Program Advisory

End Report
7th Trimester

2013-2014 Trimester 3

RSM
Student
Representation

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Introduction

The 7th Trimester committee consists of four members, with three second-year students and one third-year student. There is a good balance between the BA/IBA students. All of them have been motivated during this first two trimesters, even though our committee has a relatively smaller size. Because the 7th trimester for the majority is something they will have to go through in a year, it also explains their high motivation.

The 7th Trimester committee is established to gather feedback about the exchange, internship, minor, interim projects and everything else that the student is confronted by in the 7th trimester of his study curriculum. It is the trimester where the student can give a personal touch to its study, within the frameworks set by the university. Therefore it is of high importance that the communication and the procedures for the various possibilities in this trimester are well regulated. This can also become better by reviewing the practice; this is how the student experienced it. The 7th trimester is perceived as the most important period for the RSM student. It is the chance to develop beyond the limits of the regular studies.

This trimester, our committee has put effort into researching for the topic 'Exchange', for both people who are going on exchange during the next trimester and for people who have already returned from their exchange.

With kind regards,

Program Advisory
7th Trimester Committee 2013-2014

Methodology

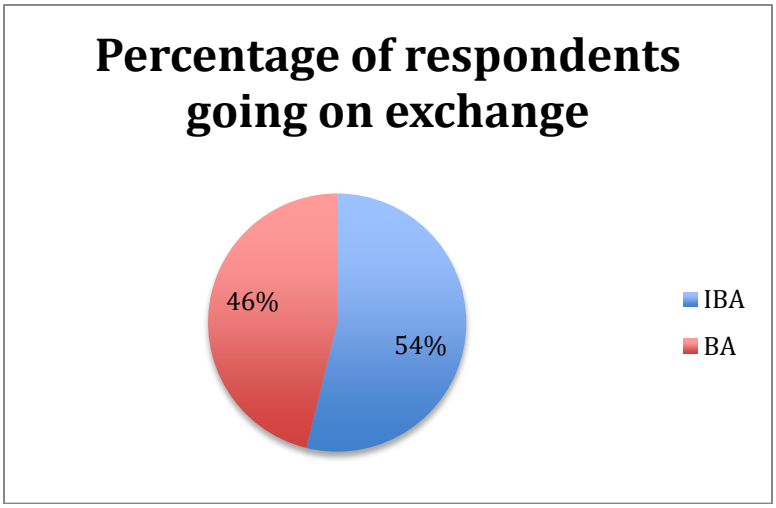
Students returning from exchange

Qualitative surveys were distributed online among 3rd year students who have just *returned* from their exchange programs. The surveys aimed to study their general satisfaction level of the experience as well as the difficulties they faced. Ample space was provided wherever possible for students to elaborate their answers and give additional feedbacks.

Total of 19 surveys were completed, 17 of which were done by IBA students. Thus this report disregards the 2 responses from BA and only focuses on the IBA students. Due to a miscommunication, two of the 1-to-5 scale questions (question 12 and 14) were translated into 1-to-7 scale in the online version. For the comparison purpose, these 7 scales were translated back to 5 scales (i.e., from "Very Dissatisfied—Dissatisfied—Somewhat Dissatisfied—Neutral—Somewhat Satisfied—Satisfied—Very Satisfied" to "Very Dissatisfied—Dissatisfied—Neutral—Satisfied—Very Satisfied." Meaning, there is no longer a distinction between "Satisfied" and "Somewhat Satisfied.")

Students going on an exchange

For the research regarding the students that are *going on* exchange, qualitative and quantitative surveys were distributed online (refer to appendix A for the survey). The survey was aimed at BA and IBA 2nd year students who are going on exchange and thus have experienced the application process. We used qualtrics.com as a platform to publish our survey and afterwards distributed it to students directly. In addition, Ligaya Kasmo-Borgonje, Programme Manager Bachelor Exchange, helped us distribute the surveys by posting it on blackboard. In total, 34 surveys were submitted, of which 4 were dropped, as they were not completed (see figure 1 for the distribution of the respondents). The study was aimed to see how the students have experienced the application and selection process and what their thoughts were regarding the information process and how well it was communicated.



