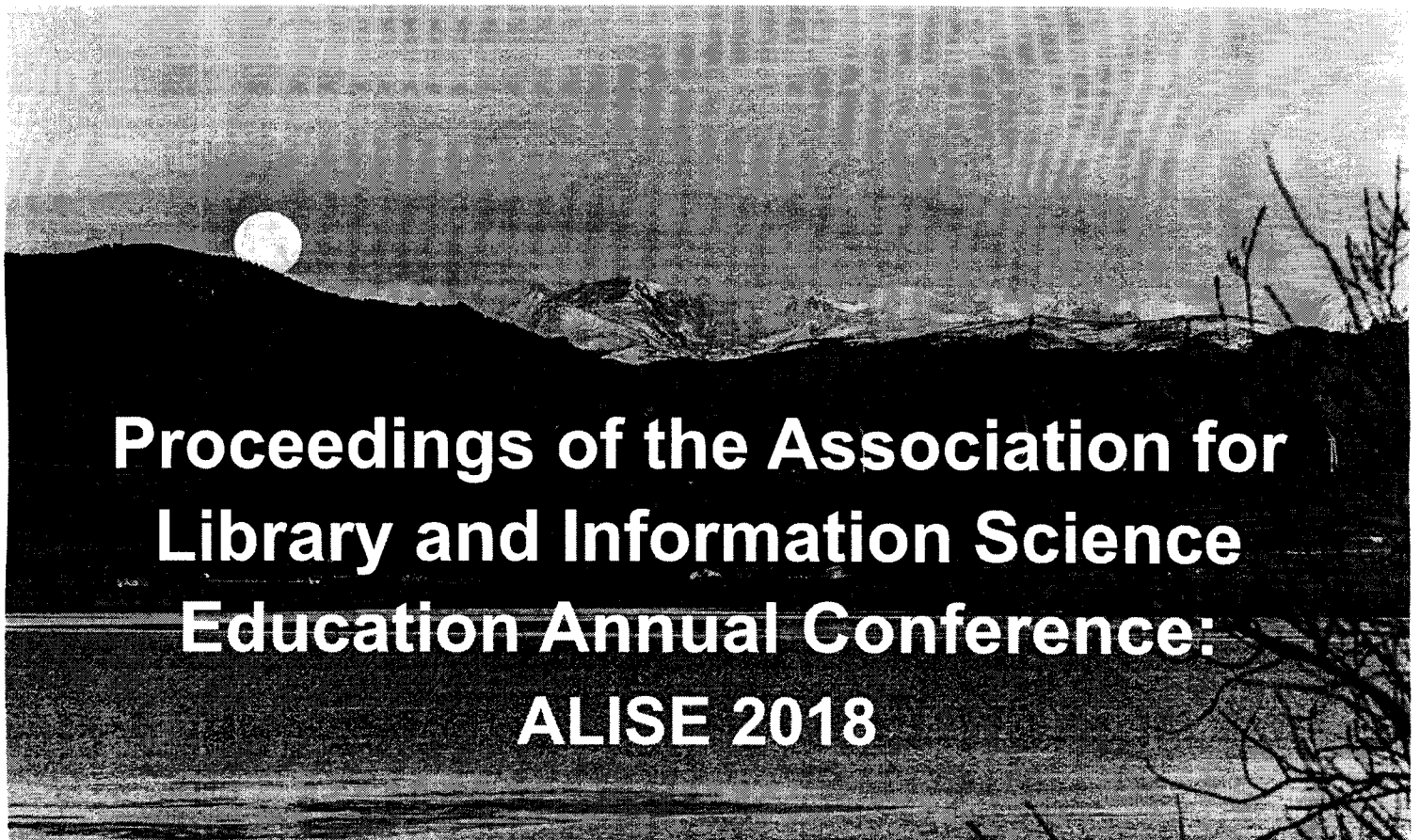




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# **Approach to Harmonization of Entry Requirements for Graduate Program in Information Science at European Higher Institutions: EINFOSE project**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Various aspects of harmonization at European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer programs in Library and Information Studies (LIS) have been studied since early 1990s. Since 2004-05 – when a project on Curriculum Development was funded through Erasmus program – up to 2016, there were no projects on education in Library and Information Science funded by European Union. The main goal of this paper is to present and discuss the results after the first year of the Erasmus plus project entitled European Information Science Education: Encouraging Mobility and Learning Outcomes Harmonization (EINFOSE).

