

## **STUDENT WORKLOAD – STUDENT OR TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY; CASE STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION, SLOVENIA**

Jasna Kržin Stepišnik, jasna.krzin-stepisnik@guest.arnes.si, Olga Kolar,  
olga.kolar@guest.arnes.si, DSc. Nada Trunk Širca, nada.trunk@fm-kp.si, DSc. Dušan Lesjak,  
dusan.lesjak@fm-kp.si  
**University of Primorska Faculty of Management Koper, Slovenia**

### **ABSTRACT**

Substantial changes in society and the development of higher education, the enhancement of its quality and social relevance, and the solution to the major challenges it faces, require strong involvement not only of governments and of higher education institutions, but also of all stakeholders, including students and teachers. A greater responsibility of higher education institutions towards society and accountability for the use of public resources is required as well. Higher education institutions have to form the most effective ways to achieve the required learning outcomes, defined in study programs. They also have to monitor results of learning process and influence on student and teacher work in terms of improvements and progress. Among others the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) can influence on effectiveness of the study process and responsibility of students, teachers and higher education institutions towards time spent in studying. Assessment of students' workload, defining the learning outcome to be obtained and introducing the active teaching methods are essential for creating new educational procedures. In this research summary we allege some key findings of our research which took place in selected higher education institution in the academic year 2005/2006. It was carried out as a case study and was focused on problems related to actual student workload and responsibility for time spent in studying. As to students' and managements' statements the teacher is considered the key factor to influence on students' actual workload. Monitoring the actual student workload and emphasizing its importance can make students and teachers aware of taking responsibility for acquiring knowledge. Findings in this paper could be used by management for organizing a study process.

**Keywords:** Bologna process, credit system, student workload, responsibility, knowledge.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the past few decades Europe has gone through some big political, economic and social changes. Knowledge has become the fundamental good with an essential impact on the entire progress of the society. It is considered to be a fundamental capital of the modern world (2). The society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations (11, 13).

The development of higher education, the enhancement of its quality and social relevance and the solution to the major challenges it faces, require strong involvement not only of governments and higher education institutions, but also of all stakeholders, including students, teachers and management. A greater responsibility of higher education institutions towards society and accountability in the use of public resources is required as well (13).

Because of demands for greater accountability in economical use of public resources, because of large number and pretentiousness of students and also because of a keen competition higher education institutions have to constantly assure and prove its effectiveness (5, 7, 9).

European systems of higher education are focused on quality, transparency, comparability and accessibility and have been changing through the so called Bologna process (3). The main issue of the European higher education space is to prepare the student to go in for labour market, to make him able to acquire further qualifications, to play an active role as a citizen and to continue his education. Consequently it demands and encourages changes in management of higher education institutions. Its main task is to enable qualitative educational process and efficient operating of the institution as a whole (4).

General and specific competences of students are being developed by new programs (8). The constituent element of the European comparability is the credit study system which enables to make comparisons by taking into consideration the efforts of students, consequently the difficulty of the study (14).

The European credit transfer system – the ECTS serves as a tool for creating curriculums. Higher education institutions are able to create the most efficient ways to achieve required competences related to a specified study program. The ECTS enables us to monitor results. It effects students and their responsibility to study time in order to acquire knowledge. It influences teachers' work, their choice of teaching methods and student activities. The ECTS also effects the management of higher education institutions, which have to form the most effective ways to achieve the required learning outcomes, defined in study programs. By monitoring results of the learning process the management can influence students' and teachers' work in terms of effectiveness, improvements and progress (1, 4, 10).

Modernized studies »according to the Bologna Declaration« started in Slovenia during the academic year 2005/2006. The higher education system in Slovenia consists of the sixth, seventh and eighth educational level (12). The Slovene higher education system can be compared with the new classification and corresponds to the first, second and third level defined by the Bologna. According to the Slovene statutory provisions our higher education institutions are obliged to verify actual student workload each academic year until the first registered generation takes a degree and at least each second year thereafter (6).

All changes and requirements mentioned above demand different approach to creating, executing and verifying the educational and research work (9). The aim of this paper is to examine the responsibility for student workload and to investigate problems related to actual students' workload by monitoring, as well as by comparing estimated and actual workload. It also describes the response of students, teachers and management of the selected higher education institution.

