

Report Leiden University for THE BRIDGES-LAC project

1. Introduction & Aim of the Research.

Within the context of the Erasmus Mundus program of the EU a committee has been formed to investigate the subject mobility and barriers to exchange on the field of higher education. The name of this project is Bridges-LAC¹ and is focused on the relationship between the EU and the Latin American Countries (LAC).

On March 26, 2009 an international seminar took place in Mexico City with all the participating partners in the Bridges-LAC project. At this seminar, the subject of the research was re-examined and specific points of focus were defined. The study which is now conducted by **Leiden University** will in specific focus on the focus of **Best Practices**. We will focus on several different faculties of universities in the Netherlands.

2. Methodology.

Our research has been conducted by way of a survey through which we have questioned the academic staff into their opinions and experiences regarding the (barriers to) mobility of both academic staff as well as students (see the Appendix for the format of the survey).

Through the survey we have aimed to investigate three separate aspects of mobility. The first aim of the research was to get a better insight into the relevant barriers to exchange and mobility relating to exchange of **academic staff**. We presented the participants with a list of possible arguments that might function as a barrier in their decision-making process to participate in exchange and asked them to indicate the relevance of each of this argument. Additionally, they were asked if there were other barriers, not mentioned in our survey.

The second aim was to investigate, through the same format, what the relevant barriers are for **students**. We asked our participants, which consisted solely of academic staff (professors) what they thought acted as barriers for students in their exchange possibilities.

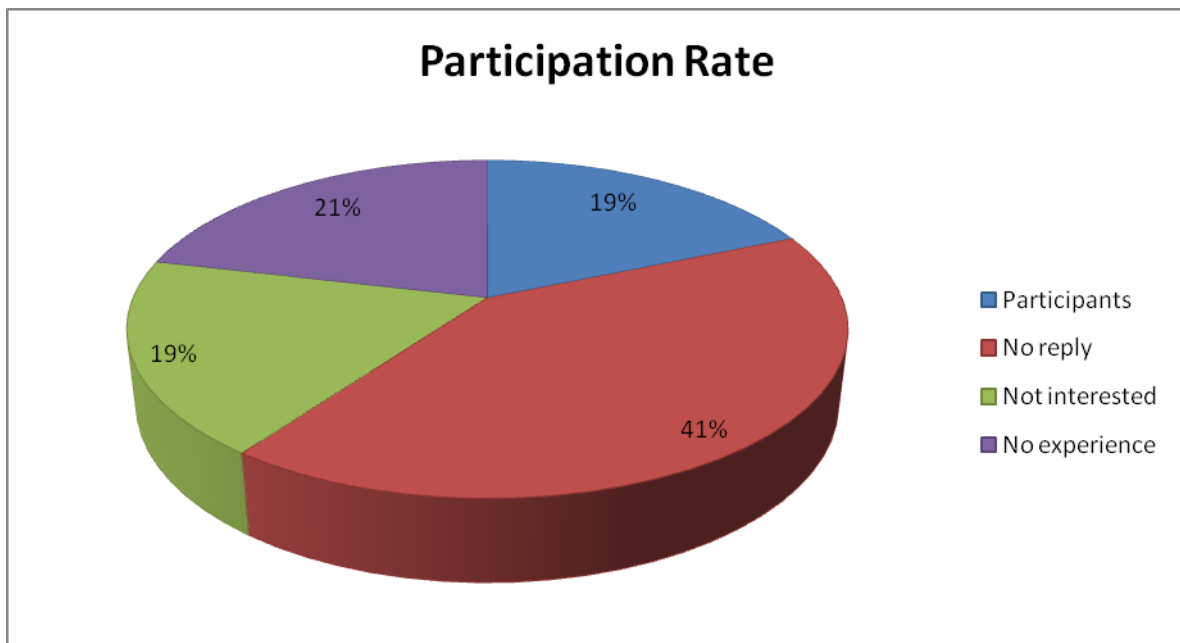
¹ Building Relationships & Improving Dialogue Geared towards Erasmus Mundus' goalS- Latin America & Caribbean

The third (and final) aim of the study was to get an indication of what are considered **best practices** at other universities, or countries, regarding the facilitation and support of exchange for both students as well as academic staff. Through the use of open questions, the participants were asked to give their opinion with regards to best practices, 'bad' practices and what they feel needs improvement at their own universities.

