

## AN INNOVATIVE EUROPEAN SPORTS TUTORSHIP MODEL (ESTPORT) FOR THE DUAL CAREER OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

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### Abstract

The Dual Career of Student-Athletes is a topic of great interest in Europe, and the European Commission supports projects to implement measures that promote and stimulate this career. Within the European Dual Career ESTPORT project, two sports tutoring models were analyzed (UCAM Tutorship Model and DUCASTUN Model) in two different countries (Spain and Italy). In 2016, the UCAM model of sports tutoring was used to tutoring 188 students. They were granted a scholarship and assisted by an individual tutor. The model and the system which has developed from it was evaluated. That provided essential pieces of information on sports life, academic life and sports tutoring. The DUCASTUN model of the University of Rome "Foro Italico", was implemented with 18 student-athletes and evaluated through the ESTPORT project, emphasizing the use of Web 2.0 technology as an essential element to achieving effective sports tutoring.

**Keywords:** High Education - Sport - Dual Career - Sport Tutor.

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### Un innovador modelo europeo de tutoría deportiva (ESTPORT) para la carrera dual de estudiantes-deportistas"

### Resumen

La carrera Dual de Deportista-Estudiante es un tópico de gran interés en Europa, es por ello por lo que la Comisión Europea apoya una línea de proyectos para poder implementar medidas que fomenten y dinamicen la carrera Dual. Dentro del proyecto europeo ESTPORT de Carrera dual dos modelos de tutoría deportiva fueron analizados (Modelo UCAM Tutorship Model y Modelo DUCASTUN) en dos países distintos (España e Italia). El modelo UCAM de tutoría deportiva controla 188 alumnos en 2016 que obtienen una beca deportiva y un seguimiento de un tutor, este sistema fue evaluado aportando información relevante sobre la vida deportiva, la vida académica y el tutor deportivo. El modelo DUCASTUN de la Universidad de Roma foro itálico fue implementado con 18 deportistas estudiantes

y evaluado a través de proyecto ESTPORT incidiendo en el uso de la tecnología Web 2.0 como elemento esencial para lograr una efectiva tutorización deportiva.

**Palabras clave:** Universidad - Deporte - Carrera Dual - Tutor Deportivo.

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### Um modelo europeu inovador de tutoria esportiva (ESTPORT) para a dupla carreira de estudantes-atletas

#### Resumo

A carreira de dupla atleta-estudante é um tópico de grande interesse na Europa, razão pela qual a Comissão Europeia apóia uma linha de projetos para implementar medidas que promovam e estimulem a carreira de dupla. No projeto Europeu Dual Career ESTPORT, foram analisados dois modelos de orientação esportiva (Modelo de Tutoria UCAM e Modelo DUCASTUN) em dois países diferentes (Espanha e Itália). O modelo de tutoria esportiva da UCAM controla 188 alunos em 2016 que obtêm uma bolsa esportiva e acompanhamento de um tutor; este sistema foi avaliado, fornecendo informações relevantes sobre a vida esportiva, a vida acadêmica e a tutoria esportiva. O modelo DUCASTUN da Universidade de Roma, Foro Itálico, foi implementado com 18 estudantes atletas e avaliado através do projeto ESTPORT, enfatizando o uso da tecnologia Web 2.0 como um elemento essencial para obter uma tutoria esportiva eficaz.

**Palavras Chaves:** Universidade - Esporte - Dupla Carreira - Tutor esportivo.

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#### Introduction

There is a growing interest in the topic of dual career student-athletes (Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015). The dual career is the combination of a sporting career with an academic career in such a way that both can be developed without interference with each other and in a successful way. In the last years, the importance of helping professional athletes during and after finishing their professional career has been highlighted by the European Union (EU) through specific initiatives and political strategies supported by its funds (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). The EU has taken aware of the importance of enhancing athletes learning and education, allowing them to attend university courses. These courses aim at developing athletes' skills and competencies (European Commission, 2007; 2012). The ethical starting point of this recent interest by the EU for athletes' education is that education is a human right. The athlete deserves to enjoy this right in all stages of their life because they are serving the community through sport, and they were and are useful to society (Schweiger, 2014). Some relevant studies in this area (Giulianotti, 2004) point out that although Universal Right exists for education, as established in Article 26 of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (United Nations, 1948), however, there is evidence that young athletes have had to seriously compromise their educational development in favour of a potential elite sports career; "Historically among young athletes, specialization in sports disciplines with a view to entering elite levels has invariably led to a serious shortfall in other forms of education that promote their personal

and social development” (Giulianotti, 2004: 4). There is a need, therefore, to provide support for athletes to help avoid this.

