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STUDY-RELATED INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OF STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS, INFORMATICS AND NATURAL SCIENCES (MIN)

Summary findings of a survey conducted in January 2017

FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS, INFORMATICS AND
NATURAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG RESEARCHERS

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SUMMARY FINDINGS

- When the survey was conducted, 85.3% of the 1,319 participants had not yet taken part in a study-related period abroad.
- 33.1% (64) of those who had spent time abroad are planning an additional period abroad in the near future. In 2017, 99% of the surveyed MIN students stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the time they spent abroad.

TIME AND TYPE OF THE PERIOD SPENT ABROAD

- Two thirds of the surveyed bachelor's students (66%) commenced their period abroad in the fifth or sixth subject semester.
- The most important type of a study-related period abroad for MIN students is still a period of studies abroad, as indicated by 64% of the internationally mobile students. International internships, which have been chosen much more rarely since 2014, are in second place (13%).
- 10% of internationally mobile students combined study with an internship for their most recent period abroad (an increase in comparison to 2014).

DURATION OF THE PERIOD ABROAD

- In 2017 internationally mobile students spent a longer period abroad than the participants in a survey conducted in 2014: while only 21% of all MIN students spent 6–12 months in another country in 2014, 2017 saw an increase to 28%.
- Approximately two thirds (67%) of the internationally mobile students were abroad for half a year or less. Only 5% stayed abroad for longer than 1 year.

LOCATION OF THE PERIOD ABROAD

- The majority of internationally mobile students show a preference for European countries (2017 59%, 2014 62%). Great Britain is the most favored western European host country (10.6%), followed by Sweden (9%), France (8%), Norway and Spain (each 6.5%). Most likely the frequent use of the Erasmus program accounts for the large share of students spending their time abroad in an EU country.
- The USA is the third most favored host country by MIN students with a share of 8.5%. Asian countries are not quite so popular: In fifteenth place at 2%, Malaysia is the highest ranking Asian country.

SOURCES OF FUNDING INFORMATION

- The Internet is the primary source of funding information on a study-related period abroad (approximately 42%). Information events, the University's website, and academic offices rank in second to fourth position as further sources of information.
- Some 5% of all surveyed students obtained information on funding opportunities from MIN's international affairs website. In 2015 an information portal was installed with funding programs facilitating periods abroad, effectively implementing a measure based on the findings of the first survey in 2014. The low rate of 5% can be explained with the fact that these offers are forwarded via the academic offices and the foreign exchange coordinators to the interested students.

FINANCING THE PERIOD ABROAD

- Almost two thirds of the internationally mobile students (65%) relied on parental support, an increase when compared to the share of 59% in 2014.
- Approximately 47% of the internationally mobile students (8% more than in the previous survey) benefited from the ERASMUS program.
- Most participants in the ERASMUS program use mixed financing for their period abroad: 81% (8 percentage points more than in 2014) drew on parental support and/or used savings accrued through employment prior to the period abroad (38%). 31% received additional funding from the federal student loan scheme for studying abroad (Auslands-BAföG).

PERSONAL DETAILS REGARDING STUDY ABROAD

MOTIVATION FOR A STUDY-RELATED PERIOD ABROAD

- The broad majority of the surveyed students (85%) went abroad of their own accord (82% in 2014).
- One of the primary motivating factors for MIN students embarking on a study-related period abroad was to gain personal experience (adventurousness). Getting to know a different culture took second place (thus having gained importance) as did learning a language (second place in 2014).
- Women (90%) deem it likelier that they will go abroad for study-related purposes than do men (75%).
- Only 16% of the surveyed internationally mobile students were encouraged or required by their curriculum to spend time abroad.

ORGANISATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

- More than half (52%) of the internationally mobile students found that realizing a study-related period abroad was completely or relatively unproblematic.

- In this respect, there are distinct improvements: 79% of students faced minor or major difficulties when surveyed in 2014, while 49% did when surveyed in 2017.

GAINS FOR INTERNATIONALLY MOBILE STUDENTS

- Having exciting experiences and honing language skills took the first two places. Expanding knowledge of the subject and employment opportunities were perceived as less strong.
- Evaluations varied slightly depending on the type of the period spent abroad: the majority of those students who completed an internship abroad (88%) stated that they had expanded their knowledge of the subject. Only 59% of the students who studied at a university abroad made the same statement. However, they felt that they had enhanced their CVs and improved their employment prospects.

