

# **End Report**

## **Program Advisory General Studies**

**2015-2016 Trimester 2**



RSM  
**Student  
Representation**

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## Introduction

The RSM Student Representation strives to enhance the quality of education at the Rotterdam School of Management where it can. Program Advisory in particular aims to contribute to this by facilitating continuous improvement in both the IBA and BA programs. The General Studies committee's goal is to provide the best educational environment for students at RSM.

In this trimester, the committee has set four topics to research and gather feedback on. These are: workshops, the use and availability of information sources, the current method of registration for courses and exams, and the distribution of examination papers.

Kind regards,

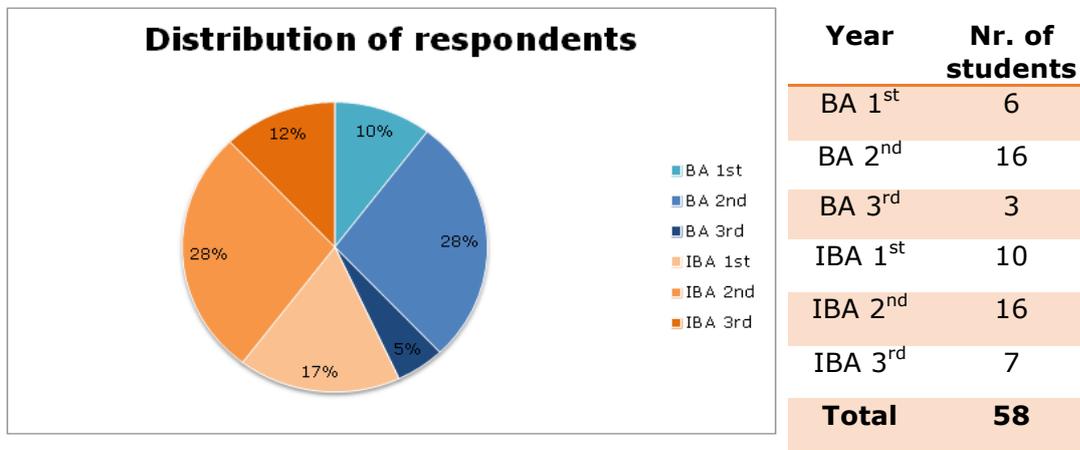
On behalf of the General Studies Committee for Program Advisory,  
Kevin van den Boogaard

# Methodology

As in the previous trimester, the committee gathered feedback on the chosen topics via the distribution of a survey and the organization of a focus group. In the survey, all topics were addressed. In the focus group, workshops were discussed in more detail.

## Survey

The survey was distributed online through the use of Google Forms, which facilitated the analysis of the gathered data. Since this trimester the feedback collection period coincided with the SR Open Feedback Days (15 - 19 February), the committee was able to obtain a fair number of responses with a rather even distribution of respondents from BA and IBA, and the different years. A detailed composition of responses is shown below.



As can be seen in the pie chart, 43% of responses came from BA students and 57% from IBA students. Furthermore, unlike last trimester, the number of responses from third year students has increased considerably, as they have returned from their exchanges and internships. However, the response rate among first and third year BA students is still rather low and something the committee will focus on improving in the coming trimester.

## Focus group

It was difficult to gather focus group participants this trimester due to several deadlines around that period. Consequently, only four students (3 IBA, 1 BA) attended the committee’s discussion. To compensate for this low attendance and to gather additional information, the committee members also discussed the topic with fellow students in a more informal setting. This allowed the committee to have lively discussions on the topic and to obtain valuable new insights that were taken into account when creating the survey.