Participation

In total we have contacted 150 people from universities in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. Out of this group 41% has not responded to our request for participation in the survey. Out of the people that have responded, the majority felt unable to cooperate/participate either because they were not interested in participating or because this topic was not relevant to them.

In total, 19% of the people we have contacted have responded and participated in our survey.



3. Overview of Results.

Barriers to exchange Academic Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The application procedures, bureaucratic rules and paperwork involved in applying/arranging for exchange• The work pressure at the home university• The lack of assistance from home (in to a lesser degree the destination) university in terms of administrative support
Barriers to exchange Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial considerations• Language barriers• Recognition of degrees• Lack of assistance provided by both the home as well as destination universities

Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• United Kingdom – in terms of room for personal initiative, minimal rules and less hierarchical structures• Bilateral agreements, organizations and/or cooperation, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Euroculture➤ Noha➤ Europosgrados➤ AUGM-Caimbra Groups
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Strengths & Weaknesses	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal initiatives & contacts on inter-department level• Exchange coordinator <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• International Office• Knowledge – i.e. language, culture, about other universities, about possibilities and options.• Recognition of programs and degrees is lacking
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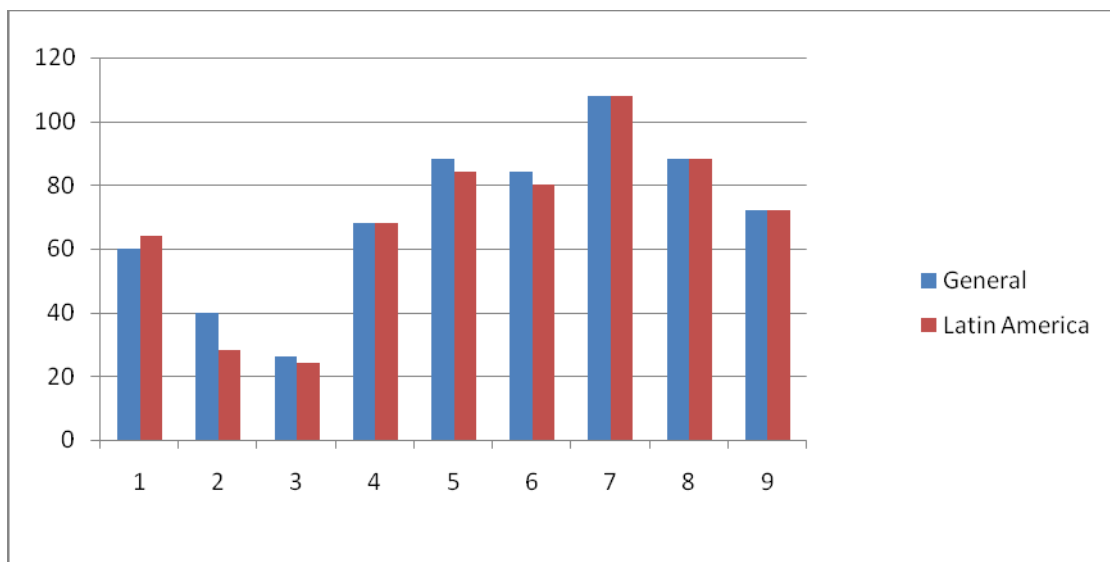
4. Preliminary conclusions.

Results

In the charts below, the results of the surveys are depicted. The participants were asked to 'grade' each barrier according to relevance from 1 (least relevant) to 5 (most relevant). In total there were 28 participants who have answered our survey. Therefore, each barrier could have received a maximum of 140 points and a minimum of 28.

Academic Staff

Chart 1. Relevance of barriers in numbers/points (out of a possible 140 points).

