



# Order 144 – Study on the use of credit systems in higher education cooperation between the EU and the US

Final Report

October 2011

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A report submitted by GHK in cooperation with Technopolis  
Contribution from the US made by Penn State University

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## Executive summary

The European Commission and the US Department of Education have been supporting the EU-US cooperation in education and training since mid-nineties with the establishment of the first Atlantis programme (1995-2000). The programme has since evolved to cover a range of actions that include student mobility and design of joint or double degrees. More recently, the two institutions have engaged in a policy dialogue which takes the form of EU-US Education Forum. The Forum is based on an exchange between policy makers and academics from both the EU and the US on themes of common interest. The main objective is to exchange good practice and to support policy learning. Based on the recommendations of the 2009 Forum, two studies on credit systems in higher education were launched. One study was commissioned by the US Department of Education and analysed the use of credit systems to support student mobility from the point of view of US higher education institutions. The second study was commissioned by the European Commission. This report presents a synthesis of the two study findings. The studies had for objective to:

- Analyse the use of credit systems for mobility between the EU and the US;
- Identify good practice for enhancing transparency and recognition of study abroad periods between the EU and the US.

### Approach and Methodology

To translate the broad questions into a feasible methodological framework, the study had to clarify and delimit certain conceptual issues around the theme of credit systems.

#### Types of credit recognition covered

The study looked at the use of credit and credit recognition for:

- Entry into higher education programmes (the theme of qualification recognition was also covered under this topic);
- Granting exemption and recognising credit when a period of study was undertaken abroad. This covered situations of organised mobility as well as free-movers' mobility (outside an agreement); and
- Joint or double degrees where students have to comply with the requirements of two or more higher education institutions.

The study did not look at award of credit for purposes of recognition of prior learning. It did not cover situations where students have the possibility to be granted credit and exemption because they have achieved relevant knowledge, skills and competences through work or other non-formal or informal learning activities.

#### Geographical scope and the type of institutions covered

As described below, the main sources of information for the two studies were stakeholder interviews and case studies. To identify the potential case studies and stakeholder interviewees, the EU research team first selected nineteen EU countries in which web-sites of higher education institutions were screened. These countries were selected to represent a broad geographical coverage (north-south-east-west and centre), large, medium and small countries, countries with different higher education systems and traditions with using credit. Stakeholder interviews were carried out in fourteen countries and case studies in thirteen countries using the same criteria for country coverage. The US research team selected nine Higher Education Institutions (HEI) based on US geographical location, institution size, and 2008-09 ranking of US students doing mid-length (semester) or short-term study abroad. In addition five HEI's who participate in the EU-FIPSE Atlantis initiative and offer simultaneous or dual degrees (five different disciplines), and three non-HEI private providers of study abroad were covered. Stakeholder interviews were carried out with key directors of study abroad offices in these 17 cases, and web-sites were analysed as the key data for evaluating best practices in the how credit was recognised and transparency for study abroad was provided to students. To ensure that a broad range

of higher education institutions' types were covered in the case studies, both EU and US study teams made sure that the following HEI's were all present in the sample:

- Large comprehensive universities;
- Smaller specialised higher education institutions;
  - Including higher education institutions with a technical focus.

All the higher education institutions covered in the case studies had already developed cooperation with the US or EU and all had clear focus on strengthening their international activities, including through students' mobility.

### Understanding of credit and challenges in credit recognition between EU and US systems

The study sought to illustrate how credit systems facilitate the recognition and transparency of study abroad periods. To this end it was necessary to use a broad understanding of the concept of credit and to identify the systems' dimensions and key differences between EU and US HEIs that pose particular challenges in the recognition and transfer of credit from study abroad. Those challenges are:

- Establishing trust between HEI faculty members on the quality of courses at the exchange partner, especially when credits will fulfil required programme components. Key differences between EU and US education systems described below make the development of mutual trust a greater challenge than when exchanging students between very similar systems.
- Differences between the EU and the US in the way the degree and programme components relate to each other and the related lack of understanding of course choices available to students between the EU and the US HEI offers:
  - In the EU there is little distinction between the requirements for a specific programme components and the requirements for a generic degree (all courses fulfil both requirements simultaneously). In US such distinction exists. Consequently EU students studying abroad seek courses that fulfil the conditions of the specific programme they are preparing.
  - In the US Bachelor degrees include distinct components of general education courses, and major/minor programme courses, with majors further broken down into required core, optional, and elective components. There is a distinction between the generic requirements of the Bachelor degree (in terms of general education credit) and those of the specific programme (major and minor requirements). Due to this structure, US students abroad tend to take courses for general education and electives rather than for core courses related to their minor or major.
- Difference in how learning is levelled and structured between the EU and US degrees.
  - In the EU Bachelor degree consists of a first cycle of 3 or 4 years, followed by a second cycle of 1 or 2 years at the Masters level, and a third cycle of at least 3 years at the Doctoral level.
  - In the US the Bachelor degree consists of 4 years divided into 2 years of lower-division general education requirements, and 2 years of upper-division major/minor programmes, followed by 1-2 years for the Masters level, and 3 years for the Doctoral level.

Without explanation, these distinctions may be confusing for students and HEI staff.

HEI faculty members and staff experience difficulty in establishing equivalence between courses taken at the abroad HEI and courses at the home HEI due to:

- Difference in the basis for describing the learning content of a course or programme component
  - In the EU: programmes are increasingly described through learning outcomes which define the content of programme components in terms of what students will successfully perform after completion of the course (and its assessment), though descriptions of syllabi are also available.
  - In the US course syllabi include curricula/teaching inputs expressed as topics to be studied, texts to be read, and assessments or evaluation procedures.
- Difference in the amount/volume of learning as expressed through a numeric value (credit points);

- In the main EU credit system (ECTS) the amount/volume of learning measured by credit points includes all study time (workload) both in an out of a classroom or laboratory setting that is typically needed to reach the required learning outcomes.
- In the US the amount/volume of learning measured covers only contact time in a classroom or laboratory.

HEI faculty members and staff experience difficulty in equating performance of students across different EU and US systems of evaluation, or grading:

- In the EU there is a large variety of grading approaches but in general performance grades are distributed more in line with a normal curve with mean and median around the 55-59<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- In the US performance grades are distributed more in a positively skewed curve with mean around the 75-80<sup>th</sup> percentile.

### Methodology

The EU and US studies were based on a qualitative methodology that consisted of the following:

- **Screening and analysis of web-sites:** The EU team screened over 100 higher education institutions in 19 EU countries to identify those institutions which appeared to have developed approaches to credit recognition in the framework of student exchanges with the US. The screening also aimed to find out whether and what information on credit transfer was available from higher education institutions' web-sites. In addition the final reports of a sample of Atlantis projects were reviewed. The US team screened the top 40 universities ranked by Institute of International Education (IIE) according to the total number of students who study abroad for mid-length (semester) and short-term durations, and also screened all the 41 Atlantis awards for dual/simultaneous degree programme development from the 2006-2010 award years. Fourteen universities were selected (nine from the IIE list and five from the Atlantis awards, for thorough analysis of university study abroad websites for the description of key practices in credit recognition and transparency for student mobility.
- **Stakeholder interviews: The EU team conducted** 20 semi-structured interviews with persons from organisations/units supporting mobility with the US or those supporting credit and qualification recognition (in particular a number of ENIC/NARIC centres). The objective of these interviews was to identify any information at national level about guidelines for dealing with credit recognition with the US or typical issues encountered. The US team initiated email interviews with a representative from each of the 14 HEI's and 3 private providers, and completed email, phone, or face to face interviews with 10 representatives. The objective of these interviews was to clarify website information on study abroad and to seek fuller answers to key questions regarding credit recognition;
- **Case studies:** practices concerning recognition of credit from the US and the EU in fourteen EU HEI's, and 14 US HEI's with 3 US private providers used by over 500 HEI's, were selected for an in-depth review. The focus of the case studies was to identify how higher education institutions recognise, evaluate, and transfer credit, what tools and protocols are in place, and to gather some views from staff and students and to identify main success factors. The EU case studies were based on 82 semi-structured interviews with international coordinators (28), staff in charge of credit recognition (22) and where possible students (32). The US case studies were based on the analysis of website transparency supplemented by semi-structured interviews with international coordinators (10) to clarify inadequate website information.

### Student mobility between the EU and the US: Background information

EU-27 countries are the first destination of US students who choose to study abroad. According to the Open Doors survey data there were more than 135,000 US students who have spent a period of their studies in an EU country in 2009. Note that this data does not cover US students who are enrolled for full degree studies in the EU. It covers different forms of student mobility, including students who take part in courses organised and accredited by US institution in Europe. In other words, not all of these 135,000 US students have benefited from credit transfer from an EU higher education institution towards their US home institution.



There is no comprehensive data about mobility of EU students towards the US. The most representative figure comes also from the Open Doors survey according to which, in 2009, there were more than 57,000 EU students enrolled in US higher education institutions (data according to type of visa). The US are the most important destination country of EU students when intra-EU mobility is excluded.

EU higher education institutions are important partners for US universities that develop joint or double degree programmes.

The following frequently cited obstacles to student mobility have been identified by existing research on this topic and apply also to EU-US mobility:

- Lack of easily accessible and comparable information about study opportunities in EU countries and about the education systems themselves;
- Financial concerns – in particular for EU students the option of going to spend a period of study in the US remains a significantly more costly than being mobile within the EU where most institutions do not charge fees and where opportunities for co-funded exchanges are greater;
- Visa policies for students and related work permit policies for spouses or students;
- Academic barriers covering credit recognition but also aspects such as requirements in terms of examinations needed to enter higher education programmes or language examinations.

This study was building on the existing evidence which shows that credit recognition and recognition of qualifications matters for student mobility (in US terms, qualifications refers to diplomas and degrees held that establish a qualification to enter the next higher level of study). Students who do not have clear information about whether and how credit from abroad will be recognised or those who fear that their qualifications may not be adequately recognised when pursuing their studies abroad are less likely to be mobile or will opt for those countries where these risks are perceived as being lower.

## Characteristics of credit systems in the EU and the US

The use of credit systems in higher education is widespread both in the US as well as in Europe. In the US, the use of credit systems has a very long tradition and the origins of credit systems in education and training can be traced back to the US higher education system. On the other hand, in some European countries the use of credit is a recent development. Though most US institutions use a common approach to defining credit, there is no top-down initiative aiming at making credit systems in US higher education converge. In Europe, on the other hand, the top down initiative stemming from the Bologna Process ministerial decisions has definitely accelerated the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Nowadays, ECTS is the most commonly used credit system in Europe. Those higher education institutions that do not use ECTS for internal purposes (that is for example the case of many UK institutions) often use it for credit transfer within the EU. Having said that, efforts are still required to make sure that ECTS is implemented in a homogeneous manner across the EU as the extent to which the ECTS core principles are implemented in practice still varies greatly (between countries but also between institutions).

The most commonly used credit system in the US is the 'semester hours of credit' system. Table 1.1 below compares the main characteristics of this credit system with ECTS. The recognition and transfer of credit issues examined in this study are based on the major conceptual or structural differences between how credit is assigned to course content in US and EU HEI's, rather than on the numeric conversion of credit points. The key differences were already outlined above:

- The use of learning outcomes to describe and define the content of programme components when using ECTS, while US programme components are generally described through curricula/teaching inputs such as the topics to be studied in a course. There is an assessment movement in US higher education to include in course syllabi a description of the materials students will produce and how these assess specific programme objectives;
- The use of contact hours in a classroom or laboratory as a basis for calculating credit value in the US while in ECTS, student workload covering a full range of learning activities is expected to be used; and

- Standardised use of two levels of lower-division general education courses (designated as 100 and 200), and upper-division major programme courses (designated as 300 and 400) at the Bachelor level in the US, while in Europe there is no common approach to describe the level of courses other than defining whether they are Bachelor or Masters level. This is in part due to the fact that EU programmes usually do not include general education courses as it is the case in the US;

In terms of commonalities:

- Both systems have defined a standard number of credits for a full time academic year (60 in ECTS and 30 in the US system);
- In both systems the use of semesters as basic structuring elements is most common; and
- In both systems there is usually clarity about who is in charge of credit recognition from another HEI or from abroad at the level of the faculty or department. This facilitates the practical arrangements.

Another important issue for this study is the difference in amount of flexibility in course selection offered to EU and US students in their home HEI. Generally, a student that has greater flexibility in selecting courses at the home HEI can have an easier time finding courses that will transfer back from the host HEI and maintain normal time progress to earning the degree/qualification. Mobility can be limited when students have little flexibility in home programme course requirements because it can be very difficult to find a host HEI course that equally fulfils the requirement when evaluated by the home HEI programme faculty. In general, the US system, especially at undergraduate level, gives students more flexibility in choosing optional components than what can be observed in the EU. This is a consequence of both the requirements of general education in US degrees, and the common structure of major programmes as having both a required common core of courses and student selected sub-emphases that are fulfilled through optional or elective course choices. However, in Europe, there is no common approach to this issue. Some higher education institutions have a rather liberal approach to this point and predefine only about 50% of a programme through core courses, while others define firmly a much larger share of the programme. Important differences in this form of flexibility exists within both EU and US universities between the disciplinary departments, where sciences and professionally accredited studies tend towards more conservative approaches, and arts and humanities tend towards more liberal approaches.

Table 1.1 Comparison of the ECTS with the US semester hours of credit system

	ECTS	US – semester hours of credit system
<b>Main characteristics</b>	Based on learning outcomes that define what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to do for each programme component combined with the expected student workload to achieve these learning outcomes. Workload covers all learning activities (contact hours, projects, practical work, autonomous study, etc.)	Based on contact hours with teaching staff No specific requirements for defining the content of courses. In general courses are defined through curricula that emphasise the teaching inputs as topics or objectives for learning, rather than specific outcomes to be demonstrated by students who gain proficiency with the course content
<b>Level is expressed in terms of</b>	In general, courses are either at Bachelor or Masters level. Institutions have their own approaches to defining prerequisites and there is no commonly shared system of levels to differentiate among courses within a study programme.	Each course has an assigned level. In general five levels are used (100, 200, 300, 400 and 500). Courses at the 100 and 200 level are lower-division introductory general education. Courses at the 300 and 400 level are upper-division major and minor programme courses. Masters study overlaps Bachelor level 400 courses as well as including 500 level courses. Doctoral study is level 500 and above.
<b>Quantification of credit (number of credit)</b>	ECTS is based on the principle that a full academic year of study is equivalent to 60 ECTS. It is generally accepted that one ECTS credit is	<i>Lectures:</i> 15 hours of formal instructions (one hour per week) = 1 semester credit; <i>Laboratory course:</i> 2 or 3 times more than a lecture course. Thus, 1 semester credit =

<b>points/credits)</b>	equivalent to 25 to 30 hours of student workload. There is no 'standard size of course components'. Course components can have different credit values from one higher education institution to another.	2 or 3 times 15hours of formal instructions <i>Practice course</i> : 3 or 4 times more than a lecture course. Thus, 1 semester credit = 3 or 4 times 15hours of formal instructions.  Full academic year is usually around 30 credits.
<b>Characteristics of programme components</b>	There is a variety of types of course components (lectures, practical seminars, laboratory work, work placements, etc.) and no common approach to the way these are defined or how their size is expressed in terms of credit value. Some higher education institutions have modularised programmes but the approach to modularisation is not homogeneous. Most institutions use a semester as a basic structural element, but some work with trimesters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Separate courses typically exist for each type of course component (lectures, laboratory, practice-internship placement). However, a single course can include hours of contact divided between multiple components in any proportion.</li> </ul> <p>An academic year is divided into two semesters. Summer is commonly used as a third semester each year.</p>

## General guidelines about credit recognition

The Lisbon Convention on recognition of foreign qualifications and periods of study abroad defines certain basic principles for recognition of credit concerning both: full qualifications or shorter periods of mobility. Under the Lisbon Convention the comparison of qualifications or periods of study abroad in view of recognition should be based on the concept of substantial difference. Recognition should be granted unless substantial difference can be demonstrated. Evidence from other studies shows that it is not clear whether the rules embedded in the Lisbon Convention are actually known and used at the level of higher education institutions. The case studies from this analysis provide very little evidence that the concept of substantial difference is used in practice by EU or US higher education institutions for credit recognition. In general persons interviewed did not refer to this concept and it does not appear to be embedded in explicit procedures. However, the fact that persons in charge of credit recognition do not explicitly refer to the concept of substantial difference does not mean they are necessarily looking for narrow equivalence. In fact, several case studies show that the approach to credit recognition can be rather liberal (great variety in terms of content of courses taken abroad) can be accepted when the two institutions have well developed cooperation, high levels of trust and clear agreements in place. The concept of substantial difference could be used more systematically when it comes to granting credit recognition for core (major) programme courses, in particular where recognition of core courses taken abroad is proving difficult.

## Recognition of credit from the US in the EU

Overall, the analysis of case study evidence shows that studied EU institutions are systematically making sure that credit recognition from the US is enabled:

- All the universities studied in the case studies consider it as a norm that a mobility that lasts one semester or more would entitle students to credit recognition (though the way this is arranged differs greatly);
- All the universities have clear processes in place to support credit recognition and these processes apply to mobility within the EU, but also from anywhere else including the US. As European higher education institutions have strengthened their international focus over the past decade or two, they have also systematised and professionalised the management of student mobility;
- The facility with which EU institutions arrange credit recognition from the US depends very much on the understanding the people in charge have of the US higher education system (including the credit system) and the level of trust (which is related to the volume and frequency of exchanges with the same university in the US) between the partner institutions.

From the data available, the difficulties in credit recognition (for organised mobility) between EU and the US do not seem significantly greater than the difficulties students encounter with credit recognition

within the EU. It is true, that the EU and US credit systems are different and the ways they are used at institution level can also vary. However, ultimately the use of credit in the US is systematic as it is in the EU. When a person understands the US system it becomes much easier to understand how different higher education institutions use it. In other words, a lot of the obstacles related to credit recognition from the US to Europe can be overcome when an understanding of the US higher education system, qualifications structures and the use of credit is developed. The differences between credit systems in the EU and the US are an initial obstacle because people on both ends have to get familiar with the way the other system works, but there are no systemic features of the two systems that would render credit recognition impossible. All the examples analysed show that there are no obstacles in transferring credit from the US to the EU that could not be overcome. It is important to note that this does not mean that all credit achieved in the US can be recognised in a given EU institution and vice versa (see below).

Beyond the difference in conceptualisation and use of credit and the way EU and US qualifications are conceived, another major obstacle to credit recognition from the US towards EU can be found in the way qualifications and study programmes are structured in EU higher education institutions. This obstacle is not specific to mobility with the US but applies to any longer term student mobility. Though ECTS is broadly used in Europe, there are major differences between countries, institutions and even departments in how much flexibility for credit accumulation is given to students. In general, it is easier to recognise credit from abroad, especially from a system that has a rather different approach to education and conception of courses, in programmes where students are given flexibility. However, it is possible that a liberal approach cannot fit all study disciplines, in particular, it may be difficult to put in place when the study programme has to comply with strict requirements of an external quality assurance body (for example, in medicine).

The case studies also show that the obstacles created by the stringent nature of study programmes in certain systems, universities or disciplines, can be overcome and even credit for core (major) programme courses can be easily recognised if the HEIs ensure:

- Careful selection of partner institution to make sure that the quality and level of outcomes are coherent and meet the requirements of both institutions;
- Flexible comparison of courses based on the identification of substantial difference rather than looking for too strict equivalence;
- Good quality course description made available to the partner institutions; and
- Progressive development of mutual trust through exchanges of students and staff and continued communication.

The study identified two broad models higher education institutions use in organising credit recognition from the US, though these models can be applied more generally. The two models are compared in table 1.2 below. The models present two extreme cases but intermediary approaches and varieties between programmes at the same HEI also exist.

Table 1.2 Comparison of the liberal and conservative approach to credit recognition

	Liberal approach	Conservative approach
<b>Main characteristic</b>	Students can freely choose from the courses offered by the partner institution or department (possibly with restrictions on level of courses to take)	Students are given a list of courses to choose from or the courses selected are systematically compared with courses offered in the home HEI
<b>Basis for deciding whether the student can take the selected course</b>	Some relevance for the degree that the student is preparing. In the most liberal approaches students are given free choice of courses	Equivalent relevance between the course in the host HEI and an comparable course in the home HEI
<b>Decision is based on</b>	Information such as the course title or a brief course description	More detailed comparison of the course description (depending on what information is available: learning outcomes and/or teaching inputs)

<b>Typical situation where this approach is applied</b>	The study programme in the home HEI is itself based on a liberal approach to credit accumulation: students have important freedom to choose courses and a broad range of options are available to them	The study programme in the home HEI is rather 'tightly' defined with a large share of core/compulsory components. The study programme is a joint or double degree, or cooperative agreement between faculty in a similar major programme at both the EU and US HEI.
<b>Credit recognition is managed by</b>	International coordinators in each department or even centrally at the level of the university	Individual teaching staff members in charge of courses with which the foreign course is compared
<b>Approach to transfer of credit points</b>	Using a conversion table between ECTS and US credit points or simply by requiring students to take the same number of courses in the US as what is required for a semester in the EU (assuming this is equivalent to a semester workload in the home HEI)	According to the number of credit points the home institution course is allocated
<b>Advantages</b>	Flexibility given to students Students have the opportunity take on courses not offered in their home HEI Lower workload for those in charge of recognition than in the other model	Suits study programmes which are based on a large number of compulsory components Ensures full coherence of the pathway Minimises the risk that students choose options that are of marginal relevance to their degree
<b>Risks</b>	This approach works best where there is a very high level of trust between the two institutions. If the level of trust is not sufficiently developed there is a risk that the too liberal approach could undermine the credibility of the mobility period	There is a risk that the staff in charge of recognition would be seeking too detailed equivalence rather than focusing on substantial difference The need to compare courses on case by case basis can be resource intensive Students can miss important opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and competence not offered in their home HEI

The fact that the US credit system is based on contact hours rather than workload, as it is the case with ECTS, is not a structural obstacle and all institutions find solutions to translate the US metrics into the ECTS (or another) metrics. The solutions differ because the ways credit recognition is envisaged and used in the home higher education institution vary greatly. For some institutions the underlying approach is the assumption that credit for one full time academic year in one system equals the credit required for one full time academic year in another system. Others prefer a course-by-course comparison and translation. The following approaches were identified in the case studies:

- Some institutions compare the course from the host institution (in the US or elsewhere) to an equivalent course in the home institution and the student is in practice (on his/her transcript) awarded the credit for the course of the home institution;
- Some institutions compare the course from the host institution to a course of similar nature and give the student the number of credit points that the home institution course has (but it is clear from the transcript that the course passed is that of a foreign institution);
- Some make a rough estimation: if in the US the student is required to pass four courses of total value of X US credits per semester and in the home institution, they are required to pass 5 courses equivalent to 30 ECTS, each course passed in the US is allocated 7.5 ECTS;
- Some use conversion rates and these can differ; and finally
- Others do not translate the credit on course-by-course basis and simply state that for two full semesters in the US the student has been achieved 60ECTS.

There is no best way to approach this issue. All of the above approaches have proven to work and each certainly has strengths and weaknesses that are for each single higher education institution to consider. The use of one approach or another will depend on:

- How the credit system of the home institution is conceptualised (e.g. what is the importance of points compared to accumulation of course components and learning outcomes; what are the rules in terms of credit accumulation);
- The visibility the home institution wishes to give to the study period abroad on documents such as transcripts;
- Legal constraints (how can credit from abroad be recognised), but also practical constraints related to aspects such as ICT systems managing learners' transcripts, etc.

ECTS is not predominantly about the workload as expressed in the form of credit points, but an important feature of ECTS are learning outcomes. The use of learning outcomes to describe and define courses is not common in the US. Students ultimately achieve knowledge, skills and competence, but these are not described in the course description or their transcript. One could say that when international coordinators from EU institutions recognise credit from abroad based on a US course description, they make certain assumptions about the learning outcomes of an individual based on their expert judgement of the course inputs. However, there is no evidence in the case studies that the persons in charge of credit recognition would see the absence of learning outcomes descriptions from US course descriptions as a major obstacle. In the more liberal approaches to credit recognition this is often based on a very broad judgement of whether the course appears relevant based on the teaching inputs described (or sometimes just the title and the level). In the more conservative approaches, a more detailed analysis of the course description comparability with the home course is made. While certain people in charge complained during some interviews that the US course descriptions they have worked with were not always of sufficiently good quality, they did not specifically mention the lack of learning outcomes. The complaints rather concerned the details of the course curriculum and the reading lists (in other words the inputs). This does not mean that learning outcomes do not matter for credit recognition in the context of organised student mobility; if the institutions observed that the returning students did not achieve new knowledge, skills and competence, it is unlikely they would continue exchanges with a given institution. Most higher education institutions in Europe give students recommendations about the level of courses to choose in the US, meaning that they express certain requirements about the level of learning outcomes expected. Beyond the issue of level, they do not require any detailed comparisons of learning outcomes.

In some of the case studies the use of learning outcomes is a fairly new element of programme design. One could say that the reason why the staff in charge of recognition is not particularly concerned about the lack of outcomes description is because they are not yet fully used to working with this concept. However, even in those examples where the use of learning outcomes is well established, there is no evidence that the lack of learning outcomes descriptions would be a major obstacle to credit recognition from the US.

Regarding the recognition of prerequisites, a large share of case studies noted the fact that mobile EU master's students were not able to enrol in graduate courses in the US. Not all EU institutions consider this as a problem. In fact, some believe that it is fair to expect these students to take courses that are at level 400 (or even 300) in the US. In most US HEI's, courses at the 400 level also compose as much as 50% of the credits in master's level degrees. However, this was seen as an issue in particular for the development of dual and joint degrees.

## Recognition of credit from the EU in the US

The analysis of case studies indicates that US universities encourage study abroad and have established offices for education abroad to organise and facilitate the institutional processes for credit recognition and transfer (called articulation). The following points follow from the analysis of the case studies:

- The process of recognising credit from study abroad at EU HEI's is the same as transferring credit from another US HEI. Courses are evaluated by a designated faculty member within the closest similar discipline using course descriptions and materials provided by the student. Some evidence exists that lower-division courses may be recognised by administrative personal and "general" credit in the same or closest discipline awarded at the home HEI. Clearly, upper-division and major/minor programme courses are evaluated by departmental representatives and credit is

awarded for an equivalent home HEI course and the home course, not the EU course, is listed on the transcript. This process is generally named “articulation” and covers the process of establishing sufficient equivalence between courses offered by any other HEI, national or international. Free-movers submit transcripts for the evaluation of transfer EU credit to admissions offices, and not to international programmes offices, so some differences in evaluation processes can occur.

- Study abroad offices have developed websites with a range of transparency regarding the selection of appropriate study abroad programmes and courses. A few HEI websites provide a queried data base in which students can enter a home HEI course, or home major/minor, and learn of EU locations with already articulated courses for credit transfer. With these dynamic sites, students can often also go the other direction and enter an EU location and find courses that fulfil a home course. While dynamic queried websites for study abroad planning are desirable, most of the case studied HEIs provide only a static list of courses that have been articulated between EU-US HEIs over the past five years.
- Study abroad offices have developed websites with a range of transparency regarding the process of accomplishing a study abroad experience. Many US HEI’s have online applications for study abroad that include advising links and documents for the pre-approval of the courses proposed for enrolment abroad. The process for seeking transfer of courses when returning to the home HEI is also described, and in some cases is managed online and students can upload materials from their abroad course to support the evaluation. For some HEI’s a study abroad learning plan must be signed before departure by advisors within the student’s major programme, as well as an international advisor.
- Most all of the HEI’s include a menu of study abroad programmes administered by private external providers such as IES, CIEE, CIS, AESOP, or Arcadia University. Students are approved by their home HEI to participate in the external provider programme abroad, and all arrangements are handled by the external provider, including the recognition of credit from the host HEI. The process of credit recognition by external providers is highly similar to the process used in an HEI, in that faculty boards are established drawing members from the participating US and EU HEI’s, and these faculty make site visits and evaluate course materials to articulate credit equivalence between the participating US and EU HEI’s. The articulated transfer credit is communicated by the provider to the home HEI, and if a transcript is required for a free-moving student, the provider provides one from a university who has agreed to serve the provider as a “school of record.” The school of record articulates study abroad credit to their catalogue of courses.
- The recognition of grades from study abroad courses varies widely across the case study HEI’s. Some HEI’s only transfer credit and not grades, although they require that the EU course is passed for credit to be awarded. Some HEI’s give students the option to request before going abroad to take the abroad courses as pass-fail, although this option is often provided within a home HEI policy that grants students an option to take a certain number of all degree courses, home or host, as pass-fail. Some HEI’s require the conversion of grades and they use commonly accepted formulas between UK-EU-US grade systems, or conversion formulas developed by faculty members who have established specific study abroad programmes in a major/minor programme of study. Only a few case HEIs provided transparent access to grade conversion tables for students.
- Credit recognition is relatively easy for electives and lower-division general education courses taken abroad. For upper-division major and minor programme courses, credit recognition is facilitated by cooperative agreements designed jointly by the relevant major faculty members from the EU and US HEIs as in dual degree programmes. Fulfilling core major programme requirements through study abroad is most difficult outside of articulated faculty agreements, whereas fulfilling optional or elective major programme requirements is easier.
- Contrary to the perception of some EU feedback in interviews, the recognition of credit abroad in majors or minors that have professional accreditation is not more difficult than the recognition of credit in any other major or minor. Professional bodies that accredit programmes of study that result in professional licensure for US occupations do not limit the number of credits that can be taken abroad, but only require the careful evaluation of equivalence to the approved programme of

study by the disciplinary faculty at the home HEI. The success of Atlantis dual degree programmes in professional areas of engineering, education, and health demonstrate that carefully articulated programmes of study that include both home and abroad credits do meet licensure requirements.

The key difficulty in recognising credit abroad is not limited to study abroad in the EU and may actually be less problematic for students who study abroad at EU HEI's. This difficulty is the ownership of the home HEI major programme of study by the faculty who teach in that home programme. Many US HEI's are implementing residence requirements desired by faculty who wish to ensure that their students have a sufficient number of credits from their home university, especially at the upper-division 300-400 level in the major programme. This strong sense of ownership parallels the EU study team identification of "conservative" approaches to credit recognition. Some major-minor programme faculty take a more "liberal" approach and allow students greater optional course selection, and some take a more "conservative" approach and have a much larger set of core requirements for the programme. These trust issues between faculty members in US and EU HEI's have been resolved in a positive way through the EU-FIPSE Atlantis programme grantees who design mobility programmes that include the recognition of credit from study abroad partners; however, it might be the case that HEI's who seek to develop Atlantis programmes are already in HEIs with a more "liberal" approach to the development of major programmes that can include a broad range of global perspectives and not a narrowly defined disciplinary core of courses.

Even though the US case studies demonstrate best practices in the transparency of credit recognition to encourage and facilitate study abroad, many US HEI's do not provide adequate processes, information, or support before, during, and after study abroad experiences. The following obstacles remain at many US HEI's:

- Insufficient use of learning agreements (or equivalent) that students complete with departmental and international advisor consultation before departure. Consequently, US students have no guarantee that the credit gained in Europe will fulfil a degree requirement thus not delay their progress towards graduation. The process of recognising credit upon return is not always transparent;
- Insufficient guidance as to what courses to choose and how the credit for courses will be recognised until return, in part because the articulation of courses between partner US and EU HEIs is not readily available to students in online databases or lists. Students in HEI sponsored study abroad and free-movers typically apply for transfer credit in different university offices (international versus admissions), and at some case HEIs this evaluation process is not coordinated and may be done by different staff;
- Insufficient transparency in how grades will be translated even in those cases where adequate information is provided for students to choose a pass-fail option for their study abroad courses.

On the other hand, US students enjoy a lot of freedom in choosing courses at the EU HEI when they only seek to fulfil home HEI degree requirements for 1) general education, 2) electives, or 3) optional courses for a minor or major programme that takes a more liberal approach (though they are often limited by the availability of the course in the English language). Fulfilling core major and minor programme courses remains a significant challenge that depends on the level of trust between the programme faculty from both the US HEI and the EU HEI. In the US case studies, this trust seems to be best established through professional collaborations, mutual visitations and faculty exchanges, and curricular partnerships similar to the EU-FIPSE Atlantis mobility and dual degree programme.

## Recommendations

Table 1.3 below presents the key recommendations made, according to the type of target group at whom they are addressed.

Table 1.3 Summary of study recommendations

Target Group	Recommendation
<b>Recommendations for the EU-US</b>	Discuss how to increase the collaboration and trust between faculty members from EU and US HEIs in the development of programmes that integrate study abroad for core



<b>policy dialogue</b>	major and minor components as well as elective and optional components
	Set up an exchange about quality assurance in the EU and the US at both policy maker and practitioner level to ensure the recognition by professional licensure and accreditation bodies of study abroad components in the home HEI degree
	Exchange good practice on protocols and procedures to support 'recognised' mobility of students, based on the acceptance of EU qualifications and US degrees for study abroad at the next cycle, and the creation a transfer credit data exchange between US and EU HEI's for study abroad courses that have been articulated.
<b>Recommendations for EU and US stakeholders supporting mobility and in charge of qualification recognition</b>	Continue emphasising credit recognition as part of mobility as key elements of students' mobility
	Assess the use of the concept of substantial difference in credit recognition for mobile students and promote the use of this approach by faculty members who evaluate study abroad courses to articulate them for transfer credit.
	Prepare a document supported by examples of how the US degree qualifications and credit system compares to the home system in a given EU country to facilitate mobility at the next cycle.
<b>Recommendations for EU and US higher education institutions</b>	If possible adopt a liberal approach to credit recognition for core, optional, elective, and general education programme components, especially in organised student mobility. If it is not possible to adopt a liberal approach compare courses based on substantial difference.
	Do not consider the differences in credit points allocation or grading systems between the EU and the US as an obstacle
	Develop/ maintain clear protocols around credit recognition from abroad across offices and departments in the institution, and improve the content description of courses taken by exchange students to enable better evaluation of credit
	Support EU-US exchanges among faculty and staff in charge of recognition to build trust between faculty partners, to integrate study abroad components into major and minor degree programmes, and to improve consistency of the credit articulation within the institution



# Part A: Analysis of the use of credit systems between the EU and the US

## Study findings

## 1 Introduction

Credit recognition is an important element for supporting students' mobility. This study analyses the way credit recognition is arranged between EU and US higher education institutions in the framework of organised student exchanges and also when it comes to mobility of 'free movers' (i.e. students who are mobile outside the framework of an inter-institutional agreement or a programme). The study was commissioned with a view to address the following issues by:

- Giving an overview of the role and use of credit systems in supporting higher education student mobility between the EU and the US;
- Identifying and analysing a pool of examples of good practice on how European higher education institutions ensure credit recognition from the US; and
- Informing the policy dialogue and the work of practitioners on possible improvements regarding credit recognition between the EU and the US.

The study has been carried out as part of the policy dialogue between the European Commission and US Department of Education.

This report follows the below structure.

Part A of this report presents the findings of this study. After an initial introduction of the general policy context for this assignment it is structured as follows:

Section 2	Gives an overview of the EU-US cooperation in education and training;
Section 3	Presents the methodology and approach followed in this study;
Section 4	Describes the background information about EU and US mobility and joint degrees;
Section 5	Explains the key aspects of credit systems in the EU and the US;
Section 6	Discusses the findings of this study with regard to credit recognition between the EU and the US;
Section 7	Summarises the conclusions of the analysis;
Section 8	Presents the recommendations arising from the research;

Part B contains a full description of all case studies carried out under this assignment and which fed into the writing of this report,

The Annexes are structured as follows:

- Annex 1 Contains additional data about EU-US student mobility
- Annex 2 Presents information about EU interviewees' profiles
- Annex 3 Contains the topic guides for EU interviews
- Annex 4 Contains examples of good practice from US Case studies
- Annex 5 Contains the bibliography

## 2 EU-US cooperation in education and training: Policy background

This study was carried out in the context of the cooperation in the field of higher education and vocational education and training between the EU and the US. The cooperation dates back to the adoption of the Agreement between the European Union and the United States of America establishing a cooperation programme in higher education and vocational education and training<sup>1</sup> in 1995. This agreement set the basis for the first phase of the Atlantis programme (1995-2000). The Atlantis programme was renewed based on subsequent agreements for the period 2000-2006 and later on for the period 2006-2013<sup>2</sup>. The Atlantis programme is further described below.

The 2011 interim-evaluation of the external cooperation agreements in higher education, training and youth with the US and Canada<sup>3</sup> presents the relationship between the overall objectives of the EU-US cooperation in this area and the specific actions as shown in Figure 2.1 below. The figure shows that the overall aims of the EU-US cooperation are mainly motivated by the willingness to develop mutual understanding and the need to support competitiveness of both parties. The benefits are expected to occur at individual level (persons who take part in mobility), institutional level (education institutions which engage in cooperation) and system level, as a spin off effect of the institutional cooperation.

Figure 2.1 Objectives and actions of EU-US agreements



Source: Ecorys (2011)

<sup>1</sup> European Council (1995) '95/487/EC: Council Decision of 23 October 1995 concerning the conclusion of an Agreement between the European Community and the United States of America establishing a cooperation programme in higher education and vocational education and training': <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/Notice.do?mode=dbl&lang=en&ihtmlang=en&lng1=en.fr&lng2=da.de.el.en.es.fi.fr.it.nl.pt.sv.&>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2001) 'Agreement between the European Community and the United States of America renewing a programme of cooperation in higher education and vocational education and training': <http://www.ipex.eu/IPEXL-WEB/dossier/dossier.do?code=CNS&year=2006&number=0061&appLng=EN>.

<sup>3</sup> Ecorys (2011) *Interim-evaluation of external cooperation agreements in higher education, training and youth with the US and Canada*: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/evalreports/education/2011/extreport\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2011/extreport_en.pdf)

### 2.1.1 Atlantis programme

The Atlantis programme aims to contribute to the overall objectives of EU-US cooperation; in particular, to enhance mutual understanding and improve the quality of the human resource development of the EU and the US<sup>4</sup>. This is expected to be achieved through the development of bilateral transatlantic student exchanges and joint curricula. Credit recognition is a crucial part of the programme which identifies as one of its specific objectives the following:

*'To improve the quality of transatlantic student mobility by promoting transparency, mutual recognition of periods of study and training, and where appropriate, portability of credits'<sup>5</sup>.*

The Atlantis programme is a key pillar of the EU-US cooperation<sup>6</sup>. With an annual budget of EUR 4 to 5 million from each side, the Atlantis programme is implemented through consortia of higher education or vocational training institutions in the United States and the European Union. It is managed jointly by the European Commission through the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency and the US Department of Education.

The actions funded under this programme are<sup>7</sup>:

- **Transatlantic Degrees:** the programme supports partnerships between EU and US institutions to establish joint study programmes and exchanges of students and staff, in order to increase student mobility, innovation, curriculum development and academic recognition between the EU and the US. The joint study programme can concern common curriculum components as well as joint and double degrees. The aim of the programme was to fund 200 projects with 6,000 participants in mobility over eight years;
- **Excellence in Mobility projects:** these projects provide funding to joint consortia for short-term transatlantic mobility of students. They do not lead to the award of a joint or dual/double degree. This action also funds grants for students and staff;
- **Policy-oriented Measures:** the measure aims at enhancing collaboration in higher education and vocational training through comparative analysis and the promotion of dialogue on the recognition of qualifications and accreditation.

The Atlantis programme is also supported by the **Schuman-Fulbright scholarships**<sup>8</sup>. These allow qualified professionals to study, carry out research or to give lectures overseas. The EU part of the funding is EUR 320,000 per year, the US one is USD 260,000. An average of 22 grants is given to EU students and scholars per year, 17 to US students and scholars. The European Commission also supports a network of alumni students (OCEANS Network<sup>9</sup>) who took part in EU exchange programmes with countries outside Europe. The alumni network is seen as key in promoting awareness of EU cooperation programmes with these countries (Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and USA) and giving visibility to the programme actions.

### 2.1.2 EU-US policy dialogue on education and training

The European Commission engages in policy dialogue with a number of countries outside the EU<sup>10</sup> in order to exchange good practice and evidence about themes of common interest.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2006) 'Agreement between the European Community and the United States of America renewing a programme of cooperation in higher education and vocational education and training' [http://ec.europa.eu/education/eu-usa/doc1901\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/eu-usa/doc1901_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Idem

<sup>6</sup> Due to budget constraints on the US side, the Atlantis programme has been discontinued from 2011

<sup>7</sup> For more information see the European Commission website on the topic: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/eu-usa/doc1156\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/eu-usa/doc1156_en.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Fulbright-Schuman programme: <http://www.fulbrightschuman.eu/>

<sup>9</sup> Organisation for Cooperation, Exchange And Networking among Students:<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oceans-network.eu/>

<sup>10</sup> See the website of the European Commission on external cooperation in education and training [http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc1172\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc1172_en.htm)

Policy dialogue can take the form of high-level discussions between senior policy makers, but it can also take the form of a discussion with a broader group of policy makers, academics and practitioners. The policy-dialogue between the EU and the US has recently taken the form of an EU-US Education Policy Forum. It joins representatives from the European Commission and the US Department of Education with experts from the academic community.

The first two meetings of the forum have focused on:

- Strengthening education cooperation between the EU and the US; the future of higher education reforms; cooperation between university and businesses (October 2009, in Washington D.C<sup>11</sup>);
- Quality of higher education, schools and teacher development; the future need for skills (October 2010, in Brussels<sup>12</sup>).

A third meeting is to take place in November 2011 in Washington DC: based on the conclusions of the first two fora<sup>13</sup>. It should focus on the topics of access to higher education and in particular with regard to minority groups as well as the theme of qualifications frameworks. The key conclusions and messages from the two previous fora are summarised in Box 1.

### Box 1: Summary of conclusions and recommendations from EU-US education policy fora

The **Atlantis programme**: the first conclusions have been positive in making exchanges of students and staff easier. The forum stressed the need to further develop the programme while supporting it with an adequate budget. It also emphasised the expansion of the **entrepreneurship dimension** of the programme.

The **Joint EU-US Tuning study** was launched, as part of the project 'Tuning Educational Structures in Europe'<sup>14</sup>, in Indiana, Minnesota and Utah with the support of the Lumina Foundation with an aim 'to explore the feasibility of a larger EU-US Tuning scheme and to explore the possibility of applying the tuning approach to transatlantic degrees under the Atlantis programme'<sup>15</sup>. On the basis of a feasibility study, a follow-up was agreed which will lead to more transparency of learning outcomes in the higher education systems in US and the EU. It should also result in the development of a methodology for evaluating the change brought to higher education by the Tuning approach in the US and the EU (in terms of behaviour, learning and completion rates).

The **Alumni Association** – the OCEANS Network, links past and current participants of the Atlantis programme. The forum suggested the creation of transatlantic 'ambassadors'.

Finally, the forum has initiated three studies to review the situations in the EU and the US vis a vis specific themes, to exchange and compare good practices in order to increase the impact, relevance and visibility of programmes and policies. The themes of the studies are:

- a **Study on university-business cooperation** should present the situation challenges and issues, at the same time as highlight good practices on how

<sup>11</sup> European Commission (2009) *EU-US Education Policy Forum - Joint Statement - Washington, DC, October 8-9*: <http://www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc> - [www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc](http://www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc).

<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2010) *EU-US Education Policy Forum - Joint Statement - Brussels (Belgium), October 11, 2010*: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/eu-usa/doc/joint10.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> which recognised the role of education for the societal integration of migrants and the importance of policies promoting the equality of access of disadvantaged groups to higher education

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.unideusto.org/tuning/>

<sup>15</sup> European Commission (2009) *EU-US Education Policy Forum - Joint Statement - Washington, DC, October 8-9, 2009*: <http://www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc> - [www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc](http://www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc).

universities engage with businesses in the EU and the US;

- a **Study on anticipation and identification of labour market skills needs** identifying the mechanisms to ensure relevance and responsiveness of European and US education systems. It covers an overview of measures regarding anticipation, identification and validation of skills needs. A specific focus was put on the convergence of efforts to move towards education, training and qualifications systems based on competencies and learning outcomes.
- The **Study on higher education credit systems in the EU and the US** (this report).

These studies are expected to feed into the third forum. .

## 2.2 Objectives of the study

While the EU-US cooperation covers topics that are broader than students' mobility, mobility is an important aspect in making the desired changes happen. In order to ensure the quality of student mobility, but also to make sure that mobility is attractive for the students and that the added value of it is recorded and recognised, credit recognition should be ensured. This is why the EU-US policy dialogue suggested to analyse practices in the use of credit systems between the EU and the US and to identify good practice. The question of credit recognition is at the core of this study.

In this framework, this study aims at contributing to the cooperation between the EU and the US in the field of higher education and, by enhancing the understanding of the credit systems on the two sides of the Atlantic and their use in the transatlantic mobility of students. More particularly, it has the following objective to<sup>16</sup>:

*Undertake a comprehensive comparative study on higher education credit systems in Europe and the US; compare experiences and identify best practices for enhancing transparency and recognition of study abroad periods between the US and EU.*

The results of the study will feed into the policy dialogue on education and training between the US and Europe and should improve the recognition of credit across the Atlantic (both ways). They should feed into the funding programmes of the European Commission and the US Government which fund students' mobility and also feed into the practice of higher education institutions when it comes to mobility which takes place through other means.

The main target groups for this final report are:

- Policy makers in the US and the EU developing cooperation in higher education in this area;
- Practitioners within higher education institutions who deal with issues of recognition of credit;
- Multipliers such as organisations and bodies who support higher education institutions within a country in shaping their institutional policies for the recognition of credit.

This report presents the EU and US contributions to the above defined objectives. The EU and US teams conducted parallel studies on the same topic using similar methodology, and wrote separate final draft reports that were subsequently combined into this report (for more information see Section 3 on methodology).

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<sup>16</sup> Terms of reference



## 3 Methodology and approach

This report covers the use of credit systems between the EU and the US. As already mentioned in the previous section, this report combines the results of two parallel studies conducted by separate EU and US study teams. The EU study team conducted website analysis and extensive in-depth interviewing to construct fourteen EU HEI narrative case studies that each highlight a unique best practice; whereas, the US study team conducted in-depth website and document analysis with clarifying interviews to construct fourteen US HEI and three US private provider categorical case studies that offer best practices for mobility in the US. As this section will show, the interviews that provide evidence for the EU analysis were predominantly carried out with Europeans who have responsibilities for organising student exchanges and recognising credit and qualifications in the EU, those who have more strategic responsibilities in this regard as well as a number of students who took part in EU-US exchanges.

This section presents the scope of the study, followed by the conceptual framework used for the data collection and analysis and finally the methodology used to carry out the analyses in the EU and US.

### 3.1 Scope of the study

As presented in Section 1 of this report, the objectives of the study were formulated in a very broad manner. In order to carry out the analysis it was necessary to define a more restricted scope for this research.

The scope was defined with regard to the following main dimensions:

- Geographical coverage

It would not have been possible to carry out a comprehensive study on credit systems in Europe due to the great variety in how the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is implemented at the level of higher education institutions. The following approach was taken:

- In 19 EU countries a sample of 102 higher education institutions with cooperation arrangements with the US was identified as a first step. These institutions' website were screened (see below) to identify the ones with the most promising approaches to credit recognition. These countries were selected to cover the east- west north south dimensions of the EU as well as a balanced mix between countries with different higher education systems and traditions.
- In the second stage, 14 higher education institutions located in 13 EU countries were identified and their approaches were further explored. Initially, 15 countries and 15 institutions were covered by the sample, but it proved impossible to organise interviews with any of the institutions identified in two of the countries (see below).

The country coverage of the EU study is presented in Figure 3.1 below.

The US team also ensured a broad geographic spread of US HEI's, furthermore, the academic conference of the universities was also considered to avoid having too many representatives from any one academic conference association. During the screening of HEI's international study abroad programmes, the extensive use of private providers for organised study abroad also became apparent, thus three of the most popular providers were included in the data collection and analysis. The three providers include 502 total member schools from the US and 67 member schools from the EU.

- Type of credit recognition covered

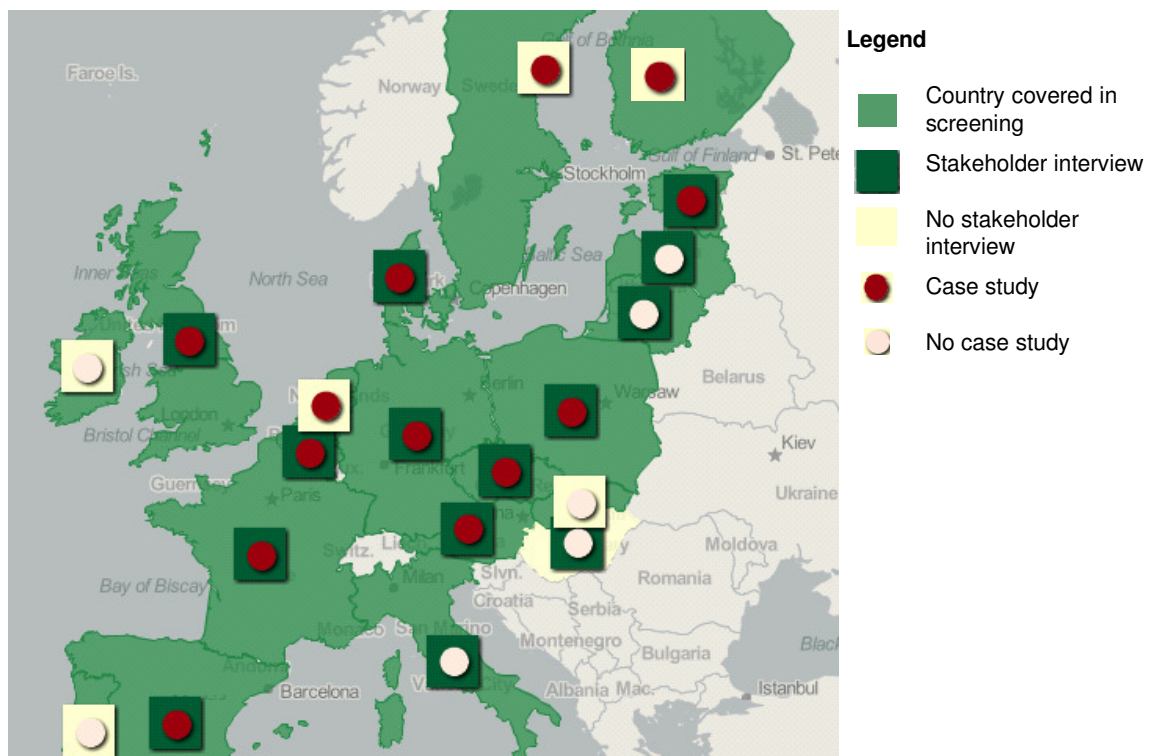
The focus of this study was on credit recognition at the level of bachelor and master's degrees. The use of credit for short cycle qualifications and doctoral programmes was not included. Furthermore, this study only looked at how credit is recognised when it

comes to qualification recognition (for access to further studies) or to recognise periods of study abroad. The study did not look at the use of credit for the recognition of prior learning that took place outside higher education (for example, to recognise working experience or to recognise prior vocational qualifications).

- Type of higher education institutions covered

The study covered different types of higher education institutions; several large comprehensive universities are covered but also a few specialised institutions. As will be shown below, efforts were also made to cover a range of fields of study or disciplines during the case studies, to avoid focusing on those fields where credit recognition is possibly more easy to organise and arrange (such as social sciences). In the US study, this was also accomplished by selecting five HEI's from the Atlantis dual degree programmes to represent five different disciplines: Business, Psychology, Education, Chemistry, and Engineering.

Figure 3.1 Geographical coverage of this study



### 3.2 Conceptual framework

The study focuses on the use of credit systems for the recognition of what has been achieved abroad during students' mobility, in the context of EU-US cooperation. In particular, the study envisages the recognition of credits in three cases:

- access to a programme<sup>17</sup>;
- student exchange;
- joint or dual degrees.

<sup>17</sup> This study looks at access to a second cycle programme only.

In order to **access a programme**, the recognition of credits is conditioned by the fact that the student has achieved the necessary prerequisites for successfully following the programme. Depending on the programme or the system, the prerequisites may be expressed in a rather general manner, in terms of level or they can be expressed in terms of credit in a given discipline/ field of study. In order for foreign students to access a programme, the higher education institution needs to examine the credit from abroad to identify the equivalence between the content of the degree the person holds and the content of the degree that is normally the prerequisite for entering the programme (in terms of level or in terms of content of credit).

In the case of **student exchange**, credit recognition can concern core subjects and/or optional subjects. In the US context it can concern courses part of a major or minor programme, and also general education or elective requirements for the bachelor degree. For core subjects, credit is often recognised based on the equivalence between the content of programmes (be it major or minor in the US context). In Europe, when using ECTS, the equivalence should be established based on learning outcomes (rather than teaching inputs). Student workload, as expressed in terms of credit points, is normally not a basis for identifying equivalence and as noted in the ECTS users' guide<sup>18</sup>:

*In practice a 4 ECTS credit component in one institution can replace a 5 ECTS credit component in another institution if learning outcomes are equivalent. The student will then be awarded 5 ECTS credits.*

Likewise, in converting ECTS to US credit points, a student can also receive the full number of credits for a US course that is determined to be equivalent to an EU course even when the conversion of credit points does not correspond exactly to the ratio used (for example the student can get 4US credits even if when applying a ratio of 2ECTS to 1US credit the person should obtain 3US credits). This is because it is common practice to refer to the credit value of the US home HEI course rather than to strictly convert the numbers of credit points.

In the case of **joint degrees** credit recognition should be based on articulation of the content of programmes (minor and major in the US) in the two partner institutions.

In the paragraphs above it shows that identifying some level of equivalence is at the core of credit transfer. The problem is that the term equivalence can be interpreted with different levels of stringency. Seeking for exact correspondence between the content of programmes from two different institutions is unfair to the student. Even when two students undergo the same programme within a single institution, their actual learning outcomes will differ. On the other hand, if the level and nature of learning outcomes from abroad are not in line with the minimum requirements of the programme, this can also disadvantage the student as s/he may have difficulties in following the rest of the programme (the prerequisites may not have been achieved). For credit recognition to be fair there is a need to ensure that the minimum requirements have been met without setting the bar too high for students coming from abroad. In any case, the requirements for students coming from abroad should not be higher than the minimum requirements put on 'home' students who pass the programme in the institution where the credit recognition will take place.

