

eduGI.LA

ALFA project II-0250-A-FI

White paper: Credit transfer systems

Christoph Brox – Oct 10, 2003

Working group lead: U Muenster

Working group: ISEGI/UNL

This White paper details an organizational aspect of the White paper “Introduction of Bachelor/Master”. Content of program of studies is described in White paper “Curriculum harmonization”. The White paper “Certification” bases on these three and targets to bridge the open gaps for practical mobility measures.

Status quo at project start

Credit transfer systems usually are part of the organizational framework of Bachelor and Master programs. They form the organizational basis for students exchange and certification.

Europe:

The European standard ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) is currently introduced to European universities. It targets the *quantity* of courses of studies. All courses of studies and other students` activities required by the university`s curriculum add up to 60 credits per year. The students` workload is estimated by 45 working weeks per year, which equals up to 1800 working hours per year or 30 working hours per credit (standard in Germany, differences in other countries). In addition, the *quality* of courses of studies is standardized, yet the standards are quite weak. They require teaching modules; meaning thematically focused teaching units of four to ten semester hours, finalized by some kind of success control. Still for each student exchange both universities have to compare and assure the quality in an extensive case-to-case procedure (bilateral learning agreements, transcripts of records).

The ECTS system is based on three core elements:

- information (on study programs and student achievement)
- mutual agreement (between the partner institutions and the student)
- and the use of ECTS credits (to indicate student workload).

These three core elements are made operational through the use of three key documents:

- the information package
 - the application form/learning agreement
-

- and the transcript of records.

Most of all, ECTS is made operational by students, teachers and institutions who want to make study abroad an integral part of the educational experience. In itself, ECTS in no way regulates the content, structure or equivalence of study programs. These are issues of quality, which have to be determined by the higher education institutions themselves when establishing a satisfactory basis for cooperation agreements, bilaterally or multilaterally. The code of good practice called ECTS provides those actors with tools to create transparency and to facilitate academic recognition.

Full academic recognition is a *conditio sine qua non* for student mobility in the framework of the Erasmus and Socrates programs. Full academic recognition means that the study period abroad (including examinations or other forms of assessment) replaces a comparable period of study at the home university (including examinations or other forms of assessment), though the content of the agreed study program may differ.

The use of ECTS is voluntary and is based on mutual trust and confidence in the academic performance of partner institutions. Each institution selects its own partners.

ECTS provides transparency through the following means:

1. ECTS credits, which are numerical values allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course unit requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at the institution that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, fieldwork, private study - in the library or at home - and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only. In ECTS, 60 credits represent the workload of an academic year of study and normally 30 credits for a semester and 20 credits for a term.
2. The ECTS information package (provided by this document) which supplies written information to students and staff on institutions, departments/faculties, the organization and structure of studies and course units.
3. The ECTS learning agreement covering the program of study to be taken and the ECTS credits to be awarded for their satisfactory completion, committing the student to undertaking study abroad as an integral part of his or her higher education, the home institution to guaranteeing full academic recognition of the credits gained abroad and the host institution to providing the agreed course units, subject to timetabling.
4. The ECTS transcript of records, which shows students' learning achievements in a way, which is comprehensive, commonly understood and easily transferable from one institution to another.

Good communication and flexibility are also needed to facilitate the academic recognition of studies completed or taken abroad. In this respect the ECTS coordinators have an important role to play as their main tasks are to deal with the academic and administrative aspects of ECTS.

The full range of course units of the department/faculty using ECTS should in principle be made available to the mobile student, including taught doctorate course units. Students should be enabled to follow regular course units - and not courses specifically designed for them - and should not be precluded from the possibility of fulfilling the host institution's requirements for a degree or diploma. ECTS credits ensure that the program will be reasonable in terms of workload for the period of study abroad, for example, a student whose choice of course units totals 120 ECTS credits for an academic year would have to work twice as much as an average local student at the receiving institution, and a student whose program totals 30 ECTS credits for a whole academic year would be undertaking much less work than the average local student and would in effect be studying part-time.

European cooperation on ECTS faces two limitations:

- Different constraints for official introduction
- Different standards.

Italy, Spain, France, UK, Sweden, and Finland are supposed to be the most advanced countries (European Commission, ECTS Extension and Feasibility Project, 2000 at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/ECTSrap.pdf>). However, the European standard of ECTS is interpreted in many different ways. The required number of ECTS credit point differs (e.g., 42 in the Netherlands, 60 in Germany) as well as the student workload of one ECTS credit point (e.g., 10 in Spain, 40 in Finland). Even in one country there are different regulations, e.g., in North-Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, a student workload of 1.800 hours per year is required; other German states require something between 1.500 and 1.800 hours per year.

U Muenster :

Ifgi has informally introduced ECTS. Ifgi provides

- Students Information package in English language
- Learning agreement with hosting universities before sending students
- Transcript of records for documentation of students' achievements.

Ifgi currently follows the traditional German system of semester hours per week. Already courses can be certificated on the basis of ECTS. In the context of the ongoing introduction of Bachelor and Master Programs, ifgi will officially introduce ECTS.