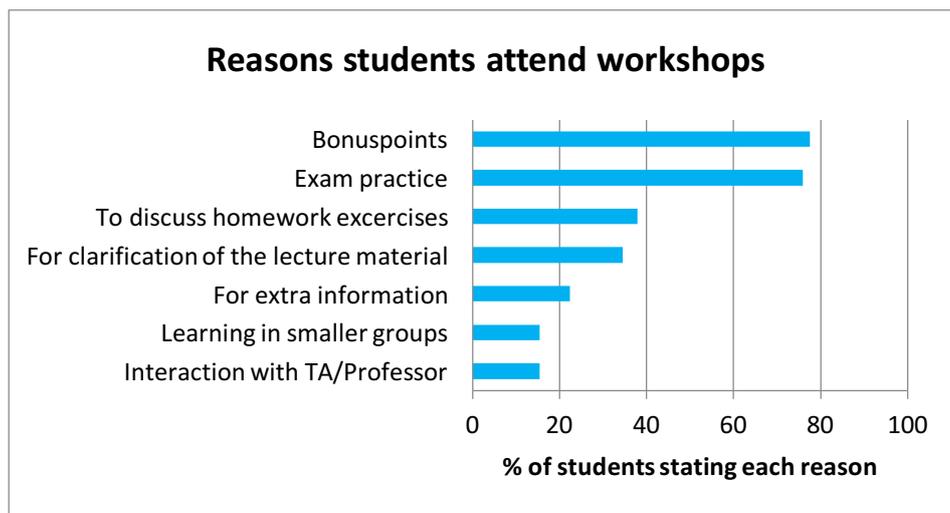
# Topic 1: Workshops

Workshops play an important role in students’ academic life. Most have at least one course per trimester that offers workshops and, when used adequately, they can be of great value. However, workshops differ greatly in their setup. Some are mandatory while others are not, some enable students to obtain bonus points, etc. All these aspects are decided upon by each professor and can sometimes lead to confusion among students. Therefore, and in order to shed some light on what students prefer, the committee decided to focus on this topic.

## Feedback from survey

Overall, responses throughout the years in both IBA and BA were very consistent. 81% of respondents believed that workshops were of great help to study and understand the content of a course, and that they added onto what is taught in lectures. When we distinguish between workshops for quantitative and qualitative courses, we find that 87.9% of respondents find workshops for quantitative subjects helpful, while for qualitative subject the number is only 42%.

We also wanted to understand the underlying reasons why students attend or do not attend workshops when they are not mandatory. As seen in the graph below, the majority of students attended workshops either because bonus points could be obtained or because exam practice questions were discussed. Although less frequently, students also stated that their attendance was because homework exercises were discussed or because they offered clarification on material explained in lectures. With regard to the reasons why students decide not to attend workshops, we find that if workshop slides are posted online and the solutions to the exercises are available, students do not find it necessary to attend the workshop. Furthermore, respondents also often mentioned that workshops are simply too large and therefore less helpful.



### **Feedback from focus group**

Responses gathered during the focus group were largely in line with those from the survey. However, something that was brought to our attention were working lectures. While this method is less common, it is used for some courses, such as Operations Management. Students expressed that these lectures are too big and that it is very difficult to get the attention of teaching assistants to ask a question. Therefore, they would prefer smaller group workshops.

### **Solution according to Program Advisory**

In order to increase the attendance at workshops that are not mandatory, smaller workshops may be wise. Teaching assistants should be easy to contact in case of questions and working lectures should be considered to be transformed into group workshops. This seems especially important for quantitative subjects as these workshops are perceived as the most helpful.

### **Checklist to improve the problem**

- Try to reduce the size of workshops
- Transform working lectures into workshops
- Have as many workshops for quantitative subjects as possible

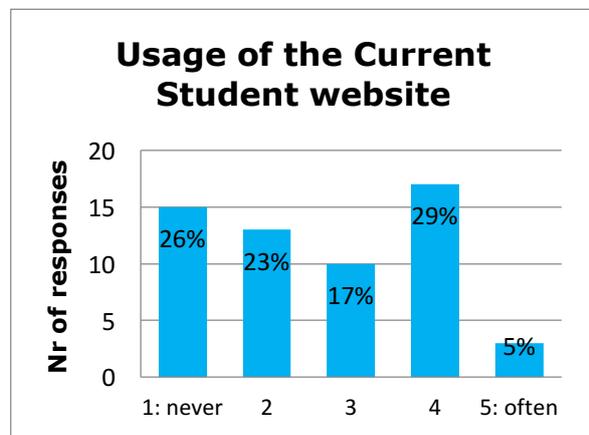
## Topic 2: Information sources and availability

RSM uses multiple information channels, such as e-mail, Sin-Online and the Current Students website. The committee would like to research the effectiveness of the different information channels, as well as students' preferences.

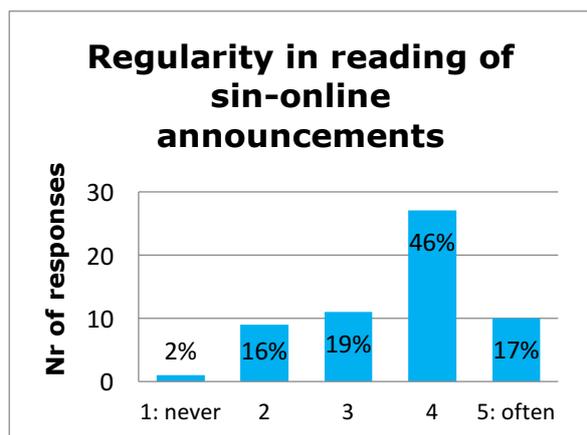
### Feedback from survey

The majority (81%) of students is familiar with the Current Student website. Surprisingly, the 19% who were not familiar with it were almost exclusively IBA first and second year students. Nevertheless, this did not include third-year students, implying that student's familiarity with the website increases over the years.