The athlete has to be helped to develop as a professional and human being and to join the life-long learning system which society provides for its members. In contemporary European society, the issue of dual careers represents a very central topic. Nowadays, the leading educational agencies and institutions of the Old Continent have recognized the importance of the development of the athlete, and they are aware of the complex problems that all this implies. Actually, it carries complex demands for quality teaching activities, social and professional placement, and teaching program development (Bastianon, 2014). The characteristics of the athlete, who is both a student and professional who wishes to earn a university degree, require a specific system capable of both teaching and assisting them in following both routes. For this reason, the universities which are interested in devoting part of their efforts as educational agencies to these kinds of athletes know that they need to focus not only on the specific and particular contents of their teaching programs but also on the specific organizational and logistical aspects related to the teaching activities.

The concept of dual-career refers to the combination and coupling of an athletic career with education and/or occupation (Geranosova; Ronkainen, 2015). For an athlete, pursuing an education while competing in high-performance sport can be a challenge. We know that nowadays there is an increasing demand for athletic performance in elite sports. This can determine a very high pressure on athletes, who are often forced to choose between maximizing their athletic potential or obtaining a good degree for their post-athletic career (Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000). As claimed by Geranosova and Ronkainen (2015), if this, on the one hand, can often lead to premature discontinuation of the athletic career due to prioritization of education (Amara; Aquilina; Henry, 2004), on the other hand, the athlete may tend to invest less in education due to her/his exclusively focusing on athletic success (Aries et al., 2004). It is crucial to keep in mind that although the longevity of sports careers varies according to the sports, most athletes have to face the inevitable decline of their physical abilities at the time when the majority of workers have stabilised in their professions. North and Lavalley (2004) indicate that the end of the sporting career in 5-7% of elite athletes occurs at an average age of 34 years and depending on the type of sport, the age of making this transition may vary, found that athletes in gymnastics, diving, swimming, skating and judo thought to retire between the ages of 24 and 30. Sailing, golfing, riding and shooting, retirement typically occurred after 40.

For all these reasons, the dual-career represents a challenge for European universities that need to invent new ways of reorganising their knowledge, regulations and the learning models they offer to their students. This has to be done to help student-athletes in their learning processes which, if one wants them to be effective, they have to be supervised and monitored through an appropriate system of

supervision, capable of adapting to the needs and requirements of the student-athlete both as a person and professional. One of the main questions relating to the dual career of athletes and its issues concerns “what”, or better “who” the student-athlete is. According to the main definitions, a student-athlete is a person who is a full or partial university or high school student, and who participates in athletics or plays sport as an individual or member of a federation, a club, or of a sport association (Gómez, Bradley & Conway, 2008).

The centaur profile of the student-athlete calls for a specific holistic approach in terms of learning models, organisation and structuring of experiences offered to them (Wylleman, Reints & De Knop, 2013). The research on the dual-career of athletes supported by the European Union testifies the importance of this holistic approach (Aquilina; Henry, 2010; Platts; Smith, 2009).

One of the main ethical issues concerning the dual career of student-athletes deals with so-called “desert”, i.e. what the student-athlete deserves in terms of rewards, attention, care, support, guidance, tutorship and mentorship, assistance from universities and public institutions. From a philosophical point of view, the “desert” is a matter of justice, fairness, and rightness. “Desert” in dual-career stems from a variety of forms, generally, it is about some positive or negative treatment that athletes ought to receive during and after their transition from their sporting career to their educational path. One might claim why an elite student-athlete, compared to an exceptional student –worker should deserve an ad hoc treatment and individual attention by the European Union and Public institutions to support his/her academic career? Also, in light of a speculative theory of justice, is it right or wrong to actively support student-athletes when they decide to attend a university course? A professional athlete is a person who is engaged in sport to earn a salary and survive. Sport is not a hobby for her/him. Very few athletes can generate a significant income from the sport. Most of them are poor, and after their professional sporting career, they are forced to restart a new life and find a new job. The question of what student-athletes deserve is closely connected to issues of social justice (Miller, 1976; Rawls, 2009). Elite sport is associated with certain effects, such as national effects such as national affirmation of its population, among other issues. Sport has in itself intrinsic good while the athlete, through sport, showing her/his competencies, skills, virtues and values, transforms them into extrinsic goods.

