



# RESEARCH IN/ON COMMUNITY SERVICE-LEARNING

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ECSL 2019, Antwerpen



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UNIVERSITEIT  
BRUSSEL



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# CONTEXT



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# VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL (VUB)

## CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT



### Building blocks

The foundations for the third general strategic plan are:

- **A warm VUB**

We focus on trust, respect and engagement for the joint VUB project. This means a withdrawal from too formal and legalistic an organisational model. We heed the call for more informal contacts. HR and infrastructure are important tools to accomplish this. We want to tap into the VUB potential much more. Through a VUB Academy we learn more from each other.

- **A connected VUB**

The Brussels' component is an important element of internal and external cohesion. At the same time this is not the only element. The diversity of society must be anchored more and better into the operation of VUB. Intense cooperation with organisations, schools and individuals that build upon the same values as VUB must be made concrete.

- **A learning VUB**

In order to keep our education concept up to speed with the 21st century the commitment of those who learn is essential. Digital, diverse, international, sustainable and participative are recurring keywords that must lead to broad and specialised bachelor programs and better access to the university. Other teaching forms such as hackatons must take shape.

- **An open VUB**

A connected world facilitates the link between research budgets and economic growth. Open data, open science, interdisciplinary research that makes a difference in an ethical humanistic context is the challenge. In-depth excellence, broad relevance.

## BRUSSELS IS OUR LIVING LAB

Since we are fortunate to work in Brussels, we know better than anyone else what our changing society needs, and how our interdisciplinary approach can provide answers to those problems. The lines between research, education and service to society are blurring evermore.

Buddy project:  
Bruggen  
Bouwen



UNIVER.CITY

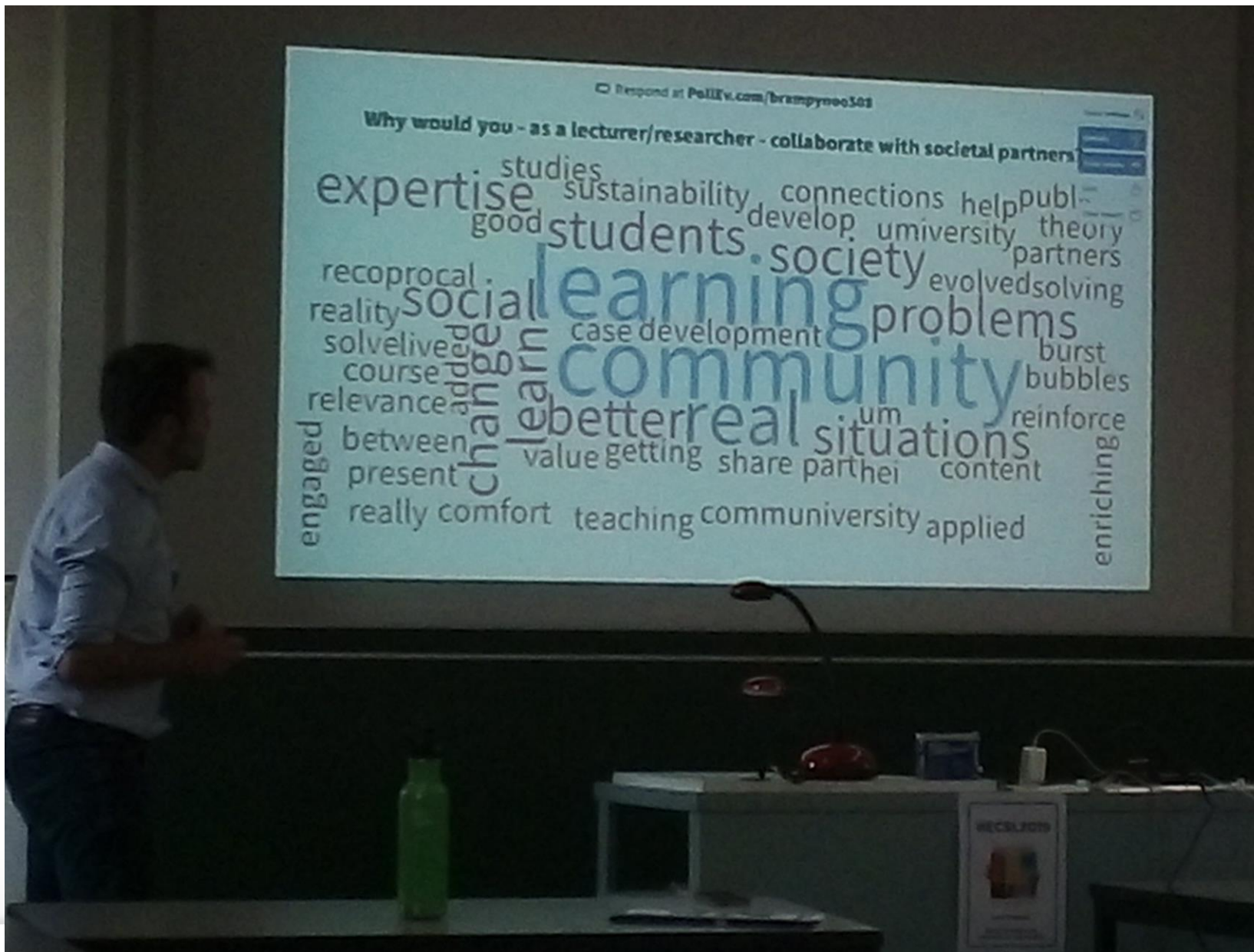
A STRATEGIC PROJECT

- Promote & support CEL in our institution
- Connect with (possible) partners & Brussels
- Runtime: 2018-2020
- Team: 5 members (1.4FTE) from different departments: Central Department of Education, Research & Development (Science shop), Academic Language Department

- Develop an evidence-based toolkit
- Professionalization initiatives for (interested) lecturers
- Evidence-based design principles & (research) framework
- Professional Learning Community → 2018-19 and 2019-20
- Continued support for (interested) lecturers
- Online platform: [www.univercity.be](http://www.univercity.be)



# What does Community Engaged Learning (or Community Service Learning) mean to you?



# EXPERIENCE WITH COMMUNITY SERVICE / ENGAGED LEARNING?



Educational strategies that integrate **societal partnerships**, contexts and dynamics in the curriculum, as building blocks for **experiential education**; as an entry point for academic and non-academic actors to learn **with, from and for each other**, and contribute to sustainable - scientifically grounded – progress.

