

# Relocating within the university. Proposal of a relocation rate based on a study of educational trajectories

*Reubicándose en la universidad. Propuesta de una tasa de reubicaciones a partir de un estudio de trayectorias educativas*

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## Abstract

The university has undergone important changes in recent years such as the expansion of a greater heterogeneity in the students' profile. This reality has led to significant changes in the university access, the achievement and the job prospects of university students. Students come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, different access pathways and are incorporated into the university with different expectations and rhythms, which is producing a diversification of educational paths. In this sense, this diversification leads to a greater frequency of trajectories that trigger changes of degree and dropouts, which has meant that numerous studies have been developed to determine explanatory factors. This paper approaches the changes of degrees and dropouts of university studies using the concept "academic relocation" through an analysis of the educational pathways of 60.300 subjects. The period examined has been six academic years (2009-10 to 2014-15). The main aim is to study "relocations" between undergraduate degrees to propose, from this, a new indicator: the "relocation rate". The perceived differences between degrees and their grouping by branches of knowledge allows noting important institutional heterogeneity.

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## Resumen

La universidad ha vivido transformaciones importantes en los últimos años como es la expansión de una mayor heterogeneidad en el perfil de los estudiantes. Esta realidad ha implicado cambios significativos en el acceso a la universidad, los resultados y la salida hacia el mercado laboral de los universitarios. Los estudiantes provienen de entornos socioeconómicos diferentes, de vías de acceso diversas y se incorporan a la universidad con distintas expectativas y ritmos están produciendo una diversificación de las trayectorias educativas. En este sentido, esta diversificación conduce a una mayor frecuencia de trayectorias que desencadenan cambios de grado y abandonos de los estudios, lo que ha supuesto que se hayan desarrollado numerosos trabajos para determinar los factores explicativos. Este trabajo aborda los cambios de grados y abandonos de los estudios universitarios utilizando el concepto de "reubicación académica" mediante un análisis de trayectorias de 60.300 sujetos. El período analizado ha sido seis de cursos académicos (2009-10 a 2014-15). El objetivo es estudiar las "reubicaciones" entre titulaciones de grado para, a partir de ello, proponer el cálculo de un nuevo indicador: la "tasa de reubicaciones". Las diferencias apreciadas entre titulaciones y su agrupación por ramas de conocimiento permiten constatar la importante heterogeneidad institucional.

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The idea of a homogeneous university, with a student body coming from a similar segment or social class and with a predominantly similar academic behaviour, in terms of dedication to studies, is part of the past. In the decades prior to the so-called democratization of the university there were also students of different social origins and different study rates and dedications, but in the last two decades the Spanish university has undergone important transformations, with a more heterogeneous student population and with high levels of dropout and prolongation of studies.

Some previous research on the dropout of university studies shows that there is an important variation by degrees (Cabrera, Bethencourt, Álvarez Pérez & González Alfonso, 2006) and that it is a multidimensional phenomenon that should be studied from different perspectives and disciplines in a complementary manner. The most traditional and common studies in this field have focused on analysing the level of association and the predictive capacity on the academic success of the sociodemographic, educational variables prior to access and related to students' personal circumstances, such as gender, dedication to studies, previous academic results, socio-familial status or social origin, socio-cultural group of belonging or economic difficulties, among others, and, usually, comparing those who dropout and those who continue their studies until obtaining their degree (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer, 2007). Among their main conclusions, it stands out that the results in previous educational stages and in standardized tests of performance before entering university, as well as the family socioeconomic status are significant predictors of success in the university (Bethencourt, Cabrera, Hernández, Álvarez & González, 2008; Lassibille & Navarro, 2009; Rodrigo, Molina, García-Ros & Pérez González, 2012), being especially important to identify and offer differential answers to the problems and needs of the students who access the university classrooms with different social compositions

and that generate diverse effects (Ariño & Llopis, 2011; Fachelli & Navarro, 2015; Troiano & Elías, 2013; Villar, 2010).

