



'Intellectual property' discipline - practice-focused training during online education

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Abstract

The purpose of this report is to present opportunities for interactive training of students studying the 'Intellectual Property' discipline in the digital environment. Regardless of the platform used to conduct the training (Microsoft, Google Cloud, Webex, Zoom, etc.) the platform itself presents a different opportunity to make the learning process more interactive, which in the traditional way of teaching is difficult to apply. Given the resource provision with a device for each participant in the learning process - lecturer and students, which is difficult to implement in the classroom and a mandatory factor for participation in online teaching and studying, we could apply a different method of intellectual property training to minimize the gap between theory and practice.

The report will present the lecturers with the opportunities to organise different practical components either in an online lecture or by creating and moderating parallel and independent virtual rooms dividing the students in groups. In this way in addition to acquiring practical skills, students will be stimulated to work in groups and present their results.

In addition, the possibility to work with different online resources and databases will give students specific knowledge, which is a valuable advantage in their subsequent professional realization as experts in the intellectual property field. Students will be able to apply the acquired knowledge and skills directly in their practice as experts in various business organizations that already own intellectual property rights, that will create intellectual property objects or that will acquire intellectual property rights in the future. In this way, the students who will later work in this professional field will directly contribute to the acquisition and maintenance of a competitive advantage of the respective organization in terms of protection and management of intellectual property.

Keywords: *Intellectual property, online education, intellectual property search, databases, competitive advantage*

1. Introduction

The importance of the intellectual property system in the modern economy is constantly growing, which is reflected in the adoption of various international and regional directives and regulations aimed at harmonizing legislation in the field, as well as legislative changes not only in specialized legislation on various intellectual property objects, but also of other normative acts. For example, at national level, in Bulgaria in 2015 there were amendments to the Higher Education Act, by which the universities were obliged to have a 'system for the protection of intellectual property, incl. regulations and structure for the realization of the results of scientific research and other objects of intellectual property, as well as for training in the protection of intellectual property'[1].

As a representative of the University of National and World Economy (UNWE), which is the only university in Bulgaria that has a training unit in intellectual property, it is a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to teach a discipline dedicated to this issue to students in the professional field of economics while they are at the very start of their higher education. The system of intellectual property includes both objects of industrial and artistic property and new objects of intellectual property, which makes it challenging to teach students the necessary basic theoretical knowledge in this field in a relatively short teaching time – in the current moment forty-five academic hours. In this report, I will present the opportunities that the online environment has opened for me as a lecturer, as a side effect



of the Covid Pandemic, to adapt the intellectual property course to the specifics of online learning and at the same time for the needs of practice-focused training.

2. Possible practical components in the intellectual property course in online environment

This report will present various practical components that could be involved in the preparation of students studying the intellectual property discipline, according to the relevant curriculum, as well as the preliminary preparation, which is recommended to be carried out by the lecturer. The proposed practical classes are not vast and aim to help lecturers in adapting the curriculum for online teaching, as well as to emphasize on the practical components in the teaching process.

The practical components that can be easily implemented in the learning process in intellectual property discipline are:

- searches in different data bases for claimed and registered industrial property objects such as inventions, industrial designs, trademarks, etc.
- review and searches in catalogues of production music.
- review and searches in registers of the Council for Electronic Media, collective rights management organizations, independent rights management organizations, names of artistic groups, etc.
- calculating due remuneration from certain users of musical works, etc.

3. Preliminary preparation for practice-focused training

Depending on the hours of the discipline and the extent to which it includes hours for exercises, each of the above components could have a different weight and focus.

One of the possible approaches is the presentation by the lecturer of the different databases and the possibilities for searching different objects. Based on experience, however, online education in cloud platforms can give much deeper opportunities to engage students in the learning process by which they will be able to acquire knowledge and practical skills during lectures and their additional preparation on the discipline after them will be less intensive.

As I have stated in a previous study 'although a cloud platform may be unfamiliar and difficult to learn by a teacher or a student, with the right approach and sharing the necessary learning resources to work with it, both teacher and students will be able to overcome the technical hurdle and enjoy the functionalities and convenience of the platform.' [2] In this regard, what I found most suitable for the practice components of teaching and learning processes are the so-called breakout rooms. What does that mean? Dividing students into separate online rooms, within the current online lecture, which allows them to work on a pre-set assignment in groups - something that is difficult to implement in a present format in an audience where the work by groups is often difficult or ineffective due to the difficulties in forming groups that do not interfere with each other and that can focus on the task. Another advantage of this way of organizing the work is that the lecturer can join the individual groups to monitor their progress and, if necessary, give them additional guidance. After the allotted time for group work, students return to the common virtual room and can present the results of their joint work.

My experience from the last two years of online training in this discipline by including a component of parallel sessions, shows that this method of organizing the lecture in combination with the focus on the practical acquisition of theoretical knowledge is favoured by students. The approach, combined with linking the results of teamwork with the final grade in the discipline or with the provision of the possibility of exemption from the exam, further increases the motivation and positive performance of students.