The student-athlete, before being both an athlete and a student, is a person. As a person, the athlete is recognized to be a “means”, or even more effectively, a human being capable of expressing; completing the intrinsic and internal values and virtues that sport as a social practice bears to humankind. We recognize that the student-athlete plays such an essential function for our society, and consequently, we reward her/him for this important role and function. This means that sport is a human capital able to activate resources that bring good to the community in which we live. To be

clear, it is not the athlete in herself/himself that we reward (through special attention when she/he attends a university course or the high school) but her/his dedication as a person to sport and its internal and intrinsic goods. Actually, we are convinced that dedicating her/his life to the sport, to its values and virtues, a person will always be a better person and, therefore, more useful to society in line with de Coubertin's concept expressed in his so-called theory of "Sports Republic".

Based on the above, the aim of this study was to analyse the impact of the ESTPORT model developed at the private UCAM-Catholic University of Murcia, Spain, and the DUCASTUN project, implemented at the public university Foro Italico in Rome, Italy. Both projects were developed between 2015 and 2017.

### **Core features of the UCAM Sports Tutorship Model**

There are three theoretical principles to be considered under the Sports Tutorship Model: Integration, it aims to provide all academic, professional and sport services and activities currently scattered in different agencies, units, departments and institutions, etc.; Individuality: The programme is structured in an individualized itinerary for each athlete, and Pro-activity: The programme acts proactively, anticipating future needs.

In practical terms, the Model will work as follows: the diagnosis and identification of specific needs of the athlete; guidance and advice for future jobs; and enabling the sports and academic careers to work together in professional guidance, training, employment and collaboration (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2017; 2018a).

Procedure for granting a sports scholarship, application for admission and registration of the athlete begins with the application and granting of a sports scholarship. There are two methods of recruiting sports scholarship holders for the Sports Service, by searching for talents by the technicians of the Service and by the athlete's own request.

The sportsman can contact the Sports Service and make requests or queries, through the email account or by telephone. Then the commission intervenes, in charge of filtering and evaluating the applications, finally deciding whether or not to grant the scholarship to the student.

There is a specific procedure to enrol and grant a scholarship to new students who want to apply to UCAM study programs. The University assists the new students by providing them with an individual tutor who helps them to carry out the procedure to enrol. The student he advises and reports all the documentation to complete and procedures, such as may the transfer of the academic records from their home university. This step is necessary to proceed with the registration. Later with the help of the Sports Tutor of each degree, the student enrolments are made, taking into account the personal,

academic and sports situation of each student. Guidance is provided in the case of students with studies completed in other universities, who request recognition of prior credits to complete the application. Sports scholarship students from the second year onwards, with the coordination of the Sports Service, are advised by their corresponding Sports Tutors. Tutors use the Virtual Campus as a tool to help them when choosing subjects and academic strategy on behalf of the student. Throughout this process, direct contact with the Secretariat Office and its Economic Management Unit is essential, recognising the importance of each role they play.

Respect to follow-up of incidents, once the athlete is enrolled and is attending the course regularly, it is essential to keep track of the possible incidents that may arise, in order to ensure that the compatibility between academic and sports life is successful. In case of a problem, the Sports Service receives a message from the student, and any unexpected problem is solved. Examples of problems can be an adaptation of exam dates to training programs, management of absences due to non-attendance to class due to attendance at competitions, paperwork, information on specific topics or any other situation related to the academic aspect.