working definition Community Engaged Learning @VUB

# TIMELINE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY



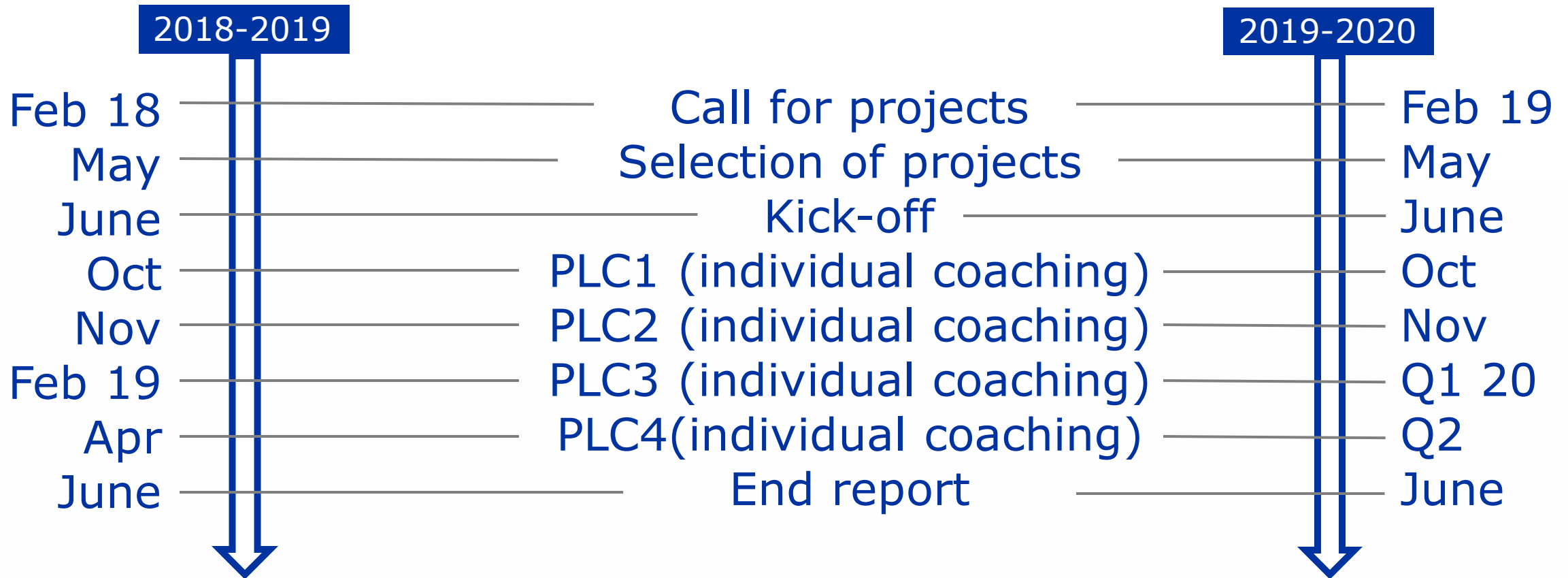
Kick-off

=

Foundation  
for the  
success of the  
PLC



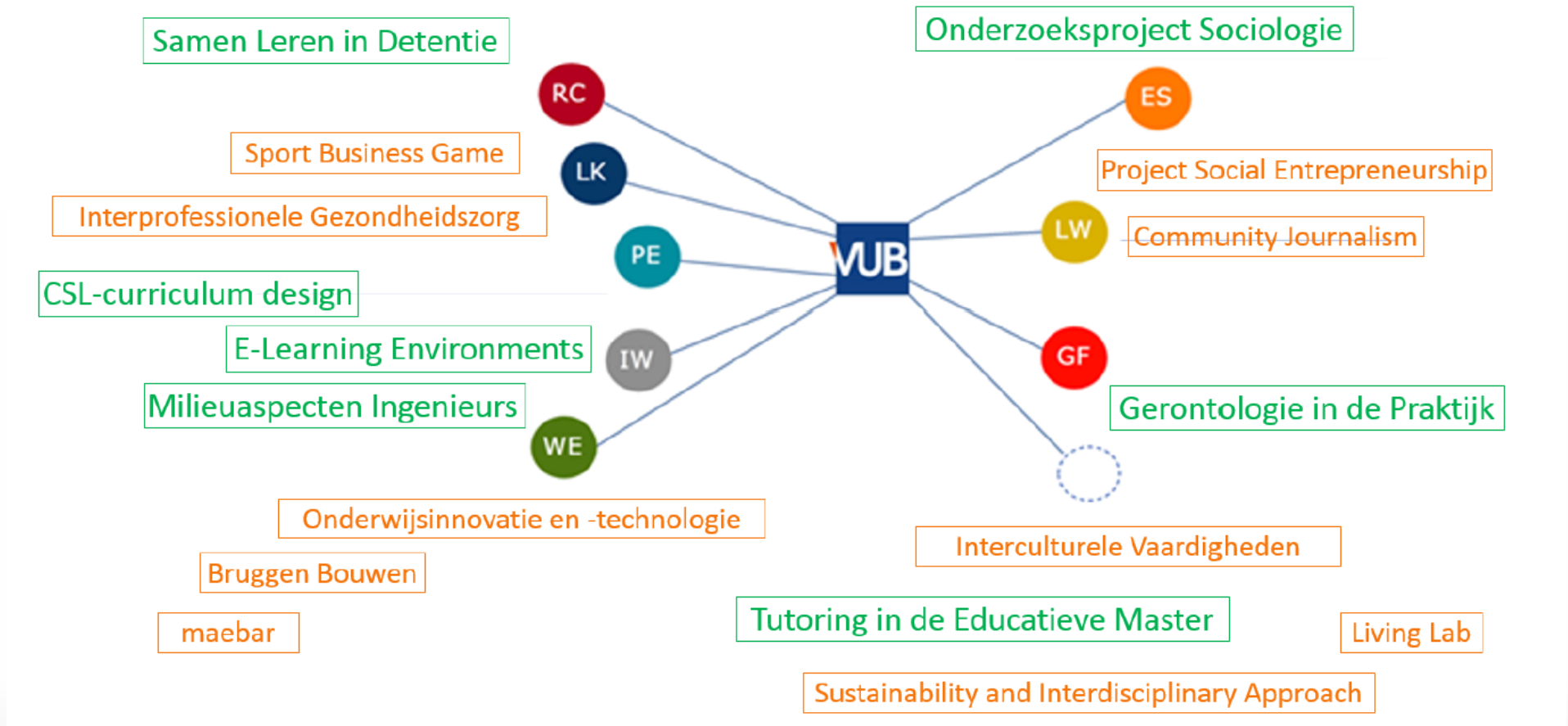
# TIMELINE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY



# PROJECTS

2018-19

2019-20



# 1. RESEARCH ON CSL



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# OVERVIEW STUDIES

## Research on CEL

- Lecturers
  - Baseline study
  - Lecturers in the PLC
- Students
  - Baseline study
  - Focus group
- Partners (CSO's)
  - Baseline study
  - Interviews

## Research in CEL

- Case study 'Blended CEL'
  - Focus group with students in Educational Innovation and Technology

# STUDY 1 MONITORING STUDY - LECTURERS

## BASELINE MEASUREMENT

**AIM:** baseline measure on VUB lecturers' perceptions of Service-Learning and their current CSL practices

### Specific for this presentation

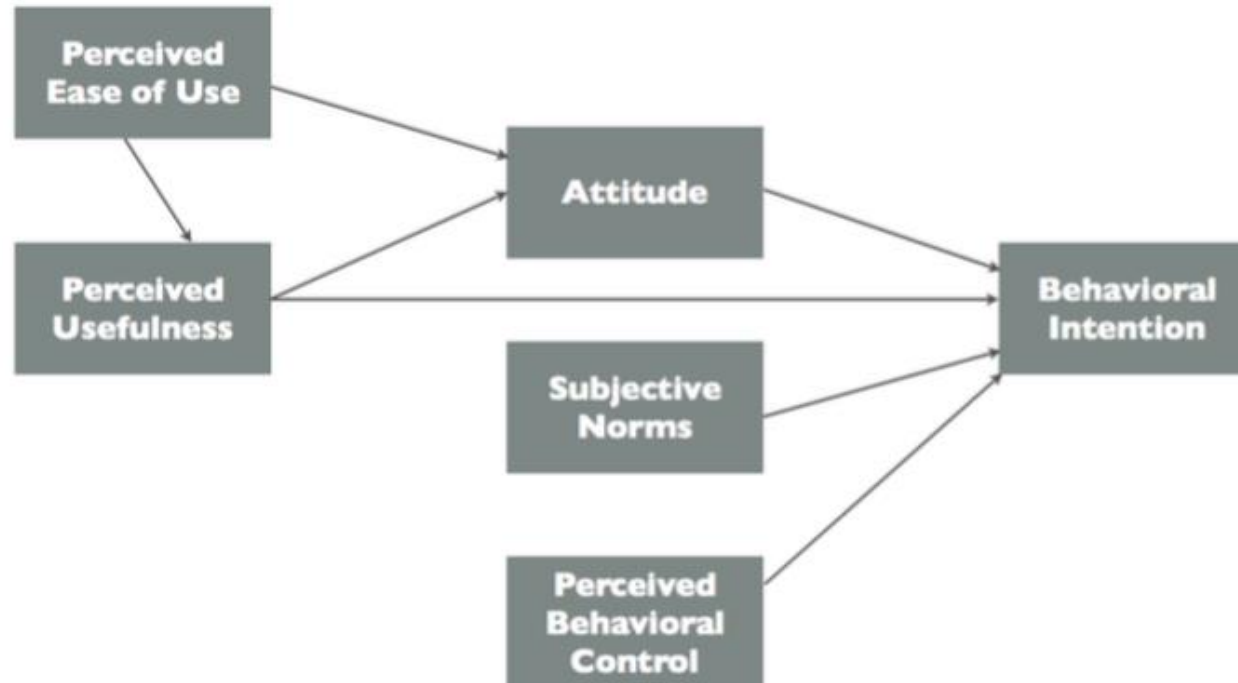
RQ1: Are there differences between lecturers with and without CSL experience in their perceptions of Service-Learning

RQ2: to what extent can lecturers without CSL experience be motivated to incorporate CSL in their courses



# INSTRUMENT

## C-TAM-TPB



Framework: C-TAM-TPB (Combined Technology Acceptance Model and Theory of Planned Behavior)

→ Integrate CSL activities in your course(s)

→ 20 items

→ Additional variables

→ Why CSL? (added) value of CSL?

→ Vision on CSL

→ Targeted competencies

→ CSL activities

→ Added value of Brussels?