Ifgi does not grade according to ECTS. But ifgi grading can be transferred to ECTS grading. Students' grading base on the following table:

ECTS Grade	Suggestion IfGI	% of successful students normally achieving the grade	Definition ECTS	German (KMK, 2000)	Benotung IfGI
A	A+ A-	10	EXCELLENT - outstanding performance with only minor errors	1,0-1,5 (hervorragend)	1,0 1,3
B	B+ B-	25	VERY GOOD - above the average standard but with some errors	1,6-2,0 (sehr gut)	1,7 2,0
C	C+ C C-	30	GOOD - generally sound work with a number of notable errors	2,1-3,0 (gut)	2,3 2,7 3,0
D	D	25	SATISFACTORY - fair but with significant shortcomings	3,1-3,5 (befriedigend)	3,3
E	E+ E-	10	SUFFICIENT - performance meets the minimum criteria	3,6-4,0 (ausreichend)	3,7 4,0
FX	FX/F	--	FAIL - some more work required before the credit can be awarded	4,1-5,0 (nicht bestanden)	4,3 und schlechter
F	FX/F	--	FAIL - considerable further work is required	4,1-5,0 (nicht bestanden)	4,3 und schlechter

Certification of foreign universities' courses base on workload. Ifgi certifies a workload of 30 h as one ECTS credit point.

U Castellón:

U Castellón did not introduce ECTS. But they are used to it and can translate the Castellón credit points to ECTS. Currently, U Castellón credit points reflect the contact hours. There is no general formula for calculating the workloads, but U Castellón will be able to document students' workloads.

U Castellón provides a students information package in English.

NU Lisbon:

ISEGI/UNL has introduced ECTS for the Bachelor program in 2002/03. By university requirements, in January 2004 all programs have to implement ECTS. Consequently, ISEGI/UNL is on the way implementing the respective standards.

The Bachelor program requires 240 credit points (incl. the thesis)

The Master programs require 60 credit points in courses and in addition the Master thesis (1 year).

1 credit point equals a students' workload of 25 h.

U Concepción:

The introduction of a credit transfer system is planned.

Within the Bachelor program, 1 credit point equals 32 h students' workload. Within the Master program, 1 credit point equals 48 h students' workload.

A students information package in English is not provided. U Concepción provides transcripts of records in order to document students' achievements. Students' exchange does not take place on the basis of previous learning agreements with the sending universities.

U Concepción grades Master students with A-D and failed.

Bachelor students a graded on a scale from 1-7, approved with 4-7.

INPE:

INPE provides credit points for courses. 1 Credit point equals 1 contact hour per week in a semester. Preparation or homework is not included. INPE assumes a typical workload of 30 h for 1 Credit point.

INPE translates the ECTS grades as in the table above. At INPE it is not sufficient to pass all courses. Dependent of the program, a certain average grade must be achieved.

U Pernambuco :

The credit point system of U Pernambuco bases on contact hours. 1 credit point equals 15 contact hours.

U Pernambuco can provide a documentation of students' workload for eduGILA exchange students. In general, 1 credit point equals 30 h of workload.

U Pernambuco provides a students information package in Portuguese.

IT Toluca :

The introduction of a credit transfer system is not planned.

Project activities

- Clarify status quo (month 1)
- Clarify topics, and expected results of cooperation (month 2)
- Draft version of white paper (month 4)
- White paper (month 5)

Results

Due to different national requirements, eduGILA partners cannot agree on same credit transfer systems. Consequently, the cooperation targets two goals:

- Making credit transfer systems transparent
- Develop tools and standards for transfer different credit transfer systems into each other.

EduGILA standards:

- The partners provide students information packages in English language.
- The workload of modules and courses is documented (contact hours, homework).
- The content of modules and courses is documented on the basis of mutual agreement between the partner institutions and the student (learning agreement).
- Students' achievements are documented (transcript of records)

Translation of grades:

As a basis, the eduGILA partners take the ECTS grading system. Each partner translates the ECTS grading system into each one's specific grading system. Thus, the grading systems can be translated within the partner network.

ECTS Grade	Definition ECTS	Concepción	Toluca	ifgi	Lisbon	INPE	Recife, Master	Recife, Bachelor	Jaume I
A	EXCELLENT - outstanding performance with only minor errors	94 - 100	93-100	1,0 (A+) 1,3 (A-)	18-20	A+ (4,2) A (4,0)	A	10-9	8,5-10 (sobresaliento, including matricula honor, very rare grade)
B	VERY GOOD - above the average standard but with some errors	89 - 94	86-92	1,7 (B+) 2,0 (B-)	16-17	A- (3,7) B+ (3,3)	B	8,9-8	7,0-8,49 (notable)
C	GOOD - generally sound work with a number of notable errors	79 - 88	79-85	2,3 (C+) 2,7 (C) 3,0 (C-)	14-15	B (3,0) B- (2,7)	B	7,9-7	7,0-8,49 (notable)
D	SATISFACTORY - fair but with significant shortcomings	73 - 78	71-78	3,3 (D)	12-13	C+ (2,3) C (2,0)	C	6,9-6	5,0-6,99 (aprobado)
E	SUFFICIENT - performance meets the minimum criteria	68 - 72	70	3,7 (E+) 4,0 (E-)	10-11	C- (1,7)	C	5,9-5	5,0-6,99 (aprobado)
FX	FAIL - some more work required before the credit can be awarded	57 - 67	51-70	4,3 and worse (FX/F)	8-9	D (0)	D	4,9-4	0,0-4,99 (suspensado)

F	FAIL - considerable further work is required	1 - 56	< 51	4,3 and worse (FX/F)	0-7	D (0)	E	3,9-0	0,0-4,99 (suspens o)
---	---	--------	------	----------------------------	-----	-------	---	-------	----------------------------

Agreements

- The eduGI.LA partners agree on the following standards:
 - The partners provide students information packages in English language.
 - The workload of modules and courses is documented (contact hours, homework).
 - The content of modules and courses is documented on the basis of mutual agreement between the partner institutions and the student (learning agreement).
 - Students' achievements are documented (transcript of records)
- The eduGI.LA partners agree on the translation of grades (see table above).