## **RESEARCH**

In order to do research on actual student workload a case study was carried out in academic year 2005/2006. It took place in a selected higher education institution, which has more than 2000 students in four study centers. The research was being conducted over a period of time from October 2005 to the end of September 2006. Students, teachers and the management were involved in this process. The objectives of the research were:

- To evaluate the procedure of monitoring actual student workload.
- To evaluate the questionnaire.

- To establish actual workload of a (average) student during his study by sampling students and to find out the eventual differences between estimated and actual student workload during his study.
- To examine the responsibility for student workload.
- To suggest an efficient monitoring of actual workload of students at higher education institution level and how to contribute to the national higher education system as example of “good practice”.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research designed as a case study had its quantitative and qualitative part. Several methods and techniques of data acquisition were constituent parts of it. A questionnaire had to be completed by students. Data related to the actual student workload during their study were acquired weekly during the learning process or after the completion of the course. They refer to typical activities of students, e.g.: lectures, seminars.

The data related to the actual workload of students were being collected during the whole academic year 2005/2006 by means of the questionnaire:

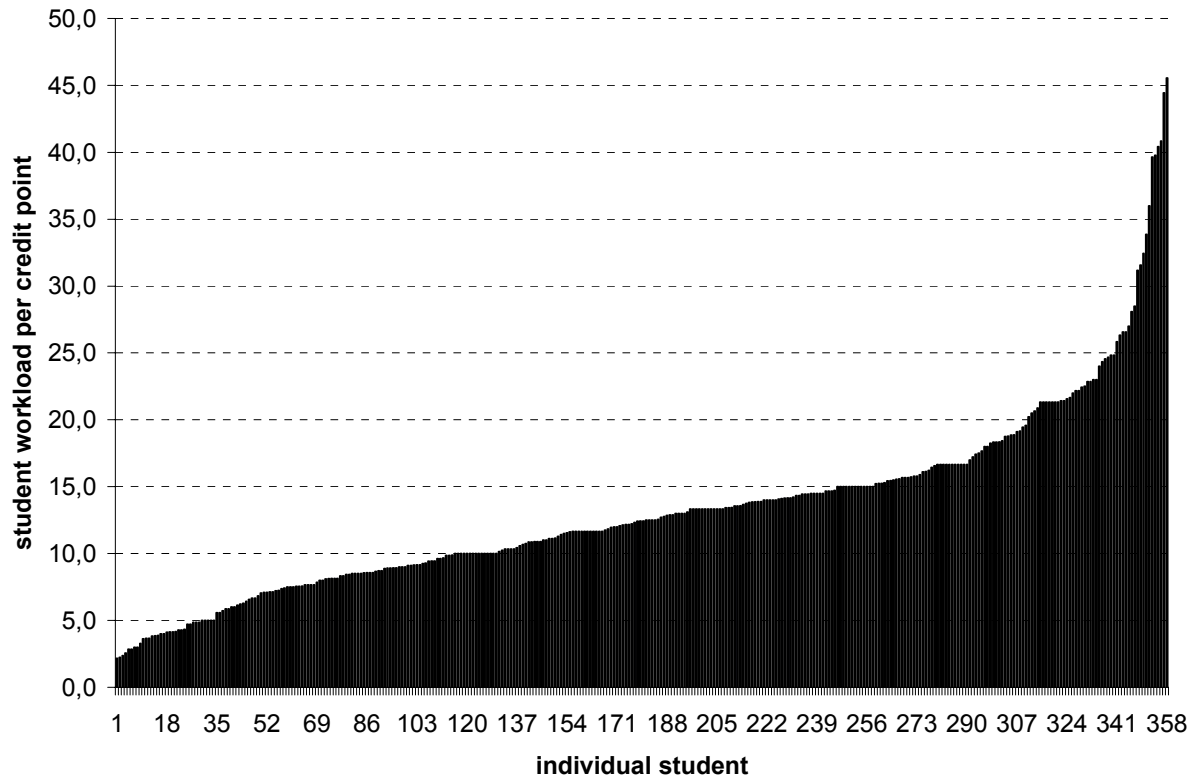
- They were acquired from a sample of students out of the study centre A, together with data about all their courses and all years of their study. These questionnaires were completed by students during the learning process weekly.
- They were acquired from the whole population of students out of the study centre B and from the selected courses. Data about courses lectured during winter semester were entered into the questionnaire by students after the completion of courses. Questionnaires for courses lectured during the summer semester were completed by students weekly.
- They were acquired from the whole population of students at the selected course performed as an e-learning course.