## STUDY POPULATION / SAMPLE

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Population: VUB personnel that may be / is involved in teaching: (guest)professors, assistants, PhD's => N=2097

Online survey, two follow-up mails to (partial) non-responders

December 2018 – January 2019

Sample: N=253 participants of which 101 completed

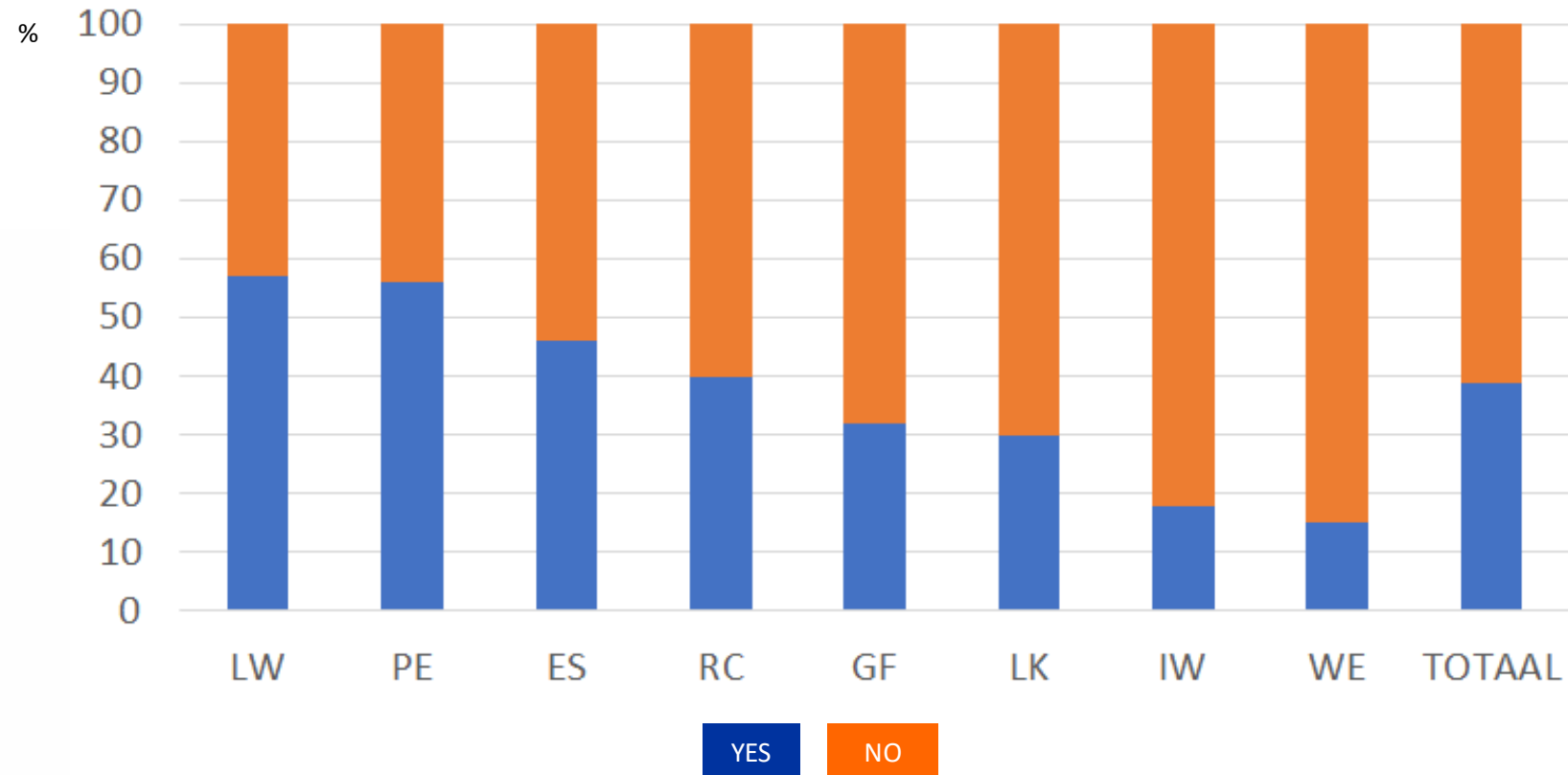
Representative for gender (43,2% female, 56,4% male) and faculty

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Professors</i>	117	48,5
<i>Teaching assistants</i>	42	17,4
<i>Scientific personnel</i>	66	27,4
<i>Administrative staff</i>	1	,4
<i>Other*</i>	15	6,2
<i>Total</i>	241	100,0
<i>Missing</i>	12	
<i>Total</i>	253	

*\*Combination of above categories*

## Are societal actors already involved in your education?

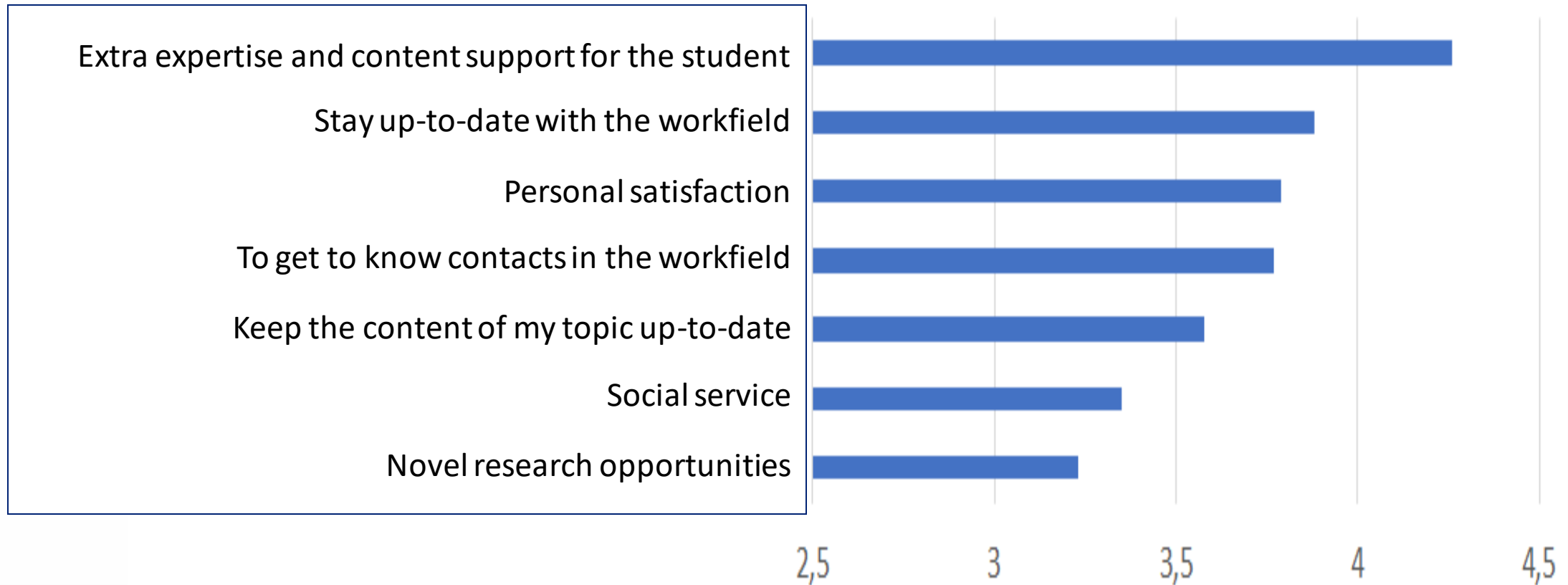
LW: Arts & Philosophy  
PE: Psychology & Educational Sciences  
ES: Economics & Social Sciences  
RC: Law & Criminology  
GF: Medicine & Pharmacy  
LK: Physical Education  
IW: Engineering  
WE: Sciences & Bio-engineering





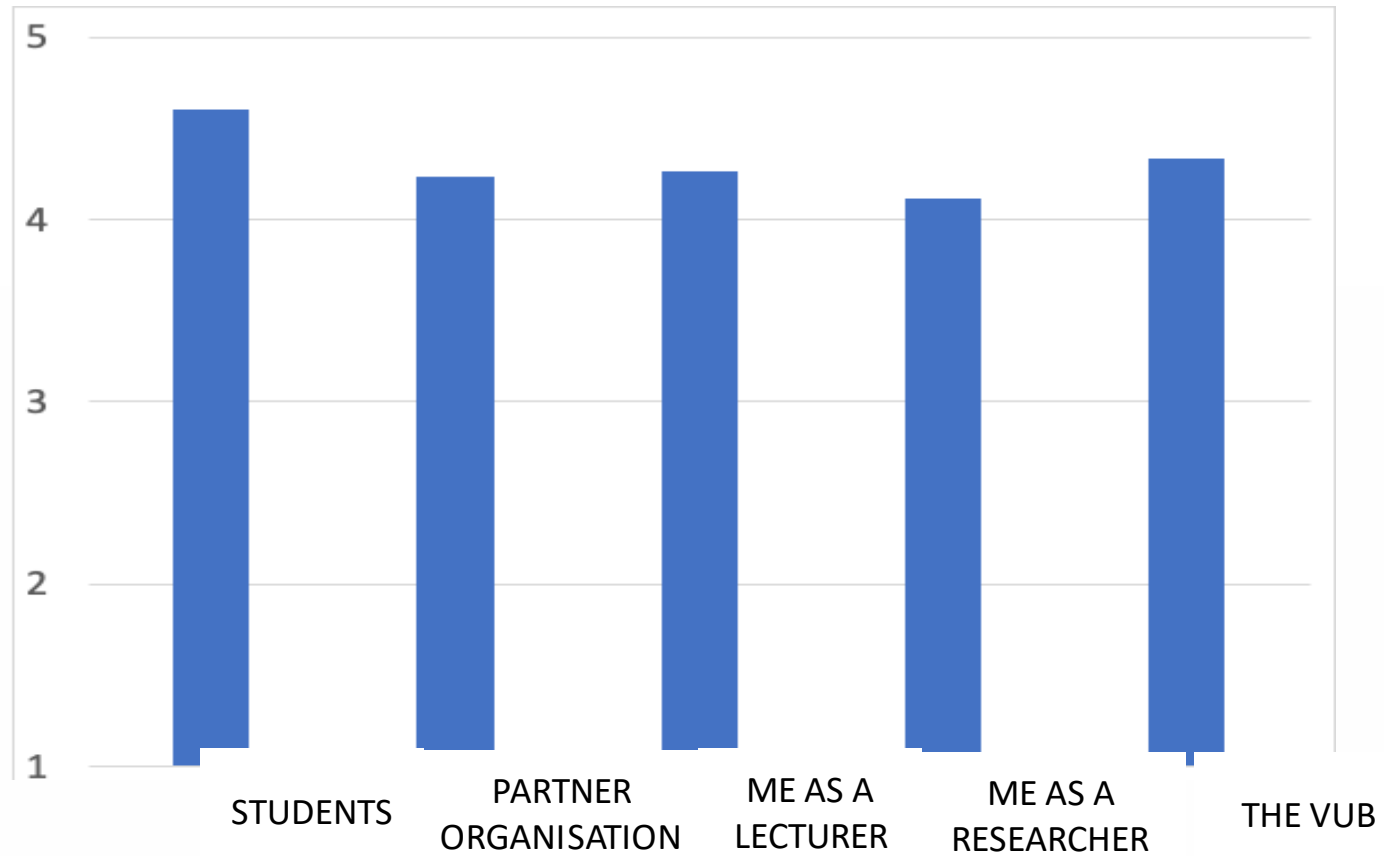
# **Why would you - as a lecturer/researcher - collaborate with societal partners?**

