

**Program Advisory**

**End Report**  
**Examination & Tutoring**

2012-2013 Trimester 2



RSM  
**Student  
Representation**

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## Introduction

This Trimester, among others, it is studied whether the course workload in relation to the number of ECTS allocated is perceived as suitable. Not all courses will be treated, only specific cases will be reviewed. Beside this topic, the second part of this trimester's discussion points, opinions and feedback has been acquired regarding exam contents and the protocol. Students were approached individually and were asked to comment on exam aspects such as the coverage of the literature and lecture slides on the exam, follow-up questions (i.e. using the solution of question 1 in order to solve question 2), the exam structure, multiple choice questions and open questions e.g.. In response, the elaborative opinions and results presented below have been gathered.

With kind regards,

Committee members Examination & Tutoring  
Program Advisory

## Methodology

During this trimester, our Examination & Tutoring has gathered feedback in the same specific way as the first trimester. All students have been approached personally instead of being asked to fill out feedback forms.

The Examination & Tutoring committee considered this to be a better idea, because in this way it is easier to collect more person related and relevant information. Thereby, it is a clearer and more representative view of the current issues within the faculty RSM. However, this way not all the information is obtained about the backgrounds of the students (which year they are in, BA/IBA e.g.).

Moreover, we used the feedback from the Focus Group event to evaluate our feedback. We gained some new feedback from this event. The Examination & Tutoring committee stands for the methodology of approaching and talking to many students to form a good overview on the opinions of the Examination & Tutoring topics.

## Subject 1: Open questions on examinations

Often wise, examination papers are not solely structured by multiple choice questions. In these cases, students are tested on their knowledge by means of open questions which consist of multiple sub-questions (1a, 1b, 1c). These questions often grant a student a high amount of marks when answered correctly, therefore having a large direct impact on your final exam grade. However, it is often the case that when students are incapable of answering the first question, they are automatically excluded from answering the follow-up sub-questions.

### Feedback

After having approached students regarding this matter and having asked for their opinions, it shows that the vast majority could relate to a before mentioned problem and even experienced it themselves.

First-year students saw this problem arise during the Mathematics exam, whereas second-year students had to deal with this issue during the ORM/QDM exam. After getting stuck at the first question and thus lacking the correct answer, they could not solve the follow-up questions which required calculations with this required correct answer from mentioned question.

It was found that students experienced large amounts of pressure to solve this start-up question in a correct manner. Moreover, it is found that students deal with stress – some even indicated to panic – upon realizing that they are incapable of providing the right solutions to the question.

Additional feedback reflected that by being unable to solve the first question, a lot of examination time is lost by attempting multiple approaches to solve the problem, by hoping to provide oneself with an answer that could allow them to solve the follow-up questions. As a result of this, students spend a great deal of time attempting to solve the first question and thus in a later stage, lack the time to solve the rest of the exam problems.

Overall, the opinion about follow-up questions tended to be somewhat negative. Students generally found follow-up questions to be unfair. In addition, it was established that follow-up questions do not allow students to really show and express their studied knowledge – which is found to be the purpose of an exam. As one student put it: *"A follow up question feels more like a punishment (when wrong) rather than a reward (when right)."* Upon getting stuck on one question, it does not give students the opportunity to allow the remainders of the questions.

In some cases, this leads to stress and pressure on the student, sometimes leading them to also incorrectly answer other questions on the exam.

## Solution according to PA

A possible solution to this problem is the adjustment of the exam structure, with special regards to the section that deals with open questions. The general structure would not change; there will be an introduction with relevant information which a student will have to process, followed up with a set of sub-questions. The difference and solution to this frequent problem kicks in when the sub-questions arise; upon being unable to answer the first question, a “dummy-answer” should be provided for the second question which is in no way related to the first question. In other words, exam questions should be able to be treated in an independent way. This particular method will grant students the opportunity to answer all sub-questions given. The first question, which was answered incorrectly, would not be assigned any marks due to the failure of providing the correct answer. This enlarges the objective measurement of the ability that the student understands and can apply the techniques and knowledge necessary for that specific course.

Students can be assigned for questions which required usage of the “dummy-answer”, though, and in return can earn points for these questions. Implementation of this method would reduce the rate of pressure for students, as well as take away the problem of suffering from a lack of time. It is inferred that upon modifying the exam structure, students will be able to show a better performance.

## Subject 2: Coverage of study content in exams

Regarding the coverage of literature and lecture material, opinions seemed to be distributed to a certain extent. Some students found the overlap between literature and exam questions to be somewhat fair and did not seem to have any complaints. It was said that most questions were indeed taken from the assigned literature. On the other hand, students expressed dissatisfaction regarding course material coverage and provided us with valuable feedback. Multiple students stated that often, there is too much literature in the sense that not all of it can be tested on the exam: "I think sometimes we are told to prepare way more [literature] than necessary, and it is impossible for the professor to test us all the knowledge based on a couple multiple-choice questions." In addition, it is found that exams vary too much in that some are based highly on lecture slides, whereas others are mainly based on the book. This should be balanced on an exam.

