

# LEARNING TO TEACH: EUI TRAINING ON TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**When we start a PhD program, not all of us have experience teaching, but often PhD students - either in the course of our doctoral studies or beyond - are somehow expected to know how to teach. Many of us then try to recall our own experience of being a student, or our memories of the professors that we had. But higher education environments have changed, as have classrooms and the cultures in and around them. So, methods of teaching and learning might need to change and adapt accordingly as well.**

This summer, we participated in the European University Institute's (EUI) summer school, Introduction to Teaching in Higher Education, in Florence, Italy. It turned out to be a good place to learn about and discuss new methods and challenges in higher education teaching. The training was organized at the EUI, a unique higher education institution that focuses mainly on PhD programs in European studies. The EUI was established in 1972 by European Union member states to promote cultural exchange among the member states and to contribute to the development of the region.

As the very establishment and existence of the EUI itself reflects, the roles and missions of universities have changed over time. In recent decades, many universities have tried and are trying to incorporate international, regional and global dimensions into their research activities and teaching-and-learning practices. These manifest not only in terms of the "content" of courses, but also in terms of curriculum design — including pedagogy, methods of assessment, and so on — and how it's tied to the achievement of expected learning outcomes (e.g. intercultural competences, critical thinking, analytical and evaluation skills). The higher education environment has become more diverse, and new opportunities and challenges have emerged. With these changes, more universities are starting to pay more attention to the teaching-and-learning function of the universities. From this perspective, the summer school we attended serves as a valuable resource for PhD students and aspiring teachers in higher education.

The summer school consisted of 20 class hours distributed over four days. In this period two experienced instructors covered a broad array of topics related to teaching and learning, including the different theoretical approaches and the EU policy framework in higher education, as well as the more practical aspects of teaching, such as the management of the teaching space, the introduction of more interactive dynamics, and the importance of the teaching persona for engaging the students in more interesting lectures and classes. A teaching session followed by extensive feedback provided a very useful experience for students both with and without teaching experience.

Furthermore, the summer school focused on course design and allowed us to practice planning a course and understanding the relationship between different aspects that need to be taken into account when teaching. Therefore, the future teachers learn how to follow the students' learning process and to adapt the teaching should it be deemed necessary.

*Learn more about the European University Institute and its teacher training program:*  
<https://teachertraining.eui.eu/>



The parallel reflection on the degree of achievement of the learning outcomes is essential. After the end of the summer school, an assignment consisted in the preparation of course design and a peer review process.

This type of training is very useful given the often limited and uneven access to pedagogic training available to PhD students in universities. The preparation for higher education teaching is usually provided in different formats—short two-day courses or short workshops. This variety of training formats of higher education teaching illustrates the gap in preparation that PhD students face when beginning their teaching experience.

For instance, few courses discuss broader topics such as course design and pedagogic approaches. Therefore, training programs like the EUI's summer

school on higher education teaching become a common way to externalise this preparation. PhD students and teaching assistants that feel they need to deepen their own training tend to find such courses to be valuable preparation. The uneven training provided shows that introducing similar courses in different universities would be positive for PhD students who want to prepare better for their teaching experience. A similar course undoubtedly would be appreciated by those members of the teaching community that are in the early stages of their careers.

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