Recently, the Yearbook of University Indicators published by the Ministry of Education has incorporated a new indicator that accounts for the change in studies: the "study change rate" that shows the percentage of students in a newly enrolled cohort in a given enrolled course in a degree and in a university and that have not been enrolled in that same degree for two consecutive academic years, because they have enrolled in some other degree and have not graduated. This newness better explains the quantification of dropout, since until then "dropout" and "change" were not distinguished from each other and any change of title was counted as abandonment, which was not entirely accurate or was, at least, questionable.

Overall dropout (the sum of the partial dropout rates in the first, second and third year) for the total of public universities stands at 37.5%, with a significant difference between women and men, since men dropout more (40.5%) than women (31.6%). In the Valencian public universities, this figure stands at 27.3%, and the difference between men (31.3%) and women (23.7%) is also significant.

Regarding the partial dropout rate, available data for the 2010-2011 entry cohort show a dropout rate in the first, second and third year of 19.6%, 7.9% and 4.0% respectively for women, and 24.9%, 10.5% and 5.1% for men, for public universities, in order to compare with the study carried out.

The rate of study change has lower percentages than that of dropout, standing at 13% for the case of Spanish public universities; this rate is also more noticeable in the case of men (15.39%) than in women (10.92%). In the case of the Valencian public universities the figure drops to 11.69%.

In previous works, we had already indicated the desirability of considering in a differentiated manner a change of degree

regarding the dropout of university studies (Villar, Vieira, Hernández & Almeida, 2012). Therefore, we consider that this recent indicator considered by the Ministry broadens and improves the information on formative trajectories of university students. Even so, in this paper we suggest a new indicator that aims to complement the two previously mentioned, with a calculation that focuses on degrees, rather than on the student body; we call it the “relocations rate”.

The rate of study change considers the number of students who change their career as a unit of measure. The rate we propose, the “relocations rate”, considers the degree as a unit of measure, that is, it focuses not on the students, but on the degrees. Thus, the objective is to quantify the enrolment movements that the degrees have, both in a sense of attraction and expulsion. We start from the idea, supported by our research, that there are university degrees that, structurally, contain a greater probability of relocations than others. The factors that affect this are diverse. Therefore, this rate does not contradict the rate of change of the study proposed by the Ministry, but complements it.

In the current university, we can affirm that the formative itineraries do not necessarily happen in a linear or univocal way. There are formative return, relocation itineraries. Educational trajectories are questioned and rethought and educational decisions are relocated. The concept of “relocation” allows us to broaden the view to understand the formative transitions from an analytical position that considers reversibility and non-linearity as defining a large part of the current formative and work trajectories of young people.

In summary, the objective of this text is to study the relocations between degrees, to calculate a “relocations rate”. The noticed differences between degrees and their grouping by branches of knowledge allow the verification of the important institutional heterogeneity.

## Method

### *Participants*

The context in which this research has been carried out is the University of Valencia. The data come from an operation explicitly designed and made from six databases corresponding to the first-year enrolment from the 2009-10 to 2014-15 academic years. We have obtained data from students who have enrolled one, two, three and even four times in first year during this six-year period. In total, the numbers of subjects considered were 60,300, which generated 63,488 enrolments.

### *Procedure*

First, we performed a descriptive analysis of data on relocations by disaggregating according to the number of listed registrations and branches of knowledge. Right after, we present a matrix of relocations to graphically observe the transitions between degrees. Third, we calculate the general pattern followed by the relocations studied by an equation. Then, we show the data on the relocation rate, a new proposal that focuses on the calculation taking into account the proportion of degrees of a university.

It is relevant to note that the databases used do not allow to discriminate those enrolments that are second or successive enrolments of students that had already enrolled before the first academic year considered, i.e. before 2009-10. Even so, the inclusion of data from six courses with a large number of students allows us to reduce the possible statistical effect of students enrolled before 2009.

## Results

The University of Valencia publishes indicators of the degrees and masters taught on the development of education, such as the dropout rate of first-year students. This rate, which is standardized at the state level and shared by all other universities, shows, as is well known, the percentage of students who have enrolled for one year in the university and have not done so in the two

subsequent academic years. We also calculate the indicator called change of studies, as we have already mentioned in the introduction section to this text. These indicators focus calculations on students, that is, they take as a unit of measure the students who abandon or change their degrees without any other consideration. Therefore, we contemplate to consider the phenomenon of students' changes of academic pathways from the concept of relocation, this is another semantic that better explains conventional indicators. Relocations as we understand them here do

not focus on the student, but look at the degrees, toward the branch of knowledge, the moment of change and other appreciations. It is not so much the students who relocate, in their individuality, but the fact that there would be a relocations map following a general pattern in the studied institution.