Furthermore, when speaking of balance and coverage, students express strong preference towards having multiple questions based on several chapters of the literature, rather than having one extended follow-up question that would only cover a single chapter. In this sense, there wouldn't be any occurrences of taking away a large amount of credits for the student, for the sole reason it did not fully master one of the many topics covered in the course. A clear example was that on a recent exam, 20 out of 100 points were assigned to a calculation and topic which was solely covered on a total amount of three lecture slides. Another point of disturbance for some students are questions that are based on guest lectures. Questions are sometimes specifically formulated such as "what did the professor say about this topic in lecture 7", which is found to be of non-adding value. Rather, it is a test to check if you attended the lecture. Another student stated the in general, "the quality of the guest lectures is somewhat poor as some guest speakers are not used to give presentations in front of large crowds."

In this category, there has also been a valuable comment on the exam difficulty. Most students simply stated that they found exams to be either too difficult or doable, but this is likely to be related to their own preparation methods. One student shared her thoughts and mentioned the following: "A low passing rate, in my opinion, only reflects the lack of guidance by the professor or mandatory literature. For example micro economics, this course has had a very low passing rate for 3 years if not more. This is probably [the case] because the book is not representative for the exam at all! The level of the exam is so much higher. If lowering the difficulty level of the exam is not possible, at least provide proper lectures and workshop tutors. The exams depend too much on the discipline and intelligence of the student.

### Solution according PA

The solutions PA would like to address are as follow:

- Balance the amount of question derived from the book versus the lecture slides;
- Balance the amount of questions derived from the different chapters within the book;

## Subject 3: Regulations

Momentarily, students do not seem sufficiently aware of what organizational body to refer to when it is found that examination-protocols are not being followed by relevant parties.

### Feedback

Students have referred to experience annoyances and disturbances with respect to the invigilators during the exams. There appears to be no consistency regarding the exam-protocol and its implementation. In addition, students do not know what office or entity could possibly deal with any complaints/suggestions that arise on behalf of the students.

### Solution According to PA

It is considered important that for every examination, the front page of the exam will be uploaded onto Blackboard. This is in order for the students to be aware of the examination regulations, e.g. taking home the scrap paper, usage of graphical/programmable calculators, and so on. When students are familiar with the rules, they will be able to refer back to this document when it is assumed that rules are not being stuck to by invigilators.

### *Checklist to improve the problem*

It is of essence that students know who to address aforementioned problems to, i.e. when invigilators deviate from the prescribed examination protocol. The final purpose is to create a higher rate of awareness towards the Student Representation and the Examination. To exemplify this, the following suggestions have been set up:

- SR First Help: this is a concept that allows RSM students to be fully informed of the (student) organization. Students need to be informed that SR can be addressed when there are any RSM-related complaints. Moreover, this will provide the student with a sense of assurance, knowing that they have an organizational student body that they can count and rely on. It is proposed to distribute a flyer or a small booklet of our organization, which can be added to potential goodie-bags.
- SR NewSRoom article: the last couple of months, we will focus on NewSRoom to familiarize students with the current state of matters at RSM. We would like to publish an article on SR NewSRoom to display openness towards receiving feedback, complaints and suggestions.
- Statement of contact details on exam front pages: an example of this could be the mentioning of Examination Board's email address. The committee is convinced that this will raise more awareness regarding respective Board among all students.

## Subject 4.A: Workload in comparison to ECTS for BA

This subject is divided in two parts. The first part is this subject related to the BA course and the second part is related to the IBA part. The ratio in terms of working hours varies strongly per course that is taught to the students. The university has assigned a specific amount of credits (ECTS) to all courses studied. These ECTS are based on the amount of working hours that are required one to invest in studying this course. One ECTS point is equivalent to approximately 25 to 30 working hours. There have been remarks and comments; however, that assignment of these ECTS to courses is done in a manner which is not entirely justified, as there seems to be no fair balance and ratio between the courses and their credits. For some courses, it has been shown that more working hours need to be invested than initially implied by the amount of credits obtained upon completion of the course.

### Feedback:

Students are showing a wide range of opinions for this matter. Most students state that the credit-distribution is fair among all courses and do not have any particular complaints. Others found that some courses take up more preparation hours than the pre-assigned and assumed hours in relation to ECTS. For first-year students, comparisons were conducted between Mathematics, 'Bedrijfskundige vaardigheden' and 'Gedrag in Organisaties'. Respective students found it surprising that more ECTS are assigned to 'Bedrijfskundige Vaardigheden' and 'Gedrag in Organisaties' than to Mathematics. In additions, academic expectations from students were higher for the latter-mentioned course than for others. The course consisted of regular lectures, workshops, weekly assignments (bonus), and a midterm. In comparison, 'Bedrijfskundige vaardigheden' only required the student to complete a few, minor assignments, alongside with mandatory attendance for the mentor sessions. The second-year students mentioned 'Wetenschapsleer'. Aside from weekly lectures, students were required to write three essays and study multiple articles. These efforts resulted in a mere amount of 3 ECTS.