Since the appropriate level of equivalence may be difficult to define, international practice in the area of qualification and credit recognition works using the concept of **substantial difference**. For recognition of periods of study abroad the Council of Europe and the Unesco Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (also called the Lisbon convention) says<sup>19</sup>:

*Each party shall recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education programme in the party in which recognition is sought, **unless substantial differences can be shown** between the periods of study*

<sup>18</sup> European Commission DG Education and Training (2009) *ECTS Users' guide* available on the internet: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe (1997) *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm>

*completed in another party and the part of the higher education programme which they would replace in the party in which recognition is sought.*

For more information about the Lisbon convention see section four.

Recognition of students' credit is therefore linked to the way in which higher education institutions identify correspondence between programme components at their separate institutions. The process of establishing correspondence/equivalence will differ depending on whether:

- the situation in which credit should be recognised concerns student exchange in a joint major or minor programme where the content of the study period abroad has been agreed in advance between the collaborating discipline faculty members at the partner HEI's; or,
- the situation in which HEI's have a general agreement for student exchange, and students must design their own set of courses for study abroad using past articulated credits, or upon return request evaluation of new courses abroad following the established process at their home HEI; or,
- the situation concerns a student who is mobile on his/her own initiative and where there was no prior mobility agreement between HEI's, or articulation of credit transfer for specific courses between the relevant HEI's.

It is normally expected that, in the case of organised student exchanges and joint-programmes, there is prior agreement on which credit from abroad will be recognised, how and under what conditions. This underlines the importance of preliminary contacts and work by relevant faculty members of the two higher education institutions on identifying correspondence/equivalence between programmes and programme components. In this case, students need to do little work before, during, or after mobility to have the study abroad credits recognised. When the student seeks recognition after having spent a period of study abroad without a prior agreement on courses, the institution where the student seeks recognition needs to make a judgement on whether credit can be recognised and how this evaluation can be completed with fairness to the student's study abroad efforts. Once this evaluation is completed and an abroad course is articulated for recognised credit for a home course, future mobile students can have the assurance of the transfer for that study abroad course. The transparency of these past articulated credits, both within a joint programme agreement and simply between the two HEI's, and the process for credit recognition are key conceptual issues.

Another issue that is important for credit recognition is the **structure** of the specific programme in the home institution where the student is seeking recognition. Depending on the field of study, it is quite common that there are important differences in the structure and amount of flexibility in course selection within the same institution. Some (major and minor) programmes are much less flexible than others when it comes to the combination of core, optional, and elective requirements. In the US there is also the additional degree requirements of general education that some major and minor programmes also specify to less and greater extent. It is quite common that programmes in fields of study that are regulated or closely linked to a regulated profession (for example, in areas such as medical, education, pharmaceutical or engineering studies) are much less flexible than programmes in areas such as social sciences or arts. It is likely that the more flexible the (major, minor, or degree) programme is for students studying within the institution, the easier it will be to get credit from abroad recognised (provided that the minimum requirements are met). The understanding of equivalence in this context is likely to be very broad. On the other hand, if the programme or degree offers little flexibility to students within the institution, it is likely that more strict equivalence will be required from students coming from abroad or going for study abroad.

Finally, of key relevance is the question of how a higher education institution identifies whether the credit achieved abroad is satisfactory for their requirements? What is the basis for such a judgement? Who makes the judgement, and does that differ for courses at different levels or degree and programme relevance? It was expected that this study would

identify a variety of practice with respect to these issues. The following range of situations was initially expected:

- based on prior relationships between the institutions: the two institutions cooperate and hence they trust that the credit awarded in one of the institutions meets the requirements of the other institution;
- based on evaluation by staff members in the international studies office, admissions office, faculty review boards, or faculty members within course relevant disciplinary departments.
- based on evaluation of the teaching content/curriculum inputs for the course;
- based on evaluation of the returning students' aptitude;
- based on comparison of the learning outcomes for the given programme components using work completed by the student;
- joint design of the programme component between collaborating faculty members.

In any case, **trust** between the two institutions is crucial. This can be supported by more formal mechanisms such as evidence about institutional quality assurance, signing of bilateral agreements or signing of learning agreements with the student. It can also be supported by less formal actions such as exchanges of teaching staff.

Credit is associated with a **numerical value**. This can be assigned based on a different basis (see Section 4 for the discussion of differences between the EU and US understanding of credit), but in general it expresses the volume of learning of a given course component. The award of credit indicates that the person has successfully achieved the course component requirements. However, the expression of the volume of learning is only one dimension of 'credit'. Another key dimension is the **level of learning**. This can be expressed through an explicit qualifications framework, but the existence of different qualification types within one system also suggests a certain hierarchy between levels of learning<sup>20</sup>. A third important dimension is the student **performance**. While the achievement of credit expresses that the person has successfully achieved the (minimum) requirements, it does not say anything about his/her performance with regard to these requirements. This is expressed in terms of **grades**. Given that the appreciation of a person's level of performance is often an important element in the design of higher education pathways (grades are used to decide about progression to further levels or as a selection mechanism), a great deal of discussion about credit transfer in higher education is associated with issues of grades' translation.

The discussion above outlines the key issues at stake when analysing credit recognition and the transparency of the processes and protocols. These issues were reflected in the topic guides for case study interviews. The questions in case studies were formulated around the following key topics (in no specific order):

- the role of quantification of credit in transfer with the US (the number of credit points);
- the use of and role of learning outcomes which describe (and define) the content of credit;
- the flexibility in credit accumulation (for core, optional, and elective credit - within a major or minor programme, or general education and elective credit for US degrees);
- the role of the assessment process and how this is recorded – including the use of grades;
- the use of catalogues or other online tools and databases that provide transparent equivalences for programme components identified between home and host HEI's;
- the development of trust through mechanisms such as memoranda of understanding, but also other means; and
- the preparation and transparency of credit transfer through a priori agreements about the course programmes to be taken abroad by a given student.

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<sup>20</sup> See for example the discussion on the role of qualifications frameworks in recognition of qualifications in Hunt and Bergman (2009) *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation* p.23.

### 3.3 Methodology

Given the nature of the topic to study, it was decided to follow a purely qualitative approach for this analysis. The methodology relied primarily on four types of data collection approaches:

- Literature review about EU-US student mobility and issues of qualifications and credit recognition;
- Desk research through which website of a sample of universities were reviewed;
- Stakeholder interviews; and
- Institutional case studies.

The last three methods are described in further detail below.

#### 3.3.1 Desk research (stocktaking)

The desk research consisted of reviewing existing arrangements for recognition of credit from the US and EU based on higher education institutions' (HEI) websites. As part of this task a selection of Atlantis programme projects' final reports were analysed, and HEI's selected for inclusion.

##### Country coverage for stocktaking in the EU research

During the stocktaking task, websites of 102 HEIs in 19 EU countries were reviewed. The 19 countries were selected to represent a range of countries in terms of size, geographical dimensions of Europe and higher education systems in Europe. Countries were also selected so as to cover those that have large numbers of student mobility with US (see Section 4.1).

As will be discussed in Section 4, there are differences in the extent to which the core principles of ECTS are being implemented in higher education institutions. Countries can be clustered according to the predominant approaches. Table 3.1 shows that the countries covered also represented a variety in terms of prevailing approaches to the use of credit systems.

**Table 3.1 The coverage of different approaches to credit allocation in the selected countries**

<b>Dominant practice in credit allocation</b>	<b>Country covered by this study</b>	<b>Number of institutions identified in the countries covered</b>
Credits allocated to courses based on estimation of the average student workload and defined and written learning outcomes.	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Sweden	21
Credits allocated to courses based on estimated average student workload, but without using learning outcomes.	Austria, Belgium-NL, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal	45
Credits allocated to courses based on defined and written learning outcomes, but without an estimation of average student workload.	The Netherlands, UK-E/W/NI	26
Credits allocated to courses based on teaching / contact hours.	Slovakia, Spain	10

Source: Cheps et al (2009)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Cheps et al (2009) *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment: The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area* p.22.

In each country a certain number of HEIs that had developed student exchanges with the US were identified. The 102 institutions, of which websites were reviewed, were not equally spread across these countries and in some countries up to 10 HEIs were identified whilst in others only two or three. This is mainly due to the frequency of exchanges with the US and the amount of information on this matter available on HEIs' websites. Through desk research the research team tried to identify those HEIs in each country which would have significant levels of exchanges with the US – this was mainly based on the number of partnerships with US HEIs as presented on the websites.

### Stocktaking in the US research

The US study team took a narrower approach to the review of websites by examining those ranked in the top 25 for US student mobility in semester length and short-term study abroad. The research team then selected the nine HEI's from this list that provided the best potential to yield best practices with further in-depth analysis of the institutional practices and policies as transparent for students and faculty members on the study abroad websites. This decision is based on the condition that US HEI's are several years into the extensive development of online policy, procedure, and academic programme information. To these nine, the US study team added five HEI's that have established joint-dual degree programmes through the Atlantis initiative.

### Review of HEIs websites

The research teams reviewed the websites of the selected higher education institutions. The aim of this screening exercise was to identify any information on the use of credit in existing cooperation arrangements. For each screened institution, researchers completed a mapping grid which synthesised the information presented on the websites.

The screening was also a basis for the identification of examples explored later in the study.

In order to complete the fiches, researchers reviewed various parts of a given HEI's website focusing on information about the exchanges with US universities (concerning both student exchanges and dual degrees). The following parts of websites were screened:

- the international department of the university/HEI;
- information for students of the given HEI who wish to go abroad (on the site of the different departments);
- information for foreign students who wish to enrol in studies in this university (only reviewed by the EU research team);
- agreements, memoranda of understanding or other documents which set the framework for cooperation with US universities;
- stories of students who have studied abroad.

In the case where absolutely no information about credit recognition could be found in a particular HEI website, the given HEI in the sample was replaced by another one of the same country (such cases were only found among the EU HEIs).

In EU countries where the data gathered from the screening of the HEI's website was limited, further desk-research was undertaken in order to find other sources of relevant information about credit recognition from/to the US.

For US HEI's where the website analysis raised questions about the study abroad programmes, policies, and procedures, follow-up interviews by phone and email were conducted to clarify institutional practices.

### Review of EU-US project reports

In order to have a broader range of information about possible examples to include in the study as well as to see how Atlantis funded projects dealt with credit recognition, the EU research team reviewed eight projects' final reports. Eight reports were reviewed because these were the reports available to the Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

at the time of writing. The reports were screened in order to identify information about the use of credit and about credit recognition procedures. The amount of information relevant for this study found in these reports varied greatly. Most reports were very short and focused on the procedural description of a project rather than giving information about the way agreements were developed and the obstacles encountered.

The US team reviewed the Atlantis joint-dual degree programmes from the 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 funding cycles. This screening eliminated policy and mobility projects that did not specifically involve dual or simultaneous or joint degrees between the participating US and EU HEI's. Forty-one projects met this criteria, and the briefs for each programme at the FIPSE-Atlantis online were reviewed and any links provided to websites for the programmes. Particular attention was paid to the number of students who were mobile in the programmes and the degree of transparency provided for credit recognition and study abroad participation. Five distinct disciplines that also engaged significant numbers of students in study abroad and had well developed online resources for the programme were selected for in-depth analysis.

### 3.3.2 Stakeholder interviews in the EU

The role of stakeholder interviews in this assignment was to:

- Gain an understanding of the overall policy towards cooperation with US universities (if existing);
- Gain an understanding of system-level issues or guidelines around recognition of credit between the country and the US;
- Identify relevant publications or documents;
- Gain information about possible examples of good practice.

In total, 20 interviews were carried out with stakeholders and representatives who corresponded to either of these profiles:

- People in intermediary organisations in charge of supporting mobility of students with the US/ or organisations in charge of promoting the higher education of the given country abroad. These were organisations running funding programmes for student cooperation or other organisations with the mission to promote European education;
- Representatives of student organisations that have an international dimension or possibly representatives of alumni organisations (EU students who have studied in the US or vice-versa).
- People in the ENIC/NARIC centre in charge of the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Table 3.2 presents the list of organisations interviewed. As shown in this table, stakeholder interviews were carried out in 15 EU countries. Slightly less than one third of the interviews (6) were with ENIC/NARIC centres and more than one third (8) were with institutions that promote international higher education cooperation in general, also covering the US; two Fulbright Foundation staff members were interviewed.

Table 3.2 List of organisations interviewed

	Organisation	Role	Country
1	OeAD ICM - Centre for International Cooperation & Mobility	Supports promotion of Austrian higher education abroad	AT
2	Ministry of Education and Training - Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training	NARIC	BE
3	Fulbright Czech Republic		CZ



	Organisation	Role	Country
4	Fulbright Germany		DE
6	German Academic exchange service - DAAD New York	Administers mobility programmes and promotes German higher education abroad	DE
7	Danish Agency for International Education	Promotes Danish higher education abroad	DK
8	Archimedes foundation	ENIC/NARIC	EE
9	Fundación Universidade Espana	Promotes Spanish higher education abroad	ES
10	Campus France	National agency for the promotion of French higher education abroad	FR
11	International Centre for Pedagogical Studies	ENIC/NARIC	FR
12	Hungarian Equivalence and Information Centre, Educational Authority	ENIC/NARIC	HU
13	CIMEA - Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence	ENIC/NARIC	IT
14	Ministry of Education and Science, International Cooperation Division	Supports cooperation in education and training including with countries outside the EU	LT
15	Academic Information Centre	ENIC/NARIC	LV
16	Perspektywy Education Foundation	Non-for profit organisation that promotes international Polish higher education in cooperation with other Polish organisations in the field of education	PL
17	OCEANS Network	Network of alumni of EU-funded mobility programmes with major industrialised partner countries outside the EU	Student Unions/Alumni associations
18	European Students' Union (ESU)	Stakeholder organisation	Student Unions/Alumni associations
19	UK QAA	Develops a common credit policy among UK higher education institutions	UK
20	British Council	Promotes UK higher education abroad	UK

### 3.3.3 Case studies

#### Selection of examples

Based on the desk research, and sometimes based on the recommendations of the stakeholders interviewed, for this study the EU research team selected a sample of twenty institutions and the US research team selected a sample of fourteen institutions and three private providers with potentially interesting practices in credit recognition. The examples were studied through more in-depth interviews to explore the specificities of how credit is used in cooperation with the US and what issues are being encountered. All examples included in the final sample (14 EU and 17 US) show certain elements of good practice. However, given that the information gathered through desk research was not extensive, in most cases it is possible that other HEIs in the US and EU have equivalently good or possibly better approaches to credit recognition than the ones studied here in greater depth.

The good practices were selected on the basis of the stocktaking exercise and the initial interviews, according to the following criteria:

- The sustainability of the approach: the practice already exists for a certain period of time and it is operational, meaning there is evidence that students' periods of studies in the US and EU are regularly recognised;
- The intensity of EU cooperation with US partner universities<sup>22</sup> and for US HEI's, the number of programmes and students to study abroad<sup>23</sup> as an indicator of institutional commitment to mobility;
- The evidence of the use and transparency of a credit system for recognition;
- The example of good practice cited by interviewees during initial interviews or other indications of good practice (e.g. ECTS label);
- When interviewees indicated a specific university as a possible good practice, this information was prioritised.

In addition, the sample of higher education institutions for case studies was selected so as to:

- Cover a range of EU countries (east/west/north and south of Europe as well as large/medium and small countries) and US states and academic conferences;
- Cover institutions with a variety of approaches to organising international mobility: centralised as well as decentralised arrangements and structures;
- Cover institutions with a variety of profiles: multidisciplinary universities as well as more specialised universities/higher education institutions;

Universities with a clear internationalisation strategy, where credit recognition is clearly identified as an objective, were generally selected.

The initial EU list contained fifteen HEIs and a list of five additional possibly good examples. However, due to the fact that it appeared difficult to organise interviews in the time allocated, it proved necessary to adjust the initial list slightly. No HEI from Italy was available to talk to the research team at the time of carrying out the case studies and the Italian HEI was hence replaced by a second German university. In Ireland it appeared that despite the initially collected information, one of the institutions suggested it did not use credit for mobility with the US and the other institution identified was not available for interviews.

The sample of examples studied is presented in Table 3.3 for both EU HEIs and Table 3.4 for US HEIs.

Table 3.3 List of EU case studies

	Country	Selected institution	Identified through	ECTS DS Label
1	Austria	Boku University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	Screening	No

<sup>22</sup> This was assessed taking into account the volume of partnerships with the US. The intensity was ranked as rather low where less than 10 partnerships were in place, medium where between 10 and 19 partnerships were in place and high where 20 or more partnerships were in place.

In general, universities with medium or high intensity of cooperation with the US were selected because the assumption was that they would have set up systems for recognition of credit in cooperation with the US and would have a good understanding of the US higher education system. On the other hand, in a few cases, universities with fewer partnerships were also selected where there was a clear sign that the cooperation was structured and led to credit recognition.

<sup>23</sup> The number of students to study abroad from a US HEI in 2008-09 is reported by the Institute of International Education in their "Open Door" report for the top 20 comprehensive doctorate HEI's with mid-length and 20 HEI's with short term study abroad. <http://www.iae.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Leading-Institutions-Duration-Institutional-Type/2008-09.aspx>

2	Belgium	Université Catholique de Louvain	Recommended	No
3	Czech Republic	Masarykova Univerzita Brno	Recommended	Yes
4	Germany	Technical University of Braunschweig	Recommended	No
5	Germany	Freie Universitat Berlin	Screening	No
6	Denmark	University of Copenhagen	Recommended	No
7	Estonia	University of Tartu	Screening	No
8	France	IEP Paris (Sciences Po)	Recommended	No
9	Finland	University of Helsinki	Screening	No
10	The Netherlands	University of Groningen	Screening	Yes
11	Poland	Warsaw University	Screening	No
12	Sweden	Lund University	Screening	No
13	UK	Essex University	Screening	No
14	Spain	University of Navarra	Screening	No

Table 3.4 List of US case studies

Higher education institution	Criterion for inclusion in the sample	Reference web-site
Bentley University Dual Degree Programme	Atlantis Programme: Business	<a href="http://www.bentley.edu/ibim/">http://www.bentley.edu/ibim/</a>
Boston University	Open Doors: 3 <sup>rd</sup> mid-length study abroad	<a href="http://www.bu.edu/abroad">www.bu.edu/abroad</a>
Indiana University	Open Doors: 8 <sup>th</sup> mid-length study abroad	<a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/">http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/</a>
Marshall University	Atlantis Programme: Psychology	<a href="http://www.marshall.edu/cip/?page_id=73">http://www.marshall.edu/cip/?page_id=73</a>
Michigan State University	Open Doors: 1 <sup>st</sup> short-term study abroad	<a href="http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/">http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/</a>
New York University	Open Doors: 1 <sup>st</sup> mid-length study abroad	<a href="http://www.nyu.edu/studyabroad/">http://www.nyu.edu/studyabroad/</a>
Penn State University	Atlantis Programme: Education	<a href="http://gpglobalea.gp.psu.edu">http://gpglobalea.gp.psu.edu</a>
University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign	Open Doors : 11 <sup>th</sup> mid-length study ab.	<a href="http://www.studyabroad.illinois.edu/">http://www.studyabroad.illinois.edu/</a>
University of Kansas	Atlantis Programme: Chemistry	<a href="http://www.studyabroad.ku.edu/">http://www.studyabroad.ku.edu/</a>
University of Minnesota	Open Doors: 7 <sup>th</sup> mid-length study abroad	<a href="http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/">http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/</a>
University of Pennsylvania	Open Doors: 12 <sup>th</sup> short-term study abroad	<a href="http://sa.oip.upenn.edu/">http://sa.oip.upenn.edu/</a>
University of Texas at Austin	Open Doors: 4 <sup>th</sup> short-term study abroad	<a href="http://www.utexas.edu/student/abroad/">http://www.utexas.edu/student/abroad/</a>
University of Washington	Open Doors: 2 <sup>nd</sup> mid-length study abroad	<a href="http://studyabroad.washington.edu/">http://studyabroad.washington.edu/</a>

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Atlantis Programme: Engineering	<a href="http://www.educationabroad.vt.edu/">http://www.educationabroad.vt.edu/</a>
Institute for the International Education of Students (IES Abroad)	180 US/60 EU members	<a href="https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/home.html">https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/home.html</a>
Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE)	241 US/7 EU members/61 EU Programmes	<a href="http://www.ciee.org/study/index.aspx">http://www.ciee.org/study/index.aspx</a>
Council of International Schools (CIS)	81 US members	<a href="http://www.cisabroad.com/index.php">http://www.cisabroad.com/index.php</a>

### Overview of case study interviews

In contrast to the US HEI's study abroad websites, relatively little written information about the procedures for credit recognition was provided at the EU HEIs studied; therefore, the EU case studies were based nearly exclusively on interviews while the US case studies were based nearly exclusively on website analysis. The EU objective was to carry out between three to four interviews in each HEI aiming at fifty interviews in total. This goal was largely surpassed as eventually 82 persons were interviewed in the 14 universities. Some of the persons were interviewed in a joint group discussion. In most HEIs four or more persons were interviewed. It was not possible to reach the minimum number of three interviews in only one case, mainly due to scheduling problems<sup>24</sup>.

All interviewees had certain knowledge and experience of recognition of credit obtained in the US. The people interviewed belonged to the following three categories:

- International coordinators;
- Students who have studied in the US (or US students who have studied in the EU);
- Teaching staff in charge of recognition and/or development of joint programmes (using credit systems);

Table 3.5 below presents the break-down of interviews per HEI and per type of interviewee. Due to the timing of the interviews (which partly coincided with the examination period), in certain HEIs it was possible to gather much more people to be interviewed than in others. More detailed information about the profile of interviewees is presented in Annex 2.

The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted based on a topic guide for each type of interviewee (see Annex 3). The interviews were adjusted to the approach in each of the higher education institutions as well as to the responsibilities/ experience of the interviewee. Most interviews were carried out face to face but in a few cases it was necessary to conduct them over the phone. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. The student interviews were shorter (between 20 and 30 minutes). As said earlier, some interviews were carried out in a group. For example, in several cases the students were brought together in one or two interviews which lasted more than one hour. Similarly, the teaching staff in charge of credit recognition was sometimes brought together in one or two group interviews. Interviewing staff members in a group had an interesting side effect; in several cases it appeared that people in charge of credit recognition within universities in several departments have never exchanged information on how they proceed. The difficulties of implementing a common approach to credit recognition with an institution became apparent through these exchanges (this point is further discussed in Section five).

The main objectives of the interviews were:

- To identify any existing explicit guidelines and procedures and to discuss these;

<sup>24</sup> Note: all interviews were carried out over the duration of five weeks in May and June which was a very busy period in all HEIs.

- To gain a detailed understanding of how HEI staff proceed in preparing and ensuring credit recognition;
- To gain a point of view of the final beneficiaries (students);
- To identify obstacles encountered.

All case studies were written up following a common format and they are presented in part B of this study.

Table 3.5 Breakdown of interviews carried out for each case study

University	Total number of interviews	International coordinators interviewed	Students	Other staff members
Boku University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	4	2	1	1
Université Catholique de Louvain	6	2	3	1
Masarykova Univerzita Brno	5	2	1	2
Technical University of Braunschweig	3	1	1	1
Freie Universität Berlin	4	1	2	1
University of Copenhagen	5	3	2	0
University of Tartu	2	1	0	1
IEP Paris (Sciences Po)	8	4	4	0
University of Helsinki	5	2	1	2
University of Groningen	10	3	5	2
Warsaw University	3	2	0	1
Lund University	10	2	6	2
Essex University	5	1	3	1
University of Navarra	12	2	3	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>

### Website analysis by the US research team

The search for best practices in the procedures and policies for study abroad credit recognition, and their transparency for prospective students and interested faculty members, guided the analysis of US HEI websites. The US research team applied the following set of questions in their analysis of online information, and with focused follow-up interviews of HEI and private provider representatives when adequate online information was not available or easy to find.

Structure of web-site review:

- Online list of departmental coordinators, content evaluators, or advisors (could be different people or could all be the same person);
- Online database of course equivalencies;
- Online document for credit/grade transfer by host EU HEI;
- Grading policies in place for pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory options. How are EU grades scaled or transformed into home university grades?

- Are pre-departure advising forms available and how are they used?
- How does the university arrive at an evaluation of equivalency in course content?
- Is there any variation in the standard conversion of 1 US credit for 2 ECTS credits?
- Do policies differ for study abroad programmes sponsored by home university or outside private providers?

In addition to these questions for all US HEI's and private providers of study abroad programmes, the following points were analysed for the Atlantis dual degree programmes:

- Is there a minimum number of credits required for study at any partner institution?
- Is there a minimum number of credits in the major required at each partner institution?
- Are any special courses in the major required at any partner institution?
- Is there a thesis or major project in order to get the degree from each partner institution?
- How are general education requirements at US universities fulfilled?
- Are there any special transfer of credit and admissions to degree procedures between partner institutions?
- Are there any special requirements completed at the US HEI in order to earn the EU degree?
- Are plans of study published that detail how to achieve dual degrees?

The performance of students in study abroad credits was also a focal issue for study by the US research team. The analysis included a review of various conversion scales used by case study HEI's, in comparison to a detailed statistical analysis of 26 US students from three different semester-long study abroad programmes in a UK university. The analysis is therefore constrained to an examination of conversion issues between UK grading and US grading scales and not other EU country grading practices. The examination of this issue using detailed grade information from the students provides a specific example for the development of grade conversion scales.

## 4 Student mobility between the EU and the US: background information

There is already a long tradition of EU-US student exchanges, with the Fulbright Foundation Scholarships dating back to the years after the Second World War. Even though these scholarships are not restricted to Europe, several hundreds of students come from Europe to study in the US and vice-versa. As said earlier, the EU-US Atlantis programme is progressively up-scaling and it is now over fifteen years old. National programmes of EU Member States are another source of support available for mobile students between the EU and the US. Finally, there are large numbers of mobile students who support their studies in the US or US students in Europe from their own resources.

As a background to this study, this section describes the general trends of mobility between the EU and the US, including figures on studies undertaken abroad and the main schemes within which these operate. It then reviews, based on existing sources, the main issues related to this mobility, including credit recognition.

### 4.1 Mobility of students between the EU-27 and the US

#### Box 2: Note on mobility data

It is rather hard to obtain comparable and complete statistics about student mobility given the differences in:

- Definitions of a mobile student: some countries use statistics which reflect numbers of students with foreign nationality or students with a foreign country of residence, while information on numbers of students who have previously studied in another country are rare;
- Definitions of the term mobility: most statistics only capture so called 'degree' mobility (i.e. foreign students enrolled in a full degree programme); 'credit' mobility (which concerns periods of study abroad for which students gain recognition) is typically only captured through programme data, but it is rarely compiled at national level, but there are also other forms of shorter duration mobility (such as summer schools) which are rarely captured.

This section gives a brief overview of some of the data available about student mobility between the EU and the US (see Table 4.1). It is based predominantly on the data from the Open Doors survey complemented by data about total higher education student population from Eurostat.

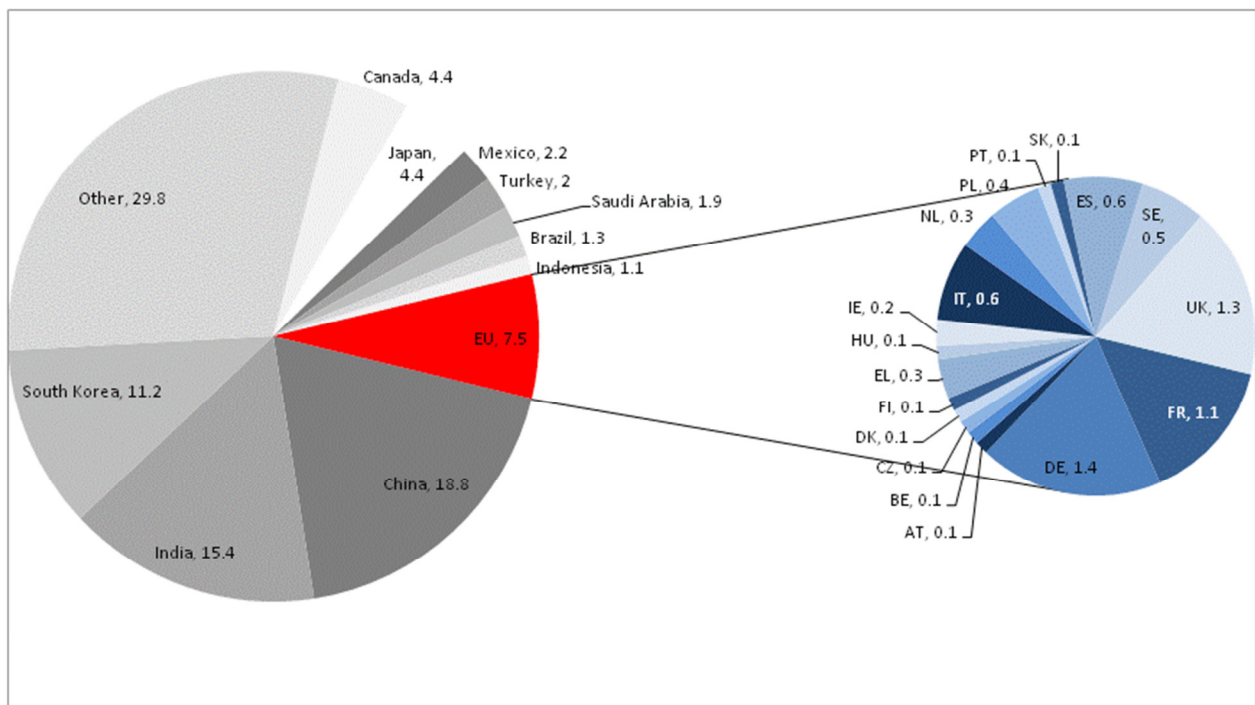
The Open Doors survey defines<sup>25</sup> a foreign student as (internationally mobile student) *anyone studying at an institution of higher education in the United States on a temporary visa that allows for academic coursework*. It defines as a mobile US student *only those students who received academic credit from an accredited US institution of higher education after they returned from their study abroad experience. Students who travel and take courses abroad without receiving academic credit are not reported in Open Doors, nor are students who are enrolled overseas for degrees from non-US institutions*.

Consequently, while it gives an overview of both credit and degree mobility towards the US, it only gives an overview of credit mobility from the US towards other countries (degree mobility from the US to other countries is not captured). Despite these gaps, the Open Doors survey is the most complete source of data about the mobility of US students. The data included in the Eurostat database does not enable the differentiation of flows between the US and the EU nor does the data in the UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) database enable such differentiation.

<sup>25</sup> See the definitions here Institute for International Education: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/FAQ.aspx#faq1>

As indicated in the introduction, student exchanges between the US and the EU are significant. When taken jointly, the EU-27 countries were the fourth most common place of origin of foreign students in the US in 2009-2010 (after China, India and South Korea) – see also figure 4.1. There were more than 57,000 EU-27 students in the USA in this period. EU-27 countries are by far the first destination of US students abroad. More than half of those US students studying abroad (141,955<sup>26</sup>) choose Europe (in the geographical sense) as their study destination. Though this figure comprises the whole of Europe (it is not restricted to the EU-27), it can be assumed that the vast majority of these students are in the EU-27 countries. In 2008-2009 there were more than 126,000 US students in the 10 EU-27 countries that are the most common destinations of US students<sup>27</sup>. US students represent a large proportion of all foreign students in Ireland (nearly 20% of all foreign students come from the US). Their share is also important in Poland (nearly 6%) and United Kingdom (nearly 4% of all foreign students) – see figure 4.2.

Figure 4.1 – Origin of foreign students in the US (percentage of total foreign students, 2009)



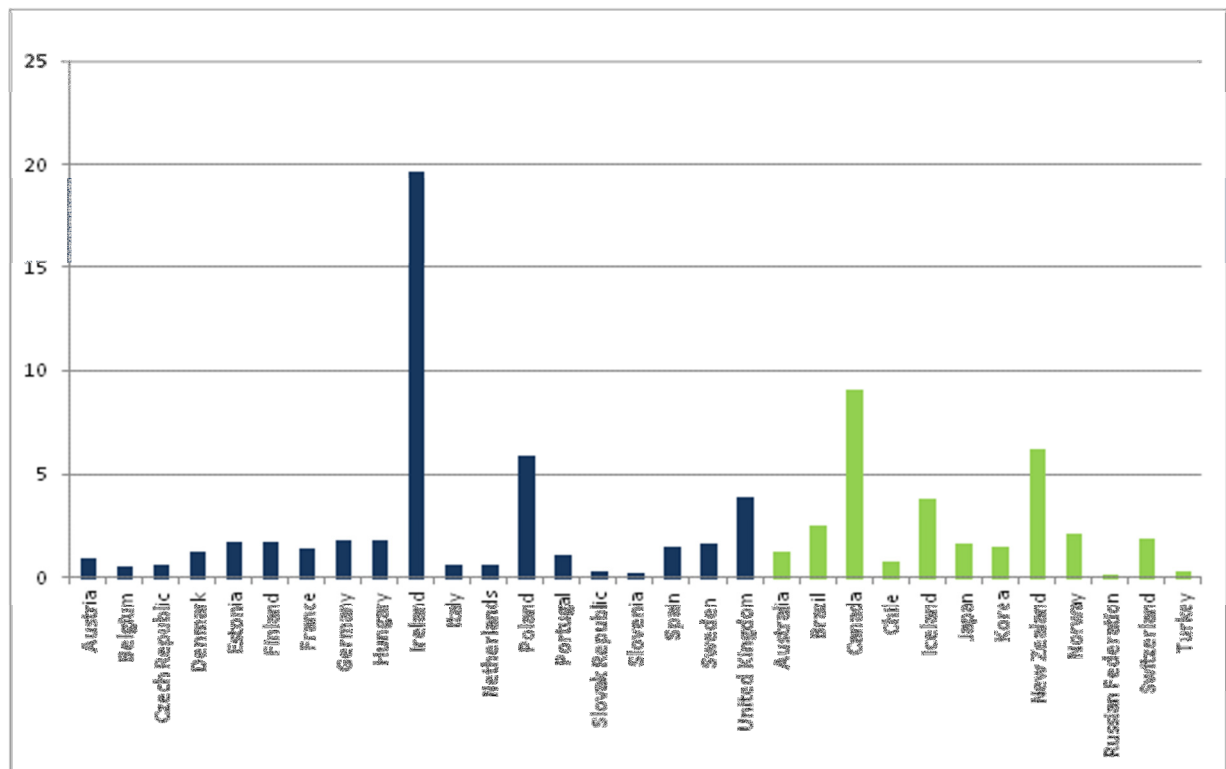
Source: OECD (2011) Education and Glance 2011

<sup>26</sup> Institute of International Education. (2010). '2010 Fast Facts' Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2008-10> - <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2008-10>.

<sup>27</sup> Source: Institute of International Education: Open doors



Figure 4.2 – US students studying in other countries as proportion of total foreign students (in percentage, 2009)



Source: OECD (2011) Education and Glance 2011

In terms of total figures, there are more EU-27 students in the US than US students in the EU. The flow of students between the two entities is rather imbalanced; for one US student coming to the EU, there are nearly two EU-27 students going to the US. Germany, United Kingdom and France are the EU countries with the largest numbers of students studying in the US, accounting for 45% of the EU citizens studying in the US. This is proportionate to the size of the population of these countries (which are in fact the largest countries in the EU in terms of population and also in terms of tertiary student population). However, while the numbers of US students in the EU grew in the last decade (see below), the numbers of EU students in the US decreased by 10% in the period 2000-2001 and 2009-2010 (see Table A-4 in Annex 1). The numbers of French, Irish, Italian, Portuguese and UK students in this period grew (though far less than the total growth of foreign students in the US), but the numbers of all the other EU-27 countries decreased in this period in some countries quite dramatically. For example, the number of Swedish students in the US fell by 32% in the period 2000-2010, the number of Greek students fell by 34% and the number of Hungarian students fell by nearly a half (43%). This decrease in mobility of EU students towards the US is not in line with the general mobility trend of EU students; within Europe (comprising EU-27, EEA and candidate countries), the mobility of EU students grew by nearly 60% in the period 2000-2009. For detailed figures see Table A-4 in Annex 1. Consequently, this downward trend in the mobility of EU students towards the US indicates a decrease in attractiveness of this destination, especially compared to other EU countries.

US students who come to Europe most frequently choose to study in the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and Spain. Germany and Ireland are also countries among the top 10 destinations of US students abroad. While the number of US students in Europe grew by 44% in the period 2000-2008 (see Table A-2 in Annex 1), this growth was slower than the growth of the overall figure of US students who went abroad (69% growth in the given period), indicating that other destinations are becoming more popular with mobile US students. The number of US students who study in China has more than quadrupled in the same period and the numbers of those who study in South Korea, South Africa, Argentina,

Brazil or India has nearly quadrupled (see Table A-1 in Annex 1). Among the EU-27 countries which have seen a significant growth of US students in the period 2000-2009 are a few countries where the initial, but also current figures, were very low (e.g. Estonia or Cyprus). However, there are also a few EU-27 countries which have seen a substantial increase in the intake of US students and receive relatively high numbers. These are: Czech Republic, Denmark, (the figures have nearly tripled), Belgium, Sweden, Greece and Hungary (the figures have doubled). The growth of US students in those countries which receive most students in terms of total numbers (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain and UK), has in most cases (with the exception of Ireland and Italy) been slower than the growth of US students abroad. In the UK the figures have been stagnating (only 3% growth in the given period). For detailed figures see Table A-2 in Annex 1.

Proportionally to the whole tertiary education student population in the country, the EU-27 countries which have the greatest share of students studying in the US are: Luxembourg, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Sweden and Ireland (all have more than 0.5% of students studying in the US – see Table 4.2). The EU-27 countries which receive most US students proportionately to their home student population are: Luxembourg, Ireland, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, Denmark, Austria and Malta (all receive close to an equivalent of 1% of home students or more – see Table 4.2).

Table 4.1 EU-US student mobility: key figures

	USA	EU	Comment
Foreign students as a proportion of total students in tertiary education (2008)	3.4%	7.8%	In the EU the countries with proportionally the most foreign students are: Belgium, Germany, France, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Austria, UK <sup>28</sup>
Incoming foreign students	There were 57,323 EU-27 students in the USA in 2009/2010 <sup>29</sup>	There were 30,800 US students in the EU in 2008	Most foreign students in the EU come from China, Morocco, India and then the USA (Russia is right after the USA) <sup>30</sup>
	Students from EU countries among the top 25 countries of origin (% of foreign students in the US) <sup>31</sup> : Germany: 9,548 (1.4%) UK: 8,861 (1.3%) France: 7,716 (1.1%)	Destinations of US students in the EU <sup>32</sup> (percentage of US students abroad): UK: 31,342 (12%) Italy: 27,362 (10.5%) Spain: 24,169 (9.3%) France: 16,910 (6.5%) Germany: 8,330 (3.2%) Ireland: 6,858 (2.6%) Czech Republic: 3,664 (1.4%) Greece: 3,616 (1.4%) Austria: 2,836 (1.1%) Netherlands: 2,318 (0.9%) Denmark: 2,244 (0.9%)	

<sup>28</sup> European Commission (2011) *Progress towards the Common European Objectives in education and training: Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011*: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc2881\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc2881_en.htm)

<sup>29</sup> Institute of International Education. (2010) International Student Totals by Place of Origin, 2008/09-2009/10. Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>

<sup>30</sup> European Commission (2011) *Progress towards the Common European Objectives in education and training: Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011*: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc2881\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc2881_en.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Idem.

<sup>32</sup> Institute of International Education (2011) Open Doors 2010 Fast Facts: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/FAQ.aspx#faq1>

Table 4.2 EU-27 students in the US and US students in the EU-27 (2009)

	Total students in tertiary education	Students from this country in the US		Students from the US in this country	
		Number	As a proportion of all students	Number	As a proportion of all students
Austria	308,150	994	0.32%	2,836	0.92%
Belgium	425,219	845	0.20%	1,447	0.34%
Bulgaria	274,247	2,495	0.91%	76	0.03%
Cyprus	30,986	586	1.89%	171	0.55%
Czech Republic	416,847	828	0.20%	3664	0.88%
Denmark	234,574	989	0.42%	2244	0.96%
Estonia	68,399	220	0.32%	73	0.11%
Finland	296,691	663	0.22%	335	0.11%
France	2,172,855	7,716	0.36%	16910	0.78%
Germany	2,438,600	9,548	0.39%	8330	0.34%
Greece	637,600	1,837	0.29%	3616	0.57%
Hungary	397,679	664	0.17%	897	0.23%
Ireland	182,609	1,212	0.66%	6858	3.76%
Italy	2,011,713	4,072	0.20%	27362	1.36%
Latvia	125,360	286	0.23%	14	0.01%
Lithuania	210,744	361	0.17%	86	0.04%
Luxembourg	3,011	56	1.86%	372	12.35%
Malta	10,352	32	0.31%	95	0.92%
Netherlands	618,502	1,830	0.30%	2318	0.37%
Poland	2,149,998	2,264	0.11%	595	0.03%
Portugal	373,002	1,015	0.27%	240	0.06%
Romania	1,098,188	2,204	0.20%	219	0.02%
Slovakia	234,997	466	0.20%	27	0.01%
Slovenia	114,391	192	0.17%	88	0.08%
Spain	1,800,834	3,971	0.22%	24169	1.34%
Sweden	422,580	3,116	0.74%	1150	0.27%
United Kingdom	2,415,222	8,861	0.37%	31342	1.30%

Sources: Tertiary education enrolment (Eurostat), Data on student mobility towards and from the US (Institute of International Education – Open Doors)

In summary, student mobility between the EU and the US is characterised by:

- Established exchanges and relatively high numbers of student flows in both directions;
- Certain imbalance between the numbers of students going from the EU-27 towards the US and vice versa;
- In terms of trends over the last decade: growth in US students' numbers in the EU (though lower than the general growth of US students abroad) and decrease of EU students in the US (despite the general growth of EU-27 students mobility).

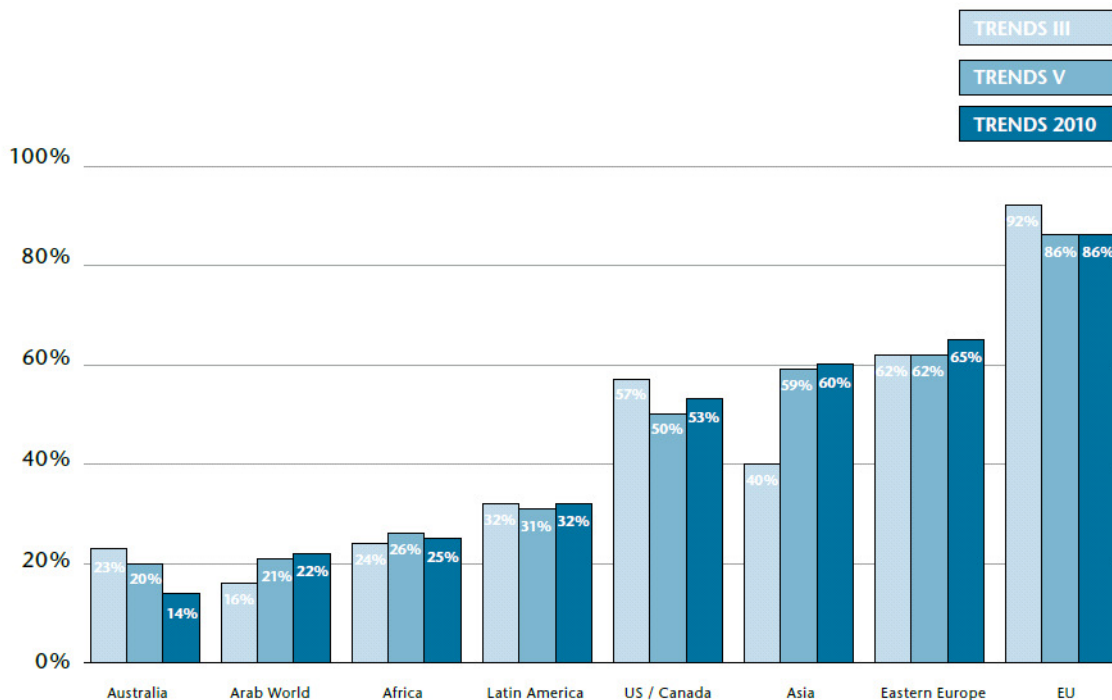
Against this evolution it is interesting to note that 53% of the 821 European higher education institutions surveyed by the European University Association regarding their international

ambitions indicated that they wished to increase the attractiveness of their education offer in the US and Canada (see Figure 4.3). When the responses of universities are analysed alone (without other types of higher education institutions), US and Canada are the priority region for developing universities' image<sup>33</sup>. This indicates that there is strong interest among EU higher education institutions to further develop the established links with the US and it can be assumed that this expansion probably also concerns students' mobility (even though other aspects such as researchers' mobility or research cooperation also contribute to the increasing attractiveness of EU higher education institutions).

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<sup>33</sup> Surssock, Andrée and Smidt, Hanne (2009) *Trends 2010: a decade of change in European Higher Education*, European University Association.

Figure 4.3 In which geographical areas would your institution most like to increase its attractiveness? <sup>34</sup>



Legend: Trends III survey was carried out in 2003 and Trends V survey in 2007

## 4.2 Types of student mobility and their use between the US and the EU

Broadly speaking, one can distinguish between three types of mobility patterns:

- Free movers;
- Exchange agreements;
- Joint and double degrees.
- **Free movers** are students who go to another university for a period of study or for a full degree, outside the scope of an exchange agreement. They have the freedom of selecting the foreign university as well as the courses they will follow unless they are constrained by aspects such as the rules of the funding programme (if they receive such support). They typically pay the tuition fees (unless these are covered through other means of support) for a full degree or for a full semester. In such cases, they have no obligations to the university where they completed their prior studies, or from where they go abroad as part of their studies. They can interrupt their studies (e.g. using a leave of absence procedure) or try to negotiate with the home institution that the period abroad would be incorporated into their programme. If the latter case succeeds, their mobility period becomes more formalised and they will most likely have certain obligations towards their home institutions; there may be a framework for their study abroad and the recognition of credit achieved abroad. In the first case (they go without any prior agreement), they may apply for transfer of credit (recognition) for the credit achieved abroad a posteriori, but the home institution has no obligation to recognise credit achieved in this manner abroad. In such cases the evaluation follows the same policies as the transfer of credit from any other home country or foreign country HEI.

<sup>34</sup> Idem.

It seems that a large majority (according to the cited survey it is more than three quarters) of EU students in the US are free movers,<sup>35</sup> but compared with other regions/countries the proportion of free movers is lower; for example, all Indian students in the US surveyed as part of the cited research were 'free movers'. This indicates that the role of agreed student exchanges with the US is relatively important compared to agreed exchanges with other countries/regions.

In most cases when students go abroad during the course of a study programme, in the framework of an agreement between the two institutions and return to the home institution to complete the programme, their study abroad is part of an **exchange programme**. It appears from the case studies that EU higher education institutions prefer students to go abroad in the framework of such organised exchanges. This is also the model that is privileged by the Atlantis programme. Student exchange programmes are also much more common than joint or double degree programmes<sup>36</sup> (see below).

The framework in which the exchange takes place may be more or less formal. The exchange can be negotiated between two faculties or departments on an ad hoc basis or it can be formalised in an agreement at the level of either the university or of the department. Such agreements contain the general conditions for study periods spent at the other universities, including issues such as student status, fees (or exemption from fees) and issues related to practical arrangements.

The specific courses to take while abroad are commonly open to student choice beyond what prior students have successfully transferred from the study abroad partner institution. In most cases with undefined exchange programmes, students are required to choose their study abroad courses to fit unfulfilled requirements in their home degrees/programmes. Based on the case studies it appears that some HEI's provide advice to students on how to select a study abroad partner HEI, and how to choose the courses that will best satisfy home degree/programme requirements.

Another type of arrangement for mobility in higher education between the EU and the US are **joint and double degrees**. The differences between a double degree (also called dual degree in some cases) and a joint degree in a transnational context can be described as follows<sup>37</sup>:

- In both cases the student studies in at least two institutions (and when taking in a transnational perspective, these are located in two countries);
- In the case of dual or double degrees the student receives two (or more) certificates: one from each institution that is part in the double degree;
- In the case of a joint degree the student receives only one certificate issued jointly by the HEIs taking part.

When it comes to the use of joint and double degrees between the EU and the US, the Kudey and Obst (2009) survey found that:

- The use of double degrees is more common than that of joint degrees and this is also related to the fact that, as shown by our interviews, in some countries it is legally impossible for HEIs to issue certificates in cooperation with foreign institutions;
- EU students participate much more in EU-US joint and double degree programmes than US students.
- The top five partner countries for US institutions when they develop joint or double degrees are: Germany, China, France, Mexico, South Korea and Spain. This situation might also be due to a different approach to the internationalisation of the US universities

<sup>35</sup> Obst, D. and Forster, J. (2005) *Perceptions of European Higher Education Country Report: USA* Academic Cooperation Association Secretariat: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/doc/us.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Kudey Matthias and Obst Daniel (2009) *Joint and Double Degree Programs in the Transatlantic Context: A Survey Report*, Freie Universität Berlin and Institute of International Education

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

who are much more engaged in the development of off-shore campuses (including in Europe), than EU universities.

- In Europe, the majority of the joint and double programmes (43%) tend to be stand alone programmes, 39% are an optional add-on to an existing one.
- The US institutions offer more joint/double degree programmes at undergraduate level than at the other levels. EU institutions on the other hand, offer more programmes at graduate level.
- Most of the time, when US institutions have joint and double degrees that involve EU partners, they involve one or two of them. When EU HEIs have double or joint degrees that involve US partners, they in most cases only involve one of them (see Table 4.3).
- The most frequent academic disciplines in which the joint or double degree programmes are offered include business and management, engineering, mathematics and computer sciences and social sciences (see Figure 4.4).

Table 4.3 Number of partner institutions in joint and double degree programmes (in percentage of institutions surveyed)<sup>38</sup>

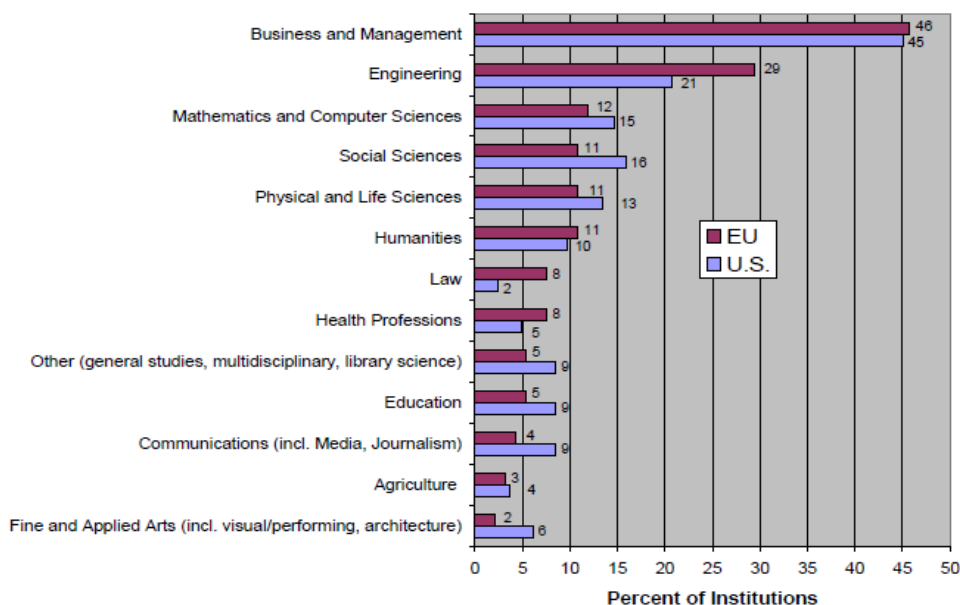
Number of partners institutions	US HEIs responding to the survey		EU HEIs responding to the survey	
	In the EU	In the US	In the EU	In the US
0	29%	51%	8%	46%
1	34%	42%	29%	34%
2	20%	3%	16%	8%
3-4	8%	3%	18%	7%
5+	8%	0%	29%	5%

81 US HEIs responded to the survey 53% (i.e. 43 HEIs) of US HEIs' respondents had joint or double degrees with EU institutions	92 EU HEIs responded to the survey 86% (i.e. 79 HEIs) of EU HEIs' respondents had joint or double degrees with US institutions
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Source: Kudey and Obst (2009)

Figure 4.4 Top academic disciplines in which joint or double degree programs are offered



Source: Kudey and Obst (2009)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

### 4.3 Obstacles to student mobility

The literature outlining the obstacles to student mobility highlights a number of factors that are related to the decision to be internationally mobile as a student. The determinants of pursuing a mobility period during higher education exist at three levels: the macro-scale (globalisation and internationalisation of higher education systems), the institutional level (such as the quality of the educational institution) and individual factors (such as language competences and personal motivation). Literature examining the factors that influence students to take part in the Erasmus Programme in the EU<sup>39</sup> highlight aspects such as the cost of living, the host country language, distance to the home country and the quality of the university. Another study which investigated the reasons associated with study abroad periods for students from New Zealand<sup>40</sup> emphasised the role of ongoing support to students and how effectively overseas study was integrated into student degree programmes.

Most commonly issues of financing, the lack of recognition of courses, language and culture barriers, lack of information, legal and other informal factors create barriers to student mobility. These obstacles apply to higher education mobility in general and are not specific to mobility between the United States and the European Union. The literature relating to these obstacles is vast and this section does not summarise all issues relating to the barriers to general student mobility.

Of these obstacles that students face in general, some barriers can be considered as particularly important in relation to mobility between the U.S. and the E.U. These are given in order of occurrence at each stage of the mobility period; from having enough information about taking part in a mobility period, securing the financial funding to support the mobility period, obtaining the necessary visa and paperwork, to issues of credit recognition upon return. The key obstacles are:

- Lack of information
- Financial concerns
- Visa issues
- Academic barriers

#### 4.3.1 Lack of Information

The lack of information creates the first main obstacle for students wishing to take part in a mobility period. Difficulties in obtaining reliable information about both European higher education and study opportunities in the United States act as a deterrent for students considering a study period abroad. The lack of easily accessible information relating to the respective education systems, the variation of languages and the diversity of available information within the EU can present a barrier to students from the US wishing to explore the options to study in the EU. The Academic Cooperation Association (2005)<sup>41</sup> survey relating to the perceptions of European Higher Education in non-EU countries found that information on Europe and its higher education was missing or hard to access.

