
A PhD subject on libre software

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Background

- Idea by Joaquín Seoane, back in 2001.
- Jointly designed and taught by him and Jesús M. González-Barahona
- Joint subject, in PhD programs of UPM and URJC
- Classes and materials in Spanish
- Taught in Madrid, Spain
- Trying to cover libre (free, open source) software from several points of view (economic, legal, software development, etc.)

Brief history

- First edition: Spring 2002, UPM
- Second edition: Spring 2003, UPM-URJC
- Third edition (scheduled): Spring 2004, UPM-URJC
- Recordings and other material available on-line from 2002 and 2003 editions

Goals

- To provide students with a basic background on facts about libre software
- To help them to understand the basic legal, economic and development implications of libre software
- To enable them to explore more details
- To put them into a position where they can decide to opt for libre software models or not

Profile of students

- Enrolled in PhD programs related to computer engineering and tele-com engineering
- Guest students are also allowed (about 30%)
- Usually, good knowledge of software technologies
- Not necessarily good knowledge in libre software
- Different interests (pure researchers, more academic-oriented, some from the industry)

Structure

- About 30 hours of lectures, discussions and student's presentations
- Based on lectures by Seoane and González-Barahona
- Also, invited speakers (in-person, or sometimes using recordings)
- Students are encouraged to prepare in-depth, original works
- Discussions are an integral part of the classes

Topics

- Introduction and history of libre software
- Intellectual propriety, software patents and libre software licenses
- Libre documentation and other libre resources
- Development models and how to set up a libre software project
- Development tools usual in libre software projects
- Business models and consequences of the adoption of libre software

Educational material

- Slides for all the topics
- Digital recordings of most topics
- A good collection of specialized presentations by students
- A 150-page book covering most of the topics (in collaboration with UOC, new this year)
- Most of the material can be used by others

Conclusions

- About 50 students enrolled so far
- In general, good acceptance (maybe because it is not a “technical” subject)
- A large corpus of educational material being generated
- Interest from other institutions
- A ground for launching other initiatives

<http://curso-sobre.berlios.de/>