### Relocations: basic descriptive data

First, we observe the data on dislocated relocations according to the number of registrations made (Table 1).

Table 1. Listed people and enrolments. Academic years 2009-10 to 2014-15

First-year enrolled students	Enrolled people	Percentage	Enrolments	Percentage
<b>1 time</b>	57225	94.90%	57225	90.14%
<b>2 times</b>	In the same academic year 476	2967	5934	9,35%
	In different academic years 2491			
<b>3 times</b>	103	0.17%	309	0.49%
<b>4 times</b>	5	0.01%	20	0.03%
<b>Relocations</b>	3075	5.10%	6263	9.86%
<b>Total</b>	60300	100%	63488	100 %

Source: Elaborated by the authors using data from first-year enrolment databases from 2009-10 to 2014-15

Relocations affect approximately 5% of students or 10% of enrolments. Next, we will study this phenomenon in more detail.

In order to study the dynamics of relocations in more detail, we have taken into account some methodological decisions. First, in the following analyses we manage without students who accumulate three and four enrolments in the first academic year, which are 103 and 5 respectively (see Table 1), because in these cases there is a heterogeneous casuistry of degrees of origin and of destination. That is why we will study only the group of people who in the academic years considered have been re-enrolled once in the first year, that is, 2,967 people who have generated 5,934 enrolments.

Secondly, of this total number of people we will manage without 476 who have re-enrolled in first year in the same academic year. This is

due to two reasons, because they are administrative readjustments, for example, due to reallocations of places after a first period of enrolment (what we know popularly as "auction of places"), and because the databases analysed do not allow to distinguish when was chronologically the first registration and when was the second. The sample, therefore, is reduced to 2,491 people.

Thirdly, we will also manage without 32 people who re-enrolled five years after the first enrolment, which may be a relocation or an enrolment in one degree after finishing another one. This way, the sample studied is definitely made up of 2,459 people.

Next, the data of the analysis of the relocations flow according to branch of knowledge, to which the university degrees are attached, are shown. Table 2 shows the detail of the branch of the first enrolment (rows) and

the branch of the second enrolment (columns). Then, in Table 3, these data are re-elaborated to distinguish the relocations in degrees

outside the same branch, which we will call *ad extra*, and within the same branch, which we will call *ad intra*.

Table 2. Relocations according to branches (absolute values)

	AE	AH	S	Affiliated centre	H	SL	Total	Balance	
<b>AE</b>	62	5	6	0	6	24	103	-6	-5.82%
<b>AH</b>	2	233	5	3	7	130	380	17	4.47%
<b>S</b>	11	17	61	2	84	64	239	-116	-48.53%
<b>Affiliated centre</b>	1	4	0	265	3	109	382	-80	-20.94%
<b>H</b>	0	14	37	2	215	75	343	10	2.91
<b>SSL</b>	21	124	14	30	38	785	1012	175	17.29%
<b>Total</b>	97	397	123	302	353	1187	2459		

Source: Elaborated by the author using data from first-year enrolment databases from 2009-10 to 2014-15.

AE: Architecture & Engineering; AH: Arts & Humanities; S: Sciences; H: Health Sciences; SSL: Social Sciences & Law

Table 3. *Ad extra* and *ad intra* relocations of branches (absolute and relative values)

	Total enrolments	Total	Proportion	<i>Ad extra</i>	% <i>Ad extra</i>	<i>Ad intra</i>	% <i>Ad intra</i>
<b>AE</b>	2368	103	4.35%	41	39.81%	62	60.19%
<b>AH</b>	8834	380	4.30%	147	38.68%	233	61.32%
<b>S</b>	5422	239	4.41%	178	74.48%	61	25.52%
<b>Affiliated centre</b>	2279	382	16.76%	117	30.63%	265	69.37%
<b>H</b>	11963	343	2.87%	128	37.32%	215	62.68%
<b>SSL</b>	32614	1012	3.10%	227	22.43%	785	77.57%
<b>Not listed</b>	8						
<b>Total</b>	63488	2459	3,87%	838	34,08%	1621	65,92%

Source: Elaborated by the authors using data from first-year enrolment databases from 2009-10 to 2014-15.