It has also been noted<sup>42</sup> that the limited information provided by both home and host institutions for mobility periods is not only a barrier. It also fails to ensure adequate support before going abroad, during the study period or upon return. This lack of sufficient information on scholarship opportunities, living costs, tuition fees, suitable programmes, language requirements, application procedures and credit recognition acts as a barrier and also means students are not sufficiently prepared for the mobility period.

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<sup>39</sup> Rodriguez Gonzalez C., Bustillo Mesanza R. and Mariel P. (2010) *The Determinants of International Student Mobility Flows: an empirical study on the Erasmus programme*, Higher Education, Volume 62, N. 4, octobre 2010, p. 413-430.

<sup>40</sup> Doyle, S., P. Gendall, L.H. Meyer, J. Hoek, C. Tait, L. McKenzie and A. Loorparg (2010) *An Investigation of Factors Associated with Student Participation in Study Abroad* Journal of Studies in International Education, Vol. 14 No. 5, p.: 471-490.

<sup>41</sup> Found at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/doc/acasummary.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Junor S and Usher, A (2008) *Student Mobility & Credit Transfer A National and Global Survey*, Educational Policy Institute, retrieved on 31/05/2011 from <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/publications/pubpdf/credit.pdf>



#### 4.3.2 Financial Concerns

Once students have gained the information necessary to consider and apply for a mobility period abroad, funding is one of the core concerns for students. A key difference in mobility costs exists for students who are free-movers and exchange students who register for study abroad through their home HEI and participate in an agreed exchange between US and EU HEI's. Free-movers from either the EU or the US must pay for tuition at the study abroad HEI; whereas, students who study abroad under an HEI agreement, pay tuition to their home university. For exchange students, the home HEI transfers funds according to the agreement with the host HEI, or the home and host HEI's maintain an exchange balance in which they send the same number of students back and forth to each partner to balance the tuition. An additional study abroad fee may be required to support the exchange if it is based on direct enrolment in the host EU/US HEI, and not a balance of students studying in both directions.

For free-movers from the EU contemplating a study period or degree in the United States, financial issues are particularly pronounced in comparison to within-EU mobility. The financial crisis and escalating debts in state and local governments in the United States has contributed towards rising tuition costs. As a result, tuition for out-of-state undergraduate students increased by 6% in 2010-11 according to the College Board's *Trends in College Pricing 2010* report<sup>43</sup> which equates to USD 11,900 on average as a full-time out-of-state student at a public four-year college. Typically the cost of attendance for international students is comparable to the tuition paid by out-of-state students. International students also incur additional expenses for travel, lodging and food and mandatory health insurance.

This is in stark contrast to the tuition fees incurred by EU students studying within the EU. Although there is an increasing debate surrounding the introduction (or re-introduction) of tuition costs in many countries of the EU, in comparison to studying in the United States, undergraduates within the EU have a significantly lower financial burden. Therefore, it is unsurprising that 52% of non-mobile students stated that obtaining funding was an important factor in their non-mobility decision to be mobile from the EU to the US<sup>44</sup>. A study by the Illuminate Consulting Group in 2010<sup>45</sup> states a tendency to see the potential introduction of tuition fees at the university as creating a reduction in international student enrolment<sup>46</sup>, including that of free movers<sup>47</sup>. The OECD supports the suggestion that the comparatively small growth in international student enrolments in the US between 2000 and 2008 and the deterioration of the US market share in international education is likely to be at least in part due to the high tuition fees for international students in comparison to other countries.

The U.S. Government generally does not provide financial assistance to non-U.S. citizens, except through federally funded exchange programmes<sup>48</sup>. As a result, it is commonly the case that international students must secure sufficient funds to cover these rising tuition costs, and their living expenses. The limited availability of scholarships through either federally funded exchange programmes or EU initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus poses a significant barrier to mobility from the EU to the US. This combination of high tuition fees and the lack of scholarships can deter students from being mobile.

Many of the US students interviewed by the US research team noted that living expenses for study abroad were a challenge when they had to sign year-long rental agreements for lodging at their home HEI. The actual costs of lodging abroad were often less than the costs of lodging at the home university, or close by where rents can be inflated due to the proximity

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<sup>43</sup> Found at [http://trends.collegeboard.org/downloads/College\\_Pricing\\_2010.pdf](http://trends.collegeboard.org/downloads/College_Pricing_2010.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> IDEA Consult (2010) *Study on mobility patterns and career paths of EU researchers*. Found at [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/MORE\\_Extra\\_EU\\_mobility\\_report\\_final\\_version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/MORE_Extra_EU_mobility_report_final_version.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> The Illuminate Consulting Group (2010) *Perspectives on International Student Recruitment and Tuition Fees*.

<sup>46</sup> 76% of respondents expected a sustained reduction of overall international student enrolments in the next 3-4 years with the introduction of fees.

<sup>47</sup> 88% expected a sharp reduction of free movers

<sup>48</sup> ACA, *Perceptions of European higher education in third countries - US Country Report, 2005* Found at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/doc/us.pdf>

to a university. Thus, year-long study abroad had financial advantages in that students did not have to maintain or negotiate two residences, both home and abroad.

#### 4.3.3 Visa matters

The decline in international student enrolments in US colleges and universities is not only attributed to rising tuition costs, but also the real and perceived difficulties in securing necessary student visas. Evidence from the period 2001 to 2004<sup>49</sup> found that 53% of international students studying in the United States indicated that 'they had encountered problems with complicated visa procedures or strict requirements in planning to study in the United States'.

Visa and immigration rules also have been found to be an important factor related to U.S. students' decisions to study in the EU<sup>50</sup>. Twenty percent of U.S. students<sup>51</sup> who were mobile to the EU said that immigration regulations were an important influencing factor. Immigration policies also concern the possibility for spouses to work in the EU during their mobility period. Over 30% of U.S. students<sup>52</sup> surveyed for the study had concerns about securing work permission for their partners during their study period in Europe.

#### 4.3.4 Academic barriers

Academic barriers to student mobility commonly present themselves in two different ways; the qualifications necessary for entry into a programme and the recognition of qualifications/courses/credits achieved abroad after a period of study. For students choosing to enter the United States from the EU, and vice versa, to study for a full degree programme, there are issues of equivalency in entry requirements to the course. For example, post-secondary students from the EU wishing to pursue a degree programme in the US generally must submit results from either the ACT (American College Testing) or the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) as well as their school transcripts. This means students in EU countries with central exit examinations are required to take both the examinations of their home country and the college entrance examinations of the United States. This can place a burden on students from the EU wishing to gain entrance to an American university by having to prepare for both national exams and college entrance exams of the US. This issue is seldom relevant for students in dual or simultaneous degree programmes between US and EU HEI's that have established a joint exchange degree programme, nor for students who are studying abroad for a limited time as an exchange student.

Credit recognition and the ability to transfer credit after a mobility period is also an academic barrier to mobility for those wishing to pursue shorter periods of study abroad. As stated by Junor and Usher (2008),<sup>53</sup> credit recognition is the key to '*supporting students along educational pathways and allowing for movement between programmes and institutions*'. Inevitably, students are unlikely to pursue a mobility period abroad if they will either not be awarded equivalent credit for this time or it is uncertain if the study period will be recognised. Even where credit from one university is equivalent to credit at another institution, there is a second issue of the recognition of pre-requisite courses. In some cases, home universities require some prerequisites to be taken at the home institution, although some courses taken at the host institution were equivalent<sup>54</sup>. This can create a perceived barrier for those interested in a study period abroad as it can lead to longer completion times of programmes and related additional costs due to this extended length of time to degree completion. The

<sup>49</sup> Obst D and Forster J, (2005) 'Perceptions of European Higher Education Country Report: USA', Perceptions of European higher education in third countries, Academic Cooperation Association Secretariat: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/doc/us.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> IDEA Consult (2010) *Study on mobility patterns and career paths of EU researchers*. Found at [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/MORE\\_Extra\\_EU\\_mobility\\_report\\_final\\_version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/MORE_Extra_EU_mobility_report_final_version.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Idem, p .19

<sup>54</sup> Wachter B (2009) 'Increasing Europe's Attractiveness for International Students: What Can we Learn from the Bologna Process?' in *Higher Education on the Move: New Developments in Global Mobility*, Global Education Research Reports-Report 2, IIE & AIFS.

following sections of the report will address credit recognition between Europe and the U.S. in further detail.

#### 4.4 Implications for this study

This brief background section sets the scene for the discussion about credit recognition between the EU and the US. Even though the figures discussed do not give an exact picture of the EU-US student mobility, they indicate that the flows between the two are relatively important. There is consequently already existing demand for credit recognition when it comes to both: recognition of full qualifications for the purpose of further studies (in case of degree mobility), or recognition of credit for courses/ programme elements as part of student exchanges, or joint or double degrees. The fact that double or joint degrees exist or are being developed between US institutions and EU HEIs also implies that there is a need for agreements about how credit for various programme components from one institution to another will be recognised. The design of joint or double degrees also necessitates articulation of curricula which requires finding a common agreement on their structure, content, as well as on credit arrangements. At the same time, existing data indicates that there are difficulties in arranging credit recognition between EU and US higher education institutions especially at the level of study involving core (major and minor) programme requirements, rather than optional or elective degree requirements. Though academic barriers, such as credit recognition or recognition of previous qualifications for entry, are only two among several obstacles in student mobility, they continue to be of importance when other factors such as funding, language or visa issues have been addressed. The policies guiding the recognition of credit in study abroad, and the transparent availability of those policies and procedures for students to support their timely decision making to study abroad are therefore of importance.

## 5 Credit system use and development in Europe and the US

The use of credit systems in higher education is widespread both in the US as well as in Europe. In the US, the use of credit systems has a very long tradition and the origins of credit systems in education and training can be traced back to the US higher education system. On the other hand, in some European countries the use of credit is a recent development. Though most US institutions use a common approach to credit, there is no top-down initiative aimed at making credit systems in US higher education converge. In Europe, on the other hand, the top down initiative stemming from the Bologna Process ministerial decisions has definitely accelerated the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

This section discusses the conceptual basis of credit systems used in the US and in Europe before presenting certain data about difficulties in credit recognition between the two.

### 5.1 Credit systems development in higher education in the EU

The development and use of credit systems in European higher education has undergone important changes over the decade 2000-2010 as the ECTS became one of the pillars of the Bologna Process. While a number of higher education systems used credit before the start of the Bologna Process (namely the institutions in the UK, the Nordic countries, the Baltic States, Ireland or Hungary<sup>55</sup>), over the last decade the use of credit and more specifically the use of ECTS became a core feature of curriculum and programme design in higher education. This development implied that:

- Many HEIs in Europe were used to a different approach to using and calculating credit than those at the core of ECTS. In these systems the adoption of the ECTS required an adaptation of HEIs practices including a shift from linking credit with aspects such as contact hours to the notions of learning outcomes and workload; and
- In the remaining institutions, the concept of credit and the associated concepts of credit transfer and accumulation were new. Here the implementation of ECTS required not only the adoption of the credit 'metrics', but also a new approach to conceiving and designing study programmes in order to enable more flexibility and choices to students.

As a result, the implementation of ECTS at European level was (and still is) a progressive process with continuous adjustments. While in 2011 most students transcripts and diploma supplement documents contain information about credit (mostly in terms of ECTS)<sup>56</sup>, the practices in defining and awarding credit still vary, in particular when it comes to using learning outcomes as a basis for credit allocation<sup>57</sup>.

#### 5.1.1 Characteristics of ECTS

ECTS was first developed as an instrument to support credit transfer between higher education institutions in the framework of student mobility organised under the Erasmus programme. At that time, it was predominantly based on teaching inputs. It has progressively evolved into a system used for both credit accumulation and credit transfer in the framework of transnational mobility but also for mobility within a country or within a single institution.

The main goal behind the development of ECTS was to enable the recognition of studies abroad. When ECTS was first introduced in Europe in the 1980s, the procedures for recognition of foreign studies were rather rigid and based on a detailed comparison of

<sup>55</sup> EUA (2010) Trends 2010 : <http://www.eua.be/events/past/2010/presentation-of-trends-2010/home.aspx> <sup>55</sup> EUA (2010) *Trends 2010*.

<sup>56</sup> See for example presentation by Janerik Lundquist and Margit Schatzman at the 2010 annual conference of the European Association for International Education *ECTS credits: does practice match theory?* 18.10.2010 <http://www.eaie.org/pdf/nantes/403.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Cheps et al (2009) The Bologna Process Independent Assessment: The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area : [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf) <sup>57</sup> See for example Cheps et al. (2009).

curricula (Wagenaar 2007<sup>58</sup>). Furthermore, it was quite common that higher education systems were based on the use of contact hours, however these did not give a good account of the work a student was expected to do during his/her studies. The work that students were expected to do autonomously through independent studies, project work, or periods of practical training were not accounted for. It was rather common that student curricula were overloaded, which had as a side effect of high dropout rates or repetition (Wagenaar 2007). Another reason why a system based only on contact hours was considered inappropriate was the diversity of higher education structures, approaches and traditions across Europe. Higher education institutions in Europe combine different learning activities to develop programmes, but the proportion of classroom teaching, practical work, autonomous work, project work, etc., varies greatly. While different learning activities can lead to similar outcomes in terms of students' knowledge and competences, some are more intensive in contact hours than others. Consequently, it was considered that a system based on contact hours would not give a sufficient account of the equivalence between courses, even though the expected learning outcomes were equivalent. As a result, ECTS was progressively redefined to strengthen the core role of two main concepts:

- The concept of learning outcomes: the award of credit signals that the learner has achieved the expected learning outcomes independent of the inputs that s/he has been through;
- The concept of workload which embraces all learning activities that a person is typically expected to complete in order to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

### Box 3: Core features of ECTS

In ECTS, credit is based on **learning outcomes** and student **workload**.

Each programme component (unit, module, course, etc.) is defined in terms of learning outcomes which set out what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do upon the completion of the programme component.

Based on the definition of the learning outcomes, the higher education staff identify the typical student workload needed to achieve these learning outcomes. Calculation of student workload covers all learning activities including the teaching hours, independent work, practical assignments, etc.

In ECTS 60 credits are allocated to a full time year of formal learning. One credit is typically between 25 and 30 hours of workload.

Source: ECTS Users' Guide (2009)

#### 5.1.2 Implementation of ECTS in Europe

As mentioned above, ECTS was first designed to be used as a translation instrument for higher education programmes between two European higher education institutions. However, it became progressively adopted as the main national/institutional credit system. The use of credit as a means to enable flexibility and recognition of studies abroad was already mentioned in the Sorbonne declaration of higher education ministers in 1998. Neither the Sorbonne declaration nor the consequent declarations requested countries to directly implement ECTS. Instead, the emphasis was on implementing credit systems compatible with ECTS. However, most EU countries have decided to implement ECTS directly<sup>59</sup>. Most did it on the basis of a national legislation while elsewhere higher education

<sup>58</sup> Wagenaar, Robert (2006). An introduction to the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS). In EUA, *Bologna handbook: making Bologna work*.

<sup>59</sup> With the exception of the UK where a national credit system compatible with ECTS is used for credit accumulation and transfer at national level and ECTS is only used for international student exchanges.

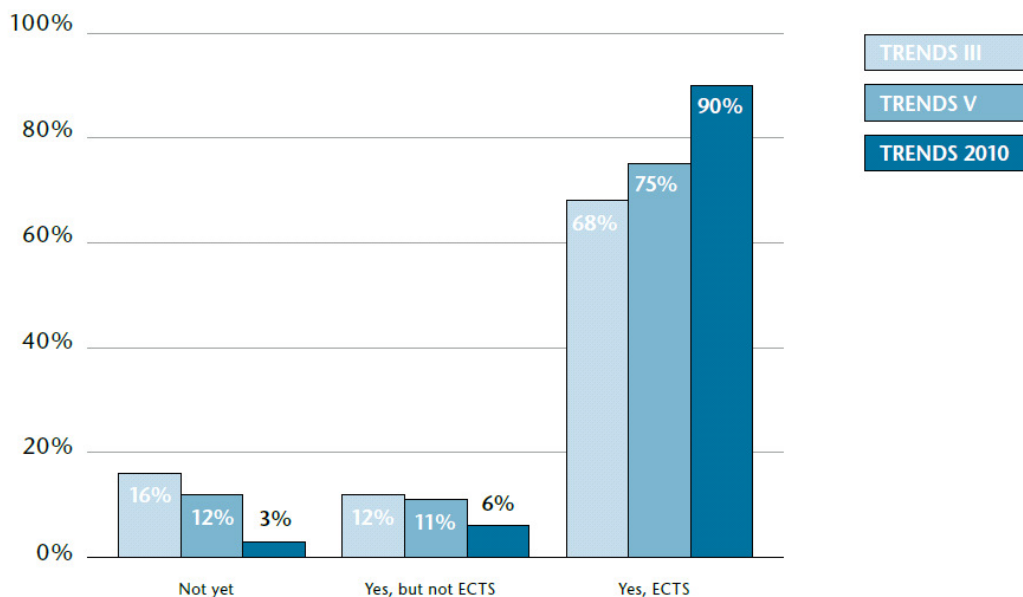
institutions were free to choose to use ECTS (Eurydice 2009<sup>60</sup>). The fact that ECTS was often introduced on the basis of legislation means that (publicly funded or nationally recognised) higher education institutions are required to develop programmes using credit-based components and all components as well as qualifications are quantified using credit points in line with ECTS.

As a result, according to a survey of 821 higher education institutions in the EU (representing around 15% of all HE institutions), in 2010 most institutions used ECTS for both credit transfer and credit accumulation, though its use for credit transfer is more common (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2). A clear progression in use of ECTS has been observed between 2003 and 2009.

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<sup>60</sup> Eurydice (2009) *Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process*, European Commission: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09_en.pdf) - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09_en.pdf)

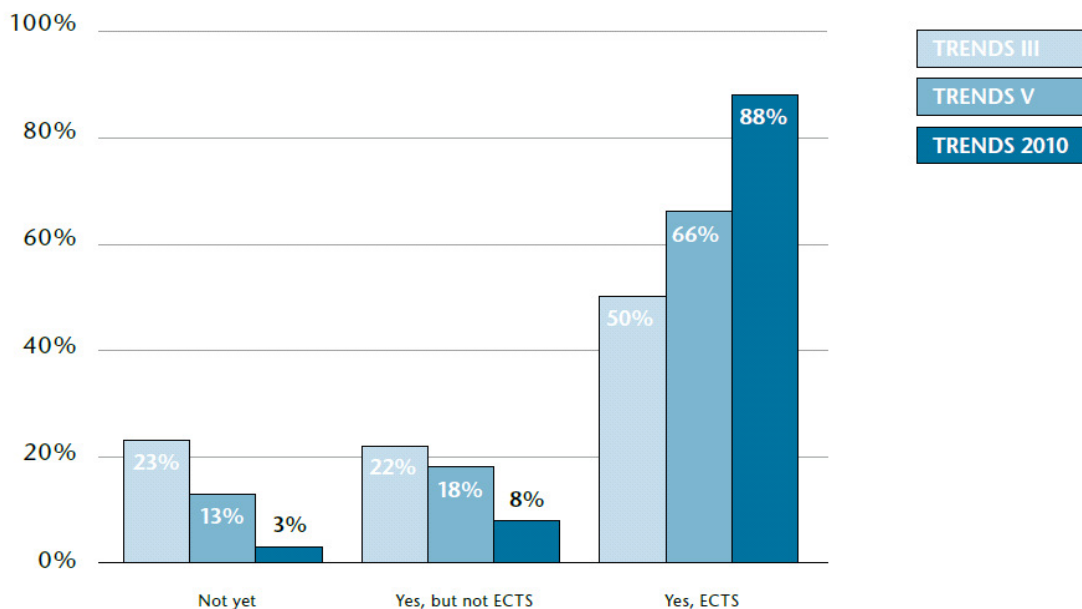
Figure 5.1 Does your institution have a credit transfer system for all bachelor and masters degree programmes?



Legend: Trends III survey was carried out in 2003 and Trends V survey in 2007

Source: EUA (2009)

Figure 5.2 Does your institution have a credit accumulation system for all bachelor and masters degree programmes?



Legend: Trends III survey was carried out in 2003 and Trends V survey in 2007

Source: EUA (2009)

Despite progress, the implementation of ECTS at the institutional level is far from being homogeneous across Europe. Even though the use of ECTS has in principle become widespread, the extent to which the implementation is actually in line with the ECTS principles

varies greatly. As shown by the independent assessment of the Bologna Process,<sup>61</sup> only in eight EU countries is ECTS broadly implemented at the institutional level respecting the use of both learning outcomes and workload (see Table 5.1). The use of teaching hours as a basis for allocation of credit is still a common practice in five countries and the estimation of workload without actually using learning outcomes per programme component is the most common approach (13 countries). A very similar picture is provided by a study carried out by the Eurydice unit of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission<sup>62</sup>.

Table 5.1 Dominant practice in allocation of credits

Dominant practice	Higher education systems	Number of countries
Credits allocated to courses based on an estimation of the average student workload and defined and written learning outcomes	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Sweden, UK-Scotland	8
Credits allocated to courses based on estimated average student workload, but without using learning outcomes	Austria, Belgium-NL, Belgium-FR, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia	13
Credits allocated to courses based on defined and written learning outcomes, but without an estimation of average student workload	The Netherlands, Romania, UK-E/W/Nl	3
Credits allocated to courses based on teaching / contact hours	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, Spain	5

Source: CHEPS et al. (2009)<sup>63</sup> p.22

The use of credit systems is also linked to the modularisation of higher education programmes. Modularisation is commonly understood as the use of modules which are discrete, not too large (one of two terms/semesters) and which give students certain flexibility in choosing the courses they follow. While there is little comprehensive information on the use of modularised programmes in Europe, there seems to be enough evidence to conclude that so far modularisation is not as wide-spread as one would think it would be given the wide-spread use of ECTS. According to the survey of the European University Association, 46% of higher education institutions that responded to the survey (out of 821) have modularised all programmes, while another 23% have only modularised some programmes<sup>64</sup>. The independent assessment of the Bologna Process identified that more than 90% of programmes were modularised in 11 EU countries (Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, UK-Scotland). In another nine countries the modularisation is more or less developed (between 25% and 90% of programmes) while elsewhere it has not yet been put in place<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Cheps et al (2010) *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment: The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area* : [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Eurydice (2009) *Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process*, European Commission: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09_en.pdf) - [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/eurydice09_en.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> CHEPS et al. (2010) *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area Volume 1 Detailed assessment report*: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> EUA (2010), *Trends 2010* p. 46, <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/trends-in-european-higher-education/trends-vi.aspx><sup>64</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Cheps et al (2009) *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment: The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area*, p. 23 : [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf)<sup>65</sup>

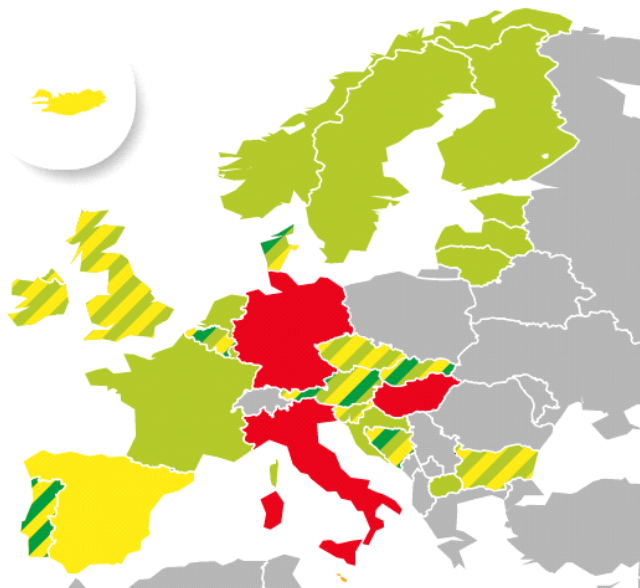


The ECTS system as it was originally conceived, was meant to address a number of principal objectives of the Bologna Process, in particular mobility, lifelong learning and validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It can therefore be used for a variety of purposes:

- To give flexibility to students within an institutions (choice of optional modules);
- To recognise credit from other institutions in the same country or abroad; or
- To recognise learning outcomes achieved outside higher education: be it in another education and training system (for example, vocational education and training at post-secondary level) or through work or leisure (recognition of non-formal and informal learning).

The extent to which ECTS is actually used for all these three purposes varies greatly from institution to institution as well as across higher education systems. In some countries certain national level rules and guidance exist about the recognition of learning outcomes achieved outside higher education, while in other systems such recognition is rather difficult<sup>66</sup>.

Figure 5.3 Is recognition of prior learning really available in your country (survey of student union representatives)?



Legend: ● available according to national/regional policy; ● available only in some sectors; ● available only in some institutions; ● other (limited or being discussed); ● not available at all

Source: ESU (2009)<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, it can be concluded that while ECTS is theoretically by large the most widespread credit system used in Europe, in practice there is a variety of institutional credit systems which are more or less in line with the key principles of ECTS and which can contain much more detailed arrangements and use (in addition to the basis set in the ECTS Key Features and the ECTS Users' Guide).

<sup>66</sup> See for example GHK (2011) *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010 Thematic Report – Validation in the Higher Education Sector*  
<http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77645.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> European Students Union (2009) *Bologna with students' eyes*.  
[http://www.esib.org/documents/publications/official\\_publications/BWSE2009-final.pdf](http://www.esib.org/documents/publications/official_publications/BWSE2009-final.pdf)

### Box 4: Echoes and dangers of fragmented ECTS implementation

A study called 'Bologna with Student Eyes' conducted by ESIB<sup>68</sup> found that there was a distinct danger of the Bologna Process being implemented 'a la Carte', which they argued would hamper the chances and opportunities of the process given its 'comprehensive' and 'interlinked' nature. The biggest danger that the study found was that ECTS was in danger of being implemented superficially. For example:

*'The Bologna three-cycle system is widely in place throughout Europe, if one just looks at the surface. Most countries have put in place the necessary legal provisions, and a significant amount of students are enrolled in bachelor, master or doctorate programmes. However, there is a substantial lack of real curricular reform throughout the EHEA. An alarming number of national unions of students report that the old, long programmes in their country have been simply 'cut' into two, with the new first cycle qualification having an unclear value to students and to the labour market.'*<sup>69</sup>

Another danger is that ECTS will only be translated from national qualifications, which were calculated using the old system and not from workload, making the system indecipherable. For example, the credit points may not be 'fair' due to the way they were calculated (using division/multiplication) in one country compared to another. There is also a poor understanding of how credit is accumulated by students because credit accumulation systems are quite new in many countries. The overall effect can be that one country does not know how to interpret credit accrued in another institution or country.

#### 5.1.2 Instruments and initiatives related to the use of ECTS

The implementation of ECTS takes place in the context of broader higher education reforms that will not be discussed here in detail. These reforms lead to the development of other instruments that are related to the use of ECTS and could support its wider use. The following five instruments are of particular relevance:

- National qualifications frameworks;
- The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education;
- Qualifications review (related to the Tuning process);
- The Europass Diploma Supplement;
- ECTS grading table/scheme.

#### *National qualifications frameworks*

National qualifications frameworks define:

- The typical learning outcomes for a qualification at a given level. The qualifications frameworks are based on levels whereby each level is defined through a general statement describing the level of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competence and possibly also other characteristics). Qualifications at higher levels are characterised by greater complexity of knowledge and competences, expertise within a given area and also aspects such as greater autonomy and/or critical approach to information.

In general, the spectrum of higher education qualifications covers three levels: first cycle (bachelor or undergraduate degrees), second cycle (masters' degrees and the equivalent) and third cycle (doctoral degrees and the equivalent). In certain systems a sub-level (short cycle) exists within the first cycle (typically corresponding to two years higher education degrees).

<sup>68</sup> European Students Union (2007) *Bologna with students' eyes*.

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Bognastudenteyes2007.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.6-7.

- The processes through which qualifications are involved in the qualifications framework. In other words, the procedure through which it is verified that a specific qualification indeed leads to learning outcomes at the given level.

Qualifications frameworks are often related to the development of registers or databases in which all qualifications in the framework are recorded.

Qualifications frameworks are relevant for credit systems because:

- They facilitate the identification of equivalence between qualifications and consequently also between programme components. Typically credit transfer would take place between qualifications at the same level though in some cases credit can be transferred vertically (towards qualifications at higher levels);
- They support trust in credit from abroad as qualifications that are within the national qualifications framework are quality assured (see below).

### *Quality assurance*

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area<sup>70</sup> define the key aspects of quality assurance that should be put in place in all European higher education systems. The quality assurance is based on three key processes:

- Internal evaluation – whereby the higher education institution puts in place a system through which the quality of inputs and outcomes is monitored and progressively improved;
- External evaluation – through which an independent quality assurance agency (national or regional body) periodically assesses the effectiveness of internal quality assurance procedures. The external quality assurance also includes system level analysis;
- External evaluation of quality assurance agencies through a peer-review process based on common European criteria. This is also related to the setting up of a register of European quality assurance agencies.

Quality assurance is relevant for credit systems because:

- If a higher education institution is accredited by a recognised quality assurance agency, the trust of other institutions in credit awarded by that institution should be strengthened as the credit will be linked to academic standards;
- Linking credit to quality assurance mechanisms gives it real application and ‘currency’;
- International confidence in the quality of credit will only improve if they are linked to quality assurance mechanisms;
- The internal quality assurance process covers a range of issues including design of programmes and their components and assessment.

Depending on the system, the quality assurance processes may be closely related to the inclusion of qualifications in the qualifications framework.

### *Review of qualifications and study programmes*

The implementation of qualifications frameworks and the review of quality assurance processes lead to, in many EU countries, revision of higher education programmes and qualifications. The implementation of qualifications frameworks brought new structural elements for certain higher education systems (definition of bachelor degrees in systems where only long master’s degrees existed). Together with the quality assurance approach, expectations have been created according to which higher education programmes should be designed in a different manner (than they used to be in many countries and institutions):

- They should be linked to career options of graduates through the clear and explicit definition of learning outcomes;

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<sup>70</sup> ENQA (2005) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

- The structures of qualifications should give graduates the opportunities to move from one level to another, but also to change pathways in the transition points.

As part of this development, some EU countries have started working on defining common minimum standards per discipline which would be shared to all HEIs awarding qualifications in the given discipline. Such development is for example, currently on going in the Czech Republic<sup>71</sup>. This process of defining learning outcomes based standards is inspired by the EU-funded initiative called Tuning, which resulted in the identification of a set of common learning outcomes benchmarks in a number of disciplines<sup>72</sup>. The benchmarks developed through the Tuning project were a voluntary tool to use by higher education institutions to self-assess or adjust their education and training offer. The idea behind the development of such common EU benchmarks, in terms of learning outcomes, was three-fold:

- To develop, test and mainstream (through broad involvement) a method for identifying and describing learning outcomes in European higher education;
- To strengthen the quality of higher education programmes in the given disciplines; and
- To improve comparability of programmes and qualifications' content across the EU.

The development of learning outcomes based standards as part of this process is directly related to ECTS because these definitions should underpin the calculation of workload and the consequent allocation of credit.

The Tuning approach has nearly become a trade mark over time and it has been tested in different contexts, including in the US. The Lumina Foundation ran a pilot project in 2009, which looked at the feasibility of using the Tuning approach in the US<sup>73</sup>. The findings of this pilot project were positive and as a result, a feasibility study looking at quantitative aspects and qualitative instruments to improve the transparency of learning outcomes was initiated. During the EU-US policy forum 11 October 2010, the European Commission and the US Department of Education encouraged a joint study with the purpose of inducing more transparency in learning outcomes in the higher education systems in the US and the EU, as well as to develop a robust methodology for evaluating the changes brought about to higher education by the Tuning approach in terms of behaviour, learning and completion rates. This study was launched in 2011 and its objective is to:

- Compare the processes and outcomes of the development of conceptual frameworks in the subject areas of history and physics, which should result in an alignment of academic standards and reference points. This undertaking should serve as a model for other subject areas.
- Develop a robust methodology, based on qualitative and quantitative parameters, to measure the effects of applying the Tuning approach to degree programmes, teaching staff, students and graduates.

#### *The Europass Diploma Supplement*

The Europass is one of the EU's main instruments to support mobility, and one of its components is the Diploma Supplement. This is a document issued by a university and describes the qualification the learner holds. The Diploma Supplement comprises eight parts providing information on the holder, the diploma, the level of the qualification, the content and results obtained, the function of the qualification, the certification of the supplement and the national higher education system. European higher education institutions are advised to translate the workload for the qualification into the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Therefore, it is relevant for use in credit transfer as it should

<sup>71</sup> Stastna et al. (2008) *Národní soustava kvalifikací pro terciární vzdělávání Úvod do diskuse*  
<http://www.bologna.msmt.cz/?id=vybrane-oblasti/ramcenarodni-soustava-kvalifikaci-uvod-do-diskuse>;

<sup>72</sup> For more information see the website of Tuning Educational Structures in Europe:  
<http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

<sup>73</sup> For more information see the website of the Lumina foundation:  
[http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/topics.html?\\_stopic=9](http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/topics.html?_stopic=9)

present a standard format and describe what the person has achieved in a widely spoken language (most often English but possibly others).

#### *ECTS grading scheme*

Although it is mainly credit that is transferred between higher education institutions and systems, some also transfer grades. Grades have the benefit of providing an indicator of the actual level of performance, whereas a credit attests that the minimum criteria have been met. In institutions where grades are transferred, this is often related to the fact that in many higher education systems students performance is related to aspects such as scholarships, progression towards higher levels or sometimes even employers' choice. Consequently, not translating the grades could imply a disadvantage for students concerned.

The ECTS Users' Guide contains guidelines that higher education institutions can use to translate grades from abroad. It is based on a system through which the institution where credit is awarded indicates whether a student's performance is in the top 5%, 5-10%, etc., of achievement. This is then translated following the same logic to the grading system of the institution where the person seeks recognition.

Though such a system would certainly guarantee fairness of students' credit recognition, there is for the moment no information about the extent to which it is actually being used.

## 5.2 Credit systems in higher education in the US

The majority of US students complete their degrees after having been through periods of studies at several different universities: 60% of the students completing a bachelor's degree do so in more than one institution.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, credit systems and transparent processes for the transfer of credit between US HEI's are an important element of the American system of higher education in ensuring recognition of past achievements from one institution to the other so students can accomplish degrees without extra cost and time.

A key area for credit transfer in the US is between two-year Associate degree institutions and four-year Bachelor degree institutions, especially within the same state or geographic location. In order to facilitate the transfer of credit between US HEI's, the most popular mechanism developed is an articulation table or agreement that specifies how credit for courses will transfer between institutions. These articulation tables are developed by the evaluation of individual courses by the faculty members in the respective, or closest, academic discipline or department. Many two-year institutions will seek formal agreements with state-wide four-year institutions so they can recruit students with the promise that credits taken there will transfer to four-year degree programmes at nearby HEI's. Because each state government in the US provides some support to public two-year and four-year HEI's, the concern that students could not transfer credits between public HEI's led to recent legislation in over half of the states (30) to enforce articulation agreements between state-wide public HEI's. About half of the US states have developed a common core curriculum (23 states) that is focused primarily on lower-division general education credits for the Bachelor degree, and a few have mandated state-wide common course numbering system (8 states) for public HEI's that receive any state funding. These measures do not include credit recognition and transfer for major or minor programmes at the Bachelor's level of study, although, articulation tables between US HEI's can include upper-division credits that have been evaluated and recognised by the institution faculty members within the respective major or minor programme of study. Financial incentives were also launched in 15 states to develop agreements, whereas 3 others offered scholarships or tuition reductions to encourage transfer<sup>75</sup>. The detail of the legislative measures existing for credit transfer is provided in Table 5.2.

<sup>74</sup> Eckel P and Kin J. (2011), 'An Overview Diversity, Access, United States: of Higher Education in the American Council on Education The Unifying Voice for Higher Education and the Role of the Marketplace'. <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/2373805/An-Overview-of-Higher-Education-in-the-United-States-Diversity>

<sup>75</sup> Junor S and Usher, A (2008) *Student Mobility & Credit Transfer A National and Global Survey*, Educational Policy Institute. <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/publications/pubpdf/credit.pdf>

Table 5.2 Two- and Four-Year State Transfer Policies<sup>76</sup>

Category	Explanation	Number of States
Legislation	Some states have written transfer and articulation policy into legislation through statutes, bills, or resolutions.	30
Co-operative agreements	State-wide co-operative agreements between post-secondary institutions can sometimes take the place of legislation if there is no official policy regarding transfer and articulation.	40
Transfer data reporting	Data is reported on transfer activities in the state.	33
Student incentives and rewards for transfer	In an effort to encourage transfer between community colleges and four-year universities, some states provide extra incentive by offering financial aid, guaranteed transfer of credit or priority admission to transfer students.	18
State-wide articulation	State-wide articulation guides provide concrete descriptions of the requirements and attempt to answer questions students may have regarding the transfer process.	26
State-wide common core curricula	A common core curriculum streamlines the articulation process by eliminating the confusion that can arise when separate institutions require different core courses to fulfil graduation requirements.	23
Common course numbering systems	A student at a community college will be assured of taking the proper requirements if there is a common course numbering system.	8

Source: Junor S and Usher, A (2008)

Although no federal legislation exists for the transfer of credits, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and the American Council on Education and the Council for Higher Education issued a statement in 2001 supporting the principle of making credit transfer easier and were committed to ensuring institutional academic standards. The results of their survey of US HEIs on credit transfer policies and practices in 2003 concluded<sup>77</sup>:

*The states are doing a good job of addressing transfer problems in the most traditional form of transfer: 2-year to 4-year institutions. However, they are only beginning to address horizontal transfer (2-2 or 4-4). Similarly, the states are doing well in addressing the transfer of general education ("core courses") and associate degrees. Beyond that, however, few states have evolved common course-numbering systems or clear systems for transfer of courses within the major, although many are working on such mechanisms.*

These results highlight the difficulty in transferring credit for major and minor programme components between US HEIs as a backdrop for the similar issue and challenge in transferring major programme credits between US and EU HEIs. Also, in 2001, the National Articulation & Transfer Network was created by the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education and the Institute for Higher Education Policy to provide information for students and school administrators in terms of state policies and key support on transfer of credits.

A more recent development in making the transfer of credits easier was in February 2005, when Howard P. McKeon, Chairman of Subcommittee on 21st-Century Competitiveness and John Boehner from the Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman, called for the introduction of the College Access and Opportunity Act (H.R. 609); the bill would ensure that credits are not unfairly and arbitrarily denied and it requests colleges and universities to:

- establish transfer of credit policies;

<sup>76</sup> Idem.

<sup>77</sup> American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (2003)

- make those policies;
  - available to the public; and,
  - to abide by their own individual policies.

Some of the recommendations were included in the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education (Spellings Report) regarding the need to build a more national and formalised system of credit recognition.<sup>78</sup> The current status in each US state of transfer and articulation of credit processes can be examined through an website provided by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers<sup>79</sup>.

### 5.2.2 Characteristics of credit systems in the US

There are two major credit systems used in the US, but also a few local credit systems in certain HEIs. The two major credit systems are:

- The semester-hours of credit
- The quarter hours of credit.

The main characteristics of these approaches are presented in Table 5.3. Overall, the US credit systems are rather tightly related to the education and training programmes and instruction hours. In the US the credit system is based on how the inputs are organised and the weight of credit points is based purely on the inputs. The use of ECTS in Europe is trying to avoid this too close link between the credit system and the study programme. In ECTS, credit based on the combination of learning outcomes and the workload needed to achieve them. However the emphasis on learning outcomes should ensure that credit recognition is ultimately based on learners' knowledge, skills and understanding rather than the teaching inputs.

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<sup>78</sup> Junor S and Usher, A (2008)

<sup>79</sup> See: [http://www2.aacrao.org/pro\\_development/transfer.cfm](http://www2.aacrao.org/pro_development/transfer.cfm)

Table 5.3 Main credit systems in the US

Name	Number of terms per academic year	Duration	Total of credits for the period	Total of credits for one academic year (undergraduate level)	Total of credits for a bachelor degree	Conversion of systems	Lecture course	Laboratory course	Practice course
Semester hours of credit	2 semesters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 15 weeks</li> <li>or,</li> <li>▪ 16 weeks</li> </ul>	15 or 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 30 (15 credits x 2 semesters)</li> <li>or</li> <li>▪ 32 (16 credits x 2 semesters)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 120 (15 credits x 8 semesters)</li> <li>or</li> <li>▪ 128 (16 credits x 8 semesters)</li> </ul>	Credits are multiplied by 3/2 when transferring to the quarter system (30 semester credits x 3/2= 45 quarter credits).	15 hours of formal instructions (one hour per week)= 1 semester credit.	Values 2 or 3 times more than a lecture course. Thus, 1 semester credit = 2 or 3 times 15hours of formal instructions.	Values 3 or 4 times more than a lecture course. Thus, 1 semester credit = 3 or 4 times 15hours of formal instructions.
Quarter hours of credit	3 quarters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10 weeks</li> <li>or</li> <li>▪ 11 weeks</li> </ul>	15 or 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 45 (15 credits x 3 quarters)</li> <li>or</li> <li>▪ 48 (16 credits x 3 quarters)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 180 (15 credits x 12 quarters)</li> <li>or</li> <li>▪ 192 (16 credits x 12 quarters)</li> </ul>	Credits are multiplied by 2/3 when transferring to the semester system (45 quarter credits x 2/3= 30 semester credits)			

Source: ECE (2003)<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Educational Credentials Evaluators (2003) Credit Practices in the United States and Suggestions for determining US credit equivalences for credit systems used in other countries.



### 5.3 Comparison of ECTS and the credit systems used in the US

The most commonly used credit system in the US is the ‘semester hours of credit’ system. Table 5.4 below compares the main characteristics of this credit system with ECTS. The major conceptual or structural differences between the use of credit in the US and in the EU are:

- The use of learning outcomes to describe and define the content of programme components when using ECTS, while in US components are generally described through curricula/teaching inputs;
- The use of contact hours as a basis for calculating credit value in the US while in ECTS, student workload covering a full range of learning activities is expected to be used; and
- Standardised approach to describing the level of programmes components/ courses in the US, while in Europe there is no common approach to describe the level of courses other than defining whether they are Bachelor or Masters level;

In terms of commonalities:

- Both systems have defined a standard number of credits for a full time academic year (60 in ECTS and 30 in the US system); and
- In both systems the use of semesters as basic structuring elements is most common.
- Another important issue for this study is the difference in amount of flexibility in course selection offered to EU and US students as a consequence of the different structure of the US and EU Bachelor degree. This affects the choices students can make about credit taken abroad that would correspond to the requirements at the home HEI. In general, the US system, especially at undergraduate Bachelor level, gives students more flexibility in choosing optional components than what can be observed in the EU. These optional components consist of the lower division general education requirements that range from 30 to 60 US semester credits of the Bachelor degree. For some major and minor programmes of study that begin in the third year of US university study, these general education requirements are specified, but for some major/minor programmes the general education credits are left entirely to student choice. These major/minor programmes might be considered more liberal in their degree requirements. In addition to this potential flexibility in the first two years of study at a US HEI, the last two years of study in the major/minor programmes can also be more liberal or conservative in requirements. A major can have core courses that all students must take, as well as optional requirements with a menu of choices, and electives that are entirely up to student choice. Majors in professional areas or those with accrediting bodies, might have less flexibility in the optional and elective courses in the major programme. In Europe some HEIs have a rather liberal approach to degree requirements and predefine only about 50% of a programme through core courses, while others define a much larger share of the programme. Important differences between the flexibility of degree/programme requirements also exist within universities among departments, and this flexibility is a key issue for students in considering and planning study abroad.

Table 5.4 Comparison of the ECTS with the US semester hours of credit system

	ECTS	US – semester hours of credit system
<b>Main characteristics</b>	Based on learning outcomes that define what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to do for each programme component and the expected student workload to achieve these learning outcomes. Workload covers all learning activities (contact hours, projects, practical work, autonomous study, etc.)	Based on contact hours with teaching staff
<b>Level is expressed in terms of</b>	In general courses are either at Bachelor or Masters level. Institutions have their own approaches to	Each course has an assigned level. In general, lower division general education courses use a 100 and 200 numbering

	defining prerequisites and there is no commonly shared system of levels to differentiate among courses within a study programme.	system, upper division major and minor programme courses use a 300 and 400 numbering system. Master level courses use both the 400 and 500 numbering system and it is most common that 50% of the courses must be at the 500 level or higher.
<b>Quantification of credit (number of credit points/credits)</b>	<p>ECTS is based on the principle that a full academic year of study is equivalent to 60ECTS.</p> <p>It is generally accepted that one ECTS credit is equivalent to 25 to 30 hours of student workload.</p> <p>There is no 'standard size of course components'. Course components can have different credit values from one higher education institution to another.</p>	<p><i>Lectures:</i> 15 hours of formal instructions (one hour per week) = 1 semester credit; <i>Laboratory course:</i> 2 or 3 times more than a lecture course. Thus, 1 semester credit = 2 or 3 times 15hours of formal instructions <i>Practice course:</i> 3 or 4 times more than a lecture course. Thus, 1 semester credit = 3 or 4 times 15hours of formal instructions.</p> <p>Full academic year is considered to be 30 credits.</p>
<b>Characteristics of programme components</b>	<p>There is a variety of types of course components (lectures, practical seminars, laboratory work, work placements, etc.) and no common approach to the way these are defined or how their size is expressed in terms of credit value. Some higher education institutions have modularised programmes but the approach to modularisation is not homogeneous.</p> <p>Most institutions use a semester as a basic structural element, but some work with trimesters.</p>	<p>While courses can differentiate between lectures, laboratory work, and practice work placements, a single course can contain all three forms of activity. An academic year is divided into two semesters.</p>

Source: Own analysis based on ECTS Users' Guide and Educational Credentials Evaluators (2003)

#### 5.4 Credit and qualification recognition at transnational level: what do we already know?

With increasing mobility (degree mobility as well as credit mobility), the theme of credit recognition has gained importance within Europe but also more broadly. The basic principles for recognition of both qualifications and periods of study are set in the *Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*<sup>81</sup>, which was signed and ratified by 51 countries in Europe and beyond. The US has signed the Lisbon Convention but it has not been ratified yet. The Lisbon Convention is based on the principles that:

- Countries and higher education institutions should have transparent policies and procedures in place to recognise qualifications and periods of study abroad;
- Unless a substantial difference between a candidate's qualification and host country qualification is demonstrated, the qualification should be recognised;
- Recognition of periods of study abroad is based on the principles that the programme elements undertaken abroad are relevant for the programme for which recognition is being sought and that the period of study abroad has been properly assessed and documented by the foreign higher education institution.

All countries that signed the Lisbon Convention have designated bodies that act as National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility and they form the network of ENICs<sup>82</sup>. However, their role is advisory and the main responsibility for qualification and

<sup>81</sup> Council of Europe: <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=165&CL=ENG>

<sup>82</sup> See the ENIC NARIC website: <http://www.enic-naric.net/>

credit recognition in most cases lies with the higher education institutions (the exception being when qualification recognition concerns regulated professions or labour market recognition). The information centres act mainly with regard to the recognition of full qualifications. Recognition of credit (periods of study) is entirely the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves and is in most cases delegated to the level of departments/faculties (see the discussion later on in this study).

Unfortunately, there is no comparable quantitative international data on qualification recognition of mobile students and there is also little qualitative comparative information that would enable a deduction about whether overall qualification and credit recognition worldwide is satisfactory. However, the evidence that exists within Europe points towards some persisting difficulties even though these do not concern the majority of students. This evidence is summarised below.

When it comes to the recognition of qualifications the following studies illustrate the difficulties encountered:

- 93% of foreign students coming to Germany have received some recognition for the qualifications they held previously, a figure that may seem impressive at a first glance. However, there seems to be major differences in the form of recognition granted; 30% of individuals who held a previous first cycle higher education degree only gained recognition at the level of a secondary school-leaving certificate or to enter higher education and another 19% gained partial recognition. Only 40% gained recognition as a bachelor degree and 13% gained recognition at a higher level<sup>83</sup>.
- In Poland, 95% of requests for qualification recognition in view of further studies were accepted, but the survey of higher education institutions revealed that the procedures are not always applied in a consistent manner and applicants do not always receive the appropriate information (for example, about the right to appeal)<sup>84</sup>.
- A survey of credential evaluators in Europe revealed that:
  - Credential evaluators do see Diploma Supplements but these are still not systematic despite the fact that the Diploma Supplement document was adopted in 1999<sup>85</sup>;
  - ECTS is increasingly used on Diploma Supplement documents but it seems to be rare in some countries like Italy or Spain;

This shows that the transparent information on qualifications and credit that underpins qualification recognition is not yet systematically provided to mobile students and graduates.

With regard to recognition in the framework of mobility exchanges (credit mobility), the majority of student union representatives surveyed as part of the Bologna with Student Eyes 2009 assessment, responded that some or many students in their department had problems with credit recognition when mobile during their studies (see Figure 5.4). The survey of Erasmus students carried out by the Erasmus Students Network showed that full recognition of credit gained during organised mobility within Europe was not guaranteed even if a valid learning agreement was in place. It showed that 29.7% of students received partial recognition and nearly 4% received no recognition. Of those students who received partial recognition, 56.7% received recognition for more than two thirds of credit. When looking at

<sup>83</sup> HIS (2011) *Internationalisation of higher education: foreign students in Germany and German students abroad*: [http://www.his.de/publikation/archiv/X\\_Pub/index.html?reihe\\_nr=X913](http://www.his.de/publikation/archiv/X_Pub/index.html?reihe_nr=X913).

<sup>84</sup> Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education: Survey on the Recognition Procedures in Poland <http://www.nauka.gov.pl/higher-education/recognition-of-foreign-qualifications/recognition-of-academic-qualifications/activities-of-the-polish-enic-naric/activities-of-the-polish-enic-naric/artukul/survey-on-the-recognition-procedures-in-poland/>

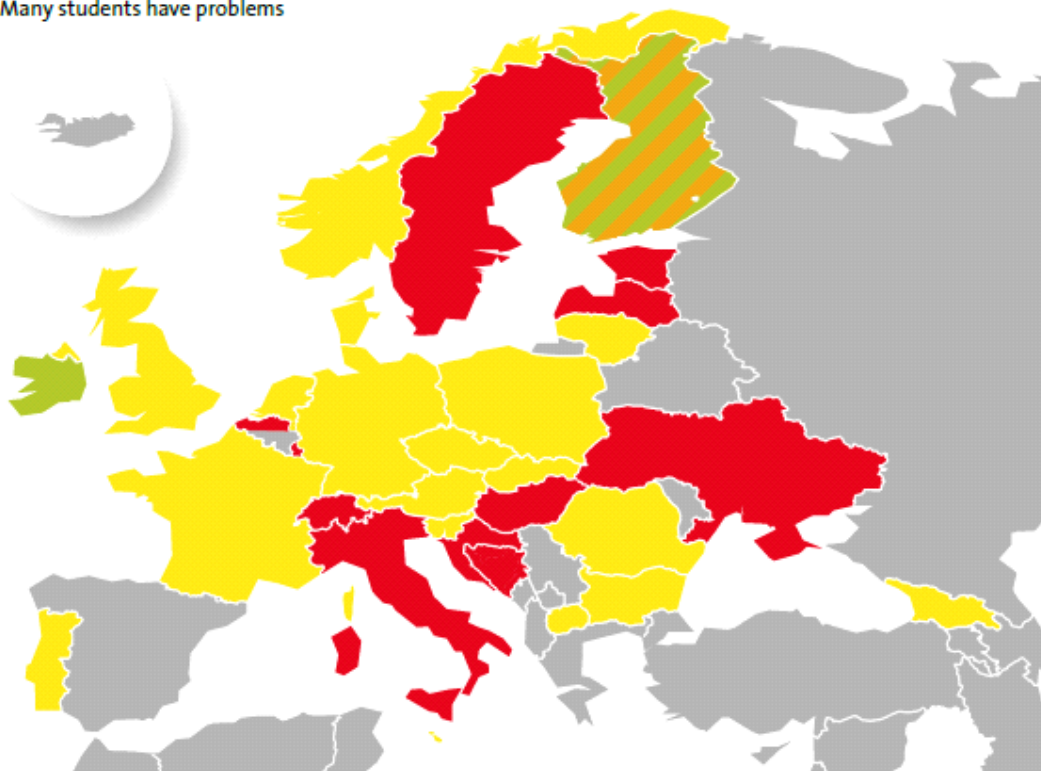
<sup>85</sup> Diploma Supplement Explanatory notes [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds_en.pdf)

the responses of HEIs, the survey showed that nearly in 77% of HEIs (111 HEIs responded) more than 80% of students received full recognition of credit achieved abroad<sup>86</sup>.

Figure 5.4 Results of a Student Union survey about the credit recognition of returning students

*-Situation of national students returning from a period of study abroad encountering problems with the recognition of their credits*

- None or almost none have problems
- Some students have problems
- Depends on where they were studying
- Many students have problems

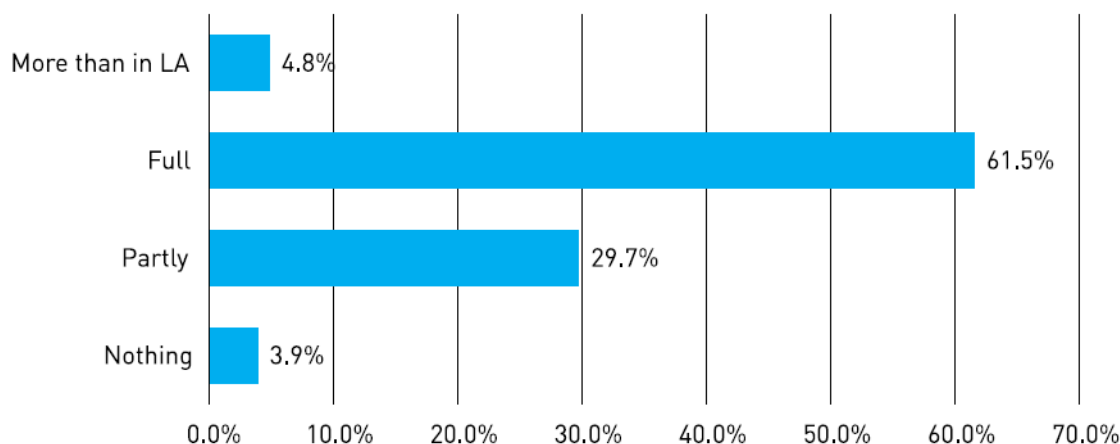


Source: ESU (2010)<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Erasmus Student Network (2009) *Problems of recognition in making Erasmus*: <http://www.esn.org/content/prime-problems-recognition-making-erasmus>.

