

Addressing Employability and Sense of Belonging of Digitalization and Application Development (DAD) students.

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DAD, cand.it in short:

- Entry with bachelor degree from various non-IT disciplines (mostly SSH).
- A two-year project-organized problem-oriented (PBL) study.
- Learning goals: Programming, Systems Thinking, Computational Thinking, Digitalization, Human Computer Interaction, Design/evaluation of IT systems.

Challenges:

- Learning goals were not adequately grasped.
- Employability numbers were low.
- Students' sense of belonging was low.

Underwent Activities:

- A new study regulation has been rolled out, heavily focusing on:
 - Boosting the learning goals with new courses/redesign of existing ones.
 - Utilizing students' Bachelors throughout the education.
 - Increasing project collaboration with companies/organizations.
 - Working with UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- A new name was utilized to better reflect the new curriculum. From *IT Design and Application Development (IDA)* to *Digitalization and application development (DAD)*.
- A new recruitment strategy was rolled out:
 - OPEN HOUSE event.
 - Tougher entry criteria.
- A new employment strategy was rolled out:
 - LinkedIn and CV writing workshops on 9th semester.
 - DAD EXPO on the 10th semester (companies and students meet at CS).
- Creation of a new DAD student/alumni organization (named FADASE by the students).
- Creation of two new DAD Studios accessible only by the DAD students.
- Joint 7th and 9th semester midterm project seminars.

Results in relation to Employability:

- Better grasp of DADs learning goals:
 - Better exam performance.
 - Increased confidence in programming in a variety of programming languages and better integration to project work.
 - Increased appreciation of their Bachelors' degrees and an increased understanding on how they can be used within an IT environment.
- Most students seek work earlier (end of 8th, beginning of 9th semester).
- Employability numbers have improved. At 3three quarters after completion the percentage of unemployed DADs was:
 - 2019: 45.6%
 - 2020: 28.6%
 - 2021: 8.3%

Results in relation to Sense of Belonging:

- Increased communication/collaboration among the students by sharing the same physical space.
- Increased interactions among the different years (typically after the joint mid-term seminar).
- Increase in joint activities:
 - Invited guest talks organized by FADASE.
 - Extracurricular activities.

Future activities:

- To collect data from recent alumni to better grasp the impact of the underwent activities.
- To increase interactions between DAD students and alumni through FADASE.

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