

Breakfastclub 'Flexibility in education'



Introduction

The composition of our student population is changing and the need for inter-multi-disciplinary educated students is increasing. Therefore education should be flexible in order to provide students the opportunity to broaden their horizon and not only focus on their primary program.

During the introduction of the breakfastclub the concept of Virtual Exchange was explained. The University of Leiden has several collaborations with other universities around the world, in order to provide students the chance to follow courses in an other field of interest online. This makes following courses more flexible and gives students the opportunity to achieve their EC's while not physically attending college at Leiden University faculties. According to Hanneke Wegman, flexibility should focus on freedom of choice, level of education, tempo of the students and should fit the background of the student.

The discussion was focused on two main questions; what problems and limitations do you experience when we talk about flexibility in education. The other main question was; if you could create your own perfect flexible education, how does it look like?

Discussion

Current situation /obstacles

- Students experience a lot of level differences when they start the master. Because of that, some courses are way too easy or way too difficult. Introduction courses could be included to retrain students in order to try to get the students on the same level. These introduction courses could be provided online.
- Students need more objective information about all the possibilities there are. A lot of teachers are biased and want the best for their own course. But this is not what students need. They need to know all the possibilities there are and form their own opinion about these options.
- There are a lot of compulsory courses during master programmes. For students who already know what they want those courses feel like obligations that should be done instead of an addition to their education.
- The room for choice in the masters is highly variable
- Students also need more advice and help by choosing for example electives. This will help the students to make the right choices.
- Some programs focus too much on the opportunities there are in their own field. Students want to know more about other fields and programs. Programs should also be able to provide students information about the opportunities there are at other faculties. Courses that could add on their primary education.
- Students who did not pass a course or follow two programs experience problems with taking all the exams. Some exams are on the same day. It should be possible to due the

re-exam even if you are not able to follow the full course. In this way students are able to stay on track.

- Students who followed MOOC's said they were interesting, but that the level of English is not high enough/ professional enough
- Students who tried to do/ are doing minors at another university point out that, due to the different ways in signing up, difficulties may arise. Additionally, some universities give priority to their own students and due to this, students may not know until the end of August if they can do a minor at another university. This can result in students being too late with applying for a plan B at our university since deadlines also differ per university.
- Some faculties/ studies are very strict when it comes to differing from the set curriculum, even though they encourage you to do electives at different faculties/universities. They will send you to the exam committee, which sometimes takes weeks or even months to reply.
- Students who chose to do a board year suffer a lot of study delay. The University of Leiden does not strongly encourage board years, they provide a system where it is difficult to follow courses besides this.

LUMC

- Electives are too much focused on deepening instead of broadening.
- Students from the LUMC pointed out that while they do have space for minors and electives, they are restricted to minors within their faculty/study area, even though these minors could be about subjects that will be repeated in their set courses. Besides, they even have already so many courses within their curriculum, flexibility in courses or adjustments in this program is almost impossible.
- Huge gaps between courses and residency, however, the study is not flexible enough to fill these gaps with electives, other internships etc.

FGGA

- On the contrary, FGGA students experience the opposite of LUMC and experience that they have a lot of freedom in their bachelor. At the start of the third year, students can do whatever they want for 30 EC in the first semester. This could be an internship or minor at a different faculty. This makes it easy for students to do the minor or internship they desire to do. Even studying abroad is a possibility if your grades are good enough. At the start of the second year a mandatory lecture is given with the options you have at the start of your third year. They make clear what the options are and what are the requirements. This could lead to people not knowing in the first year they have to achieve certain grades, because otherwise studying abroad is not possible.

Humanities

- Students experience a lot of freedom, they can choose the minors they like and want, also minors that are a great addition to their bachelor. Sometimes students have

problems with the difficulty of courses. Some interesting courses are 100/200 point courses, which are not difficult enough. Some studies require that you follow 300/400 point courses, while you are not familiar with certain studies, which make the courses even more difficult, because it is a whole new experience for students.