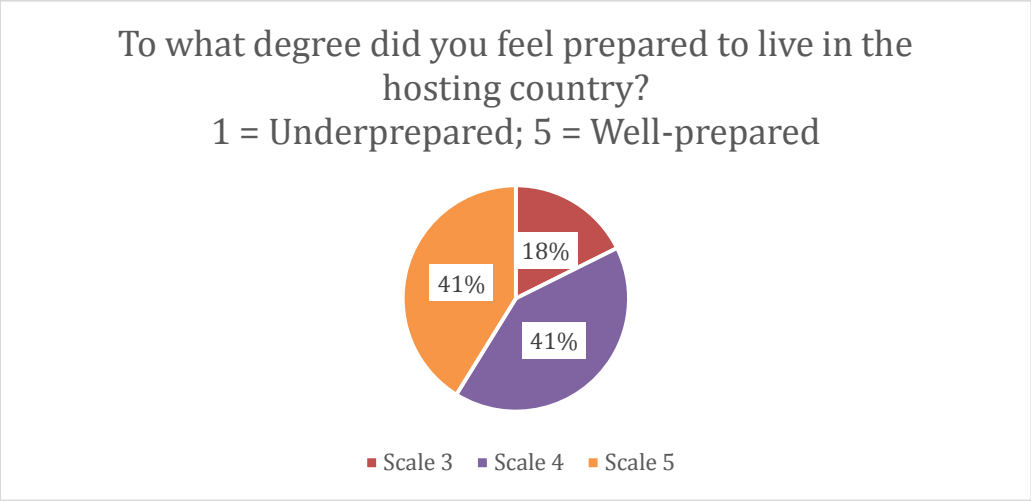
[Figure 1] Respondents Distribution students going on exchange

Subject : Exchange 2013 - 2014

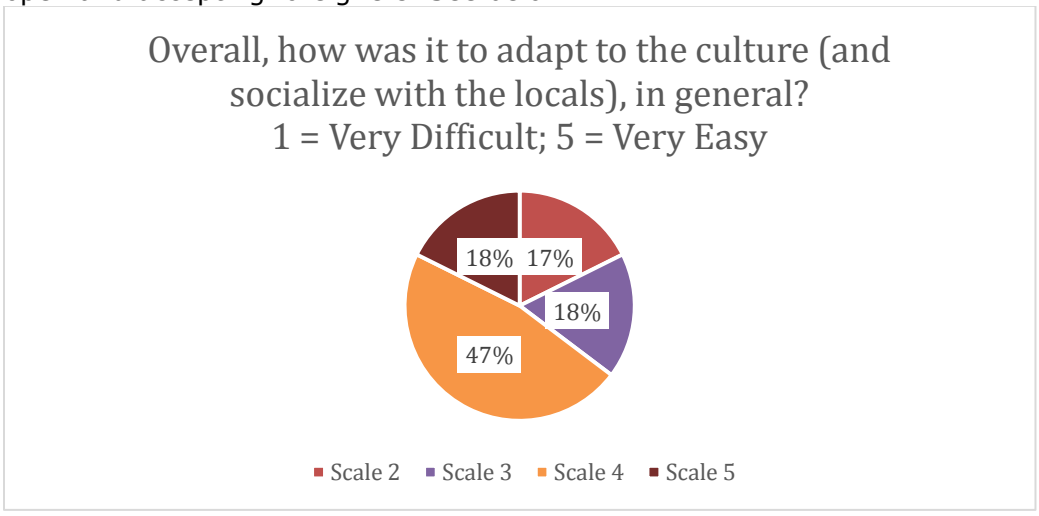
Feedback from the surveys

Students who've returned from exchange:

The respondents unanimously stated they did not face any problem with the application procedure at the **partner** university.
All students felt prepared for the exchange prior to their departure. A respondent who answered "3" in the scale commented it was mainly due to the concerns about the language barrier. See below:

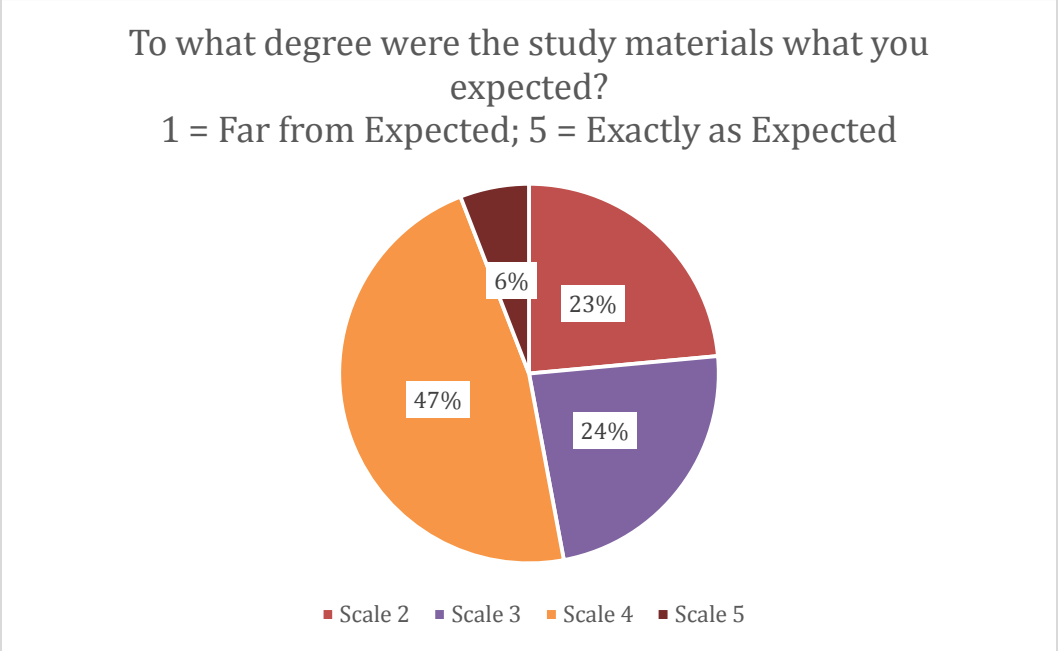


Most students did not face significant difficulty in adapting to the culture and socializing with the locals. The respondents who answered 2 or 3 found the language barrier and the locals not accepting foreigners as the main difficulties. Most respondents who answered 4 or 5 either a) was hosted by English speaking countries, b) hosted by the country that shares a similar culture with the respondent's home country or the Netherlands, or c) generally found the locals to be open and accepting foreigners. See below:

