



History of Tuning

European Origins

Higher Education throughout Europe in the 1990s was not a unified system. Degrees and academic credits did not translate across country lines, causing students and graduates to become stuck where they went to school. In response to this situation, and in an effort to make European universities more globally competitive,¹ higher education ministers from 29 countries came together on June 19, 1999 in Bologna, Italy to sign what would become known as the Bologna Declaration. The Bologna signatories vowed to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA)—to do for higher education in the European Union what has already been done for currency, a unified bank, and the common market.² Countries participating in the EHEA would streamline their higher education systems in terms of degree cycles (degrees offered and the number of years required for each), academic credits, life-long learning, accessibility for disadvantaged populations, quality assurance (analogous to accreditation³), and other Bologna “action lines.” Eleven years later, the EHEA has been officially established, the number of countries participating has grown to 47 out of a possible 49—including all 27 in the European Union—and Bologna’s action lines have been implemented with varying degrees of success.⁴ One of those action lines, the “tuning” of degrees by discipline to make their expectations clearer to students and more in line with workforce needs, has been adopted by 18 countries in Latin America and recently in the United States, as the Lumina Foundation’s Tuning USA initiative.

The Bologna Process, as the reforms defined in 1999 came to be known, came about during a time of sweeping change in European higher education, picking up on reform momentum that had already been building.⁵ Participants were already familiar with Bologna themes.⁶ For example, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) existed prior to Bologna, but had not been used for credit accumulation purposes before the 2003 Ministerial Meeting.⁷ Making credits more easily evaluated and consistent across borders has been one of the Bologna Process’s successes, although only two-thirds of European institutions have adopted the ECTS.⁸

Bologna reforms are not enforced as policy or mandate. True to the original declaration, countries participate voluntarily, though they do feel pressure to do so.⁹ To participate, a country must 1) have ratified the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe (1954) and 2) provide written evidence of their commitment to the Bologna Process’s goals.



Bologna Process Goals

Every two years, representatives of each Bologna country gather for a “Joint Ministerial Meeting and Communiqué” to report on progress, and to discuss new and on-going implementation strategies. The smaller Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meets twice per year and develops the themes for the Ministerial Meetings.¹⁰ The BFUG is co-chaired by the country holding the presidency of the European Union that year and a representative of a non-EU country (alphabetical, starting with Albania in 2010¹¹). Meetings have been held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009), and Budapest-Vienna (2010), this last a special Anniversary Conference in which the EHEA was officially launched.¹² After taking stock of the Process’ progress in terms of its original goals as laid out in the 1999 declaration which were planned to be met within ten years, the Bologna Ministers of Education agreed at their 2010 Ministerial Meeting to revise the goals and expectations of the Process, setting a new date of 2020 for many of its benchmarks. The next Ministerial Conference will be held April 26-27, 2012 in Bucharest, Romania.

Mobility, the ability of students to move between universities across country borders, is one of the key Bologna action lines. Before Bologna, students had trouble moving across borders because foreign transcripts were not always recognized, and national funding systems tended to reward universities that retained students.¹³ As part of the mobility effort, Bologna has sought to even out degree cycles across the EHEA, introducing a three-degree system similar to that used in the United States (bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral). This has required extensive reform in some participating countries, especially those that historically offered a single degree (e.g., Germany and the Netherlands). Students have tended to be the strongest critics of some of Bologna’s mobility reforms.¹⁴

Germany had used a basic five-year “Magister’s degree” system previous to the implementation of Bologna reforms. The introduction of a new 3 + 2 system, with a new bachelor’s degree, led students to hesitate to enter the workforce with just the new bachelor’s degree, as employers were unsure of how to value it. Students also found that curricula were being compressed, leading students in both Germany and Austria to complain of “factory-like” learning conditions.¹⁵ Student mobility actually decreased, as they felt compelled to stay in Germany to finish their degree and enter the workforce.¹⁶ In 2009, these issues fuelled riots in Germany and Austria.¹⁷ Peter van der Hijden of the European Commission claims that the problems in Germany stemmed from bad implementation of the reforms, while the administration in that country has blamed the reforms themselves.¹⁸



Students are not the only group to have criticized the Bologna Process. David Coyne, a former education expert at the European Commission, says that the biennial Ministerial Meetings have tended to produce new communiqués without scrutinizing what has already been done.¹⁹ Implementation has been weak in some cases, says Jo Ritzen, president of the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands, because countries have tended to nationalize the process and have not been guided by a centralized agency.²⁰

Tuning

The Tuning process, in which faculty collaborate on degree competencies, in an effort to make expectations clearer to students and degrees more in line with workforce demands, has been taken up by more than 100 universities in Europe.²¹ European faculty in Bologna institutions started the Tuning process in 2000, in response to the Bologna Process, and it has since become a central aspect of Bologna.²² Adelman points out that Tuning is the one area of Bologna where faculty can affect reform themselves.²³ Tuning is also the Bologna action line that countries outside of Europe have adopted, in Latin America and more recently in the United States.

Higher education observers in the United States first took note of Tuning in 2008, when the Lumina Foundation sponsored the publication of Clifford Adelman's *The Bologna Club* monograph. The *Bologna Club* and its revised version published in the spring of 2009, *The Bologna Process for U.S. Eyes*, were widely disseminated across the American higher education landscape. Adelman warned readers that universities in the United States were no longer at the international pinnacle of higher education, and argued that Tuning was one aspect of Bologna that the United States needed to take on.²⁴ The United States had slipped to the bottom of the international rankings in terms of graduation rates, yet was at the top in terms of expenditures per student.²⁵

At the same time in the spring of 2009, Lumina formally launched Tuning USA, as part of their "Big Goal" of increasing the number of American college graduates to 60% by 2025. Lumina first piloted the initiative in six disciplines in Indiana, Utah and Minnesota, to determine Tuning's potential in United States contexts.²⁶ In 2009-10, Tuning USA moved into a second phase, as Texas and Kentucky were brought on board for the first official round of Tuning USA. Also that year, Lumina partnered with IEBC to provide leadership and logistical support to the initiative. The Hewlett Foundation also joined the initiative that year as part of its "Deeper Learning" initiative. With guidance and support from Lumina and Hewlett, IEBC will be tuning in other states and organizations in the coming months and years, and hope to one day establish a national Center for Tuning.



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