There is no noticeable difference in website-usage between BA and IBA, and the different years. Interestingly, the students who said that they use the website very often, were almost all IBA students. This means that while a considerable amount of IBA students is not aware of the website, those who are make frequent use of it. Consequently, it is important to increase awareness of the Current Students site especially among IBA. The graph shows that a bit over half of the students visit the website regularly (option 3 to 5). Furthermore, while 26% stated that they never use the website, it should be kept in mind that 19% of students were not aware of the website. Hence, only 8% of those who know the website don't use it.



As expected, every student is familiar with Sin-Online. Furthermore, the general frequency with which students check it is rather high, as can be seen in the graph. Concretely, 82% read the announcements on a regular basis (option 3 to 5). Note that there weren't any noticeable differences between years and studies. Lastly, a large portion of respondents (73%) find these channels of communication efficient. However, several students would like to receive Sin-Online announcements via email, while others would like more clarity and integration between the two channels.



### **Solution according to Program Advisory**

While the majority of respondents perceive the current communication channels as efficient, some measures for improvement could be implemented. For instance, Sin-Online announcements could be sent via e-mail. As the importance of an announcement strongly differs per student, it may be valuable to let students decide about which subjects or channels they would like to receive email notifications on. In addition, important last-minute announcements, such as changes in lecture rooms or cancelled lectures, should be possible to receive via SMS, as it is done with examination grades. Lastly, in order to further increase students' awareness of the Current Students website, some Sin-Online announcements could link back to the website or simply inform students about changes or new information that is on the website.

### **Checklist to improve the problem**

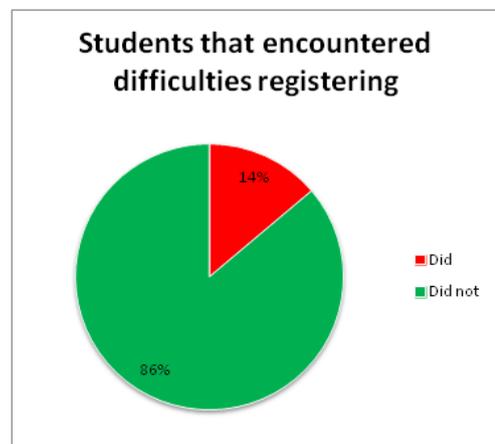
- Make it possible to have announcements sent via email
- Urgent announcements should be send by SMS
- Ensure some Sin-Online announcements link back to the Current Students website.

## Topic 3: Courses and exam registration

In the current academic year, there has been a change in the way students register for their courses and respective examinations. While at first course registrations were separate from exam registrations, which sometimes led students to forget about registering for their exams on time, students are now automatically registered when subscribing for the respective course. Furthermore, while course subscriptions were initially done through Sin-Online, Blackboard access is now granted through Osiris. With this brief topic the committee would like to gain insight into how students perceived this change and into possible difficulties students may have encountered with their registrations.

### Feedback from survey

As seen in the graph, the majority of students has not encountered any difficulties registering for their courses. This is consistent among BA and IBA, as well as the different years. Not surprisingly, students who did not have any difficulties welcomed the changes. Nevertheless, students did express their preference for only having to register once to obtain their timetable, Blackboard access and exam registration. This implies that when all registrations have been combined into a single one, it will be appreciated by students. Of the students who did encounter difficulties, it was sometimes due to technical issues, however, in most cases it was due to not being informed enough on how to register.



### Solution according to Program Advisory

Overall, students appear to be satisfied with the changes in registration made so far. Nevertheless, technical issues and other difficulties students have encountered should be taken into account when the one-time registration is launched. Furthermore, we believe that unawareness of the new registration will quickly decrease. Nonetheless, perhaps changes can be communicated more extensively in the future.