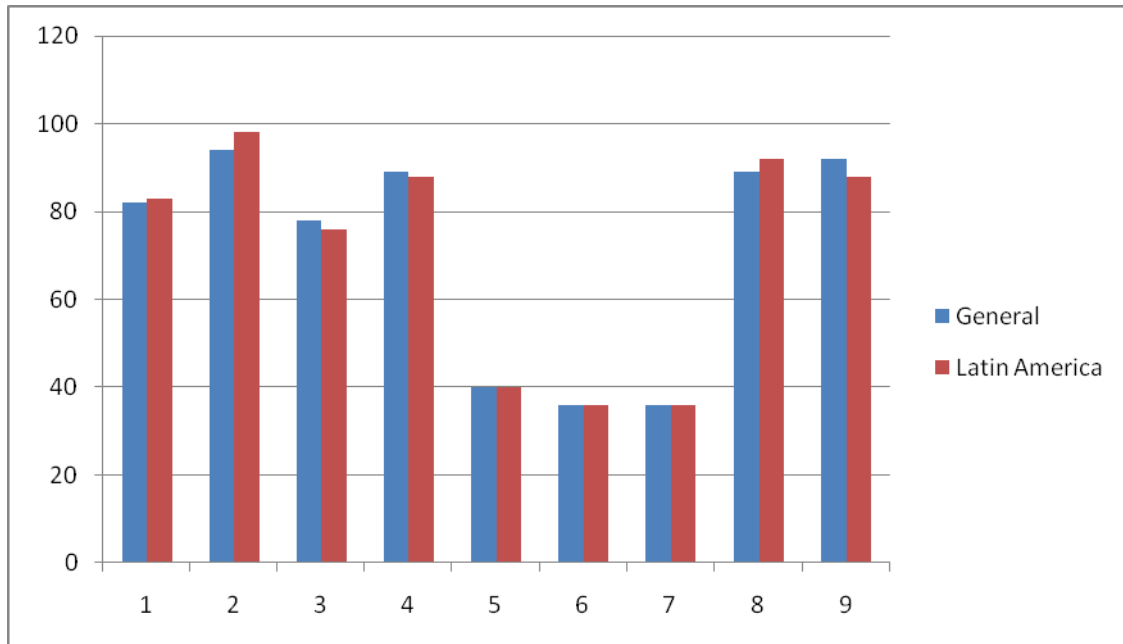


1. It is difficult to locate the knowledge-base in the universities abroad
2. There are too many countries to choose from
3. I have no or little knowledge of the structure and degrees that the universities there offer
4. The programs do not run parallel to those in the Netherlands
5. The funding for the exchange in terms of funds available (money)
6. **The paperwork involved in applying for exchange (visas; forms; applications; etc)**
7. **I don't have the time to go on an extended exchange to another university (work pressure is too high)**
8. **There is no supportive administrative and practical assistance from my home university**

9. There is no supportive administrative and practical assistance from the destination university

Students

Chart 1. Relevance of barriers in numbers (out of a possible 140 points).



- 1. Finance**
- 2. Language (not knowing the home language of the country in which you want to study abroad)**
- 3. The academic year does not overlap**
- 4. The degree offered is not recognized in the home country (or EU)**
5. There is no combination of work/internship and study possible
6. The lack of status of the university or department
7. Lack of local knowledge
- 8. Lack of assistance/information provided by home university**
- 9. Lack of assistance/information provided by destination university**

Trends.

Overall, there have been similar responses to the survey which indicate that the results generally apply to most universities and departments in the Netherlands.

Additionally, there seem to be little differences in barriers to exchange and general and exchange in specific between the Netherlands and Latin America – these barriers seem to apply equally to any type and destination of exchange.

Best Practices and Comments

In the open questions-part of our survey we asked the participants to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of their universities or departments in terms of stimulating and facilitating exchange. With regards to **strengths**, what stood out of the responses was that in most cases, exchange is the product of personal initiatives and tends to be based on bilateral department-contacts. The university of Groningen was praised for its exchange coordinator, which seems to work well in facilitating and supporting exchange whereas in Leiden the equivalent of this (International Office) was criticized and considered a barrier to exchange.

We also asked the opinions of the participants in terms of **what could be improved** in their universities or departments with regards to exchange. We found several different types of answers. The first type relates to university-specific improvements and concerns the improvements in administrative and practical support as well as the improvements in hierarchical structure in the university, as one applicant mentioned that more room for initiative should be given and not be restricted by bureaucratic measures. Other types of improvement were found to relate more to norms, standards and knowledge – such as the recognition of diplomas, knowledge of language and culture and knowledge of the types of programs and degrees that are offered abroad.

In terms of **best practices**, many participants referred to approach being taken by the UK and UK universities. The pragmatic approach, room for personal initiative and support structures are found to be working particularly well. One participant in particular found that the non-hierarchical structure, lack of bureaucratic impediments and the minimizing of rules were specific aspects of the UK-approach which are needed here as well.

Other types of **best practices** relate more to the bilateral structures in terms of bilateral agreements, conferences or organizations involved in exchange and improving relations between countries and/or universities. Among these are Euroculture, Noha, Europosgrados and the AUGM-Caimbra Group. There seems to be a positive evaluation concerning these types of activities where the bilateral relations are being established or improved and where the exchange is being encouraged, stimulated. This is considered positive both in terms of practical improvements regarding the exchange, as well as because it creates more awareness in providing practical assistance or information.

