

Guide to “team teaching” in the FORTHM Alliance

“Team teaching” is one of the new possibilities offered to teaching staff and their students thanks to the close links developed between the universities of the FORTHM Alliance. It is a very flexible format: the term covers any courses for which staff and students collaborate between universities, including some degree of online teaching.

An example of a team-teaching project:

Gloria teaches economics at the University of Valencia. Through a FORTHM “speed-dating” event, she has met Jani who is also an economics teacher, but who works at the University of Jyväskylä. Since they both teach an introductory course in macroeconomics aimed at undergraduate students, they decide to share some of their teaching in one semester. Gloria has a 16-hour course for a group of 25 students and Jani teaches a 24-hour one to a group of 18. They decide that they are going to do most of their teaching individually and physically in their home university, but that they are going to organise 6 x 2-hour sessions online, in order to share some of the teaching and to give their students a common assignment.

Technical solutions:

Various technical solutions are available and open to teachers, who are free to choose which tools to adopt. In this example, their local FORTHM offices provide support to Gloria and Jani to help them access the FORTHM “Digital Academy”. This gives them a shared Moodle space accessible to all students and editable by both staff members, in this case hosted by the University of Valencia. They use Teams to set up videoconferences accessible to all participants, and they post the links to these sessions in Moodle. The students can either connect individually (from home or a study room) or as a class.

When the students are working together on their assignments, they use a combination of Teams, WhatsApp and Zoom meetings, plus group chats on Instagram, that they organise themselves depending on their preferences as a group.

Course organisation:

Teachers are free to organise their courses as they like. In this particular example, the common classes are planned as follows:

1. A common session near the beginning of their respective courses, so that the students get to know each other. They host the session together and have the students play ice-breaking games in breakout rooms, as well as discussing the learning objectives of the course and giving details of the joint assignment that the students will be given to carry out in international teams during the semester.
2. A session taught by Gloria on her speciality, to students from both universities.
3. A second session taught by Gloria on her speciality, to students from both universities.
4. A session taught by Jani based on a study he carried out.
5. A second session from Jani.
6. A common session near the end of both courses, once the students have completed and submitted their assignments, where the groups give short oral presentations of the work done, which the other class members and the professors then discuss with them.

Language:

There are a variety of solutions to overcome potential language barriers, allowing staff and students who are able and wish to speak foreign languages to do so, but at the same time providing translation solutions for those who do not.



In this particular scenario, Jani speaks good English and is happy to teach in that language, however some of the students are not comfortable following classes in English. Gloria is able to follow English, but she is uncomfortable speaking that language in a classroom situation, and her other classes take place in Spanish. To overcome these difficulties, they use translation tools. When they are teaching, they use Powerpoint to provide real-time subtitles.¹ Jani speaks in English and his slides are automatically subtitled in English to make them easier to follow. Gloria speaks in Spanish and has her slides subtitled in English too. The students are also able to choose subtitles in Spanish or Finnish on their own computers if they prefer.

The students mix languages when they are working together. Most speak some English, but some Finns like to try out their Spanish, and for some groups there are other shared languages, such as Italian or German. They also use Microsoft Translator as a chat channel during their meetings. Everyone connects with their smartphone to this channel and the app's speech-to-text capacity allows them to have real-time translations of what is being said or written for languages they do not understand.²

Evaluation, grading and credits:

Although the students are working together on their assignment, the two teachers grade their own students in their respective grading system. Since the courses already exist in each university, there is no credit transfer – the students simply validate the existing module in their home university. However, they also receive a FORTHM “open badge” and certificate, stating that they have taken part in an internationally-taught module. Gloria chooses just to use the assignment as her one grade for the whole course, whereas Jani includes other coursework and marks in the students' final grade. Each teacher remains responsible for their own students and evaluations.

Advantages:

For the students, the experience is novel and enjoyable – for a few of their classes they get to meet and then work with fellow economics students from a partner university, to make new friends. They get to practice some languages, find out about how Economics is taught elsewhere, and benefit from the teaching of another professor from a different country. They also get a badge and certificate showing they were involved in an international module, and maybe feel attracted to apply for another FORTHM activity to go and visit the partner university physically.

For the teachers, this is a chance to get to know one another better, to exchange ideas, to share some of their teaching, and to give their students a new pedagogical experience. They are still paid all of the course hours by their home university, even though the workload is now shared. This collaboration might also lead to other deeper forms of cooperation in the future, such as a whole module taught jointly online, or even a “blended mobility” exchange, where the online teaching is followed by a trip by one of the groups to the other country, in order for the students to meet each other in person.

There are no strict guidelines for “team teaching”, meaning that the teachers can go as far as they want in sharing courses or combining online and offline teaching, depending on their wishes, their pedagogical objectives and the organisational possibilities they have. Local FORTHM offices can advise on technical solutions and help to find potential partners for team teaching.

¹ <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/translator/education/lectures-and-presentations/>

² <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/translator/apps/features/>