<sup>87</sup> European Student Union (2010) *Bologna at the Finish Line*: [http://www.esib.org/documents/publications/ESU\\_BAFL\\_publication.pdf](http://www.esib.org/documents/publications/ESU_BAFL_publication.pdf)

Figure 5.5 Extent of recognition among Erasmus student respondents who had a valid learning agreement signed before the mobility period (n=1693)



Source: Erasmus Student Network (2009)<sup>88</sup>

On the other hand, in parallel to the issues mentioned above, good practice also exists. In Denmark, for example, the right to qualification or credit recognition for any mobile person has been embedded in legislation with the right to appeal. The full transparency of the process is ensured by the operations of the Danish Agency for International Education (see Box 5).

### Box 5: Denmark: full transparency in qualification recognition processes

The Danish Agency for International Education, in line with the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications Act, annually reports to the Danish parliament about activities carried out in qualification recognition in a given year. The agency sees a continued growth in applications for qualification recognition (all situations combined: regulated professions [within and outside the EU], advice for academic recognition or advice for labour market recognition [non-regulated professions]). In the period 2005-2009, the number of requests received has tripled (from 1078 to 3208). Of the requests received, the assessment of foreign qualifications is completed in 90% of cases (in the remaining cases it is either forwarded to another institution – 3%, the request is declined – 3%, or the agency provides information [but not a statement on recognition]).

In 2009 the agency received 18 complaints related to credit recognition, which is the same volume as the year before.

The agency maintains a publicly accessible database which contains records of all previously carried out assessments which show the title of the foreign degree and the year it was issued as well as the recognition statement and (where available) the equivalence in Denmark<sup>89</sup>.

In 2007 the agency commissioned a user satisfaction survey which included both qualitative and a quantitative research. The survey showed rather high levels of satisfaction among users (81% of respondents [57 response rate] were largely satisfied with the procedure). Most respondents were also satisfied with the assessment result (how their qualification is compared to the Danish system). The respondents pointed out that the service should be better known among migrants and mobile persons coming to Denmark.

Source: Danish Agency for International Education<sup>90</sup>

Finally, when discussing the effectiveness of qualification and credit recognition, one has to bear in mind the nature of this process and the challenges it represents. When talking about free movers (i.e. when the mobility is not organised a priori) and outside certain specific

<sup>88</sup> Erasmus Student Network (2009) *Problems of recognition in making Erasmus*: <http://www.esn.org/content/prime-problems-recognition-making-erasmus>.

<sup>89</sup> <http://cirusonline.cirusintra.dk/vdb/cvuu/>

<sup>90</sup> See the Agency website: <http://en.iu.dk/recognition>

cases (like those governed by transnational legislation or agreements), it is not realistic to expect a 100% recognition rate. There will always be cases where recognition is not possible for issues such as fraud, lack of complementarity between credit achieved abroad and the qualification for which a person seeks recognition or insufficient performance at the assessment (compared to what is expected in the system where the person seeks recognition). Therefore, information about percentages of positive recognition results needs to be put into perspective with data on why recognition was refused when it was refused.

#### 5.4.2 EU-US credit recognition: evidence from other sources

Previous evaluation of the Atlantis programme, which funds students' exchanges, joint degrees, as well as innovative policy oriented projects between the EU and the US, has shown that the recognition of credit in the framework of this programme was rather good but could be improved. According to the Interim Evaluation of External Cooperation Agreements in Higher Education, Training and Youth with the US and Canada, HEIs which had taken part in the projects of the Cooperation Agreement, state that they had faced many obstacles in the policy/practice dimension, such as involving credit recognition.<sup>91</sup> As such, the recognition of periods of study and the portability of credits was an important reason to take part in the project<sup>92</sup>.

The evaluation shows that the rate of credit recognition of students taking part in the Atlantis programme is very similar to the rate of recognition of Erasmus students (see above).<sup>93</sup>

- 62.3% of students had their credit achieved through EU-US exchanges recognised as equivalent;
- 1.9% were recognised more than equivalent of the credit achieved abroad; and
- 18.9% less than equivalent.

There is no information about credit recognition between the EU and the US outside this specific programme. However, given that the Atlantis programme explicitly aims at putting in place recognition of students' credit, it could be the case that outside this programme the recognition is lower.

Related to the above, the results of the *Transatlantic Degree Programs Survey 2008* found that:

- Both EU and US institutions consider the negotiation of credit recognition and transfer as rather challenging. Only aspects such as securing funding and ensuring sustainability, are rated significantly more challenging and aspects such as designing the curriculum and the existence of different requirements for general education are considered as a little more challenging<sup>94</sup>;
- Most students who took part in the exchanges under the studied joint or double programmes, took part in learning courses abroad that led to the achievement of credit (i.e. no summer schools, etc.). The proportion is higher for EU students (88%) than for US students.<sup>95</sup>

With regard to recognition of whole degrees, the following main issues exist when it comes to mobility between EU and the US:

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<sup>91</sup> 49.8% of the respondents stated that during the implementation of the project, they had encountered obstacles in the Policy/practice dimension, e.g. credit recognition to some extent and a great extent.

<sup>92</sup> Rated as 6.57 on a scale from 1 to 12 (1 being the most important and 12 the least important).

<sup>93</sup> Ecorys (2005) *Interim Evaluation of the Cooperation Programmes in Higher Education and Training between the European Union and Canada and between the European Union and the United States of America*: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/eu-usa/doc/eval05.pdf>.

<sup>94</sup> Kudey and Obst (2009) *Joint and Double Degree Programs in the Transatlantic Context: A Survey Report*, Freie Universität Berlina and Institute of International Education: [http://www.ifki.fu-berlin.de/v/tdp/en/news\\_dates/news/09-01-22\\_ieesurvey.html](http://www.ifki.fu-berlin.de/v/tdp/en/news_dates/news/09-01-22_ieesurvey.html).

<sup>95</sup> Idem.

- Differences in duration between the US and EU first degrees (many EU countries and institutions have adopted three years first cycle degrees<sup>96</sup>). However, it appears that there is a growing acceptance of three year EU degrees for entrance to US postgraduate programmes (see Table 5.5);
- Admission of North American students to entry for higher education in Europe in the absence of a national upper-secondary school leaving certificate in the US (see Hunt 2009<sup>97</sup>). For example, the Danish Agency for International Education states as entry requirements for higher education in Denmark, the following requirements<sup>98</sup>:
  - High School Graduation Diploma and one year of higher education studies (e.g. college studies in relevant academic subjects) or equivalent supplementary studies; or
  - High School Graduation Diploma and three Advanced Placement Test within academic subjects; or
  - High School Equivalence Diploma (General Education Development) and one year of higher education studies (e.g. college studies in relevant academic) or equivalent supplementary studies.
- The difference in focus and structure of EU and US undergraduate degrees. The European degrees are typically more specialised and focused on one core subject whilst degrees in the US contain a larger number of credits for what could be called general education courses<sup>99</sup>. This difference could be an obstacle for US graduates entering master's degree programmes in Europe. However, as pointed out by Hunt (2009), *graduates of a competitive undergraduate programme, especially an honours programme with a thesis, will have no more than a year or so of so-called 'general education' courses unrelated to the major subject*. All major programmes in US HEIs establish entry requirements from the first two years of study in general education and by specifying courses extend the study of the major subject components to at least three years. This means that given the differences in duration of undergraduate degrees (three and four years), the credit students gain for core subject tends to be the same between EU and US HEIs.

Table 5.5 Policies of US institutions towards three year Bologna degrees (% of institutions, sample 177 institutions)<sup>100</sup>

	2005	2006
<b>Bologna three-year degrees as an issue on campus</b>		
▪ Major issue	18	12
▪ Minor issue	41	32
▪ Not an issue	41	56
<b>Single institution-wide policy or policies vary by department</b>		
▪ Single policy	62	62
▪ Different policies	16	18

<sup>96</sup> CHEPS et al. (2010) The Bologna Process Independent Assessment The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area Volume 1 Detailed assessment report: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf) <sup>96</sup> CHEPS 2010, p.16.

<sup>97</sup> Hunt (2009) Transatlantic recognition issues: seeking new directions in the twenty-first century in *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice* vol 16, nbr 1 March 2009 p 65-81.

<sup>98</sup> See <http://en.iu.dk/recognition/entry-to-higher-education>

<sup>99</sup> Hunt, S (2009) Transatlantic recognition issues: seeking new directions in the twenty-first century, in *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, Volume 16, Issue 1*.

<sup>100</sup> Council of Graduate Schools (2007) *Findings from the 2006 CGS Graduate Admissions Survey, Phase III Admissions and Enrolment*: <http://www.cgsnet.org/Default.aspx?tabid=172>.

▪ Combination	22	20
<b>Approach to evaluating Bologna three-year degrees</b>		
▪ Do not accept	29	18
▪ Provisional acceptance (additional work required)	9	4
▪ Evaluate for equivalency	40	49
▪ Determine applicant's competence to succeed (faculty evaluation)	22	29

Source: Council of Graduate Schools (2007)



## 6 Credit recognition between EU and the US

The previous sections have shown that there are already large flows of mobile students between the EU and the US (in both ways), but also that these destinations are increasingly competing with other study destinations. As the intra-EU mobility has increased, the share of mobile EU students going to the US has dropped. Financial obstacles are certainly one reason why smaller proportion of EU students go to the US, but the fact that mobility within the EU has become a lot easier is probably also a reason that matters. European HEIs have developed their capacity to coordinate and manage student mobility. Thanks to the Erasmus sub-programme and also the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms, a number of concepts and standard procedures have been mainstreamed making mobility easier. As a result, a certain ‘common language’ and trust in each other’s practices have been developed. This does not mean that difficulties do not exist when it comes to intra-EU student mobility, nor does it mean that the concepts and procedures used are fully coherent and compatible across the whole of EU (see below). Nevertheless, as concluded by the independent assessment of the Bologna Process, the ‘architectural’ elements of the European Higher Education Area are now in place and set the basis for further improvement<sup>101</sup>. This is also supported by the evidence from the EU case studies covered here; though the details of approach to organising mobility and ensuring recognition of learning undertaken abroad vary, the key features of all EU case studies are remarkably similar. Such common language and common understanding is not yet generalised between the US and the EU. As will be discussed later in this section, in many cases there are a few individual persons in EU HEIs who have an understanding of the US higher education system, depending on the frequency and duration of exchanges with US partner institutions.

Credit recognition is rarely the central issue discussed when it comes to facilitating student mobility. It typically comes after financial and administrative issues only. However, as the organisation of mobility has become easier, use of a common language around mobility more widespread and trust has grown stronger, credit recognition within Europe has also improved. Even though, as discussed in Section 5, some difficulties in getting credit recognised remain.

When asked about issues related to credit recognition between the EU and the US, all stakeholders and practitioners in HEIs confirm that this is not the core problem they encounter in organising mobility. In general, issues around student recruitment and funding are seen as more prominent problems to tackle. However, this does not mean that credit recognition is easy and always handled well. As noted earlier and as will be discussed in this section in greater detail, issues related to credit recognition are often closely intertwined with other aspects of mobility organisation. Therefore, this study in itself had to broaden the scope of analysis to include other aspects of facilitating mobility.

### 6.1 The point of view of EU national stakeholders

This section builds on the information provided in the EU stakeholder interviews and gives an indication of the way EU-US recognition issues are seen from the national perspective. Before entering into the analysis of the information provided one needs to bear in mind the following caveat:

- Several stakeholders provided only very scarce information referring to the fact that there were no issues in the area of recognition that would be specific to the exchanges between the EU and US and which could not be generalised to other countries/regions;
- They also noted that there were no specific guidelines of procedures for dealing with qualifications from the US that would not apply to the recognition of other qualifications;

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<sup>101</sup> CHEPS et al. (2010) The Bologna Process Independent Assessment The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area Volume 1 Detailed assessment report: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna\\_process/independent\\_assessment\\_1\\_detailed\\_rept.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/bologna_process/independent_assessment_1_detailed_rept.pdf)

<sup>101</sup> Cheps et al (2010)

- Some also highlighted the very decentralised character of qualification recognition whereby qualification recognition would be the competence of HEIs and no information was collected at the national level.

#### 6.1.1 Guidelines for qualification and credit recognition

Credit recognition from the US and from any other part of the world or within Europe is dealt with in a decentralised manner. As said earlier, the Lisbon Convention contains basic principles to which countries and consequently HEIs in these countries are expected to adhere. The Lisbon Convention is supported by a set of recommendations about how to assess foreign qualifications,<sup>102</sup> but these guidelines do not specifically address recognition of credit for periods of study. A recent (2009) review of the implementation of the Lisbon Convention noted a number of difficulties and inconsistencies in the way the recognition of foreign qualifications is governed in the countries which have signed and ratified the Convention and take part in the Bologna Process<sup>103</sup>. Points highlighted that are of particular relevance to this report are:

- Not all countries are planning concrete measures to improve recognition practices and of those measures mentioned, only a few are actually designed to reach the level of HEIs (e.g. Italy and Norway were planning to monitor implementation at HEIs);
- There is little information available about the implementation of the Lisbon Convention at the level of HEIs. Only a few countries have carried out surveys or reviews of HEIs' activities in this area. While in a few countries there is evidence that HEIs have clear and coherent procedures for qualification recognition in place, in other countries such internal documents appear to be rare.

The below citation illustrates the variety of situations regarding credit recognition for periods of study abroad<sup>104</sup>:

*Sweden claims that, in recent years, recognition of study periods is based on the existence or nonexistence of substantial differences in learning outcomes rather than on differences in detailed content. Denmark admits that it could not be clarified whether the institutions look for full compliance with their own curricula and Germany reports that laws on higher education stipulate that equivalence must be determined in order to recognise course credits earned abroad and that detailed information on equivalency determination is given in the framework examination regulations. In Latvia, higher education institutions admit that they have too little experience and should have more information in order to provide fair recognition of credits earned abroad. Denmark and Romania report that, in the case of an exchange agreement with a foreign institution, the recognition of study periods can be automatic and with full credit. Denmark underlines the importance of the existence of appeals procedures and states that it has also amended legislation so that Danish students are given the same opportunities of appealing against credit transfer decisions as has been possible for people with foreign degrees or study periods.*

As shown above, it cannot be assumed that HEIs in Europe are in general aware of and in line with the good practice principles in credit recognition from abroad – especially when it comes to using the concept of substantial difference.

The findings of stakeholder interviews carried out for this study confirmed the above situation. While stakeholders recognise the importance of credit recognition for student mobility, in general terms, there is little evidence of guidance from the side of national authorities or main national stakeholders about this issue. It seems that most stakeholders

<sup>102</sup> UNESCO and Council of Europe (2010) *Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres)* <http://www.cicic.ca/docs/lisboa/recommendation-foreign-qualifications-2010.en.pdf>

<sup>103</sup> Rauhvargers and Rusakova (2009) *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe.

<sup>104</sup> *Idem.* p.58.

expect that HEIs are aware of the international good practice in this area as embedded in the Lisbon Convention. Furthermore, there are no specific guidelines that would concern the US qualifications system in particular.

There is little evidence of documents available for HEIs to use to examine the commonalities and differences between qualifications structures in the US and in the EU countries covered and the way credit is used in the US and in the countries studied. There is a great deal of information for prospective students about the US system, examples include information on the 'education USA'<sup>105</sup> website or brochures prepared by the same organisation<sup>106</sup>. This information describes the US system and US qualifications from a student perspective. There is hardly any 'comparative' information which would put the US system of qualifications and credit in perspective with the different EU systems and which could support the work of HEI staff in charge of credit and qualification recognition.

When it comes to the guidance provided to students who are thinking of mobility towards and from the US or those who are seeking recognition, this appears non-existent in most countries. As said earlier, communication material about the US system is available, but this does not provide information about recognition issues or only in very general terms. Only very generic guidance explaining the qualification recognition procedure in general terms is available to students. Information about the comparability of qualification types or qualification levels is rare.

However some exceptions were identified:

- The Danish Agency for International Education presents the list of qualifications that are generally required from foreign students to be able to access the first year of higher education programmes in Denmark;
- The French consular services in the US gives general indications about the comparison of qualification types between France and the US (see also below)<sup>107</sup>;
- The German Universities of Applied Sciences Alliance of Excellence, which works closely with DAAD in particular regarding student exchanges with the US, gives prospective students the information that 1 ECTS credit in general equals 0.5 US credit<sup>108</sup> (information based on the guidance by the US National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Academic Credentials which specifies that 1 ECTS is equivalent to 0.5 semester credit or 0.75 quarter credit<sup>109</sup>).

From the EU case studies, it shows that there are major differences between institutional approaches to understanding and interpreting the US system. But there are also major differences in how individual staff members understand it. The case studies contain examples ranging from very liberal and open approaches to the acceptance of credit from the US to more stringent approaches with systematic course by course comparison. Though the case studies covered EU institutions only, the interviews seem to indicate that the acceptance and recognition of credit from the EU in the US is more difficult than the other way around. The problem does not really occur for optional general education or elective courses at undergraduate level, but it seems very difficult to get recognition for core programme courses achieved in Europe in the US (both at undergraduate and graduate level).

While interviewees mentioned the absence of guidance, most interviewees did not see it as particularly useful to provide such guidance, as illustrated by the below statements extracted from interviews:

<sup>105</sup> Education USA website: <http://educationusa.state.gov/>

<sup>106</sup> For example: Education USA (2010) *If You Want to Study in the United States*: <http://educationusa.state.gov/>.

<sup>107</sup> See the website of the French consulate in Boston: <http://www.consulfrance-boston.org/spip.php?article1199#Comparaison-des-cursus-educatifs>

<sup>108</sup> German Universities of Applied Sciences UAS7 website: <http://www.uas7.org/scholarships/study-a-internship-program/study-details.html>

<sup>109</sup> NAFSA (2005) *Admissions wRAP-Up Newsletter April 2005*: [http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/NAFSA\\_Home/Resource\\_Library\\_Assets/ACE/wrapup\\_apr05.pdf?n=649](http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/NAFSA_Home/Resource_Library_Assets/ACE/wrapup_apr05.pdf?n=649)

- *There is no reason to give guidelines to higher education institutions. These would not be useful as every degree is so different. It is not even possible to neatly transfer from biology in one university to another within the UK without individually assessing at what stage the student is and what subjects that student has taken.*
- *Credit recognition is an issue, but it will remain an unresolved issue. There are pockets of good practice, but there are also some institutions that are not interested in credit transfer.*

These citations indicate that some interviewees believe that each university and staff member needs to find their own way and develop their own understanding of the US system. On the other hand, these statements come from people already familiar with the US system and with procedures and protocols in place. Guidelines could be particularly useful for those who wish to start working with partner institutions in the US and who have little information on where to start.

In addition, this lack of interest in providing guidance to students and HEIs can be due to several aspects such as:

- The understanding that any guidance would become an authoritative source of practice;
- A narrow understanding of credit which is associated with its numeric representation. As a consequence, when one speaks of guidance about credit recognition, most people envisage numeric translation tables which are not seen as being the most important aspect of qualification recognition. Instead, examples and guidance about how to use the concept of substantial difference could be provided.

The main difficulty that arises from the excessively tight application of the numeric conversion of credit points from US semester or quarter credit to ECTS and vice-versa, is that three year bachelor degrees (180ECTS) are 'undervalued' (term used by the Italian NARIC) and the number of credit points could be used as an argument for non-recognition.

Several interviewees also mentioned that there were relatively low numbers of individuals with US degrees or credit, seeking advice with ENIC/NARICs or appealing to decisions taken by HEIs. Interviewees interpret these low numbers as an indication that the recognition at HEI level is rather smooth:

- *As compared to the overall number of US students in France, the number of those who asked for recognition of qualification (with ENIC/NARIC for entry) is quite small. It can therefore be assumed that most of them do not have issue with this and that HEIs recognise US qualifications.*
- *The qualifications board (Denmark) collects complaints about credit transfer decisions at HEI level. The appeal board has only processed 82 cases since 2007, of which only 4 concerned complaints over the recognition of US credits. This very small number of complaints compared with the many students on full degree or exchange programmes abroad, corresponds well with our general understanding that credit transfer decisions are dealt with smoothly at the institutional level.*
- *There are very few problems in terms of credit recognition. Overall, there is a good cooperation between Spanish and US universities.*

Though the low number of complaints is certainly a good sign, it cannot be taken for granted that it fully reflects the level of satisfaction with qualification and credit recognition as:

- Not all countries have appeal procedures in place; and
- It is not clear whether students are aware of the possibilities to appeal and willing to do so<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> For example, the evaluation of the Danish Cirius centre (now Danish Agency for International Education) in charge of qualification recognition and advising HEIs on qualification recognition found that: *applicants were not aware they could appeal to a court of law*. Denmark is one of the countries that has a rather well established and

### 6.1.2 Qualifications recognition

In line with the above indication that little general guidance or information about qualification type comparison is presented, the information provided by interviewees about how US qualifications were recognised in Europe was not comprehensive. Nevertheless, the following information was found.

The French Consulate in the US gives the following generic information on the comparison of French and US degrees to students, employers or HEI staff<sup>111</sup>:

- Specialisation takes place later in the American system;
- **US high school diploma:** this level does not necessary allow an American student to enter higher education in France. It is not the equivalent of the French Baccalaureate. The validation of a degree is given depending on the type of American institution where it was prepared, the number of hours studied and the type of education.
- **US bachelor's degree:** it can sometimes be the equivalent of a French Bac+2 (short cycle) or Bac+3 (bachelor degree) degree depending on the American university where it was prepared.
- **US master's degree:** when the student prepared a thesis, French universities usually consider it as a master's level, and the student can enter third cycle studies. Without the thesis, the qualification is recognised as equivalent to a bachelor degree.
- **Doctorate:** is similar in the two countries.

The Danish Agency for International recognition updates a database of recognition opinions issues regarding qualifications from all countries, including the US. The information in the database covers aspect such as: the educational institution where it was awarded, original title of the qualification, corresponding Danish qualification, year of completion (from and to), length of the programme (in years), and the mode of study( full-time/part-time, assessment of the qualification compared to Danish qualifications and year of assessment)<sup>112</sup>. At the time of writing the database contained 375 sheets on US qualifications.

The German interviewee mentioned, and persons interviewed for several case studies confirmed, that there are difficulties with the recognition of European master's degrees in the US for access to third cycle programmes: *Thus, an American student that goes to Germany for his master, or a German master's level graduate, cannot enter a PhD programme in the US; s/he has to undertake the course or part of it again.* At the same time, there can be difficulties in the recognition of US master's degrees in Europe (in particular in Germany): not all US master's degrees have a research component. The University of Braunschweig confirmed that masters courses without a research component are not recognised for access to doctoral studies.

In Poland, the vast majority of US students are enrolled in medical degree programmes (83% - 807 students in 2009)<sup>113</sup>. This is interesting as this form of studies is typically highly regulated and the recognition of foreign qualifications (especially outside the EU) is complex. However, the interviewee reported that:

*Students coming from the US to study medicine in Poland usually come to study for the full programme. They get the full diploma in Poland, which is recognised in the US. They must still have a specific exam in the US, but the diploma is recognised.*

This information is confirmed by the website of the Poznan University of Medical Sciences which conducts courses in medical studies in English. As presented on the website, the

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transparent approach to qualification recognition. Nordic Recognition and Information Centres Network (2006). *Recognition work in Denmark* <http://norric.org/files/evaluation-reports/Evaluation-Denmark.pdf>

<sup>111</sup> <http://www.consulfrance-boston.org/spip.php?article1199>

<sup>112</sup> See the agency website <http://en.iu.dk/recognition/our-assessments/assessment-database>

<sup>113</sup> Data provided by the interviewee based on Polish Statistical Office.

*United States Department of Education recognises the accreditation of Polish medical schools as equivalent to that of American medical schools.*<sup>114</sup>

### 6.1.3 The role of mobility funding programme requirements and countries strategies

A few interviewees underlined the positive role that funding programmes for student mobility can have on supporting credit recognition; for example, *the DAAD (in Germany) funds exchanges only if there is a credit transfer agreement between both universities*. Credit recognition is also expected as part of the Atlantis programme funded exchanges.

The International Student Exchange Programmes (ISEP) programme, which is based on a broad network of HEIs, gives a brief description of the credit system and grading approaches in the universities that are members of the network<sup>115</sup>.

In addition to funding programme requirements, the US visa regime requires foreign students under the exchange visitor visa status to take a minimum of 12 semester credits at undergraduate level and 9 at graduate level. This requirement defines the minimum volume of learning in the US that a foreign student has to undertake.

Four countries where stakeholders were interviewed, had national strategies/initiatives in place to strengthen cooperation with US HEIs:

- The UK analysed the future potential for strengthening cooperation between UK and US HEIs in all areas including student, researchers and staff exchanges. The report also discusses the need to ensure credit recognition: *it is quite clear in conversations with those responsible for study abroad programmes, that the host country should be able to offer credits for programmes as short as three weeks as well as one semester, one year and summer schools*<sup>116</sup>.

Related to the above review, the UK-US New Partnership Fund funds up to 20 projects with up to GBP 20,000 in seed money to support the development of new partnerships in the UK and the US or to expand existing cooperation. Priority is given to partnerships in the science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medical fields. Student, staff and researcher mobility as well as collaborative degrees, are among the priorities<sup>117</sup>. Despite the relatively low funding amount, the interest was high and 230 applications were received (31 projects were selected).

- Spain highlighted the ambition to become the second preferred destination among US higher education students.
- Denmark mentioned a rather different approach to attracting US students which consists of providing programmes structured in a similar manner as in the US, in Denmark. At the Danish Institute for Study Abroad, which hosts a large share of US students in Denmark, the credit structure mirrors most North American institutions. Most courses are three credits, while a few carry one or six credits. Semester students take 12-18 credits, including no more than 15 credits from three- or six-credit courses. The main argument for the promotion of this programme is that studying at this institute should not delay US students' graduation, as long as they take the necessary steps to agree about their courses taken in Denmark with their home institution<sup>118</sup>.
- In Germany, DAAD funds student exchanges (3000 German students and 1500 US students every year) as well as joint degrees (eight as of 2011, but planning to fund more).

<sup>114</sup> Poznan University of Medical Sciences web-site: <http://www.mdprogram.com/html/accreditation.shtml>

<sup>115</sup> ISEP (2010) *Transcript Evaluation Guidelines 2010* <http://www.isep.org/coordinators/Downloads/TranEval.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> Kemp and Humfrey (2010) *UK– US Higher Education Partnerships: Realising the potential*.

<sup>117</sup> Partnership Grant Guidelines: [http://www.britishcouncil.org/guidelines\\_for\\_application\\_uk-us\\_higher\\_education\\_new\\_partnership\\_fund.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/guidelines_for_application_uk-us_higher_education_new_partnership_fund.pdf)

<sup>118</sup> Danish Institute for Study Abroad: <http://www.dis.dk/>

#### 6.1.4 Other issues mentioned

The stakeholders interviewed also mentioned some additional issues in credit and qualification recognition that are difficult to fit into the categories above. These are:

- Difficulties in further developing cooperation between EU and US HEIs in view of student exchanges due to the fact that certain US universities want to keep the process of degree management fully under their own control and are reluctant to accept some uncertainties in this area which always arise when mobile students are taught and assessed in another institution (foreign or not). This leads to the fact that most US HEIs prefer to open their own courses abroad (by for example renting facilities) rather than set up an exchange with a European HEI.<sup>119</sup> Such practices result in an overall reduction of the mobility of US students and a decrease of their studies with students and faculty members under an agreed upon exchange with a European HEI.
- Some issues arise due to differences in the levels of difficulty between EU and US programmes. EU students in their second or third year of bachelor studies would often find courses typically taken in the first and second years of US studies too easy and EU HEIs are reluctant to recognise these courses advising their students to take courses at more advanced levels and vice-versa for US students. US students may arrive to the partner institution in Europe with a variety of backgrounds due to the more open nature of US studies, which makes it difficult for the EU institution to define a specific course programme for them. US students are much more likely to study abroad in their first two years of university study as well because general education and elective credits are more easily recognised to fulfil degree requirements at their home US HEI. Thus, they arrive with less preparation in major-minor programme courses that compose the central core of EU HEI offerings, since general education courses are not required in the EU degree. This can lead to some academic struggles for students who in US culture also tend to be younger in the 19-20 year old range.
- Differences in the nature and structure of programmes, which apply more or less to all higher education systems in Europe, were mentioned in Germany only. It was noted that: *the US parties say that the liberal curriculum is missing in Germany and Germany, conversely, says the US curriculum is not restrictive enough.*

The fact that the US higher education sector was increasingly seeing EU HEIs as competitors on the scene of international higher education, which is linked to growing interest in the Bologna Process and associated developments including aspects such as the Tuning project.

## 6.2 The point of view of EU higher education institutions

Fourteen EU case studies have been undertaken to provide a more in depth look at how credit is used in mobility between the EU and the US (the discussion of the US case studies is presented in the following section). Before discussing the EU case study findings with regards to the study topic, a brief introduction to the examples covered is provided. The full case study write-ups can be found in Part B of this report.

The range of numbers and types of agreements presented in this sample of case studies varies, as does the number of outgoing students. Table 6.1 gives an indication of the level of mobility between the EU and the US in the institutions studied. It shows that the sample contains case studies where mobility concerns relatively small numbers of students (these case studies in general focus on one department only), to examples where the numbers of

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<sup>119</sup> American Council on Education, Issue Brief: U.S. Branch Campuses Abroad, September 2009, by Green, M. & Koch, K., reports results of a survey of US HEIs on the establishment of campuses abroad. Findings suggest that EU branches were established before 2000 and recent developments have turned to Asia, that 66% of campuses in Europe have a local HEI partner, the majority of faculty teaching at a branch are from the host country for 66% of the campuses, and 40% of the branches enroll a majority of host country students rather than international students.  
([http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/pubs/ace/Crossborder\\_Survey\\_Results.pdf](http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/pubs/ace/Crossborder_Survey_Results.pdf))

students going to the US are more than one hundred. Furthermore, several of the universities studied have large numbers of agreements with US HEIs whilst others have only a few. A few of the HEIs have one or several joint or double degrees with US institutions.

Table 6.1 Case study characteristics: scale of cooperation with US institutions

University	Number of agreements	Joint/double degrees	Outgoing students to US (approx) per year
Boku University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	13		25-35
Université Catholique de Louvain – Economics Department	16	1 double degree	5-6 on the TREE programme
Masarykova Univerzita Brno	11 at central level (of which 6 cover mobility) 6 at department level		36 (in 2008)
Technical University of Braunschweig	11		50
Freie Universität Berlin	40	1 transatlantic masters	70
University of Copenhagen	50		
University of Tartu	6		29
IEP Paris (Sciences Po)	60		250
University of Helsinki	6 central, 5 bilateral/faculty	1 joint degree	189
University of Groningen	50 (mix of central and faculty)		70-100
Warsaw University – cooperation with North Eastern Illinois University	5		20
Lund University	72	Several	179
Essex University	20		40
University of Navarra	25		90

All of the HEIs studied in greater detail have either strong internationalisation strategies or a focus on internationalisation in the university strategy (Helsinki). Internationalisation strategies are related to the willingness of these HEIs to strengthen excellence and broad recognition of their work. Some of the internationalisation strategies studied are holistic and include aspects such as the importance of personal development, access to different cultures, teaching methods and increasing employability.

The below list gives some examples which show that the HEIs studied have a strong international focus:

- BOKU (AT) wants to develop joint study programmes in all disciplines offering course modules in English.
- University of Copenhagen (DK) offers the opportunity for students to participate in immersion courses. Each department offers English courses, generally at a higher level. There are over 500 such courses and almost 50 master's degree programmes offered in English. They publish a course list in the form of a database, which enables everyone to see what courses are taught in English to facilitate mobility.
- The University of Tartu (EE) offers a large number of English taught courses allowing international students to enrol in full semester programmes designed specifically for visiting students.
- The University of Braunschweig (DE) is inviting teaching staff from US universities to teach at Braunschweig for one or more semesters.



- Proficiency in English is required of all staff at the University of Groningen (NL). The University required all staff to undergo an English language test and teaching staff who did not qualify were asked to take English language class.
- At the University of Navarra (ES), they want to increase the number of bilingual degrees and programmes, with 50% of credits received to be from English taught courses.
- Masaryk University (CZ) is implementing a rector's directive according to which all student mobility of more than two weeks has to lead to achievement of credit.

For most of the HEIs, the US is one of several important target countries for cooperation outside Europe, but most of the institutions have important partnerships with HEIs in other non-EU countries. In a few of the institutions studied, namely Science-Po (FR) and the Free University Berlin, the US is a strategic partner country and mobility towards the US is consequently rather high.

The case studies also cover institutions which have already been using credit (ECTS or other) for a very long time (for example Helsinki or Essex), but also those where the introduction of ECTS was first brought in by the Erasmus programme and the systematic use of credit for the design of study programmes is still relatively new (for example, Warsaw University or Masaryk University).

### 6.2.1 The main types of approaches

It appears from the analysis of the case studies, that there are two broad approaches to credit recognition for mobility among the institutions studied:

- A liberal approach (e.g. Sciences Po, Essex, Masaryk University); and
- A more conservative approach based on systematic comparison (e.g. Braunschweig University, Free University Berlin, Warsaw University).

Intermediary cases exist and sometimes, within an HEI, one department may pursue a rather liberal approach while another one may be seeking systematic comparison with the home study programme. It seems that the use of one approach or another may also depend on the nature of the discipline/ programme. The structures of programmes in certain disciplines such as arts, social sciences or business and economics, appear to be more open in the way the programmes are structured in the EU institutions and consequently, the departments are more likely to pursue a liberal approach. For other disciplines such as natural sciences, engineering or medical programmes, the comparison approach seems to be necessary given the more stringent nature of the home study programme definition.

Table 6.2 below attempts to present some core features of the liberal and comparative model of credit recognition observed.

Table 6.2 'Liberal' and 'conservative' models of credit recognition

	Liberal approach	Conservative approach
<b>Main characteristic</b>	Students can freely choose from the courses offered by the partner institution or department (possibly with restrictions on level of courses to take)	Students are given a list of courses to choose from or the courses selected are systematically compared with courses offered in the home HEI
<b>Basis for deciding whether the student can take the selected course</b>	Course relevance for the degree that the student is preparing In the most liberal approaches students are given free choice of courses	Comparison between the course in the host HEI and an equivalent course in the home HEI
<b>Decision is based on</b>	Information such as the course title or a brief course description	More detailed comparison of the course description (depending on what information is available: learning outcomes and/or teaching inputs)
<b>Typical situation where this</b>	The study programme in the home HEI is itself based on a liberal approach to credit	The study programme in the home HEI is rather 'tightly' defined with an

<b>approach is applied</b>	accumulation: students have important freedom to choose courses and a broad range of options are available to them	important share of core/compulsory components; joint or double degrees
<b>Credit recognition is managed by</b>	International coordinators in each department or even centrally at the level of the university	Individual teaching staff members in charge of courses with which the foreign course is compared
<b>Approach to transfer of credit points</b>	Using a conversion table between ECTS and US credit points or simply by requiring students to take the same number of courses in the US as what is required for a semester in the US (assuming this is equivalent to a semester workload in the home HEI)	According to the number of credit points the home institution course is allocated
<b>Advantages</b>	Flexibility given to students Students have the opportunity take on courses not offered in their home HEI Lower workload for those in charge of recognition than in the other model	Suits study programmes which are based on a large number of compulsory components Ensures full coherence of the pathway Minimises the risk that students choose options that are of marginal relevance to their degree
<b>Risks</b>	This approach works best where there is a very high level of trust between the two institutions. If the level of trust is not sufficiently developed there is a risk that the too liberal approach could undermine the credibility of the mobility period	There is a risk that the staff in charge of recognition would be seeking too detailed equivalence rather than focusing on substantial difference The need to compare courses on case by case basis can be resource intensive Students can miss important opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and competence not offered in their home HEI

Source: own analysis

### 6.2.2 The organisation of mobility

It is clear from the case studies that the role of international offices differs greatly in the case studies covered. There are those which only focus on some core functions, such as the administration, running of websites, online applications etc. (but run a mostly decentralised system). There are those which have core functions and also play a role in student selection and organising faculty selection committees. There are also those with comprehensive functions, such as at the University of Essex, which are also involved in the grade translations for all returning students. Finally, a few universities adopt a totally decentralised approach where all is done at the department level.

A classification has been developed in the UK to understand the range of management approaches to internationalisation. It distinguishes between international offices that fulfil a range of core functions, those that have an expanded remit and those that have a comprehensive mandate for internationalisation of the HEI (see Table 6.3)<sup>120</sup>. Adapting this approach to include the role of the international office in management of learning agreements, credit recognition and grade translation, the study team has attempted to categorise the HEIs studied in Table 6.4.

<sup>120</sup> CHEMS Consulting (2008) *The practice of internationalisation: managing international activities in UK universities*.  
<http://www.international.ac.uk/resources/The%20Practice%20of%20Internationalisation.%20Managing%20International%20Activities%20in%20UK%20Universities.pdf>

Table 6.3 Classification of international office functions

Classification	Areas of coverage
<b>Core</b>	International marketing Handling enquiries Managing admissions Student support functions Legislation and codes of conduct
<b>Core plus</b>	Study abroad, student mobility Support for incoming students Review and due diligence for agreements and memorandum of understanding Language support Financial and welfare advice Scholarships Management of overseas offices
<b>Comprehensive</b>	Overall responsibility for the internationalisation strategy Looking after visitors International alumni Fostering employability Integrating the experience of students Developing culture Relationships with networks

CHEMS Consulting (2008)

Table 6.4 The international office functions in the case study HEIs

University	Type of approach of the international office	Notes
Boku University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	Core plus	The Centre for International Relations is in charge of all the international agreements Credit recognition is ensured centrally, grades are translated at the department level
Université Catholique de Louvain	Decentralised	The international coordinators are at the faculty level which ensures credit recognition
Masarykova Univerzita Brno	Core	The international office checks that students have a learning agreement in place and provides advice, but the credit recognition is ensured at department level
Technical University of Braunschweig	Mainly decentralised with some core functions	This is a mainly decentralised system with the international office responsible for administration, faculty credit and recognition
Freie Universität Berlin	Core	Decentralised credit recognition There is a centre for international cooperation and a student exchange office
University of Copenhagen	Mainly decentralised with core function	There are faculty level international offices which do most of the work. There is a central administration with a more minor role
University of Tartu	Core	There is an international student service in charge of the selection of incoming students. Outgoing students are organised at the faculty level. A separate grant committee is also involved. Credit

		recognition is decentralised
IEP Paris (Sciences Po)	Comprehensive	The international division is in charge of verifying that students have successfully completed the required courses abroad. Validation and credit recognition is done by a committee specifically in charge of study abroad periods
University of Helsinki	Core plus	There is the international student service that deals with most issues centrally, but credit recognition is decentralised.
University of Groningen	Decentralised with some core functions	The main work, in particular choice of courses and credit recognition, is done at the faculty level
Warsaw University	Decentralised with some core functions	As above
Lund University	Decentralised - core is the university wide agreements	There is a centralised student mobility group, and faculty level international coordinators
Essex University	Comprehensive	There is a study abroad office and a student mobility committee – all is done centrally
University of Navarra	Decentralised	The choice of courses and credit recognition are ensured at department level

Source: own analysis

As apparent from Table 6.4, the case studies show a mixture of centralised and decentralised approaches to the organisation of exchanges, with variations in between. The organisation of the process tends to be done centrally. The credit recognition tends to be organised in a decentralised manner, at the faculty level. In order to facilitate the decentralised management of credit recognition, some of the more rigorous systems, such as in the two German examples, are supported by very transparent learning agreements, conversion tables, memorandum of understanding and course equivalences to guide the students as to which course they will be able to take on their study period abroad.

Both BOKU and the University of Essex have centralised systems of student exchange. Essex in the UK has a study abroad office which organises all aspects of the study abroad including the grade conversions and suitability of courses chosen. The departments' role is only to ensure there is no overlap of courses chosen. The system works well if there is more openness in the course choices. In both cases, the universities say that students can take any course offered. There are no predefined course lists or equivalences. However, at BOKU, students are encouraged to take electives abroad for ease of management, organisation and accreditation. If there is an insistence on doing mandatory course, the faculty will get involved on a case by case basis to ensure the course content is understood and recognised. Sciences Po is also centralised, but is a rather small highly specialised institution which has exchanges only in the areas related to political science.

In order to ensure that the decentralised approaches work well, there is a high level of support for mobility of staff as well as students to familiarise themselves with other systems. Furthermore, to ensure academic quality, setting up programmes, understanding each other's requirements and obligations, course contents and workload expected are of key importance, which requires intensive cooperation between the partners. It is important to note that even where all aspects of credit recognition are managed at the level of individual departments, other functions related to student mobility are often centralised (in particular all the administrative aspects).

Partner universities have to get to know each other well to be able to implement easy and nearly automatic credit recognition for a study abroad period. This is reportedly the most time

consuming and difficult part of student exchanges which can include a great deal of administrative, bureaucratic and academic work – in particular in the cases of joint or double degrees development. When it comes to the credit recognition of ‘free movers’, this is dealt with on case by case basis and assumes that students have sufficiently detailed descriptions of course content for credit achieved abroad. It is not clear whether such recognition is systematically based on the assessment of substantial difference, as said earlier in this section.

### 6.2.3 Course choices available to mobile students

Broadly speaking there are three types of courses of which higher education programmes are composed:

- Core or mandatory courses;
- Elective courses in a predefined range of courses; and
- Free choice courses or credit that is fully open to students’ choice.

The proportion between these types differs very much from one programme to another. Practices vary within universities, among departments and fields of study. When it comes to student mobility from Europe towards the US, theoretically, this can concern any type of courses. In practice, it seems rather rare that students would take core courses abroad, with the exception of joint or double degrees where curricula are articulated and possibly accredited by accreditation agencies of all countries that take part. The reasons mentioned why it may be difficult for EU students to take core courses in the US are:

- Difficulties in identifying equivalence between courses in the EU country and the US partner institution;
- Differences in level of the course;
- Differences in assessment and its quality assurance.

However, it is possible for EU students to go to the US and take courses that are part of their core programme and some students with such experience have been interviewed. This is more often possible in cases where the level of trust between the HEIs is high and the nature of programmes in the given discipline tends to be fairly comparable. All joint and double degree programmes oblige students to comply with the requirements of both the home and the host HEI and therefore core courses have to be taken both in Europe and in the US.

For US students coming to the EU it appears more difficult to take core courses, while in Europe, this may be the other way around. On one hand there, is a language issue:

- it may be more difficult for students to follow a course that is not in English and therefore they are more likely to perform inferiorly, consequently, they may not wish to receive lower grades for core courses;
- the range of courses available in English at the host institution (outside the US) may be more restricted and not match the requirements for equivalence with a core course; or
- in some cases the courses offered in English tend to be at master’s level and require specific prerequisites restricting the choice of mobile US undergraduate students.

On the other hand, there is a certain lack of trust from the side of the US higher education institutions that seem to encourage students to take on courses that are more related to the ‘general culture’. Similarly, US higher education accreditation agencies may in some cases restrict the possibilities for taking core credits abroad. The University of Braunschweig mentioned that in the double degree programme they have in mechanical engineering with a US institution, the accreditation body only allows students to take 6 out of 24 US credits abroad. This is considered disproportionately low for a double degree. To tackle this issue some HEIs develop courses specifically to cater for the needs of foreign students in their institution. For example, the University of Lund has designed so called Specific Area Studies. These are courses specifically developed for incoming students to provide a broad variety of English taught courses where there is no prerequisite to take the course.

Overall, the more general studies approach in the US compared to Europe could cause issues. That is why in most cases, the way around this is to focus on electives during the study period abroad, leaving the more mandatory subjects to be studied at the home institution. In order to ensure that US students make the appropriate choices, in Belgium for example, the US incoming students receive special attention from the advisors. They try to advise US students to choose those courses for which they can ensure equivalences. This requires that the advisors are familiar with the home university requirements – which is the case in the example from UCL (BE) cooperation with Clemson University, but this is difficult to ensure when the range of partner universities is broad because each have different expectations.

When students are able to take a core course abroad this implies that equivalence between a home institution course and a US course has been identified. According to the theory of the ECTS, one should use the learning outcomes to identify such equivalence. The interviews carried out for this report show that in reality in most cases, HEIs use:

- Course headings;
- Course/curriculum descriptions (such as themes/theories or authors covered); and/or
- Reading lists.

It is difficult to say with certainty if this information is used because US HEIs do not provide learning outcomes descriptions of their programmes and components or if this is also the normal practice in exchanges within Europe. However, from the way this information was provided, it seems that it is rather common practice to base credit recognition on this type of evidence.

Defining course equivalences between US and EU programmes is not very widespread amongst the case studies, although there is widespread use of course lists. Some of the course lists are well developed and have pre-approved courses but do not necessarily hold defined levels of outcomes. There appear to be more course equivalence lists for incoming students from the US as also indicated in the interim report of the parallel US study<sup>121</sup>. The Masaryk University mentioned that the university was going to progressively develop a database of accepted credit courses from abroad as part of its new institutional policy on credit recognition in the framework of mobility, but this was not yet in place. The exceptions are the German universities, which are legally obliged to base credit recognition from abroad on course comparison with the home programme and hence develop equivalences.

On the other hand, even if the courses are not pre approved as part of a course catalogue/equivalence list, they have to be approved at the stage of the learning agreement or through the study plans, depending on the system. In such cases, the decision is made on a cases by case basis – this is particularly common where students go to a large number of host institutions in many different departments. Where course equivalence lists exist, if a student wishes to deviate from the list, they need to go through a period of negotiation.

Several case studies note that they advise their bachelor or master's degree students who go to the US, to take courses that are at levels 300 and 400 in the US system. The University of Warsaw also accepts courses at the level 200. Entry level courses (100) are generally not encouraged (and possibly not accepted) for mobile EU students in the US. The universities also noted the difficulties of master programme students in getting access to courses at graduate level in the US.

### 6.2.3.1 Examples

#### **Core courses**

TU Braunschweig has a well developed system for its dual degree. The idea behind this was to list similar courses between the two institutions. These are then explicitly set out in the learning agreements.

<sup>121</sup> Myers et al (2011) *EU-US Study on credit systems in higher education: Interim report*.

The Faculty of Engineering at Lund University is piloting a new a five-year integrated engineering studies programme with a mobility window. The faculty developed a study programme with its US partners which contains a preapproved study abroad semester. The whole study programme, including all the courses to be studied abroad, were developed together with the partners, meaning there is no need to have an accreditation procedure after the students return home. As students follow a predefined set of courses - completely in line with their studies at the home institution – exchange studies are already quality assured by the partners in advance.

**Examples of free choice**

Tartu for example, does not have course equivalences but there is a course list. Students can enjoy relative freedom in terms of course selection during an exchange period as long as they have all compulsory courses completed at the University of Tartu. The university does not set strict requirements, but students have to follow the courses included in their learning agreement. Flexibility regarding course selection is also ensured by the fact that master’s students have a minimum of 120 ECTS to complete during the two years of their studies, but there is no maximum set. Students can take on more courses and finish their master’s studies e.g. with 150 ECTS.

For Sciences Po (FR), the year abroad at the undergraduate level is compulsory and considered as a life-experience for its students. The idea is thus to make this experience as close as possible to the local student routine. In addition, the fact that the bachelor degree of Sciences Po is multidisciplinary also explains that students in exchange can freely choose their course; there is no obligation for students to specialise in a particular subject of study at the bachelor level. The master’s level is stricter.

Table 6.5 Course equivalences in some of the case studies

<b>BOKU</b>	None Can choose any course relevant There are no course lists
<b>UCL</b>	A list of similar courses is available List of compulsory subjects
<b>Copenhagen</b>	There is a course list in the form of a database published for incoming students Students need preapproval for their study plan
<b>Braunschweig</b>	This is important with pre defined lists of courses which students can choose
<b>Groningen, Faculty of Arts</b>	No course equivalences are used There is a list of courses for incoming students, but not outgoing Courses have to be pre-approved
<b>Navarra</b>	Some faculties provide catalogues of courses Some departments have course equivalences
<b>Lund</b>	No list for outgoing – with the exception of joint or double degrees It is necessary to pre approve study plans
<b>Essex</b>	There is no list. Individual departments may insist on some compulsory courses
<b>Masaryk University</b>	Database on credit recognition is being developed based on previous practice. This will not constitute a list of course equivalencies as such, but it will contain information about how a course was recognised in the past.

Source: own analysis

Thorough descriptions of the course content and indications of the prior knowledge required to undertake a given course contributes significantly to appropriate and successful course selection. The differences between the courses offered by the Danish and American universities were described by a former exchange student as follows:

*During the first two years of my studies I had to take mainly specific, mandatory courses at the University of Copenhagen, which covered broad topic areas sometimes over consecutive semesters. The whole system and selection of courses were very well organised but created a rather firm study structure. While studying in the United States I could take on many more courses during a year – nine in total from a wider course variety and therefore I could customise my education. Source: A former Danish exchange student*

#### 6.2.4 Translation of credit values and grades

There are a number of different approaches to the translation of credit values and grades which illustrate the very individualistic approaches that are taken by institutions and indeed, in some cases department.

##### *Credit values*

Firstly, there is the issue of credit values. As already highlighted, the US and the EU systems for credit are quite different, and the interpretation of the use of ECTS in Europe has still some way to go before it could be considered a transparent and harmonised system.

As a consequence, universities in exchange programmes do not always use the same types of conversion tables. In fact, some HEIs do not convert credit points at all but they award students the number of credit points they would have achieved for a broadly equivalent course in their home institution. For example, in the University of Masaryk, if a core course is taken abroad (which is possible – though rare with the US), the student obtains the same number of credit points as what the core course is worth in the home institution.

The US universities typically convert credit back to semester or quarter hour credits. This is generally through specifying the number of courses students need to take abroad. US students rarely carry out core courses abroad. For example, in the case of the UCL (BE) double degree, UCL developed a conversion table between ECTS and US credit hours, while Clemson (the US partner HEI) preferred to transfer credit based on course comparison.

On the EU side, the credit ratio is also not consistent between the EU and the US. At UCL (BE), Lund (SE) and Tartu (EE) for example, the credits (ECTS:US) are generally converted at 2:1, at BOKU (AT) it is 2.5:1, in Helsinki University (FI) it is 1.75:1. In the Technical University of Braunschweig (DE), it is department specific and differences exist. In some cases, there is a 5:3 ratio, but other departments will not even specify and it is done on a course by course basis. Science Po (FR) specify credits in a way that requires students to follow the same number as an average full-time American - usually 4 courses per semester (12 US credit hours per semester). Sciences Po considers that the usual 60 ECTS per year corresponds to 8 courses per year in the US system (depending on the institution). When students spend two semesters abroad and pass 8 US courses, they are given 60 ECTS credits, but this is not divided 'course by course'. A full semester load at the University of Groningen equals 30 ECTS, which is about 4 courses, therefore in general, a course taken in the United States is considered to be worth about 7.5 ECTS credits.

There are further stipulations in some cases, where for example, at Tartu, one credit point corresponds to 26 hours of studies (lectures, seminars, practice, homework or independent work, assessment of learning outcomes) performed by a student. The UK is slightly different as they do not use the ECTS credit system. However, the university of Essex case study shows they assign workload credits and credit values in the same way. Credits are not used as a way of converting from one system to another and emphasis is on grades.

##### *The grading system*

Grading systems differ significantly and there are different ways of understanding and translating from the EU to the US and vice versa. In fact, grading systems within Europe vary greatly and sometimes there are major differences within a country, between institutions, disciplines or even between departments of the same HEI.

First, there is the issue of the translations of grades between the two systems. In the EU, grades are written in many different ways (A-E, 1-5, 5-1, 1-10, 1-20 etc.). The translations also differ. In Boku (AT) an A or B in the US becomes a 1. A C becomes a 2 and so on. Until



recently, in UCL in Belgium, only grades A to C in the US system was transferred and grades below that were not accepted. With the introduction of the ECTS, this caused a number of issues as D and E was in fact a pass and needed to be included in the grade conversion. TU Braunschweig found that a simple translation from their numerical system to the alphabetical scale of the US did not work, as the grades were weighted differently. In particular, the German system is more rigorous at the top end. This initially caused issues in convincing the US institutions that the German students were good enough. As a consequence, an equivalence table was created.

Another issue is the distribution of grades. In the University of Essex in the UK, UCL in Belgium and Groningen in the Netherlands, there has been quite some debate over the grading system associated with credit. It seems that in general, EU HEIs tend to use the top grades less, i.e. students rarely get a 19/20 or a 20/20. Therefore, an 18/20 would be considered excellent. In the US, there is more use of the whole spectrum of grades and it is only through understanding the distribution of grades that performance levels can be better translated. This can also pose issues for the returning US student who may be required to have achieved a 20/20 to prove their excellence and for their future careers, but such grades would be very difficult to achieve by EU students.

**Examples:** University of Groningen, Faculty of Arts translates the grades obtained abroad as the following table shows.

US grade			A	B	C	D / E / F
NL grade	10	9	8	7	6	5 and below = fail

Grading is certainly an issue for US students and a growing concern in EU countries. In Tartu in Estonia, the grade translations are performed individually at the faculty level and percentages are allocated.

To improve the understanding of grades, some HEIs accompany the grade with a descriptive explanation as can be seen from the below example from the University of Copenhagen, illustrating the breadth of grades.

(12) For an excellent presentation that demonstrates a high level of command of all aspects of the relevant material and containing no or only few minor weaknesses. A

(10) For a very good presentation that demonstrates a high level of command of most aspects of the relevant material and containing only minor weaknesses. B

(7) For a good presentation that demonstrates a high level of command of the relevant material but containing some weaknesses. C

(4) For a fair presentation that demonstrates some command of the relevant material but containing some major weaknesses. D

(2) For a presentation meeting only the minimum requirements for acceptance. E

(0) For a presentation not meeting the minimum requirements for acceptance. Fx

(-3) For a presentation that is unacceptable in all respects. F

2 is the required grade to pass a subject.'

