The Academic Consultancy Training (ACT) course at Wageningen University

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Wageningen University
Outline

- ACT? Why-what-how?
- Different perspectives
  - Student - Teacher - Commissioner - Coordinators
- Role in study programs

Ask questions as they arise
Why ACT?

- End 1990 employer feedback on WU graduates
  - Well trained in subject matter and scientific skills
  - Presentation and work related skills could be better
  - Working in professional teams needed training
- Over the years focus changed
  - Presentation → high school skill
  - Disciplinary → multi-disciplinary teams
  - Disciplinary → transdisciplinary projects
- The future?
  - Solutions → roadmaps for transformative change?
ACT? What?

A query/concern/challenge

University students

Society

An advice
Society = commissioners

- Business (43%):
  - Small and medium enterprises
  - Multinationals

- Public sector (34%):
  - Local, regional or national
  - Political parties
  - Advisory boards
  - Research and education institutes

- NGO's (16%)

- Public-private cooperation (7%)
Students = 26 of 32 MSc programs

- Environmental Sciences
  - (soil – water – atmosphere – policy)
- Social Sciences
  - Economy - sociology - communication
- Technology
  - Chemistry -> bio-systems engineering
- Biology
  - Ecology -> molecular
- Animal Sciences
  - marine - terrestrial
- Plant Sciences
  - Molecular breeding -> natural resource management
- Food, Nutrition and Health
  - Molecular nutrition -> life styles
Approaches to projects differ

- More multi disciplinary (expert advice)
  
  Propose a strategy to reduce food waste in a catering company
  
  Estimate the impact of climate change on natural fibers production

- More transdisciplinary (multi-stakeholder platform facilitation)
  
  Develop a digital Eco-map with ecological and sustainability oriented shops and activities in a region
ACT but how?

- Student – learning
- Teacher – coaching
- Commissioner – expectations
- Coordination – make this all work
How? Philosophy – praxis oriented approach

...our strengths, our challenges ......

I

Subjectified or personal

Cross-boundary Integration in Action

We

Inter-subjectified or social

It(s)

Objectified or factual

.....my skills, mindset, background...

.....our tasks, our product....
How? time-line

-8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

-8 week course (252h/student)

Pre-register
Apply

8 week course (65h/team)

Plan
Prepare

8 week course (12h/team)

Plan

Content coaches

Course coordination team

Project acquisition

Assign

Trouble shooting

Commissioners

Submit projects

Interaction with students

Students
How – course schedule

- Support from process coach (personal and team coaching) and from academic advisor (content coaching of team)
- Engaging in discussions with various academic and societal actors
How – course schedule

- Support from process coach (personal and team coaching) and from academic advisor (content coaching of team)
- Engaging in discussions with various academic and societal actors
How – Educational approach

Instrumental education
i.e. transferring expert knowledge, expert observations and possible solutions

Emancipatory education
i.e. equipping students to use and experiment with the insights acquired to address together a real life issue and their personal development
How Educational approach

- Teams are highly independent
- Roles of project manager, secretary and financial controller are assigned prior to team start
- Teams are composed on the basis of applications
- Project formulation is kept vague and open ended
- Teams negotiate and write their own project proposal before executing it
## Assessment elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Assessed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation paper</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project proposal</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>PW teacher, Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm reflection paper</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Coach, CPD trainer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final reflection paper</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual assessment</td>
<td>Individual/team</td>
<td>Fellow students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final product</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Advisor, coach, commissioner</td>
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Grading

- Project proposal: 15%
  - 50% by coach, 50% by PW teacher

- Product: 42.5%
  - 50% expert, 25% coach, 25% commissioner

- Team process: 10%
  - 100% coach

- Individual process (includes reflection papers): 32.5%
  - 50% coach, 50% mutual assessment team
Assessment tools

- Rubrics for personal assessment elements
  - Related to the I, We and It domains

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Not able to listen to contributions of others</td>
<td>Listens well and generally asks clarifying questions when needed</td>
<td>Able to use active listening whenever needed</td>
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- Rubrics for products
  - Slight difference between academic advisors, commissioners and coaches
Some numbers 2013/14 & 2014/15

- 950-1000 students
- 150-165 projects
- 75 different process coaches (unique persons)
- 100 content coaches
- 2 academic coordinators
- 4 period coordinators (5 educational periods)
- 1 financial supervisor
- 1 staff responsible for logistics
Entrance requirements for students

- Minimally 36 credits of their 120 MSc credits done
- Preferably more credits including a MSc thesis written

Background:
- All Wageningen MSc’s are 2 years of 60 credits each
  - 60 credits courses including ACT
  - 36 credits major thesis / 24 credits minor thesis or academic internship
Requirements for process coaches

- Experienced teacher
- Coach training
- Research background in one of the Wageningen field
- Interested in projects beyond own discipline
Requirements for projects

- Need input from different disciplines
- Feasible within 8 weeks for teams of 5-7 students
- Of an advisory nature
- Would gain from an academic approach
- External party interested to pay the project costs
Role of ACT in MSc programs

- Train in multidisciplinary team work
- Train in professional self assessment
- Train in advisory skills

In addition to:
- Disciplinary courses
- Research project
- Academic internship (research environment mostly)
QUESTIONS?
VT contact to inquire about study abroad for ACT course:

Dr. Erik Ervin, Assistant Dean of Academic Programs, CALS; eervin@vt.edu
Commissioners’ comments

- “Good quality in relation to the price.”
- “I received an exploration that indicated exactly what I needed.”
- “The project gave rise to a continuing discussion and gave ideas for solutions.”
- “They answered my question, so I was satisfied. However, I had expected more from university students...”
Commissioners’ opinion

- The multi-disciplinary character of the course: 23.81%
- Relatively cheap labor: 15.48%
- Quick results: 8.33%
- Quality of the results: 6.7%
- Enhance or maintain contact with the university: 6.0%
- Objective perspective on your organization: 4.76%
- Doing the university a favor: 4.76%
- Other, namely: 6.0%
- The academic character of the course: 4.76%
- The multi-cultural character of the course: 2.38%
- Fun: 1.19%
Student appreciation (n=264)

- Communication with commisioner
- Clarity of problem definition by the commissioner
- The consultancy oriented character
- Time available for the product
- Communication with content coach
- Communication with ACT-team
- Place of self-reflection
- The multi-cultural aspect

**Importance**

**Presence**

**Appreciation**
Evidence for a Collective Intelligence Factor in the Performance of Human Groups

Anita WilliamsWoolley, Christopher F. Chabris, Alexander Pentland, Nada Hashmi, Thomas W.Malone

In two studies with 699 individuals working in groups of two to five, there was evidence of a general collective intelligence factor (the c-factor) that explained a group's performance on a wide variety of tasks.
About working in a team

This “c factor” was not strongly correlated with the average or maximum individual intelligence of group members ..........

.............. but was correlated with the average social sensitivity of group members, the equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking, and the proportion of females in the group.