The Sports Tutorship has to be run by tutors-mentors assigned to athletes and supervised by a coordinator, who analyses their training and professional itinerary together, diagnosing and detecting their needs. This model provides individualized attention that involves face to face and telemetric Information, advice and guidance, brokerage and management of all resources that high-level athletes may need to ease their transition to work after their sporting activity. These tutors will be responsible for collecting and integrating various existing resources for formal and nonformal training, labour intermediation and support in an active job search that are of interest for athletes, both their professional evolution and for their access to the labour market.

The “UCAM Sports Tutor” requires the development and maintenance, in each academic year, of the Official Census of Athletes who participates in competitions, federated or university competitions, representing the institution. They are athletes of particular interest to the Sports Activities Service and are students enrolled in any of the courses held at this institution.

To sum up, this system requires control of academic and sports performance of all students included in the Official Census, personal tutoring to reinforce all Census students, the establishment of appropriate lines of coordination between the different students of the Census concerning their sports commitments and their academic obligations, establishing, individual and/or individualized treatments of dates of exams, class attendance; collection and/or delivery of work and homework.

It is also essential to keep in mind information and on-going advice on topics of interest to Census students, liaison and representatives of all students, as well as to the Department Division of Physical Education and Sport Sciences and the Sports Activities Service and the election, along with the



Heads of the Faculty of the student-tutor. About the objective of creating the figure of the Student Tutor, it is essential to point out that UCAM already has this figure. For some years now, it has introduced to help Student-Athletes, which will be the “link” between classmates and teachers. On many occasions, it is clear that this figure could solve problems faster, like group works or retrieve class notes on days that cannot be attended.

The responsibilities of the student-tutor are significant because it allows to having access to Information by a classmate directly is considered more enjoyable than working directly with a professor, due to the different positions in the organisation chart of the university. For these reasons, UCAM is focused on improving its Student Tutors and that they become an indispensable tool in the future. Furthermore, finally collecting Information for the annual report of each Faculty in Sports results obtained, observed Academic Performance., predictable short and medium-term sports projection, personal report and others, determined at the time, inherent to those already described.

### **Rights and obligations of student-athletes**

Students-athletes, as all the students, have rights and obligations. Within the rights are assignment and general support from the sports-tutor and from the students-tutor, supervision and support from the sports staff from the University (researchers, and coaches), changing an exam date, exemption from class attendance, facilitating participation in university championships and supervision and support from the medical and health staff from the University (physiotherapist, etc.). Within the obligations are representing the University in the acts that it requires, competing for the university at the national university championship and other competitions, participating in lectures, conferences, inaugurations, etc., representing the University, sharing their experiences in their sports life, participate actively in social networks representing the University.

### **Other contextual data from Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM)**

In the academic year 2015-2016, 188 people benefited from the UCAM scholarship program, of which, 139 remained active during the course (through taking exams).

Of these, 89 were men, and 50 were women, who belonged to 23 different sports modalities. Concerning the type of studies enrolled, 107 were in undergraduate studies and 32 in postgraduate courses (University Master or Official Master). Among the sports practised, football stands out, with 28.8% of athletes studying (33 in undergraduate studies and 7 in Master’s studies) followed by Athletics with 9.4% of athletes studying (8 in undergraduate studies and 5 in Master’s studies).

About undergraduate students (107), they enrolled in different Faculties of the University, with particular attention to those students who studied in the Faculty of Sports (35.5%), as well as those who studied in the Faculty of Health Sciences (18.7%) and the Faculty of Legal and Business Sciences.

Taking into account the percentage of success in the studies carried out by scholarship students (calculated by dividing the enrolled credits by successfully approved credits), the results show a success rate of 72.3%.

### **The research and methodology of implementation of the sport tutor model of UCAM**

The aim was to find out whether any differences between the perceptions of the sports students about sport and their academic work exist, as well as that about the support provided by the University throughout ESTPORT model. The general idea of the model is to establish a collaboration synergy in the field of sport for professional athletes and to establish a network among European universities and other parties that are related to the sports development, linking this to a tutorial of the athletes so that they can combine their higher education with professional sports. To do so, this project aims at developing a European “Sport Tutorship” model at universities that will allow high-level students-athletes further develop their dual career across Europe. Therefore, the ultimate goal is to facilitate, through the Sport Tutorship, the integration of athletes into the University context, by maintaining their athletic career performance.