AE: Architecture & Engineering; AH: Arts & Humanities; S: Sciences; H: Health Sciences; SSL: Social Sciences & Law

In general, two-thirds of the relocations are *ad intra*, i.e. they occur within the same branch of knowledge, and a third is *ad extra*. The highest value is presented by Social Sciences and Law –SSL–, with 77.57% *ad intra*; the lowest value is observed in Science, with 74.48% *ad extra*. In other words, in SSL only 1 out of 4 relocations are to another branch, while in Science the behaviour is the reverse: only 1 out of 4 relocations is within the same branch.

This differentiated behaviour is also reflected in the calculation of the relocations balance. The net difference with respect to the

relocations volume provides high and positive percentages in the case of SSL (17.29%) and very high and negative in Sciences (48.53%). As for the number of relocations in relation to the number of enrolments (taken together, that is to say, without discounting enrolments that are second, third or fourth enrolments of relocated students), there is a significant proportion of relocations in cases of schools attached to the University of Valencia. Such a case would require a particular study. The lowest number of relocations is found proportionally in Health Sciences, followed by SSL. Architecture and Engineering, Arts and

Humanities and Sciences present similar percentages, although, as has been pointed out, there is a notable difference between the proportion of relocations *ad intra* and *ad extra* in the case of Sciences.

We will now analyse the time of the relocation. The number of cases where there was a change of degree where the enrolment took place (degrees of origin) in the period indicated (2009/10 to 2014/15) and where they have been re-enrolled once in another degree (degrees of destination); it has been differentiated the academic year in which they made the change since the first enrolment. Cases coded with 0 have been discarded because they may be due to cases of administrative readjustments of enrolment in the same year, and also cases coded higher

than 4 because they may be due to cases where a degree has been completed and a second one is started.

#### *Relocations matrix*

There are important differences between outings and entries in each grade. The data on the difference between outputs and entries, in absolute terms, and the percentage relation of the increase show very high and negative increases, which means that in those degrees there has been a significant departure of students, since in some cases it exceeds 50%.

In a summarized way, relocations can be observed by branch of knowledge and according to the year of change from the first enrolment in the table 4.

Table 4. Relocations according to branches of knowledge, in absolute and relative values (horizontal percentages)

Branch	Year of change					Year of change			
	1	2	3	4	Total	1	2	3	4
<b>Architecture and Engineering</b>	66	20	13	4	103	64.08%	19.42%	12.62%	3.88%
<b>Arts and Humanities</b>	281	55	19	25	380	73.95%	14.47%	5.00%	6.58%
<b>Science</b>	160	43	26	10	239	66.95%	17.99%	10.88%	4.18%
<b>Associated centres</b>	339	31	10	2	382	88.74%	8.12%	2.62%	0.52%
<b>Health Sciences</b>	217	75	26	25	343	63.27%	21.87%	7.58%	7.29%
<b>Social Sciences and Law</b>	726	147	83	56	1012	71.74%	14.53%	8.20%	5.53%
<b>Total</b>	1789	371	177	122	2459	72.75%	15.09%	7.20%	4.96%

Source: Elaborated by the authors using data from first-year enrolment databases from 2009-10 to 2014-15

#### *Relocations equations*

These data lead us to calculate the general pattern of the relocations of the degrees for the case study of the University of Valencia, expressed by the trend line. This pattern follows an exponential line and can be represented by the following equation:

$$[1] \quad y_n = \frac{2}{3} x_n^{-2}$$

This relocations equation indicates the proportion of relocated students ( $y_n$ ) dependent on the academic year ( $x_n$ ), and is a reasonable approximation to the formula  $y_n = 0,6717x_n^{-1,967}$ , which corresponds to the equation of the trend line of the values in Table 5, and which will be taken here as an interim basis. Thus, for the case studied, the relocation percentages according to the academic year would be:

Table 5. Relocation percentages by academic year

Academic year	y	Accumulated
1	66.66%	66.66%
2	16.66%	83.33%
3	7.40%	90.74%
4	4.16%	94.90%

This means that, with a relocations equation, it is not necessary to establish the total count of the relocations, since an estimate can be made from a single academic year. Logically, the relocations total corresponds to the formula:

$$[2] \quad r_t = \frac{r_x}{y_n}$$

For administrative purposes, it is trivial that

$$[3] \quad r_x = \frac{m_2}{2} + \frac{m_3}{3} + \dots$$

That is, the number of relocations is equal to the sum of the number of enrolments of people who have enrolled twice in an academic year divided by two, the enrolments made by people who have enrolled three times divided by three, etc. This statement is accurate to avoid the effect of duplications in the final computation.

Leaving aside the case of the degrees that are taught in centres attached to the University of Valencia, because they present an extreme behaviour, the trend lines of the branches of knowledge, in which the grades are grouped, present differences between them. It is possible to say that the lines of exponential tendency represent better than any other the situation of the values. On their behalf, the straight-line lines simplify this representation by showing the slope of the lines, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Trend lines by branches of knowledge

	Exponential trend line	Straight trend line
<b>Total</b>	$y = 0,6717x - 1,967$	$y = -0,2113x + 0,7782$
<b>Architecture and Engineering</b>	$y = 0,6966x - 1,874$	$y = -0,1874x + 0,7184$
<b>Arts and Humanities</b>	$y = 0,6316x - 1,924$	$y = -0,2116x + 0,7789$
<b>Science</b>	$y = 0,6925x - 1,9$	$y = -0,1954x + 0,7385$
<b>Health Sciences</b>	$y = 0,6293x - 1,675$	$y = -0,1822x + 0,7055$
<b>Social Sciences and Law</b>	$y = 0,6451x - 1,857$	$y = -0,2049x + 0,7624$

If we look at the factor  $a$  of the equation of the trend line it allows us to order the branches of knowledge according to the following arrangement:

AH - Total - SJ - C - AI - S

At one extreme we have the Arts and Humanities (AH) branch that has a higher

(descending) slope, which means that the relocations frequency will be relatively higher than average during the first years of university enrolment. At the other extreme Health Sciences (S) can be found, a branch in which relocations will take place after the first university years.

