

Initiative Extension of Exchange Procedure



FRONT

FOR THE ACTIVE STUDENT

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Introduction

Students at Tilburg University have the opportunity to go on exchanges at other universities during their studies. For many students, gaining an experience abroad through an exchange is one of the highlights of their student life. Not only is an international experience a great addition to their CV, it also gives students a unique opportunity to get to know other cultures and universities, develop their language skills and gain international connections. Moreover, student exchanges promote the ever-increasing internationalization, something that is highly valued at Tilburg University.

Tilburg University's strategy describes that, through our core values, we want to be curious and courageous as a university. We want to challenge students to be curious about their orientation in society, where the connection with the (international) community and other universities results in an exchange of knowledge and skills. From Front's vision, this means that the university facilitates an environment in which students are encouraged to broaden their horizons. The University must be courageous in learning to explore new avenues in this.

What Front encounters is that the current exchange procedure consists of a one-sided process, in which only the weighted average of a student serves as a selection tool. The active student, who chooses to engage in extracurricular activities in addition to their studies, is not sufficiently heard in this process. Active students are defined as students who engage in activities in addition to their studies, such as volunteering, being administratively active, being an entrepreneur, taking extra courses and more. The current process only encourages students to achieve the highest possible GPA in order to stand a chance of an exchange. Front thinks it is important that the active student and the motivated student who cannot achieve the highest average get a better chance in the selection for an exchange. We would therefore like to see the exchange procedure changed, with motivation and extracurricular activities playing an important role in the selection process.

Proposal

Currently, Tilburg University uses the method of including only the GPA in the exchange procedure. The student can submit their top three destinations, whereby the student has to submit ten courses per university and provide a compact motivation for each course. In the current procedure, Tilburg University takes into account students who did a board year in their second or third bachelor year and have received a board grant for more than 4.5 months. These students have to fulfil a fewer ECTS, exempting them from 30 ECTS.

Although this reduction is a good first step, Front would like to see motivation and extracurricular activities play a role in the exchange procedure, in addition to the weighted average. Now that only grades count, students who undertake extra besides their studies are less likely to get to the desired destination during their exchange. Participating in many extracurricular activities may in fact mean that striving for the highest possible average is not always the top priority. From the active student's point of view, it is important that students develop personally and academically through activities. Expanding the procedure to include extracurricular activities would ensure that the procedure would better reflect the student's entire career and not just focus on the weighted average. As a result, not only students who have done a board year will be included, but all active students will have a greater chance in the selection process.

At several other universities, including a motivation letter and CV is already an important part of the exchange procedure and ranking. At Wageningen University & Research (WUR), for instance, a motivation letter can be uploaded for the first choice of destination and the CV is included in the entire procedure¹. The weighted average remains important for this procedure. However, when student averages are close to each other, the student with the most significant motivation letter and CV is more likely to be allowed to go on exchange to the preferred destination. A motivation letter considers why a student wants to go to the preferred destination. Extracurricular activities are also taken into consideration, if they fit with the university and/or the subjects that can be taken at the destination.

Furthermore, there is also the possibility of having the exchange procedure take place from the perspective of a score card, as the Vrije Universiteit (VU) is currently doing². Their 'score card' consists of six perspective points: Motivation, CV, grade average, number of ECTS, extra (study) programs and language skills. This makes it possible to increase your score through good motivation, extra experiences and extracurricular activities. VU uses this method to maintain transparency in the selection process. Front thinks that creating a scorecard could also be a good addition to Tilburg University's selection procedure. This way, objectivity and measurability are maintained, but not only the weighted average is considered.

Front has been in discussion with the Study Abroad & Exchange Team and knows that an evaluation of the selection process is currently in progress by them. However, an evaluation of the current process does not yet result in a change to the procedure. Also, we would like new solutions to be considered that would give active students a better chance of being selected for exchange. Front would like to be included

1 <https://edepot.wur.nl/558825>

2 <https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363d-d7cega5/078c7dc5-9ffd-49b0-a186-46d8924ff5a8/Exchange%20score%20card%202023-2024.pdf>



in shaping the changes to the exchange procedure so that new selection criteria can be developed for the 2024/2025 application period. In this regard, the evaluation of the current procedure can provide a useful basis for developing the new criteria.

To achieve this, Front would like to see a working group set up in which all stakeholders participate to discuss how to shape the exchange procedure in a broader way. The Study Abroad & Exchange Team will ideally participate in this, complemented by any stakeholders from the faculties. The Study Abroad & Exchange Team is working on the procedure on a daily basis and can bring the results of the evaluation to this working group as soon as they are known. Furthermore, we would also like to participate to bring attention to the student perspective, especially from the point of view of the active student.

Conclusion

By means of this initiative, Front asks the Executive Board to set up a working group to work on expanding and adapting the current exchange procedure, in which the possibilities of including a motivation, CV and/or scorecard will be included in the working group. We believe that studying is more than just achieving a high average. Therefore, we believe that the average should not serve as the only selection criteria in the exchange procedure. By extending the procedure, Front wants to offer active students a better chance of being selected for exchange. Front hopes that the Executive Board will consider this initiative.



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