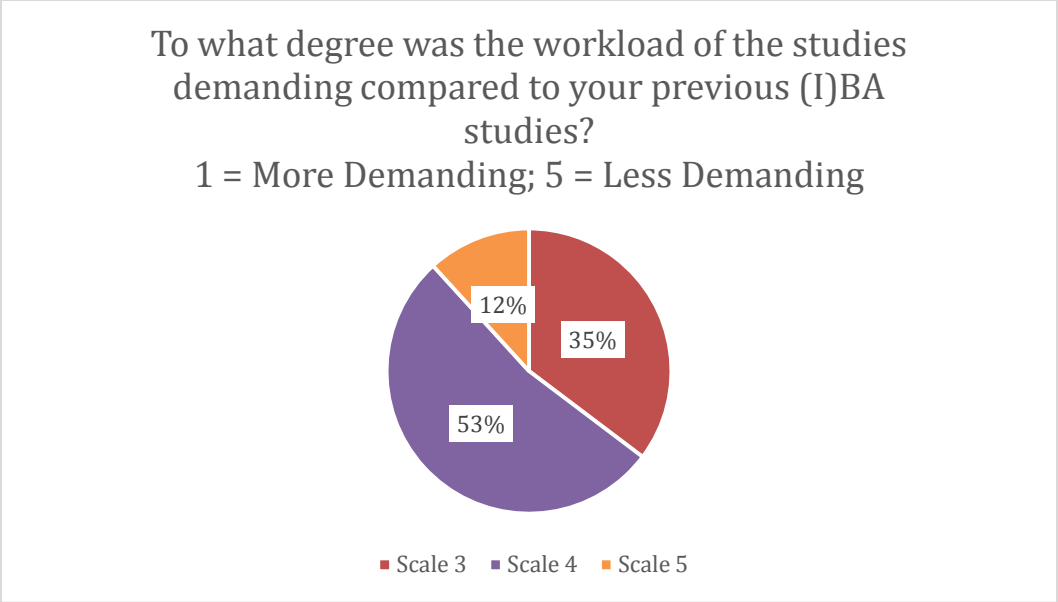


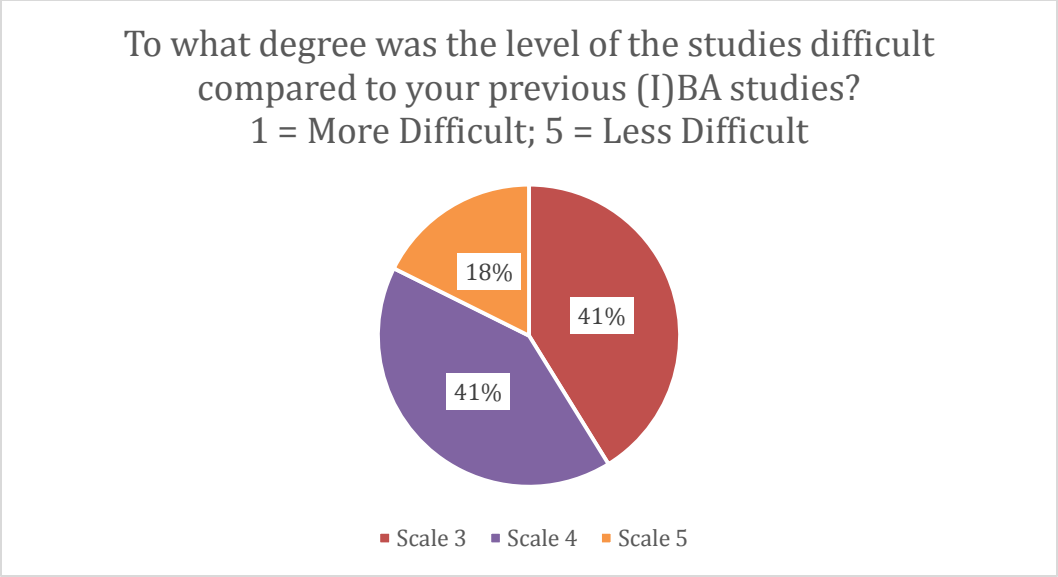
There was only 1 student who did not find the language requirement by the host school to be "usually not enough" to communicate with the locals. Nonetheless, 65% of the respondents stated there was no language requirement by the hosting university; 12% stated they were already fluent speaker of the required language. Thus, no conclusion can be drawn from the data and further study should be conducted regarding language requirement.

In general, 23% of the students faced courses that were significantly different from what they expected. See below:



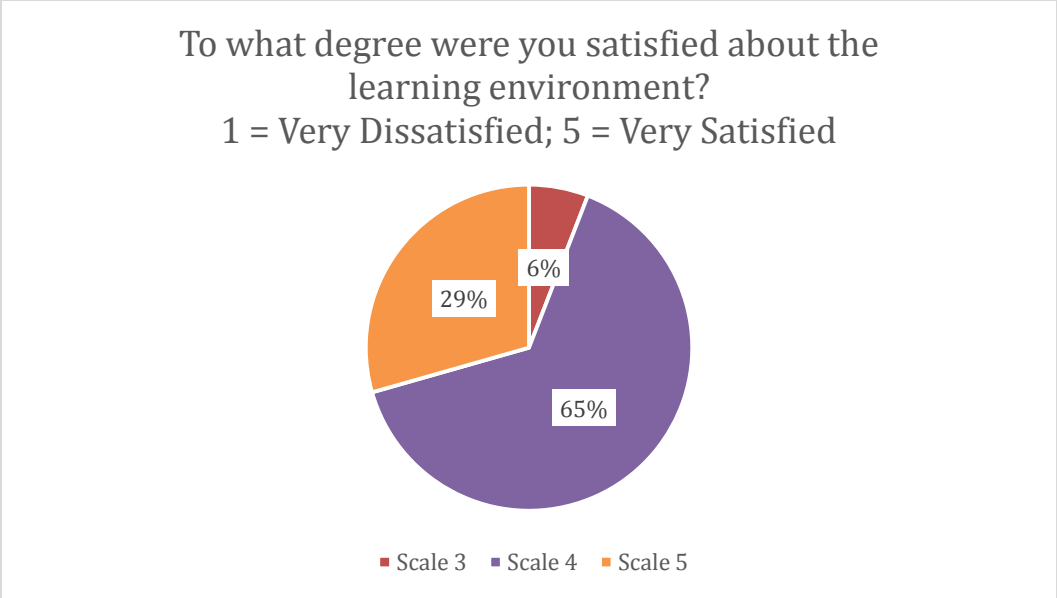
In addition, most respondents found the programs at the host university to be easier than the (I)BA programs. The workload also appears to be lower. Some students commented they genuinely felt the courses to be very easy with little workload. However, a student pointed out the teaching method of the hosting university was considerably different from that of IBA, thus comparison was hard. Furthermore, some comments stated the workload and the difficult indeed vary depending on the commitment of individuals.

