

End Report

Program Advisory Examination & Tutoring

2014-2015 Trimester 2



RSM
Student
Representation

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Introduction

The Examination and Tutoring committee (Program Advisory) is composed of five members: Razjaan Rashid (BA1), Parikrama Rai (IBA1), Elisa de Leeuw (IBA2), Lotte Bijl (BA3) and Andrea Stehrer (IBA3). This allows for a good balance between IBA/BA and the different years.

The committee's aim is to provide valuable insights to Program Management in order to enhance the quality of students' learning experience (via workshops) and the assessment of their performance. The specific topics researched this trimester were: perusals and the use of tutoring organizations, as suggested during the Program Management meeting in trimester 1.

The goal of this report is to objectively reflect students' opinions on the topics mentioned above, and to provide recommendations for potential improvements. We hope some of these can be implemented in the coming years.

Sincerely,

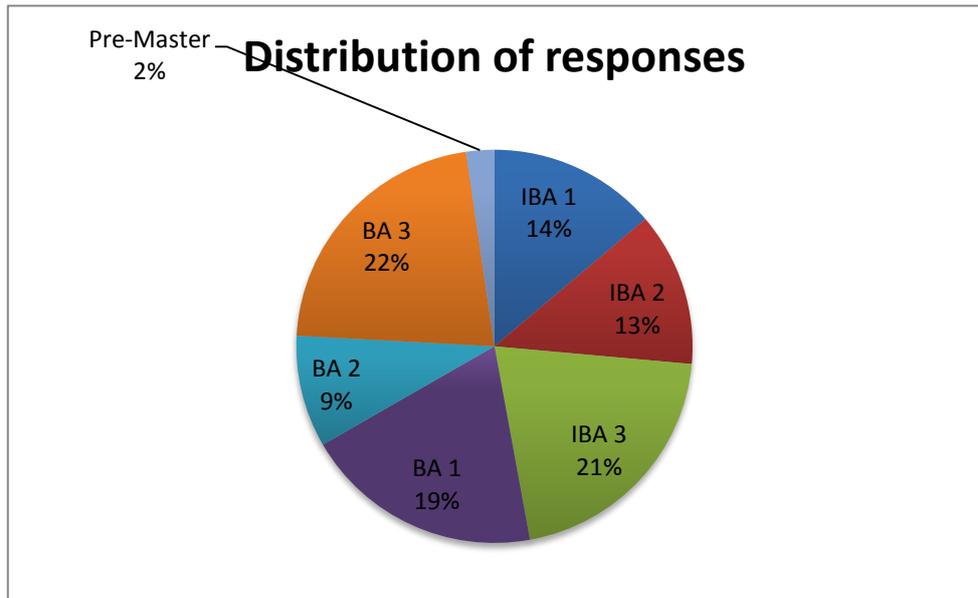
The Examination and Tutoring Committee
Program Advisory

Methodology

Survey

To gather quantitative and qualitative data for our research, two main approaches were used; a survey and a focus group. In order to get a randomized sample, the survey was distributed online through the IBA and BA Facebook groups. However, given generally low response rates in the past, students were also contacted by individual committee members. Furthermore, several surveys were filled out at the Open Feedback Days, organized between 16 and 20 of February. In total, 87 responses were gathered (up from 59 in the previous trimester):