## **TOPICS:**

Accreditation; Curriculum; Education programs/schools; Online learning; Pedagogy

## **INTRODUCTION**

The main goal of the paper is to present and discuss the results after the first year of the Erasmus+ research project entitled *European Information Science Education: Encouraging Mobility and Learning Outcomes Harmonization* - EINFOSE (<http://einfose.ffos.hr>). Special emphasis is given to one of EINFOSE project's deliverables: results from the students and teachers' evaluation of the first summer school organized as a part of the project (*European Summer School on Information Science – ESSIS*).

Various aspects of harmonization at European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer programs in library and information studies (LIS) have been studied since early 1990s. In 2005 a project, funded also through Erasmus program, resulted in the international conference organized in Copenhagen, and several articles and one e-book on curriculum development (Lörling, L. & L. Kajberg, 2005). Since then there were several attempts to conduct a follow-up study, such as the one proposed by EUCLID (*European Association for Library & Information Education and Research*) but none of them was successful. It was only in 2016 that a proposal for EINFOSE project, submitted by a group of European scholars to Erasmus+ call, was accepted for a two-year funding period (2016-2018) (EINFOSE, 2017).

The aim of the project is to study and ultimately overcome differences among entry requirements and learning outcomes in the field of Information Science (IS) at eight European

Universities, partnering institutions in EINFOSE project: University of Barcelona, Spain; University of Borås, Sweden; University of Graz, Austria; Hacettepe University, Turkey; University of Hildesheim, Germany; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; University of Osijek, Croatia and University of Pisa, Italy. These differences have been causing large mobility barriers between European HEIs that offer Master of Arts (MA) in IS and problems in recognition of learning outcomes and ECTSs (European Credit Transfer System) at the EU level.

## **CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS**

One of project's working hypothesis is that common entry requirements could mitigate or even eliminate the differences in enrolment procedures at different HEIs that offer programs in IS and might contribute to the higher enrolment of students with different educational background at the graduate level programs in IS. The project seeks to investigate how these barriers could be eliminated or lowered. To achieve this goal partners intend:

- To strengthen partnership between HEIs involved;
- To exchange best practices through seminars for teachers from partner institutions;
- To organize two summer schools in order to provide students with the basic knowledge of the IS field so they could start their MA programs in IS well prepared;
- To design and deliver online teaching and communication platform containing material for four courses as Open Educational Resources (OERs) that could later be developed as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs);
- To present the results of various intellectual activities that aim to enrich teaching and learning processes at each partner's institution;
- To provide recommendations for the harmonization of learning outcomes and their recognition;
- To strengthen the purposeful mobility at the European level.

Target groups for this project are students with a Bachelor degree, university teachers, professional organizations in the IS field and policy and decision-making authorities that are responsible for the Quality Assurance (QA) and Qualification Framework (QF) at EU and national levels. Communication between the partners and distribution of tasks are carefully planned and follow the timeline of the project. As required by Erasmus plus program, Multiplier Events are planned with a goal to involve participants from various stakeholders who could comment and suggest improvements for each of the intellectual outputs presented.

The summer schools (ESSIS 2017 was held in Katlenburg, Germany from August 27 until September 1, 2017 and ESSIS 2018 will take place in Graz, Austria in July, 2018) are seen as a unique networking opportunity, which could initiate further international (and multi-national) initiatives.

## **RESEARCH**

The study presented in this paper was conducted in September 2017, after the ESSIS 2017 was held. The data was gathered with the help of quantitative and qualitative methodology. First, participating students filled out an online evaluation survey. This was followed by in depth semi-structured interviews with three students coming from non-information science field (at undergraduate level). Students A (BA in Italian language and literature) and C (BA in business)

came from Italy, and a student B (BA in nuclear energy) from Turkey. This study tried to answer the following research questions: (1) What is the educational background of students participating at ESSIS 2017? (2) What learning outcomes did students achieve at ESSIS 2017? (3) In what (L)IS topics are students in particular interested and would like them to be addressed at ESSIS 2018? (4) How are students satisfied with ESSIS 2017? (5) What are the students' preferred teaching methods for ESSIS? (6) What should be changed for ESSIS 2018? Also, a focus-group discussion with teachers who taught at ESSIS 2018 were conducted on the last day of the summer school at the Project Management Team meeting, with the goal to evaluate ESSIS from teachers' perspective, highlighting its strengths and discussing its weaknesses and opportunities.

**A total** of 15 students (out of 22 students who participated in the ESSIS 2017) filled out the online survey (response rate 68.18%). The students were evenly distributed among partnering institutions and the majority of respondents (60%) had a Bachelor degree in a scientific area other than (L)IS (e.g. nuclear energy engineering, management engineering, language and literature, business administration, administration, civil engineering).