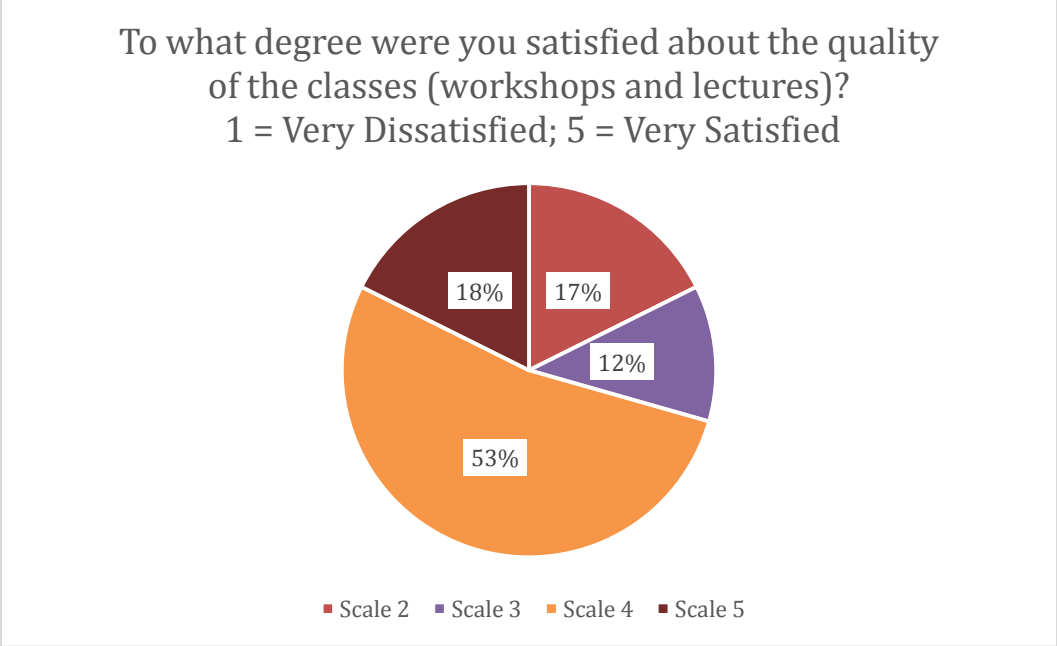




On the other hand, the satisfaction level of the learning environment was generally high, with an average of 4.2. There was only one negative comment. A student who was at York University addressed the security issues on the campus, where a number of sexual assaults took place.

The satisfaction level of the classes was lower with an average of 3.7. A student who answered "2" commented some classes were "not challenging AT ALL." Another respondent had an issue with the language fluency of the "teachers." See below:





In general, several students pointed out the study reports were made available for students too late, with potentially many outdated information.
A student who was hosted in Spain suggested (I)BA should encourage the students to learn the language regardless of the language certificate requirement.

