

Report Breakfastclub October 17th: Integration LUS 2018-2019



Introduction

Breakfastclub 1: Wijnhaven, The Hague

The theme of this Breakfast club was integration. The students who showed up for the informal panel discussion focused amongst others on the cultural, social, and language barriers, surrounding integration in Leiden and The Hague. Two speakers introduced the topic:

→ Bram Ieven: University Lecturer

The university gets financial support for every student, which is a nice motivation to attract more students and thus also international students. That is not directly a bad thing, but the university did not spend enough time on thinking what this international attraction means for the university. We should focus more on engaging internationals, instead of integration; 'what does it mean to study in the Netherlands at this particular moment?' Engaging international students in the Dutch society and culture on the long term can be beneficial for integration on campus. We should emphasize that everyone is part of the community and should be involved in the national debate, also when you're here for only a couple of months/years.

→ Mikal Tseggai: Former LUS chair and now currently working at the city council of The Hague.

Five years ago there was no good relationship between LUC, Public Administration and International Studies; they looked down at each other. Interfaculty relationship remain important for Campus The Hague. It is important to focus on issues common to all students regardless of their background. For example, housing is a big problem that is encountered by most students. However, there are a lot of Dutch student houses that have blatantly stated that they do not want to live with international students. There is a difference between integration and inclusiveness and it is more about being inclusive and approachable. International students can also demand that university policies be written in English so that they would be able to participate in university affairs. International and Dutch 'groups' should be less afraid of each other and it can also be useful to know the culture within the university and the set of unwritten rules that guides action and behaviour.

Recommendations per theme:

1. **Leiden and The Hague** are two different communities that have to be treated as separate entities that deserve different strategies for integrating students on Campus. In order to satisfy the needs of both Dutch and International Students, a close analysis is needed to find out what these groups truly need. This can be executed by study associations of the different faculties. This should be done while assessing the future flow of where international students will be and their needs. It is currently the case that Bachelor students in Leiden are too small of a group to cater to, and that mindset is wrong.

2. **Language** should be focussed on using English and expanding the opportunities to acquire the Dutch language.

One of the options regarding languages courses is to organize language cafes. There, students exchange their languages/teach each other their native languages. The idea is that the students are paired up and one of the students teaches Dutch, while the other teaches another language like French or Spanish for example. This can for example be organised in Plexus or Behive by Internatiol student coordinators, Internatioal Student Network (ISN) or study associations of the different faculties.

Another option is the possibility of having the Dutch language as an elective course which would open up opportunities for international students to learn the language and be more aware of their community and culture. Also, it is a general complain that it is too expensive to take Dutch courses which is the major reason why students shy away from taking the class, so if prices were reduced then that would be good. This could be organised by the international coordinators of the university of Leiden.

3. **Introduction weeks** need to be explained very well, so students pick the right week.

The HOP/OWL week serves as a good first step opportunity to have activities involving the simultaneous participation of national and international students. Also for february intakes, there is no HOP but OWL, however, this is not useful for those who are going to be having all their classes in the Hague. This does not allow the Hague students starting in February to be given useful information. Information supply for these introductory committees could be better organized. The students/staffmembers who organise these weeks should take care of proper and clear information.

4. **Housing** remains an issue for internationals.

Housing is a major issue for most students as it is quite difficult for students to secure an accommodation for themselves. If the university can have more subcontractors to alleviate this housing difficulty for students then it would be highly beneficial. It would be a good idea to e-mail every Dutch student who is going to study abroad to ask if he or she is willing to offer their room for an international student (The LUMC is already doing this). This should be done by the international coordinators of the different faculties.

5. **Career prospects** for internationals need more opportunities

Most of the activities in the career events are in Dutch which marginalises the non-Dutch speaking population of the university and discourages them from participating in such activities. The use of English during some of the career events helps to provide equal opportunities for international students to participate. Asserting the importance of the Dutch language in some sectors could also help to paint a picture of where internationals have chances in the Dutch job market which even could help motivate students to learn Dutch. Study associations should focus more on doing their career events in English. This should be encouraged by the university, for example via the deans of the faculties.

6. **Dutch Culture** needs to be framed inclusively.

It might be beneficial to give a course in Dutch culture, with the goal to involve internationals in the political system and make it more than just a place where they can study, so their

involvement grows within the university. In order for them to feel like they need to blend in, there needs to be a moment when they feel like there is an access point to the society. Those Dutch culture course could be for example be organised by the international coordinators or by the study associations.

7. **Study associations** should organize more events in English.

Events: When it comes to language culture, it is important to make events that are interesting for a lot of people more accessible. When somebody isn't able to understand the language, this is demotivating to visit an event. This can be executed for example by international committees of the different faculties (LUMC; Lisco – Leiden international student committee).

Extracurricular opportunities: In the case of board years, internationals are often underrepresented. The HOPweek and the OWL week do involve internationals, but for regular study associations this often isn't the case, also not for less extensive roles (e.g. committees, language courses and even joining the associations). Possibilities in extracurricular activities should be promoted more.

8. **University Events** should be organized, social and non-social without the focus on integration, to provide an overarching interfaculty space where students can roam.

Organizing events that are solely for the purpose of integration aren't by far as attractive as events that gather students based on interests that intersect, creating a body with the legitimacy of the university, forming an academic and cultural hub for both Dutch and International students.