Case studies where grades appear to be less of an issue, were observed in Denmark, Finland and Sciences Po, for example. Although grades are awarded and used, students only need a pass to progress onto the next year. Sciences Po does not transfer grades obtained in the US at all. The exchange year is validated as a whole. A qualitative appreciation is given in accordance to the grade point average (GPA) obtained in the US. However, this appreciation has few consequences on the diploma and it won't appear on it.

All of these different interpretations mean that dialogue and trust are important features of the relationships between the exchanging universities.

At the very least, there needs to be a good level of support for the academics on both sides, in getting together to advance the process of mutual understanding, transparency and coherence for the students. The international coordinators also have a key role to play in relation to administration, coordination and transparency:

*The international coordinator of UCL has also done various visits to Clemson and has done considerable work to explain how the ECTS grading scale was different from the US grading scale, in order to ensure recognition of credit for Belgian students.*

Visits whilst students are away are also important for all aspects and for example, in the UCL case, negotiations could take place with respect to grades and credits, issues which sometimes only arise on arrival. In the case of BOKU, students arriving in the US did have a period of grace at the beginning to assess their learning agreements and ensure they are taking the right courses.

### 6.2.5 Duration of the period of study for which credit recognition is granted

The duration of mobility is also somewhat related to credit recognition. It appears from the case studies that most EU institutions are interested in developing longer term (one or two semesters) mobility exchanges with US HEIs and in such cases, they systematically envisage credit recognition. Though this point was not systematically covered by the case studies, it seems that short term mobility (such as summer schools or short intensive courses) is not a core element of EU HEIs' mobility strategies. It is not clear whether credit is awarded for shorter terms exchanges and it seems that the credit equivalent to one semester workload is in most cases the minimum 'currency'. Only the Czech example mentions that there is an institutional policy to ensure that all mobility of more than 14 days gives students the right to receive credit recognition.

On the other hand, several case studies (e.g. Lund, FU Berlin, Masaryk University) mention the fact that US HEIs are interested in such short term mobility exchanges for which students can receive credit. One example mentions (University of Braunschweig) that when US students wish to receive credit recognition to enrol in a master's degree or a PhD programme, the university cannot recognise credit gained in US for short term courses.

Also related to the issue of duration, a few examples mention the fact that the timing of terms in the US does not match the timing of terms in the EU institution (for example, this is mentioned in the example from Warsaw University). This means that to spend one semester in Europe, US students would have to take two US terms. That is why universities develop specifically adapted courses which fit into the US calendar.

## 6.3 Some insights from EU students' points of view

While there are major differences between institutions, the transparency of information about what they can expect in terms of qualification and credit recognition when coming back from the US, is not yet fully established. More than half of the case studies interviews revealed some issues related to credit recognition that could have been avoided had students had the appropriate information ahead of going abroad. Obviously, the small number of students interviewed in these case studies is not representative of the full EU-US student exchanges, but the recurrence of certain issues indicates that improvements could be made.

This is confirmed by the results of the website reviews. When the research team carried out the website screening of higher education institutions, it appeared that very little information is available on HEIs websites about their cooperation arrangements with universities in the US. Hardly any websites described the differences between the course structures and credit systems in the EU and the US advising students about the level of courses to take when abroad or the number of US courses they would have to take. While it can be expected that this information is given to students orally as part of their preparation for the stay abroad, gaps exist.

The following evidence from case studies shows that information provided to students could be improved:

- A Danish student who took part in an exchange in the US noted that a major issue for him was due to his misunderstanding regarding the requirements for the US term, and the linked requirement of the full-time workload between his home and host institution. He completed only 12 credits per quarter instead of the desired 15. However, had he received the needed support he would have been warned earlier that the number of courses he has signed up for was not sufficient or would not be adequately recognised;
- In several case studies the issue of timing is mentioned and the fact that students have to prepare their learning agreements in Europe at a time when the US institutions do not yet know what courses they will open in the next term. This implies that students are not certain whether they will be able to take part in those courses they are expected to take (according to the agreement) or whether they will have to amend their agreement. Apparently in many cases, changes are required implying that when changes are being made there is less time to negotiate issues related to credit recognition as students often have to choose their courses rather quickly after the beginning of the term.
- In one case study it was reported that, even with a learning agreement, after the students came back from their mobility, some had to take some courses again as those they had taken in the US were not close enough to their curriculum at the home university.
- The (low or insufficient) quality of course descriptions was pointed out in two case studies. The course descriptions can in some cases be misleading, requiring students to change their original study plan.
- With regard to issues in accessing master's degree programmes: one student reported that he had to take bachelor's level courses as the University of California does not admit fourth year master's students as graduates, but as undergraduates. This is due to the differences between the 3+2 and 4+1 structured higher education systems. Students have the opportunity to clarify that they are master level student while being abroad, but it is done on a case-by-case basis and students are admitted as undergraduates. The same situation was reported in the Czech example.
- The student interviewed in the Czech case study knew that the credit gained abroad would be recognised and she knew how many courses she needed to take in the US, but she did not have the information about how the exact number of ECTS points will be calculated, nor whether and how grades from US will be translated.
- The Warsaw case study mentions that in some cases it is necessary for students to pass additional examination(s) on their return because they cannot take a comparable course in the US. Though this happens in a minority of situations, additional assessment is sometimes required.

In general, US students have to face much more uncertainty about how their period of study abroad will be recognised when they are studying in Europe. The use of learning agreements on the US side seems to be very rare or even inexistent. US students usually do not know how their credits will be transferred. US students can only ensure that they get recognition for the courses selected when they arrive back home. They have to go to the specific departments (covering their major and minor) in turn to have it approved by a professor. The professor responsible for the given study programme decides whether you receive credits for the courses and at which credit level (100, 200 or 300 credit level). As the US students do not know for which courses they will be granted recognition, they sometimes tend to enrol in more classes than necessary in order to ensure a minimum of credit recognition back home. This means a high workload for them and they do not receive recognition for the additional efforts. In addition, in one example it was mentioned that each department in the US has its own policy to transfer credits: *a student reported that back home his political science department will use the conversion table 3 US credits = 4 ECTS, while the history department will use 2 US credits = 4 ECTS.* It was also noted that the US students are also required to bring as much information as they can back home about their classes (syllabus, course content, transcripts, etc.).

However, despite the above difficulties, the students' appreciation of the EU-US exchanges was strong. In terms of organisation, they were generally satisfied with the support received from coordinators and mentors. Both types of support appear crucial to establishing quality student mobility.

## 6.4 Key elements for good practice in credit recognition based on EU analysis

Following the more general issues related to credit and qualification recognition between the EU and the US, this sub-section presents, based primarily on the case study examples, what appear to be the elements of good practice for credit recognition in the framework of student exchanges with the US. Even though, as a more careful reading shows, these elements of good practice are fairly general and applicable to other situations/cooperation in other contexts.

This sub-section is not meant to provide guidelines or a unique model of good practice. In fact, it shows that a given aspect can be approached in different manners depending on the HEI, its needs, situation and expectations. The below discussion shows the key topics to be addressed in order to support credit recognition, giving some successful examples of how it is done in the HEIs studied.

The elements of good practice arising from the case studies are in line with broader level policy documents and guidelines on mobility or credit transfer. They confirm the feasibility and usefulness of the approaches defined in European documents such as the ECTS Users' Guide<sup>122</sup> or the Erasmus University Charter<sup>123</sup>.

### 2.1.2 Framework agreements

Credit recognition of a study abroad period starts at the point of the establishment of agreements between the US and European partner institutions. These agreements define the scale and scope of the exchanges. The process of developing agreements is the opportunity to clarify each others' practices, procedures and expectations, including in regards to credit recognition.

The different agreements play various roles and serve different purposes. Faculty level agreements, for example, are usually more restrictive, enabling students to study only courses offered by the faculties that signed the agreement and do not provide access to the other parts of the university. On the one hand, this might limit the choices of the students, on the other hand, it ensures that students can study courses which are coherent with their main field of study.

General agreements tend to offer a wider selection of courses to the students but might not enable access to special courses e.g. business studies. The level of autonomy of the faculties is always a decisive factor in agreement setting. There are also universities e.g. the University of Essex, which do not enter into collaboration with US partners, unless the partners open up all their courses to all exchange students. While this approach could serve as a best practice example on how to establish collaboration, it has to be noted that reciprocity – opening all courses in front of exchange students - between US and UK universities, can be more easily undertaken as there are no language barriers. The same requirement could be a major barrier for the other non-native English speaking universities. For example, at the Faculty of Engineering at Lund University, if there is an exchange student who wishes to study a class, even if it is just the one, the professor will ask all the other students if it is agreeable to deliver the whole course in English instead of Swedish. This is a very flexible approach, but may not be universally acceptable in Europe, and especially not in those countries where English is not well spoken by students or professors.

**Establishing new agreements** – Copenhagen University takes a faculty level approach to establishing new agreements. There are eight faculties at the university. When there is a

<sup>122</sup> European Commission DG Education and Culture (2009) *ECTS Users' Guide*  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf)

<sup>123</sup> <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/erasmus/EUC.htm>

decision to be made regarding the establishment of a new university level general agreement, at least three out of the eight faculties have to be in favour for it to go ahead.

#### 6.4.1 Study programme flexibility

It appears clearly from the case studies, that if the study programme in the home institution is flexible, it is a lot easier to fit mobility into learners' pathway and also to recognise credit in a flexible manner (i.e. without too detailed comparison and accepting courses that are rather different yet relevant to courses offered by the home institution). The example from Masaryk University shows that given that students have a lot of flexibility in terms of both: choice of courses and decisions on which courses to take, when and how much credit to get in a semester, it is relatively easy to fit in a mobility of one or two semesters, even if this is to concern optional courses only (though in the example of this university it is also possible to get credit for core courses abroad).

There are also different ways in which the mobility period can be foreseen in the programme. The following cases were identified:

- Fully flexible study programmes allowing students to go abroad in any semester or trimester (though students can be advised to go at a certain point of their studies);
- Structured study programmes with a predefined mobility window;
- Joint or double degrees incorporating student mobility as a basic element.

There are pros and cons to all the approaches. The fully flexible study programmes are harder to manage in terms of outgoing and incoming students, but are less time consuming for development. In some cases, where such flexibility is offered, it can be that the choice of courses available is more limited – though that is not the case in all case studies where such great flexibility is offered. Furthermore, the flexibility for the student can enhance their learning experience.

The structured exchange programmes which contain pre-defined mobility periods and clear course selection and equivalencies, are more time consuming to develop, and may involve changes to the home institution curriculum. However, once established, it is perhaps easier for the credits to be applied and fully integrated into the degree. It is possible to achieve nearly automatic recognition. There are also higher levels of quality assurance as a consequence. Joint or double degrees are the most time consuming to develop and least flexible with pre defined curriculum and institutions. However, once established, they too have well defined expectations and higher levels of quality assurance because there is co-development and cooperation in the design.

#### 6.4.2 Application and preparation procedure

There are a number of issues regarding the application procedures for a study abroad period. The following points could be useful to consider in respect of setting up application procedures:

- Sufficient time allowed for the planning and application procedure as experience shows that student exchange to the US needs around a full year of preparation;
- Clear expectations regarding the requirements to be fulfilled during a study abroad period;
- Detailed step-by-step guidelines and checklists developed and made available for the students as well, to maximise the success of the applications;
- Use of simple forms and templates throughout the application process e.g. learning agreements with clearly defined fields and requirements;
- Dedicated personnel: the guidance and help of university personnel such as international mobility managers or student advisors, are highly appreciated by the students e.g. orientation to which university / which courses to apply for based on the needs of the individual students;

- As much information as possible with constant maintenance on the universities' websites which facilitates mobility both for incoming and outgoing students e.g. list of courses available to take – e.g. University of Copenhagen;
- Harmonisation of the faculty level and central administration procedures, and making it efficient through developing a division of labour between the actors involved e.g. University of Groningen, central International Service Desk taking care of the resident permits for the incoming students;
- Providing an online platform to submit application packages e.g. the University of Tartu.

#### 6.4.3 Selection procedure

The following points could be useful to consider

- Applications go to dedicated department level bodies to assess, such as study boards or exam boards;
- The members of the bodies comprise professors, student advisors (with some level of personal knowledge regarding the student) and also students;
- The members of the body could also be involved and follow the student's study abroad and performance. E.g Lund University: students need to discuss their study plans with a study councillor or study advisor to ensure that the selected courses are in line with their main field of study;
- Relevance of the courses selected and of the stay abroad as a criterion for selection;
- Develop selection criteria which consider all social, academic and cultural benefits and gains of a potential study abroad period;
- Have consistency between the central and faculty level admission criteria, especially when students can apply for both. The ranking and assessment of students should always be done by the faculties even when the exchange is through a central university agreement;
- Minimising the steps of information exchange between all the actors involved. If both the faculties and the central level are involved, make this transparent and avoid duplicate efforts.

#### 6.4.4 Course content versus learning outcomes?

To decide whether a course from abroad, and consequently credit for that course, is relevant for a given student and his/her programme, most HEIs rely on course descriptions. In the EU it is increasingly the case that such course descriptions contain learning outcomes descriptions, however this is rarely the case in the US. In the US course descriptions predominantly focus on giving an overview of the teaching inputs. Persons in charge of approving study plans and/or recognising credit can judge from such description whether the course is relevant for a student or not. This is currently taking place in most of the HEIs studied.

Several case studies note that the quality of the course descriptions provided is not always sufficient. The interviewees from the University of Helsinki note that it should be the duty of the partner institutions to provide good quality course descriptions. Sometimes when the description is not satisfactory it is possible to further clarify issues with the course coordinator in the host institution if good contacts exist. But this makes the process more resource intensive.

#### 6.4.5 Students' understanding of credit recognition

Before going students should know:

- That the courses they have opted for will be recognised on their return if they successfully pass the assessment;

- How many credit points they will gain for each course;
- Whether and how their grades will be translated.

#### 6.4.6 Full-time workload

There should be a clear definition and specification of the workload required from the students while studying abroad including:

- A description of the value of one credit (both European and US) with the exact workload amount.

E.g. BOKU and ESSEX descriptions highlight the potential differences:

‘Single ECTS credit is based on a workload of 25 hours, including both classroom contact hours and study undertaken at home. A full year’s workload is thus normally 60 credits, or 1500-1800 hours of work. Although the US system is usually also based on credits, it calculates these based only on contact hours. In general, a full year’s workload is expressed as between 12 and 15 credits in the US, with the minimum being 12.’ – BOKU

‘Essex has its own credit system in which a full academic year consists of between 120 to 135 workload credits and 35-40 hours of academic work per week in term-time (there may be some variation between different schemes of study).

- In the specification, the schedules applied by the various universities semester / quarter should be clear: indicating how this affects the acquisition of the appropriate amount of credit.
- Ensuring, transparent communication of any minimum requirements. For example, in the US to have residence permits and visa, students are usually required to get 12 credits a quarter. Also, ensuring this is related back to any home institution’s regulation.

#### 6.4.7 Conversion of grades

In many higher education systems grades matter for further progression and possibly for other aspects such as scholarships. It is therefore important to make sure that students who go abroad are not penalised by their stay abroad because of grades. It is not always necessary to translate grades, in some examples (for example University of Helsinki), it is sufficient to transfer credit. However, when grades are translated this should be done in a fair yet flexible manner. One needs to accept that when translating from a system with relatively few scales (like the US one), towards a system with a broad scale (like in Belgium – 20 points), it will be impossible to make a sufficiently nuanced translation to find out exactly how the student performed. Distribution of grades or written feedback can provide more detailed information, but not all HEIs have such distributions and providing written feedback can be considered as resource intensive if the numbers of mobile students are high.

There can be a rationale for deciding that grades achieved abroad will not be translated. Students should be encouraged to take courses at the appropriate level of difficulty so that gaining a pass grade is not considered as ‘too easy’. To motivate them to perform well, the possibility of using qualitative descriptions of performance can also be used (see for example, Sciences Po).

Furthermore, HEIs in Europe should not assume that all US universities use the same grading approach. Often the case studies show that the same translations of grades are being used, while the distribution of grades can very much vary from one university to another.

#### 6.4.8 Requirements of credit recognition after returning home

- HEIs should be encouraged to give approval on the selected courses before a student’s departure. The University of Copenhagen for example, has a straightforward process of approval of selected courses before students leave.

- If changes are required to pre approved courses or plans, there needs to be a fully developed system of communication back to the home institutions and approval undertaken based on the course descriptions and the study plan. In the case of Lund, this also includes literature and study books, for Groningen, it goes one step further to include a description of all achievements of the students.
- In some cases, HEIs may leave the range of options for students to take very open (see for example, Sciences Po), just specifying the number of courses (possibly their level) and possibly the broad disciplines applicable. This is easier in cases where there is full trust and long established cooperation with the foreign partner institution. In these cases the HEI only needs to verify that the basic requirements were met and the credit transfer is automatic.

#### 6.4.9 Other issues

It seems beneficial for the cooperation between two HEIs and also for future students, to use student feedback. This can serve for example, to update the records on partners' institutions and the courses undertaken (e.g. at Lund) or to inform their fellow students about their experiences (through giving presentations at the University of Groningen or BOKU): 'Students are asked to fill out a detailed form once they return to BOKU explaining how they found the US partner institution and giving advice to future students who may wish to travel there. This is a useful tool for helping students understand what to expect on their study abroad exchange'. In Masaryk University Sciences Po, the student reports on their study periods abroad are also publicly available.

The trust between HEIs is a crucial issue that underlies successful cooperation and also credit transfer. Credit transfer appears easy, even for 'high stake' courses (such as core courses) when the two institutions know each other well. Personal contact between staff members supports such mutual understanding and trust. There can be a few 'relay' persons in the international office and/or within the specific department if the exchanges are decentralised, who have trusted contacts in the partner institution. Where cooperation is less well established and trust is not yet fully developed (for example, either because the cooperation is beginning or because it is part of a broader network programme such as ISEP), it is easier to organise mobility around courses which represent lower stakes – optional or free choice courses.

### 6.5 The point of view of US higher education institutions

The US research team analysed the mobility practices of fourteen HEIs and three very popular private providers that organise study abroad semesters for 502 US HEI and 67 EU HEI members. The case studies sought to describe the study abroad programmes at the HEI for major-minor programme or general education-elective degree requirements and the centralisation or decentralisation of study abroad programme management. For each case study, the course articulation process was identified and the transparency of this process described and evaluated. For each case study, the policy and procedures for grade and credit conversion were identified and described. The summary of US HEI practices, with best practices identified, is divided below into two sections on credit transfer and transparency, then credit and grade conversion.

#### 6.5.1 Credit Transfer and Transparency

At all United States (US) higher education institutions (HEIs), the transfer of credit for study abroad follows the same process of evaluation as the transfer of credit taken at any US external HEI. The student is responsible for submitting an official transcript from the external HEI, complete a request for the evaluation of each course for which transfer credit is desired, and supply documentation from the external course that includes a syllabi that details class time, topics, readings, and assessments; students are also encouraged in some cases to supply work completed in the course. In the US, regional accreditation of the HEI adds a measure of validity to the evaluation of the course and in such cases the evaluation might require little more than a comparison of course titles between the two HEIs. In the cases of minor or major requirements, upper division undergraduate, and graduate level courses, the



evaluation request is routed by the Office of Admissions to a faculty member within the closest discipline of the external course in order to identify a home course that most closely includes the same content. If a home course cannot be identified, then “general credits” in the discipline are usually awarded. Once this evaluation is done for one course from one external HEI, it remains valid for a period of at least 5 years and in some cases with accredited HEIs, it can last even longer. To facilitate the mobility of students, HEIs provide transparency for transfer credit that has already been articulated with multiple HEIs.

The majority of HEIs have separate university offices for study abroad and processes within these offices that parallel the evaluation of study abroad credit used for the evaluation of transfer credit from another US HEI. They may use the same list of discipline contacts for the evaluation of courses, or they may establish their own list of departmental faculty contacts. They may compile a list of previously articulated courses for the various study abroad programmes they manage. In a few cases, they shared the same online database of articulated equivalent courses with the Office of Admissions that is the typical university office to process transfer credit requests. In almost all cases, it appeared that the study abroad office established their own process for the evaluation of study abroad courses, using their own paper or online forms and separate record keeping.

- Michigan State University is the best example of an online database that can be queried to learn of prior evaluated transfer credit. They provide the “MSU Transfer Credit Evaluation Unit” for all external credit that has been evaluated for transfer (see Annex 4, Example 1<sup>124</sup>). The University of Pennsylvania offers a similar tool, but it is restricted to registered students.
- The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities also provides a queried database for both US and study abroad transfer credit; however, it only includes courses that fulfill Liberal Arts general education credit. Minor and major courses are not included.
- Four universities provide static spreadsheets that list previously articulated credit from study abroad programmes. The spreadsheets are accessed through each study abroad programme website. The University of Kansas is the best example of spreadsheet information as students can easily find the list that details courses at the host HEI and the equivalent course at the home HEI (see Annex 4, Example 2<sup>125</sup>). The University of Texas at Austin, Indiana University, and Penn State University also provide links on each study abroad programme webpage to spreadsheets of previously articulated courses for that programme.

Given the rather standardised process for the evaluation of transfer credit within US HEI’s, a student may have to have study abroad courses evaluated by several different discipline faculty, and encounter different requests for supporting materials from each disciplinary department evaluator. In most cases, students use paper forms to request approval for study abroad courses before they depart, and have a face-to-face meeting with the relevant academic advisors at which they receive signatures on their paper study abroad plan.

- The University of Minnesota has the most explicit and informative academic planning form for students to complete prior to their study abroad experience. This form includes various questions students should ask their Learning Abroad Adviser, their College Adviser, and their Major/Minor Adviser, and what they should bring to the academic planning meeting with Advisers (see Annex 4, Example 3<sup>126</sup>). Indiana University (see Annex 5, Example 4<sup>127</sup>) and Virginia Tech (see Annex 4, Example 5<sup>128</sup>) have one-page

<sup>124</sup> Michigan State University searchable transfer credit equivalency system  
(<http://transfer.msu.edu/Institution.asp>)

<sup>125</sup> University of Kansas static listing of credit articulation with the Danish Institute for Study Abroad  
([http://www.studyabroad.ku.edu/customtags/ct\\_FileRetrieve.cfm?File\\_ID=0407724870770300700203721A0007301140301730A1C007607010E077471027170057004730A](http://www.studyabroad.ku.edu/customtags/ct_FileRetrieve.cfm?File_ID=0407724870770300700203721A0007301140301730A1C007607010E077471027170057004730A))

<sup>126</sup> University of Minnesota Academic Planning form for study abroad approval before departure  
([http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/PeopleSoft/Common/AcademicPlanning\\_web.pdf](http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/PeopleSoft/Common/AcademicPlanning_web.pdf))

<sup>127</sup> University of Indiana Overseas Study Advising Plan for study abroad approval before departure  
(<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/docs/Forms/AdvisingPlan.doc>) and directions for student use  
(<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/docs/Forms/IUBAdvisingPlanInstructions.doc>)

forms that provide the essential planning tools for students. At Virginia Tech, each College or department has an individualised form (although they appear to be identical except for the heading at the top), and individualised instructions for advising and the completion of the form prior to departure.

- In one case, The University of Pennsylvania, office for study abroad programmes provides an online “Penn Abroad Academic Approval Form” that students complete to initiate a prior review of planned abroad courses by the relevant academic college for the student. This form is electronically signed, or eventually completed on paper and signed in a face-to-face meeting with the student and advisor.
- In some cases, no forms are used for prior approval of the study abroad courses or programme, and students must complete forms upon return for any courses they took that have not been previously articulated. Penn State University provides an online submission process for the recognition of study abroad credit based on prior lists of articulated courses, and for the evaluation of study abroad credit that is not already articulated on the programme historical course list spread sheet. This online form requests the uploading of the study abroad course syllabus (see Annex 4, Example 6<sup>129</sup>).
- Internally developed, exchange, and dual degree programmes that have already been designed and/or approved by the home HEI faculty in collaboration with the study abroad HEI also tend not to have pre-departure advising forms. In these cases the courses to be transferred are pre-determined and evaluated by the faculty who developed the programme. The best example of transparency with this type of programme is the Bentley-Tilburg Dual Degree Programme that provides at their website a detailed curriculum map of courses to be taken with home equivalents, as well as detail on credit and grade conversion (see Annex 4, Example 7 and 8<sup>130</sup>).

Once an external course is evaluated and articulated in terms of credit at the home HEI, the publication of approved transfers differs across HEI’s, thus creating variable transparency for students interested in study abroad as an integral part of their degree. Transparency differs based on the information provided through each HEI office for study abroad programmes. Some have well developed websites that provide descriptions of internally developed and approved study abroad programmes; courses to be taken abroad are listed, described, and conversions to credit at home are provided for student curricular planning. Others only describe the study abroad programme in general terms and provide a link to the foreign HEI where possible courses to be taken can be reviewed; some of these courses may have prior articulation and some may require evaluation upon the student’s return, but this most often is not identified for the student. When provided, the web descriptions of how courses abroad fulfill specific home courses is most often a static listing of prior articulations, but in a few cases the HEI study abroad office provides a dynamic web page in which a student uses an interactive form to select a study abroad HEI, then one of the courses available at that HEI, to have the home HEI equivalent information returned through an online query of a the database of prior approved transfers.

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<sup>128</sup> Virginia Tech College of Engineering Transfer Credit Request Form for pre-approval of a study abroad plan ([http://www.eng.vt.edu/sites/default/files/pageattachments/study\\_abroad\\_transfer\\_credit\\_form%20revised%206-2-2011.doc](http://www.eng.vt.edu/sites/default/files/pageattachments/study_abroad_transfer_credit_form%20revised%206-2-2011.doc))

<sup>129</sup> Penn State University process for student application to recognize credit from abroad as an equivalent course at Penn State ([http://gpglobalea.gp.psu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent\\_ID=EF7701F1-939F-962A-3B62D18230899758&Link\\_ID=EF7F3C3D-9FF5-AAC7-25DC67128D29658C&pID=5&IID=19](http://gpglobalea.gp.psu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent_ID=EF7701F1-939F-962A-3B62D18230899758&Link_ID=EF7F3C3D-9FF5-AAC7-25DC67128D29658C&pID=5&IID=19)) and online form for student to upload information and documents from the host course for evaluation (<https://www.global.psu.edu/ea/CEquiv/>)

<sup>130</sup> Bentley University-Tilburg University Sample Dual Degree Curriculum Map that lists the semester by semester courses recognized for dual degree study at consortia partner universities ([http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Bentley\\_Tilburg\\_Cadre\\_1\\_curriculum\\_List\\_08-26-10.pdf](http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Bentley_Tilburg_Cadre_1_curriculum_List_08-26-10.pdf)). Bentley University International Bachelor’s in Information Management student handbook for students studying at Tilburg and Deusto Universities ([http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Sept\\_2010\\_academic\\_handbook\\_v2.pdf](http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Sept_2010_academic_handbook_v2.pdf))

HEI's that provide externally approved programmes offered through the external study abroad providers such as IES, CIEE, CIS, AESOP, or Arcadia University rely on these external providers to evaluate transfer credit. Upon completion of the provider's programme, the host transcript is converted to a provider transcript based on the evaluations of site visits and academic councils made up of faculty and study abroad personnel from the HEIs that become members of the provider's academic council or affiliate university group. The key provision is that students enroll in their home HEI and through their home HEI's office of study abroad they are enrolled in the external provider's study abroad programme. Credits are articulated by the external provider and routed directly to the home HEI office of study abroad for entry on the student's home HEI transcript, or an US HEI is used by the external provider as a "school of record," and that HEI issues a transcript to the student for the transfer of externally awarded credit from a US HEI using whatever process is required at the home HEI for the transfer of credit from another US HEI.

A single policy recommendation would be the electronic integration of course articulation databases across US and EU HEIs. An organisation such as the Council of International Schools, or the Institute of International Education, could provide an interconnected database that articulated courses already approved at any US HEI to any other EU HEI through the many separate articulated databases that already accomplish this an individual US HEI with an individual EU HEI. Within the US, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, provides extensive interconnected evaluation tools for the transfer of credits across US HEIs. They provide a website with state by state articulation guides and data bases<sup>131</sup>. Another for-profit organisation, College Source, licenses an online database programme called "u.select"<sup>132</sup> at which a student can look up a course at one US HEI and learn what other US HEIs accept this course and the exact credits fulfilled with a transfer.

### 6.5.2 Credit and Grade Conversion

While a definitive study could not establish a formula for the conversion of UK, European ECTS, and US credit systems, almost all case studies used the following convention: 4 credit in the UK = 2 ECTS = 1 US credit. In most cases for US HEIs, the conversion rounds up the US credit awarded to a whole number. Thus, 5 ECTS = 3 US credits. This is most often based on the established equivalence of full time semester long study of 30 ECTS to 15 US credits to 60 UK credits.

The conversion of grades will remain a difficult issue and likely individually determined by faculty groups within individual HEIs, nevertheless uniformly decided at even one US HEI. With study abroad programmes taken through the home HEI, students almost always receive resident credit and grades are converted using a scale developed specifically for that programme by faculty within the relevant discipline. Variations exist in the ability of students to study abroad on a "credit/no-credit, or pass/fail" basis, although it is always the case that the students must have a minimum pass in the study abroad course for credits to count.

- Michigan State University provides the best example of transparent grade conversion scales developed for a study abroad at each partner HEI. The list of study abroad HEIs provides both a list of courses articulated to the Michigan State equivalent and a link to a separate document that details the grade conversion from the host HEI to the home HEI. While not every HEI has a grade conversion scale available, it appears that those that are most frequented for study abroad have published conversion scales (see Annex 4, Example 9<sup>133</sup>).

<sup>131</sup> See [http://www2.aacrao.org/pro\\_development/transfer.cfm](http://www2.aacrao.org/pro_development/transfer.cfm)

<sup>132</sup> See <https://www.transfer.org/uselect/login.htm>

<sup>133</sup> Michigan State University grade and credit conversion for the Department of English programme with the University of Aarhus, Denmark ([http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP\\_Aarhus.pdf](http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP_Aarhus.pdf)); grade and credit conversion for MSU College of Natural Science with Lancaster University, United Kingdom ([http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP\\_Lancaster.pdf](http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP_Lancaster.pdf)); grade and credit conversion for Department of Psychology with Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany ([http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP\\_Giessen.pdf](http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP_Giessen.pdf))

- At Indiana University and Boston University grades count in the student's GPA for only internally designed programmes. Non-home programmes transfer credit for course abroad that are passed, but no grades. This is the same at the University of Texas Austin except that the study abroad grades for affiliated programmes are shown on the student's transcript but still not included in the student's GPA.
- At Virginia Tech, no grades from study abroad count in the student's GPA.
- At the University of Minnesota, grades for internal programmes count and students have a choice to apply for external programmes to be credit/no-credit before they study abroad.
- At the University of Illinois, grades from all programmes count in the student's GPA. However, students can apply for a Credit/No-credit option before departure. This is the same at the University of Pennsylvania but students are limited by overall academic policy to a certain number of pass-fail courses, and the request for enrollment in that status is the same for residential or study abroad courses. It is similar at the University of Kansas, except that no major courses can be selected for pass-fail, and electives can only be based on individual college academic policy with the number of allowable pass-fail credits. Also at the University of Washington, students can request pass-fail option for elective courses studied abroad.
- At Penn State University, Michigan State University, New York University, Bentley University, and Marshall University, all grades count in the calculation of the student's GPA for study abroad programmes taken through the university office of study abroad as residential study abroad credits.

Only one of the HEIs in the study group, The University of Texas Austin, made use of a host university faculty evaluation form at the conclusion of the course to assist in the conversion of grade at the home university. This form must be downloaded by the student and completed at the end of the study abroad class by the teacher of the class. It is similar to a form used by the University of Manchester, England (see Annex 4, Example 10<sup>134</sup>). The course instructor notes the % of contribution towards the final grade for essays, practical work, discussion, attendance, mid-term and final exams. The instructor also notes the position of the student in the total number of students in the course and the average grade of all students in the course. This information can help to establish a scale for converting grades that uses statistical information on the distribution of students and skills, materials, and performances evaluated.

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<sup>134</sup> University of Manchester Appendix IV: Grade Conversion Supplement Form: The University of Manchester Exchange Student given to the host instructor to complete for the exchange student at the end of an abroad course to assist in the conversion of grades to the home university (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=9801>). The entire report entitled "Framework for credit transfer and grade conversion of study abroad" provides the policy and procedures for study abroad in both US and other EU countries.

## 7 Conclusions

There is already important student mobility between the EU and the US that brings along the demand for credit and qualification recognition. EU HEIs receive most US students studying abroad and the US is an important destination country for EU students who are mobile outside the EU. This mobility is supported by a range of public initiatives, but many exchanges exist based on HEIs' own initiatives. Public funding programmes for mobility tend to emphasise the need for credit and qualification recognition in order for beneficiaries to receive support. Longer term mobility organised at the initiative of HEIs also seems systematically related with credit recognition. Recognition of short-term mobility (summer schools or short courses) can very much vary from one institution to another. It seems that most EU institutions are interested in developing and recognising longer-term mobility while US HEIs may find it difficult to motivate students for longer term mobility and therefore encourage shorter exchanges as well as US faculty led study abroad experiences that are embedded within home course enrolment.

Given the desire of US major programme faculty to maintain control over the core components of a major programme, fewer opportunities exist for US students to study abroad for purposes other than fulfilling electives or general education degree requirements. This curricula control helps to explain the difficulty in establishing semester and year-long study abroad at EU HEIs where the majority of courses are at a level corresponding to the major-minor upper-division level of US HEIs. Thus most organised US study abroad agreements articulate course recognition between US and EU for US lower-level general education and elective requirements, and only recently faculties started to develop specific initiatives to establish joint and dual degrees concerning upper-level core (major) programme requirements.

With the exception of short-term exchanges, it appears that EU and US institutions are systematically ensuring that credit recognition from the US is enabled:

- All the universities studied in the case studies consider it as a norm that a mobility that lasts one semester or more would entitle students to credit recognition (though the way this is arranged differs greatly);
- All the universities have clear processes in place to support credit recognition and these processes apply to mobility within and between the US and EU. As European higher education institutions have strengthened their international focus over the past decade or two, they have also systematised and professionalised the management of student mobility. Likewise, US HEIs have strengthened their portfolio of organised study abroad agreements, recruitment and advising, and centralised the process of planning study abroad and credit recognition and transfer upon return. US HEI study abroad websites have become a key transparent resource for students interested in study abroad;
- The facility with which EU HEIs arrange credit recognition from the US depends very much on the understanding the people in charge have of the US higher education system (including the credit system) and the level of trust (which is related to the volume and frequency of exchanges with the same HEI in the US) between the partner institutions. This level of trust remains a central issue for US HEIs as department or discipline level faculty members evaluate study abroad courses to add them to the articulated list of recognised credit; thus their awareness and contact with the EU HEI programme faculty remains key in building the fundamental trust.

From the data available, the difficulties in credit recognition (for organised mobility) between EU and the US do not seem significantly greater than the difficulties students encounter with credit recognition within the EU or the US. It is true, that the EU and US credit systems are different and the ways they are used in any one HEI can also vary, but ultimately the use of credit in the US is as systematic as it is in the EU. When a person understands the US system it becomes much easier to apply it to understand how different HEIs use it. In other words, a lot of the obstacles related to credit recognition from the US to Europe can be overcome when an understanding of the US higher education system, qualifications structures and the use of credit is developed. The differences between credit systems in the

EU and the US are an initial obstacle because people on both ends have to get familiar with the way the other system works, but there are no systemic features of the two systems that would render credit recognition impossible. All the examples analysed show that there are no obstacles in transferring credit between the US and the EU that could not be overcome. It is important to note that this does not mean that all credit achieved in the US or the EU can be recognised in a given EU institution and vice versa (see below).

Beyond the difference in conceptualisation and use of credit and the way EU and US qualifications are conceived (overall: generalist versus specialist and theoretical versus practical approaches), another major obstacle to credit recognition from the US towards EU can be found in the way qualifications and study programmes are structured in EU HEIs. This obstacle is not specific to mobility with the US but applies to any longer term student mobility. Though ECTS is broadly used in Europe, there are major differences between countries, institutions and even departments in how much flexibility for credit accumulation is given to students. The case studies cover a range of situations: from very liberal and flexible approaches with a lot of space for students' choice, to much more prescriptive study programmes with a lot of predefined compulsory subjects. This same range from liberal to conservative approaches to degree programmes exist in US HEIs and has the same impact on US student mobility to study abroad in the EU. It is easier to recognise credit from an abroad HEI programme where students are given flexibility in the use of that credit upon return at the home HEI. It is critical to realise that at US HEIs, while credit from abroad may be successfully articulated to an equivalent home course and entered on the student's transcript, if that equivalent home course is not already recognised as fulfilling a degree requirement, the student must apply for the credit recognition on a case by case basis with their major programme faculty advisor, who can deny the request to use articulated study abroad credit to fulfil home degree requirements.

It is also possible that a liberal approach cannot fit all study disciplines, in particular, it may be difficult to put in place when the study programme has to comply with strict requirements of an external quality assurance body (for example, in medicine). The case studies show that the obstacles created by the conservative approach, or stringent nature of study programmes in certain systems, universities or disciplines, can be overcome and even credit for core (major programme) courses can be easily recognised if the HEIs ensure:

- Careful selection of partner institution to make sure that the quality and level of outcomes are coherent and meet the requirements of both institutions;
- Flexible comparison of courses based on the identification of substantial difference rather than looking for too strict equivalence;
- Good quality course description made available to the partner institutions; and
- Progressive development of mutual trust through exchanges of students and faculty and continued communication.

The fact that the US credit system is based on contact hours rather than workload, as it is the case with ECTS, is not a structural obstacle and all institutions find solutions to translate the US metrics into the ECTS (or another) metrics. The solutions differ because the way credit recognition is envisaged and used in the home HEI vary greatly:

- Some EU HEIs compare the course from the host institution to an equivalent course in the home institution and the student is in practice (on his/her transcript) awarded the credit for the course of the home HEI. This is also the predominant practice in US HEIs. Likewise, the private providers of study abroad translate EU courses into an equivalent course name and number at the US "university of record" for the provider.;
- Some EU HEIs compare the course from the host institution to a course of similar nature and give the student the number of credit points that the home institution course has (but it is clear from the transcript that the course passed is that of a foreign HEI). At US HEIs this often occurs when a specific equivalent home course cannot be identified. Then general credits in the discipline, or closest department, are awarded to the student, but they are rarely noted as foreign credits.;

- Some EU HEIs make a rough estimation: While the minimum semester credit load in most US HEIs is 12 credits, the required load to graduate on time in 4 years is 30 credits a year, or 15 per semester. If in the US the student is required to pass five courses of 15 US credits per semester, the equivalent load of 30 ECTS in the EU would make each course passed in the US equivalent to 5 ECTS;
- Most US HEI's use a conversion rate of 2 ECTS = 1 US semester credit, and US HEIs will round up fractions to whole US credits, thus a 5 ECTS course is converted to 2.5 US credits and rounded up to 3 US credits in most cases, although some conversion formulas can differ. Some EU HEIs also use such conversions; and finally
- Other EU HEIs do not translate the credit course by course and simply state that for two full semesters in the US the student has been achieved 60ECTS. This approach was not identified in any of the US HEIs examined.

There is no best way to approach this issue. All of the above approaches have proven to work and each certainly has strengths and weaknesses that are for each single HEI to consider. The use of one approach or another will depend on:

- How the credit system of the home HEI is conceptualised (e.g. what is the importance of points compared to accumulation of course components and learning outcomes; what are the rules in terms of credit accumulation);
- The visibility the HEI wishes to give to the study period abroad on documents such as transcripts;
- Legal constraints (how can credit from abroad be recognised), but also practical constraints related to aspects such as ICT systems managing learners' transcripts, etc.

However, ECTS is not predominantly about the workload as expressed in the form of credit points, but an important feature of ECTS is the learning outcomes. The use of learning outcomes to describe and define courses is not common in the US. The syllabi used for US courses contains a description of the required assessments or projects that would demonstrate proficiency with the knowledge inputs described by course topics and readings. Obviously, students ultimately achieve knowledge, skills and competence, though these are not described in the course description or their transcript. One could say that when international coordinators from EU HEIs recognise credit from abroad based on a US course description, they make certain assumptions about the learning outcomes of an individual based on their expert judgement of the course inputs. However, there is no evidence in the case studies that the persons in charge of credit recognition would see the absence of learning outcomes descriptions from US course descriptions as a major obstacle. In the more liberal approaches to credit recognition the evaluation of study abroad courses is often based on a very broad judgement of whether the course appears relevant based on the teaching inputs described (or sometimes just the title and the level). In the more conservative approaches, a more detailed analysis of the course description comparability with the home course is made. While certain people in charge complained during some interviews that the US course descriptions are not always of sufficiently good quality, they did not specifically mention the lack of learning outcomes. The complaints rather concerned the details of the course curriculum and the reading lists (in other words the inputs). This does not mean that learning outcomes do not matter for credit recognition in the context of organised student mobility; if the HEIs observed that the returning students did not achieve new knowledge, skills and competence, it is unlikely they would continue exchanges with a given institution. Most HEIs in Europe give students recommendations about the level of courses to choose in the US, meaning that they express certain requirements about the level of learning outcomes expected. Beyond the issue of level, they do not require any detailed comparisons of learning outcomes. In some of the case studies the use of learning outcomes is a fairly new element of programme design. One could say that the reason why the staff in charge of recognition is not particularly concerned about the lack of outcomes description is because they are not yet fully used to working with this concept. However, even in those examples where the use of learning outcomes is well established, there is no evidence that the lack of learning outcomes descriptions would be a major obstacle to credit recognition.

For some US HEI case studies, returning students are asked to supply the outcome projects and papers from their EU course to assist in the evaluation and articulation back to home courses. In principle, there are no structural elements that would hinder credit recognition from the US or EU. Nevertheless, the case studies show that some specific aspects of the US higher education qualifications system can pose a problem for credit recognition by EU universities and mobility opportunities for US students. The extent to which these aspects are seen as problematic varies very much from one HEI to another, depending on the approach the university has to defining its own qualifications. These aspects are:

- The fact that some US higher education courses are considered to be at a level that is too low for credit recognition towards a European degree (courses at level 100), and the reverse becomes a deterrent for US mobility for students who seek EU courses to fulfil 100 and 200 level general education requirements;
- Compared to most bachelor degrees in Europe, the US programmes are considered as too general and hence many EU HEIs try to restrict the choice of courses students take abroad to one department or field of study. To receive credit recognition students have to choose courses that are relevant for their home programme or even equivalent. Even though, examples can be found among the case studies where HEIs accept any student choice from the partner university. On the other side, EU programmes are considered to be too major specific and hence many US HEIs do not see sufficient courses that can be substituted for home degree requirements, especially when there is a lack of flexibility to fulfil major core programme components abroad;
- The above aspects can also be an obstacle for US students seeking recognition for their bachelor degrees when coming to Europe. If their study programme was too diverse compared to the HEI requirements in terms of prerequisites, the person may need to undertake some additional courses. On the other side, EU students who hold a 3 year first cycle Bachelor degree do not have the same total number of credits as the US Bachelor degree, and can be unfairly prevented from taking master level courses.;

In the context of organised mobility, the above issues are easily overcome by using learning agreements through which the student can specify the courses to be taken abroad and the faculty person in charge (e.g. the international coordinator in the EU or the major programme faculty advisor in the US) can sign off the study plan which specifies how the selected courses articulate with the requirements in the home institution..

Another possible obstacle mentioned was the lack of research elements in certain US masters degrees which makes it difficult for US students to enrol in doctoral studies in the EU; this factor was not discussed in the US HEI cases.

Finally, the variable quality of HEIs was also noted and most EU and US HEIs insist on identifying the right partner institutions with similar levels of academic requirements and a matching culture of quality and approach to teaching and research.



## 8 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, this final section presents the research team recommendations. The recommendations have been structured into three levels:

- Recommendations for the EU-US policy dialogue;
- Recommendations for EU stakeholders funding mobility and dealing with qualification recognition in EU Member States; and
- Recommendations for EU higher education institutions.

### 8.1 Recommendations for the EU-US policy dialogue

**R1: Discuss how to increase the collaboration and trust between faculty members from EU and US HEIs in the development of degree programmes that integrate study abroad for core major and minor components as well as elective and optional components**

The flexibility perceived for US students to study abroad and at US HEIs is most likely attributed to the structure of the US Bachelor degree with 1-2 years, or 30-60 US semester credits, of general education degree requirements. US degrees of 120-140 total credits can have nearly 50% allocated to general education. Major programme courses are the main focus of the last two years or 60-80 credits of the Bachelor degree. Thus, EU students are challenged to find courses that fulfil their core programme requirements at US HEIs where most open courses are general education and not necessarily the best fit for their home EU degree.

A common problem would seem to be the trust of EU and US faculty members that core required degree courses can be adequately substituted with study abroad courses. This problem has been a direct focus of government initiatives such as Atlantis, to encourage faculties to collaborate on joint or dual degree programmes that integrate core courses from abroad partners. Articulated exchange courses and mobility agreements are key instruments produced through faculty exchanges that establish the trust in partner HEIs.

If study abroad experiences are to move beyond electives and general education degree requirements, then policy makers should continue to consider how to increase the collaboration and trust between faculty stakeholders in core (major and minor) programmes in US and EU HEIs.

The examples in this study show that such recognition of core courses is possible. The policy dialogue could promote good practice in recognition of core components.

Bodies such as ENIC-NARIC network centres but also quality assurance agencies and academic conference associations or universities associations can have a role to play in identification and promotion of good practice.

**R2: Set up an exchange about quality assurance in the EU and the US at both policy maker and practitioner level to ensure the recognition by professional licensure and accreditation bodies of study abroad components in the home HEI degree**

The conclusions of this study identify as one of the obstacles to mobility from the US towards the EU, the fact that US quality assurance bodies have very stringent requirements on the proportion of courses US students can take in a foreign institution. This perception among

some EU HEIs was not shared by the US HEIs case studied. The US HEIs analysed saw the difficulty in recognition of core (major) courses taken abroad as equivalent to home components in cases where these serve to fulfil key criteria required by external professional quality assurance bodies.

This study does not provide any indication as to the underpinning reasons for US faculty members appeal to external professional bodies as the source for such stringent course requirements. Hypothetically, this could be due to several issues:

- It could be a way for US higher education institutions to 'protect the market' and to ensure that foreign education does not become a competition to the US higher education system;
- It could also be related to the lack of trust in the quality of courses passed abroad; or
- It could be related to the fact that US HEI faculty are not aware of the quality assurance measures in place in Europe and hence do not have trust that courses taken abroad equally satisfy professional requirements in a particular disciplinary field.

If the main issue is related to trust and there is willingness towards more cooperation and exchanges, the theme of quality assurance could be covered in one of the policy dialogue discussions and pursued through an exchange between EU and US quality assurance bodies.

The landscape of European higher education quality assurance bodies has been restructured recently and many countries have reviewed (or are reviewing) their quality assurance methods and criteria in line with the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher Education. These developments could offer a great deal of material for discussion and exchange at policy and practitioner level.

### R3: Exchange good practice on protocols and procedures to support 'recognised' mobility of students, based on the acceptance of EU qualifications and US degrees for study abroad at the next cycle, and the creation of a transfer credit data exchange between US and EU HEIs for study abroad courses that have been articulated

Another issue that could be dealt with in cooperation between the EU and the US concerns the processes and protocols for credit recognition in the framework of organised student mobility. US institutions are clearly used to receiving foreign students for full programmes and on exchanges, however, it seems that when it comes to sending US students abroad and making sure the credit they gain abroad is recognised, certain procedures and protocols that are common practice in the EU may be transparent and in use for general education and elective study abroad, but are underdeveloped for study abroad to fulfil major programme components at the US HEI. Many EU institutions now have very clear protocols in place (often developed thanks to the Erasmus programme influence) that make student mobility relatively easy to organise, but also to recognise students' credit upon return. As shown also in this study, there is no single good practice model on how to organise students' mobility within an HEI, however, there are certain key functions and processes that are in place. Who performs these functions and processes may differ, but the structural elements remain. These are for example:

- Recruitment and selection;
- Design of study plan abroad;
- Approval of the study plan and selected courses;
- Signature of learning agreements;

- Maintenance of course databases and catalogues with the appropriate information on courses that have been articulated across US and EU HEIs so these can also support student mobility planning and credit recognition;
- Modification of learning agreements;
- Reception of learners' transcripts from abroad;
- Validation and recognition of credit from abroad.

The theme of protocols and processes for managing 'recognised mobility' could be a topic for exchange if there is interest on the side of US stakeholders and higher education institutions.

The analysis seems to support the development of a single unified queried database of study abroad courses that have been articulated between any two US and EU HEIs. This could provide a one-stop place to interconnect the evaluation of study abroad courses. Both US and EU HEIs should have an incentive to participate in this data base as it would lead to the identification of their particular institution as a desired location for study abroad. However, given the diversity of higher education systems in the EU, maintenance of such database could be very resource intensive, at least from the EU side.

## 8.2 Recommendations for EU stakeholders in the field of student mobility and qualification recognition

### R4: Continue emphasising credit recognition as part of mobility - key elements of students' mobility

It is common practice nowadays within the EU that longer-term student mobility is nearly automatically seen as mobility that should give students credit recognition. The funding programmes, national rules and also international policies in this domain (such as the Lisbon Convention), have certainly had an important role to play in mainstreaming this practice. Of key importance to students, however, is the transfer of study abroad credits back to their home HEI so they do not lose time towards graduation, or incur additional expense from having to extend their studies for a study abroad semester.

It is important to maintain this close association between student mobility and credit recognition, even though many short-term study abroad opportunities are being developed that do not include credit recognition. To handle this issue in US HEIs, "embedded programmes" have become very popular in which the faculty offers a study abroad component that is also led by the home faculty member, and the activities carry home credit or fulfil requirements within the home course in which the short-term experience is embedded. Such embedded programmes have a typical length of 2 to 3 weeks abroad.

It could be possible to further encourage that, where appropriate, credit recognition is also used for mobility periods of duration shorter than one semester. This could be conditional to learning periods that comply with the basic features of ECTS: they have defined learning outcomes, there is an estimated workload and an assessment process.

### R5: Assess the use of the concept of substantial difference in credit recognition for mobile students and promote the use of this approach by faculty members who evaluate study abroad courses to articulate them for transfer credit

The international practice as embedded in the Lisbon Convention, suggests that credit recognition for periods of study should be based on assessing whether there is (or not) a substantial difference with the course from the home institution. The case studies in this report show that while certain HEIs (or certain departments) have a very open and liberal approach to credit recognition in the framework of organised mobility with trusted institutions, others base credit recognition on course by course comparison. For US HEI's, this articulation process is completed for each new course taken abroad, then typically the evaluation lasts for a period of time from two to five years. This process is very decentralised (often done by teaching staff and at best by international coordinators) and there is little information whether those in charge prefer to seek for equivalence (and how stringent equivalence) or whether the concept of substantial difference is used in practice. The selection of case studies carried out here shows that the comparison is based on curricula/ course descriptions but most interviewees acknowledge that the actual practice depends from person to person. For US HEI's the evaluation of abroad courses that appear to match home general education level courses are not stringent or may not even involve a discipline/department faculty member. For major or minor programme courses, a relevant disciplinary faculty member always completes the evaluation.

While the concept of substantial difference is probably known to the expert community of credential evaluators, there is no evidence suggesting that higher education staff and faculty dealing with credit recognition of mobile students is familiar with it and actually uses it.

There could be benefits in preparing simple, user-friendly and practical brochures, examples and check-lists which could guide persons in charge of credit recognition in higher education institutions in this process.

### R6: Prepare a document supported by examples of how the US degree qualifications and credit system compares to the home system in a given EU country to facilitate mobility

The study found that there is very little guidance or material explaining how EU higher education institutions can work with US higher education institutions to mutually recognise each others' credit. The HEIs studied did not look for such guidance, but at the same time they were already experienced in cooperating with the abroad HEI. Furthermore, even in these HEIs, it seems that not all staff involved in credit recognition has the same level of understanding of the other's credit system.

As said in the conclusions, there are major differences between the EU and the US credit systems and also between the ways in which degrees and programmes are constructed. These differences can be overcome but they need to be understood. Guidance material explaining how the US system compares to the home system, supported with certain concrete examples showing how an EUHEI can cooperate with a US HEI, can help those launching a cooperation. It can also avoid misunderstandings and make sure that there is a common understanding across different HEIs and across departments on how the abroad system compares to the home system.

## 8.3 Recommendations for EU practitioners (higher education institutions)

R7: If possible adopt a liberal approach to credit recognition for core, optional, elective, and general education programme components, especially in organised student mobility. If it is not possible to adopt a liberal approach, then compare courses based on substantial difference.

The case studies show that where a liberal approach to course selection and consequent credit recognition is in place, the process of credit recognition can be relatively easy. This does not mean that students need to be given full freedom about the decision on which courses to take. Their choice can be constrained by certain requirements such as:

- The level of course;
- The department where to take the course; and/or
- The relevance of the course for students' study programmes.

Furthermore, such a liberal approach should be pursued with HEIs that are trusted by the home institution when it comes to the quality of their teaching and outcomes.

Where possible, such a liberal approach greatly facilitates the organisation of mobility and enables students to benefit from courses that are rather different from those offered in their home institution, yet relevant.

It is not always possible to have such a flexible approach. Some programmes have to be designed in a more stringent manner and some higher education systems have rules and traditions which will not change overnight. When the preferred approach to credit recognition is based on course by course comparison, do not search for equivalence. Perfect equivalence does not exist. Furthermore, even students who have been through the same course will have different learning outcomes. Therefore, it is more constructive to concentrate on finding out whether there are any substantial differences between the courses in terms of: level, core focus, depth and breadth or workload. However, this requires that the host institution is able to provide a sufficiently good description of the course.

### **R8: Do not consider the differences in credit points allocation or grading systems between the EU and the US as an obstacle**

This study shows that the differences in the numeric metrics used by US credit systems and ECTS can be overcome relatively easily. These differences are not a fundamental obstacle. The examples and the synthesis show that there is a range of possible solutions and it is likely that any HEI will be able to apply at least one of these solutions.