Students who are going on exchange:

When students were asked what their thoughts were on the application process in general, the majority thought it was quite well organized and some even excellent. Only 12% of the respondents were neutral and thought it could have been organized better. Overall, all students expressed that they were happy with the good organized information sessions and of the fact that there was enough time between the information sessions and the deadline of application. The majority knew exactly what to do and found a lot of aid in the booklet. However, some students felt that their hosting universities were very vague and took a lot of time to respond. They mentioned that communication with the hosting universities could be done better.

The students were made aware of the selection process primarily due to the kick-off at the start of the year (20 responses out of 30) in combination with the information session held by International Office (17 responses out of 30). This indicates that the newly implemented information sessions are helpful and appreciated by the students. A few students also mentioned that the study and internship abroad fair and SIN-online also helped, however, not to such a great extent. As for the way the selection was conducted, there was a clear separation between students finding the selection quite strict (23%) and quite flexible (35%). It was mentioned that it would be useful if more information regarding the selection process would be communicated to the 1st year students, as it is very important to maintain a high average grade from the beginning. Multiple respondents expressed that they did not know this until they reached the second year, which could already be too late for some students.

Moving on to the next section, we asked our respondents if they felt that they were treated fairly and equally in the selection procedure. Overall, everyone was satisfied and thought it was reasonably fair. Some BA students expressed that they had the feeling that they were treated unfairly and that their chances of being selected is smaller compared to IBA students (28% of the BA students). Important to note, is that a lot of students (40%) expressed that they would like to hear the reasoning why they did or did not get picked. They claim it would be nice if the procedure was a bit more transparent and if they could be informed as some students felt confused why they did or did not get picked and why they got their specific choice and not another.

Regarding the courses the students could choose from at the hosting university, 38% felt satisfied and 31% felt very satisfied. The students expressed that there was a large selection with a lot of courses touching upon different aspects, which they liked. A small group was dissatisfied, namely 12%. This was mainly due to the fact that there were not enough courses taught in English, however this is dependent on the hosting university (e.g. Reykjavik University only had 4/5 courses taught in English).

Concerning the information made available by the international office at RSM (rankings, courses and qualities), there was an even separation. A lot of students expressed there was enough information whereas other students claimed that they had to research a lot themselves regarding their specific choices. However, overall, the majority claim that RSM is doing a good job and believe it is fair that this is up to themselves and their own responsibilities. In addition, almost all students found the reports from previous exchange students very helpful and interesting.

In general 84% of the respondents felt happy with the results of the selection of the process. The rest of the students were dissatisfied regarding the choice they got.

Concluding, we asked the BA and IBA students if they were aware of the free-mover possibilities at RSM and the rules and policies for this. The results were surprising as 69% were not aware of the policies and some students did not even know what it was. Some students mentioned that they have heard of it but really would not be able to explain what it entails. Some mentioned that this should be explained a bit more extensive at the information session or made clear through blackboard. A small group of students mentioned that if they had more information regarding the topic they would definitely look into it and pursue it.

Feedback from the Open Feedback Session:

There was only one feedback, which suggested "every student should be guaranteed an exchange space." However, this lays several issues a) number of students who wish to go on an exchange changes every year, b) there is a fixed number of students that Erasmus University and the partnering universities agreed to exchange, c) changing the number of those exchange students every year would lay a series of complications, and d) changing the number of partnering universities annually is impossible as the relationship is long-term based, to mention some of the obvious reasons. The decision can only be made by the top management of the university.

Feedback from focus group

Before discussing the problems we came across during this focus group, we asked our respondents about their positive experiences with the selection process. Everyone agreed that the online platform RSM provided was very well organized. The information guide was clear and the study reports and the fact sheets were very helpful. They believed that the students who were motivated to go on exchange had enough time to check the information given online and reading the experiences from other students gave them a positive impression of going on an exchange. They were also very happy with the fact that they could e-mail, call or drop by the international office to ask any question they had about the RSM Bachelor Exchange.