**Participants:** There were 108 respondents to the questionnaire. Student-athletes were defined by those who were performing at the maximum level of their sport while studying at university. Students at UCAM were exempt from paying tuition fees for the duration of their studies. Participants were mostly performing their sport by representing the university in competition and thought Spanish championships, although there was a high number participating in championships at both European and International levels. Although to a lesser extent, some competed within the Olympic Games. Some students were also either at a professional or semi-professional level thus, gained support from other entities other than UCAM for their dual career, mainly from sports clubs and a lesser extent by the Higher Council of Sport through government aid.

**Instrument:** “ESTPORT-survey”: The student-athletes were measured using the Spanish version of the “ESTPORT-survey: Questionnaire about the perceptions of dual-career student-athletes” (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2016). The instrument was composed of 84 questions about “Academic life”, “Sporting life”, and “Sports Tutor”. The perception of the student-athletes was assessed twice: by a pre-test and post-test.



Procedure: The student-athletes complete the questionnaires anonymously and individually, in a relatively relaxed situation, without being subject to study or competition pressure, without the presence of the coach or teacher (time: 30 minutes). Questionnaires were accessed online. The subjects did not receive any additional information. However, they were given an information document about the project so that they were fully aware of the project ESTPORT itself.

## **Results and discussion**

One of the main motivations of the athletes to study university was to increase the chances of getting a job once their athletic career ends. “Enjoy studying” and “wanting to improve their education” are other reasons that athletes responded. Sports performance is an element that seems to influence the performance of athletes since it is not always easy to achieve while having an “academic life”. Students defined themselves as student-athletes rather than athlete-students because they tend to see sport as a priority more important than their studying at university because of the time they are dedicating to it, and its relevance for them in that specific moment of their life (Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015). Concerning the perception of difficulty in matching sports with their studies, student-athletes find it difficult, although they value to a great extent the flexible curriculum that exists at the UCAM, as well as the ability to have distance learning and the existence of the figure of the sports tutor.

The expectations of the athletes once they finish, indicate that they would like to work in what they have studied, although they still wanted to continue their athletic career. Student-athletes recognized the relevance of having support from both their coach and families, as well as from friends and the sports service of UCAM. In this university, the athletes mentioned the methodological strategies that the teachers implement in order to support the dual career. It should be noted that the pattern of studying for the athletes was not very different from non-athlete-students, as they take 1-2 years for an academic course compared to 1 year.

About the perception of difficulty in matching sport with their studies, student-athletes find it consistently tricky, although they value to a great extent the flexible curriculum that exists at UCAM, as well as the ability to have distance learning and the existence of the Sports Tutor.

Concerning the pieces of information that the athletes have about their circumstances, there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding the national and regional regulations that affect them as high-level athletes, since more than half do not have that information. About half of the students at UCAM also do not know the academic regulations of the University regarding elite athletes. This is a pivotal

finding to help inform and improve future actions regarding raising awareness about such regulations for student-athletes.

To conclude, athletes have stressed the relevance of virtual tools that favour their study, the methodology to teaching them the content of the disciplines, the need for achieving knowledge and being well educated as well as obtaining a degree to find a future job once their studies are completed.

The athletic career seems to present itself as an aid to face the ‘academic race’ and sports training so that they do not interfere with student-athletes’ academic performance, as suggested by previous research (Jonker, Elferink- Gemser, & Visscher, 2009; Lorenzo & Bueno, 2012). This reinforces the present findings that show that the athletes of UCAM have a high load of training, with approximately half of them training 4-5 days a week and between 11 and 20 hours a week. Most athletes here believed that training does not interfere with their academic performance.

There could be a direct relationship with the teaching support tools that athletes have, being the most used of the virtual campus. In this sense, to obtain positive results by combining athletic career and academic training, the literature reflects both the need to promote ethical and sustainable sports practices and the development of an elite sports system, which would be useful in the identification and the promotion of sports talents, respecting the education/training needs of young athletes (David, 2004).

Concerning the athletic career, the results stand out that the athletes would like to dedicate themselves to what they have studied once they finish their “sport race”, as well as athletic performance. Also, they have highlighted not only the importance of the Sports Tutor who support them to achieve their dual-career but also the importance of studying for their future career and making a living when their athletic career ends.

