

End Report

Program Advisory

7th Trimester

2015-2016 Trimester 2



RSM
**Student
Representation**

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Methodology.....	4
Survey.....	4
Focus group.....	4
Topic 1: Exchange application and selection process	6
Feedback from Focus Group	6
Feedback from survey	7
Solution according to Program Advisory	8
Checklist to improve the problem.....	9
Topic 2: Visibility and accessibility of exchange information	10
Feedback from focus group.....	10
Feedback from survey	11
Solution according to Program Advisory	12
Checklist to improve the problem.....	12
Conclusion	13
Appendices.....	14
Appendix A: Survey questionnaire	14
Appendix B: Focus group case.....	14

Introduction

This year's 7th Trimester committee consists of four enthusiastic members: Marlin Gerke (IBA 2), Anna Nellißen (IBA 2), Soufien Hasnaoui (BA 1) and Lisa van Delft (IBA 3). As a part of Student Representation's Program Advisory, we aim to improve the information flow between the various parties related to the 7th trimester of BA and IBA. The committee will do this by gathering feedback from students about the various options, such as exchange, internship, and minor. At the same time, we want to start a dialogue with (I)BA Program Management, Career Services and the International Office to exchange ideas.

The topics which have been researched this trimester are: the exchange application and the selection process, as well as the visibility and accessibility of information.

In this report we strive to reflect the opinions of the students in a highly accurate and objective manner. On their behalf, we will make suggestions and look for appropriate solutions regarding the 7th trimester.

Sincerely,

7th Trimester Committee 2015-2016
Program Advisory

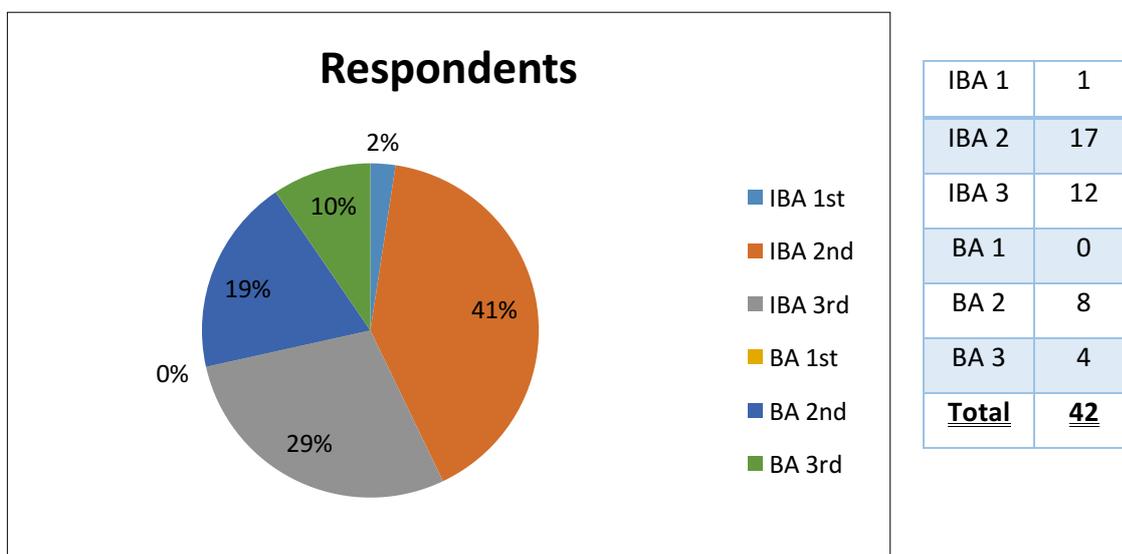
Methodology

Throughout this trimester, both qualitative and quantitative feedback has been collected on the exchange application process and the information sources used. To do this, the following methods were used: survey, focus group, and informal talks with a few mentors.

Survey

By using Google-forms we created an online survey that covered the two research topics of this trimester. Open, closed, as well as rating questions were incorporated in this survey. Therefore, we were able to retrieve useful quantitative as well as qualitative data.

In total, 42 students responded to our survey; 71% IBA students and 29% BA students. We were especially interested in the responses of 2nd and 3rd year students as they are currently going through the selection process or did so last year. The following figure provides a more detailed overview of the distribution of respondents:



Focus group

On Tuesday the 27th of January 2016, the 7th trimester committee organized a focus group. Similar to previous years, it was a great success. Students felt content they could express their opinion, and the committees were able to gather

valuable information through more in-depth conversations. Fortunately, the focus group provided a perfect opportunity to collect more feedback especially from BA students, whose response rate for the survey was relatively low. The case that was provided to participants as well as some guiding questions can be found in Appendix 2.