## Why do you collaborate with societal partners?



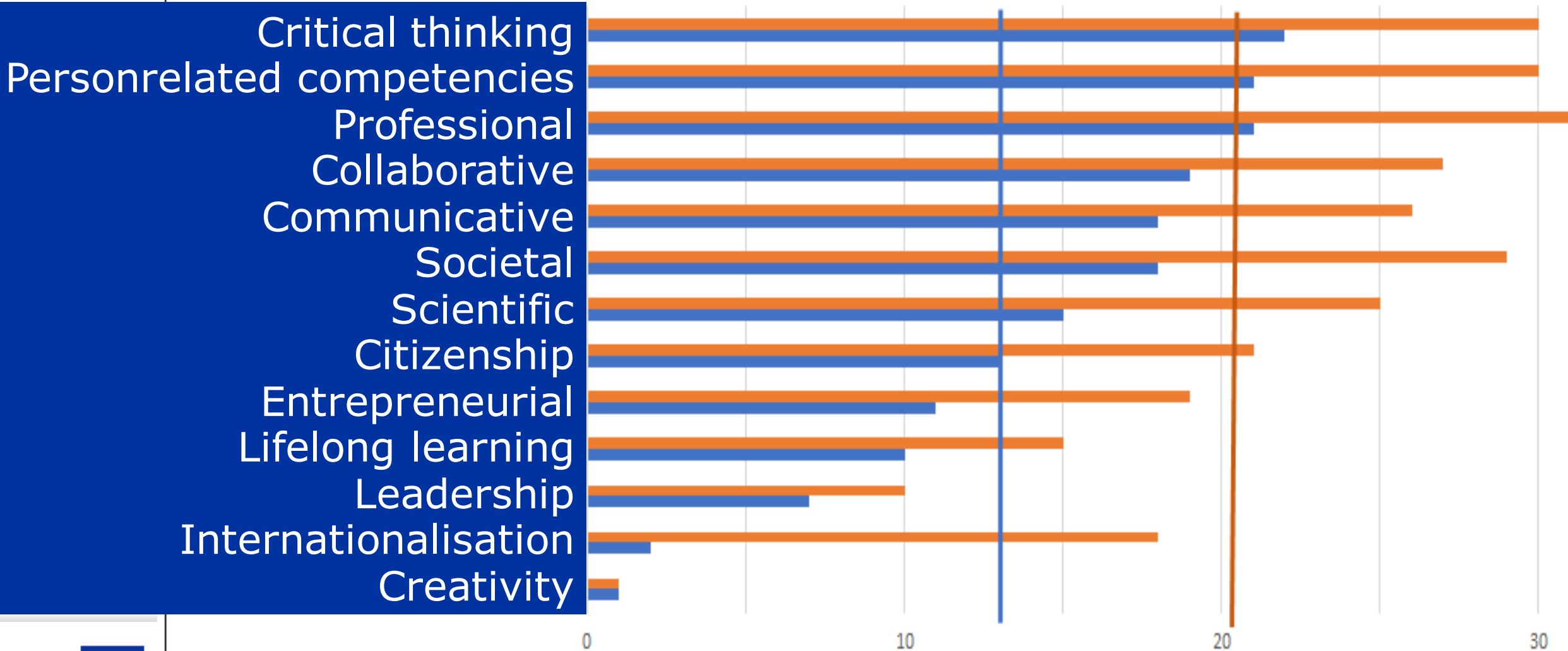
1: not at all for this reason - 5: completely for this reason

# To what extent is community service learning an added value for..



1 : NO ADDED VALUE - 5: LARGE ADDED VALUE

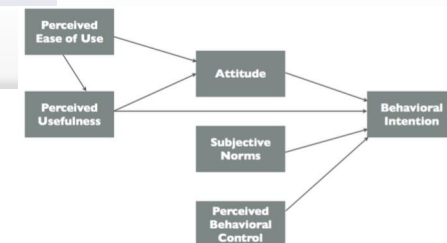
# WHICH COMPETENCIES DO YOU ADDRESS WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING ACTIVITIES?



# RQ1: ARE THERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LECTURERS WITH AND WITHOUT S-L EXPERIENCE IN THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

1 -> 7 Likert scale	N (exp / no exp CSL)	Cronbach alpha	M (SD) (all)	M (SD) (exp)	M (SD) (no exp)
Perceived Usefulness	100 (36 / 64)	.85	4.95 (1.62)	5.92 (1.03)	4.40 (1.64)
Perceived Ease of use	100 (36 / 64)	.90	4.40 (1.35)	5.29 (.98)	3.90 (1.28)
Attitude	100 (36 / 64)	.86	4.88 (1.69)	5.76 (1.12)	4.38 (1.76)
Subjective Norms	126 (49 / 77)	.85	3.21 (1.38)	3.79 (1.41)	2.85 (1.23)
Perceived Behavioral Control	126 (49 / 77)	.84	3.79 (1.25)	4.41 (1.15)	3.40 (1.15)
Intention	100 (36 / 64)	.99	3.64 (2.06)	5.23 (1.73)	2.75 (1.66)

Lecturers with experience score significant higher on all C-TAM-TPB scales





# CAN EXPERIENCE WITH CSL BE PREDICTED?

## LOGISTIC REGRESSION

<i>Dependent variable -&gt;</i>	<i>Exp / no exp CSL<sup>1</sup></i>
<i>Perceived Usefulness</i>	3.04 (p=.08)
<i>Perceived Ease of Use</i>	4.41 (p=.04)
<i>Attitude</i>	.93 (ns)
<i>Subjective Norms</i>	.01 (ns)
<i>Perceived Behavioral Control</i>	.76 (ns)
Variance explained (Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> )	.407
<i>Model test</i>	$\chi^2(5)=35.18; p<.001$

**77% classified in  
the correct group**

# RQ2: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN LECTURERS WITHOUT S-L EXPERIENCE BE MOTIVATED TO INCORPORATE S-L IN THEIR COURSES

## LINEAR REGRESSION

<i>Dependent variable -&gt;</i>	<b>Exp &amp; No exp (N=100)</b>		<b>No Exp (N=64)</b>	
	<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Intention</i>	<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Intention</i>
<i>Perceived Usefulness</i>	.88 (p<.001)	.44 (p=.008)	.85 (p<.001)	.42 (p=.05)
<i>Perceived Ease of Use</i>	.06 (p=.25)	--	.11 (p<.10)	--
<i>Attitude</i>	--	-.02 (ns)	--	-.11 (ns)
<i>Subjective Norms</i>	--	.21 (p=.028)	--	.33 (p=.01)
<i>Perceived Behavioral Control</i>	--	.29 (p=.003)	--	.25 (p=.05)
Variance explained	.843	.609	.829	.540
<i>Model test</i>	F(2.97)=267.25; p<.001	F(4.95)=39.54; p<.001	F(2.61)=154.21; p<.001	F(4.59)=19.51; p<.001