Some discussions were performed within the groups of selected students. Individual interviews were conducted with teachers lecturing renewed programs and an interview with the higher education institution management representative.

Some other documents were analyzed as well, e.g.: teachers made some schemes and reports on their work.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

Students who had finished lectures at particular courses and passed exams gave back 358 questionnaires. Some students gave back the questionnaire for one subject only while the others returned questionnaires related to several subjects. A significant difference was observed with regard to minimal and maximal actual student workload. The maximal indicated actual workload can be at least 15-times bigger than the minimal one (Figure 1). The existence of heterogeneousness among students can be pointed out.



**Figure 1:** All students included into research divided according to the actual workload per credit point.

The actual workload had to be calculated per credit point for comparability of data related to the actual student workload at different courses. According to the acquired data students require, on average, 13,6 hours/credit point for their study. It represents about half of the estimated student workload (25-30 hours per credit point).

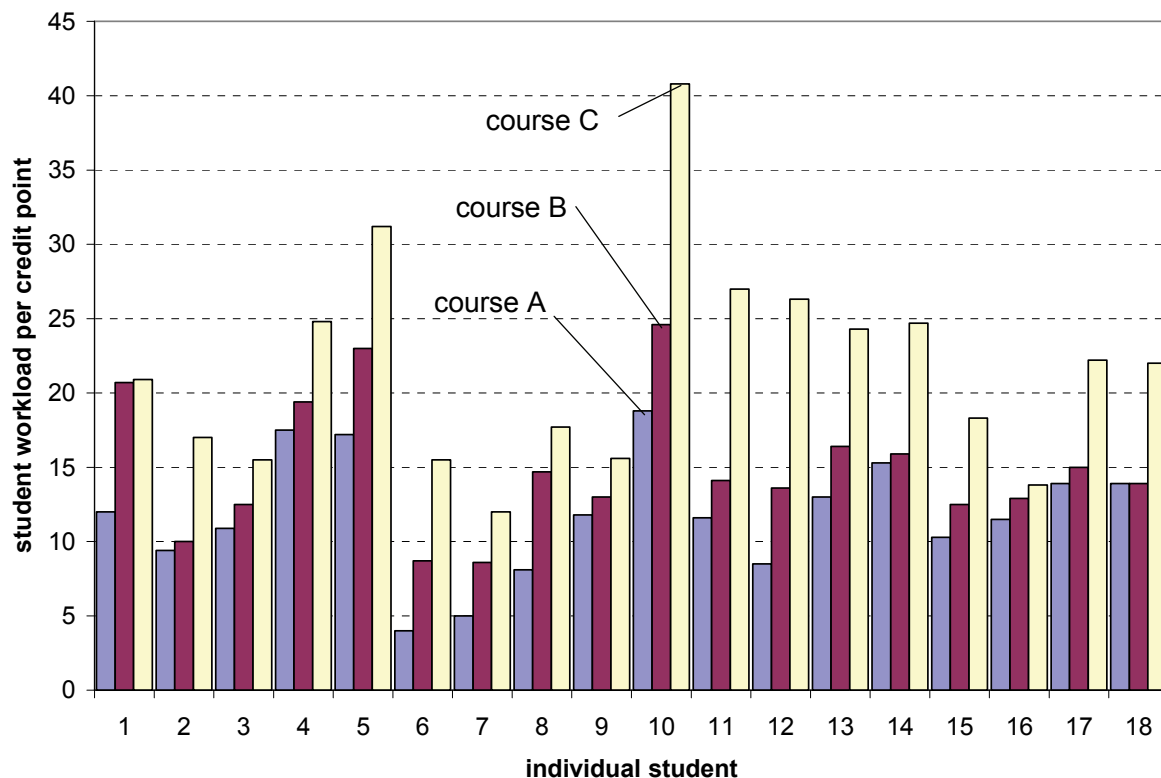
Reasons for this outstanding discrepancy were explored by students, teachers and the representative of the management. Inappropriate monitoring might be one of reasons (problem of memorizing), but it was not confirmed by the acquired data.