IBA 1	12
IBA 2	11
IBA 3	18
BA 1	17
BA 2	8
BA 3	19
Pre-master	2
Total	87



Focus group

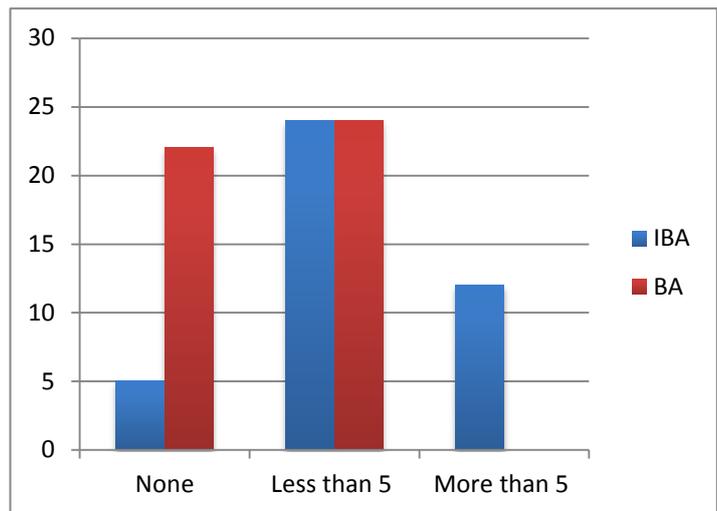
To gather participants for the committee’s focus group, friends/acquaintances of committee members were invited. This may bias our sample to some extent, however, given very low response rates in the past, it was the most feasible option. In total, the focus group consisted of 7 students, of which 6 were from IBA. In terms of nationalities and year of study, the distribution was as follows: 4 Dutch participants and 3 internationals (France, Latvia, India); 1 first-year, 2 second-year and 4 third-year student. As a result, we obtained a relatively homogeneous sample (mainly consisting of IBA 3 students). Nevertheless, given that the topic was perusals, 3rd-year students were more adequate than 1st-years, as they should have more experience with it.

Subject 1: Perusals

After every exam, professors organize a perusal, which allows students to (sometimes) look at their exam, to ask questions, and to learn from their mistakes. We would like to find out whether students frequently make use of these opportunities, why they do/don't, how perusals could potentially be improved and whether the elimination of scrap paper has an effect on this. Moreover, the structure of perusals varies considerably from course to course. For instance, some resemble more a lecture, while others are organized in smaller groups or even in individual feedback sessions. We are interested on what, according to students, works best.

Feedback from survey

Our findings reveal that only a very small portion of students truly make use of perusals. They also clearly show that more IBA than BA students attend them. Concretely, only 12% of IBA students in our sample have never attended a perusal, while for BA this is the case for almost half of the respondents (48%). Furthermore, while none of the BA respondents has attended more than 5 perusals, 29% of IBA students have. Despite that, more than half of both BA and IBA have attended between 1 and 5 perusals.



Next we wanted to determine what the motives are behind students' attendance at perusals. Many respondents stated they went to both learn from their mistakes (67% IBA, 58% BA) as well as to scrutinize the grading (81% IBA, 83% BA). Conversely, approximately half of the respondents (50% IBA, 46% BA) found that perusals do not really contribute to their learning, while only 20% found that it did. This is concerning given that perusals are meant to learn from. As a result, we think that the structure of a perusal deserves attention.

The low percentage of students who believe they can learn from perusals may be related to the fact that only one fourth of them considers there to be enough opportunities to ask questions and that one third believes the distribution of exam papers takes too long (35% IBA, 29% BA). Moreover, only 30% of respondents found that one session is enough, while the majority (50% IBA, 54% BA) believed it depends on the number of participants. Additionally, many students mentioned that perusals are often very chaotic, crowded and noisy, and that they would like to be able to use scrap paper again.

While most students (71% IBA, 83% BA) stated that they would still attend perusals if they could take scrap paper with them and the answers were posted online, an alternative that students would also like is posting the exam including answers and explanations of the correct answers. However, for several courses this is likely to be unfeasible. Therefore, it would be better to allow the use of scrap paper again, but restrict it to students who stay until the end of the exam, or allowing them to pick up their scrap paper sometime after the exam, to prevent students from having to wait in the examination hall for a long period of time.

In terms of perusal organization, there are many different ways. Our results show that the majority (52% IBA, 50% BA) prefers a workshop-like structure, followed by rather

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individual feedback (47% IBA, 33% BA). That is, students can get their exams, look at them outside of the professors office, and once they are done, return them and ask questions when needed. It is also worth noting that when we take a closer look at the respondents who attended more than five perusals, we see that 91.7% of these students attended the perusal to learn from their mistakes. We consider their opinion more relevant since they have more experience and their opinion is less biased by one (bad) experience. Moreover, most of these students (58%) suggest to structure the perusal in a more individual manner as mentioned above.