<b>1 -&gt; 7 Likert scale</b>	<b>N (exp / no exp CSL)</b>	<b>Cronbach alpha</b>	<b>M (SD) (all)</b>	<b>M (SD) (exp)</b>	<b>M (SD) (no exp)</b>
<i>Perceived Usefulness</i>	100 (36 / 64)	.85	4.95 (1.62)	5.92 (1.03)	4.40 (1.64)
<i>Perceived Ease of use</i>	100 (36 / 64)	.90	4.40 (1.35)	5.29 (.98)	3.90 (1.28)
<i>Attitude</i>	100 (36 / 64)	.86	4.88 (1.69)	5.76 (1.12)	4.38 (1.76)
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<i>Intention</i>	100 (36 / 64)	.99	3.64 (2.06)	5.23 (1.73)	2.75 (1.66)

Possible drop-outs in Exp group vs interested in No exp group

## TARGETING INTERESTED LECTURERS

N	Group 1	Group 2
Exp	34	2
No exp	38	26

	Descriptives M (SD)		Linear regression	
	Group 1	Group 2	Attitude	Intention
<b>N</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>Perceived Usefulness</i>	5.74 (.93)	2.89 (1.13)	.71 (p<.001)	.37 (p=.013)
<i>Perceived Ease of use</i>	4.92 (1.03)	3.07 (1.18)	.13 (ns)	--
<i>Attitude</i>	5.74 (.92)	2.64 (1.03)	--	-.04 (ns)
<i>Subjective Norms</i>	3.68 (1.17)	2.06 (.91)	--	.18 (ns)
<i>Perceived Behavioral Control</i>	4.34 (.97)	2.70 (1.12)	--	.37 (p=.003)
<i>Intention</i>	4.44 (1.83)	1.59 (.78)	--	--
<b>Variance explained</b>			<b>.60</b>	<b>.44</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### EXPERIENCED/INTERESTED LECTURERS

Important for (continued) CSL integration:

- Perceived usefulness and perceived behavioral control

#### Institution

- ✓ Valorize societal partnerships (eg during evaluation)
- ✓ Foresee means (time, budget, personnel) to support / facilitate lecturers who are integrating CSL
- ✓ Provide professionalisation opportunities and good practices
- ✓ Provide support such that lecturers can focus on teaching (administrative, communication with partners,...)

#### Faculty

- ✓ Actively engage lecturers to collaborate with societal actors
- ✓ Draw a learning line of CSL throughout the programs

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### LECTURERS WITHOUT EXPERIENCE

A significant part of the lecturers cannot be motivated to integrate CSL; and that is OK!

But for those interested in CSL integration:

➤ Perceived usefulness, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control

#### Perceived usefulness

- ✓ **Added value of CSL -> engaging for students, additional expertise from societal partners**
- ✓ **Powerful learning environment**

#### Subjective norms

- ✓ **At institutional level: promote societal partnerships**
- ✓ **At faculty level: invite relevant societal actors, invite lecturers with CSL experience**
- ✓ **At student level: probe for students' attitudes towards working with authentic cases**

#### Perceived Behavioral Control

- ✓ **Faculty/program: Draw a learning line of CSL throughout the programs**
- ✓ **Institution: provide means (time, budget, personnel)**
- ✓ **Professionalisation!!**

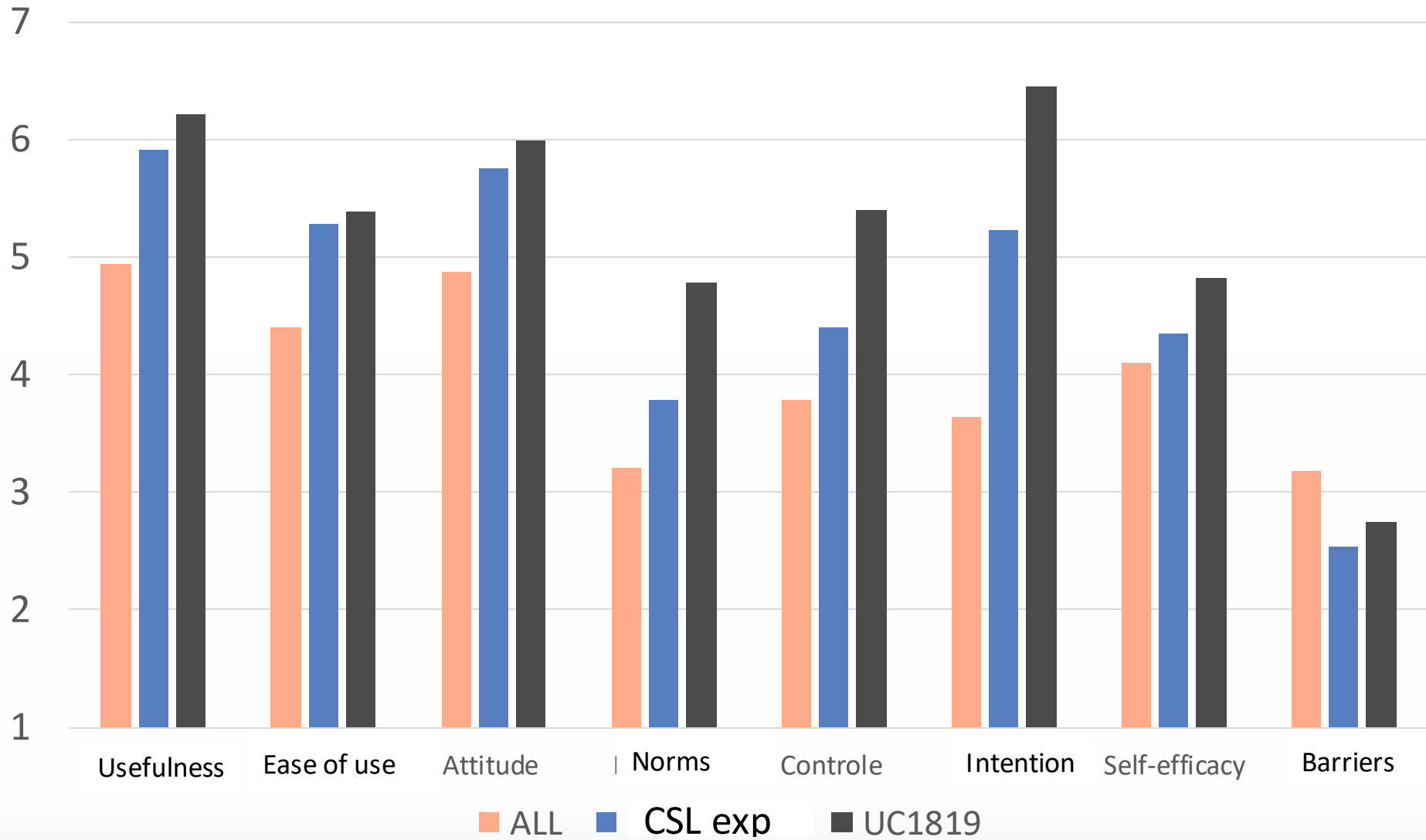
## STUDY 2 – LECTURERS OF THE PLC

### OVERVIEW

## **AIM: To what extent was the PLC effective?**

- 9 projects – 9 final reports of lecturers
- Behavioral measurements
- Evaluation of the PLC

# BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS



1: completely disagree - 7: completely agree



# CONCLUSIONS

## EFFECT OF THE PLC

- More positive attitudes towards CSL
- Perceptions of more control, increased knowledgebase
- Strong intention to continue integrating CSL
- Gained competencies throughout the PLC sessions:
  - Formulating CSL learning goals
  - Make evidence-based during the design of a CSL course
  - Guiding students during CSL activities
  - How to evaluate a CSL course
- Participants value in particular that they have time to work on their own case
- New interdisciplinary collaborations between members of the PLC

## STUDY 3 - STUDENTS

### BASELINE MEASURE

Online survey during site visits

**AIM: investigate whether there is support for CSL in the VUB student population, and to what extent students have experience with CS(L)**

N=79

## RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Faculty	N	SJ*	Ba	Ma	MnM	Age (M)	#y VUB (M)	M	F
Bio-engineering	13	2	5	6		21,5	2,7	8	5
Economic & Social Sciences & Solvay Business School	8		3	5		21,8	2,3	2	6
Medicine	25		20	5		20,4	2,1	10	15
Engineering	7	1	5	1		19,4	1,7	5	2
Arts & philosophy	5		3	1	1	23,0	3,6	1	4
Physical Education	6		3	3		22,5	3,8	2	4
Psychology & Educational Sciences	8		6	2		20,8	1,6	1	7
Law & Criminology	6			6		24,0	3,7		6
<b>Total (N/M)</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>°21,3</b>	<b>°2,5</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>49</b>