When asked to rate (on a scale 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest mark) the degree to which they have mastered the learning outcomes of ESSIS 2017, the respondents were quite positive, as can be seen from Table 1.

Respondents indicated that internationality of the summer school added significantly to its value (Mean 4.9). This aspect of the summer school was also visible in the interviews. Namely, all three respondents, when asked to single out what they liked most about ESSIS 2017 emphasized this "international setting", "possibility to meet new friends from abroad", and also the fact that there were many instructors coming from various institutions and countries.

**While a total** of 80% thought that the work-load of the summer school was appropriate, only 33% reported that they plan to continue working on the post-summer school assignments (on topics relevant to the four courses taught: *Advances in information science*, *Research methodology in information science*, *Principles of information seeking and retrieval*, and *Evaluation of information services*) in order to obtain additional ECTS credits.

Overall, students were satisfied with ESSIS 2017 (20% thought it was outstanding and 67% thought it was very good) and all (100%) would recommend it to their friends. In the interviews, all three students emphasized their satisfaction with the summer school – its organization and program, but also the venue and instructors. All three interviewees volunteered the information that they liked it so much that they are going to talk about it to their colleagues and recommend them to take part in the ESSIS 2018. Also, a student from Turkey added that this was his first experience at the summer school and that it was so positive that it motivated him to look for similar experience next summer.

When asked about the changes that should be made in ESSIS 2018, the students emphasized three main issues: teaching methodology, length of the summer school and scope of topics. In interviews, when asked about the topics they personally liked at ESSIS 2017, the interviewees singled out bibliometrics and data visualization (student A), text analysis and the principles of work of search engines (student B), and evaluation (student C). Although respondents indicated

that the mixture of lectures and group assignments were well suited to the format of ESSIS 2017, they noted that in ESSIS 2018 more room should be given to students' group work and individual assignments. In the interview, student B, for example, particularly liked the group work and practical assignments because he saw that as the opportunity to further connect and get familiar with other students at the school. Closely related to this, students also recommended that the duration of the next summer school (ESSIS 2018) should be a bit longer (at least five full working days) but also that short breaks should be introduced more frequently (after every 45-minutes) because they found it difficult to follow new topics for larger periods of time. Finally, when asked about the topics which they would like to be addressed (to a larger degree) at ESSIS 2018 they noted the following: big data, data mining, public library issues, heritage preservation, information organization, databases and publishing.

**Table 1. Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes	Mean
I gained new insights	4.5
I learned new tools for solving problems	4.2
I am able to better combine new knowledge and draw conclusions	3.9
I appreciate the new theories and tools, and the relevant conclusions that could be drawn from that	4.3
I improved my learning skills	3.9
I am able to solve problems in group of international students	4.3
I understand better the professional terminology	4.1

On the last day of ESSIS 2017, after the Closing Session, the discussion was held among Project Management Team and teachers, mainly in regard to the format and content of the summer school. On the teachers' side there was also a strong inclination toward the smaller number of courses offered (max. three), and the following were proposed: *Introduction to Information Sciences*, *Information Retrieval* and possibly *Evaluation of Information services*. This reduction in courses would enable better coverage of the topics for which students expressed special interest (big data, data mining, public library issues, heritage preservation, information organization, databases and publishing) and a more focused and coherent introduction to emerging trends in the field of IS.

## CONCLUSION

The study presented in this paper (online survey and in person interviews with students, and focus group with teachers) provided solid guidelines for the second summer school that will be organized as a part of the EINFOSE project. Based on the feedback given by students and teachers, it was decided that at ESSIS 2018 only three courses will be taught (focusing on fewer relevant topics), more room will be given to student assignments (individual or group work) and their active participation in classes. Also, special attention shall be given to social events and networking opportunities (both among students themselves, and among students and teachers) in this valuable international environment.

One of the main outcomes of the **EINFOSE** project in general will be the development of *Policy Recommendation for the Entry Requirements and Learning Outcomes Harmonization*. The draft of this document will be available for public discussion at the EINFOSE conference *International Symposium on the Future of Education in Information Science – FEIS* which will be held in Pisa, Italy in September 2018 (<http://feis2018.di.unipi.it>).

The EINFOSE objectives are in line with *ET2020*, especially its key priorities from the *Modernization agenda* (EC, 2011) that relate to the improvement of the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, promotion of student' and staff' mobility, cross-border cooperation and the emphasis on the importance of the "knowledge triangle". All partners involved in EINFOSE project are determined to further develop their partnership network, share experience with other colleagues, and to take an active part in the implementation of the goals of the 2013 *Communication on Opening Up Education* (EC, 2013), in particular of these goals that might result in easier recognition of digital skills and qualifications across borders.

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