AGREEMENT PRIOR TO PERIOD ABROAD: STUDENT STATUS

- Almost three quarters of internationally mobile students remained enrolled at their home university. These figures correspond with the findings of 2014.
- Some 22% took a leave of absence so that the time spent abroad did not count towards the regular period of study.

INFORMATION ON ECTS SYSTEM

Apparently, there is still a large demand for information on the ECTS system. 57% (in 2014) and 52% of the survey participants in 2017 felt insufficiently informed.

CONCLUDING A LEARNING AGREEMENT

Preparing for their period abroad, 75% of the students concluded learning agreements. A learning agreement was only mandatory for some 53% of the students in 2014.

EXPERIENCES AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

The broad majority of internationally mobile students organized their arrival to and departure from the foreign destination privately. Only approximately 6% received support from the host university or their department (almost the same answer in the survey of 2014).

SUPPORT PROVIDED DURING THE PERIOD ABROAD

- Two thirds of those surveyed rated orientation events as useful.
- In the last three years and in contrast to the survey conducted in 2014, students used language courses and mentor programs to a substantially lesser degree, or did not select them as useful.

LANGUAGE OF CLASSES

- The classes attended by the majority of internationally mobile students (72%) were conducted, at least partially, in English. This share was substantially lower in 2014 at 64%¹. More than a quarter of the participants stated that the classes were held exclusively in the national language.
- Less than half of the students had to provide documentation of their language skills in order to study at the host university.
- More than half of the students (53%) were able to study abroad without any such documentation.

WORKLOAD AND SYLLABUS AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

- More bachelor's than master's students (42%) found subject requirements easier. Master's students perceived them as approximately equal to those demanded at the home university (approximately 48%). However, the workload of the master's program was conceived as heavier than in the bachelor's program.
- The syllabus did not pose a problem for the majority of the students (91%).

COMPLETED STUDY UNITS AND CREDITS OBTAINED AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

More students (66%) stated in 2014 that they had completed the study units planned for their period abroad (compared to only 61% in 2017). With the exception of the Department of Biology, the share has strongly decreased in all departments.

NON-ACHIEVED CREDITS

- In 2017 the amount of planned credits that were obtained was also lower than the figure established by the survey of 2014.
- The students gave several reasons, from personal ones to language barriers, for failing to obtain the desired credits.
- Language barriers were the most frequently cited reason in 2014.
- Currently, content-related and formal aspects play a subordinate role.

PROCEDURES AT THE HOME UNIVERSITY UPON RETURNING

RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECOGNITION

Either the head office of the department / degree program or the Department of International Affairs was responsible for the recognition processes of most students (66%). The survey

¹A possible explanation could be that, at the time, non-English-speaking countries were selected more frequently as the destination for the period abroad than in the previous 3 years.

participants must have misunderstood the role of the Department of International Affairs. However, the chairs of the examinations boards are responsible for fewer cases.

REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

- 42% of the survey participants reported that there had been a formal and content-related review. In 2014 64% of the surveyed students were subject to such reviews.
- The ECTS credits of 38% of the students were reviewed only formally, marking a significant increase since 2014 when 26% were reviewed.
- In 2014 4% were still not subject to a review of academic performance abroad—the figure in 2017 was 10%².

RECOGNITION PROCEDURE

- The completed coursework of 84% of the participants was recognized. This percentage is substantially larger than in 2014 (73%).
- The results of every tenth student were only partially recognized, and those of 6% were not recognized at all. This figure marks a decrease from 10% in 2014.
- More than half of the student participants rated the recognition procedure at their home universities, organizationally and time-wise, as completely unproblematic, and good or relevant with regard to its content.
- In both 2014 and 2017 10% struggled with great organizational or time-related difficulties, and rated the procedure as irrelevant with regard to its content.

NON-MOBILE STUDENTS

GENERAL WILLINGNESS

88.6% of the survey participants could generally imagine spending a period abroad. Thus, they are mobilizable. 11.4% of those who have not yet spent a period abroad are non-mobilizable (no interest). Many expressed the wish for clarity about the added value of studying abroad.

THE MOST IMPORTANT MOBILITY BARRIERS

- 20% of all surveyed students stated funding problems as the primary barrier: approximately 45% of the non-mobile students would find it difficult to spend time abroad due to high additional costs and the cost of living there combined with the absence of earning opportunities.
- In particular, master's students fear losing time in their student life-cycle (19%) or have no window of mobility for spending a period abroad (17%).
- Ties to their family and partners are the reason that bachelor's students remain in Germany.

²The performance of 7% was not reviewed at all, as the curricula were compatible, or the study program was a joint/double degree, and studying abroad thus constituted a fixed component of the curriculum.