles

The course is open to all VUB 3rd BA & MA. In 2016-2017 27 students enrolled - with very diverse profiles, in 2017-2018, this number increased to 45 students. Two educational supervisors support the students, guided by an academic supervisor. The VUB Science Shop acts as a mediator between the CSOs and the course coordinators and is the first contact point for involved CSOs.

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