Guideline: How to organize a hybrid graduation ceremony

A hybrid graduation ceremony for the online master programme The Psychology of the Digital media.

Project manager CLI
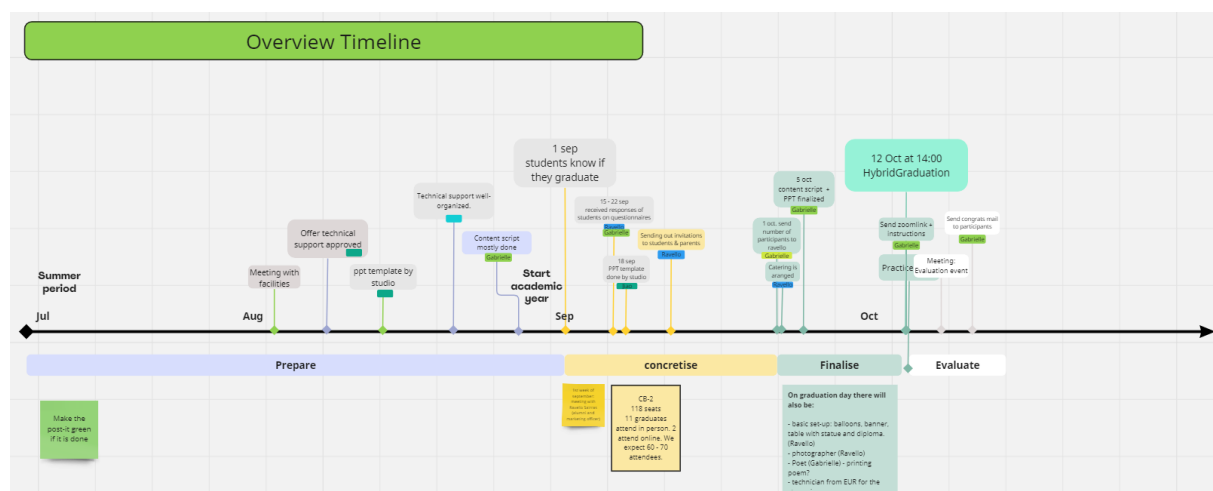
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Introduction

The online master track Psychology of the Digital Media (PDM) is the first completely online master within ESSB in 2022. The question arose how to design the graduation ceremony. Surprisingly, those PDM-students requested a graduation ceremony on campus. As PDM did not require students to come to campus, the programme decided to organize a hybrid graduation ceremony. This was a novel concept. In this guideline you will find the learnings from organizing a hybrid graduation ceremony for about 20 PDM-students. Hopefully, you find this helpful in organizing yours.

Why the use of a project manager

In 2021, PDM underwent a redesign with the help of a project manager from CLI. During this process, the project team understood that the organization of a hybrid graduation ceremony was a novel concept that would take more effort to figure out. Hence, the project manager from CLI helped with the organization of it. Outlining the steps we have taken thus far could make the process easier next time. If the route is clear, such hybrid graduation ceremony may not need extra project management support in the future.

Overview of the process

The CLI project manager and a PDM teacher were responsible for initiating the process. One of the issues we ran into was keeping overview of the various moving parts. To manage the overview, we created a Miro board which is most valuable for its timeline (see photo). In this overview it becomes clear who is doing what and when. Below the timeline there is space to add essential information such as the number of students and location. It is useful for those who are responsible for keeping an overview. Find more details about photo here. The password is: Yello2023.

The moving parts

We received support from various colleagues at the EUR which has been a fruitful collaboration. In the next few lines, we share our insights with the various moving parts we needed to organize the graduation ceremony.

Arrange meeting with your graduation officer

At ESSB, a graduation officer organizes all graduation ceremonies for its faculty. It is helpful to find this person at your faculty as well. In our case the graduation officer at ESSB took care of the standard graduation ceremony process:

- Arranging the room in which the graduation ceremony is held.
- Accessing budget for organizing the graduation ceremony.
- Preparing and sending an online questionnaire to students.
- Preparing and sending the invitations.
- Creating the ppt-presentation for the graduation ceremony.
- Arranging the catering.
- Arranging the diplomas and little gifts to be present in the event space.
- Arranging the diplomas that need to be sent to students who are not physically present.
- Arranging the standard decoration, including balloons and banners.
- Arranging a photographer.
- Helping with the built-up and break-down of the event space.

During the process we learned the following things:

- We made an effort to offer these online students a possibility to get their diplomas sent to them free of charge. Usually, they need to pay a fee for it. Hence, it is helpful to specifically ask at your faculty whether this is possible.
- We arranged nothing more than the standard decoration. During the evaluation of the ceremony some of our collaborators suggested that the ambience could be enhanced with some additional lightning. This can be discussed with the technical support team.
- During the evaluation we reflected on the technical arrangements we had made. We assumed that online students needed to be able to participate in real time. It turned out that the few students who participated online did not want to be on the screen or participate online. Have we known this earlier, the technical arrangements could have been much simpler (and less costly). Hence, it is useful to get the following two questions answered in time in for example the questionnaire:
    o How many students will participate online?
    o From those students, how many of those students will participate in real time?
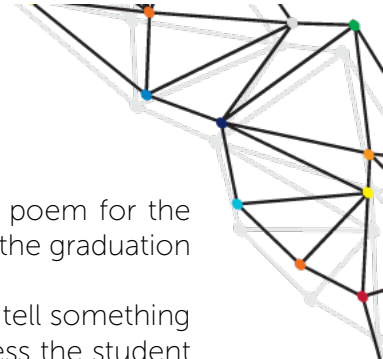
Arranging technical support

To make the technical arrangements, we asked the studio (studio@eur.nl) for support. Our colleague from the studio gave advice. This colleague organized the equipment and support for the lightning and recordings via Panopto and Zoom. Make sure you know how many online-attending students want to participate.

Create the script for the ceremony

If you are responsible for taking care of the graduation ceremony at your programme, then you will probably oversee creating the script. The script details out the schedule for the event including who is talking about what and when.

During the creation of the script, we learned the following things:

- To dress the graduation ceremony up, we invited a poet to write a poem for the graduates. This was eventually included in the mail that was sent after the graduation ceremony.
- During the ceremony the habit emerged that students were asked to tell something about their thesis. Next time, we may want to alternate how to address the student when asked to come up and collect their diploma. It would be advisable to discuss this with participating teachers how to do this.
- Ideally, it is worth doing a dry run of the graduation ceremony. If this is not possible because of busy schedules, be sure everyone knows the script.
- We created a new ppt template so the design would add ambiance to the special occasion. You can use it as inspiration.

Hold a meeting with all collaborators
To make sure everyone was on the same page, we held a meeting with the facilities staff member, the graduation officer, and technical support staff member. This helps to get a realistic look and feel of how the graduation ceremony is going to look like and make some changes were necessary.

Evaluate the event
We paused for a moment and evaluated how the event went. This helped to distil our learnings and share it with those who want to organize a hybrid graduation ceremony next time.

List of resources
- The miroboard as template
- The PPT- template