When respondents were asked which courses had a perusal structure that they liked, the following were stated: Applied Business Methods, Law/*Rechten*, LSG, Marktcontext and Gedrag in Organisaties. The main reasons were that they were organized in small groups, that professors were present and gave direct answers to students' questions, and/or that students could write their comments/complaints on a separate paper (to be considered afterwards).

Feedback from focus group

The feedback received from the focus group that took place on February 12th was similar to the results obtained via the surveys, but also offered some new insights.

Most of the participants have only attended one focus group. The main reasons for that were: students were pleased with their grade, they forgot to register, or they were not able to attend, for example because they were abroad. This latter issue was mainly raised by IBA students given that perusals tend to be shortly after the new trimester begins and many students are not back by then. However, unlike our survey respondents, participants believed that most students attend perusals to examine the grading and potentially improve their grade by spotting mistakes.

This leads us to grading transparency. Many students found that the way in which an exam will be graded should be specified more on the exam itself. This of course applies mainly to open questions. For instance, students found it should be stated how much every part of a question is worth, whether points will be deducted for a wrong answer, etc. These things are often only explicitly mentioned in the answer sheets and/or at the perusal. Nevertheless, it would be relatively easy to add brackets with the respective points after each part of the question.

Additionally, participants stated three areas of perusals that could be improved. First of all, they would appreciate more interaction. For instance, perusals in which merely the correct answers were shown, were not regarded as very helpful as students could not ask their individual questions. Second, the organization is often chaotic and students agreed that there should be a more standardized structure. Alternatively, the way the perusal will be organized should clearly be stated in advance. For example, in the case of a workshop-like perusal, it could be specified which questions will be treated before and after the break, or it could be announced whether it will be organized more like a lecture in which all (open) questions will be looked at. Another shortcoming participants have noticed was that many times there was not enough time for them to go through their exam and then ask questions. This could be avoided by organizing smaller groups or allowing students to see their exams and then ask individual questions while returning them.

Participants also distinguished between open and multiple choice exams. For the latter, they believed it would be best to allow students who stay until the end of the examination to take scrap paper with them and simply post the answers online. Here a perusal would mainly have the purpose of answering questions that remained unclear.

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On the other hand, students thought that when open questions are involved, it is good to go through each question and have the opportunity to ask specific questions at the end.

Lastly, participants also mentioned that often perusals are simply too long after the exam took place. In order to minimize this issue, professors should make a reservation for the grading procedure as soon as possible to allow for speedy grading. Additionally, if students were allowed to take scrap paper with them, they could check their answers shortly after the exam, decide whether it is necessary to attend the perusal and note down their comments while they are still very familiar with all the material covered.

Solution according to Program Advisory

What both the survey and the focus group revealed is that students highly value the opportunity to ask their individual questions and that they prefer smaller groups that make the process more organized and allow for enough time to ask questions. Therefore, students have a preference for perusals that are organized similar to workshops, or in which they can pick up their exam, look through it and then ask specific questions while returning it. However, in this case, a teaching assistant may have to be present to make sure no photographs are taken or exam answers are changed.

To alleviate the fact that perusals are held so long after the exam, professors should make a reservation for the grading process as soon as possible. Moreover, scrap paper would allow students to check their answers online shortly after the exam, decide if attending the perusal is necessary and note down their comments/questions right away. Nevertheless, vacations and breaks should be taken into account, especially for IBA, as otherwise many students are not able to attend the perusals because they are not in the country.

To make the exam distribution faster and have less crowded perusals, it should be required to register for them on Sin-Online. However, professors should clearly specify how the perusal will be organized. Furthermore, students believe that the organization should vary depending on the type of exam. While for open questions they believe it is good to go through all questions; they believe that for multiple choice ones it should be more focused on individual questions that remain unresolved. Moreover, for the latter, they think that the use of scrap paper is the most feasible option.

