



## BEYOND COMPETENCES: NEW CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL SOCIETY

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**TITLE:**

**Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): axes of an institutional strategy of teaching innovation.**

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**1. ABSTRACT:**

The Universitat de Girona has introduced international collaborative online learning (COIL) as an institutional strategy for teaching improvement and innovation in which different units, services and centers are involved. The commitment to this institutional strategy lies in the desire to foster synergies between priorities and cross-cutting initiatives set out in the strategic documents with the aim of providing the student body with training to face challenges as global citizens.

**2. KEYWORDS**

Collaborative learning, intercultural experiential learning, active teaching methodologies, curriculum internationalization, COIL, teaching innovation.



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### 3. DEVELOPMENT

In March 2019, the Universitat de Girona (UdG) approved the UdG2030 strategic plan, which aimed at “a model of learning, research, knowledge transfer and social commitment, to provide a bridge between humanism, science and technology”. The commitment to develop a teaching model has a long history that has been consolidated over the years, based, among other things, on the promotion of teaching innovation actions and the impulse of active teaching methodologies in different fields at UdG (examples of this are the Networks and Groups of Teaching Innovation, the interdisciplinary approach and inter-departmental centres, circumscribed to faculties and particular studies, and the experiences of curricula in faculties such as those of Medicine and Nursing, which are based on the methodology of Problem-Based Learning).

This trajectory, added to the institutional commitment of the strategic plan has allowed to advance in the teaching model UdG21, which aims to guide the training of students towards the real needs of society and customize the training proposal of the UdG based on a learning marked by flexibility, the proposal of challenges, the resolution of problems and the transversal and multidisciplinary approaches.

At the same time, the UdG approved the institutional strategy of internationalization UdG Global in February 2020. The central objective of this strategy is to significantly increase the internationalization of the University, proposed in an integral way, and is committed to exploring new forms of curricular internationalization from digital formats.

In this context, the UdG has launched this project of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as an institutional strategy for teaching improvement and innovation in which different units, services and centres are involved, ensuring its transversality and institutionalization: Office of the Vice-Rector for Communication and International Relations, Office of the Vice-Rector for Teaching and Academic Affairs, Josep Pallach Institute of Educational Sciences, Modern Languages Service, Office of International Relations, all the faculties and two affiliated centres.

The commitment to this institutional strategy lies in the will of the Universitat de Girona to promote synergies between transversal priorities and initiatives established in the strategic documents with the ultimate goal, in this specific case, of providing students with such a training as to meet the challenges of being global citizens. The benefits attributed to the implementation of the COIL methodology include this objective:

- It brings an international and intercultural dimension to subjects (global orientation).



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- It is a transversal project: it is interdisciplinary and involves different units and groups of the UdG. It is adaptable to any discipline, and allows the development of interdisciplinary proposals.
- It promotes the development of so-called “soft skills”, which are essential for professional future and personal development (especially the intercultural and digital ones; they may also include skills in third languages).
- It allows a more inclusive internationalization (less than 3% of students do international mobility), and it is respectful of the environment.
- It allows progress in the trajectory of teaching innovation at the UdG, and in the use of active teaching methodologies.

Virtual exchange, or COIL, is an optimal methodology to introduce, on the one hand, an international dimension and experience to the curriculum and, on the other hand, to encourage the acquisition by students of transversal skills that allow them to face, as responsible citizens and as competent professionals, the challenges of a global world. In this sense, among the transversal competencies that are promoted at the UdG, we highlight those that will be worked on in a special way in the use of this methodology:

- Analyse complex situations and design strategies to solve them individually and as a team.
- Work in a team, establishing those relationships that can most help to bring out potential for cooperation and maintain them on an ongoing basis.
- Select and use the most appropriate information and communication technologies for each situation, in the personal and professional spheres.
- Analyse the socio-cultural characteristics of one's own field of professional and personal action to take them into account in a constructive way.

The COIL methodology is implemented when two teachers from two geographically distant institutions (sometimes there may be more) design a shared activity within a subject, with the aim that students work in mixed groups and can obtain an integrated intercultural experience. In particular, the aim is to emphasize the acquisition of intercultural competence by students, which will enable them to deal with the various interpretations of the different values, norms and behaviours that are often taken for granted and that they have acquired as natural and normal.

The objectives of this teaching innovation initiative based on the COIL methodology are, in short:



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- Offer students an intercultural and world-connected experiential learning experience.
- Extend the collaborative learning experience beyond classrooms and subjects.
- Implement the UdG transversal competences in intercultural work environments (specifically intercultural, linguistic and digital competences).
- Have dynamic learning environments.
- Promote networking in virtual learning environments.
- Encourage interdisciplinarity/collaboration between disciplines and areas of knowledge.
- Promote and/or consolidate collaborations between the Universitat de Girona and universities around the world.

