

One of the reasons we can do a complex real-world case study in the integration project is that it is not a course in any particular academic subject, like software engineering or information system design, in which students have to acquire textbook knowledge and skills. We are convinced, however, that the key success factor of the BIT integration project is the combination of three elements that reinforce each other: training of management and communication skills, re-activating and integrating knowledge gathered at other courses, and practicing these on a real-world problem. Due to the way in which our university is organized – every lecturer is responsible for his own courses, and there is little reward for improving the quality of teaching – it is not self-evident that lecturers get to know about each other's teaching and discuss the aims of the different courses and the overall curriculum. Fewer than three weeks before, the information system design exercise (partly overspecified, partly underspecified, and generally vague) was a hard experience for most students, as testified in the course evaluation. Yet the case study assignments in the project week were no less vague, but nobody thought this inappropriate, and the teams were now better prepared for it. In sum, our experiences show that it is possible to cover real-world case studies in a limited time span, 160 hours of work. To be fair, it has to be remarked that the faculty's evaluation procedure does not validate whether the objects of a course are the proper ones – but for the integration project there is little reason to worry – and whether the students have truly acquired the skills they think they have acquired.⁸ Trivial as it may seem, it takes some quite some coordination effort to ensure that the modules in this course, for which different persons are responsible, are consistent with each other and with what is taught in half a dozen other courses. The integration project fosters this process and thus has a beneficial effect on the coherence of the curriculum. Moreover, the project week is set up in such a way that the team members must work on different tasks in order to get the work finished in time, but have to share, discuss and integrate their findings in order to obtain a coherent result. Such evaluations are based on students' assessments of whether the objectives of the course have been reached and are geared towards issues that can be improved. Our key to success in a rather compact course is to combining the three mentioned factors into an integrated project in which they reinforce each other. A suitable case study and good preparation are obviously prerequisite to make a project like this worthwhile.