Topic 1: Exchange application and selection process

The first topic examined students' opinion on the application as well as the selection process for the Bachelor Exchange, in order to obtain a better understanding of students' perceptions of fairness, availability of information and the online application system. The particular focus of this topic was to compare the opinions of 2nd and 3rd year students, in order to identify whether improvements have taken place or problems emerged.

Feedback from Focus Group

The focus group enabled the collection of valuable feedback from an equal number of 2nd and 3rd year students. It became evident that last year's students encountered a significant amount of confusion and problems particularly regarding the language requirements and the online application system (submission, mandatory fields not clear). Both issues have largely been avoided this year, as 2nd year students reported very clear language requirements and had no problems regarding the online application systems as a whole. Furthermore, it was mentioned by 3rd year students that the interviews were conducted in an inconsistent manner and students received highly diverging questions, which were therefore not well comparable. However, 2nd year students who had already had their interview at this time reported an overall feeling of fairness and the impression that everyone had to answer more or less the same questions. Nevertheless, some students mentioned that it is overall not very clear what to expect during the interview. Additionally, 3rd year students reported the wish for more guidance and assistance after the nomination at the partner university, particularly regarding insurance and visas, in which context it was also mentioned that overview-files of the (likely) required documents per host country would be very helpful.

An important point mentioned by all students were last-minute changes in the allowed courses at certain partner universities, as well as the sudden dropping out of partner universities, of which not all affected students were informed.

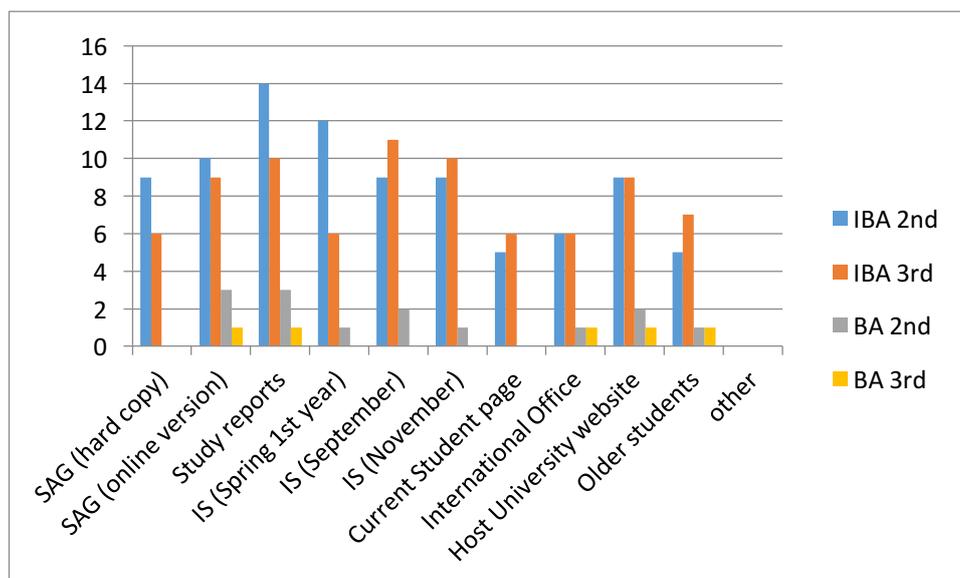
Lastly, all participants agreed on the fact that the Excel-file listing courses taken by previous exchange students is somewhat misleading. The majority of students believed that the courses listed there were the only ones that could be taken at a certain university, which considerably influenced their choices of universities.

Feedback from survey

The survey provided additional, more specific insight on the topics raised in the focus group, and overall responses were coherent with what was discussed during the focus group.

Negative feedback concerning the clarity of (language) requirements was given exclusively by 3rd year students, implying that previous issues were successfully solved this year. Numerous 2nd year students described the overall application process as very clear and well guided. Nevertheless, the wish for more transparency regarding the selection process was mentioned frequently. Particularly, students would like to know how much each component of the selection counts and what resulted in them (not) being allocated to certain choices. Also, the somewhat confusing character of the Excel-file listing courses per partner-university was mentioned again, implying that it is seen as an issue by a large number of students.