One of the critical gaps in the literature currently around the dual-career is to know how best to enable student-athletes to be successful in gaining a career post studying, by not allowing their sporting performance to affect their future careers negatively.

The tutor was introduced to help achieve this, by providing individualized advice about their academic studies and particular sport, thought to be one route to achieving success for the dual career student (Álvarez, Pérez, López, & González, 2014; López de Subijana, Barriopedro, & Conde, 2015; Vilanova & Puig, 2013). Therefore, it was necessary to know the perceptions of the dual-career student-athletes about the “Sports Tutor”.

In this research, differences were found between the perceptions of the amateur, semi-professional or professional athletes, with the latter preferring the Sports Tutor more than the other two groups. Overall, the student-athletes valued the services and features highly, regarding the dual-career at this university. A strong relationship with the Sports Tutor was found, shown by regularly

keeping in touch, mainly by email. According to the perceived results, the student-athletes supported the interaction between the Sports Tutor and the Sports University Service as a mechanism that was good to facilitate the dual career. Also, they presented high scores of perceptions about the relevance of the Sports Tutor, mainly because they needed someone who would listen to them and who was available for this purpose.

Other high scores by the student-athletes were for the need of a Sports Tutor for “personal support” more than for “academic support” or “time management”. Most of the student-athletes showed that they prefer the Sports Tutor to advise/help them with how to contact teachers, how to justify any academic assistance based on training and/or competitions, or how to overcome aspects of teaching and learning (e.g. seminar help, placement support), among others. Finally, the student-athletes perceived the “student-tutor” or “peer-tutor” highly, mainly as a way to help them to prepare for exams and to inform them of any changes generally. To sum up, the student-athletes perceived the Sports Tutor as a mentor to guide the academic, sporting and personal life of their dual career (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2018b).

## **Conclusions**

About the core features of DUCASTUN Model (Dual Career Academic Support and Tutoring Unit), the 2.0 Tutorship system described earlier in this report, that was used to implement the dual career of University of Rome “Foro Italico” (URFI) student-athletes, aimed to find a better way to motivate and help student-athletes develop knowledge, comprehension, and reflection. This system was used to help inspire confidence and motivate the student-athletes to learn autonomously and in a critical way. What was important focused was to find a way to work with the preferred learning style for each student-athlete and to utilise innovative communication approaches to help facilitate the whole process. Currently, virtual and networked environments based on Web 2.0 technologies can offer new and outstanding possibilities to better mentoring and tutoring student-athletes who follow university courses. Online tutoring is usually practised utilising different approaches and methodologies. Online environments applied in tutorship of student-athletes tend to involve the utilization of VLE (Virtual Learning Environments) such as Moodle and Blackboard, or learning management systems. The ongoing evolution of Web 2.0 technologies and learning methodologies have made the process of online tutoring more accessible, friendly and more comfortable to be carried out. This process seems to perfectly match the characteristics of the specific tutoring and mentoring for student-athletes that is needed.

The online tutoring can help student-athletes to be tutored and mentored both as individuals and as a community of learners. The system can facilitate the achievement of the student-athletes tutorship, that is to say: critical and self-reflexivity, independent learning, knowledge construction, transformative and collaborative learning based on groups, the community of practice, online interaction, and discussion. The current online tutoring model is based on social constructivist learning principles and critical reflective thinking.

Although the URFI had a Moodle platform for teaching part of the courses in Olympic studies and sport ethics, we decided to use Facebook as a learning platform and tutoring system for our student-athletes. Although this is a commercial networking platform, it was chosen for three principal reasons: firstly, because of the advantages of its easy accessibility. Secondly, because of the dialogic and interactive nature of the relationships between the teachers and student-athletes following the course. Thirdly, in line with contemporary theories of learning online, to highlight the importance of social networking for human learning from a constructivist and communitarian perspective.