Likewise various grading scales exist to convert performance in study abroad to the approximate level of performance in the home grading system. However, many HEIs provide an option for non-graded study abroad so students who pass the courses at the abroad HEI receive full credit, but grades are not transferred or figured into the home cumulative grade point average (or equivalent). This issue may be more important for US students as grades constitute a significant factor in student decision to select courses and programmes for study abroad.

### **R9: Develop/ maintain clear protocols around credit recognition from abroad across offices and departments in the institution, and improve the content description of courses taken by exchange students to enable better evaluation of credit**

The institutions where credit recognition from the US (but from abroad in general) appears easiest are the ones where a clear procedure/ protocol exists. This protocol clarifies who does what at what point in the process and on what basis:

- There is a clear information about how students should choose courses abroad;
- There is a common approach as to how persons in charge identify whether the course taken abroad is suitable to ensure that credit is recognised (based on what information

the decision is made, is there is a different approach for credit concerning core courses and credit concerning optional courses, etc.);

- Students receive clear information about how credit will be recognised and whether grades will be translated and how;
- Amendments of learning agreements are made in line with the point above to ensure that even if a student has to take a different course than initially planned, the credit will be recognised.

Having in place a common policy regarding the process of credit recognition ensures greater consistency and better transparency for students.

Unifying credit evaluation and recognition policies and procedures across all offices and departments of an HEI will provide greater transparency for students and faculty members in the process. If possible, utilising the same databases for the evaluation of study abroad credit by both Admissions offices and International Programmes offices could contribute to building trust between the HEI and abroad partner HEIs.

Establishing minimum descriptions for courses that include more than titles or a few short sentence descriptions will facilitate trust building and credit evaluation. All US HEIs generally use course syllabi to describe the content of course learning and objectives and these would be most supportive for delivery to EU partner HEIs.

### **R10: Support EU-US exchanges among faculty and staff in charge of (major) programmes and credit recognition to build trust, to integrate study abroad components into core (major and minor) programmes, and to improve consistency of credit articulation within the institution**

The case studies show that many higher education institutions have a decentralised approach to credit recognition. This means that the decisions about whether credit from a foreign institution can be recognised are made by persons within the specific department who know the nature of the home programme, how it is structured and hence they make an informed judgement about what is 'relevant' or what constitutes substantial difference. On the other hand there is a risk that different procedures will be applied in each department. As said in the conclusions of this study, credit recognition from the abroad is easier when the faculty or staff in charge of recognition have a good understanding of the abroad qualifications system and how credit is used there. Such good understanding may exist in some departments due to a long standing exchange or personal experience of faculty/staff, but not in others. Benefits in terms of greater consistency of approaches and procedures could arise from exchanging how different departments deal with credit recognition.

When group discussions have been organised for this study among persons in charge of credit recognition they revealed that there is little or even no exchange within HEIs about this topic. In most cases EU staff actually welcomed the opportunity to exchange on how they decide on credit recognition from the US.



# Part B: Use of credit systems between EU and the US

## Case Studies



## 1 University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (Austria): a system based on trust

### Key Facts

All of the students at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna (BOKU) have the opportunity to apply for a scholarship to study abroad, and on average about 25-35 scholarships are granted each year to go to the US.

The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences is a university that sees itself 'as an education and research centre for renewable resources'. It began its life as primarily an agricultural institute in 1872, as the 'Hochschule für Bodenkultur Wien.' Since then, it has expanded its range of expertise to include the natural sciences, engineering and economics and explores all issues that 'deepen our knowledge' of 'ecologically and economically sustainable use[s] of natural resources in a cultivated landscape.'<sup>135</sup>

The University has been sending students through bilateral agreements between departments in BOKU and US universities for many years before the Centre of International Relations was set up in 1991 to formalise and extend these agreements. Now the university has contracts with over 13 different US universities, which allow its students access to the full range of courses offered. Most of the students who study abroad do so at the Masters level, either in taught courses or in research programmes. There is also a high level of professor mobility.

BOKU was one of the first universities to develop an Internationalisation Strategy in Austria. In it, the development and increase of student and teacher mobility is central, and includes a target increase of student mobility of 3.5% in the medium term and 5% in the long run. It also includes an ambition to develop Joint-Study-Programmes in all disciplines offering course modules in English.<sup>136</sup> Although many joint-study programmes have been set up in BOKU with countries across Asia, New Zealand and Europe, there are as yet no such programmes with the US. However, there are discussions to develop one with the University of Minnesota in Natural Resource Management and Ecological Engineering.

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### Context for cooperation with the US

BOKU first started cooperating with the US at the department level through mutual research projects, lecturers visiting and teaching in US universities, and eventually through sending students abroad. In 1991, a Centre for International Relations was created in order to assist with the management of these bilateral agreements and to extend them into full contracts open to all of the students at BOKU. Student mobility became central to the internationalisation strategy, although US partner institutions never took precedence over other countries. The current strategy of BOKU is to focus on developing its international activities in countries of South-East Europe, Central and Latin America and Central and South-East Asia mainly.

BOKU now has agreements with over 13 different universities, including:

- Florida A&M University (Florida, Tallahassee)
- University of Georgia (Athens)
- Cornell University, Ithaca, (New York)
- Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana)

<sup>135</sup> Universität für Bodenkultur Wien: <sup>135</sup> <http://www.boku.ac.at/zib.html>

<sup>136</sup> Universität für Bodenkultur Wien: <sup>136</sup> <http://static.boku.ac.at/zib/strateng.html>

- Iowa State University (Ames, Iowa)
- University of Minnesota (Minneapolis)
- Michigan State University (East Lansing)
- Michigan Technological University (Houghton)
- West Virginia University, (Morgantown, West Virginia)
- University of Wisconsin-Madison, (Wisconsin-Madison)
- University of Arizona, (Tucson, Arizona UA - Partner Information)
- University of Nevada-Reno, (Nevada Nevada-Reno)
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln, (Lincoln, Nebraska)

#### **Overall approach to managing student mobility and recognition**

The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences has a substantially centralised system for managing student mobility. It is important for the departments to have a history of knowing and working with US partner institutions before those universities can be considered for partner agreements (this applies for any partner institutions in fact). Once a partnership is developed, the Centre of International Relations will take over the management of those partnership agreements and of student mobility.

BOKU has a number of scholarships that allow students to study abroad without having to pay extra tuition fees to the US partner institutions. The application system for applying for these is also handled centrally, although students do have the option of electing to pay the tuition fees themselves.

The transfer and recognition of credit also occurs centrally using a conversion table that converts US credits into BOKU ECTS credits. However, the conversion of grades happens at the department level, although it appears as though there is a general degree of conformity about how this happens across the departments.

#### **Developing credit recognition with the US**

A high level of trust has developed between BOKU and its US partner institutions, which helped to overcome obstacles arising when transferring credit between universities. BOKU changed to the ECTS (the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) system in 2003. Although the US system is usually also based on credits, it calculates these based only on contact hours. In general, a full year's workload is expressed as between 12 and 15 credits in the US, with the minimum being 12.

Once a student has decided what US university they would like to attend and which set of courses they would like to take, the Centre of International Relations will check that the student has chosen an equivalent of what is considered a 'full-workload' for two semesters. Because a full-workload in BOKU is 60 ECTS, and a full workload in the US is normally 12 credits, the Centre of International Relations will simply multiply the US credits by 2.5 to see what the workload equivalent is for a BOKU student. This is a different approach from simply counting the number of courses. For example, each of the courses in the US is often heavier in terms of workload than a single course at BOKU. This often means that one US module is the equivalent to two or more BOKU modules, and students need to take less of them.

When the student returns home they bring with them a 'transcript' describing the grades they achieved in the US and this is given to their course coordinator, who is responsible for translating the grades back into the BOKU system. US grades are expressed as letter grades from A to E, whereas BOKU grades are expressed as a number from 1 to 5. In the Department of Economics and Social Sciences, these are translated using a conversion

table, where grades A and B are translated into 1, grade C into 2, all the way to F, which is a fail and translates into a 5. Although responsibility for translating the grades occurs at the department level, it appears as though there is a high degree of conformity across the departments.

In 2004/05, BOKU started to change from the older Viennese degree system to the Bologna system (at the same time the university adopted the ECTS). Under the old systems the diploma were more specialised. The change to a more flexible degree structure gave the university 'higher flexibility' because it enabled students to move into the marketplace or choose to continue studying at universities across Europe. The Centre for International Relations was initially concerned about how these changes would affect their US partners, but the high level of trust and dedication that had developed between them meant that they were able to adapt to the changes.

The majority of students who study abroad at BOKU now do this in their Masters degree either on taught courses or on research projects, with about 20-30 students studying in the US each year on taught courses and about 6-10 on research programmes. Virtually all the students who study abroad do so for one semester in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year. There is the possibility of staying on for a 2<sup>nd</sup> semester once abroad, but this involves filling out a new learning agreement. The timing and duration of a semester in the US is not a problem for students visiting from BOKU, because they come back well before their colleagues back in Vienna have started taking exams.

#### Implementing credit recognition

All of the relationships that BOKU have with US universities come from a long history of working and developing trust with each other. BOKU does not sign contracts to exchange students unless this is already in place. This system ensures that the two universities will be completely compatible in terms of the teaching and research areas they specialise in and the quality of their practise. An example of how collaboration can start is from the Department of Economics and Social Sciences, who were approached by a US university that wanted to collaborate over a research project on global sustainability and wanted to have a team that included European partners. This developed into teaching together through video conferencing. BOKU also engages in projects funded through the Atlantis scheme. Schemes and projects like these help BOKU professors become more mobile and teacher mobility is crucial to cementing their relationships with US universities. Even where there are no research projects that directly require BOKU lecturers to travel, they will still spend short periods, such as a few weeks in their partner institutions to teach and remain in touch.

An area the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences wants to develop, and which is mentioned in their internationalisation strategy, is to have more Joint-Study-Programmes. Although BOKU does not have any with the US at the moment they have 10 others in place with countries across the world, such as in New Zealand, Singapore and across Europe. BOKU is trying to develop a Joint-Study-Programme with the University of Minnesota in Natural Resource Management and Ecological Engineering. The Centre of International Relations sees Joint-Study-Programmes as an advantage to the University because they enable it to collaborate on its areas of strength, and trade in its areas of weakness, ultimately meaning it can offer more rounded education opportunities to students and increase the range of options it has to offer.

In 1991, a Centre for International Relations was created in order to assist with the management of the student exchange bilateral agreements and to extend them into full contracts open to all students at BOKU. The model for sending students aboard is loosely based on the European system, such as in the ERASMUS scheme. For example, the university makes good use of Learning Agreements, which are used to clarify what courses the student intends to take and are sent to the partner institution. However, some aspects are less European, such as the practise of signing detailed contracts instead of Memorandums of Understanding.

### Tools to support credit recognition

The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences uses specific instruments to support credit recognition with US HEIs:

- **Memorandum of Understanding:** BOKU has very specific and detailed contracts which specify how student exchanges will take place with their US partner institutions. These can be referred to as Memorandums of Understanding, but they are more precisely seen as contracts because Memorandums of Understanding can tend to be more general agreements based on trust. These contracts allow students from BOKU to study any of the courses offered at the US partner institution and in return their partner institutions can send their students on any courses BOKU offer. The contracts also contain many other crucial details such as what rights to housing the students have, what fees they pay, the length of their stay and how many students will be exchanged. The contracts have a 'balancing agreement', which means that over three years the number of students who go on exchanges from Vienna to the US will be equal to the number who go from the US to Vienna. The Centre for International Relations finds that in general this seems to work well. The contracts are renewed every three years.
- **Learning Agreement:** BOKU uses Learning Agreements. These are seen as very useful by the Centre of International Relations, as a device for detailing what courses and modules the students intend to take and thus adding clarity and security to the student exchange. In some cases the student may need to change what courses they want to study. This can be necessary because some courses fill up, or it may simply not be what they were expecting. Fortunately the US system allows a week window for students to rearrange their course options and the student then writes home to explain the changes in an email. The email and the Learning Agreement are then kept as confirmation of what the student agreed to take and compared to the transcript on the students arrival home.
- **Course equivalences:** There are no course equivalence lists. BOKU has detailed contracts which allow its students to choose to do any of the courses available at its partner institutions. Initially, there was resistance from some departments because the lecturers felt that it was important for their students to take all of the mandatory subjects at home. This issue was overcome by encouraging the students to save their elective modules for when they travel abroad, so that there was no need to compare the course content on the mandatory subjects with those offered in the US. This also has the benefit of allowing the students to fully experience the different subjects offered at the US universities without constraint. If a student is really set on taking a mandatory subject abroad, then it is possible, but only on a case-by-case basis, where the course coordinator makes the final decision based on the course content in the partner institution.
- **Lists of courses to choose from:** As described above, there are no course equivalence lists, instead, students are encouraged to save their electives for when they go abroad so that they do not need to match mandatory courses taught at home with those taught in the US. The only constraint on what course the student can take is that it must be relevant to their degree. This is checked when the student submits their request form for funding to travel to the US, and has to write down what courses they intend to take and why. The course coordinator is then responsible for checking the relevancy of the requested courses, but looking at the title and course description in the US course catalogue.
- **Conversion tables for credit values and grades:** As mentioned above, BOKU has a substantially centralised system for managing student mobility. The Centre for International Relations handles the contracts with the US partner institutions and the application process the students go through. Part of this process is checking that the students have taken a sufficient workload using a credit conversion table. This table multiplies the number of US credits the student takes abroad by 2.5. This means if the student takes a minimum of 12 credits a year in the US (or 6 per semester), then he or

she will have exceeded the equivalent full-time workload of 60 ECTS credits per year (or 30 for half a year.) Once the student returns to Vienna, the departments take charge of calculating the student's grades using a conversion table. It appears as though the departments all translate US grades in the same way, which is to convert A or B to 1, C to 2, D to 3, E to 4 and fail to 5.

### Protocol for credit recognition

Initial impetus to study abroad has to come from the student. It is up to them to research what courses they want to study at the partner institutions and to ensure that the courses are relevant and of the correct level. Relevancy and level is then later checked by the course coordinator who looks at the title and the course description to ensure relevancy and who looks at the course code to ensure the level is correct. Students may take courses which are suitable for both undergraduates and postgraduates, from course code 400 and above, but they are strongly advised to select some masters-only courses, which have a course code 600. The student fills out a Learning Agreement with their course choices.

The student needs to approach two tutors and ask them to write a reference. The reference asks the tutors to explain whether they believe the student will be able to cope in a study abroad period, in terms of their academic record and ability. It also asks them to explain in what capacity they have experience of the student.

The student also needs to write a Letter of Motivation. This letter explains why they believe they should be eligible for funding to study in the US. The letter should explain why they believe they will be able to cope with the academic workload based on their academic record, why they have chosen the modules that they have and why this is additional to what they could study in Vienna and why they are interested in living in the US.

The students hand these documents to the Centre for International Relations, which checks that the student is taking a full workload. The documents are then assembled in front of a committee that selects the most capable students based on the evidence provided to them. Their decision is based on academic record, as well as a demonstration of enthusiasm and the benefits the students would gain from experiencing the US education system. The decision is finally signed by the Dean.

Once the student is abroad they have a week to change their Learning Agreement. This can be necessary because some courses in the US partner institution may be full or because the courses were not what the student expected. This time-period where the Learning Agreement can be changed works particularly well in the US, because US universities only allow students to change their modules in the first week. In Europe, there is no formal period for changing modules – it can be done at any time, and this makes the process less tractable for the home institution like BOKU.

Once the student returns, the credit and grades need to be transferred from the US system to the European system. This is done using a conversion table and the transcript of the students' grades as described above by the departments. There are no issues in terms of the duration of the semester taken in the US, as this will have ended before BOKU's students have even started taking their exams.

The student is asked to fill out a detailed survey explaining how they found the experience of travelling to and study in the US. This asks questions that may be helpful to future students, like tips and suggestions in local customs and signs of respect, and how helpful the host University was on a range of factors. It also asks the student whether they would return and what they liked best about it. The results of the survey are published on the internet to assist future students.

### Perceptions of staff

The staff in charge of the credit recognition process seemed to be satisfied with the existing practice. In particular, the course coordinators did not report any problems with how US grades were translated into European grades. This could be because the Austrian students benefit from a shorter grading scale than the US students, so that a B in the US is a 1 in

Vienna, and they thus suffer few complaints. They also seemed to be happy with the student mobility exchange process and the subsequent credit recognition process.

The course coordinators were also satisfied with the numbers and choice of students sent abroad, and found that the opportunity of going abroad strengthened their course design rather than complicate it. For example, the opportunity to do research abroad was good for the Department of Economics and Social Sciences because it meant that students could do primary field research as using interview and questionnaire techniques in a new country. An example of where this has been put to good effect was a student who went to the University of Georgia in Athens to do research on consumer attitudes to genetically modified food, and experimented with different types of labelling to see how respondents reacted. Her results were then compared to another student's work on the same subject which had been conducted in Spain and the same experiment which had been conducted in Austria. This example shows how the opportunity to travel abroad allows the students to expand their fieldwork techniques and benefit from having the grades they have earned recognised once they come home.

### Perceptions of students

Student perceptions seemed to be positive overall. The student interviewed who was studying a Master of Science in Biotechnology was satisfied with all the procedures involved in applying to study abroad and transferring credits and grades once she was back. She found the process for applying for funding was 'fair' and not too arduous overall. She was happy with the amount of information that was available explaining how to apply to study abroad and was happy with the amount of information and support available once she arrived there. Despite being the first student to travel to the University of Minnesota, she made good use of the forms students have to fill out to record their previous experiences, which are routinely published on the Internet. This gave her a much clearer idea of what to expect from the American education system.

Upon her return from the US, the interviewee was satisfied with the way that her grades had been translated and was aware of how the conversion table worked. While she was in the USA she had to change one of the courses she had put on her Learning Agreement because it was already full. However, this caused her no problems as she fully understood how many credits she needed to replace this course with. She was generally satisfied with the workload that she had chosen in the US, which she understood to mean that the number of credits she was expected to choose, and the translation of those credits, worked fine.

### Success factors of this approach

There are a number of critical approaches taken by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, which have significantly contributed to successful student mobility and cooperation with its US partner institutions:

- Having a dedicated Centre of International Relations. This department was set up in 1991 because there was already a great deal of international exchange and cooperation. The success of the department was dependent on building a good relationship with the academic staff and the University's partner institutions. These success factors have enabled the Centre of International Relations to create a centralised system for sending students abroad and managing US cooperation agreements, which has made student mobility much more transparent and tractable for all the stakeholders involved.
- The networks of trust between the US partner institutions and BOKU are extremely valuable. These relationships mean that the Universities stay in communication and keep creating new forms of cooperation. These relationships are cemented through regular visits to the US, sharing of teaching and working on research projects together. These relationships are further enabled by making full use of the schemes and funding available.
- Having a reliable person to facilitate the stay of the student at the host institution. BOKU provides this service for any students who arrive from the US so that they have someone to speak to if they encounter any difficulties and need someone who understand the

Viennese education system and who is an English speaker. Likewise, part of the trust developed between BOKU and its partner institutions is that it knows that this same function will be performed on behalf of its students when they travel abroad.

- Having learning agreements. These facilitate the discussion and later definition of what the student will study in advance of them going abroad. This is useful because it allows the university to make a decision about whether the student should be eligible to go abroad and also forms a sort of binding agreement between the university and the student. Having a clear agreement about what the student is going to study while abroad prevents confusion and gives security to both parties.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

There are many aspects of the way that the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences organises its student mobility that could be used as an example of best practise. These include:

- The conversion tables that BOKU uses to convert credit and grades both work smoothly and have earned the respect of staff and students alike. They would make a good example of best practise and would be applicable for most US university system and most European universities using ECTS and European grading systems.
- In fields where it is unlikely that the mandatory subjects will be taught elsewhere, for example in the field of life sciences at masters level, then the possibility of encouraging students to save their options so that they can take these abroad offers a simple way to circumvent having to substantially redesign a course in order to accommodate a study abroad period.
- Students are asked to fill out a detailed form once they return to BOKU explaining how they found the US partner institution and giving advice to future students who may wish to travel there. This is a useful tool for helping student understand what to expect on their study abroad exchange.
- Having grants that pay for students to study abroad. This is an enormous benefit to students who would not otherwise be able to cover the cost of tuition fees themselves. This is particularly true of the US where tuition fees are higher than almost anywhere else. BOKU has also made full use of the available grants and schemes on offer from the EC and the government of the USA, including the Atlantis scheme among others.

## 2 The Economics School of Louvain (Belgium): careful attention given to recognition of credits

### Key Facts

The Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) is a university with a strong internationalisation strategy and it is one of the pioneers in the internationalisation of Belgium universities. Over the years, UCL has decentralised its external relations, giving to departments total autonomy in terms of international cooperation. Bilateral agreements are thus signed by Faculty members.

In this context, the various departments have developed strong ties with international partners. In total, there are 16 bilateral agreements with US universities that are operational. The majority of those are to be found at the Louvain School of Management and the only double degree with an US partner is to be found within the Economics School of Louvain. Each bilateral agreement involves 2 or 3 UCL students in exchange per semester. The Programme TREE (Transatlantic Exchange in Economics) is running since 2005 and involves 5 to 6 UCL students per year.

### Forms of cooperation with US universities

Department bilateral agreements (normal mobility)	Double degree
<p>Within the Law School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ University of the Pacific, Stockton</li> </ul> <p>Within the School of Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Duquesne University, Pittsburgh</li> <li>▪ University of South Carolina, Columbia</li> <li>▪ University of Texas at Austin</li> <li>▪ University of Cincinnati</li> <li>▪ Appalachian State University, Boone</li> <li>▪ University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, Minneapolis</li> <li>▪ University of North Florida, Jacksonville</li> <li>▪ Cornell University, Johnson Graduate School of Management, Ithaca</li> <li>▪ Clemson University, Clemson</li> </ul> <p>Within the Economics School of Louvain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ University of California, Santa Cruz</li> <li>▪ Clemson University, Clemson</li> </ul> <p>Within the Philosophy department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Texas State University (US SANMARC01) Ville/Pays: San Marcos</li> </ul> <p>Within the Polytechnic School :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oklahoma State University, Stillwater</li> </ul> <p>Within the Architecture School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Oklahoma State University, Stillwater</li> </ul>	<p><b>Within the Economics School of Louvain:</b></p> <p><b>The Atlantis Programme TREE (Transatlantic Exchange in Economics) 2006-2011 between the:</b>  <b>Université catholique de Louvain, Universiteit Maastricht (Netherlands) and Clemson University (USA)</b></p>



The particularity of the Economics School of Louvain is that it has developed normal mobility to the US as well as the unique double degree programme with the US of UCL; the Atlantis Programme TREE 2006-2011.

The Programme TREE is running since 2005 and enrolls 5 to 6 UCL students per year. A cohort of exchange students from both universities spends 6 months at Maastricht University for an Erasmus exchange, followed by one year at UCL, followed by one year at Clemson University.

At the end of the programme students are awarded the Bachelor diploma in Economics of UCL and the Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Clemson.

Credit recognition in the context of a double degree is of significant importance since both universities must insure that students met the diploma requirements from both sides and not just only from one side as it is the case in normal mobility exchanges.

Credit recognition is totally decentralised at UCL, and thus dealt with by each department individually. At the Economics School of Louvain, credit recognition is dealt with mostly by the international coordinator with the support of the academic coordinator of the School (see contact details below).

The framework for credit recognition is based on strong coordination between both universities and the main tool in the validation of courses taken abroad is the common list of courses that established the equivalences between both universities' courses. Conversion tables for credits and grades are also being used.

The process of recognising credits has been working efficiently at the Economics School of Louvain, due to the good cooperation between universities' coordinators and students.

This fiche will particularly focus on credit recognition in the context of the double degree between the Economics School of Louvain and Clemson University. Credit recognition in the context of normal mobility with the US will also be taken into account, however, to a smaller extent since the main issues of credit recognition were encountered in context of the double degree programme.

#### Contact information and list of people interviewed

<http://www.uclouvain.be/73942.html>

<http://www.uclouvain.be/international.html>

#### Context for cooperation with the US

##### ▪ Internationalisation strategy<sup>137</sup>

As previously mentioned, the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) is a university with a strong internationalisation strategy and it is one of the pioneers of the internationalisation of Belgium universities. The Administrative Service for External Relation was born in 1967; it was the first Belgian university to create such a service. In the beginning of the eighties the Service was transformed into the Service for International Relations.

The Challenge of UCL is to permanently transfer the international relations competences to the various departments. Over the years, it has decentralised its external relations, giving departments greater autonomy in terms of international cooperation. Bilateral agreements are therefore signed by Faculty members.

The internationalisation strategy of UCL consists in:

- The cooperation with developing countries. The aim is to promote the academic and research cooperation with developing countries and to ensure it is not a marginal

<sup>137</sup>Université catholique de Louvain: <http://www.uclouvain.be/international.html>

aspect of the cooperation but rather a strong and valuable collaboration at the same level than with Western universities.

- The development of student mobility. In order to enhance its international reputation, UCL has been developing various strategic partnerships in terms of student mobility. It also ensures attendance at various international conferences such as the NAFSAA. Regarding **student mobility with North America**, UCL has strongly developed its cooperation with North America. It has 16 operational bilateral agreements with US partners and 54 bilateral agreements with Canadian partner institutions. Canadian universities have been particularly receptive in terms of bilateral cooperation since 2000 mainly because their public system is strongly promoting international exchanges. In contrast, US Universities have a different internationalisation policy from Canada or Europe. Indeed, the culture of 'going abroad' is not as promoted as in Canada or Europe and many American universities prefer to develop university branches abroad rather than establish exchange agreements with European universities.
- Developing the attractiveness of the university to ensure UCL is visible internationally. The main goal is to ensure foreign students who want to study at UCL have the necessary information at their disposal.

▪ Importance of credit recognition

There is no direct mention of credit recognition in the international strategy of the University<sup>138</sup>. Nevertheless, student mobility is described as one of the key elements of the internationalisation strategy of UCL. In the context of the decentralisation of UCL's external relations, credit recognition is considered to be part of the higher education management rather than part of the overall strategy, leaving departments with the responsibility for credit recognition. This way, departments are viewed as the competent bodies to ensure credit recognition and define the conditions for recognition.

In this regard, the Economics School of Louvain insists on the importance of credit recognition in their cooperation with foreign higher education institutions. The School has stipulated credit recognition as the basis for validating courses followed abroad and for awarding double degrees. It is thus part of the Economics School's internationalisation strategy to ensure credit recognition and to give particular attention to credit recognition issues.

A key element of the internationalisation strategy of the Economics School was to create a specific job role for an international coordinator with higher education and management experience to deal with credit recognition issues.

The Economics School wanted to guarantee that credit recognition issues are dealt with at the highest level, ensuring successful cooperation with international partners and providing students with detailed academic advice and supervision.

In addition, credits are a key element for the financial support allocated to students: indeed, students need to ensure that they obtain and validate their credits abroad in order to receive a scholarship.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

The Economics School of Louvain has placed great importance on credit recognition in the development of the double degree programme with Clemson University. It has elaborated a specific process in collaboration with Clemson University for ensuring the recognition of credits. Overall, it was reported that credit recognition is working well with the US due to close cooperation and coordination between both universities and as a result of the work of the respective international coordinators.

<sup>138</sup> Université catholique de Louvain: <http://www.uclouvain.be/international.html>

In order to be awarded with the double degree in Economics from UCL and Clemson University, the student must satisfy the educational requirements from both universities. This process implies a major difficulty which is to define possible equivalent courses as well as a way of recognising credits from one university to the other.

In order to define a process for credit recognition in the context of the double degree, various difficulties were addressed. The following were reported as significant issues:

- **Difference in the nature of programmes – generalist vs. specialist**

Clemson University offers an education which is more general, giving the possibility to the student to choose a variety of courses whereas the education system at UCL is stricter and requires students to follow a long list of compulsory courses for each year of study. This situation is not considered problematic for Belgian students who go to the US; since all students have the same educational background. With only small differences in elective courses, it is easier to define which courses they still need to undertake at Clemson in order to fulfil both degrees requirements.

This difference in education system is mainly a problem for US students who arrive at UCL with very different backgrounds. US students are unsure about which courses they need to undertake at UCL in order to satisfy the education requirements of both universities.

The difference in the nature of programmes therefore generates difficulties to define equivalence between courses from Clemson and UCL at their arrival. In addition, as the Belgian system is less flexible, students are not able to choose the courses they would like to take at UCL as freely as in the US, they are required to take all compulsory courses of UCL's Bachelor degree in Economics for which no equivalence could be found.

To overcome this problem, the Belgian coordinator meets with each US student, looking at their diverse academic backgrounds, establishing a wider equivalence and recognition of credits between courses from Clemson and UCL's, and determining which courses were required individually.

- **Difference in grading systems**

The difference in grading systems generated significant problems for credit recognition. Clemson University, in its tradition, only transfers credit for courses for which the student obtained, using the US grading scheme, A, B, or C, excluding the transfer of credits for courses below C. Clemson was using this requisite in the situation where US students wanted to change universities and asked for a transfer to Clemson. This requisite was also applied at the beginning of the exchanges for recognition of credits from UCL students arriving at Clemson. However, the US grading systems of A to F does not correspond to the ECTS scale of A to F, where a grade of D or E is still considered to be a pass grade. This situation was therefore causing problems in terms of the basis for credit recognition since both scales overlapped.

Consequently, the Economics School of Louvain has established a specific grade conversion table with Clemson University to avoid this problem (see table below under the section 'tools to support credit recognition'). Now, Clemson University has agreed to transfer credits for courses where the student obtained the ECTS grade of D or E.

The difference in grading systems also created other problems for transferring grades.

At UCL, when a Belgian student comes back from America, US grades need to be transferred according to the Belgian law. At the Economics School of Louvain, another conversion table above is used (see Table 1.4 under the section 'tools to support credit recognition').

Yet, some issues with the transfer of grades remain. Belgian students who go to the US and come back to UCL face some difficulties in transferring their grades because a grade A in the US corresponds to a Belgian grade between 17/20 and 19/20. Here it

should be noted that a grade of 20/20 is usually never awarded as there seems to be a view that perfection does not exist.

Therefore, when a student comes back with a US 'A' grade it is difficult for the international coordinator to assign to it a specific grade in the Belgian system (it is somewhere between 17-19). However, for an individual student the difference between 17 and 19 can significantly matter for his/her future studies and future career. When this situation is encountered, UCL asks the US University to provide the ranking of the student in the classroom (for example best 10% etc), and to estimate his/her overall performance. The international coordinator of the Economics School of Louvain also contacts the student's American teachers to obtain more detailed feedback. Nevertheless, this is a complicated process and is only carried out for outstanding students to avoid undermining their future academic career.

- **Differences in the education systems**

The Belgian education system allows a student to succeed its year of study as long as they have the average grade of, usually, 12 out of 20. In this case, even if the student has failed one or two courses (for which the grades are inferior to 10/20) the student can still succeed its year of study. In contrast, in the US, a student is not allowed to fail a course. If the student fails a course, its credit is simply not accounted for.

In this context, there have been situations where Belgian students could not see their credit recognised by Clemson University for some failed classes, even if they had a good average grade in total. It was reported that, for instance, an UCL student who had failed a maths course at UCL was not initially granted recognition by Clemson University and consequently was asked to follow another maths course in order to satisfy the degree requirements. In the end, instead of following a new maths course, the UCL student could submit for recognition another maths course, for which he was successful this time.

Usually, when this problem arises, Clemson University tries to find another similar course for which equivalence and credit recognition can be granted.

- **Differences in credits systems**

According to the international coordinator from the Economics School of Louvain, the recognition of credits was initially hindered by the differences in the way credit value is calculated in the EU and the US (one US credit corresponds to one hour of teaching while in Europe ECTS credit is based on workload). It was therefore difficult to apply a strict conversion table between the two credit systems as they do not measure the same thing. Each institution has therefore developed its own method. UCL developed a conversion table between ECTS and US credit hours while Clemson preferred to transfer credit based on course comparison.

To facilitate the process of recognition, a list of similar courses that each university had in common was established, looking at the content of each course. Equivalent courses for which recognition could immediately apply were thus defined between both institutions.

Secondly, in order to develop the curriculum of the double degree programme, it was necessary to look at the degree requirements from both sides in order to ensure the recognition of credits.

The Economics School of Louvain looked at the official Belgian credit requirements ('minima doyens') to be awarded of a Bachelor degree in Economics. These 'minima doyens' are used as the basis for the recognition of credits from the US. When a US student arrives at UCL, the international coordinator analyses his/her credits background and uses the conversion table between ECTS and US credit hours where the usual workload for a Belgian and a US student are compared and taken into account. The table stipulates that 15 US credits corresponded to 30 ECTS per semester at a Bachelor level (one US credit hours = two ECTS). In this way, the credits of a US student are transformed into the ECTS scale. Once the conversion is established, the international

coordinator calculated how many ECTS credits the US student still need to undertake at UCL on the basis of the 'minima doyens' requirements for a BA in Economics. If the background of the student accounted, for instance, for 15 ECTS in Accounting, and if the 'minima doyen' for Accounting is of 20 ECTS for the BA in Economics, he/her will still need to undertake courses at UCL to the value of five ECTS in Accounting related courses to complete the 20 ECTS 'minima doyens' to be awarded of the UCL degree.

Conversely, Clemson University has preferred to transfer credit on the basis of course content comparison rather than establishing a conversion table of credit systems. Credit was transferred finding possible equivalent courses. For instance, if a US student has followed a Sociology course at UCL, when he comes back to Clemson, his credits will be recognised as a usual Social Science course at Clemson, often of three US credit hours, independently of its ECTS value.

### Implementing credit recognition

In 2005, Clemson University contacted the Economics School of UCL to invite them to develop a double degree in Economics. The Economics School of UCL did not know Clemson University although they had already established regular student exchanges with the Louvain School of Management. The double degree was launched shortly after. Documents needed to be ready within one month in order to be able to apply for the Atlantis Programme before the deadline. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the partner institutions, though this did not detail credit recognition procedures.

Credit recognition with the US was as a result of subsequent work and bilateral agreements. The process evolved gradually, and both formal and academic contacts were made throughout the arrangement of the cooperation. It remains an on-going process. After five years in which the programme has been running, major difficulties have been solved and less amendments are now required.

As previously stated, the Economics School of Louvain was a pioneer in Belgium in terms of developing a process for credit recognition with the US. It has developed a procedure for credit recognition based on strong cooperation and dialogue with the US partner. The School is regularly invited to conferences such as the AIEA<sup>139</sup> and the NAFSA<sup>140</sup> to represent their cooperation procedures.

Good cooperation between both universities was made possible as a result of an important dialogue between academics and international coordinators from both sides and because both institutions shared a common enthusiasm to develop the double degree according to each institution specificities.

The process of credit recognition and of the elaboration of the curriculum was gradually improved each time an issue was raised. Various in-campus visits were made to Clemson University in order to discuss the different issues (as discussed in the section above).

The academic coordinator from the Economics School of UCL spent 8 weeks at Clemson as an invited professor and used this time to discuss credit and degree issues with the Register Office of Clemson. The first promotion of students from the Tree programme was already at Clemson, and various issues of courses and recognition of credits for Belgian students were raised.

The international coordinator of UCL has also participated in various visits to Clemson and has carried out considerable work to explain how the ECTS grading scale was different from the US grading scale, in order to ensure recognition of credit for Belgian students.

Students were also strongly involved in the process. Belgian students were constantly in contact with the international coordinator of UCL. They could therefore easily express their concerns about the programme and about credit recognition issues and were encouraged to do so. The international coordinator, during her in-campus visits, also met with UCL's

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<sup>139</sup> <http://www.aieaworld.org/>

<sup>140</sup> <http://www.nafsa.org/>

students to discuss course and credit recognition issues while they were following the programme at Clemson University. As reported by one of the students, they were able to negotiate credit allocation and grade allocation, especially for elective courses since compulsory courses are defined prior to departure through the list of equivalences.

For instance, they were able to ask for recognition of credit at UCL for an elective course they followed at Clemson as long as they justified in writing the reasons why they thought the course was equivalent to one at UCL. In addition, they were able to negotiate the conversion of grades. Indeed, at the beginning of the programme, the grading scale was stipulated as A (US scale) = 17/20 and B (US scale) = 14/20. Belgian students wanted the B grade to be equal to a 15/20 rather than a 14/20, arguing that the scale was unfair due to the workload they had at Clemson University and because a former student of UCL was granted B=15/20 for a summer school course previously followed at Clemson. After discussion, the B=15/20 was granted.

The development of trust was definitely one of the key elements that enabled a valuable cooperation between both institutions. The various visits and meetings facilitated good understanding between institutions that subsequently lead to the building of trust. Trust also helped to establish a new regular exchange programme where the Economics School of Louvain invited Clemson University to take part.

#### Tools to support credit recognition

Credit recognition, within the scope of exchange programmes and the double degree is made possible through the use of several tools. These include:

- **A memorandum of Understanding** specifying the conditions for the exchange was signed between partner institutions, though this did not detail credit recognition procedures.
- **A bilateral agreement** was signed between partner universities mentioning that: ‘Course transfer will be accomplished by a combination of approved course equivalencies and ECTS credit evaluation. For instance, the BA Econ curriculum defines a collection of required courses, many of which serve as prerequisites for later coursework. In this case, it is necessary to identify a course at a partner school as equivalent in content (both topics and depth) in order to approve it for a particular slot in the curriculum. In addition, the BA Econ programme allows the student to select from a variety of upper division economics courses in order to satisfy a ‘Major Requirement.’ An advanced economics course offered at UCL or UM may be used to satisfy this requirement, even if the equivalent course is not offered at CU. The consortium would use the ECTS structure to determine whether or not it is acceptable for transfer to satisfy these requirements. The Timetable calls for selected CU faculty to be trained in the ECTS system during the first year.’
- **A list of course equivalences** (see example table below): in order to develop the curriculum of the double degree, partner universities have defined which economics courses they had in common in order to easily grant equivalences and credit recognition. The idea was to list similar compulsory courses that both universities had in common, looking at the content of each course and at the degree requirements of both institutions, rather than creating a new curriculum.

#### Example of courses equivalencies

UCL’s course	Transfer course description	Clemson’s equivalent
ECGE 1312	PUBLIC ECONOMICS	ECON 420
ECGE 1313	EUROPEAN ECONOMICS	ECON 4
ECGE 1314	FINANCIAL STUDIES	FIN 410
ECGE 1316	ECONOMETRICS	ECON 405

- **List of courses to choose from:** In the case of regular exchange between Clemson and the Economics School in the field of international and monetary economy, a list of courses to choose from has been established by the academic coordinators of both institutions, in compliance with the requirements of the degree. A student in exchange is required to choose courses from this list. In case the student wants to deviate from this list, he/she needs the approval of the academic coordinator responsible for this mobility programme.
- **Learning Agreement:** A learning agreement must be signed prior to departure for each type of exchange by the international coordinator. Thanks to the list of course equivalences and list of courses to choose from, students know prior to departure which compulsory economics courses they will need to take in order to satisfy the degree requirements. For elective courses, students can select from the variety of courses provided by the host university. In any case, there is some flexibility for the student to change courses once at the host institution. Nevertheless, if the change concerns a compulsory course, the student must ask for permission and justify its reasons in writing. In the US context, the use of the learning agreement is supposed to be compulsory however students have mentioned some discrepancies between the theory and the practice where sometimes the learning agreement is only signed at the end of the programme.
- **Conversion tables for credit values and grades:**  
In the Belgian context, based on the usual workload for both an American and a Belgian student, it was established that 15 US credits corresponded to 30 ECTS per semester at a Bachelor level (1 US credit hours = 2 ECTS). This table was therefore crucial in defining how many courses students needed to follow whilst in exchange in order to meet the Belgian degree requirements as well as to transfer credits from the US, either for a Belgian students that comes back or from an American student that arrives at UCL.

In the US context, as previously mentioned, Clemson University has preferred to transfer credit on the basis of course content comparison rather than establishing a conversion table of credit systems. Credit was transferred finding possible equivalent courses. For instance, if a US student has followed a Sociology course at UCL, when he/she comes back to Clemson, their credits will be accounted for the value of a usual Social Science course at Clemson, often of 3 US credit hours, independently of its ECTS value.

In addition, Clemson University transfer credits from another university only for courses for which the student obtained, using the US grading scheme, A, B, or C, excluding the transfer of credits for courses below C. However, the US grading systems of A to F does not correspond to the ECTS scale of A to F, where a grade of D or E is still considered to be a good grade. This situation was therefore causing problems in terms of the basis for credit recognition since both scales where overlapped.

Consequently, both universities have agreed on this conversion table for grades and credit transfer in order to avoid this problem in the future (see Table 1.3). Now, Clemson University has agreed to transfer credits for courses where the student obtained the ECTS grade of D or E.

Conversion table for grades when transferring credits to the US

European system ECTS grade	US system
A	A
B+C	B
D+E	C
F	D and F

As previously mentioned, another conversion table is used when transferring grades from the US:

UCL's conversion table for grades from the US

ECTS	UCL	Clemson
	20	A
A- Excellent - Top 10 %	19	
	18	
	17	
B - Very Good – Top 25%	16	B+
	15	
C - Good 30%	14	B
	13	B-
D - Satisfactory 25%	12	C+
	11	C
E - Pass Bottom 10%	10	C-
	9	D
F - Fail	8	E
FX	0 to 8	F

#### Protocol for credit recognition

The recognition of credit is being organised, with the support of the tools described above, by three levels of actors: the international coordinator of the Economics School of Louvain, the academic coordinators from the Economics department at Clemson, and the students.

- The international coordinator from the Economics School of Louvain provides the outgoing and ingoing student with the equivalence list of courses between both partners, and advises students in their course choice looking at the degree requirements of both degrees. The international coordinator assesses the courses based on degree requirements and also signs the learning agreement prior to departure.
- The academic coordinator at Clemson receives Belgian students and helps them to finalise their course choice at the host institution and ensures that they meet the US requirements to be awarded the Clemson degree in Economics.
- Students must have their learning agreement completed and approved prior to departure. They must choose their course according to the equivalence course list and are free to choose elective courses of their choice.
- The international coordinator of the Economics School at UCL and the academic coordinator at Clemson are responsible for validating the credits obtained, and for transferring the grades (in the Belgian case) in compliance with the tools and procedures described in the previous section. The international coordinator of UCL also asks for the ranking of each student in order to fairly transfer his/her grades. Usually, all credits are recognised since students base their course choice on the equivalence list as well as on the requirements of both degrees in order to be awarded of the double degree.
- Nevertheless, a non validation situation can happen for an elective course if the student has chosen something extremely different from his field of study. For instance, a Belgian student has chosen the course of 'sexology' in the US and was not granted recognition back at home. However, the student knew prior to departure that this situation will



happen and knew he will have to undertake an additional course the following year at UCL.

### Perceptions of staff

The staff in charge of recognition perceives the recognition of credit from the US as working very well. Since the programme was launched 5 years ago, considerable improvements for the recognition of credits from the US have been carried out.

As the coordinators of the Economics School of Louvain have reported, recognition of credits from the US was made possible thanks to the considerable efforts from both sides to make the Tree programme work. The staff reported that the in-campus visits and the various meetings between both coordinators were essential in order to solve the problems of credit recognition and to agree on the various tools for establishing recognition.

The constant feedback received from students, thanks to the liaising work of the international coordination from UCL is also a precious tool in order to improve the procedures of credit recognition and the programme.

The Economics school of Louvain is regularly invited to international conferences in order to present their practices in terms of cooperation with the US.

### Perceptions of students

Overall students seem to be **satisfied** with the system for the recognition of their credits. They were provided with all the **necessary information** prior departure about how universities will process in terms of credit recognition.

Students from both sides were particularly grateful for the **help of the international coordinator** of the Economics School of Louvain in advising them of which courses they needed to take in order to fulfil the requirements of both degrees. They knew they could rely on the coordinator for advice and for questions concerning the recognition of credits. They also appreciated that their feedback was taken into account in order to improve the programme.

Overall, students expressed the feeling that credit recognition is a difficult process and understood that it could never be 100% accurate since both education systems are very different.

Nevertheless, an issue was raised regarding transfer of grades from the US for general education courses and for honour courses. Indeed, Belgian student in exchange at Clemson University have seen their grades transferred in the same way for a general education class and for an honour class which is usually a much more difficult class. They expected a better grade for the honour class since the effort made was not the same than for the general education class.

In addition, there was a concern raised regarding the workload of the Belgian student at the host university. They found that the workload was particularly heavy compared to the average workload of an American student. This situation was due to the fact that in order to fulfil the American degree requirements at the same time as the Belgian requirements; students needed to undertake 'general education' courses in addition of their economics classes. They knew prior to departure that they had to enrol in general education course however they found the amount of work higher than expected.

Conversely, American students also found it difficult to adapt to the Belgian education system and were glad that their grade were not transferred to their US Grade Point Average (GPA), it would not have been fair for them to have their grade transfer since they experienced more difficulties in achieving good grades in the Belgian system.

On the other hand, they expressed the concern that their double degree would not be valued on the job market because it might be misunderstood as the grades obtained in Belgium will appear in the transcripts, although they do not count for their GPA.

### Success factors of this approach

The success of this approach was due to various factors.

The first major factor of success was the **strong and valuable collaboration** between both universities. Since the beginning of the programme, both institutions were willing to find the best way to ensure fair recognition of credits for the students. This led to **good communication and cooperation** between the different actors.

Also, the various **in-campus visits** that international coordinators from UCL carried out were crucial to establishing dialogue and solving recognition problems, and thus enhance the cooperation and the development of trust between both institutions.

Another key element of success was the fact that, as part of the internationalisation strategy of the Economics School of UCL, the **specific graduate-level job** of ‘international coordinator’ was created and assigned to a management expert. This was to ensure there was someone in place with management skills leading with student mobility issues on a full-time basis.

In addition, the **strong involvement of the students** in the process has proven to be a key element. Indeed, there is permanent contact between Belgian students abroad and their international coordinator at UCL. During in-campus visits, a meeting with students is also planned. This good communication between students and the international coordinator is valuable as it facilitates an immediate reaction to issues associated with credit recognition.

Finally, the **flexibility** allowed for credit recognition is a key success factor. Indeed, in order to make the programme work, there was the need to be open to partner’s concerns and to find a procedure that succeeds in satisfying both partners.

### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

In conclusion, the case of the Economics School of Louvain can be seen as good practice for the **strong collaboration** established between partner universities and for **the attention given to the recognition of credits**. Indeed, this good collaboration and dialogue between partner universities ensured that concerns from both sides were taken into account when developing the curriculum for the double degree and the procedures for credit recognition. It therefore enabled successive agreements and amendments on procedures for credit recognition.

In addition, a further key factor of success is the fact that the international coordinator of the Economics School of Louvain is **a full-time position** and that the person in charge is a **specialist in management issues**. Particular attention is therefore given to course equivalences and credit concerns.

### 3 Masaryk University Brno (Czech Republic): towards rectors' directive on student mobility

#### Key Facts

Masaryk University has had an internationalisation strategy in place since the year 2003. It is a comprehensive strategy that focuses on different forms of internationalisation: from short term mobility (such as summer schools), through longer term student mobility, staff mobility (concerning both teaching and administrative staff) to joint research.

Most student mobility (both outgoing and incoming) takes place within the EU but outside the EU, the US is an important target country. Masaryk University has 11 agreements with US universities of which 6 cover student mobility (some more department level agreements also exist). A few of these agreements date back to the late nineties but most were signed in the last decade. In 2010 there were 20 (24 in 2009) students who went to the US and 41 (53 in 2009) incoming students from the US<sup>141</sup> (note: this does not cover doctoral students). US students are one of the main foreign students groups coming to Masaryk University for mobility exchanges.

Masaryk University (MU) is the only Czech university taking part in the ISEP programme, which puts in contact a network of HEIs in the world with US HEIs to facilitate student exchanges. Most US students who come to MU, come through this programme though there are also other bilateral agreements and exchanges with US institutions. The university is also regularly present at the NAFSA conference and was the first Czech institution to take part in this event.

Masaryk University holds the ECTS label. Degrees of the university are based on the principle of credit accumulation and this can be arranged in a relatively flexible manner (for example students have good flexibility regarding how many credits they receive in each academic term). Credit transfer and recognition is an important aspect of student exchanges. The university is currently putting in place a rectors' directive according to which all (successful) mobility longer than two weeks should lead to achievement of credit.

While student mobility is administered centrally by the Office for International Studies (in terms of promotion, selection, administration of financial support etc.), issues related to credit recognition are handled by the international coordinators in each department.

Contact: Masaryk University, Office for International studies: <http://czs.muni.cz/en/in/home>

#### Context for cooperation with the US

Masaryk University has a strong willingness to develop its international presence and in particular to give its students the opportunity to spend a period of studies abroad and to welcome foreign students. In 2010, 1604 students spent part of their studies abroad, which represents nearly 4% of bachelor and master's degree students enrolled in the same year. France, Germany and Spain are the most frequent destination countries of MU students and Poland and Spain are the most common home countries of incoming students. Among the countries that do not take part in the EU Lifelong Learning programme, the US is the most important cooperation country in terms of numbers of student exchanges.

The cooperation with the US does not have a specific 'thematic' focus. Students from all departments can (and do so) spend a period of study in the US, even though such mobility is more frequent among students of social sciences, arts or economy and business studies than among for example medical students (but this applies to student mobility at the MU in general). The Faculty of Law has a specific department agreement with John Marshall Law School in the US.

<sup>141</sup> Masarykova Univerzita (2011) *Vyrocni zprava o cinnosti 2010* (annual report for 2010) and Masarykova Univerzita (2010) *Vyrocni zprava o cinnosti 2009* (annual report for 2009): [http://www.muni.cz/general/public\\_reports](http://www.muni.cz/general/public_reports)

As said above, the university participates in the ISEP programme. This programme is based on the principle that the university can send out as many students as they receive, but the students can go to other universities than those from which the incoming students are. Through this channel the outgoing students have a large choice of universities they can go to, which also creates some potential difficulties for credit recognition (see below) as the host and the home institution usually do not have well established relationships. However, within the ISEP programme there is a sub-programme (ISEP-Focus Exchange) that enables two universities to develop more sustainable exchanges and Masaryk University is engaged in these types of partnerships as well.

For outgoing mobility, the Office for International Studies centralises the selection and recruitment process. The office announces the opportunities on its website and through newsletters, organises the selection procedure (which follows the same rules for all mobility periods) and gives students the necessary support before departure and on return. Students from all departments can apply. To apply students have to submit:

- The required language certificate (or undertake a test);
- A motivation letter;
- Recommendation from a member of teaching staff; and
- Their transcript.

Emphasis is on choosing students who have solid academic background so they are likely to successfully pass their year abroad as well as those who connect the study period abroad in a meaningful manner with their studies and future plans. It sometimes happens that if the applications received are not of good quality, the office does select less students than there are places.

Students decide for which university they apply and which courses they would like to choose. They can opt for up to three universities.

In general mobility in the MU takes place either in the last year of bachelor studies or first year of master studies. Students going to the US are often in their first year of master's studies. Students go abroad for a minimum of one semester, but it is recommended that they spend two semesters abroad and those who go to the US in general do so.

The vast majority of incoming US students at MU are at undergraduate level. Incoming students can choose from a range of courses taught in English (but some courses are available in German and French as well). US students systematically take courses which are part of their optional courses and most often they choose courses at the Faculty of Social Studies or Faculty of Economics and Administration. All students coming through the ISEP programme have to take a minimum of four courses. The home US universities usually do not look at the credit points the course has at MU but they require a minimum number of courses. Foreign students can enrol in as many courses in MU as they wish. Some universities only recognise certain courses in which case US students have the information in advance that they have to choose from a predefined range of courses. Developing credit recognition with the US

Masaryk University has a liberal approach to credit accumulation in the way study programmes are structured. Though the typical programme is based on the assumption that students would gain 30ECTS credits per semester, they can choose to do more or less (but a minimum of 15ECTS). It is not unusual that students would get more than the 180ECTS credits which correspond to the bachelor degree. With the exception of those courses that have clear prerequisites, students also have quite a great deal of freedom to choose which courses they take in the first, second and third year of Bachelor studies. In this manner they can, if they wish doing so, get all their compulsory courses in the first and second year and, when going abroad in the third year, take the optional courses only.

There are three types of courses at Masaryk University:

- Courses compulsory for a given programme (A)

- Elective courses (B) selected within the same faculty
- Free choice optional courses (C) can be taken from the offer of the whole university

Each programme has a different structure in terms of the combination between A,B and C credit courses. The flexibility of the programme differs from faculty to faculty. For example it was mentioned that in political science, master's degrees were based on a very liberal model with only 10% of credit being compulsory courses (it is more at bachelor level, but not more than 50%).

Most mobile students, and in particular those who go to the US, take only optional courses abroad. However, it is possible to take core courses, also in the US, and it does happen. In such cases the department coordinator has to approve in advance that the credit for the foreign course will be recognised as a core course on a student's return (see below). For example the student interviewed has taken a course on 'international economic policy' in the US and this course was recognised as a core course (there is an equivalent core course in the MU programme). In such case the student is given the same number of credit points as the number allocated to the core course in MU. In fact, on his/her transcript it does not appear that they have passed this course abroad, as the course is encoded in the university IT system as the MU course.

As most students go in their final year of Bachelor studies or first year of master's studies they are advised to take on courses that are either 300 or 400 level in the US system (level of difficulty). US courses that are level 100 or 200 are considered too easy for advanced Bachelor students. It is rare that US universities would let first year master's students on an exchange to take graduate courses immediately upon arrival. However, it is possible on case by case basis. Often if in the first semester the university sees that the student performs well, they will let him/her enrol in a graduate course – but rarely in the first semester.

#### Implementing credit recognition and protocols

The university did not put in place any particular procedures for credit recognition in the framework of exchanges with the US. The process is the same as for any other mobility:

- Before departure the student has to agree his/her study programme with the international coordinator in the home department;
- The student chooses courses and the coordinator approves them based on their relevance for the study programme. The student chooses from the course catalogue of the host university and provides the coordinator with the course title and description (as available from the catalogue). For optional courses, the coordinator does not have to do an in-depth comparison with courses in MU. Only if the student wishes to take core courses abroad, does the coordinator have to make a more detailed assessment to identify whether the courses are equivalent;
- As said above, the Office for International Studies advises the student to take on higher level undergraduate courses (level 300 or 400);
- Before departure the student and the coordinator sign a learning agreement;
- If the student wishes to modify the course selection, either because the course is not open, it is full or the course does not meet their expectations, they can do so, but the learning agreement has to be modified and the change has to be agreed;
- The transfer of credit and translation of points takes place on a student's return. There are no fix translation rules or grids at the level of the university. Each coordinator decides how many credit points the courses passed abroad are allocated. In general this is based on either a comparison with a similar course in MU or based on an estimation of workload according to the course description. Some coordinators estimate that one US credit is equivalent to two ECTS.