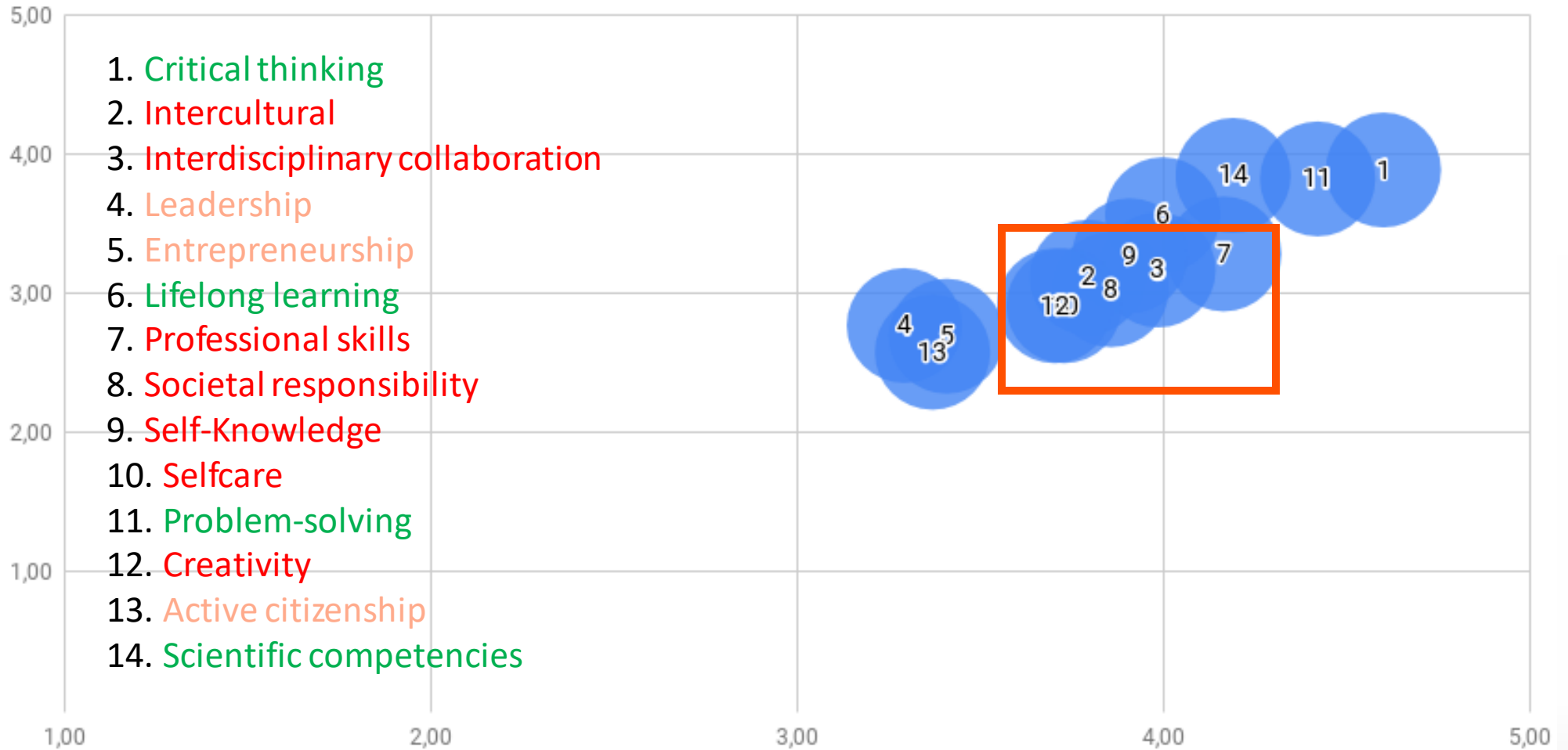
# COMPONENTS OF A CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

## EXPECTATIONS VS REALITY

	Expectations	Reality
<b>Learning about contemporary developments and challenges</b>	4,17	3,22
<b>Learning in real-life situations</b>	4,35	2,55
<b>Throughout the education contribute to societal progress</b>	3,79	2,27
<b>Make a local commitment throughout the course</b>	3,50	1,87
<b>Learning from collaboration with professionals</b>	4,33	2,78
<b>Learning from collaboration with fellow students</b>	3,92	3,76
<b>Learning from collaboration with citizens</b>	3,47	1,82

# COMPETENCIES ACQUIRED THROUGH UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: EXPECTATIONS VS CURRENT SITUATION

How satisfied are you with the way your current education stimulates this competence?  
1=not at all -> 5=very satisfied



To what extent should a university education stimulate this competence?  
1=not at all -> 5=to a large extent

# CURRENT COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES BY STUDENTS

## EXTRA-CURRICULAR

Are you currently doing some kind of community service	N	How important is doing CS to you
Yes	40	4,55
No	29	3,03
Only during holidays	4	4,25
Temporary not because of my studies	5	3,40
Total	78	3,90
If answer was NO: will you do it in the future?	29	3,03
Yes	5	4,20
No	5	2,40
Maybe	19	2,89

# Should Community Service by students be valorized?

No

Give exemption for another  
course

Award credits (ECTS) to  
the community service

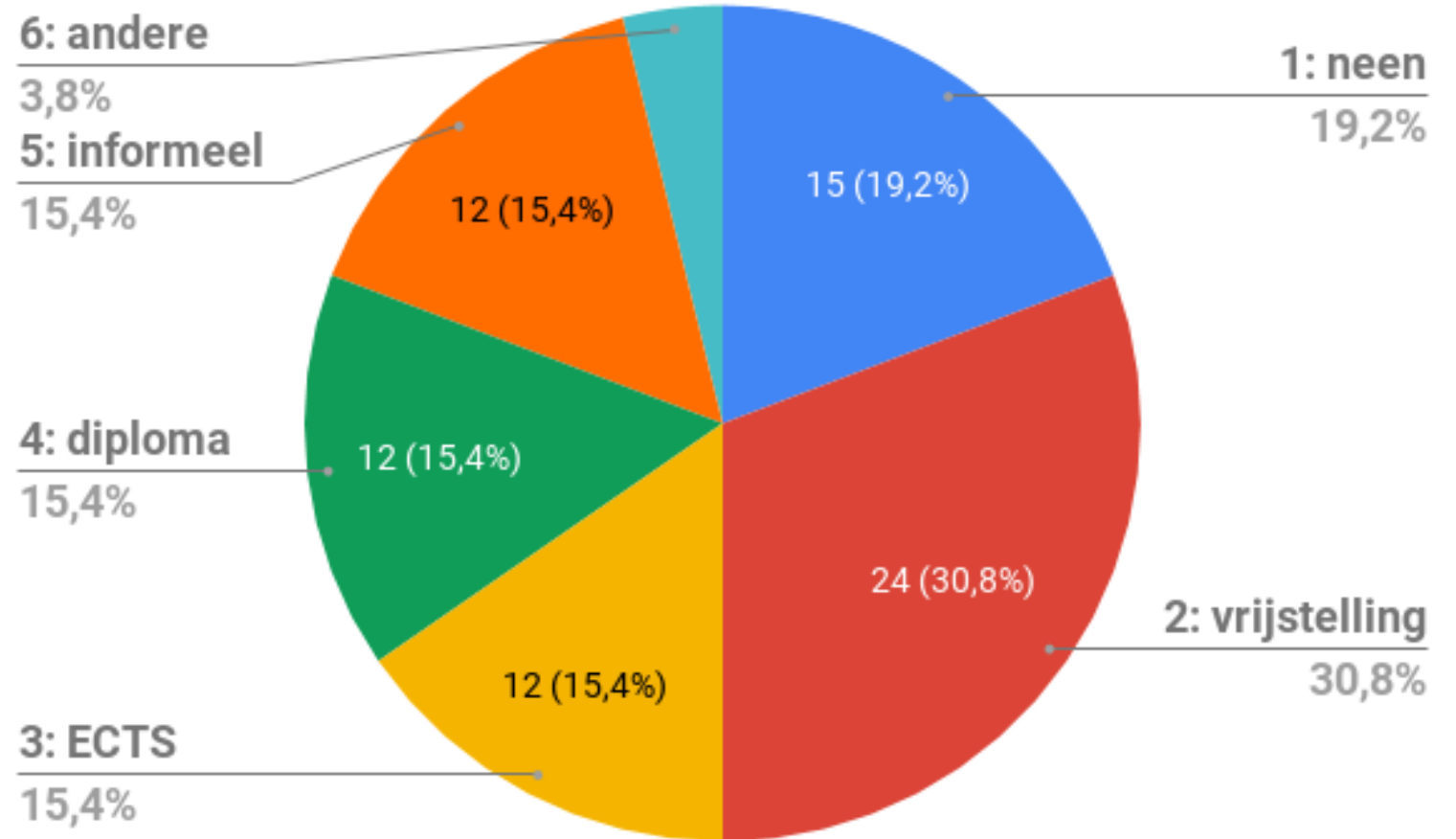
Add the community  
service to the diploma

Informal valorization (a  
drink, a flower, a badge,...)

None of the above

# SHOULD COMMUNITY SERVICE BY STUDENTS BE VALORIZED?

- 1: No
- 2: get exemption for a(nother) course
- 3: by awarding credits
- 4: mentioned on diploma
- 5: informal (e.g. By organizing an activity for these students)
- 6: other





# WHAT CAN THE INSTITUTION DO TO INCREASE THE SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF STUDENTS

pay more attention to social developments and challenges throughout the course

34

provide incentives for student initiatives (scholarships, projects, rooms,...)