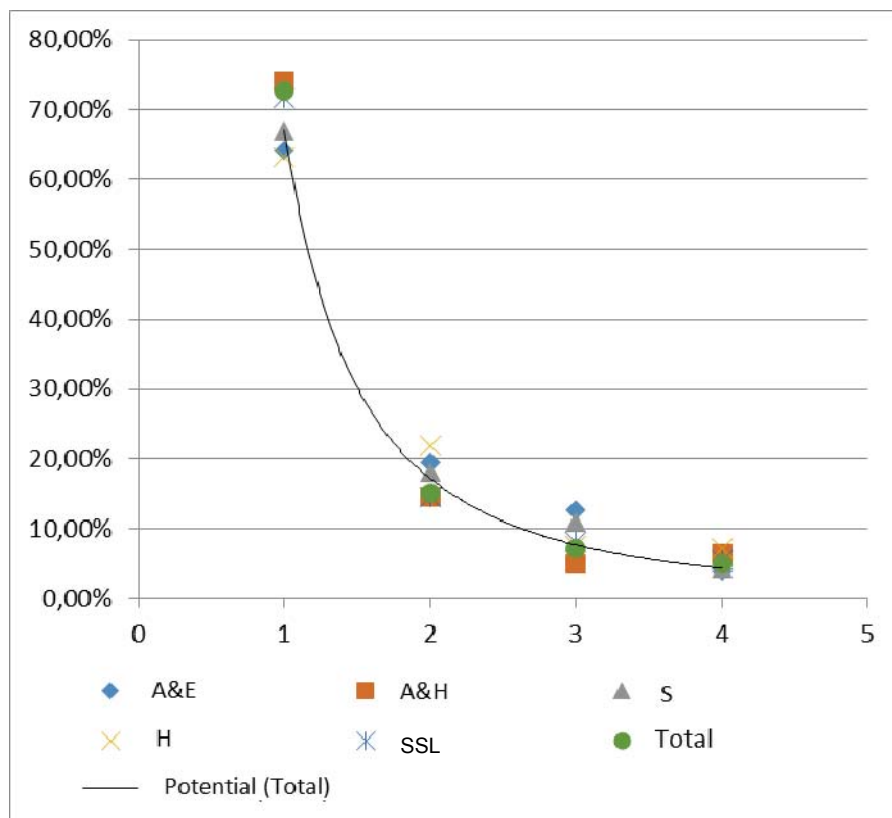


Figure 1. Behavioural pattern of relocation by branches

### Relocations rate

From the formulas that allow us to arrive at the relocations equation a relocations rate of relocations ( $RR$ ) can be calculated, for a particular university ( $u$ ) that offers a series of degrees ( $d$ ) and has a student in a course ( $e_x$ ), for a specific academic year, which could be defined as

$$[4] \quad RR_u = \frac{r_x}{y_n e_x \ln(d-1)}$$

The factor  $\ln(d-1)$  in the denominator wants to better explain the fact that relocations are possible in greater proportion in those universities with a higher degree offer. Of course, any other correcting factor could be used.

And in extended form (using the general equation of the formula [1])

$$[5] \quad RR_u = \frac{3 x^2 \left( \frac{m_2}{2} + \frac{m_3}{3} \dots \right)}{2 e_x \ln(d-1)}$$

That for the case of the first academic year is:

$$[6] \quad RR_u = \frac{3 \left( \frac{m_2}{2} + \frac{m_3}{3} \dots \right)}{2 e_x \ln(d-1)}$$

Logically, for an administrative use, to recalculate the formula [1] would be necessary for a larger set of universities.

### Discussion

In this paper, we advance in the study of the abandonment or change of university studies, but with a new semantic and computational proposal such as the concept of relocations accompanied by mathematical expressions, as we have shown by proposing a relocations rate.



The study of relocations, understood more broadly to the quantification of university dropout or change of studies, shows the significant differences that exist within the same university institution since the results are different according to degree qualifications and according to their grouping by branches of knowledge.

Although we do not have similar data from other universities, due to the complexity and particularity of this research and, logically, because it is a case study for the University of Valencia, we consider that it can contribute and open a line of research exportable to other universities and regions. The data available through the Integrated System of University Information allow us to study the rates of global abandonment, partial abandonment (differentiating in the year of study that it takes place) and change of study, but does not incorporate or concretizes how the changes of study or relocations take place, as discussed in this paper.

The analysed data incorporate information from six academic years distinguishing between relocations by branches of knowledge, by degrees and according to the moment in which the movements occur.

The transitions between degrees and *ad intra* and *ad extra*, that is, inside and outside the branch of knowledge, make it possible to verify the strong heterogeneity existing in the case study for the University of Valencia. In general, two thirds of the relocations are *ad intra* and one third are *ad extra*.

The observation of the calculations lead us to think that possible or future strategies of intervention that could arise in the university institution should be differentiated according to degrees or groups of some degrees that present similar behaviours or, at least, according to the groupings by branches of knowledge.

In this sense, the actions that could be implemented in Arts and Humanities, to mention a case, would be partially different from those that would be applied in Health

Sciences. In the case of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences and Law, attention or intervention should be concentrated on relocations in the first year of studies, after the first enrolment, through more focused actions to accompany or act in the incorporation to the university; on the other hand, in the cases of the branches of Architecture and Engineering and of Health Sciences the point of attention moves more towards years after the incorporation to the university.

The grouping of data and actions differentiated by branches of knowledge seems essential because they provide very different scenarios. According to the data for the total of Spanish public universities (University Indicators Yearbook of the Integrated University Information System, 2016), the rate of study change in the branch of Science exceeds 16% and almost 13% in Engineering and Architecture, and exceeds 11% in Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences and Law, Health Sciences does not reach 8%.

As a final comment, we can affirm that this work confirms that we cannot consider the university institution in an isomorphic way, since the degrees that integrate it present divergent behaviours in terms of the configuration of the academic trajectories, a fact that is also shown in the grouping according to branches of knowledge. This work points out the need to study these results in different institutions to see if they can be generalized.

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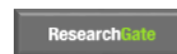
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