To implement the practical training in the manner described above, a preliminary review of the curriculum is required, which is intended to be covered by the intellectual property course. It should be borne in mind that if so far the course has been entirely theoretical, given the introduction of practical components, the time to cover the theoretical material is reduced, but the curriculum material remains



the same. Given this, it is necessary to plan the lecture course for the semester weeks and identify topics from it that are most beneficial for conducting practical classes and at the same time - evenly distributed over the period of study.

4. Conducting the practice-focused training

The way of organizing the classes depends on the lecturer. For the lecture to run smoothly, it is necessary for the lecturer and the students to feel confident with the platform used in the learning process and to have devices with stable internet, which will guarantee the possibility for their full participation. Therefore, and considering the experience gained so far in online teaching, not only specifically for this discipline, in this report I share the following experience and recommendations:

1. Give instructions. In case students have questions or are working with the platform for the first time, I recommend that they be given introductory instructions and, if necessary, by sharing the screen to go through the functionalities of the cloud platform that will be used during the training.
2. Do not assume that students will necessarily know what it is like to work in the Cloud platform, or what are functions such as screen sharing, parallel sessions, embedding sound from the device used, etc. (although we have been online for two years now) - make sure you provide all the necessary information about the way the lectures will be conducted - incl. technically, to ensure the group's peace of mind and confidence that it knows what lies ahead and that they will be able to participate fully.
3. Create a space for asking questions in a timely manner - you do not want a seeming peace of mind that the teaching method is clear and there are no questions when there are ambiguities that will fail or make group work meaningless.
4. Stay available in the online room during the breakout sessions. Students may need you for further information or instructions.
5. Be flexible in your approach. The group of students you work with may not be suitable for the interactive teaching methods that you have prepared for. That may be due to many different factors, including students using a device with a broken microphone, unstable internet connection, students being in lectures while also being at work and objective impossibility for active participation, low motivation of the group for participation, etc.

Regarding the structuring of the lecture in theoretical and practical terms, I recommend starting the lecture with a theoretical part and after a short break to move to a practical session or if the lecture ended with a theory that provides a practical component, the next lecture to start with it. In both cases, it is obligatory to give clear enough instructions, to give space for questions and, if possible, and when possible, to send instructions to students in the chat, together with links to the sites that are needed in the practical component.

Depending on the focus of intellectual property discipline and the intellectual property objects that will be taught to students, different databases and platforms can be selected for the practical components. For example, as Markova, M. suggests students can carry out searches for trade marks and designs, filed and registered according to national or European legislation. [3] Those are the databases of the Bulgarian Patent Office [4] and the one of EUIPO [5]. Patents, utility models, geographical indications may also be searched in the Bulgarian Patent Office's database. Patents may also be searched in the database of the European Patent Office <https://worldwide.espacenet.com/> [6] By these searches students learn how to check whether an organization has an intellectual property strategy expressed in protection of intellectual property objects and the strategy applied – for example in what territories they seek protection and by which possible registration system – national, regional, international.

As it comes to the second subsystem of the intellectual property system – the artistic property, there are also suitable online activities for group work. For example, students may search for Bulgarian and foreign organisations that have been registered for linear and nonlinear services, as well as for ones that have registered platforms for video distribution in the Council for Electronic Media's public registries [7]. They may become familiar with other registers on national level, such as the registers for collective rights management organizations, independent rights management organizations, names of artistic groups, all of which are public in Bulgaria. By doing this research, students learn how to find information on different intellectual property cases, they study the information found and understand in



practice the theory behind it. If the length of the course is enough, a deeper search may be done for example production music for the means of its synchronization with other creative products such as films, TV show, commercial, etc. Such catalogues of music are those of Universal [8] and Elias Music [9].

Based on experience, students find the next practical component very interesting and share to be the one of most usefulness in understanding the importance of the copyright and related right protection on music works. It's the work in groups in which they can calculate the remuneration due for the copyrights and related rights in the music works if they own a site in which music is performed publicly. For that purpose, we may use the MusicPro platform [10], created by Musicautor and Prophon – the collective rights management organizations that represent the authors and related rights holders of the music works.

4. Conclusion

Bringing the practical component in the teaching process and giving the students the opportunity to work in groups and then present their findings undoubtedly strengthens their knowledge and helps in developing crucial skills and competences for their professional careers after graduation. As Pacheva, V. discovers 'students of UNWE often choose to explore the patent policies of big companies when preparing their individual assignments in the specialty of "IP and Business"'. [11]

A little is needed to spark students' curiosity and help them understand the importance of intellectual property system. It is a lot easier when students actively conduct research and are given the right tools and freedom to explore the different intellectual property management strategies applied by the companies that are of their interest and then openly discuss their findings. No matter how soon we are going back to entirely present form of teaching and studying, I believe it is of great importance to continue making efforts to implement the practical components in the intellectual property discipline and keep the theory-practice balance.

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