23

offer more extracurricular activities that enable local engagement

33

This is not the task of the university

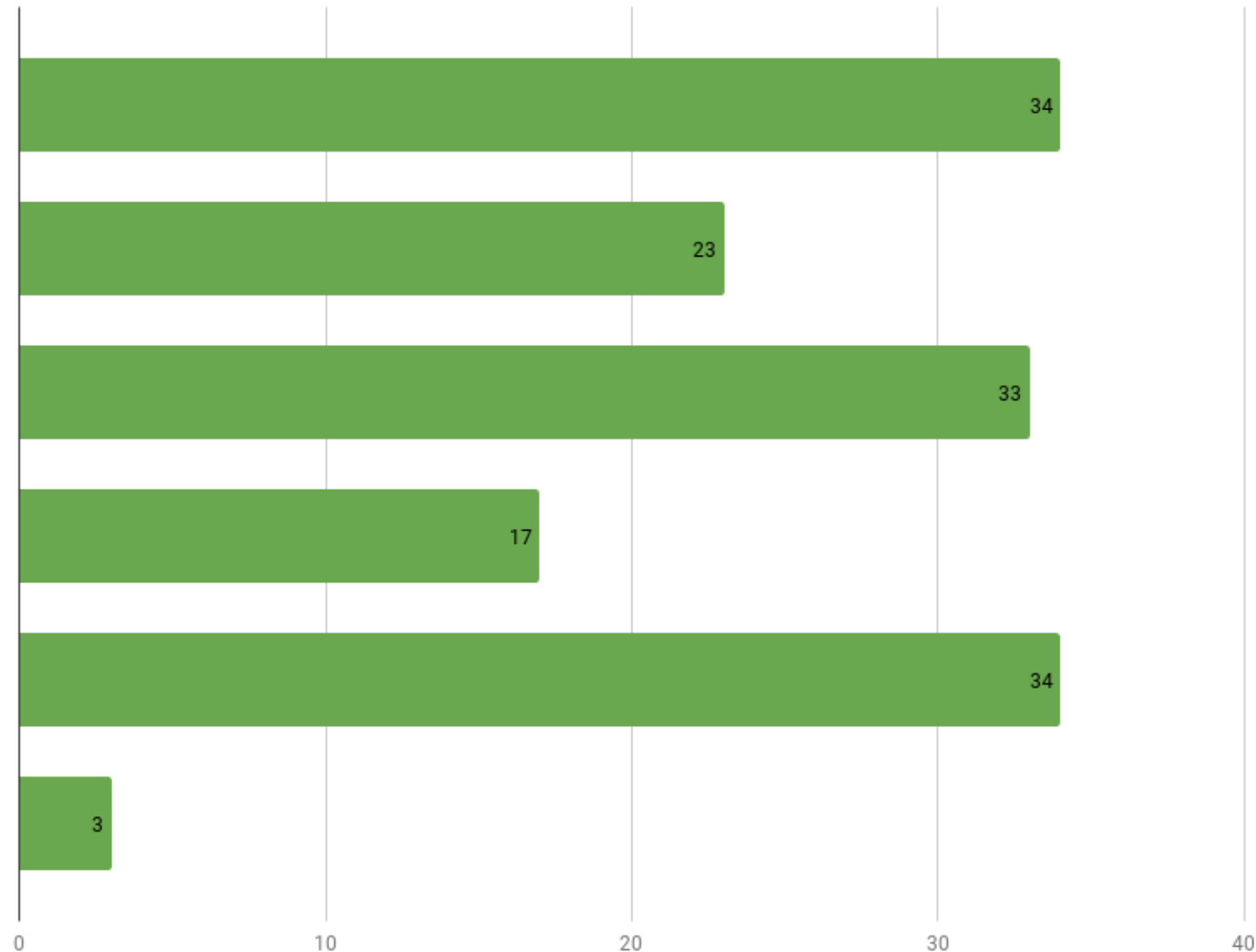
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provide facilitation measures for students who want to make extra commitments (exemptions, flexible learning trajectories)

34

Other

3



## CONCLUSION

- Students acknowledge the added value of CSL
- Students who value CS are also more likely to do (in the future) some kind of CS
- Currently (more or less) lacking in the curriculum
  - Opportunities to **learn from real-life situations**
  - Opportunities to **learn from collaboration with professionals**
- Incentives for, opportunities to, more attention to CSL activities should be provided by the university

## STUDY 4 – STUDENTS

### FOCUS GROUPS

#### **AIM: validate and gain more insight into the results of the baseline study**

Student representatives: N=10, two focusgroups

Current experiences with community service initiatives during education:

- Internships
- Guest speakers
- Working with authentic cases

# RESULTS

## CONFIRMATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE BASELINE SURVEY

### Added value

- Have societal impact
- Strengthening of competencies:
  - Self-knowledge
  - Reflection skills
  - Professional skills (project-management, collaboration)
  - ...
- Gaining insight in the (future) work environment

### Barriers

- Fear for extra workload
- Bad experiences with groupwork (e.g. *Freeriders*)
- Local issues: language, mobility

### Opportunities / Conditions for successful CSL

- Alignment of learning goals and learning content
- More interdisciplinary courses

## STUDY 5 - CSO

Needs assessment performed by the Science Shop ([www.wetenschapswinkel.be](http://www.wetenschapswinkel.be)) among Civil society organisations (CSOs): NGOs, associations, government units, voluntary organizations, communities & foundations

Selection of CSOs: different databases consulted, also existing partners, to get a comprehensive overview

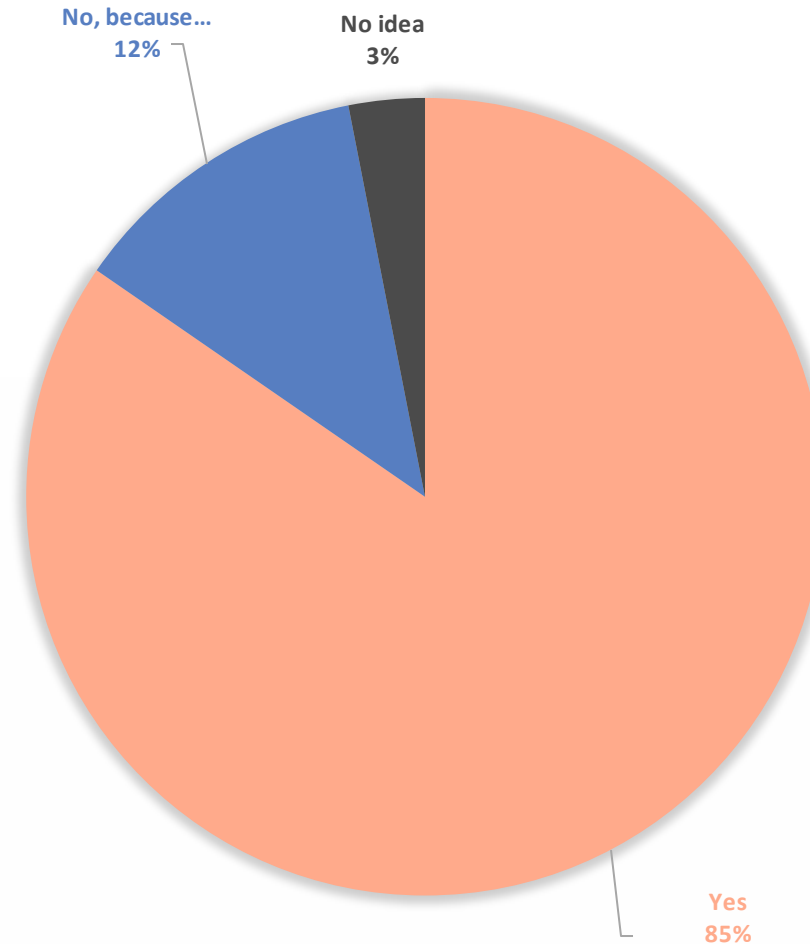
**RQ: What are the (new) needs of CSOs in terms of societal research questions/issues that could be answered by higher education students?**

## CSO - RESULTS

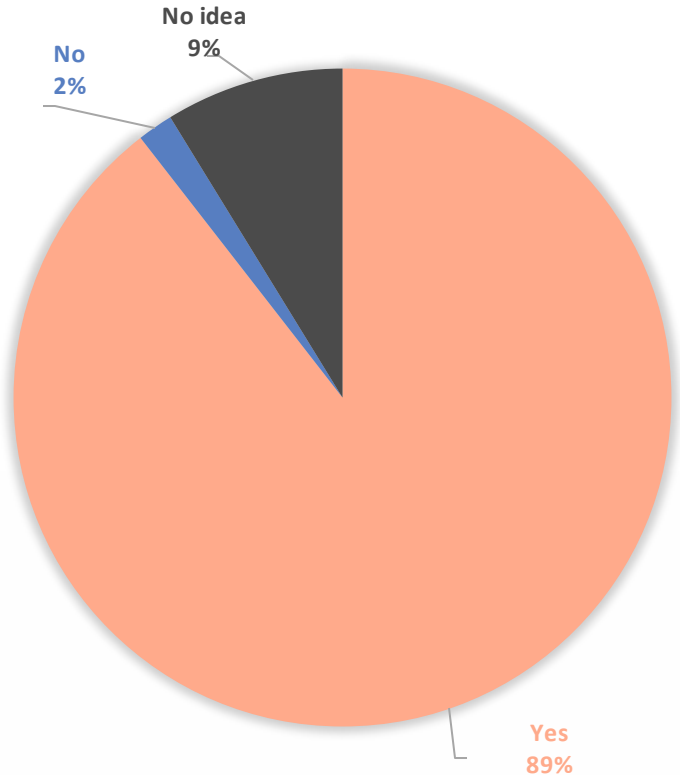
90 (out of 300) CSOs responded

- Most (are willing to) cooperate with HEIs

COLLABORATING/WILLINGNESS TO COLLABORATE WITH HEI IN TERMS OF RESEARCH?