One of the first problems discussed was the interview during the selection process of the RSM Bachelor exchange. The focus group agreed that this experience was different for every student, but they all agreed on the fact that this process was not as professional as they expected. Many students believed the questions asked during the interview were quite vague and did not go much in debt on the motivation letter. They also had the impression that the international office already made their decision before the interview started and that it is a big advantage if the members of the office like you. They also believed the qualities were not compared fairly and not accurate to requirements. Many students who did not pass their fourth trimester classes got accepted into the exchange program, while this was an important requirement communicated by the international office. Students believe more transparency on the reasons for selecting students in the selection process would be satisfying.

We were also very surprised to hear that one student who was rejected at first was told there were still spots in Europe available at the date of the focus group in May and that she was offered one of those spots. It surprised the respondents because

everyone was told there were no more spots available since March and that even if there were, it would be impossible to get one since time is needed to make many arrangements between RSM and the partner universities. This fact made students question the credibility of the process. Students would like to see more transparency on these sorts of things.

Furthermore, even though the blackboard page itself was very clear and informative, the respondents believed it was unclear how to get to the blackboard page and install it. Also, despite the fact that students are informed about the general grade requirements in their first year, the students would have liked to see more information about the grade categories per country. This way a student who wants to go to e.g. the United States can see that a 6.5 will most likely be insufficient and work on this during their first year already.

Besides that, students who spent money on the expensive TOEFL and IELTS tests and got rejected believe this is a shame. They would like to see a solution for this, where they do not have to make such big investments before having any certainty. It was also not always clear what universities need and if a language test is even required by them.

Also, some of the students attended told us that the "on hold" situation from some universities is uncertain. It is communicated in e.g. the information folder that some universities are on hold, but afterwards it appears this information is sometimes incorrect. Students also believe the selection process is extremely competitive and they would like to see more slots available so more students have the opportunity to attend the RSM Bachelor Exchange.

Students were unhappy with the date of the deadline. This date was only two days after the exams. Even though students could have started about a month before this deadline, this was a rather stressful period and the students would have rather had more time after their exams to work on their application without anything else to worry about.

Lastly, no student knew about the rules that are applicable to outgoing free-mover students. The respondents were also surprised to hear RSM will not let free-movers attend partner universities while partner universities do accept them. They agreed there should be more transparency on this process and the unknown policy and the reasons behind their decisions.

Solution according PA:

Based on the findings mentioned above, overall, we believe that the students were positive regarding the application and selection procedure, just a few things stood out.

First of all, it was expressed that communication with the hosting universities was poor. Even though this matter is very dependent on the university, PA believes that communication should be better as students feel confused and do not know what is happening while they are waiting for confirmation.

Second of all, a percentage of our respondents (33%) believe that 1st year students are unaware of the grading criteria to go on exchange. Therefore, PA advises for

RSM to start implementing information sessions for 1st year students. Even though this could be seen as very early, it does immediately communicate to the students what the standard is and what is required of them. This way they will be motivated from the start to obtain high grades and work hard. Moreover, we believe that the new information sessions implemented this year was highly valued by the 2nd year students as they found it very useful. This proves that implementing the information sessions was a success and thus we advise RSM to do the same for the 1st year students.

Third of all, this survey made PA realize that a lot of students (40%) were dissatisfied with the fact that they did not receive any feedback after conducting the interviews, as this does not give them an indication of why they were accepted/rejected. Therefore, we advise RSM to consider writing short e-mails to the students who were rejected with a short explanation by the interviewers. PA realizes it is hard to make the process transparent, as every interview conducted is personal and different. However, having some guidelines of what is preferred could be useful and eventually benefit the students. The focus group suggested to do this in an objective matrix which is shown before or after the interview, so there can be more transparency on this process.

To give the students the impression that the interview is held objective, the interview can also be with one of the interviewers who did read the motivation letter and the other one who did not. It would also be a good idea to take into account that some students are extremely nervous for the interview, as this is a very important factor in the decision. It would also help to make some standardized questions for everyone that are more about the subject in their motivation letter and about their top-three locations of preference.

PA also realizes there is probably a reason for the limited amount of slots available per university, but if it is possible to communicate to students this amount of slots can still change after the selection, this would make them more at ease. It would also be good to treat every student with the same rules to increase satisfaction and credibility. If there is a possibility of universities still having spots that can be accredited to students far after the official deadline, this should be communicated to everyone.

