

Building Soft Skills in the Digital Age: A Problem-based Approach, - short, credit bearing course -

General information

Number of ECTS: 2

Language: English

Modality: Online

Proposed period: March 2027 and March 2028

Duration: 4 two-hour online sessions – one session per week

Target groups: bachelor, master

Number of Participants: 30

Prerequisites: B2 level of English

Lecturers: **Dr Dragana Vuković Vojnović, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad**
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Course Overview:

This course is designed to help students develop essential soft skills—digital literacy, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving—using a problem-based learning approach. Students will work on real-world global issues aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG3: Good Health and Well-being, and SDG4: Quality Education for All), integrating digital tools and techniques to improve group work and effective communication.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of digital literacy and its role in modern education and work environments.
2. Collaborate effectively in teams using digital platforms for problem-based learning.
3. Enhance communication skills and critical thinking skills through discussion and presentation of global issues.
4. Analyze global issues (SDG3 and SDG4) and propose solutions through a problem-solving framework.
5. Apply digital tools to facilitate group collaboration, communication, and project management.

Session 1 (2 hours)

A: Introduction to Digital Literacy and Problem-based Learning in the Digital Age

Students will learn about the concept of digital literacy and will be able to differentiate and discuss its importance in academic and professional settings. Students will learn the basic digital tools necessary for collaboration, communication, and academic success, such as Google Workspace, Padlet, Miro and Canva. The session combines lecture and workshop activities. After the session, a joint Google drive will be shared with students that will be a foundation for sharing documents and tasks. In the following sessions, students will learn how to use other common digital tools.

B: Introduction to UN Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 4 (Good Health and Well-being/ Quality of Education)

This session will also introduce problem-based learning (PBL) as an educational approach, and students will experience working in groups in order to work on jointly assigned tasks related to complex, real-world issues. A brief overview of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG3 and SDG4) will set the stage for the thematic focus of the course.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand and implement digital literacy in the context of education and work.
- Grasp the fundamentals of problem-based learning.
- Enhance the students' ability to use basic collaborative digital tools.
- Describe and discuss SDG3 and SDG4 as the foundation for the course's global discussions.

Session 2 (2 hours) Enhancing Collaborative Skills Through Digital Platforms

A: Prior to the session students will get to know SDG3 (<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/good-health>) to prepare themselves for session 2 and to be able to discuss the topic. After introductory content from the lecturers, students will analyze, negotiate and discuss relevant case studies related to SDG3 (Good Health and Well-being), using digital tools to coordinate efforts and share resources.

Students will be divided into three groups each monitored by a teacher and negotiate a subtopic to work for the final project. Using group-based activities, students will learn how to develop collaborative problem-solving skills using Padlet and/or Canva, digital tools for collaborative work, while working in smaller groups under the guidance of their lecturers.

B: Reflection - teamwork guidelines.

After the group work sessions, students will reflect on the process regarding the experience. The focus of the discussion will be effective team communication, conflict resolution in virtual teams, and the role of digital tools in enhancing teamwork. These topics will be further explained by their lecturers in terms of best practices, and they will devise guidelines for effective teamwork to be implemented in the next sessions.

After the session students will continue to work asynchronously in their own time on the project they started.

Learning Objectives:

- Improve teamwork and collaborative skills in a digital environment.
- Utilize online collaboration tools to work effectively in groups.
- Discuss challenges and strategies for virtual teamwork, including conflict management.
- Begin working on a group project related to SDG3. After the session students continue to work asynchronously.

Session 3 (2 hours) Digital Communication Skills for Quality Education (developing well-supported arguments)

A: Prior to the session students will get to know SDG4 <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/4-quality-education/> to prepare themselves for session 3 and to be able to discuss the topic. After the introduction from the instructors, students will be able to identify key topics related to SDG4 (Quality Education) and global perspectives on education and critically assess them, in particular accessibility, inclusiveness, equity and open access. They will learn how to develop and support their arguments to achieve effective communication, which is vital in the digital age, especially in addressing global challenges.

B: In the group work session, students will engage in collaborative assignments to work on a particular topic they negotiated and start creating a short, effective presentation of their conclusions using Prezi, Miro, Canva or Padlet. In the main session they will make comments and discuss each other's work guided by the instructors. Students will engage in discussions centered around to practice articulating ideas clearly, giving constructive feedback, and building persuasive arguments using digital tools like Miro and Canva. Jointly with their lecturers, students will create guidelines for constructive feedback to be given in peer review.

Learning Objectives:

- Develop digital communication skills.
- Learn to give and receive feedback constructively in online settings.
- Conduct discussions on SDG4, promoting global perspectives on education challenges.
- Present a preliminary group project plan related to SDG4.

Session 4 (2 hours) Final Group Presentations, Peer Reviews and Reflection (SDG3 and SDG4)

In the final lecture, student teams will present their solutions to the problems identified in relation to SDG3 and SDG4. They will present their findings using digital presentation tools, demonstrating both their communication and collaborative skills. In their presentations, they will briefly include their own insights regarding the whole experience, what they learned and how they handled challenges. After each presentation, peer reviews will be conducted based on the agreed guidelines, allowing students to implement what they learned about giving and receiving feedback on their work. This lecture will also include a course wrap-up, reflecting on the skills developed and how to apply them in future academic and professional contexts.

Learning Objectives:

- Present group project solutions effectively using digital tools.
- Engage in peer reviews to provide and receive constructive feedback.
- Reflect on the overall course and the development of digital and soft skills.
- Understand the application of problem-solving and digital literacy in real-world contexts.

Assessment:

1. Participation in discussions and group work (20%): Active engagement in group discussions and teamwork using digital platforms.
2. Case study analysis and collaborative projects (20%): Group work focused on SDG3 and SDG4, where students propose solutions to real-world problems.
3. Final presentation and peer review (20%): Students will present their project solutions and participate in peer reviews.
4. Motivation (40%)

Required Tools and Resources:

- Access to a computer with camera and audio and reliable internet connection.
- Collaborative platforms (Google Workspace, Zoom).
- Project management and presentation tools (Padlet, Miro, Canva, Prezi).

Recommended Readings:

1. Hockly, N. (2016). Digital Tools for Learning.
2. UNESCO (2020). Sustainable Development Goals and Education: SDG4 Quality Education.
3. WHO (2019). Good Health and Well-being: SDG3 Implementation Report.

<https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/active-collaborative-learning/collaborative-learning>

<http://www.teambasedlearning.org/>

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/education-at-um/edlab/core-principles-pbl-constructive-collaborative-contextual-and-self>

<https://www.monash.edu/student-academic-success/enhance-your-thinking/critical-thinking/create-argument>

<https://libguides.royalroads.ca/argument/welcome>

Final remarks

This course offers students a unique opportunity to develop essential soft skills in a digital context, focusing on collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving through the lens of global issues. Through active learning and hands-on application, students will be equipped with digital literacy skills crucial for both academic success and their future careers. By incorporating digital tools for collaborative work, students will engage in interactive, real-time collaboration, improving their ability to work effectively in diverse, virtual environments. Additionally, they will gain confidence in using technology to communicate ideas, solve complex problems, and overcome the challenges of a globally connected world.

Grades Marking scale: Fail, Pass.

Pass. A result that satisfies the requirements with regard to theoretical parts, active participation, practical relevance, analytical ability and independent thought.

Fail. An inadequate result with regard to theoretical parts, active participation, practical relevance, analytical ability and independent thought.