Interestingly, some differences in the information sources used by 2nd and 3rd year students were found, as can be seen from the histogram below. The study reports were consulted by 93.3% of 2nd year students and 90.9% of 3rd year students, and were considered as (very) useful by on average 65.2%. The Study Abroad Guidelines were used by 63.35% of 2nd year students and 67.8% of 3rd year students. Both of these constitute overall popular sources. The information sessions on the other hand, were attended by significantly more potential exchange students in the previous year (95.45%) than this year (60%). Comparable results apply to the consultation of the Current Students website, the personnel of the International Office, websites of host universities and also older students, in which the number of 3rd year users of these sources ranged from 54.5% to 63.6%, while it was only between 33.3% and 60% for 2nd year students. This difference may be attributable to clearer requirements and an overall better guided process this year, but it may also stem from the fact that current 2nd year students have not gone through the processes of application at the host university and arranging a visa yet.



Furthermore, the comparability of the selection interviews was evaluated more positively by 2nd year students, with 66.7% of the respondents rating them as (very) well comparable, while only 45.5% of 3rd students did so. Therefore, it seems that the interview-process has become more standardized. However, with regard to evaluating the fairness of the allocation of exchange spots, 3rd year students' opinion was more positive, with 63.7% rating it as (very) fair, while only 40% of 2nd year respondents rated it as such. It should be considered at this point that BA students overall seem less satisfied with both the comparability of the interviews as well as the allocation of available spots, but as the number of BA-respondents was very low, this information may not be representative.

Lastly, the general satisfaction with all available information was evaluated throughout positively, with 80.9% of respondents reporting to be (very) satisfied with it.

Solution according to Program Advisory

Regarding the selection process, a rough outline of what should be focused on in preparation for the interview would be highly appreciated, along with an indication of which component accounts for how much in the final allocation process. Although very time-consuming to implement, it would also help students a lot for future selections, if everybody who did not get allocated to any of their top three universities would receive a brief explanation for the final result of their allocation. This would also likely improve the perceived fairness of the selection process.

Furthermore, sudden changes regarding partner universities and courses should be avoided as much as possible, and perhaps partner universities could notify RSM in case of unexpected changes in allowed courses, so that RSM can notify the students in due time.

Lastly, the International Office should make clear that the available Excel-file only lists exemplary courses, to avoid confusion and ill-informed choices.

Checklist to improve the problem

- Notify all students in case of sudden changes in partner universities or allowed courses at a partner university
- Clarify that the Excel-file does not list all *possible* courses
- Provide an indication regarding which component of the selection is most important
- Provide a brief explanation of the outcome of the selection process, unless students have been allocated to one of their top three universities

Topic 2: Visibility and accessibility of exchange information

Besides knowing students' opinions on the exchange application and selection process, we are also interested in the general visibility and accessibility of exchange information. Obtaining an overview of this matter and identifying possible points of improvement is crucial for the entire exchange cycle. On the one hand, adequate information is required before and during the application process so that students are able to make a well-informed decision on, for instance, their top-three destinations. On the other hand, being able to find the right information about topics such as host-university enrolment procedures and visas plays a significant role after being nominated by RSM.

Feedback from focus group

In general, focus group participants had a positive perception of the amount and quality of information provided before the exchange application. One interesting remark, however, was made about the hard copy booklet of the study abroad guidelines. Students had the impression that a digital copy would suffice, and suggested that those who really want a hard copy could be offered to pick one up at T5 individually, similar to the course manuals distributed by Program Management.

Another topic of discussion were the study reports. These are important both before and after being selected to go on exchange, as students obtain a lot of useful information from them. Overall, study reports are considered very helpful, but they could be improved by providing stricter guidelines on how to write them. Second-year students suggested to make the budget-part of the reports more clearly structured so that costs across different destinations are easily comparable, as well as destination specific information about additional costs such as health insurance and visas to be provided. Both second and third year students think the study reports are too long to obtain a quick impression, and especially the extensive description of courses is considered rather redundant.