Also, the focus group suggests to move the date of the deadline to either November (before the exams begin) or January so that students have the time to completely focus on this application process. PA would suggest to move the date to January as the interviews will take place in January and February anyway.

Last of all, regarding the free-mover policy, we were surprised to see so many students that were unaware of this policy. There are rules for the free-mover possibilities, but these rules cannot be found in any place that is accessible for students. We therefore advice RSM to consider giving more attention to this during their information sessions, on the website and in the information folders as an alternative option. This way the students who decide to make use of the free-mover possibilities will know what rules apply to this process.

Checklist to improve the problem:

- Make sure communication between hosting university and RSM students is improved
- Implement more specific grade information during the 1st year information sessions to motivate these students on time
- Give the students more transparency on the results of the application process by scoring them on an objective matrix and send them an e-mail with reasons of acceptance or rejection
- One of the interviewers could read the motivation letter and the other interviewer could not to have a more objective impression of the interviewee
- Make more slots available or communicate to students this amount can change after they applied and communicate about exceptions for attendance to certain locations to increase transparency and satisfaction
- Move the date of the deadline to early January
- Give more transparency about the free-mover possibilities and policy and publish the rules applicable to this process online

Conclusion

There were not many complaints made regarding exchange programs identified by surveys, and respondents generally appear to be satisfied. Among those problems, the exchange program being "too easy," cannot be solved by RSM, as those courses were originally designed by the hosting university for their own curriculum, not for the exchange students. The only problem identified that RSM can solve, would be giving the students more information about the hosting countries. RSM has accomplished a phenomenal job on establishing smooth application and selection process. Yet, once some students arrived in their hosting university, they still had difficulties in adapting. Not only these students who had difficulties, but students who easily adapted to the new environment pointed out it would help students significantly if study reports are made public earlier.

As for the students who went on exchange, in general, everyone was pleased regarding the selection procedure. It is safe to say that the information sessions were really useful and appreciated among the students from both faculties and maybe it should be a good idea to start implementing this for the 1st yearstudents. In addition, the students would appreciate it if the process could be a bit more transparent. This means that the students are made aware of why they got selected or not, but also that they would receive e-mails to let them know what the progress is.

Appendix A: Survey

StudentRepresentation: Program Advisory
Subject: Bachelor Exchange

The Student Representation is an independent organization that represents students of BA and IBA program. The Program Advisory provides the Programme Management with advice based on feedback they have gathered from their fellow students during the trimester. By filling in this form you can help the Student Representation to improve the quality of your education!

SPEAK YOUR MIND!

With this form, you are giving feedback about the process prior to the **Bachelor Exchange**

We are interested in both positive and negative feedback and suggestions.

You are: ☐ BA ☐ IBA

*The hosting university will be:*_____

Selection Procedure

1. How well organized was the application process?

Poorly organized ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Excellent organized

Please elaborate on the organization of the application process

2. Through what channel(s) were you made aware of the selection process?

☐ SIN message at the end of trimester 3
☐ Information session in October by international office
☐ Kick-off B2
☐ Study and internship abroad fair
☐ Other

3.How do you feel about the manner of selection compared to other faculties?

Very strict ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very flexible

Can you elaborate?

4. Do you have any advice or comments for adaptations regarding the manner of selection for the futue students who will attend the RSM Bachelor Exchange?

5. How do you feel about the fair and equal treatment in the selection procedure for RSM Bachelor Exchange? Please elaborate in the comment section below

Study

6. How satisfied are you with the amount of courses you could choose from at your hosting university?

Very dissatisfied ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very satisfied

Please elaborate on your satisfaction regarding the courses of your hosting university. (How did you experience choosing your courses, etc.)?

7. What is your opinion on the amount of information about the rankings, courses and qualities made available by the International office at RSM? Please elaborate.

Results

8. Are you happy with the results of the selection process? Please elaborate

9. Are you aware of the free-mover possibilities at RSM and the rules and policies for this? If so, how were you made aware of this? Please elaborate

General feedback

Do you have any general feedback or other comments you would like to write about? Please do so in the box below.

Date: __/__/____ (dd, mm, yyyy)

Thank you for your feedback in this survey. We will handle it with privacy.