COULD CSO RESEARCH QUESTIONS BE ADDRESSED BY STUDENTS?



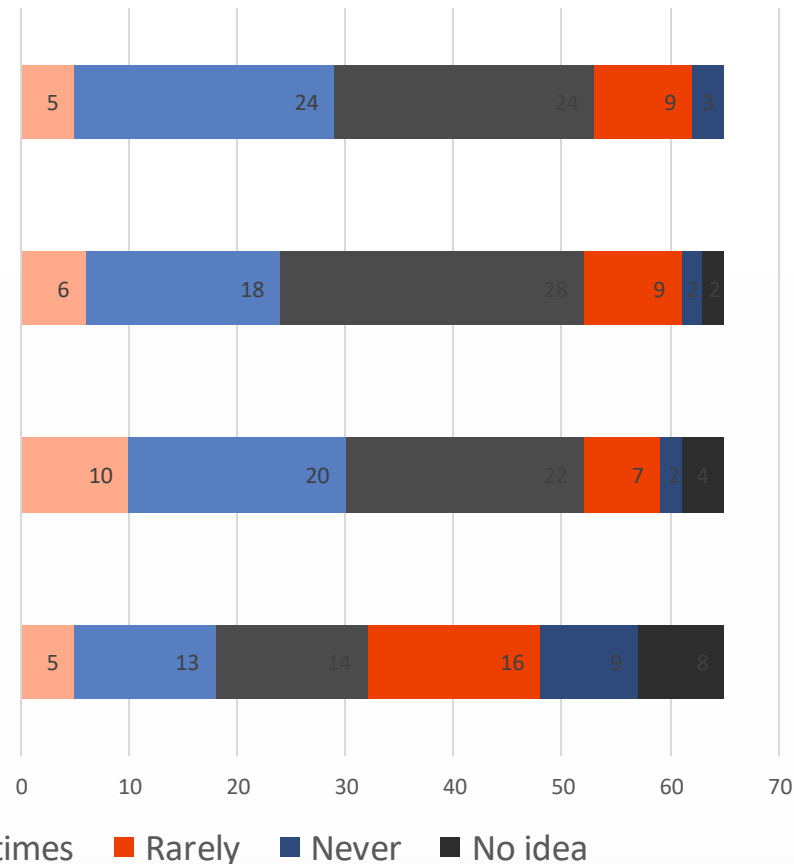
TYPE OF RESEARCH PROBLEMS CSOs FACE

Simple problems: requiring expertise from a single academic discipline

Complicated problems: requiring expertise from two or more academic disciplines

Complex problems: requiring the blending of multiple expertise from various academic disciplines and the practical insights from...

Wicked problems (very ambiguous problems which are hard to solve): requiring the blending of multiple expertise from...



## DRIVERS FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN CSO & HEI

### DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY INTERVIEWED CSOS IN SOLVING SOCIETAL PROBLEMS/ISSUES

- *Finding financing and/or time*
- *Finding volunteers/keeping them motivated*
- *Lack of knowledge and research*



# DRIVERS FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN CSO & HEI

## NEEDS / CHALLENGES IN COLLABORATION BETWEEN CSOS & HEIS

- *Need for tangible end products*
- *Help in submitting/formulating the research question*
- *Meetings between CSOs & HEIs*
- *Collaboration process: investing in building partnerships*

# OVERALL SUMMARY

## STUDIES 1 TO 5

### Lecturers

- (Willingness to) cooperate with CSOs, acknowledge added value of CSL
- Need support / guidance → PLC is useful in this respect
- Some lecturers are not into CSL & that is OK!

### Students

- Acknowledge the added value of working

with authentic cases / CSO's

- (some) Need to be urged / more incentives / more information on CSL

### Partners

- Willingness to collaborate, also with students
- Durable relationships, tangible end-products

## 2. RESEARCH IN CSL



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## E-PORTFOLIO FOR BLENDED SERVICE LEARNING

- Makes learning visible to student and teacher
- Stimulates metacognitive awareness through critical reflection (*Bass & Eynon, 2009*)
- Facilitates 'deeper learning' (*Gencel, 2017*)
- 'Ownership' fosters engagement & motivation (*Entwistle & Karagiannopoulou, 2014*)
- Allows creativity and goes beyond the classroom (*Mohamad, Embi & Nordin, 2018*)

# E-PORTFOLIO FOR BLENDED SERVICE LEARNING

- VUB Teacher Training Program
- Educational Innovation & Technology
- CANVAS
- 2 focus group discussions (12 students)

# E-PORTFOLIO FOR BLENDED SERVICE LEARNING

## MAIN AIM:

- Students perceptions on CEL
- Student perceptions on Blended Learning
- Student perceptions on Blended CEL

## STUDENTS VALUE CEL AS A MEANINGFUL STRATEGIE DUE TO ITS SOCIETAL RELEVANCE AND POSITIVE LEARNING IMPACT

"CSL makes learning more 'concrete', it helps to 'process theory' and 'challenges you to reflect on your learning process in the interim".

"Continuous feedback, reflection on one's own practice, reflecting on this is an important skill for teachers"

## AUTHENTIC CASES AND COOPERATION WITH PROFESSIONAL AND PEERS ARE FACTORS THAT ENHANCE MOTIVATION AND

"Knowing that something will really happen to your project is stimulating"

"Working with a real life case is more interesting than working with a hypothetical problem"

"The feedback you get from partners / people in the field is valuable"

"Throughout this profession, I have really experienced the added value of diversity in a team"



## STUDENTS NEED / VALUE PERSONALISED AND REGULAR FB THROUGHOUT THE LEARNING PROCESS

“The feedback within Canvas was too general to be meaningful”

“The F2F feedback sometimes came a little bit too late”

## BLENDED APPROACH IS VALUATED AS A MEANS TO PROVIDE MORE PERSONALISED LEARNING POSSIBILITIES

"Variety of online instruction/F2F feedback really worked for me. This enabled me to grow with the profession and gradually gain valuable insights. It taught me to work systematically"

"The combination of freedom and responsibility that you get as a student', that's what makes the combination F2F/online interesting"

## PROVIDING TIME AND SPACE FOR FEEDBACK / INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE LEADS TO A MORE MEANINGFUL LEARNING PROCESS

“The active learning space is a welcome change from traditional classrooms”

“The informal character, the loose, pleasant atmosphere are an added value”

## E-PORTFOLIO IS NOT USED AS A WORKING INSTRUMENT BUT AS A TOOL FOR SHOWCASING THE LEARNING PROCESS

"We decided not to work in CANVAS because it was not clear that the group page was visible to the teacher"

"The partners could not cooperate in the portfolio"

## DISCUSSION

### SIX TENSION FIELDS FOR LECTURERS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHEN SETTING UP THIS KIND OF EDUCATION

Steering ↔ Autonomy

Structure ↔ Creativity

Comfort ↔ Vulnerability

Strict timing ↔ Open time-frames

Individual growth ↔ Collective learning outcomes

Uniformity ↔ Adaptability

# 3. RESEARCH IN CSL: FOCUS?



VRIJE  
UNIVERSITEIT  
BRUSSEL

# OVERALL SUMMARY

## STUDIES 1 TO 5

### Lecturers

- (Willingness to) cooperate with CSOs, acknowledge added value of CSL
- Need support / guidance → PLC is useful in this respect
- Some lecturers are not into CSL & that is OK!

### Students

- Acknowledge the added value of working

with authentic cases / CSO's

- (some) Need to be urged / more incentives / more information on CSL

### Partners

- Willingness to collaborate, also with students
- Durable relationships, tangible end-products

## COULD WE DISCUSS?

In order to conduct research to increase the impact of CEL

➤ On which actor(s) should you focus?

➤ students, lecturers, CSO's, target population,...

➤ What angle would you take?

➤ process, product, competences, institutional / societal change...



# THANK YOU

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