Actual student workload completed in questionnaires weekly was, on average, the same as of those who filled in their data after they had finished a particular course. In teachers' opinion the main reason for such outcome could be the fact that students did not recognize and consequently did not evaluate time actually spent in, e.g.: chatting drinking coffee, discussing seminar work, informal discussion with colleagues about solving one particular problem. The representative of the management pointed out the problem of recognizing the informally acquired knowledge. Consequently it can reduce time load of more experienced or senior students.

We have to emphasize an interesting opinion of the teacher who was doing a research work trying to find out the main reasons for such low workload in today's society. The hierarchy of values should be changed as knowledge has been losing its role and value. The individual with his material goods has been prevailing. These changes in the hierarchy of values force students to work. Of course they influence the quality of study to a high degree.

We compared the actual workload per credit point in the group of students who had been observed at several courses (Figure 2). We discovered differences in the actual workload among students and differences in the workload of an individual student related to a particular

course as well. Reasons for this can be pretentiousness of the subject, role the teacher plays, if students find the subject interesting or »usable«. Findings were confirmed by students during their discussions and by teachers and the management as well. Students laid greater stress on the teacher and his teaching methods than on the contents of the course. They preferred more active teaching methods and numerous practical examples which motivated them to the point they decided to take more time for study.



**Figure 2:** Comparison of actual student workload at three different courses.

These differences can be noticed when comparing the average student workload per credit point at individual courses. Comparing six courses the average student workload per credit point differed from 9.2 hours/cp to 26.9 hours/cp, it differed almost 3-times. The actual student workload at course performed as an e-learning course differs only to a small extent from the average workload at an ordinary type of course.

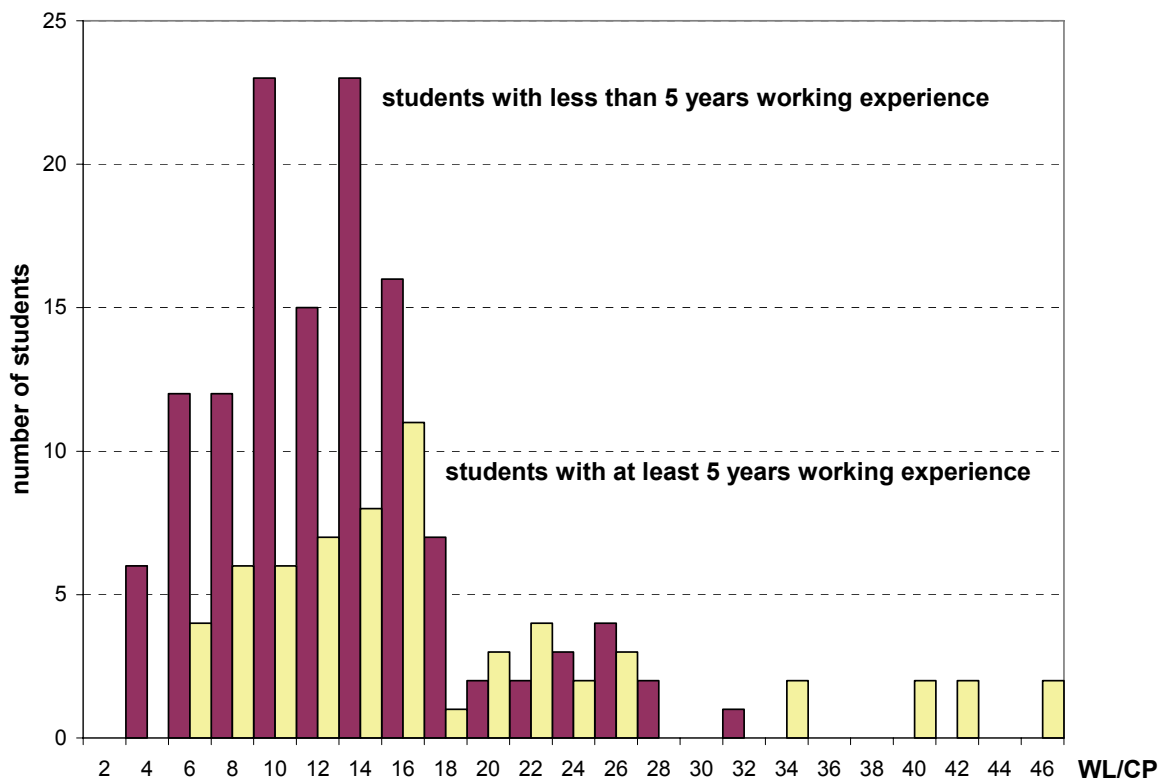
Most of the courses in the programs are compulsory, some of them are selected by students. Analysis of the actual student workload showed that students, on average, took 32% more time per credit point for optional courses in comparison with compulsory courses. The average actual student workload is 13.1 hours per credit point at compulsory courses and 17.3 hours per credit point at optional courses.