### Checklist to improve the problem

- Try to fix any remaining technical issues
- Keep a record of all encountered difficulties
- Inform students more extensively about changes

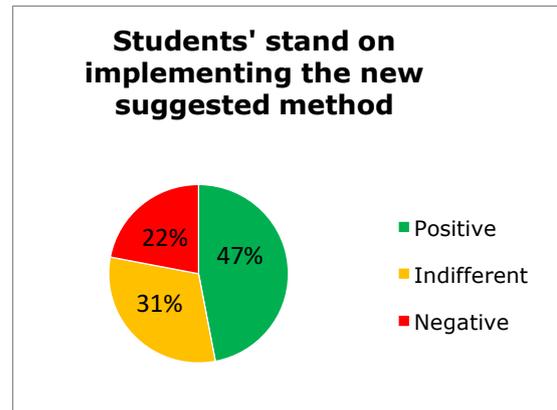
## Topic 4: Distribution of exam papers

During examinations at RSM, the exam papers are only distributed after the time for the examination has started. Since the individual blocks are rather large this often results in several minutes of difference between the first and the last students to receive their exam papers. At other universities this is handled by distributing the papers beforehand and placing them on the tables facing down. This allows all students to start at the same time and is also easy to supervise. We would like to know what students' opinions is on this subject and determine whether it would be a feasible option for RSM.

### Feedback from survey

Almost half (45%) of the respondents find the current method efficient. However, the majority of students dislike the waiting period after the examination time has started and stated that this unnecessarily increases stress. In addition, they find it unfair that at the end everybody has to stop writing at the same time.

When asked how students would perceive the implementation of the alternative method, most respondents (47%) reacted positively. Furthermore, approximately one third was indifferent and a minority of 22% would prefer sticking to the current method. It should also be noted that the group that stands indifferent is mostly populated with IBA students, whereas the group that stands more positively is, for a large part, formed by BA students.



Lastly, students had several remarks about the supervisors during examinations. For instance, IBA students sometimes experience difficulties with supervisors who don't speak English. Furthermore, some students find the noise made by supervisors to be irritating and to make it more difficult for them to concentrate.

### Solution according to Program Advisory

While there are arguments for both methods of distributing exams papers, students seem to somewhat prefer the alternative of having the exams distributed beforehand. Hence, this may be a consideration for coming years. In addition, students pointed out that noise made by exam supervisors can be very distracting and should be avoided in the future.

### Checklist to improve the problem

- Consider implementing an alternative distribution method for exams
- Urge supervisors to keep noises to a minimum

## Conclusion

In general students perceive workshops as helpful in understanding a course's content and find that they add onto what is taught in lectures. This is particularly the case for quantitative subjects. In order to increase attendance at non-compulsory workshops, a bonus system or the discussion of practice exams could be included. Furthermore, students expressed their preference for smaller workshops.

With regard to information sources, students rather frequently read the Sin-Online announcements, whereas a considerable number of them is unaware of the Current Students website. As students who are aware of it make frequent use of it, perhaps some announcements could link back to the website to familiarize students with it. This is especially important for first and second year IBA students, who often stated not being aware of the Current Students website.

Changes in the course/exam registration have overall been well-received by students. Furthermore, students will welcome the possibility to obtain their timetable, Blackboard access and exam registration in one single step. However, when this is launched, students should be informed more extensively to avoid difficulties caused by a lack of information, as sometimes was reported about the current method.

The majority of respondents stated that they would prefer it if examination papers were distributed beforehand rather than only once the exam time has started. Nevertheless, a considerable portion is also indifferent or in favor of the current method. Regardless, one thing that many students agreed upon was the fact that noises made by exam supervisors are very distracting and should be minimized.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1t\\_Ed6Iovn5IM8QW8k7FhSsXbtmuXc0JTcL-UqIkcgRk/viewform?usp=send\\_form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1t_Ed6Iovn5IM8QW8k7FhSsXbtmuXc0JTcL-UqIkcgRk/viewform?usp=send_form)

## Appendix B: Focus group case

### Topic: Workshops

Dear students, thank you very much for your attendance and participation in the focus group organized by 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 of *workshops*.

We have spoken to several students and found that inconsistencies between lectures and workshops are a bothersome and frequently issue. This can have a negative impact on the quality of education at RSM. To improve it, we would like to hear more about your experience with and suggestions for the given lectures and workshops.

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

- Have you ever noticed any inconsistencies between lectures and workshops? What are some examples?
- Do you feel workshops add onto lectures and material taught in them?
- Should all quantitative courses have workshops and lectures? Why or why not?
- Do you see a difference between working lectures and workshops? Which do you prefer and why?
- Should more non-mathematical courses have workshops?
- Can you think of any other topics that you think we should discuss?