The period after being nominated by RSM for a specific host university is the portion of the exchange process for which students see most potential for improvement. Especially third-year students reported the wish for more guidance and assistance after the nomination, particularly regarding insurance and visas, in which context it was also mentioned that overview-files of the (likely) required documents per host country would be very helpful. Similarly, students would

value an indication of deadlines for the host university's application process and when to expect an acceptance letter. Furthermore, additional assistance in the communication with partner universities, particularly in special circumstances, such as an unexpected GPA drop or last-minute change in allowed courses, would be highly appreciated. Lastly, some participants also pointed out that they would have liked to receive concise feedback on why they were assigned to a certain destination as well as on their performance during the interview.

Feedback from survey

It should be noted that only students who applied for exchange or actually went on exchange answered questions related to this topic. All in all, this included 30 out of 43 respondents, of which 4 were BA students and 26 were IBA students. Hence, as the BA response rate was very low, we cannot make general statements on this topic and the discussion below is focused on IBA.

Overall, students were satisfied with the amount of information provided about the exchange. Only one second-year student gave a score of 1/5, while all other students provided a score of 3/5 or higher. Furthermore, the quality of the provided information was awarded a score of 4/5 or higher by 93.4% of the second-year students, and 90.9% of the third-year students.

The most frequently used sources for collecting information were study reports, the online version of the study abroad guidelines, the information session by the international office, and host university websites. Furthermore, both second and third year students considered the study reports to be the most useful source of information. We also asked students whether they were able to find additional or more specific information that was not available upfront. Only 7% of second-year students and 18% of third-year students answered this with a 'no'.

Moreover, a clear trend in preferred channels for communicating new information was identified. Both second and third years view e-mail as their preferred medium, followed by Blackboard and Sin-Online, respectively. Lastly, students were also asked if there were any aspects of the exchange process that they would have liked to receive more (detailed) information on. Virtually all respondents answered this with a 'yes'. In general, students (both 2nd and 3rd year) would like to receive more information from the study reports as well as from people who previously went on exchange. Nevertheless, no topics on which there is currently no information available were mentioned.

Solution according to Program Advisory

According to our findings, students perceive the amount and quality of information that is provided about the exchange as good. However, there are also some points of improvement. Study reports could be formatted in a more consistent manner by providing stricter guidelines that facilitate (budgetary) comparisons as well as a quick impression of each host university. Additionally, students wish to receive more guidance and assistance after the nomination by RSM. This includes an overview of required documents per destination (e.g. visa), rough guidelines on deadlines of the host university's application process, when to expect an acceptance letter and more help from the International Office when unexpected problems with the host university occur.

Checklist to improve the problem

- Only provide a hard copy of the study abroad guidelines on request.
- Adapt guidelines of the study reports (stricter on consistent format, especially for the budget part, and reduce length of course descriptions).
- Ask partner universities to update their fact sheet with a detailed section on 'required documents' and 'overview and timeframe of their application process' if not already included. Another solution would be to ask students to be more detailed about these topics in their study reports.

Conclusion

Concluding from the feedback collected via both focus group and survey, it becomes evident that 2nd year students are generally very satisfied with the application process (so far). Especially the selection process and the early information sessions helped students in their preparation. Very important for the students seems to be additional support after the nomination in case any issues arise. Moreover, students still appear confused about the Excel file on Blackboard and the formatting of the study reports. Here, it might be important to highlight the purpose of the file. All in all, however, the feedback was very positive and students are aware of the great support and work the international office is doing.

Appendices

Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1CoGYlkwsYjbX6wrE1VjU3WgFcwH84qvmD-Wr7THgahM/edit?usp=drive_web

Appendix B: Focus group case

7th Trimester

Topic: Exchange - selection procedure and visibility of information

Dear students,

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

This case report is aimed at providing you with some background information on the topics: exchange selection procedure and visibility of information about the exchange.

When planning their 7th trimester, all IBA and BA students can choose between three options: going on exchange to one of RSM's partner universities, doing an internship, or a minor. During this focus group we would like to know from those of you who are either planning on going on exchange or already participated in one, how you experienced the selection procedure and the ease to find all the information you needed. By comparing the opinions from 2nd and 3rd year students, our goal is to discover what has improved over the years, and which issues still need some extra attention.

Possible questions we could discuss during the focus group are:

- What do you think about the (new) online application system?
- Any feedback on the interviews or selection procedure in general?
- How often and in what way did you use the information on the RSM current students page?
- How often and in what way did you use the exchange blackboard page; is it useful?
- If you were not able to find specific information you needed, what was the reason?
- What were the major problems you experienced during the whole selection procedure?
- Any other suggestions or comments?