Slovene higher education institutions enable a full-time study to young people aged 18 to 19. It is financed by the state. The other possibility is a part-time study financed by students themselves or by their employers. It is mostly the choice of employed adults. As for the fact that full-time study offers only a limited number of places/posts some young people have to register as part-timers. We compared the actual workload of full- and part-time students. Part-time students make less effort and take less time per credit point in comparison with full-time students (about 30% less). Students, teachers and the management consider the reason for

smaller actual workload of part-time students should be looked for in their previous experience.

According to part-time students main reasons for reduced number of hours per credit point are their experience, bigger motivation and the intensity of study. Part-time students stated they were able to carry out much more work in the same period as full-time students did. In their opinion their advantage was to be able to concentrate more when studying because of their limited time due to other obligations, e.g.: job and family. They mentioned school fees as well. They were certain the a.m. was a pretty considerable motivation for part-time students to study more intensively within their limited time.

The graph (Figure 3) shows us the comparison of actual workload of the employed and the unemployed students. The employed students who worked 10 or more hours per week (most of them alleged 40 hours) spent only 10% less time on their study in comparison with the unemployed students. It is interesting to observe that the employed students, despite lack of time, spend only 1.5 hours per credit point less in comparison with the unemployed. We get a similar picture comparing the actual workload of students per credit point related to their working experience. Contrary to our expectations, less working experienced students study less on average.



**Figure 3:** Actual student workload per credit point relating to their working experience.

According to the acquired data junior students take less time to study than senior ones, the expectations respectively. Students at 26 take, on average, one fourth or 3 hours per credit point more to study than their younger colleagues. This is an unexpected result as well.

We compared actual student workload per credit point in relation to the level of study. Students at the third level of Bologna study take, on average, 2.5 hours per credit point more than their colleagues at the first and second level of Bologna study. This is 20% more. These



data could be verified in the same manner as it was done when comparing the actual student workload, their age and working experience respectively.

## CONCLUSION

The research work has been done to influence on responsibility of all partners in educational process and to make students, teachers and the management aware of time spent on study and its relation with acquired knowledge.

The collected data shows us that junior students take less time to study than senior ones, students on first and second level of study less than their colleagues on third level, the employed students study a little bit less in comparison with the unemployed students. Surprisingly less working experienced students study on average less than their more experienced colleagues. This might be cleared up by a teacher's statement: "In my opinion the whole society tends towards the reform of values. The entire system of these values inclines a little bit from former, old, traditional ones. Material goods are becoming important. Students take more time, not only to assure minimal, but better living standard."

Changes introduced by Bologna process should be presented more effectively to students by means of study guidebooks, website and contact hours. If monitoring became a part of daily study obligations, it could have the biggest impact possible. Students would find study time essential to acquire knowledge. Teachers should also play bigger role in monitoring the actual student workload. According to students and teachers answers and opinions, the questionnaire and the procedure of monitoring should be improved. Therefore some changes were made, like the new form of prepared questionnaire for students with less divided typical activities, weeks of monitoring registered as a calendar,...