The agreement on the study programme, signature of learning agreement and credit transfer and recognition are handled at the level of departments by international coordinators. The

Office for International Studies verifies that the learning agreement is signed and offers support, if needed, to the international coordinators in explaining the US education system.

### Tools to support credit recognition

A particularity of Masaryk University is the newly developed rector's directive on study periods abroad. According to this directive, all study periods abroad of a minimum duration of 14 days have to give students the right to achieve credit. The objective of this directive is to valorise all forms of mobility, even short ones, and to further encourage credit transfer and recognition. Even for short term mobility (longer than 14 days) students should have a learning agreement which will specify how the credit will be recognised.

From the above it is obvious that a key element to ensure credit recognition is the learning agreement which is compulsory. It specifies the study programme abroad and it is the basis for credit recognition.

Another key aspect is the role of the international coordinator in each department. While credit recognition is decentralised and it is dealt with at department level, to ensure consistency, it is the role of a single person who deals with mobility within the department.

The quality of course descriptions from US universities (but also from elsewhere) is another important element that matters for agreements about course selection and consequently for credit recognition. It was mentioned in the interviews, that it is more difficult to get good quality course descriptions from some US universities than from EU universities. One coordinator noted that:

*From EU universities students come back with CDs which contain all the necessary material. From the US sometimes they give us a page which is very general. There are major differences between the universities.*

Information about how the assessment is done abroad also matters. Certain faculties at Masaryk University privilege written examinations (in particular for quality assurance and documentation in case of appeal). For example it was mentioned that the department of political science only uses written assessment. On the other hand in the US the assessment modes are much more different and oral examinations are sometimes more common (or continuous assessment based on participation). Staff in charge of credit recognition at MU is generally not in favour of accepting such assessment modes. Sometimes they would recognise more credit points for courses that are assessed in written form than those that are concluded through an oral assessment.

When it comes to the translation of grades, like for credit points, there are no general guidelines. The coordinators interviewed mentioned that they translated US grades (A,B,C,etc.) into the ECTS scale as it (one by one). As one of the coordinators said:

*Our objective is to support mobility and not to hinder it. I do not examine in depth how exactly the student performed. In general they get grades between A and C and I just transfer them.*

The university does not have any lists of course equivalencies with US universities. If credit for a course from abroad is recognised as a MU course it is assessed on a case by case basis. If a student gets recognition for an 'A' (compulsory) course, their transcript will contain the information about the MU 'A' course without referring to the US university.

### Perceptions of staff

Credit recognition is ensured by departments' international coordinators. Given the fact that most of the outgoing mobility at MU is within the EU (Erasmus programme), most coordinators are used to dealing with credit transfer using ECTS from other EU HEIs. When it comes to cooperation with the US, they see the differences in practice as an obstacle, however as they get to know the US system it becomes easier. As said by one of the staff members of the Office for International Studies:

*Yes, the US credit system is different from the way credit is used in Europe. However, within the US, it is relatively standardised. There are countries where the*

*differences are greater. The US system is relatively known to the international coordinators in the departments.*

The two department coordinators interviewed mentioned that in their fields of study:

- On one hand, the MU degree programmes were quite flexible (when it comes to share of core and optional courses), so it was easy to organise mobility and to ensure recognition (mainly concerning optional courses); and
- On the other hand, within their disciplines (political science and English language and literature), it was easy to find relevant or even equivalent courses abroad (this is not a specificity of the US).

In fact, the main obstacles perceived by the MU coordinators were not directly related to credit recognition as such, but more specifically to issues of mutual trust between the host and home HEIs. Though some MU departments have stable exchanges with one or two US institutions, it is rather common that the incoming and outgoing students go to (come from) a range of US HEIs and there is not a regular exchange and an established working relationship. Therefore, issues around trust of the quality of teaching and assessment sometimes arise. Coordinators often judge the foreign course purely based on written curriculum material, which is not always as detailed and clear as they would wish.

### Perceptions of students

The student interviewed described her mobility experience in the US, highlighting some strengths and weaknesses, as follows:

*In MU, I study two bachelor degrees at the same time: economy and political science. Before going to the US I have passed all my compulsory courses in the political science degree programme so I knew the courses I would pass in the US would be recognised as optional. However in economy, I needed to pass a core course in the US: international economic policy. I was asked to provide the course description to the coordinator to see whether the courses would be recognised.*

*I went to the US for one semester and I took five courses. I chose four and I was automatically enrolled in the fifth one by the university. It was an ICT course which is compulsory for all newcomers. It was an error that they enrolled me in that, but in the end I took it and enjoyed it. I took one course on conflict resolution, one language course and two economic courses. I changed one course. Initially I enrolled in a course called 'water conflict' but it did not correspond at all to what I was expecting. I chose mostly according to course titles.*

*The teaching in the US was a lot more practical than the teaching we get here in MU. Also the assessment was different. I took the most difficult level of economics courses. The participation in the class accounted for 30% of the grade. We had to do a lot of work such as essays and literature commentaries through-out the semester and those counted for the final grade as well. Here we are assessed based on a final test.*

*I knew the courses would be recognised before I went, but I was not sure about how the credits will be translated. I was told it was going to be 1:2 but it seems now that it is not exactly like that. I also did not know how the grades would be translated and I was initially worried that my average grade would worsen. The international coordinator in our department is mainly used to dealing with Erasmus so he was not very well informed about the US education system. However, it is currently being dealt with in cooperation with the Office for International Studies.*

### Success factors of this approach

The following aspects are the success factors of the approach described in this example:

- The liberal approach to credit accumulation in Masaryk University gives students a lot of freedom in choosing courses abroad. It also means that teaching staff is comfortable

with the idea that a course programme is flexible and that students do not have to pass exactly the same courses as those offered at MU, but they can construct their pathway;

- The teaching staff acceptance of differences between the MU use of credit and the way credit is used in other institutions;
- The centralised approach to organisation of mobility and the decentralised approach to the management of the design of study plans for mobility and credit recognition;
- The importance of the use of credit and credit recognition in the policy of Masaryk University on mobility; and
- Good understanding of the US education system by two members of staff at the Office for International Studies who deal with student mobility with the US (incoming and outgoing).

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

The following aspects from this example can be considered as good practice:

- Systematic use of learning agreements;
- Openness regarding acceptance of courses from abroad and absence of tight requirements in terms of course content equivalence;
- Possibility to take core courses abroad;
- Explicit institutional policy on credit recognition of mobility periods; and
- Clear and transparent selection process for student mobility.



## 4 Student mobility at the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) – a long history of cooperation and internationalisation

### Key Facts

This case study focuses on the role of the international office at the University of Copenhagen and describes the centralised system for organising EU-US student mobility.

The university has an extensive range of established agreements and relationships with partner universities worldwide, including more than 50 in the USA. The USA is a popular destination for Danish students with many students going to institutions such as University of California, The University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Washington, Seattle. The University of Copenhagen participates in annual conferences of NAFSA – the American Association of International Education.

Exchange agreements are for Bachelor and Master level students. Only rarely do agreements include PhD and staff exchanges. The University of Copenhagen does not have joint or double degrees with its US partners. Exchange agreements are for coursework only.

In 2004 the university changed its rules regarding student exchanges: prior to this, all students who wanted to study abroad had to apply for a whole year rather than for one semester. As student mobility became more frequent and popular, the study abroad period was shortened to provide the opportunity of an exchange period to a greater number of applicants and to meet students' requests for shorter periods.

The University of Copenhagen has a long and established tradition in internationalisation, particularly in student exchange. Nowadays, there are approximately 1,500 outgoing and 2,300 incoming students at the university every year. Mobility is concentrated within Europe, through the Erasmus programmes. Regarding student mobility with the United States, the first exchange agreements between higher education institutes date from the mid 1980s. The key principle regarding the various exchange programmes is that every student pays tuition fees at his / her home institution. In Denmark there is no tuition fee for Danish students up to PhD studies as expenses are covered through public funding. There are generous state benefits and scholarships available for Danish students.

The number of students going to study abroad can either be a fixed number in the university's agreement or a number negotiated year by year based on mutual agreement of the institutions involved.

Internationalisation involving international student mobility is a key feature of the University of Copenhagen. It is central feature of the institution's strategy Destination 2012, highlighting the need for engagement in international networks. The approach has a certain in-built flexibility due to the ability of the university to understand, and work with, counterparts abroad on establishing a fair understanding of the credit transfer. This is underpinned by the use of the ECTS as a framework tool of reference.

Contact: International Office, <http://studies.ku.dk/>

### Context for cooperation with the US

The University of Copenhagen is the largest higher education institute in Denmark. It has about 37,000 students, 1,800 PhD students and 7,500 employees. The current set up of the university was reached through recent mergers with the Royal Danish School of Pharmacy (DFU) and the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL). The university comprises eight highly independent faculties: the Faculty of Health Sciences; the Faculty of Humanities; the Faculty of Law; the Faculty of Life Sciences; the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences; the Faculty of Science; the Faculty of Social Sciences; and the Faculty of Theology.

Internationalisation, particularly student exchange, is a very important feature of the University of Copenhagen with long and established traditions. The first agreements to exchange students between higher education institutes in the US date from the mid 1980s. Building international relations has been a focal area of the university for a long time, continuing to feature in the institution's strategy document 'Destination 2012', emphasising

the importance of internationalisation and the need for engagement in international networks in the changing environment.

'Admission into the star alliance, IARU, is a milestone in more than 500 years of international commitment by the University of Copenhagen. ...Universities once only attracted students from the local area; today education is a rapidly growing market. Students now vote with their feet, applying to those institutions that offer the best education and the most stimulating study environments. In 2004, one million foreign students attended English-speaking universities; in 2020 the number is expected to reach 2.6 million. Global researcher mobility has also grown explosively – e.g. 400,000 European researchers are currently employed in the USA. The best in the world go where the best already are – where the facilities are top class and where they have the best chance of attracting funds. Finally, internationalisation also means that universities have, to a far greater extent, to educate students for an international labour market, with all the global competencies that entails.

The new international framework conditions are the third major strategic challenge facing the University of Copenhagen: How can the University of Copenhagen adapt to increased internationalisation while continuing to maintain its position as a central repository of knowledge and culture in Denmark?'

Source: Destination 2012, Strategy for the University of Copenhagen

A new strategy for the period 2012-2016, currently under development, continues to maintain the importance and emphasis put on the university's international activities, reflecting the high prioritisation placed on internationalisation by the Danish government itself. The University of Copenhagen's international relations have their roots either in relationships built through research collaborations and between researchers, or through direct contact between the administrations and international offices of various universities. There are government grants available for those students who decide to pursue their Master's studies abroad after graduating from a Danish higher education institute.

The operational approach to overseas student mobility is relatively centralised through the international office. The International office consists of 13 full time employees and six student employees and plays a vital role in enabling EU-US student exchanges. The office has multiple tasks: it coordinates the exchanges at institutional level; it facilitates mobility through providing an overview and statistics of student mobility for the whole university and arranges and maintains general exchange agreements. Furthermore the international office is the central administrative contact point for other universities regarding student exchanges.

The faculties themselves also play a significant role in facilitating student mobility and there are some significant differences between the faculties and subject fields in terms of the intensity of their activities in the field of student mobility. One of the most active faculties at the university is the Faculty of Humanities. The larger, more active faculties also have their own international office, although with a smaller number of staff employed than at the central international office.

The University of Copenhagen has more than 100 partner agreements with universities in more than 30 different countries. The partner agreements build on a one-to-one exchange, where the University of Copenhagen sends out a student to a partner university, and the partner university sends back a student to Copenhagen. The university has a broad range of established agreements and relations with partner universities all around the world, but it does not have joint or double degrees with its US partners.

The Bologna Process has been instrumental in consolidating ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) as a unified system for course evaluation within Europe and thereby making student exchange between European universities more transparent and manageable. While in the past the University of Copenhagen had used a different credit system, the ECTS has had a harmonising effect. However, this does not have a significant impact on US exchange as the US credit system is different to the ECTS credit.

The key principle regarding the various exchange programmes is that every student pays tuition fee at his / her home institution. In Denmark there is no tuition fee for Danish students up to PhD studies. The universities are funded by the state. There are generous state benefits and scholarships available for Danish students.

#### Developing credit recognition with the US

There have been a number of barriers the university had to overcome to improve its procedures regarding student mobility. The fact that there has been a long tradition of student exchanges with the US has enabled the University of Copenhagen to refine its application process and further facilitate student mobility with few major issues.

- The recognition of existing qualifications

There are a number of issues in recognition of qualifications. First US high school graduates cannot directly enrol into the University of Copenhagen. They must have either a number of relevant Advanced Placement courses or college courses in order to be considered for admission. Secondly BA degrees awarded in Denmark after three years of study are not recognised by the American partner institutions as equivalent to their four-year Bachelor degrees. Students studying abroad in the first year of their Master's degree are therefore most often not acknowledged as graduates, but have to apply for admission as undergraduates in the American system. There is some flexibility in the system in regards to courses and the host institutions often do allow individuals to take graduate level courses even though they are enrolled as undergraduates. However in terms of administration, this is a cumbersome approach, and for the students the differences in educational systems are a cause for frustration and uncertainty. As exceptions to the general picture there are a few universities in the United States which do recognise Danish BA's as equal to theirs although problems with individual faculties occur from time to time.

- Differences in the structure of courses between universities

There are differences in the overall approach to undergraduate and graduate courses which make it more difficult for incoming and outgoing students.

In Denmark, students begin to specialise from the first day of enrolling in the university while their American counterparts usually study in a much more generalised way, which has to be taken into account when students are selecting the courses for their study period abroad. Thorough descriptions of the course content and indications of the prior knowledge required to undertake a given course contributes significantly to appropriate and successful course selection. The differences between the courses offered by the Danish and American universities were described by a former exchange student as follows.

*'During the first two years of my studies I had to take mainly specific, mandatory courses at the University of Copenhagen, which covered broad topic areas sometimes over consecutive semesters. The whole system and selection of courses were very well organised but created a rather firm study structure. While studying in the United States I could take on many more courses during a year – nine in total from a wider course variety and therefore I could customise my education.'* Source: A former Danish exchange student

- Teaching method and culture

There are significant differences between the Danish and US higher education institutions not only in terms of the variety, structure and content of courses offered, but also in teaching methods and culture. The Danish system offers a more flexible approach than the US system, with fewer restrictions and more freedom allowed for the students during the semesters; including freedom in terms of class attendance and less heavy workload (e.g. number of papers to be submitted). However, the exam period requires very intense and concentrated effort from the students. In the United States the workload of the students is much more even and requires them to constantly be present and perform throughout the study periods. Although the credit value and workload of the various courses of the

University of Copenhagen and a partner US university might be the same, the underlying structures and systems are completely different, making comparison difficult.

There are also many opportunities to exploit while studying in the United States, due to the differences in the methods and teaching style of the US education system. Students might take on courses offered by various departments, get engaged in research projects or even internships. These extra activities also count towards the students' study programmes and can be translated into credits as part of the students' studies at their home institution.

- Courses taught in English – and mainly at a higher level

For incoming students the University of Copenhagen offers the opportunity to participate in immersion courses. Each department has the freedom to decide which courses are taught in English and which student group can participate in them. Particular attention has to be paid when selecting the courses as the English taught courses are generally at higher levels and require a significant amount of prior knowledge of the subject field. More than 500 courses are taught in English and the University of Copenhagen offers more than 50 Master's degree programmes in English.

- Difference in duration of courses

At University of Copenhagen the academic year is divided into two semesters, which, depending on the faculty, might be further divided into blocks: blocks 1-2 during the fall semester and 3-4 during the spring semester. Some US partner universities apply semesters and others use quarters. Three quarters equals one academic year with the fourth quarter being the summer period. For students who study abroad for an entire academic year the differences in structure do not constitute a problem. For shorter periods the overlapping start-and-end of terms may be difficult to manage and there can be issues with full time requirements (i.e. fulfilling a semester of fulltime credit during one quarter).

There are also differences in definition of what a full time study is. At Danish universities a full time study is defined as an absolute (30 ECTS per semester). In the US system a full time study is defined as an interval, for example 12-18 units per quarter.

- **Length of study periods abroad**

The university does not require students to be mobile for a study period except at the level of PhD studies (although this can be confined to the home country).

In 2004 the university changed its rules regarding student exchanges, as prior to this all students who wanted to study abroad had to apply for a whole year. However as student mobility became more frequent and popular, the study abroad period was shortened to provide the opportunity of an exchange period to as many students as possible. There are still some universities such as the University of California, where, due to a high number of exchanges, the students still go abroad for a full year. Spending a whole study year in the United States is said to help in overcoming some of the differences between the timing and schedule of the Danish and US higher education institutions.

Furthermore, experience shows that during their second semester abroad students engage in different type of activities which are often more attuned to the needs of their degree. The first semester also involved a settling in period both academically and personally.

- **Social motivation vs. academic output**

The key principle of the university regarding student mobility focuses on ensuring the academic output as a final 'product'. What is expected from students when studying abroad is an academic result gained in a different environment achieved by adapting to different requirements and culture. The social experience itself is recognised as an added benefit from the university's point of view, although it seems to be one of the main motivations of the students when deciding to study abroad.

### Implementing credit recognition

The University of Copenhagen has had relationships with US higher education institutes for the past 25 years. Although procedures have been streamlined, there remains a high level of variety due to the autonomy of individual faculties.

The main credit system used in credit recognition with the US is the ECTS, replacing a former credit-based system already in place at the university to facilitate course transfer.

The key factor in having a successfully operating system is that it builds heavily on the experience of the individuals involved at the partner institutions, and on the trust built upon these long-term relationships.

There are dedicated international offices with international coordinators both at the level of the faculties and as part of the central administration, with experienced staff enabling and facilitating student mobility. Additionally there are student peer advisors involved in the process with their activities focused on the international aspects.

- Establishing new agreements

When a decision has to be made whether to establish a new university-level general agreement or not, the question is decided by the faculties: if three out of the eight faculties are in favour, the university proceeds to sign the new agreement. The agreements cover mainly student exchanges at the levels of Bachelor's and Master's, and to a lesser extent PhD level or even staff exchanges.

### Tools to support credit recognition

- **Institutional and faculty level agreements:**

The University of Copenhagen has many general agreements to support student mobility. In addition there are different institutional and faculty level agreements providing further opportunities for students to participate in an exchange programme. There are significant differences in terms of content and focus between the two types of agreement. The university's general agreements cover all different types of studies except law, medicine and veterinary medicine. Every student can apply for a study period abroad based on the general agreements, while institutional agreements are available only to selected group of students, who study in a given institution, and so restrictions on eligibility.

The University of Copenhagen also has many existing agreements with the USA, as higher education institutes in the United States are popular destinations among students. Networking and relationship building between the international offices are very important, enabling smoother cooperation and better advice to the students, as the parties get to know each other personally and can establish close contacts. One of the events providing the opportunity to develop relations and get to know each other better is the annual conference of the American Association for International Education (NAFSA).

- **Learning agreements:** These are not in evidence at Copenhagen University. The procedures supporting credit recognition after returning home are different, as the highly autonomous faculties apply different systems. The university does not apply learning outcomes, but rather uses extensive course descriptions to assess the content, workload needed and exact value of a given course.
- **Lists of courses to choose from:** To support and facilitate incoming mobility the University of Copenhagen publishes a course list in the form of a database, which enables everyone to see what courses are taught in English at the various departments with descriptions, availability and their credit value. (See Annex I for an example of a course description and follow the link to access the online database: <https://sis.ku.dk/kurser/lptree.aspx?vnr=328&xslt=classic>) The university offers about 500 courses in English every year, with plans to increase the number of these courses in the future. The database needs continuous maintenance as the list of courses taught in English changes year by year.

### Protocol for credit recognition

The first condition for study abroad is that the home student needs to have completed at least the first two years of their university education. There are also certain courses that have to be taken at the home university. Apart from that, students have a relatively free choice on what they can study (though there may be some other restrictions depending on the various study programmes).

The decision to study abroad needs to be taken well in advance as the application procedure takes approximately one year. Students aiming to go for a study period abroad can receive help and advice from the international office or faculty members, but, due to the limited staffing available for these purposes, and the fact that every partner university has different demands e.g. rules on how to apply and take on courses, what are the requirements (e.g. credits needed to have a full-time workload, permissions to enrol to a course), students are relatively autonomous in making the decision where to go and which courses to apply for.

*'Finding the right level of courses is challenging, as you get a three-line description of a course on the websites. Furthermore, the courses you can see online at the time of the application are not the ones which will be available next year as well. This meant that after my arrival to the United States I needed to change a few courses compared to the original selection' Source: A former Danish exchange student*

Students apply through The International Office for nomination to the overseas exchange programmes. They can indicate up to three partner institutions in which they would like to study.

The application package consists of:

- Completed application form submitted to the home university through an online engine
- The letter of motivation which form the key part of the application and are the most importantly considered when assessing the applications
- The list of courses the student wants to take if being successful with the application including the title of the course, a brief description and the credit value of the course

Students need preliminary approval from their home departments that they can take various courses while studying abroad and transfer the credit after returning home, therefore thorough planning is vital.

After choosing a university the student submits a formal application to their department. There is no unified template or form to complete. In some departments there is a standard format, while others require only a description from the students. There are often changes between the preapproved selection of courses and what the students can actually take on while being abroad. This requires flexibility from the university.

Course transfer pre-approvals as well as the final approvals are assessed by Study Boards. These are set up at the level of faculties or departments, and scrutinise applications in detail. The Study Board is also responsible for deciding the course value in terms of credits at the home institution. The composition of a Study Board varies but in general they consist of professors, students and administrative staff, the latter mainly working on the credit approvals. Study Boards have a lot of experience and a thorough understanding of the major issues of application procedures and credit recognition. The university applies a 'learning by doing' approach which ensures continuity but continued improvement.

Partner universities also require students selected for an exchange to submit an application to the potential host institution. This is an application for admission to the host university through the exchange programme.

The student's main contacts whilst abroad are with the host university. However they do contact the international office of the University of Copenhagen if there is a requirement. Students have to contact their home department if they cannot proceed with their original

study plan, to notify and check any changes to avoid taking on courses which might not be accredited at the home institution on their return.

After students return from their study abroad period they submit an application to their department asking for acknowledgment of the credits gained abroad. The application to acknowledge the credits must contain detailed information on each of the courses studied abroad, including the number of pages read, tests done, primary or secondary literature used, papers written and essays submitted. There is no grade translation applied for the courses studied abroad. The University of Copenhagen uses a pass or fail system with thorough course descriptions. Grades are not required for BA studies to continue onto an MA, only a 'pass'.

The University of California, as an example, applies a similar system. Students have to obtain a preapproval from their home department before studying abroad. The US BA degree holds a range of requirements, such as fulfilment of major, minor and general education requirements. Study abroad credit may be applied to any of these requirements. University of California students know in advance that the courses will count towards the total credit needed for their degrees. It is up to the students to petition to make the credit count towards specific requirements.

Problems with the preapproved courses are normally communicated through a simple e-mail exchange with the home institution, including a description or link to the course s/he wants to take, which is enough for appropriate action to be taken. When US students return, some of the home universities register all courses in a central database. This includes a detailed course description that enables its assessment and final decision on the quantity of credits and grade. Since the grades also count when transferring back to the University of California system there are some issues to consider in terms of the transparency of the Danish Grade system (which is less of an issue for the Danish students at home).

The University of Copenhagen applies the following grading translations between the Danish scale and the ECTS.

*'The University of Copenhagen uses the Danish 7-point grading scale. We have indicated the equivalent ECTS grade to the right.*

*12 For an excellent presentation that demonstrates a high level of command of all aspects of the relevant material and containing no or only few minor weaknesses. A*

*10 For a very good presentation that demonstrates a high level of command of most aspects of the relevant material and containing only minor weaknesses. B*

*7 For a good presentation that demonstrates a high level of command of the relevant material but containing some weaknesses. C*

*4 For a fair presentation that demonstrates some command of the relevant material but containing some major weaknesses. D*

*2 For a presentation meeting only the minimum requirements for acceptance E*

*0 For a presentation not meeting the minimum requirements for acceptance. Fx*

*-3 For a presentation that is unacceptable in all respects. F*

*2 is the required grade to pass a subject.'*

Source: <https://sis.ku.dk/kurser/vis/pafsnit.aspx?snr=63896&sprog=1>

### Perceptions of staff

The University of Copenhagen is a highly internationally-oriented university with a large number of foreign staff teaching at the institution. Although there are still some professors feeling less comfortable teaching in English, there is a continuously increasing number of courses taught in English, expanding opportunities to foreign students to attend the university.

### Perceptions of students

Motivations of the students wishing to go abroad differ widely, ranging from personal interest for a given country and its welfare system to academic interest, or just for the experience of living and studying abroad. Contributors to this case study include a Danish philosophy student who spent a full year at UCLA during the third year of his BA studies and an American sophomore student currently spending a full year in Copenhagen, originally studying economics at UCLA.

The Faculty of Humanities at the University of Copenhagen has a study structure which requires students to take three quarters of their courses from other fields of study during their third year of their Bachelor's studies. This is the ideal time to spend a year abroad as students are allowed to take any type of courses to broaden their knowledge base and mindset. The student contributing to this study had complete freedom in terms of course selection, without restrictions regarding the level or content of the course selected. Studying abroad provided the student with new and different angles on a variety of subjects and he believes that staying for a whole year gave him a very beneficial experience of living in another country fully, e.g. having the daily problems, and establishing long-lasting contacts. Although he values the time spent in the United States and the gained very much from experience, he also has some concerns mostly due to administrative barriers and procedures. In terms of accreditation of his courses studied abroad, six out of the nine courses he undertook were already preapproved. For the remaining three he had to submit course descriptions and transcripts and all were accredited without problems. A major issue was however, that due to his misunderstanding regarding the term, and linked requirement of the full-time workload between his home and host institution, he completed only 12 credits per quarter instead of the desired 15, which left him with no choice but to submit an additional study paper to obtain the missing credits.

The flexibility of the exchange procedures at the universities is well reflected in the fact that the student who came to Copenhagen from UCLA initially intended to stay only for one semester, but he is now going to spend a full year at the University of Copenhagen. The process of extending the study period was straightforward, by means of a form submitted to the home department which included an option for extension. However, a difficulty has arisen in that the differences between the grading system of the University of Copenhagen and his home institution is causing confusion.

In terms of course selection and getting established in Denmark the help of the student mentors is highly appreciated. Student mentors help incoming students to find their ways around the university and the city. They help and guide foreign students in familiarising themselves with Copenhagen and the local culture.

### Success factors of this approach

The application procedure is a key part of credit recognition and transfer of the study abroad period at the University of Copenhagen, as credit recognition is based on the preapproval of the courses chosen by the student for the exchange period.

The Study Boards are an important part of the assessment as they are set up at the level of faculties or departments, and pay particular attention to the details within the application and the credits.

Detailed course descriptions help the students and the assessors to understand course contents, credits, time and academic aims.

### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

The University of Copenhagen establishes new university level agreements, if at least three out of the eight faculties are in favour of the initiative.

Preapproval of the courses to be studied abroad by a nominated Study Board highly contributes to the facilitation of credit recognition at the home institution after the students return home.



Students are involved at the exchange processes at many different stages. There are students working in the international office and students also participating in the Study Boards. The university also has student mentors who are highly regarded by the incoming students as they provide incoming students with information on academic issues e.g. how to take courses and regarding the cultural and social life in Copenhagen.

The detailed description of courses that can be found in the university's online system makes orientation of the students regarding course content and requirements very easy and transparent. It also includes detailed information on the number of ECTS credits that can be gained by completing a given course.

### ANNEX – Example of a course description at the University of Copenhagen

**Course Name:** Advanced Microeconometrics

**Planlagt udbud:** Efterår 11

**Chronology:** M.Sc.

**ECTS:** 7.5 ECTS – however students are encouraged to write a paper as a supplement to the exam, which counts for an additional 5 ECTS. (For students on the 04/05 curriculum the course is 8 ECTS points and the paper supplement is 4 ECTS for a maximum of 12 ECTS)

**Teacher:** Bertel Schjerning, [Bertel.Schjerning@econ.ku.dk](mailto:Bertel.Schjerning@econ.ku.dk)

**Schedule:**

Lectures: (total 42 hours during the semester). Class: Thomas Jørgensen,

Once you have an approved registration for the course in the student selfservice at KUnet you will automatically get access to the course website in Absalon.

**Academic Aims**

Through their completion of the course students should acquire the tools necessary to understand papers and undertake empirical analysis on microeconomic topics. The acquired skills in microeconomic theory and practice provide a strong background that enable students to do empirical analyses at a high level suitable for the master thesis, but also relevant for answering empirical economic questions that could be encountered in a government agency or in the private sector.

A) The purpose of the lectures and the exercise classes is that the student should acquire knowledge about estimation methods

- be able to review linear cross section and panel data models, and nonlinear models for discrete dependent variables, censored dependent variables and sample selection.
- be able to give an account of how these techniques are applied to quantify effects of public policies.
- be able to give an account of how such models are applied appropriately within different sampling schemes.

B) The purpose of the optional term paper is to make students pose a focused economic research question (inspired, for example, by an already published paper) • find data that can be used to answer the question

- estimate relevant models and test hypotheses using methods discussed in the course.
- programme the estimators applied in the paper using MATLAB
- investigate the properties of the estimators and tests using Monte Carlo techniques
- present the analysis in a short and focused term paper.

To obtain the maximum grade in the part of the course covered by lectures and exercises, students must excel in all of the areas listed under A) above.

For students who choose to write a term paper, student shall must also demonstrate that they can carry out an empirical investigation with special emphasis on microeconomic issues. To obtain the maximum grade, the term paper should excel in all areas listed under B) above. Note however, if the question has been investigated in a paper, then the student need to extend the analysis to obtain a high mark. For example they will need to provide a useful, correct and significant extension to the paper. This could include, for example, specification tests that were not used by the authors, better econometric techniques, a re-specification of the model that changes one of the main conclusions or collecting supplementary or alternative data.

### Course Content

The overall purpose of the course is to provide a fundamental understanding of microeconomic methods and their application. These methods consist of behavioral models and statistical techniques to estimate these models.

The course will cover the following methods of estimation:

Linear panel data models (Chapter 10-11)

Non-linear estimation methods (Chapter 12-14)

Non-parametric estimation methods (Lecture notes)

Discrete response models (Chapter 15-16)

Corner solution models (Chapter 17)

Censored data and sample selection models (Chapter 19)

Treatment effects (Chapter 21)

The course consists of a series of lectures and exercise classes (7.5 ETCS credits) and an optional term paper (giving additional 5 ETCS credits). The lectures focus on theory whereas the class provides a hand on knowledge of estimation of the models. Ideally, the whole process of investigating an economic question empirically is learned by writing a term paper.

### Syllabus

Jeffrey Wooldridge (2010), 'Econometric Analysis of Cross Section and Panel Data', Second Edition, MIT Press. chapters 10-17, 19 and 21.

**Language:** English

### Prerequisites

Pre-requisites are Quantitative Methods 1-3 (Econometrics A-C)

### Teaching and Work Forms

The course consists of 42 hours of lectures and 24 hours of computer exercises. Students can choose to hand in a term paper at the end of the semester to achieve an extra 5 ECTS.

**Formal Requirements:** None

### Examination

The assessment is based on an oral exam. Students who choose to hand in a term paper to achieve 12.5 ECTS will be assessed based both on the paper and their oral exam which will include a defence of the term paper. The defence and paper combined constitute approximately 50 % of the final grade. Students can choose to answer in English or in Danish, but the same language must be used for the exam and for the paper.

Source: Study Information System of the University of Copenhagen

## 5 University of Tartu (Estonia) - A university with a very structured approach to student mobility

This case study aims to introduce the student mobility procedures at the University of Tartu in Estonia, with special attention paid to the Faculty of Social Sciences and Education. The faculty delivers the Master of Arts in Social Sciences, Baltic Sea Region Studies programme, which is a two-year English taught Master's programme offering a dual degree option as part of the Atlantis programme or a joint programme option by spending one or two semesters at the university's partner institutions through the Network of the Baltic Sea Region Studies.

Internationalisation is very high on the agenda of the University of Tartu; therefore the university has developed a large number agreements to facilitate student and staff mobility around the world. The international collaborative partners of the university are categorised in four groups<sup>142</sup>:

- 1) Partner universities: collaboration is based on bilateral agreements. These partner institutions represent the university's most extensive co-operations covering mainly student and staff exchanges and engaging all faculties and units at the university.
- 2) Erasmus partners: to facilitate mobility based on the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. These are agreements at the level of level of individual faculties, departments, institutes and other academic units.
- 3) Partner faculties: represent collaborative agreements for student and staff exchanges with restrictions to faculty level involvement between two partnering institutions.
- 4) Other partners: where the University of Tartu has built relations to target specific areas e.g. research or education related collaboration. Furthermore there are also collaborations based on the agreements established by the Estonian government and the Academy of Sciences

The University of Tartu has 53 bilateral agreements with partner universities from 19 countries, and 6 agreements with US partner institutions, out of which five are active in student exchange. Furthermore the university also participates in various international networks, such as the Coimbra Group, Utrecht Network and ISEP (International Student Exchange Programmes), and use these channels to increase the level of student mobility. The agreements with US partner institutions are all at university level. Partner universities in the US are:

- University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- West Virginia University
- Michigan Technological University
- Emporia State University
- Nebraska Wesleyan University
- Salisbury University

The number of exchange students is on the increase at the university. During the study year 2009/10 there were almost 800 international students at the university including incoming exchange, visiting students and degree seeking students. The number of incoming and outgoing students is about equal; during the last school year there were 402 outgoing from and 340 incoming students to the University of Tartu.

Regarding US mobility there were 30 incoming and 29 outgoing students between the US and the University of Tartu during the last year. There are also American students enrolled in full time Master's (10) and Bachelor's (3) programmes at the university. The university offers mainly English taught degree programmes at the level of Master's studies, there is only one BA degree programme in English. For exchange students the University offers approx. 200 courses in English from different study fields and levels.

Contact: <http://www.ut.ee/en/studies/contacts/international-student-service>

<sup>142</sup> Source: University of Tartu: <http://www.ut.ee/en/international/international-partners>

### Context for cooperation with the US

The University of Tartu was established in 1632. It has nine faculties and five colleges at different locations in Estonia. The faculties and colleges are active on their own special areas and operate highly independently. The university has a very strong research focus, furthermore it is ranked as the leading higher education institute in Estonia, attracting at least one quarter of all Estonian secondary school graduates who want to continue their studies in higher education.

Currently the university offers 70 bachelor studies programmes<sup>143</sup>, 70 master studies and 35 doctoral studies programmes for around 18,000 enrolled students, including over 670 international students. Furthermore, there are more than 1,300 students engaged in doctoral studies. The university employs 3,500 staff, including 1,700 academic employees.

International collaborations are of high importance to the university. It is present as a statement in the strategy of the university, both in its research and educational activities. The University of Tartu has 53 bilateral agreements with partner universities from 19 countries. International collaboration takes place at different levels and across different areas. The University has international partner universities, Erasmus partner universities, partner faculties and other agreements including international co-operation agreements concluded by the Estonian government and Academy of Sciences. Furthermore the University of Tartu is a member of numerous international networks such as the Coimbra Group, EUA, the Utrecht network and ISEP.

The university also participates in several joint study programmes such as the Erasmus Mundus joint MA programmes and joint MAs delivered in cooperation with the other partner universities. In addition the proportion of international teaching staff is high. 'Over 100 international staff members teach and work at the University of Tartu every year. Many more come to deliver lectures and short courses.'<sup>144</sup>

The University of Tartu offers a large number of English taught courses (for complete list for the 2011 autumn semester see: <http://www.ut.ee/788819>) and it also provides the opportunity for exchange students to enrol in full semester programmes. These full semester programmes were designed for visiting students and they are offered in eight different areas: Baltic Sea Region Studies, European Union Studies, Eastern European Studies, Creation of the Rule of Law Society in Post-Communist Europe, Russian Language, Literature and Culture, Applied Measurement Science, Software Engineering and Semiotics.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

- **Difference in the nature of programmes:** The academic system and environment of Estonia and the US are very different. Students can explore and study many different subjects and can take part in various activities as part of their study abroad period such as placements or research projects, although the main focus is usually on taking courses. There is flexibility in how to accredit courses studied abroad. If students want to study something different, not necessarily in line with their main study fields, they can still, most of the time, accredit at their home study programme as elective courses or as extra curricula. There is no upper limit regarding how many credits a Master's student can take on. It is up to the individual. If courses studied abroad are not completely in line with the major of a student, it does not automatically mean that he / she has to extend the study period. Students plan well in advance for their exchange period and if students miss some compulsory courses while being abroad; they can take them either before they go or after they come back. Additionally the student can take academic leave to catch up with the missed courses.
- **Differences in planning – semester, trimester:** There are some differences between the schedules applied by the US partners and the University of Tartu. This does not cause major issues but is nevertheless sometimes challenging to arrange properly. For

<sup>143</sup> Source: University of Tartu: <http://www.ut.ee/en/university/general>

<sup>144</sup> Source: University of Tartu: <http://www.ut.ee/en/studies/why-tartu/international-community>

example in case of the Baltic Sea Region Studies MA programme, which is part of the Atlantis Programme, graduation is the most difficult thing for the students to arrange. American students can defend their thesis in Poland or Estonia, but the European students spending their second year in the US have to submit their thesis to both home and host universities (West-Virginia and Tartu or Warsaw). The theses are assessed by a joint committee which is complicated by the different schedules. Students have to study until early May in the US, and they are then left with only two weeks to submit their theses.

- **Use of learning outcomes:** Learning outcomes are widely used at the University of Tartu. (See Annex to this case study with an example of a course description.)
- **Facilitating incoming student mobility:** the university has developed a broad range of supporting services to facilitate incoming student mobility. International students start each semester with orientation days, to gain basic knowledge on the university procedures and Tartu itself, and to get to know each other. Every international student receives a personal tutor to provide him / her with information, help to settle in and get to know the practicalities of the academic system e.g. course registration. The International Student Service is a special unit at the university which provides assistance for exchange students and there are also **dedicated programme managers for each of the international degree programmes who are available to help exchange students with academic aspects and orientation.**

#### Implementing credit recognition

Partner universities have to get to know each other very well to be able to implement credit recognition for a study abroad period. This is reportedly the most time consuming and difficult part of student exchanges as it includes a lot of administrative, bureaucratic and academic work. Staff involved in the student exchange programmes have to understand how the partner institutions are organised and operate. Furthermore to ensure academic quality it is imperative to understand: the programme set up, each other's requirements and obligations, the course contents and expected workload. This requires intensive cooperation between the partners.

The university's Study Regulation is adopted by the Council of the University of Tartu. The Study Regulation contains detailed information regarding credit requirements and the study abroad period. The Study Regulation also describes the application procedures for a study abroad period.<sup>145</sup>

#### Tools to support credit recognition

- **Formal agreements:** Agreements also cover specific aspects such as whether free accommodation will be provided for the students and whether there is a monthly allowance or free meals (students can choose a meal plan which normally includes 19 to 21 free meals per week at university cafeterias) offered by the host university. The number of students to go on an exchange period is negotiated between the partner universities annually.
- **Learning Agreement:** Learning agreements are used as part of student exchange procedures. After successful application, students need to get a confirmation from their faculties that their proposed study plan for the exchange period at the host institution is adequate. If due to the altered circumstances students need to change their preapproved study plan while being abroad, they can do so, but have to notify their home departments.

#### ***'Formalisation of a learning agreement***

*A learning agreement must be drawn up in two counterparts. The agreement is signed as follows:*

<sup>145</sup> Link to the University of Tartu's Study Regulations: <http://www.ut.ee/960683>

- The student draws up the learning agreement and signs it
  - The student submits the agreement for signature to the **Dean/College Director** (enclosing the approved study plan that will remain with the Dean's office/College)
  - The student submits the learning agreement signed by the Dean/College Director for approval to the coordinator of the respective programme in the International Student Service (only in the case of the Erasmus programme, ISEP, DoRa 7 or an cooperation agreement between the universities)
  - The student sends one copy of the agreement to the foreign / hosting university for signature
  - The student submits the agreement signed by the foreign university to the Dean's office/College (retaining the other copy so it can be taken to the foreign university and possible amendments can be made)
  - On the basis of the **learning agreement**, the Dean's office/College registers the student for study abroad
  - The learning agreement is kept in the Dean's office/College along with the study plan.'
- Source: <http://www.ut.ee/en/studies/studyabroad/regulations-for-study-abroad/learning-plan-and-agreement>

- **Course equivalences** are not used by the university.
- **Lists of courses to choose from:** Students can enjoy relative freedom in terms of course selection during an exchange period as long as they have all compulsory courses completed at the University of Tartu. The university does not set strict requirements, but students have to follow the courses included in their learning agreement. Flexibility regarding course selection is also ensured by the fact, that Master's student have a minimum of 120 ECTS to complete during the two years of their studies, but there is no maximum set. Students can take on more courses and finish their Master's studies e.g. with 150 ECTS.
- **Conversion tables for credit values and grades:** As a general requirement, outgoing exchange students need to take 12 ECTS as minimum workload during their study abroad period. In terms of credit translation the general rule is that 1 American credit equals 2 ECTS credits in Tartu. The basis of the calculation was the hours spent on lectures in the US and in Estonia. At Tartu one credit point corresponds to 26 hours of studies (lectures, seminars, practice, homework or independent work, assessment of learning outcomes) performed by a student.<sup>146</sup> The individual faculties do grade translation of a study abroad period. There is no centralised system.

**Figure 1** Grading system at the University of Tartu

Description of the current grading system is the following:

Grade	Tartu University % of acquired knowledge
A - excellent	91-100%
B - very good	81-90%
C - good	71-80%
D - sufficient	61-70%
E - poor	51-60%
FX - fail	-
F - fail	0-50%

<sup>146</sup> Source: <http://www.ut.ee/en/studies/study-regulations/credits>

### Protocol for credit recognition

The International Student Service is in charge of the selection procedures for international student exchanges and for full time degree seeking students. The International Student Service, with its counsellors and advisors is the first contact point with enquiries regarding international mobility.

Students can apply for an exchange period through university wide competitions from all faculties. There are separate competitions organised for each university, and students are allowed to apply to various universities at the same time.

A grant committee, which comprises university staff from different central offices such as academic affairs, the international relations office and the research office, does the selection. There is no involvement of faculty representatives in the grant committee. The faculty representatives are engaged in the selection procedure through the assessments of the applications. Professors or study councillors have to assess the applications for an exchange period, as a letter of recommendation from the home departments of the student is a compulsory part of the application.

The application package for a study abroad period comprises:

- A standard application form including a motivation letter and a letter of recommendation by a professor or a supervisor
- A language certificate, to show that the student has the necessary language skills for a study abroad period
- A transcript of records of studies
- If the partner institutions have their own application forms, students are required to comply with the host institutions application process as well

Credit recognition of courses studied during an exchange period consists of two main elements:

- Before going abroad the learning agreement records the study plan including credits and descriptions of course content
- When students return to the home institution they have to submit the transcript of records to have thee accreditation of the courses completed abroad. This consists of a registration procedure in the university's Study Information System (SIS)<sup>147</sup>. The registration includes:
  - Submission of a transcript of records of the courses completed during the exchange period to the Dean's office or College respectively
  - Request to have specified courses accredited as part of the student's degree programme at the university
  - The Faculty or College registers the courses in the online Study Information System and the faculties are also in charge of grade translation.

### Perceptions of staff

As part of the Atlantis programme the University of Tartu in partnership with West Virginia University and Collegium Civitas in Warsaw developed a 'Transatlantic Dual MA Degree Programme in East-Central European Studies with a special focus on the history of the East-Central European region, with a concentration in Baltic Studies'. The study programme consists of five modules: a general module (24 ECTS), a specialised module (30 ECTS), an elective module (30 ECTS), elective courses (6 ECTS) and a Master's thesis (30 ECTS).

There are three Estonian students studying in the programme every year, three Polish students from Warsaw and six from the West Virginia University in the US. Estonian and

<sup>147</sup> Source: <http://www.ut.ee/en/studies/studyabroad/regulations-for-study-abroad/learning-plan-and-agreement>

Polish students spend the second year in the US and the first year either in Estonia or in Poland. West Virginia and Tartu have long standing relations with a bilateral agreement signed to facilitate student and scholar mobility. Both universities also have good relations with Warsaw, who was the main initiator in building this dual degree study programme. The University of Tartu was included in the programme to offer more locations and opportunities for the US student studying abroad.

Students who want to participate in the dual degree programme have to comply with the university's general requirements for mobility. Furthermore they also have to fulfil programme specific criteria such as students must have high levels of competence in English (as defined by the West Virginia University) and their GPA has to be at least 3.5 on a scale of 1 to 5. The assessment of the motivation letters is done jointly by the partners.

The dual programme was launched two years ago. During the first year, students did not know what to expect from the double degree programme and they were a bit cautious. However, as they got to know the programme and heard the experiences of the first students returning from the US, the programme became more popular. As a consequence there have been a year on year increase in demand for the course.

There is significant added value in the dual degree. Participating students get two degrees which is a very attractive feature and they get the second degree for free, as they pay tuition fees at the home institution. The labour market appreciates graduates with experience in an international environment, an exchange period is definitely considered to be a valuable asset from the future employers' point of view as students who spent a semester or a year abroad are usually more open and tolerant towards different cultures and societies.

#### Perceptions of students

Due to time limitations and schedule of the study (exam period), no students were available for a discussion regarding their experiences on a study abroad period.

#### Success factors of this approach

Although the basis of student exchanges is the agreement between two or more partner institutions, efficient student exchanges and running all the procedures smoothly requires the partners to know and understand each other, and to have good, personal relationships. The University of Tartu puts significant emphasis on getting to know their partners, they organise mutual visits and aim to meet at the different international events.

Student mobility is in general very popular and especially the opportunity to study in the US. It is easy to find suitable candidates for an exchange period, as around 4 students apply for each place available for a study abroad period in the US.

The university pays attention to the provision of a welcoming environment for the incoming students. Each incoming student has an assigned Estonian senior student tutor who undergoes special training for the role. It is a voluntary course, but participants can credit the training towards their study electives. The student tutors help incoming students with academic issues such as selecting courses, with SIS registration and with cultural information. Every new Estonian student receives a tutor as well.

In addition the university organises orientation courses to help incoming students at their arrival to find their ways and students can always contact the International Student Service with any requests or questions.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

The supporting system put in place for incoming students to direct and advise them on academic and cultural related issues is very impressive. There are administrative, academic staff and senior students involved in guiding the new students at the university, providing them with all necessary information and contacts, if needed. The International Student Service acts as a central contact point for all international students.



The transatlantic Master's programme is a very good example on how to develop joint programmes between universities that provide significant added value for the participating students.

The university's website and online study information system is very comprehensive with exhaustive information available to inform students on every aspect and procedure regarding a potential study abroad period. The detailed course descriptions facilitate the selection of courses while studying at the University of Tartu to a large extent.

#### ANNEX I – Example of a course description

### Course outline of SORG.03.032

[Help](#) | Select activity ▼  
[Home page](#)

Course information: [PDF](#) [HTML](#)

<b>Title in Estonian</b>	Läänemere regiooni poliitilised arengud
<b>Title in English</b>	Political Developments in the Baltic Sea Region
<b>Faculty/Department</b>	Chair of Comparative Politics (SHRG02)
<b>Amount of credits (1 ECTS=26 hours)</b>	6 ECTS
<b>Amount of credits (before 31.08.2009)</b>	4 CP
<b>1 credit point * 1.5 (before 31.08.2009)</b>	6
<b>Duration in semesters</b>	1
<b>Final assessment</b>	differentiated

Show involvements of this course

#### Objectives

<b>in English</b>	The objective of this course is to introduce the peculiarities as well as similarities of political systems in the Baltic Sea Region. Course focuses on 3 Baltic and 4 Nordic countries. Historical, political and cultural approaches are reconciled in context of today's political and social theory as well as practice. Concluding sessions attempt to answer the basic questions relevant to all states in region: how democratic the political systems are and what are the key dimensions in outlining the democratic nature of the political systems in the Baltic Sea region.
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#### Learning outcomes

<b>in English</b>	Students are able by the successful graduation of the course: to give overview of the political developments in the Baltic Sea Region; to compare different political systems and their developments from the historical as well as theoretical perspective; assess success of political transition process; assess functioning of the wellbeing society; analyse the relations of different political actors in the political systems of the Baltic Sea Region; analyse regional integration and location of the Baltic Sea Region in the global context.
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#### Brief description

<b>in English</b>	The following topics and questions will be analyzed: political system of the Baltic Sea Region in general, historical genesis of the systems, conceptualization of the political system, defining political system in each particular state, system persistence, utility of the political system approach, institutions, constitutions, legislature, roles of the legislature, structural arrangements, roles of the executive, administration and judiciary, administration functions and power, major political actors behind- parties and pressure groups in each state, policy making process and their implications. Course gives brief overview of the regional integration and how the state in the region relate to the countries outside of the Baltic Sea Region.
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<b>Study materials</b>	Study materials are available for registered students
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#### Syllabuses (detailed course information)

2011/2012	2010/2011	2009/2010	2008/2009
<a href="#">11/12 A full-t.</a>	<a href="#">10/11 A full-t.</a>	<a href="#">09/10 A full-t.</a>	<a href="#">08/09 A full-t.</a>

artu Ülikooli infosüsteemid. Leht koostatud 28.06.2011 12:12

## 6 The University of Helsinki (Finland): cooperation with US universities based on a long tradition of use of credits

### Key Facts

Mobility is an important aspect of studies at the University of Helsinki, which is highly promoted. Cooperation with US universities has been active in the last 15 years in the form of visits of high level delegations, professional contacts and initiatives of academics. It takes place both at the central level and at that of the departments. Six bilateral agreements are signed with partner universities in the US, and 4 bilateral agreements are signed between departments (of law and theology). In addition, a joint degree was developed in the area of forestry (see 0 below).

Forms of cooperation with US universities

University bilateral agreements	Department bilateral agreements	Joint degree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bellarmine University</li> <li>▪ University of Arizona;</li> <li>▪ University of California, Berkeley;</li> <li>▪ University of Georgia;</li> <li>▪ University of Montana;</li> <li>▪ Virginia Tec.</li> </ul>	<p>In law:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ American University, Washington College of Law;</li> <li>▪ Santa Clara University Law;</li> <li>▪ Hofstra University.</li> </ul> <p>In theology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Emory University.</li> </ul> <p>In sciences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ North Carolina State University.</li> </ul>	<p>The Transatlantic Master's Degree in Forest Resources between the North Carolina State University (NCSU), Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Michigan Technological University (MTU), and the University of Helsinki (UH).<sup>148</sup></p>

Other types of cooperation with the US are developed through programmes such as International Student Exchange Programme (ISEP), Mid-America Universities International (MAUI), and North2North.

This fiche will be concerned with the mobility of students within exchange programmes and as free movers, as the joint degree in forestry will start in 2012 only.

Overall, in 2009, 476 Finnish students went to study to the US, whereas 152 US students went to Finland for their studies.<sup>149</sup> The US is the 7<sup>th</sup> most important country for the mobility of Finnish students (after Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Sweden, France and the Netherlands).<sup>150</sup> In 2009, Americans were the 15<sup>th</sup> most common nationality of incoming students in Finnish universities: there has been a decrease in the last 8 years (from the 6<sup>th</sup> most common in 2001).<sup>151</sup>

With regard to the University of Helsinki, for the three-year period from January 2008 to December 2010, a total of 189 students went to the US to study whereas 54 US students studied in the University of Helsinki (see table below).

<sup>148</sup> This joint degree is the outcome of the project "EU-US TMDPFR: EU-US Transatlantic Masters Degree Programme in Forest Resource". Project dates: October 2008 – December 2012.  
<http://www.cnr.ncsu.edu/fer/atlantia/index.html>

<sup>149</sup>

[http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/19414\\_Exchange7\\_out\\_in\\_countries.pdf](http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/19414_Exchange7_out_in_countries.pdf)

<sup>150</sup>

[http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/19412\\_Exchange6\\_Common\\_countries.pdf](http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/19412_Exchange6_Common_countries.pdf)

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Markus Laitinen

[http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime\\_product\\_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/19405\\_Degree3\\_CommonNationalities.pdf](http://www.cimo.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/cimowwwstructure/19405_Degree3_CommonNationalities.pdf)

Mobility of students – University of Helsinki – January 2008 – December 2010  
(number of students)<sup>152</sup>

	Outgoing students	Incoming students
University wide agreements	15	3
Faculty level agreements	14	NA
Other programmes (ISEP, MAUI, North2North, traineeships, as well as free movers)	ISEP: 32 in three years Remaining:128	51
<i>Total</i>	<i>189</i>	<i>54</i>

Incoming students most commonly choose to study at the University of Helsinki based on the availability and range of programmes, agreements and summer schools. In addition, for the academic year 2010-2011, 9 outgoing students and 4 incoming students were supported by Fulbright grants.<sup>153</sup>

Credit recognition is a crucial part of studies at the University of Helsinki and is key to the mobility of students to the US and other countries. Indeed, credit recognition allows the validation of studies abroad for students who took part in exchange programmes or who went abroad as free movers. Furthermore, the recognition of credits ensures the validation of credits necessary for securing financial support in the form of state aid or scholarships.

Credit recognition is centralised at the International Student Service (ISS) but is dealt with by each individual department, on each individual case. The most important tool in the validation of courses taken abroad is the Learning Agreement, prepared upon departure and checked against the transcript of credits upon return. Conversion tables for credits and grades are also used. The information is centralised using an on-line mobility portal.

The process of recognising credits has been working efficiently at the University of Helsinki due to strong cooperation between students, department coordinators and the International Student Service. Staff and students report that they are satisfied with the process, that they receive sufficient information and support and are familiar with the procedure.