The process of implementing this strategic COIL project at the UdG has been carried out in four phases between June 2020 and March 2021.

### A) Information phase (June - October 2020)

In this first phase, meetings were organized between the different services and units directly involved (Office of the Vice-Rector for Communication and International Relations, Office of International Relations, ICE Josep Pallach) with the aim of organizing the implementation of this strategic initiative and the details of the COIL methodology. This first phase culminated with the virtual information session “Virtual exchange as a tool to introduce an intercultural experience in the classroom”, organized by the Universitat de Girona and open to the Catalan universities of Lleida and Vic-Central (27 October, 2020). This session, open to the entire teaching community of the Universitat de Girona, made it possible to identify a group of teachers interested in applying the methodology to their teaching.

### B) Phase of Identification of Needs and Interests (November - December 2020)

To follow the implementation process, it was necessary to identify both the interests and needs of teachers in order to offer specific training and to know the areas of interest in which they would like to develop the activities using this methodology. The survey (image 1) was sent to 40 people, 37 of whom responded (representing all centres/faculties). This provided key information for the next step: the creation of a teaching innovation group on COIL (images 2 and 3).

### C) Training phase (January 2021)



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The phase B survey also served to prepare a training that, on the one hand, responded to the need to improve the intercultural experience in classrooms with international and local students and, on the other, provided specific information on the process of designing an activity with the COIL methodology. The training was designed in two practical workshops taught by an expert teacher in both subjects (image 4):

- Workshop 1: COIL and intercultural knowledge: how you can best help students during the intercultural experience
- Workshop 2: Deeper immersion in COIL. Internationalize your resume with virtual exchanges

The training resulted in 28 teachers from the Universitat de Girona prepared to design and implement a COIL activity in their teaching.

The realization of this training allowed to advance in the consolidation of the project and in the implication in the face of the constitution of a stable working team in the form of the Network for Teaching Innovation of the UdG.

D) Implementation, Support and Monitoring phase (February 2021 - no end date)

This phase, in which we currently are, consists of several simultaneous actions:

- Start of pilot activities with the COIL methodology in four subjects, one of them within the framework of the Modern Languages Service. These pilots must serve to improve both the activity itself and the support that the Universitat de Girona can offer to these initiatives (search for teachers to collaborate with, specific training, good practices, evaluation of experience, dynamization of intercultural activities...). These pilots will also provide an assessment of the activity by students to include their vision and proposals for improvement in future editions.
- Creation of the Teaching Innovation Network (XID in its Catalan expression – Xarxa d’Innovació Docent –) on the COIL methodology, which will consolidate the working group created and provide teachers with a space for learning and professional development in the implementation of this learning methodology. The creation of the XID aims to capture both the interest shown in having a space to work together and share experiences of implementation of this methodology, and the purpose of promoting it institutionally at the UdG. In general, the objectives of a Teaching Innovation Network are:
  - o Encourage a type of teacher training based on the exchange and reflection of teachers on their own teaching.
  - o Create spaces to carry out this reflection.



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o Promote stable work networks among teachers interested in improving certain aspects of their teaching.

o Incorporate a dynamic of continuous and shared reflection on teaching practice.

The Teaching Innovation Network on the COIL methodology is in addition to the 13 currently existing at the UdG focused on active methodologies and teaching innovation strategies. The XIDs, promoted and coordinated by the ICE Josep Pallach, are a consolidated project with a history of more than ten years. (Image 5).

- Support for finding COIL projects with international universities complementary to the interests of UdG teachers, as well as support for creating their own proposals.
- Systematization of recognition for both students and teachers participating in COIL activities.
- Participation in the Erasmus+ KA226 project “Fostering Resilience through Accredited Mobility for European Sustainable HE innovation”, where the recognition and accreditation of COIL is one of the objectives.

The implementation of this teaching initiative and, in particular, the "Implementation, Support and Monitoring phase", includes a series of challenges that cannot be ignored. This teaching methodology requires an active approach to teaching. The effort and time spent by teachers in preparing these proposals should be recognizable, but the format and conditions for such recognition have yet to be defined. Another challenge, even for universities that have this methodology as an element of their fully institutionalized teaching, is the search for international teachers with related projects with whom to design an activity.

The introduction of the COIL methodology at the UdG is, as stated above, a long-term project and it is expected that, as groups of teachers are trained in the methodology and, at the same time, collaborations with international universities are being consolidated, these initiatives will become more common in the teaching of the UdG. An annual evaluation session of the experiences carried out is planned, which will include contributions from the teachers and the evaluation of the students who have participated.



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