Honours

- Students who started with honours, stopped because the track is very focussed on graduating within the set time (nominal). These students are often the students that want to do more and therefore do a board year (whether it is in a study or student association), more electives, study abroad, go into the university/faculty council etc. This is also the same with students who don't do honours, but still want to do extra courses and take a year longer. This is very much frowned upon by some faculties/studies.

Online

- The students indicated that while it is very interesting that new online things are being developed, they would rather see that the problem of the bureaucratic ways of approving electives and minors is being tackled.
- Students do like the idea of online courses, but wonder where they will actually find the time to do these. This is because, some studies more than others, the huge amount of deadlines during and after courses. They indicate that this makes it difficult to do the independent studying required with the online courses.
- The students indicate that while some would like more room for free electives, they do not want too much as you will start to miss the basis of the study.
- Virtual courses will have influence on (their) education. It affects the absorption of information of students. Research has shown that absorption of information is less from a computer screen than just from your books or lectures.
- Testing students in a virtual environment is also less productive. Many subjects of education can not be tested. The university must recognize that virtual courses and tests have major disadvantages.

The future/ideal situation

Politology

- The students indicate that there is room for electives, which is nice. They do not feel that a 20/80 ratio of set courses versus free space would be ideal since you would miss the essentials.
- They feel like more stimulance for doing electives outside of the study is necessary.
- Blackboard should be used more, and more knowledge should be put online so that students can do more self-study. However, when asked if lectures should then be replaced with online self-study, the answer was no. They should be more in depth.
- Using a video or a game instead of long articles to study the subject works better since this is more fun/interactive. More students will do this and in result the lectures can be more in depth.

Medicine

- The options for electives should be more 'open'. They indicate that they have to do a job shadowing with specialists, which are often working in a field that they know they do not want to do. They feel that this is a shame, since it would be more meaningful if they actually could see how a specialists in their field of interest works.
- Minors should also be more open. They feel that a broader perspective would help in their general development. The minors that are available now contain information and courses that they will hear/follow anyway in their general/set courses.
- The students also mention that doing self-study at home to prepare for a lecture should be followed by a in-depth class instead of just general information that they could have read in the articles anyway.
- The way they are taught now works very demotivating, they indicate that less restrictions and obligations could lead to more motivation as they have seen this with students from Rotterdam. They indicate that this would lead to a more conscious decision of doing courses instead of doing it because they have to.
- If programmes were set up in the same way, it would be interesting to go to other universities and follow courses there.

Biology

- The bachelor is actually working quite well since they made it easier to switch between 'specialisations' and their courses.
- They like the block schedule as it is needed for their practicals.
- Within the study, changing courses and choosing is very flexible, but when they want to go to other studies/faculties it gets harder.

Action points

- It could be an idea to appoint a kind of study advisor to provide students with objective advice about the choices they have to make and the possibilities there are.
- Make it easier to get approval for certain courses/minors. Set general rules like: if you are studying a, you can automatically assume that minor 1, 2, 5, and 7 will be approved. This relieves the stress of students that want to do electives or minors but are held back by the time it takes for exam committees to approve.
- Some studies need more space to follow minors/electives at other faculties/universities to broaden their perspectives. However, it should not be too much space as students still want to follow their general study.
- Students still have to sign up for minors or electives via signing up at the right time. It would be more fair if students could sign up for certain minors with motivation.
- A student brought up that it is nice to watch some videos online with college materials, so more time can be spent by going in depth with fellow students in longer working groups. Web lectures can help to bring this kind of flexibility even more to our University.
- It is easy to study at other universities for Humanities and FGGA. There is a bond between Rotterdam and Delft for FGGA. They can easily sign up for courses and minors at those universities. LUMC can only sign up for a minor in Rotterdam. Better cooperations between universities could lead to more opportunities for students to study at other universities.
- Students state that in general it is nice to have some stable framework in the bachelor. This gives students the opportunity to get familiar with studying and gives them the chance to explore what they want in their master. The Master would be more ideal for electives and freedom of choice.