



Virtual Mobility Before and After Student Exchanges

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SUMMARY

The overall objective of this study is to identify students' and teachers' needs and requirements in the different phases of international student exchange (preparatory phase, before exchange, during exchange and after exchange). Students' needs are investigated as a whole, whereas teachers' needs are investigated from two different perspectives: teachers' needs concerning incoming students and teachers' needs concerning outgoing students. The study methodology includes a literature search and information gathered through questionnaires, interviews and other existing sources at the VM-BASE partner institutions.

Our study confirms that students' motivation for international student exchange varies substantially. Non-Erasmus students are generally more academically-oriented than the Erasmus students. Meeting new people, practicing a foreign language and living in a foreign country are, in turn, more important for the Erasmus students. Either way, it is quite obvious that motivation also plays an important role, as far as students' needs are concerned.

Provision of timely and adequate information is something that both students and teachers highly appreciate. Both have also shown interest in the pre-exchange communication and activities with one another. Especially teachers are eager to get to know their students already before the arrival. After the exchange, contacts are mostly kept up through alumni organizations and suchlike. Students' commitment to the alumni activities is, however, often poor. Contacts with other (exchange) students are valued more.

Continuous support and guidance from the home institution are highly appreciated by the students, but often missing at present. Students have the feeling that they are pretty much on their own and that nobody cares, while they are abroad on the exchange. Therefore, communication with the home institution can be extremely important and should be paid more attention to.

Cultural and linguistic preparation is also needed according to both students and teachers. Culture shock or reverse culture shock, for that matter, are issues that are seldom discussed. The linguistic preparation and support of students are, in turn, emphasized by several teachers. At present, students' language skills are not always at the expected level, which is partly a consequence of the fact that no language certificates are required. Also students seem to appreciate language testing, at least, to some extent.

Finally, the fact that students go abroad also to study generally requires a lot more attention. Many of the needs that both students and teachers have are more or less study-related. Recognition of studies, grading and availability of courses for exchange students are probably the top 3 concerns that students and teachers face. Also, students' access to internal services before and after the exchange is considered extremely important.