Accordingly, the two online courses utilised the following e-tools both for teaching and tutoring:

- Facebook was used as the primary platform to host the content of the two courses (lessons and materials), as well as a tool for monitoring students' activities, and to send the main messages related to the course. Moreover, the Facebook group was also utilized to stimulate communication among participants through a real-time group.
- WhatsApp chat was used to sharing information and (video) chatting. Its primary goal was to create a friendly setting, to post comments or to ask questions which needed quick replies, and also as a venue for sharing pictures and links to videos and podcasts.
- YouTube and Vimeo channels were used to record lessons by the instructors of the courses and by other invited speakers in seminars and conferences held in the framework of the two courses.
- Spreaker platform was used to record and broadcast teachers' lessons through podcasts.
- Dropbox was used as a folder for sharing course materials, files, and documents.
- Skype was used as a way of video-conferencing as well as a video chat for tutoring and final examinations.
- Twitter was used for sending announcements or messages about events and seminars.
- WordPress blog was utilized as a repository for advice and alert to relevant Information from the tutors of the two courses.

To evaluate and monitor the impact of the new e-learning tools and online resources on our student and post-career athletes, we have carried out a study based on quali-quantitative research methods. To verify and understand this impact, the URFI's student-athletes were divided into two subgroups of 11 and 7 people. The first subgroup was a tutorship system based on the e-tools and online tutoring resources mentioned above. Also, a research methodology based on a simplified model of the case study and evaluation of tutoring activities related to the two courses were employed. This assessment was carried out through methods of collecting qualitative and quantitative data, such as interviews, open and closed-ended questionnaires, and focus groups. The data were obtained via a specific questionnaire administered to the students who attended the courses. As mentioned above, the student-athletes were divided into two groups composed of the following number of people: group 1=11; group 2=7; and two focus groups, each composed by the principal instructor responsible for the course, by an external observer, and by five student-athletes (5 for the first group, and 5 for the second one, so-called "control group").

The questionnaire for students was based on a Likert scale which ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = Unacceptable, 2 = Needs Improvement 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent). The questionnaire also included some open categorical questions (4, 5, 7, 8, 9) composed of two main parts, the quality of tutoring and mentoring and the liking and satisfaction with the e-tutoring tools and online resources used in the courses.

Some of the question 'stems' regarding the content and quality of the online tutoring were about the efficacy of online tutoring was, the usefulness of online tutoring was, compared to face-to-face tutorship, online tutoring and was asked to provide any other suggestions, comments, or ideas for improving your online tutoring experience.

Questions regarding the tutoring tools were summed up in a question that asked students which one of the following instruments (that is, Facebook, YouTube, Spreaker, Dropbox, Skype, Twitter) had to be considered as the most useful one in the course, and why. The focus group, lasting two hours, consisted of a restricted discussion group to reflect on the central feedback from the questionnaire administered to the student-athletes. This discussion was assisted and mediated by an external observer/researcher who acted as a moderator for the dialogue/discussion taking notes of the dialogic interactions among the participants.

The discussion was intended to ascertain the veracity of the student-athletes' opinions and answers, taking them as guidelines for discussion and critical reflection.

The evaluation by student-athletes from the first group concerning their tutors and online tutoring system quality was wholly positive. They affirmed to feel fully satisfied with the tutoring system results and gratified by the experience of being tutored and mentored online.

The same thing can be said about the focus group that confirmed the results from data produced from the questionnaires administered to the first group. Instead, data from the second group have not confirmed what emerged as results from the first one. Student-athletes' questionnaires data have provided valuable feedback for the further development of the tutoring actions. All students who attended the two courses answered the questionnaire. Results from the second group of student-athletes who were provided with a poor quality online tutoring showed a deep dissatisfaction. The data collected from the questionnaires, discussions and interviews have proved the full achievement of tutoring and educational goals aimed by the online tutorship. In the focus group relating to the second group of student-athletes – that is to say the control group – it has emerged that the student-athletes were not fully satisfied with the tutoring they were provided with. They stressed that, due to the problems and difficulties experienced in being present at URFI for lectures, and teachers' office hours offered, they would have preferred a more intensive tutoring action based on online support, and not just on a face-to-face tutoring work.