It has been stated that students take more time per credit point at their optional courses. This should encourage the management to provide students with a greater number of selective courses. If the student gets the opportunity to select his course, he works harder and acquires better knowledge.

The management of selected higher education institution also made some shifts. It will be interesting to find out to what extent they have succeeded in ensuring bigger actual workload and consequently in acquiring better knowledge with regard to the changes they made for academic year 2006/2007 such as four semesters instead of two and such as changed educational process due to introducing obligatory attendance at lectures for full-time students.

One of the main objectives of the research was to examine the responsibility for student workload. The student responsibility grows with age and level of study. Young unemployed students on average didn't feel much responsibility for their own spent time and their study as well. They exposed the responsibility of the teacher. The teacher is the most important factor which has a profound impact on time they spend in studying. Students recognized responsibility of the management as well. They agreed the management could determine or, if needed, change credit evaluation of a particular course or program as to the actual student workload. It was their opinion that the management should organize the educational process in such a way that it would enable the teacher to make good use of his role and influence.

Teachers were aware of their own responsibility for knowledge transmission and proper student workload. But they also pointed out responsibility of the students and stressed out value changes in society: "One of the reasons for lack of responsibility could be found in the fact that knowledge itself does not enable the individual to gain the appropriate social status. Of course we can not deny its impact on time spent in acquiring knowledge."

The management was well aware of the importance of monitoring from the aspect of quality as well as from the aspect of impact on teachers' responsibility and awareness regarding methods of lecturing and examining. Students should become aware of spent time and acquired knowledge as well. These are main reasons for deep engagement in monitoring the actual student workload at this higher education institution.

## REFERENCES

- Center for Educational Policy Studies. (2005). Evropski visokošolski prostor – doseganje ciljev. Komunikacije konference evropskih ministrov, pristojnih za visoko šolstvo. Retrieved December 08, 2005 from <http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si/050520bergencommuniquelo.pdf>
- Drucker, P. F. (2001). Managerski izziv v 21. stoletju. Ljubljana: GV Založba.
- European University Association. (2001). Bologna Process. Retrieved December 07, 2005 from [http://www.eua.be/eua/en/policy\\_bologna.aspx](http://www.eua.be/eua/en/policy_bologna.aspx)
- Eurydice. (2005). Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2004/2005. National Trends in the Bologna Process. Brussels: Eurydice.
- Jackson, N. (1998). Academic Regulation in UK Higher Education: Part 1 current practice and conceptual frameworks. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 6 (1), 5-18.
- Merila za kreditno vrednotenje študijskih programov po ECTS. (2004). Retrieved December 08, 2005 from <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=2004124&stevilka=5200>
- Oldfield, B. & Baron, S. (1998). Is Servicescape Important to Student Perceptions of Service Quality? Research Paper. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2004). Definition and Selection of Competences. Retrieved December 15, 2004 from <http://www.oecd.org/>
- Trunk Širca, N., Nada, Sulčič, V., & Lesjak, D. (2005). Spremembe v visokem šolstvu narekujejo drugačno vodenje visokošolskih zavodov. *Neprofitni management*, 3 (1), 53-54.
- Tuning. (2005). Student Workload, Teaching Methods and Learning Outcomes: The Tuning Approach. Retrieved December 13, 2005 from [http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=59&task=view\\_category &catid=36&order=dmname&ascdesc=ASC](http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=59&task=view_category &catid=36&order=dmname&ascdesc=ASC)
- Svetlik, I. & Pavlin, S. (2004). Izobraževanje in raziskovanje za družbo znanja. *Teorija in praksa*, 41 (1-2), 199-211.
- Uredba o uvedbi in uporabi klasifikacijskega sistema izobraževanja in usposabljanja. (2006). Retrieved June 12, 2006 from <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=200646&stevilka=1964>
- Unesco. (1998). World Declaration on Higher Education for the twenty-first Century: vision and action. Retrieved October 15, 2006 from [http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration\\_eng.htm#world%20declaration](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm#world%20declaration)
- Zgaga, P. (2004). Bolonjski proces: oblikovanje skupnega evropskega visokošolskega prostora. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta.