Student eXchange Process Modelling and Implementation by Using an Integrated BMP-SOA Approach

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One of the key processes of an open University Information System concerns managing the student exchange activities. In this paper we will try to address the challenges regarding modelling and implementation when integrating such a process by crossing different information systems. Our approach will leverage SOA architecture by using BPM in order to structure and build the service orchestration level.

Keywords: BPM, SOA, JAX-RS, Service Oriented Architecture, RESTful Web Services

1 BMP-SOA Integrated Approach

In a previous paper [1] we proposed an integrating methodology, briefly exposed in figure 1, starting from some specific methodologies that aim to bring in the same context the SOA architecture and BMP methodologies (or reverse BMP methodologies in the context of the SOA architectures) like SOAML [2], SOMF [2] or SOMA [3].

According to [4], [5], there are many ways to integrate different systems. Our approach tries to gradually transform BPM specifications in RESTful specifications in order to be implemented using some common SOA frameworks like Java’s JAX-RS, going through a set of distinct stages:
1. Setting the Business Process (BP) Model
2. Setting the HTTP API from BP Actions
3. Setting RESTFull Resources
4. Setting RESTFull Services
5. Implement RESTFull Services
6. Service Unit Testing
7. BPM Service Integration

Fig. 1. BPM-SOA Proposal workflow

where each BP Action should be described using design specifications that will cover: the action identifier, action type (UIX, Atomic Processing, Synchronous, Timing), action data inputs and action data output.

2. Setting the HTTP API from BP Action Specifications where each BP Action will
result into a HTTP Action that will be fully specified through: HTTP Action identifier: URI (from a base URL), HTTP Action Type (CRUD, RPC, UI/UX, Event based Asynchronous Acknowledgement) and HTTP Predicate, HTTP Action Input (meaning Input URL Parameters, Input Request headers, Request Body format: XML or JSON), HTTP Action Output (meaning Output Header: key-value result set, Response Body format, Response Code).

3. Setting RESTFull Resources as a model of business entities that will make the transition from process actions to an actually business data model by using HTTP CRUD Action types and identifying the underlying RESTfull resources.

4. Setting RESTFull Services to provide RESTfull resources (or business entities-based model) aiming to produce the modularization perspective to be used by the implementation of the underlying software components exposed as RESTfull services.

5. Implementation of RESTFull Services, using platforms like JAX-RS, Spring MVC, etc.

6. Service Unit Testing (service-level testing) where each RESTFull Service has to be deployed and “to live” into an autonomous executable context/runtime that will allow its validation by some modular and unit tests.

7. BPM Service Integration and Testing where service components will be integrated and orchestrated within a BP Platform Runtime (like jBPM, Bonita or Activity platforms) from where the initial Business Process could be executed and validated by integration tests.

2. Context of Student eXchange Process
In the following pages we will try to validate our BMP-to-SOA approach by implementing the above mapping guidelines into the practical context of the specific business process, targeting the integration of university information systems to support student exchange programs. This business process we have previously investigated in the larger context of University Information Systems [6].

We also take in consideration that according to [7], the educational offers must face the new challenges that require flexibility, rapidity, complexity and provide students both with specific habits and efficient work tools. In order to define a concrete context for our business process, we will describe the BMP entities or actors responsible for the BP actions to be mapped by using HTTP services.

**BPM Entities/Actors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>SubSystem/Service</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner University</td>
<td>SRMP</td>
<td>./part.univ/SRMP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>./part.univ/SRMP/students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>./part.univ/SRMP/grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin University</td>
<td>SRMP</td>
<td>./origin.univ/SRMP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>./origin.univ/SRMP/students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>./origin.univ/SRMP/grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner University</td>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>./part.univ/SPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>./part.univ/SPC/spec/disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin University</td>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>./origin.univ/SPC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The definitions for the proposed terms are as following:

- **SRMP** means Student RoadMaP: Professor, curriculum, study programs, modules, timetable;
- **SPC** means Study Programs & Curriculum: Student, grades, disciplines, tests, location, time;
- **DOCX** refers to Students, professors, secretary, documents and announcements.

### BPM Activities

Our simplified BP model proposed for student exchange programs is described in figure 2.

![BP Model and actions](image)

**Fig. 2. BP Model and actions [1]**

One could easily see that the BP model for student exchange programs tries to cover those activities related not only to student registration to another university information system, but also with importing student scholar data back to original university. This cross information cycle involves in fact a challenge regarding information integration. This challenge proved to be a complex issue for any university that accesses student-exchange academic programs.

### 3. Modelling Student eXchange Process with BMP and implementation in SOA context

Starting from the ideas described by the specialized literature [8], [9], [10], [11], in the following sections we propose a set of referential specifications that anyone could use as a reusable template easily adaptable in
order to produce a fully operational service architecture in the domain of student exchange program management.

3.1 BPM Action Specification

We start by formalizing those specific business process action features that will determine the actual service boundaries and parameters. First actions concern basic READ operations to get necessary information about study programs and course details from the partner university to establish equivalences.

**Table 2.** Action 1: <With an identification number of the student, identify the courses list for the student>, Action 2: <Identify details about the courses that the student attends>, Action 3: <Get details about the courses from the partner university>, Action 4: <Compare courses details to identify the courses the student will have to attend at the partner university>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Name</th>
<th>Action 1</th>
<th>Action 2</th>
<th>Action 3</th>
<th>Action 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Type</td>
<td>Check study program for student</td>
<td>Get details about student courses</td>
<td>Get details about the courses</td>
<td>Compare curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Data Input</td>
<td>Student ID</td>
<td>Courses List from SRMP</td>
<td>Year and semester of study</td>
<td>Courses details from origin and partner universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Data Output</td>
<td>Courses List from SRMP</td>
<td>Courses Details from SPC</td>
<td>Courses details from SPC</td>
<td>Equivalent courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next actions concern basic transactions necessary to acquire selected courses from the partner university.

**Table 3.** Action 5: <Decide which classes a student will have to attend to have a match in the SRMP>, Action 6: <Student evaluation which will take place in the partner university>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Name</th>
<th>Action 5</th>
<th>Action 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Type</td>
<td>WRITE</td>
<td>WRITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Data Input</td>
<td>Equivalent courses</td>
<td>Courses to attend, student ID, grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Data Output</td>
<td>Courses to attend</td>
<td>Grades from Partner University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last actions are about exporting student original university grades from the partner university to students’
Table 4. Action 7: <The grades must be published to be accessed from inside and outside>, Action 8: <After the student is evaluated the grades from Partner University will be accessed>, Action 9: <After the student is evaluated the grades will be converted in different grading systems>, Action 10: <Final Grades are inserted in parent university database>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Name</th>
<th>Action 7: Publish grades</th>
<th>Action 8: Access data from Partner University</th>
<th>Action 9: Grades conversion</th>
<th>Action 10: Insert grades in SRMP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Type</td>
<td>READ</td>
<td>READ</td>
<td>UPDATE</td>
<td>WRITE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Input Data</td>
<td>Student ID, grades and converted grades from Partner University</td>
<td>Credentials, student ID</td>
<td>Student ID, Grades from Partner University</td>
<td>XML/JSON Final Grades Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Output Data</td>
<td>Grades Data</td>
<td>Student grades (XML/JSON)</td>
<td>Converted grades</td>
<td>Service (message with status)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 HTTP Action Specifications [HTTP API]

As in previous section, we first present actions and formalized HTTP operations concerning identification of eligible courses from the partner university.

Table 5. Action HTTP 1: <Identify the courses list for the student>, Action HTTP 2: <Identify details about the courses that the student attends>, Action HTTP 3: <Get details about the courses from the partner university>, Action HTTP 4: <Compare courses details to identify the courses the student will have to attend at the partner university>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HTTP Action</th>
<th>Action 1: Check study program for student</th>
<th>Action 2: Search Student Details at parent university</th>
<th>Action 3: Get details about the courses</th>
<th>Action 4: Compare curricula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BPM Name</td>
<td>Check study program for student</td>
<td>Search Student Details at parent university</td>
<td>Get details about the courses</td>
<td>Compare curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTTP Type</td>
<td>READ</td>
<td>READ</td>
<td>READ</td>
<td>READ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTTP Action</td>
<td>GET</td>
<td>GET</td>
<td>GET</td>
<td>GET</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Next actions formalize the necessary transactions to define student enrollment.

**Table 6.** Action HTTP 5: < Decide which classes a student will have to attend to have a match in the SRMP >, Action HTTP 6: < Student evaluation which will take place in the partner university >
Finally, last HTTP actions formalize the information system of students’ original grades import transactions from the partner university to the university information system to the

Table 7. Action HTTP 7: <The grades must be published to be accessed from inside and outside >, Action HTTP 8: <After the student is evaluated the grades from Partner University will be accessed>, Action HTTP 9: <After the student is evaluated the grades will be converted in different grading systems and updated into equalization system>, Action HTTP 10: <Final Grades are inserted into parent university database>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>[Output] Response Body</th>
<th>Courses to attend,semester,studentID, year (JSON)</th>
<th>Grades from Partner University (XML/JSON)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HTTP Action URL</th>
<th>BPM Action Name</th>
<th>HTTP Action 7</th>
<th>HTTP Action 8</th>
<th>HTTP Action 9</th>
<th>HTTP Action 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HTTP Type</th>
<th>READ</th>
<th>READ</th>
<th>UPDATE</th>
<th>CREATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HTTP Predicate</th>
<th>GET</th>
<th>GET</th>
<th>PUT</th>
<th>POST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Input] URL Parameters</th>
<th>Year,semester,studentID,eqCourseName</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| [Input] Request Body | 
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| {} | 
| "course": "Logical games", "dateGranted": "2016-07-09", "grade": "7", "id": auto, "needsConversion": false, |
3.3 Implementation approach of Student Exchange REST model

The structure of our business data model is designed in a way to conform to the BPM requirements of the project. To accomplish this, we needed:

- a model of entity classes which are the equivalent of the tables from a database;
- a repository class to manage data queries from the database using model classes;
- service classes use data from database and apply specific methods for lists of data, to implement specific operations for REST resources;
- resource classes which contain instances of services and the REST infrastructure.

The implementation context used refers to JEE platform with JPA-ORM framework (Hibernate), JAX-RS using Jersey implementation and JAXB-OXM (Object to XML/JSON mapping) with Jackson Provider.

3.3.1 Specifications of REST Resource Model

The hierarchic implementation of classes is as it may be seen in figure 3 below:

![Fig. 3. Hierarchic implementation of model specs](image)

The (data) model classes (located in model package within the project) are: Course, Student, Grade, Equalization Each instance of these classes represents a record into the corresponding database table. Using another class (DatabaseClass) we extract the data from the database using lists of each model class. These classes are simple implementations of Java-Beans conventions as shown in figure 4.

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The service classes (located in services package within the project) are as follows:

- **CourseService**: offers the possibility to view all courses, to view a course by id, to get courses by speciality, by main field (the domain of the course), by course field (a branch from the domain), by semester, to delete, add or update a course.

### Listing 2. Course Service implementation
```java
public List<Course> getAllCourses(){
    return new ArrayList<>(courses.values());
}

public Course getCourse(long courseId){
    return courses.get(courseId);
}

public List<Course> getCoursesBySpeciality(String spec){
    List<Course> coursesBySpec= new ArrayList<>();
    for(Course crs:courses.values()){
        if(crs.getSpec().toLowerCase().equals(spec.toLowerCase())){
            coursesBySpec.add(crs);
        }
    }
    return coursesBySpec;
}
```

DOI: 10.12948/issn14531305/22.1.2018.04
public List<Course> getCoursesByMainField(String mainField) {
    List<Course> coursesByField = new ArrayList<Course>();
    for (Course crs : courses.values()) {
        if (crs.getMainField().toLowerCase().equals(mainField.toLowerCase())){
            coursesByField.add(crs);
        }
    }
    return coursesByField;
}

public List<Course> getCoursesByCourseField(String courseField) {
    List<Course> coursesByField = new ArrayList<Course>();
    for (Course crs : courses.values()) {
        if (crs.getCourseField().toLowerCase().equals(courseField.toLowerCase())){
            coursesByField.add(crs);
        }
    }
    return coursesByField;
}

public List<Course> getCoursesBySemester(String spec, int semester) {
    List<Course> coursesBySem = new ArrayList<Course>();
    for (Course crs : courses.values()) {
        if (crs.getSpec().toLowerCase().equals(spec.toLowerCase())){
            if (crs.getSemester() == semester){
                coursesBySem.add(crs);
            }
        }
    }
    return coursesBySem;
}

public Course addCourse(Course course) {
    course.setCourseID(courses.size()+1);
    courses.put(course.getCourseID(), course);
    return course;
}

public Course updateCourse(Course course) {
    if (course.getCourseID() <= 0) {
        return null;
    }
    courses.put(course.getCourseID(), course);
    return course;
}

public Course removeCourse(long courseID) {
    return courses.remove(courseID);
}

Listing 3. CourseService method to get courses by filter

StudentService: offers the possibility to add, remove, update a student and get information about all students, students by specialties or information by one student by id.

GradeService offers the possibility to add, remove, update a grade and to see the grades of a student, or by course, or by student and course name.

EqualizationService offers the possibility to add, delete, update equalizations, to view all equalizations, to view equalizations by year and semester or by student.
According to the specialized literature [12], the resource classes will be the ones that contain our REST architecture. The REST implementation of this model means that each method will have a @GET, @POST, @PUT, @DELETE (and @Path if it’s the case) annotation attached, each class will have a @Path annotation attached, and the return type of the http request using @Produces and @Consumes annotations. The specific REST annotations are included in Jersey Library, in javax.ws.rs package. The annotation @PathParam is used to get data from the URL while @QueryParam is used to get data from URL parameters.

The resource classes are:

- **CourseResource** with /courses default path sets paths and specific actions over Course objects:
  - /courses will give the list of all courses
  - /courses/mainfiled will give the list of courses filtered by mainfield, and it can return results using an url parameter to filter results by semester
  - /courses/mainfield/coursefield will return a list of courses filtered by mainfield and coursefield, and it can return results using an URL parameter to filter results by semester (see figure 5).
  - /courses/specialty/specname/courselist will return the list of courses for the specialty specname, and it can return results using an url parameter to filter results by semester (see figure 5).
  - /courses with POST,PUT,DELETE actions will add, update or delete a Course object (in JSON format).

**Listing 4.** CourseResource class to produce Course JSON documents

```java
@Path("/courses")
@Consumes(MediaType.APPLICATION_JSON)
@Produces(MediaType.APPLICATION_JSON)
public class CourseResource {
  CourseService courseService = new CourseService();
  @GET
  public List<Course> getcourses(){
    return courseService.getAllCourses();
  }
  @GET
  @Path("/speciality/{spec: .+/courselist")
  public List<Course> getcoursesBySpec(@PathParam("spec") String spec,
    @QueryParam("semester") int sem){
    if(sem>0){
      return courseService.getCoursesBySemester(spec,sem);
    }
    return courseService.getCoursesBySpeciality(spec);
  }
  ...
  // other REST-HTTP mapping methods
}
```
Fig. 5. Courses by specialty and semester (left) and by main field and course field (right)

- **StudentResource**: with /students as default path, sets paths and specific actions over Student objects:
  - /students will return a list of all students
  - /students/studentId will return the information about student with id studentId
  - /students/studentId/grades will return the list of all grades for the student having id studentId (see figure 6).
  - /students/studentId/courses will return the list of all courses for the student having id studentId and it can receive and url parameter to filter results by semester.
  - /students/studentId/equalizations will return the list of all equalizations for the student having id studentId (see figure 6).
  - /students with POST, PUT will update or add a Student object.
  - /students/studentId with DELETE action will delete the student with id studentId.
GradeResource with /grades as the default path, sets paths and specific HTTP actions over Grade objects:

- /grades will return a list of all grades
- /grades/courses/courseName will return a list of grades for the course with name courseName (see Figure 7)
- /grades/studentId will return the grades for the student with id studentId
- /grades/studentId/equalizations will return the grades from equalization system for the student with id studentId
- /grades with POST, PUT and DELETE actions will add, update or delete a Student object (in JSON format).

Figure 6. Grades for student 3 (left) and equalizations for student 2 (right)

Figure 7. Grades by student id (left) and by course name (right)
EqualizationResource with /equalizations as the default path, sets paths and specific HTTP actions over Equalization objects: /equalizations will return a list of all equalizations with the possibility to add URL parameters to filter results by year and semester (see figure 8). /equalizations/studentId will return a list of equalizations for the student with id studentId (see figure 8).

Fig. 8. Equalizations by year and semester (left) and for student1 (right)

4. Business Process Integration Model
Starting from the HTTP specification and implementation of Student Exchange REST model we made [1] the BPM.REST Action Model, which is based on a number of variables: Name, Request Body and Response Body. Following the specifications we create a project on jBMP platform (6.2.0 version) and we obtained the process diagram illustrated in figure 9.
Each BPM.REST action have some parameters and parameters assignment. The common parameters are the URL of the action endpoint and for each HTTP method of request we have parameter named Method. Below we have illustrated the Action Parameters and Action Parameters Assignment under each Action.

**BPM.REST Action 1 [Check study program for student(SRMP)] Specifications**
- Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model) - StudentResource
- Action Parameters and Parameters Assignment

**BPM.REST Action 2 [Get details about student courses] Specifications**
- Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model) - CourseResource
Fig. 11. Action 1 specs: Get details about student courses

BPM.REST Action 3 [Get details about courses (SPC)] Specifications
● Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model) - CourseResource

Fig. 12. Action 1 specs: Get details about courses

BPM.REST Action 4 [Establish Equivalent study Courses (SRMP)] Specifications
● Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model) - StudentResource

Fig. 13. Action 1 specs: Establish Equivalent study Courses

BPM.REST Action 5 [Evaluate the student (SRMP)] Specifications
● Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model) - StudentResource
**Fig. 14.** Action 1 specs: Evaluate the student

**BPM.REST Action 6 [Publish grades (SRMP)] Specifications**

- Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model) - EqualizationResource

**Fig. 15.** Action 1 specs: Publish grades

**BPM.REST Action 7 [Access data from Host University] Specifications**

- Action REST Resource Target (from REST Resource Model)
5. Conclusions
In this paper we have tried to achieve two goals. On the one hand, we made an extensive effort to build a complex of services that could automate the Student eXchange activities in a process that could be useful for those universities having students involved in international programs which are searching for a way to make these management processes more effective and transparent. On the other side, we have tried to make an experimental validation of our BPM-to-SOA modelling and to develop an approach in a relevant context inspired from a real (academic) problem encountered within actual University Information Systems.

Throughout our project we have tried to follow an end-to-end approach in order to cover the most relevant and critical aspects specific to SOA architectures. Our intentions were not to build a new SOA methodology, but to show a practical way on how to complement existing SOA approaches with the advantages of BPM methodologies, tools and platforms.

Although SOA and BMP methodologies emerged and evolved in parallel, we found that they could be fully compatible to build a mix between the very declarative approach of existing BPM platforms (meaning no code … just model, at one extreme) and the very customizable approach of SOA implementing
platforms (assuming complex and proprietary integration and orchestration protocols, at the other extreme). We prove that declarative (even visually) orchestration is possible for service-based actions built in a customized and extensible manner.

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References

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