

My master class in: **Public Management (2018/19)**

An experience of innovation by means of a “radical” flipped-classroom approach

A synthesis of the class’ approach

This document describes the characteristics of the class I realized in the academic year 2018/19. This is the result of a designing activity that started three years earlier; so many features of the course today were already present in previous editions of the class (and others will be replicated or slightly changed in the a.y. 2019/20).

The class is organized as a (almost complete) flipped-classroom: in other words, I do not give lectures during the teaching hours, but use that time for different activities, such as teamwork, class discussion (Q&A), etc. – see details later.

The class has a single teaching slot every week, which lasts 4 hours. In this time slot, the activities are organized as follows:

- The first part is dedicated to a synthesis of key theoretical and methodological issues (I coordinate this activity, and students actively participate)
- The second part consists of teamwork, to be realized working on a Case Study. Each student is part of a group of 3 or 4 students, every week they are encouraged to rotate.
- The third part is devoted to discussing the results from teamwork – two of the groups present their results to all the classroom, and then all the class discusses.

Every weekly meeting is preceded by two main activities:

- 1 week before the meeting, the students receive the material by me: (i) a powerpoint with key issues about the theoretical argument (each theoretical argument is a chapter in the class’ manual), (ii) the link to download the case study, (iii) a powerpoint with my comment to the case study
- Also, the students receive a list of interesting questions that they have to answer about the chapter and the case study during the teamwork (in the in-presence meeting)
- Lastly, the students are encouraged to actively participate to the discussion in the website’s forum, which is the space for Q&A. Students must post their questions to the Forum every week, two days before the meeting. I post my answers and comments the day before the meeting.

The Class consists of 10 modules (weeks). The Syllabus of the course indicates mandatory and additional teaching materials for each module, so the students can start collecting materials in advance and have an idea of the overall effort at the beginning. The core material is a Manual I have selected for this class: Hughes O.E. (2018), *Public Management & Administration – An introduction* (fifth edition), Palgrave. A very important issue here is that

each module corresponds to a specific chapter of the manual, so the students can follow the theoretical argument in a very linear and coherent way. Each Module is assisted by a Case Study that must be studied as an example of practical application of the core contents discussed in the theoretical section. I use Case Studies from Harvard Business Schools; all of them deal with practical applications to the public sector, in various areas of the world (this year, the Cases were about some public institutions in USA and UK prevalently). In addition to the Cases we mandatorily use during classes, I also provide a list of additional cases I suggest as a possibility to gain confidence with the topics and enlarge knowledge of specific issues.

After the first half of the Class (say, after 5 modules) I release an Assignment that the students must work on and complete for the end of the course – approximately, they have 6 weeks for working on this (on top of other course's activities). The assignment is usually based on a task for elaborating the topics of the course in a critical and personal way. For example, one year it was based on a document which illustrated Public Management Reform in one country and required the students to suggest indicators for evaluating the success of such reforms. This year, the assignment consisted in a Case Writing competition in which students must write a case about the adoption of a eGovernment project at national or local level.

During the first meeting, I illustrate the structure of the class to the interested students (the class is not mandatory, indeed). I place particular emphasis on the criteria for the final evaluation: 50% is attributed to the Assignment, 25% is my personal judgment about the active participation to the class activities (for example, Forum posts, presentations during teamwork, etc.), 25% comes from an oral exam at the end of the course.

This year, I had 51 students enrolled to the class; they were around 30 in the previous years.

Major innovations and relevant aspects of the Class

In my opinion – and according to the comments received from the students – the major innovations brought by this Class – and its major relevant aspects are the following ones:

- A stimulus for engaging students in a variety of activities – moving beyond traditional lectures or case studies
- Making the students more responsible in studying before meeting the professor during the classes
- Having more time free during classes to discuss advanced issues with the professor, instead of devoting time to study basic concepts and methods
- Developing transversal skills during the Class, such as the ability of working with others, oral presentation, self-organization, etc.

Why was the initiative effective?

Which success factors influenced the success of the initiative? After a systematic reflection on my experience, and important dialogues with students and experts from METID (the PoliMi's center which supports teaching innovation), I am pretty convinced that the most important ingredients of the success are the following:

- Give credit to students' abilities and energy. When you stimulate students and you trust them – in the privileged and particular setting and conditions described above – they react very strongly. I've never had the impression that the students skipped the assignments before classes. Actually, quite the contrary: some of them studied additional materials to be readier than others in interacting and discussing.
- Course design, ex ante. The students like the idea that since the beginning they know how the Class is articulated, the various steps and initiatives, the assignment and the requirements. They understand that the course is not designed "last minute", but that any activity has its own role in the wider design.
- Evaluation criteria. The students understand that the evaluation criteria are coherent with the real objectives of the class, which are fundamentally two: (i) developing critical thinking about the important topics of the public management, and (ii) interacting with colleagues and professor about important issues for learning in a participatory way.

Evidence of results

The results from the students' satisfaction survey are very high (3.3 out of 4).

However, the most important aspects emerge from the written comments I received from the students. With the purpose of examples, I report some relevant sentences I consider very related with key features of the Class:

- "This course is very educational. It is really nice to think the lectures as discussions and thinking and sharing on topics prepared at home rather than as a powerpoint reading. I think it really incites the students to think and it is very stimulating."
- "There were a lot of work, but it was given in a way that each student could manage it according to its interest, which for the first time in my educational process, make all the sense in the world, thank you"
- "I really enjoyed the possibility for students have a 'flipped class' during the lesson by doing the presentation at a certain point of the class, according to what they discussed in the forum. It is a great value added of the course"

Annexes

Here, some materials which represent the key characteristics of the Class I described in this note – I hope they can illustrate both aspects related to the teaching activity and its planning

1. The Syllabus of the Class
2. The presentation I share with students about the “mechanics” of the Class
3. A powerpoint I prepared for one module (I have analogous presentations for all modules)
4. A powerpoint I prepared for discussing one Case Study (I have analogous presentations for all Case Studies)
5. A document that I use every week for giving instructions for the work to be done during the subsequent Module (I have analogous presentations for all modules)
6. The text that illustrates the Assignment I proposed to the students (please remember that the Assignment accounts 50% of the final grade)
7. The files of the Students’ satisfaction survey (confidential).