Checklist to improve the problem

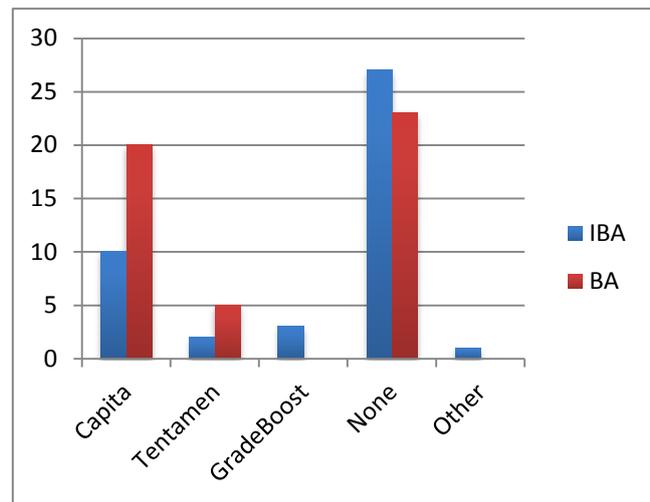
- Allow students to take scrap paper with them if they stay until the end, or allow them to pick it up after the exam.
- Implement a more standardized structure or at least clearly state how the perusal will be organized.
- Make smaller groups, such as for workshops.
- Allow for enough time to look at the exam and ask individual questions, or to write down comments on a sheet to be considered by the professor afterwards.
- Require registration on Sin-Online.
- Conduct the perusals on more convenient dates – not too long after the exam nor right after holidays/breaks.
- Make reservations for the grading process of multiple choice exams as soon as possible to shorten the grading period.
- State as concretely as possible how open questions will be graded *on the exam*.

Subject 2: Tutoring Organizations

In the past years, several tutoring and exam preparation organizations have emerged. Examples are Capita Selecta, TentamenHulp, etc. These offer (crash) courses which last from one day up to several weeks, and are aimed at helping students prepare for their exams. We would like to find out if many students make use of these, why, and whether this reflects a need for changes in some lectures and/or workshops.

Feedback from survey

The data gathered through our survey shows that approximately half of the students (37% of IBA and 52% of BA) have participated in at least one course offered by a tutoring organization. Here Capita Selecta is clearly the dominant player, accounting for 80% of the students that have participated in a (crash) course. Moreover, about 70% of these students found it to have been worth the time and money. However, in general only about half of the respondents believed such courses to be useful (41% IBA and 60% BA).



When asked for the reasons why respondents had participated in such courses, two tendencies can be distinguished. Some signed up in order to achieve a high grade and receive extra help with some questions. Meanwhile others participated because of a lack of time to study or starting too late, and viewed it as a quick way of preparation that will allow them to pass. On the other hand, the main reasons why respondents have not taken a course before are the priciness of the service, the fact that they do not require any help, as well as some students' perception of these organizations as a scam and a form of cheating.

Regarding the specific subjects respondents sought help with, we find mostly quantitative courses such as Mathematics, Quantitative Decision Making, Finance, Financiële Processen and Operations Management.

A potential solution to this could be if certain courses had an additional exam preparation workshop offered by the professors and/or teaching assistants. The majority of respondents (61% IBA, 50% BA) stated that they would attend such sessions, while approximately 35% stated that they might attend, depending on who teaches them and whether they are free.

Solution according to Program Advisory

It is to some extent concerning that over 40% of respondents have felt the need to take a (crash) course offered by a tutoring organization. We believe that this has three main sources: because of a lack of time to prepare, to receive help with their questions, and as opportunity to prepare even better for the exam.

Many students stated that they took these courses because they started studying too late and only had a short amount of time available for preparation. This is likely the result of not keeping up with the courses on a regular basis. A potential solution to this are weekly

assignments that have to be handed in, rather than online tests which are notorious for the amount of fraud involved. Since it mainly affects quantitative courses which in most cases offer workshops, this could be a feasible option. For instance, workshop attendance could be compulsory and require solving some exercises to be handed in at the end, possibly to gain bonus points as well. However we would like to mention that beginning to prepare for exams is, definitely for 2nd and 3rd year students, a responsibility students have to take themselves.