### Conclusion

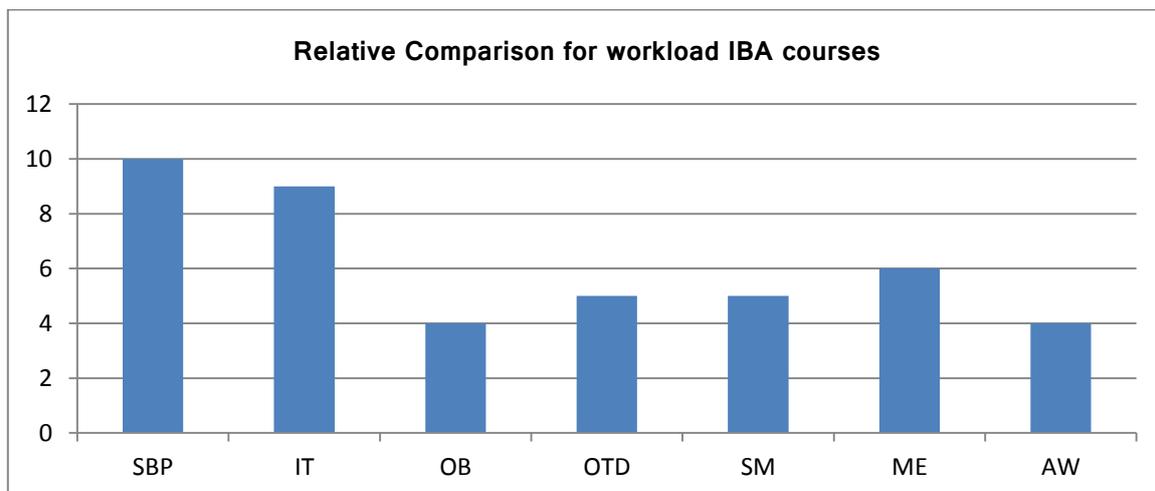
From this research, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents seem to be discontent with the division and allocation of ECTS. The E&T committee very well knows that ECTS adjustments cannot be simply executed on the short-run. Another discussion point is the expectations RSM sets regarding the academic knowledge of students. To exemplify, RSM expects a student to have prior knowledge (acquired in high school) before taking the Mathematics course. In addition, RSM advises potential, upcoming students to have an average grade-point of 7.0/10 for their Mathematics course in high school. As a matter of fact, this is a standard requirement for all applicants in the IBA-program.

## Subject 4.B: Workload in comparison to ECTS for IBA

To start with, the allocation of ECTS can be considered reasonably good for the IBA program. We base this conclusion on the following reasoning. In general when students were asked, they had to think for quite a while and, on average, came up with approximately 3 courses they genuinely felt the workload was in appropriate. In addition, the satisfaction about 3<sup>rd</sup> year courses was striking. As a result none are included in the analysis.

### Feedback

Following is a graph that shows the degree to which students feel the ECTS in relation to the workload is appropriate. For this graph SBP is chosen as the benchmark (10), as the workload of this course was experienced by students as far higher than the ECTS signals. The reader should understand that the graph gives a **relative** representation based on qualitative interviews and should not be understood as absolute numbers. The magnitude signals the degree to which students feel the workload is not appropriate for the ECTS, either too much or too little.



- **SBP:** Strategic Business Plan. Students award this course far more ECTS, most of them almost felt although it is spread over 2 trimesters, the current ECTS should be awarded for each trimester. Basis for this, are the company visits and research that takes considerable time.
- **IT:** Skills IT. The workload for this course is experienced as high. When all preparation assignments are made for this course it takes more time than 5 or 6 ECTS courses.
- **OB:** organizational behaviour. This course is experienced as relatively easy when the ECTS are observed.

- **OTD:** Organizational Theory and Dynamics. For the same reasoning as SBP it is felt that more ECTS should be awarded.
- **SM:** Strategic Management. Although the recent changes this year regarding the pop quizzes, which increases the workload as attendance to the lectures becomes somewhat mandatory. This course is regarded as easy compared to what the ECTS makes the students expect.
- **ME:** Micro Economics. The content of this course is considered challenging, therefore students would award it slightly more ECTS.
- **AW:** Academic Writing. Although contents of the course do fit the number of ECTS, the many assignments do make the workload higher than expected.

## Conclusion

On a side note it should be mentioned that: a course with a work intensive project might have the same ECTS as a course with only lectures, a book and exam. The latter might be less work, because students do not read the book/speed read. Where in the first situation, one is forced to put in a certain minimum effort through workshops or reports for example. This does show that, when certain students experience relatively more workload compared to other courses with the same ECTS, it might be that the problem are not the ECTS. It is difficult to control for this effect and it might therefore be included in the conclusions described above.

Although results are not absolute, it is advised to pay considerable attention to SBP and IT, as it appeared students genuinely feel ECTS for these courses do not represent the workload.