5. Indications & Preliminary Conclusions

In terms of the barriers to exchange that we found for the academic staff, we find that administrative and practical support seems to be lacking. Related to this is the difficulties that are being experienced relating to the paperwork involved in applying for exchange. This result seems to correspond with the remarks regarding the hierarchical structure, the bureaucratic processes and the amount of rules. Additionally, we found that the work pressure at the home university is often considered high as well, acting as another barrier to exchange.

The barriers to exchange for students are more diverse – ranging from financial barriers to lack of support to lack of compatibility with degrees and programs that are offered in the Netherlands. Although some barriers might be inherent to exchange (such as finance) there are certain specific barriers which can in principle be remedied. Firstly, taking into account the existence of this barrier also concerning staff-exchange, the lack of support seems to be highly relevant and in need of critical review and improvements. A more pro-active and dynamic support and knowledge centre regarding exchange able to facilitate, stimulate and assist seems to be needed, both by students as well as the academic staff.

Other barriers, which are more specific to student exchange, seem to relate more to institutional categories such as recognition of degrees and similarities/differences in programs and semesters. Although there is no one-way solution to this barrier, a few possibilities can be offered here that might help remedy this barrier. As indicated by our applicants in the survey, conferences

and organizations can be very helpful in this respect – they initiate and facilitate bilateral and multilateral contacts and agreements and thereby can be a helpful first step in addressing and debating this issue as well as providing possible solutions. Again here, the need for a proactive, pragmatic approach seems to be highly needed in order to begin the discussions, look for possibilities and remedies so that certain barriers can become increasingly less relevant.

Appendix.

Survey Part 1. Regarding Staff Exchange

Starting with the survey on academic staff, we would like to know how the participants look at exchange and the barriers they experience – the survey is divided into the barriers that are relevant in general and those that are specific to EU-LAC (Latin American countries) exchange.

Please mark the relevance of each factor in importance from 1 to 5*

#	(Possible) Barriers to exchange	General Exchange	EU-LAC Exchange
1	It is difficult to locate the knowledge-base in the universities abroad		
2	There are too many countries to choose from.		
3	I have no (or little) knowledge of the structure and degrees that the universities there offer		
4	I don't know if the programs they offer run parallel to the program (semester, year) offered in the Netherlands/ The programs do not run parallel to those in the Netherlands		
5	The funding for the exchange in terms of funds (money) available		
6	The funding for the exchange in terms of paperwork (university forms; visa applications; etc)		
7	I don't have the time to go on an extended exchange to another university (work pressure is too high)		
8	There is no supportive administrative and practical assistance from my home university		
9	There is no supportive administrative and practical assistance from the destination university		

* 1 = This factor is not relevant at all; 2 = This factor is relevant, but I do not consider it important; 3 = This factor does play role but it is not critical in my decision; 4 = This factor greatly affects my decision in a negative way; 5 = This factor is a barrier to exchange

Survey Part 2. Regarding Student Exchange

With this survey, we would like the personal opinions of the participants as to what they think are relevant barriers to exchange for students – again here, we divide between exchange in general, and barriers that are specific to EU-LAC exchange.

Mark each (possible) barrier in importance from 1 to 5*

#	(Possible) Barrier to exchange	General Exchange	EU-LAC Exchange
1	Finance		
2	Language (not knowing the home language of the country in which you want to study abroad)		
3	The academic year does not overlap		
4	The degree offered is not recognized in the home country (or EU)		
5	There is no combination of work/internship and study possible		
6	The lack of status of the university or department		
7	Lack of local knowledge		
8	Lack of assistance/information provided by the home university		
9	Lack of assistance/information provided by the destination university		

* 1 = This factor is not relevant at all; 2 = This factor is relevant, but I do not consider it important; 3 = This factor does play role but it is not critical in the decision; 4 = This factor greatly affects the decision in a negative way; 5 = This factor is a barrier to exchange

Survey Part 3. Open Questions regarding Best Practices in exchange in general as well as specific to EU-LAC exchange

At the last stage, we would like to learn more about the normative opinions regarding exchange, mobility and barriers.

1. What do you feel your faculty/university does that works particularly well?
2. In what areas do you feel your faculty/university needs to improve or change? Please explain.
3. Is there any other faculty in your university or another university that you know of with specific strategies or practices that you feel work very well? Please explain.