Another, more minor reason, is unresolved questions. This certainly relates to the point above, as many of these questions arise once students start preparing for exams, which is in most cases rather close to the exam date. Nevertheless, we believe that more opportunities to ask questions should be available. For instance, many students don't feel comfortable speaking up during lectures, and discussion boards on Blackboard tend to be rather inactive. Therefore, a potential solution could be if students shared their questions on the discussion board and the professor then posts a weekly document with his/her answers. Another possibility could be allowing students to send text messages with questions during the lecture, which will then briefly be answered at the end of the lecture.

A third reason for students to participate in (crash) courses is to better prepare and know what to expect from the exam. This could be aided by providing more past exams, giving practice exercises/questions similar to the ones on the exam, and offering an optional exam preparation / review workshop by either professors or teaching assistants.

Checklist to improve the problem

- Require students to do weekly or bi-monthly assignments based on the material covered in that period. This is especially recommended for quantitative subjects.
- Provide alternative means by which students can ask questions:
 - Post questions in the discussion board, which the professor will answer in a document at the end of each week; or
 - Incorporate the possibility to ask questions via text messages or other online means, to be answered at the end of the lecture.
- Provide more past exams and/or weekly exercises similar to what can be expected on the exam.
- If possible, organize an optional exam preparation/review lecture/workshop

Conclusion

In general, attendance at perusals is relatively low, especially for BA. As already mentioned, several reasons can be identified for that. Moreover, the main motivation for students' attendance appears to be to scrutinize the grading and potentially increase one's grade. Here students also noted that grading transparency of open questions should be enhanced. In terms of an ideal set-up, students would like perusals to be more structured and to know what type of organization to expect. They expressed a clear preference for smaller groups as opposed to lecture-like settings, and highly value the opportunity to ask individual questions to the professor(s). Furthermore, we believe that registration on Sin-Online should be required and that perusal dates should be chosen more carefully. Last but not least, students would greatly appreciate it if scrap paper could be used again, even if that meant staying until the end of the exam period or picking it up afterwards.

In terms of tutoring organizations, our results revealed that many students have at least once participated in a (crash) course, which most of them found helpful. The main reasons for taking such courses were to better prepare and because of a short amount of time left before the exam. Potential solutions to this would be having assignments on a regular basis that require keeping up with the course material (especially for quantitative courses), as well as offering an alternative system to ask questions, with which students are more comfortable. Moreover, a voluntary exam preparation or revision workshop/lecture could be added to some courses.

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

To view the survey distributed for data collection, please open the following link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1_p1N0NoJbU41NiV88MH75JFT5mbc0wlgucv6KPVCMrC/edit

Appendix B: Focus group case

Examination & Tutoring Topic: Perusals & Grading transparency

Dear students, thank you very much for your attendance and participation in the focus group organized by SR Program Advisory! Your opinions are of crucial value to our research and effort towards bringing positive changes to the study environment of RSM.

This case report is aimed at providing you with some background information on the topic: *Perusals*.

After every exam, professors organize a perusal so students can look at their exam, ask questions, and learn from their mistakes. However, the structure varies considerably from professor to professor. For instance, while some just hold a 'lecture' and go through the exam questions, others organize smaller workshops and yet others offer individual feedback upon request. In this Focus Group, we would like to hear your personal experience and suggestions related to this, both positive and negative.

Not only are we interested in the actual perusals, but also what students think of the transparency of grading. For example it is almost impossible to check what you actually answered, unless you go to a perusal 4-6 weeks later. However we do see that some professors upload answer sheets or entire exams on Blackboard.

Questions that you can ask yourself during this Focus Group are:

- Have you ever been to a perusal? Why?
- What did you think about the perusal(s)?
- To what extent do you find that there are enough opportunities to ask questions?
- How do you think not being able to take scrap paper with you will affect perusal attendance? Are you more likely to attend for instance?
- Do you still care about your answers on the exam after more than 4 weeks?
- Did you ever miss a perusal because you were not available at the date it was scheduled?
- Do you have any suggestions for improvement?