Moreover, we think that particular consideration should be given to the percentages related to the liking and usefulness of the e-tutoring tools. The tools student-athletes most appreciated and liked were, the Facebook discussion group, WhatsApp chat, and Skype sessions. The reasons why they preferred these tools was that they were easy to use and based on friendly interaction. Student-athletes liked more Facebook and WhatsApp because it has allowed them to be involved in a continuous dialogue with questions and answers/replies and ongoing support. Students also affirmed that they liked those e-tutoring tools because they were readily available on both tablets and mobile phones. In summary, the student-athletes gave an overall positive evaluation of the tutoring system they were provided and, as it happened in the case of the second group, ask for more of this kind of tutoring they did not experience.

The issue of the dual career of students-athletes is a relatively new area of study. The EU now recognizes the importance of dual career students-athletes. The students-athletes realize the importance of their dual career. Results from the present study (after the implementation of the programme) showed that students-athletes found it very helpful, want to continue, and be a part of such new university rules. As mentioned earlier, research on dual-career in the area of sport is limited. Only recently has it become an area of research, but many problems remain unsolved. Future research should include other variables in order to examine and describe better the issue of students-athletes dual career.

The new tools provided by Web 2.0 allow the student-athlete to share knowledge and open contents, and to develop abilities and skills to create learning communities that foster interpersonal communication. Through these resources, both the dual-career and post-career student-athletes can



develop skills for their future work and be supported in their retraining. Data from this study have shown that easy access to mobile phones and tablets explains the success of online tutoring tools.

All this stresses the need for rethinking the tutorship of student-athletes in light of the advent of these new forms of communication which are transforming the social network in online learning and tutoring environments. In line with that, this study also shows the necessity to rethink the tutorship provided to the student-athlete in terms of a specialised e-pedagogy whose aim is to make virtual environments comfortable learning environments for them.

In the future, it will be necessary to study the tutorship for the dual career of athletes taking into account all the multidimensional aspects and pedagogical challenges and framing it within the concept of 'sport guidance' which must be supported and enhanced by web technologies. Mainly, it should be aimed at developing social skills, learning communities, social-critical competencies, and constructive dialogue among people. These are considered to be the foundations and principles for an effective mentoring and tutoring system. For this reason, both e-tutoring and e-mentoring have to be seen as a part of a long process of guidance and orientation for athletes, universities, communities and families. Web technologies allow rethinking tutoring practices addressed to student-athletes as a form of human capital capable of empowering and helping them to enhance their skills as both persons and professionals in the frame of the continuous educational system. New online tutoring and e-learning technologies are capable to better link the learning process of student-athletes to the educational agencies that support them in all the stages of their professional and personal life. Moreover, they are also capable of making student-athletes' learning process and tutoring more flexible and efficient in terms of time and goals.

A significant milestone is the EU Erasmus calls, which are allowing us to develop specific projects in different EU countries on the dual-career topic. This initiative is crucial. Therefore, we propose to create a forum for discussion, under the guidance of the "InterSport Group", which brings together all these projects from the leading associations and institutions involved in the implementation of the dual-career of athletes. The goal should be to design the European model of sustainability for the Dual Career student-athletes in all its dimensions and to develop European policies based on the "good practices" tailored to the idiosyncrasies of each country, each institution and each sport.

A common challenge for universities should be the development of a program of 'Sports Erasmus', enabling high-level athletes to have a European experience with assured quality in their academic affairs (such as classes and exams) as with their sport development (i.e. training and competitions).

In conclusion, ESTPORT research and implementation unit have shown how e-tutoring and its web technologies must be seen as an essential part of the methodology aimed at helping athletes.

It is necessary not only to select, recruit and train excellent tutors for supporting the tutorship for the dual-career of student-athletes at URFI but also to identify instructors from its department who are highly motivated more sensitive towards the problems faced by such students.

These instructors need to have an open and flexible attitude and be capable of managing new distance and Web 2.0-based learning tools. Also, they need to take responsibility for the students and to face the challenge of social networks as learning environments. They have to be aware that not all instructors from a university department can adequately cover the function and role required to competently facilitate student-athletes' learning in the complex and fragmented scenarios of modern education.

However, this can only happen if URFI and all European universities will be committed to rethinking the legal constraints and barriers which oppose the enhancement of this quality in light of a more democratic, dialogic and inclusive practice. It is suggested here that there will not be any future for the student-athletes' dual career until these constraints and barriers are entirely removed and overcome (or rethought in light of a more systemic philosophical approach).

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