#### Contact information and list of people interviewed

<http://www.helsinki.fi/international/>

### Context for cooperation with the US

#### Internationalisation strategy

The University of Helsinki did not define an internationalisation strategy *per se*. Internationalisation is not perceived as an independent policy of the university, but is considered to be integral to its core activities that include teaching, research, and social interaction. As such, internationalisation is embedded within the University of Helsinki's 3 year strategy. This strategy is subject to approval by the Ministry of Education and is supported by 5 Action plans. These focus on research, teaching and studies, societal interaction, HR and management and supportive measures.<sup>154</sup>

More specifically, as part of the University's strategy, the Action plan for teaching and studies<sup>155</sup> defines the international dimension as 'an essential component of all activities' in

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Markus Laitinen

<sup>153</sup> [http://fulbright.fi/files/2966\\_FulbrightCenterGrantees2010-2011.pdf](http://fulbright.fi/files/2966_FulbrightCenterGrantees2010-2011.pdf)

<sup>154</sup> <http://www.helsinki.fi/strategy/>

<sup>155</sup> University of Helsinki (2009) *Programme for the Development of Teaching and Studies 2010-2012*, [http://www.helsinki.fi/strategia/pdf/Opetuksenjaopintojen\\_web.pdf](http://www.helsinki.fi/strategia/pdf/Opetuksenjaopintojen_web.pdf)

the strategic objective from 2010 to 2012<sup>156</sup>. Moreover, the Universities approach to internationalisation is key to ensuring the development of a robust and creative international, multicultural and multidisciplinary environment for teaching and learning. This in turn is expected to increase the scope and depth of international understanding by providing the knowledge and skills needed to communicate in different languages and different situations. This is considered to be crucial for working in international research environments and workplaces<sup>157</sup>.

### Importance of credit recognition

Credits have always been used at the University of Helsinki as they form the basis for the validation of the University degrees. Finnish credits were used before ECTS credits in the form of a 'study week' based on a workload of 40 hours.

Traditionally, students did not have time restrictions to complete their studies. Since the introduction of the Bologna process, students are required to complete their studies within a definite period. As such, it is now important to recognise the time spent abroad studying as an actual part of the curriculum and contribution towards the overall degree of the student - credits are the elements which enable them to do so.

In addition, credits are a key element for the financial support students receive. Students must ensure that at least 5 credits per month are obtained in order to benefit from state aid, and 20 credits are required to be eligible for scholarships. It is important to note that financial state aid and scholarships are portable for studies abroad, under the same conditions (i.e. at least 5 credits per month).

Interestingly there is no direct mention of credit recognition in the strategy of the University. However, the strategy does stress the value of exchange opportunities in good quality degree programmes. The strategy also recognises the importance of providing students with academic advice and supervision<sup>158</sup>. The most important tool in ensuring the validation of studies abroad is the use of credits, supported by adequate assistance and advice.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

Overall, it was reported that recognition is working well with the US and that there is good cooperation with US universities. Issues impacting on effective cooperation have, however, been recognised. These include the lack of reciprocity where evidence shows that the number of Finnish students choosing to study in the US outnumber the number of US students choosing to study in Finland. This had led to an imbalance in the exchange of students. Administrative burdens have also been highlighted as a key issue with reports of US students experiencing significant administrative, bureaucratic difficulties when trying to secure loans to study in Finland. Credit is the key element used to value the study undertaken abroad. Although grades are transferred, they are not considered as an appropriate method to validate studies undertaken abroad.

However, in some instances it can be difficult to recognise credits and there are several issues to help explain this. For example:

- **Differences in education systems:** in many cases, the US education offer is more general than that of the University of Helsinki, even when there is a major. Validating a full US degree requires an in-depth review of the programmes studied, finding the best equivalent courses, and usually requires the student to take additional courses to enable the student entry at the desired level;
- **Value of credits:** some credits obtained for validating US Bachelor's degrees do not have the same value as credits obtained at the University of Helsinki for a Bachelor's

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<sup>156</sup> Idem p.39

<sup>157</sup> Idem p.40

<sup>158</sup> Idem p.53

degree and cannot be accepted for entry to a Master's degree. This refers to the case of credits obtained from colleges or summer schools;

- **Allocation of credits:** ECTS credits are based on learning outcomes and workload. However, there is usually little information as to the method of allocation for US credits: where some indication is given, it usually refers to contact hours. The University of Helsinki has taken as a baseline for the transfer of credits, that the number of ECTS credits required for a semester is equivalent to the number of US credit required for a semester;

### Implementing credit recognition

Credit recognition at the University of Helsinki was developed on the basis of experience and exchanges with US universities. The process evolved naturally and academic contacts were made during cooperation.

There is not a specific institutionalised approach to this issue. An approach based on the ECTS credit system was developed for all international exchange programmes – including those with the US. No specific guidelines were produced and it is left to individual departments to recognise credits, with the overall objective of recognising as much credit as possible. Each case is assessed individually against the respective curriculum characteristics.

An important component throughout cooperation with US universities and for implementing credit recognition is the development of trust between universities. Indeed, the University of Helsinki has developed cooperation with well-known and well-established universities, whom it values for both teaching and learning outcomes. In the case of credit recognition trust is crucial to ensure the quality of courses which were taken abroad.

At the same time, this process also relies heavily on trust between students and teachers. As described below, students have the responsibility to provide as much information as possible for their credit recognition and teachers should ensure a fair assessment of those, asking for clarifications when necessary.

### Tools to support credit recognition

Within the context of exchange programmes, credit recognition is possible through the use of several tools. These include cooperation agreements, learning agreements, and an online portal. In addition, tables for converting credits and grades are used.

**Agreements** with partner universities take the form of a memoranda of understanding or a contract specifying the conditions for the exchange. They usually contain a general statement about the need to recognise credits during the exchange period. This however is purely indicative and not binding.

**Learning Agreements** are at the heart of credit recognition for mobile students. These are prepared by students prior to departure. Students identify the most appropriate course available at the host university that offers opportunities for credit recognition. This is based on information available from the host universities, usually from their websites:

- For compulsory courses, students try and find courses equivalent to those they would have taken at the University of Helsinki, based on the description of the content of the courses;
- For elective courses, students can select from the variety of courses provided by the host university.

Students present a list of 4-6 courses which are equivalent to the 12 US credits necessary to validate a US semester. The student then submits the Learning Agreement to the coordinator of the exchange at the department or faculty for approval. The Learning Agreement serves as the basis upon return for the recognition of credit.

One important aspect of the Learning Agreement is that it ensures the course content taken abroad is relevant and reflects what would have been taken home. At the same time, the

Learning Agreement facilitates communication between students, the department coordinator and the Student Exchange Coordinator.

It should however be noted that the Learning Agreement should not be seen as definite. Although students should prepare it prior to their mobility period, course information from host universities is not always available. Furthermore, some minor changes to the programme's courses' are possible at the beginning of the exchange period, or students themselves may choose to change the content of the Learning Agreement for other reasons. The University of Helsinki is flexible in its approach to developing Learning Agreements, however, the final agreement should be similar to what was initially agreed. In addition students must ensure information contained within the agreement is correct and that it is transferred to the department coordinator and the Student Exchange Coordinator.

Another tool to support credit recognition is the use of a centralised online portal '**mobility online**'<sup>159</sup>. This system gathers information for students applying for and participating in mobility opportunities, including the details of the degree (host institution, level and name of the degree), the courses selected (code, name, content), the Learning Agreement, and the recognition of credits (equivalent courses at the University of Helsinki, validation of the credits). This information is accessible to individual students, to responsible teachers, department coordinators and the Student Exchange Coordinator.

Finally, with regard to both students in exchange programme and free movers, **tables for the conversion of credits and grades** are used:

- The recognition of credits is based on the assumption that the 4 to 6 courses which need to be taken by students going to the US are equal to 12 US credits, which correspond to 21-22 ECTS credits. When assessing the number of credits obtained abroad, the overall rule is therefore to transform 1 US credit into 1.75 ECTS credits<sup>160</sup>;
- A table for the comparison of grades is also used:
  - 5 = excellent or A;
  - 4= very good or B;
  - 3= good or C;
  - 2= satisfactory of D;
  - 1= passable of E;
  - 0= fail of F or FX.

#### Protocol for credit recognition

Overall, the recognition of credits obtained in the US through an exchange programme is the same as for recognising a whole US degree. The recognition of credit is organised and supported by the tools described above and involves three key partners - students, the coordinator at the department or faculty, and Student Exchange Coordinator:

- the student is responsible for providing the department coordinator with all the information to enable the assessment of their studies, with as many details as possible;
- the department coordinator is responsible for assessing the relevance of courses taken, and to validate the credits obtained;
- the Student Exchange Coordinator serves as the key reference/contact point in case of question or dispute.

#### Basic documents for credit recognition

The students provide the departments or faculty they come back to or apply for with:

<sup>159</sup> <https://kvl.it.helsinki.fi/mobility/MobilitySearchServlet?sprache=en&identifier=helsinki01>

<sup>160</sup> As mentioned above, the credits are considered as similar in their allocation in this instance.

- the transcript of their studies which contain: the name and code of the courses, the credits obtained and the grades awarded and in some cases the number of contact hours<sup>161</sup>;
- a copy of the degree they obtained (in the case of recognition of degree);
- the Learning Agreement completed (for exchange programmes);
- additional information about the content and details of the courses (e.g. number of hours of classes when not provided in the transcript), copies of essays and other works.

A meeting is then organised between the student and department coordinator to discuss the actual achievements of the courses. In case the information provided by the student is not sufficient enough, the department coordinator contacts the host university to gain a better understanding of the details of the courses.

### Assessment of courses

The department coordinator assesses the courses undertaken against the courses which should have been taken at the University of Helsinki in order to validate the degree during which they went on mobility for or for which they seek equivalence. Overall, the courses of the partner universities are usually highly valued and therefore, there is no question about their quality, however questions can sometimes arise in terms of their relevance. The Learning Agreement should ensure that the courses are equivalent. In the case where changes have been made to it, the coordinator needs to ensure that remains close to the original version.

### Recognition of credits

Upon the assessment of the content of the courses, the department coordinator can validate them or not:

- in the case of validation, the US credits are transferred into ECTS credits (on the basis of the conversion table mentioned above);
- in the case of non validation, students can be asked to:
  - take ‘bridge classes’, completing their missing learning outcomes;
  - write additional essays.

### Validation of studies

If the total of transferred US credits they obtained equals 60 ECTS per year, which is the prerequisite for validation of a study year at the University of Helsinki:

- In the case of exchange students, they validate the period of study abroad as if they had studied at the University of Helsinki. They will, if applicable, also be awarded the relevant degree from the University of Helsinki.
- In the case of students, wishing to have their US degree recognised for entry into a degree at the University of Helsinki, they receive a certificate of equivalence of the US degree with a degree from the University of Helsinki. The following is an example of a statement of equivalence (Department of Psychology, Faculty of Behavioural Sciences):

‘The psychological studies included in the Bachelor of Science Degree completed by <name of the student> (born <date of birth>) in the <name of US university> University, are

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<sup>161</sup> In this regard, during the interviews it was noted that the information provided in the US transcripts was far richer than those from other countries, e.g.:

- Russian transcripts present the number of contact hours but provide no information on credits. Calculations are extrapolated from the basis that 1 credit is equal to 27 hours;
- Indian transcripts usually provide only the name of the course, with no credit value or number of contact hours.

equivalent with the Basic Studies in Psychology (25 ECTS credits) according to the requirements of the University of Helsinki. In addition, <name of the student>'s degree contains studies which are equivalent with optional psychology courses and methodological studies, totalling about <30> ECTS credits. In order to achieve the full equivalence with the major psychology studies in the degree Bachelor of Arts (psychology) in the University of Helsinki, <name of the student> should complete the Intermediate Studies in psychology (<40> ECTS credits).<sup>162</sup>

In case of disagreement during the process of credit recognition, the student can liaise with the International Student Service. The service will then liaise with the department coordinator and the host university in order to obtain sufficient information on the student.

### Recognition of grades

Within the process of validation of courses, the focus is on the recognition of credits, whereas grades are not considered as crucial to the validation of studies abroad. Grades can either be:

- given as an equivalence (on the basis of the conversion table presented above);
- accepted as 'pass' grades;
- transferred as an average '3' in case no grade was presented in the transcript.

### Perceptions of staff

Overall, staff perceived the recognition of credit from the US as working well. This can be explained by the level of information which is given to them and the familiarity with the use of credits.

In case of questions or issues, the academic staff can always **refer to the international student service**. In addition, general information about the process is provided on the intranet. Finally, a network of those responsible for student exchanges has been established and they meet several times a year to discuss issues including the recognition of credit.

The **use of credits** at the University of Helsinki is **well grounded** and the process for recognising those obtained abroad is perceived, overall, as being straightforward. Although there are no rules specific to the recognition of US credits, on the basis of the process of ECTS credits and of the equivalence between the US and ECTS credits, academic staff perceived it as easy to handle.

At the same time, staff also mentioned the **issue of time** in dealing with each case. Each student's case is different and needs to be analysed on an individual basis. The professor in charge refers to the various documents provided by the student. Depending on the amount of information provided by the student, this might require some additional (web) research, contacts with the students as well as with the host university. It is not always the case that thorough additional information can be obtained. This is often the case when little information is available on the university website and/or contacts with the students and host universities can be lengthy. In summary, the process can be time consuming.

Furthermore **coordinators might lack the capacity** to dedicate adequate time and resources to each individual case. Indeed, in some cases the department coordinators are fully dedicated to exchange students and cooperation and credit recognition is part of their usual core tasks. In other cases, department coordinators are part of the academic staff, who also has some responsibilities in exchange cooperation: their main tasks though are teaching and research, and credit recognition is an additional component to already heavy workloads. Although few students on average are concerned with exchanges in each department, additional time and resources to support credit recognition would be welcome.

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<sup>162</sup> example of statement of equivalence of studies from the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Behavioural sciences, translated by Hilikka Pakarinen.



Finally, although academic staff can easily make contacts with the host university for additional information, they also noted that the **host university should have a greater responsibility** in providing detailed information about the transcripts to the students and the home university detailing the transcripts. They would indeed be the best placed to provide information in terms of course content, size of workload and learning outcomes etc. Availability of improved and more robust information would make the role of the department coordinator easier and more efficient.

### Perceptions of students

Overall students seem to be **satisfied** with the system for credit recognition. The process in place (preparation of the Learning Agreement, submission of the information on the online portal, provision of relevant information upon return) is clear and straightforward.

At the same time they are provided with all the **necessary information** from the International student service: in the calls for exchange programmes, details are provided, and information about the Finnish credit system is provided to incoming students. In addition, they can always refer to their responsible coordinators or the international student service with any questions.

An issue raised by students concerns the **timing** for when the Learning Agreement should be prepared. As discussed above, these must be prepared before the summer when universities typically have not defined their courses for the following academic year. Students base their choice on the previous year, however this usually means their Learning Agreement will require some changes once the student actually starts studying in the US.

Also, the content of the Learning Agreement is **not always straightforward** for students to prepare. Although some departments and faculties are flexible with the content of the courses, especially in social sciences or arts, others, such as natural sciences, are more stringent. It was reported that, even with a Learning Agreement, after the students came back from their mobility, they had to re-take some courses as those they had undertaken in the US were not close enough to their curriculum at the University of Helsinki.

### Success factors of this approach

The combination of **promoting mobility** and the **traditional use of credits** at the University of Helsinki are the key success factors for the approach to credit recognition with the US. International cooperation is a key element of the studies at the University where there is an emphasis on students participating in mobility opportunities. As such, it is crucial that the studies undertaken abroad are validated upon return. At the same time, given the long tradition of using credit in the university, both teachers and students are familiar with the process for credit recognition.

In addition, the **strong involvement of the students** in the process has a proven success. Students are highly proactive in the information they provide before leaving, during their stay abroad (if any changes are made to the Learning Agreement) and upon their return. The whole process relies on their reactivity and responsibility in following up the process and providing accurate information concerning their studies.

Finally, **strong communication and cooperation** between the different actors is also crucial: it is important for students to provide all the necessary information, whilst being responsive to their coordinator's comments and questions. Coordinators make their decisions clear and transparent to the students. The international student service provides guidance and reference to students and academic staff, as well as being the contact point for any query. Finally, exchange agreements with US universities ensure quality in cooperation and in credit recognition.

### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

In conclusion, the University of Helsinki can be recognised for good practice in the **decentralisation of credit recognition** with a **central management of information**. As presented above, the fact that the process takes place within each department or faculty

ensures an informed understanding and assessment of the curriculum of each individual student concerned with mobility. In addition, students are in direct contact with their teachers. Strong central management of information ensures that the different actors have a reference point for all questions and also ensures that the system is coherent amongst the different departments.

Finally, the use and recognition of credit in cooperation with US universities follows a **similar structure to that of ECTS credits**. This unified system of credit recognition ensures that credits are recognised for their actual values and that the process is common across all departments. In turn, students and staff clearly understand the process involved applying credit recognition. Students are ensured that the judgment of courses taken abroad is consistent, and also that their courses will be validated and fully integrated in their curriculum.

## 7 L'Institut d'études politiques (IEP) de Paris (Sciences Po) (France): flexible approach to student mobility

### Key Facts

Mobility is a core aspect of studies at Sciences Po. Indeed, mobility is at the heart of the Bachelor degree since it is compulsory for each student to spend their final year of the Bachelor abroad. Student exchanges are also in place at Master level and at the research level and several double degrees are in place.

Cooperation with US universities has been extremely active in the last 10 years in the form of student exchanges, double degrees, teachers' exchanges and research collaborations in all fields of study that Sciences Po offers.

Cooperation with the US is centralised at Sciences Po via the Centre for the Americas that 'promotes and implements the institution's academic and scientific cooperation with American, Canadian and Latin American universities'<sup>163</sup>.

Sciences Po has signed agreements with more than 60 US universities, including the most prestigious US institutions, for student mobility, research cooperation and double degree programmes. The complete list is detailed in Annex A.

Overall, in 2009-2010, there were approximately 250 Sciences Po' students in exchange at US partner institution; 472 American students enrolled at Sciences Po which accounts for one third of all American students enrolled in a 'Grande Ecole' in France; more than 10 double degree programmes with a US partner<sup>164</sup>; and approximately 1200 worldwide students in exchange at Science Po<sup>165</sup>.

Credit recognition is centralised at Sciences Po. It is mainly the Centre for Americas that deals with exchange programmes with the US. The framework for credit recognition is based on a **flexible approach** towards credit recognition from the US and on a **high level of trust** Sciences Po has developed with its US partners. Overall, it was reported that credit recognition is working well with the US and it is not considered as a major issue in cooperation with US universities.

### Contact information for the Centre for Americas at Sciences Po:

<http://www.americas.sciences-po.fr/en>

### Context for cooperation with the US

Cooperation with the US has always been fully embedded in the international strategy of Sciences Po since the 1990s.

In 1996, the International Affairs Division (DAIE) was created in order to expand Sciences Po's worldwide recognition<sup>166</sup>. The US was seen as a key zone due to its worldwide recognised education system.

In order to enhance Sciences Po's international recognition, partnerships with US prestigious universities were thus seen as a key element of the internationalisation strategy.

The fact that mobility is compulsory in the third year of the Bachelor degree at Sciences Po, emphasises the importance given to credit recognition. Indeed, the year spent abroad is

<sup>163</sup> <http://www.americas.sciences-po.fr/en>

<sup>164</sup> Direction Affaires Internationales et Echanges, *Sciences Po et les Etats-Unis* : <http://www.americas.sciences-po.fr/en>.

<sup>165</sup> <http://www.international.sciences-po.fr/en/mission>

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.international.sciences-po.fr/en/mission>

entirely part of the curriculum and a student must validate his/her courses in order to be awarded the BA degree at the end of the year.

In addition, the US is the first preferred destination among Sciences Po' student for their year of exchange. This alone serves to highlight the importance of developing a process for credit recognition with the US.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

Overall, it was reported that credit recognition is working well with the US and it is not considered as a major issue in cooperation with US universities.

- **The difference in credit systems** was mentioned as the only difficulty that has since been overcome. Since there is no similarity between the credit systems, Sciences Po takes into account the general workload of an average full-time student in the US. Usually, in order to be granted the status of a full-time student in the US, a student must enrol in 4 or 5 courses per semester that should correspond to at least 12 US credit hours, depending on the institution. Also, 12 US credit hours per semester correspond to the minimum requirement for a foreign student to be granted a student visa and student status.

Sciences Po requires all exchange students to follow the same number of courses that an average full-time American student must follow. As indicated above, this is typically four courses per semester (12 US credit hours per semester). Sciences Po considers that the usual 60 ECTS per year corresponds to those 8 courses per year in the US system, though this may depend on the institution.

In order to have its year abroad validated an exchange student must complete a minimum of 4 courses per semester at the host university.

The exchange student is also required to write a report of the year studied abroad (*rapport de séjour*). The year abroad is validated as a whole and is based on the number of courses succeeded abroad and on the quality of the report. As such there is no strict transfer or conversion of credit.

There is therefore no conversion table for credit transfer in place.

#### More specifically:

- **At the Bachelor level**, the exchange student is free to choose their subject of interest to study at the host institution. The only requirement is that they must enrol in one Social Science related class per semester.

The principle behind this approach is that Sciences Po considers an undergraduate year abroad as a fundamental life experience for its students. The idea is that students participating in mobility opportunities should experience the same student routine of home based students. In addition, the Bachelor degree of Sciences Po is multidisciplinary. As such mobile students can choose their subject of choice - there is no obligation for students to specialise in a particular subject at Bachelor level.

- **At Masters level** the process follows the same logic however with a stricter requirements on the student course choice. The exchange student must enrol in courses that account for 12 US credits hours per semester that therefore account for 30 ECTS a semester. The course choice of the student must be related to his Master degree topic.
- In the **case of double degrees** with the US partner institutions, the question of credit recognition is not applicable. Instead partner universities have agreed on the degree procedures:
  - Students spend the first year of study (either at Bachelor or Masters level) at Sciences Po. In order to access the second year of study at the US partner institution, a student must have satisfied the requirements of the Sciences Po year of study.

- Successful students can enter the second year of study at the partner institution in the US and must meet the requirements of the host university. Here, US universities typically transfer credit gained at Sciences Po and determines the number of credits the student must still achieve to be awarded the double degree.
- In the case of **free movers**, Sciences Po evaluates US degrees as a whole. Free movers can only apply for a cycle of studies, either to enter into the first year of a Bachelor degree or a Masters. It is thus not possible to request credit to be transferred from one institution to another. Sciences Po has defined certain requirements for a US free mover student to be accepted in the BA or MA degree. However, as in many universities, these requirements are not specifically advertised.
- **The difference in grading systems:**  
Regarding the transfer of grades, Sciences Po does not transfer grades obtained in the US. The exchange year is validated as a whole. A qualitative appreciation is given in accordance to the Grade Point Average (GPA) obtained in the US. However, this qualitative appreciation has few consequences on the diploma and it won't appear on it.

### Implementing credit recognition

Sciences Po was one of the pioneer institutions in France to develop strong cooperation with US universities.

In order to develop a cooperation agreement for an exchange programme with a potential US partner, the Centre for Americas discuss the internationalisation strategy and the objectives for the exchange programme of each institutions. Meetings between both partners are expected to occur at this stage in order to better discuss each terms of the cooperation and to visit the campus infrastructures. Meetings and regular visits to participating institutions help develop and maintain strong cooperation between partners.

Sciences Po has developed a flexible approach to credit recognition, particularly for the exchange period at the undergraduate level. As mentioned previously at Bachelor level, there are no strict transfers or conversion of credit from the courses followed during the exchange period.

In summary, promoting the long term life benefits of participating in an exchange programme underpins the principle behind credit recognition at Science Po. Trust is the most important element of strong cooperation between Sciences Po and its US partner institutions. Mutual trust has been important for the quality of the learning experience and in applying a flexible approach to credit recognition. Factors that enhance trust between partner universities include:

- Sound research cooperation between academic staff of each institution.
- Positive feedback received from visiting professors (academic staff in a gap year) from both sides in both ways.
- The high calibre of incoming and outgoing students.
- Positive feedback from former students who have participated in mobility opportunities at Science Po strengthens relationships between partners and promotes Science Po as a key partner in mobility

The development of trust between Sciences Po and its partner institutions has encouraged the development of **new cooperation programmes**, such as double degrees programmes for example.

### Tools to support credit recognition

Various instruments are used to support student mobility. These include:

- **A memorandum of Understanding** specifying the conditions for the exchange is signed between partner institutions. However, it does not detail credit recognition procedures.

- **A Learning Agreement (LA)** must be signed prior to departure for each type of exchange. There is some flexibility on the course choice and it should be noted that the LA is not definitive. The student has a three month period at the host institution to decide which courses to register for. The international coordinator from the host institution is required to sign the LA before the student sends it back to the home institution.

For the exchange programme at the **undergraduate level**, the student must present a LA indicating their course choice and must enrol in at least one related Social Science course per semester and in at least 4 courses per semester. Apart from this requirement, the student is free to choose any subject of study. International coordinators from the Centre for Americas also sign the LA.

For the exchange programme at **Masters level**, the student must present a LA indicating his/her course choice. This must be in accordance with the topic of study at Sciences Po and must account for at least 12 US credits hours (usually 4 courses) per semester. International coordinators from the Centre for Americas sign the LA.

For US students in exchange, no LA is required. The LA tends to be defined after the exchange, depending on the courses that were recognised or not.

American institutions tend to use conversion tables of credits and grades since they pay much more attention to credit recognition for their students.

- The **intranet** of Sciences Po is also a useful tool. It provides detailed information about each partner university. In addition, each 'rapport de séjour' is accessible on the intranet. In each report, the previous exchange student reports valuable information about the host institution and its course choice. This is helpful for future exchange students to choose where to go and which courses they can expect to follow.

Given that Sciences Po has a flexible approach to credit recognition, conversion tables are not in place. Science Po works on the basis of a trusting relationship with partner organisations with high regard for the quality of teaching and learning.

#### Protocol for credit recognition

The international coordinators from the Centre for Americas ensure that an exchange student has satisfied the requirements of the year abroad.

Protocols are in place prior to the student participating in the mobility opportunity. These have been described above and refer to the minimum number of courses a learner must participate in at the required level.

On arrival additional protocols are in place. The exchange student must transmit his transcript and 'rapport de séjour' to the official representative for exchanges at the International Affairs Division. The representative will then evaluate the records of the student ensuring that the basic requirements are met. The exchange student must have succeeded in at least, the usual 4 courses that entitled him to be considered as a full-time student in the US. The International Division will then transmit a proposition to a Commission for validation of the year abroad.

The year abroad is validated as a whole based on the number of courses succeeded abroad and on the quality of the report.

**Conversely, US partners have developed a stricter procedure for credit recognition.** In the US, students usually specialise in a subject during their undergraduate degree, whilst at Sciences Po, students only specialise at Masters level. Consequently, it is important for US students participating in mobility opportunities to have specialised learning validated when they are back in their home institution.

Because credit recognition is an essential feature of Sciences Po US partners, the quality of **service provided by the International Division and the educational adviser** defines the success of the cooperation and of exchanges.

As such the International Division of Sciences Po are careful in their approach to addressing issues relating to credit recognition. It provides partners with specific information related to:

the courses at Sciences Po, the typical workload for a Science Po' student, the number of credits and about possible conversion of ECTS into US credits.

An educational adviser has also been assigned the role of answering requests of US exchange students concerning credit transfer. The adviser will guide students in their course choice at Sciences Po as well as ensuring they find the equivalent course they need in order to obtain recognition of credits back home.

Sciences Po thus ensures that American students will find the equivalences they need for credit recognition and that US partners will have all the necessary information to transfer credits accordingly.

#### Perceptions of staff

Cooperation with the US partners is considered to be effective and working well. As Sciences Po employs a flexible approach to mobility it is believed to facilitate the process of credit recognition well.

Thus, it was reported that credit recognition from the US is not considered as a major issue. Conversely though, US partners tend to develop a stricter approach to credit recognition. In this context, Sciences Po ensures sound channels of communication are in place with its partners to ensure they are in receipt of as much information as they necessary concerning Sciences Po' system.

#### Perceptions of students

Sciences Po students have reported that the system was clear; they knew prior to departure that they must undertake a minimum of 4 courses in the US and the requirement to succeed at those. They also knew that they should choose courses from at least the level 300 or 400 in the US. Moreover, students were aware that the third year of study at the undergraduate level placed a strong emphasis on gaining a mobility experience. Students were however of the view that the year taken abroad was more concerned with developing life experiences than gaining grades for this year of study. They thus could more easily enjoy the year of study abroad without worrying about grades.

Conversely, US students were facing greater difficulties in terms of credit recognition. They do not know how their credits will be transferred. In addition, each department back home has its own policy to transfer credits. A student reported that their Political Science department uses the conversion table 3 US credits = 4 ECTS while the History department uses 2 US credits = 4 ECTS. US students also reported that they do not know which courses they will be granted recognition for. Thus, students tend to enrol in more classes than necessary in order to ensure minimum credit recognition when they are back in their home institution. They are also required to bring as much information as they can back home about their classes (syllabus, course content, transcripts, etc) in order to support credit recognition.

Regarding the transfer of grades, each institution in the US applies a different conversion table. One student found it fair while the other found it unfair.

#### Success factors of this approach

The success of this approach was due to the fact that Sciences Po has adopted a **flexible approach** to credit recognition from the US. Students are relatively free to decide which courses they want to register for at the host institution, especially for student in their third year of a Bachelor degree.

The only requirement is that students have to register in **a minimum of 4 classes per semester** (that account for 30 ECTS per semester) in order to be granted the full-time student status. The exchange year is evaluated as a whole and credit recognition is granted as long as the student has not failed the courses taken abroad. The aim of Sciences Po is to offer the opportunity to the student **to live a year as close as the American student's routine**. This specific approach to the year abroad thus facilitates the smooth recognition of credits.

Another key element of success is the **high level of trust** that was established between Sciences Po and its partners in the US. In this context, Sciences Po trusts its partners in terms of the quality of teaching they offer. It has enabled Sciences Po to adopt a flexible approach to the recognition of credit, validating the year as a whole, as a particular experience, rather than rigorously transferring credits.

Finally, the fact that Sciences Po has developed **sound communication** with its US partners, providing them with information about Sciences Po's courses and credit system, has helped credit recognition to be granted for US students in exchange at Sciences Po when they return home.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

In conclusion, the case of Sciences Po can be seen as a good practice for the **flexible approach** it has given to the exchange period abroad, as explained above.

In addition, another key factor of the success of the process is the fact that **a high level of trust** was established between Sciences Po and its US partners, enabling Sciences Po to trust the quality of teaching of its partners and thus to adopt a flexible approach to credit recognition from the US, assessing the exchange year as a whole, rather than rigorously transferring credits.

Finally, the fact that Sciences Po has developed **sound communication** with its US partners, providing them with information about Sciences Po's courses and credit system, can be seen as a key element for helping the transfer of credits to the US, ensuring that US exchange students benefit the most from their exchange period at Sciences Po.



## 8 The Free University of Berlin (Germany): an international-oriented University with a long-standing history of cooperation with the USA, based on a flexible and realistic approach

### Key Facts

Since its creation in 1948 with international support coming from America and Western Europe and given its then isolated position in West Berlin, the Freie Universität Berlin has based its strategy on a very international-oriented development. Nowadays, about 17% of its students come from abroad and all students have the possibility to apply for a period of mobility abroad.

Cooperation with the USA is based on a long-standing tradition. Over the years, the university has signed cooperation agreements with about 40 American HEIs. Recently, the University has appointed a representative in New York, together with the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU), in order to strengthen its partnerships with US institutions.

Agreements and support programmes concern various forms of mobility, including, summer schools, short-term stays of one or more semesters, research internships lasting 3-4 months, etc. Students are eligible for direct exchanges with partner US universities through cooperation agreements. In addition they can apply through various support programmes (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), PROMOS, Deutsch-Amerikanisches Fulbright-Programm). Partnerships agreements can be included either university-wide or on a subject specific basis (e.g. Cluster for Transnational Legal Studies).

Since 1998, the FU Berlin has also been part of the Transatlantic Masters Programme organised in cooperation with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and 6 other European universities. Although the programme shares the features of a joint degree programme, it at present organised as a cooperation agreement.

The John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies is one of the most active departments in terms of student exchange with the US, since all Bachelor students have to go abroad for one semester and most of them go to study in the US or in Canada. The USA is the first destination for FU students with 70 students studying in a US university in 2010/2011 at bachelor, master or PhD level.

Contact: Mr. Günter Schepker, Student Exchange Office, + 49 30 83873931 [guenter.schepker@fu-berlin.de](mailto:guenter.schepker@fu-berlin.de)

### Context for cooperation with the US

Given its history, the Freie Universität Berlin has a long-standing history of cooperation with international – and particularly US - HEIs. The institution was created in 1948, with donations from the USA, as the University 'free' from political influence compared to the other Berlin University (which is today's Humboldt University) situated in the East Berlin of the then divided city. For the whole of the Cold War, the University established tight connections from its geographically isolated position in West Berlin to organisations and personalities within Western Germany, Europe, and in the USA in order to survive, both on an academic and an intellectual level. From the beginning, the whole strategy of the University was therefore based on international cooperation with exchange of teaching staff, researchers, students and common projects.

The university has taken this international focus and made it a central strategy of the University and a distinctive pattern of the institution. The success of the FU Berlin in terms of internationalisation is illustrated by the funding it received from the Excellence Initiative under the scheme 'International Network University'.<sup>167</sup> In particular, the Centre for

<sup>167</sup> The German Excellence Initiative aims at promoting cutting edge research and outstanding conditions for young researchers at universities. Three lines of funding are embedded, of which the selection of 9 Universities of

International Cooperation was set up within the framework of the 'International Network University' strategy. The Centre supports the international strategy of the University and is responsible for strengthening and expanding its research and academic network,<sup>168</sup> actively cooperating with liaison offices in foreign countries that work together with the DAAD offices abroad.

Student mobility is actively encouraged within the university. The USA is a prime destination for FU students, with 70 students studying in the USA in 2010/2011. Increasingly there is a trend towards concentration with more students sent to fewer institutions. The Freie Universität Berlin has a well-developed range of cooperation schemes with US HEIs, of which there are:

- University-wide exchange programmes with about 40 US universities, that grant tuition waiver to exchange students; and for one third, additional grants towards living expenses.
- Support to students applying for scholarships granted by the DAAD or the Fulbright-Programme (in such programmes students are not only eligible for a tuition waiver in an exchange programme, but also they receive grants for their living cost);
- Subject-specific cooperative study programmes organised in cooperation with several universities– e.g. the Cluster for Transnational Legal Studies (CTLS)<sup>169</sup> within the Department of Law, which is supported by leading law schools and departments of law around the world of which the Georgetown University Law Center; the Euromasters and the TransAtlantic Masters Programme;
- German University Alliance since 2005 with the set up of a liaison office in New York working for both FU Berlin and the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich (LMU) , with the aim to represent the interests of the two universities in the USA and in Canada and to strengthen the exchanges of students and researchers
- The presence of an office of the University of California System on the Berlin campus, as well with the Berlin Consortium of German Studies, The Duke In Berlin Programme
- The study abroad semester programme FU-BEST
- The Freie Universität Berlin Summer University FUBiS

#### **The TransAtlantic Master Programme (TAM)**

TAM is an intensive degree programme offered by a number of different universities in the US and in Europe:

- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and its Centre for European Studies (USA)
- Bath University, UK
- Carlos III University, Madrid
- Charles University, Prague
- Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Freie Universität Berlin
- Sciences Po, Paris
- University of Siena, Italy

It is based on the experience of the Euromasters programme, developed in 1995, but extended in 1998 to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. TAM is an interdisciplinary programme and students pursue graduate study on both sides of the Atlantic while earning a master's degree. The two academic years are divided into five intensive study modules. After attending the core module and US national module at UNC from August to December, students choose to attend one additional (minimum) site or up to a maximum of two additional universities in Europe to complete the remaining modules. The

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Excellence (of which the FU Berlin), which will be funded highly for their promising approach to education and research. It was compared by some media to a German 'Ivy league'.

<sup>168</sup> Website of the centre for International cooperation: <http://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/inu/en/cic/index.html>.

<sup>169</sup> Website of the CTLS: <http://www.jura.fu-berlin.de/studium/internationales/ctls/index.html>

choice of sites is dependent on the different content offered as well as on language requirements at the respective site. All courses of study are contingent upon the availability of spaces and the approval of the individual sites.

TAM is neither a joint nor double degree, even if it shares most of the features of a joint degree. The whole programme is based on a cooperative agreement. Students do however receive a TransAtlantic Masters certificate when graduating. The creation of a joint degree is regularly discussed, but is seen mere as a formality that would require addressing a few more issues. At the moment, students have the choice between two degree options. Choices are either a master's degree in political sciences awarded by the University of North Carolina or a Master's degree from one of the European Partner sites. In the case of the Berlin site, this would be a Master of Arts in Social Sciences. In Berlin, the FU is partnering with Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, where also the site-directorate is residing. The choice of degree option has an influence on the application process.

For further information: TAM's website (<http://www.unc.edu/depts/tam/index.php>), FU Berlin's webpage on TAM (<http://www.bgss.hu-berlin.de/masters/transatlantic-masters/>)

The FU Berlin uses the ECTS system. The researcher found no evidence of any specific work or issues focused on credit recognition within the University. It was reported during the interviews that credit recognition is more an issue than it was a few years ago, although credits are merely seen as a way to ensure mobility than an issue in itself. Furthermore, there is a clear interest for transatlantic joint and double degrees in the Free University of Berlin, with the publication in 2009 of the report 'Joint and Double Degree Programmes in the Transatlantic Context'.<sup>170</sup> Based on a wide survey addressed to EU and US institutions, on a scale of one to 5 (1: not challenging at all, and 5: very challenging), in the US, credit transfer recognition as an issue is on average a 3 on the scale, and in Europe credit transfer is a 3.2.

The university maintains a decentralised system for managing student mobility, with teaching staff in each department being responsible for credit recognition and the Departments' examination office formally recognising the credits. The Exchange Student Office does not intervene in the process for credit recognition, but is centrally in charge of organising exchange and the exchange programmes. It acts as a facilitator. Departments and Professors are therefore individually in charge of credit recognition and practices differ from one Department and also from one Professor to another.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

Obstacles related to student mobility with the USA are not always related to credit recognition but are broader and include:

- **Requirements and length of Masters' programmes**

Going abroad for part of the Masters is traditionally not encouraged, due to the short length of time and also the high-level requirements entailed in Master study programmes. Most of the time students go abroad for research for their master's thesis rather than on an academic exchange programme.

- **Application procedures and schedules**

It is necessary to apply well in advance to study in the US - at least one year ahead. In line with the previous paragraph, this also means that schedules are tighter for master students willing to go abroad and students should often apply before joining the study programme. This is an obstacle in terms of mobility and might be an issue when planning their studies.

<sup>170</sup> Matthias Kuder (Freie Universität Berlin), Daniel Obst (Institute of International Education), Joint and Double Degree Programmes in the Transatlantic Context: A Survey Report, 2009, Project funded by the EU-U.S. Atlantis Programme of the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture: [http://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/v/tdp/en/news\\_dates/news/09-01-22\\_iesurvey.html](http://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/v/tdp/en/news_dates/news/09-01-22_iesurvey.html)

- **Language barriers**

It is difficult to attract students from the USA due to the fact that US students do not meet the German language requirements in contrast to the German students who go to the US.

- **Different studies and financing models**

Studies are really expensive in the United States whereas there are no tuition fees in Germany. Therefore there are two issues: problems with the negotiation of the tuition waiver and during negotiations students may drop out due to cost.

In addition there is a limited number of places for FU students willing to study in the USA, specifically in relation to scholarship programmes (e.g. DAAD, Fulbright, etc) that grant tuition waivers and also support student's living cost.

- **Differences in the duration of university courses**

European and US Universities' calendars differ somewhat. This is however not only a problem between the USA and European Universities, but also between European Universities as seen with the TransAtlantic Masters Programme (TAM).

Obstacles directly related to credit recognition are as follows:

- **Differences in the curricula**

Most departments/institutes have a curriculum that must be covered by students in order to graduate. When a student spends a period abroad, he or she will need to identify which courses he/she needs to attend in order to fulfil his/her study programme and he/she will have to find similar courses abroad. The content of these courses needs to be similar in content to the courses at Berlin in order to be recognised and to grant credits. This is checked and approved by the professor in charge of the equivalent course at the FU. While 100% overlap in the content of courses never exists, professors exercise their discretion in assessing whether the similarities are sufficient. Finding corresponding courses might sometimes be a problem, especially for students in interdisciplinary study programmes such as the ones provided by the JFKI where the courses to be taken are inter-disciplinary and very specific.

- **Recognition made by each individual Professor in charge of compulsory courses, might lead to individual interpretations**

The university maintains a decentralised system for managing student mobility and therefore Professors are autonomous in terms of credit recognition. This means that practices differ from one professor to the other. This could have led to problems in terms of global harmonisation, but in almost all situations that arise, the Departments are willing to facilitate exchanges and solve problems on a case-by-case basis.

- **High US standards in terms of regulations and organisation**

For all collaborative agreements and all the more within the framework of joint and/or double degree, trust is a key factor in the credit recognition between the FU Berlin and US institutions. US Universities have really high expectations in terms of regulation standards (European/German universities might be less strict). Credit recognition is a part of regulation standards, in order to negotiate with US universities. This implies trust in the quality standard from every university participating in a given agreement.

### Implementing credit recognition

As mentioned, the system of implementing credit recognition with US universities was developed at the Freie Universität Berlin in a decentralised manner, relying on the initiative of teaching staff in each Department/Institute. Indeed, teaching staff is actively involved in each stage of the recognition process, with the University administration (in the form of the Student Exchange Office) playing a facilitating role. This means that the procedures used to implement credit recognition vary from Department to Department and to an unknown extent from Professor to Professor.

Students choose their courses in accordance with their study programme requirements, with the help of their advisor if needed. There is flexibility in fulfilling the requirements since everything is regulated at the level of the department: for instance if the exact subject is not

available, which is often the case, the student has to write a paper on the precise subject within the framework of a non overlapping course in the USA. The global rule is to adapt, to encourage mobility and to be flexible when problems arise. Professors try to avoid the situation where a student has to take a further course back in Berlin to meet their study programme's requirements.

**Development of the credit recognition approach in the TransAtlantic master programme (TAM)**

The credit recognition approach practised within the TAM is based on the experience developed within the Euromasters (highlighted above).

The Euromasters – now a joint degree - is based on a two-years study programme providing 120 ECTS degrees (30 ECTS per semester) and representing a total workload of 3,600 hours. Participating universities offers specialist modules divided into several courses, each module lasting one semester and granting 30 credit points. There are however some variations between universities in the number of courses to be taken, in the course load and in the requested exams per course. The last semester is dedicated to the writing of the Master's thesis, which is also worth 30 credit points. The Euromasters involves European universities participating in the TAM, as well as the University of Washington (Seattle).

The same approach was developed for the TAM. The whole programme grants 120 ECTS, divided as follows:

- 30 credit points for the mandatory core module in the University of North Carolina (1<sup>st</sup> semester)
- 30 credit points for each one of the following two modules, that are conducted in one or two different universities belonging to the Tam consortium (Semester 2 and 3)
- 30 credit points for the final Master thesis, conducted in the same university as the one chosen for semester 3 (Semester 4)

Within each university, examination committees are responsible for the allocation of grades and credits.

Source: Humboldt University of Berlin, Studien- und Prüfungsordnung für den europäischen Masterstudiengang Sozialwissenschaften (Euromasters), 2010

Not surprisingly, experience and inter-personal relations play an important role in credit recognition arrangement. When a question or an issue arises, the professor in charge of the credit recognition at the Freie Universität Berlin will contact their peer in the US institution. This is rare as generally speaking, students plan their study well in advance and every problem that might occur tends to be solved before the arrival at the US University. Within the TAM, the different universities report to each other twice a year and any change in the modules offered by one of the Universities is discussed at the consortium level.

**Tools to support credit recognition**

Tools are not university-wide but specific to each Department/Institute. However, the researchers found evidence of the use of **conversion tables for credit values and grades in a few departments**. Table below shows the example of the converting table between ECTS, European and US graduation systems used within the TAM.

**Example of the conversion table used within the TAM**

ECTS	Bath	Paris	Berlin	Siena	Madrid	Prague	UNC (grad)
A=excellent	70%	16-20	1.0-1.5	29-30	8.5-10	A= vyborne	H
B=very good	64%-69%	13-15	1.6-2.0	27-28	7-8.4	B=velm I dobre	H- / P+
C=good	57%-	11-12	2.1-3.0	24-26	5.1-6.9	C=dobre	P

ECTS	Bath	Paris	Berlin	Siena	Madrid	Prague	UNC (grad)
	63%						
D=Satisfactory	50%-56%	10	3.1-3.5	18-23	5		P-
E=Sufficient	49%		3.6-4.0				L
F=fail	0%-48%	Below 10	4.1-5.0	Below 18	4.9and below	F= neprospeł	F
A=excellent	70%	16-20	1.0-1.5	29-30	8.5-10	A= vyborne	H

Source: TAM Grade Conversion Guidelines, 2010-2012 (interview with the TAM coordinator at the FU Berlin)

It was mentioned during the interviews that, despite the use of common grading conversion guidelines between the University of North Carolina and the ECTS grading system, every university where the students graduate has its own recognition process. In the US University for instance, the grades of H, P and L do not convert simply to the more traditional A, B, C system. In general an H corresponds to an A+, a P corresponds to an A or high B, and an L corresponds to a lower B or C. Even within the US universities, individual professors may differ in their interpretations of the grades H, P and L and their meaning. Conversion of credits and grades are therefore always subject to individual adjustment by the TAM coordinators.

Memoranda of understanding are in use. They do not elaborate on grading conversion, since the recognition and credit transfer is left to the discretion of the home HEI.

Furthermore, there is no evidence of formal learning agreements (except the non-bidding list of courses submitted in the application process), no evidence of formal course equivalences and no evidence of lists of courses to choose from. This might be explained by the fact that everything is managed at the Department/Institute level. As a consequence, the exchanges tend to be based on interpersonal approaches, with the advisor and the student having a common understanding of needs, rather than formal protocol.

#### Protocol for credit recognition: Example of the procedure in the JFKI

FU students wishing to apply for exchange to the USA universities are most of the time undergraduate students. As already highlighted, mobility at the master's level is more difficult.

The application process is organised centrally by the Student Exchange Office. Students must submit:

- An application form and a proof of matriculation at the University
- A CV in English
- A study proposal in English detailing their course interest, why they want to study in the USA, what they want to study, what do they expect from the exchange, as well as a list of American universities they want to study at with detailed reason for their choice (2 to 3 pages)
- A complete list of courses they have followed during their curriculum, with the associated grading
- An official TOEFL exam result of minimum 100 points
- Two recommendation letters from Professors in English (or one letter for one-semester exchange)

Once applications are submitted, the Student Exchange Office operates a first selection of candidates, which are invited for an interview. A selection committee including academic representatives then selects the final list of students that the University will recommend to the US universities, according to the number of exchange positions available (about 57

positions are available every year, some only for two semesters, other for one semester). But the final decision on the intake of the students is the responsibility of the US universities.

With the exception of the application process, the rest of the mobility and credit recognition process is organised at the Department/ Institute level. As such, the rest of this section is based on the protocol as organised in the JFKI, a representative example of practice at the FU Berlin, (even if small variations exist between the different departments).

Once the student has been selected, they should get in touch with their advisors in their specific Department/Institute in order to finalise the list of courses and to prepare their study abroad. Any problem in terms of mandatory subjects to be followed and credits are discussed and solved by the advisors. If problems tend to be anticipated and solved in advance, the real process for credit recognition starts when the students come back from their US exchange University. In the JFKI it is organised as follows:

- The students come back with a transcript of records detailing which courses they have followed, their grades and a document they have prepared explaining what they have studied during the course and what is the equivalent course at the FU Berlin
- The student then has to meet each individual Professor at their Department/Institute who is responsible for the equivalent courses at the FU Berlin – e.g. if it was required in their curriculum to follow a course on a specific North-American literature movement, they have to go to the Professor responsible for this specific course within their Department/Institute with their transcript of record and the essay/exam they have produced in the US exchange University.
- Each professor concerned then looks into the transcript of records and the essay/exam and converts US credits in ECTS credits and grades, based on a conversion table used within the Institute (but not university-wide) and according to its own experience and understanding.
- The professor then issues a recognition document, which is submitted by the student to the Head of the Examination committee of the JFKI, in charge of the formal recognition of study and credits.

### Perceptions of staff

The staff members who were interviewed within the framework of this case study are generally satisfied with the process. Staff involved in students' mobility focus primarily on the final objective, that-is-to-say sending students abroad and giving them the chance to study in a US HEIs and to live a unique cultural experience. As a consequence of the years of experience and exchange of practices, they have developed a flexible approach in order to solve all problems likely to arise before, during, and after the exchange period, including issues related to credit recognition.

### Perceptions of students

No students were interviewed within the framework of this case study. Instead, interviewees from the Student Exchange Office and teaching staff were asked about the feedback they receive from students. They reported a positive feedback on the whole, with no major problems issued. The only major issue is the course requirements that FU Berlin's students have to follow if they want to go abroad, with some correspondence issues in US universities. Some students might as a consequence have to complete their courses abroad with an additional course in their Department/Institute once they are back. But everything is done to arrange the situation for the students, facilitate the exchange and find easier solutions.

### Success factors of this approach

A number of factors can be identified that account for the Free University of Berlin's successful student mobility experience with US HEIs.

- **Experience of the teaching staff** in charge of the recognition process are used to working with US partners and are very knowledgeable of the US credit system

- The role of the **Advisers** (Professors responsible for individual exchange students) within every Department/Institute, acting as personal liaison between the FU Berlin, the US Institution and the student
- The use of **transcript of records**, that are pretty descriptive in terms of content, expectations and output in every single course
- The **adoption of a decentralised, flexible, and adaptable approach** to credit recognition, with every issue being solved on a case-by-case basis between the student and the adviser. In most cases, the idea is to favour student mobility while ensuring that course requirements from specific FU departments are fulfilled. In case of problems, the adviser tries to find the best solution for the student and to avoid his/her having to complete missing courses once back in Germany.
- **Cooperation between partner universities** in case of problems: **trust** created over the years through common work, personal contact, knowledge and further collaboration on credit recognition as well as the development of common approaches is an asset

What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

Furthermore, the following aspects can be recommended as good practice:

- **Political visibility given to student mobility and international-oriented strategy**  
Although credit recognition is not considered as a burning issue in itself, international cooperation and student mobility is a clear priority for the University. It strongly encourages students to go abroad and foreign students to come to study at the Free University Berlin. Over the years this has nevertheless fostered the development of a credit recognition approach which is focused on the needs of students and staff and able to help solve problems and conflicts in study programmes and study systems.
- **The Department-led, decentralised system**  
It enables a flexible approach focused on students' needs and problem solving. Although credit recognition is subject to individual interpretation by each professor in charge of single course recognition, this approach has proved to be successful in the sense that every issue is discussed within a department, and/or with the host US University in case of problems.
- **Realistic approach:**  
The University is aware that problems in recognising credits from the USA exist but it fosters a realistic approach, based on individual Professors trying to solve any matters that might arise instead of blocking students' mobility. Advisers try to solve any issues that might occur prior to departure on a case-by-case basis while the student plans his/her trip and his/her study programme. But they are also available during the stay if anything occurs.
- Last but not least, the **TransAtlantic Masters Programme (TAM)** is a successful example of a study programme led in cooperation between European Universities and the University of Chapel Hill. It has a well-developed approach in terms of credit recognition and harmonisation of credit systems.



## 9 Student mobility at the Technical University of Braunschweig (Germany): Example of a dual degree cooperation

### Key Facts

All students at the Technical University of Braunschweig have the possibility to apply for a mobility experience in a US university, but certain Departments of the University are more encouraging of this practice than others. The most prolific department for international exchanges is the Department of Mechanical Engineering, where a third of all students spend time abroad.

The Technical University of Braunschweig has signed exchange agreements with a number of US HEIs<sup>171</sup>. In addition, the Technical University of Braunschweig is a member of ISEP (International Student Exchange Programmes), which gives students the possibility of attending programmes in 113 US HEIs. Moreover, students are entitled to propose an international exchange with a university with which the Technical University of Braunschweig has not currently signed a formal agreement.

These agreements concern various forms of mobility, including summer schools, short-term stays of one or more semesters, research internships lasting 3-4 months, and dual degrees programmes. Currently, a Dual Degree Programme in Mechanical Engineering is in operation with the University of Rhode Island. This allows students to acquire both a *Master of Science* degree from the University of Rhode Island and the *Diplom* from the Technical University of Braunschweig. The Technical University of Braunschweig is in the final stages of planning a dual degree with Purdue University in Aeronautical Engineering, and is planning further dual degrees with other universities.

The Technical University of Braunschweig has a long history of student exchanges with US HEIs, beginning in the 1970s. However, the exchanges became more organised over the last 15 years, triggered by an exchange programme with the University of Rhode Island which began in 1987 and has since developed into the above-mentioned dual degree.

International student mobility is valued highly by the Technical University of Braunschweig, which maintains agreements with HEIs in many different countries (EU, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Cuba, China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea). US HEIs figure prominently in these exchanges, with approximately 50 students from the University of Braunschweig attending US HEIs per year, and a similar number of US students attending the Technical University of Braunschweig.

Contact: International Office, Bültenweg 74/74, 38106 Braunschweig, io-sekretariat@tu-braunschweig.de. Website: <http://www.tu-braunschweig.de/>

### Context for cooperation with the US

The Technical University of Braunschweig is a prime example of the progressive internationalisation of the German higher education system. Founded in 1745 as Collegium Carolinum, it is Germany's oldest university of technology and currently a member of the TU9, a group comprised of Germany's most renowned technical universities. Conscious of the need to prepare students to work in an increasingly global marketplace, the university has established numerous forms of collaboration with universities in other parts of the world. Universities in the United States figure prominently in these links, but are not considered more important than collaboration with other parts of the world, including Europe, South America, and Asia. The University's international outlook began in the 1970s, but has increased substantially over the last 15 years. Today the University has an International Office whose role it is to promote international exchanges of staff, students and practices. The office has recently been awarded a prize by the Humboldt Foundation for its welcome

<sup>171</sup> Namely: Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta), Purdue University, State University of New York at Albany, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Nebraska at Omaha, University of Oklahoma, University of Rhode Island, University of Tennessee at Martin, University of Utah (Salt Lake City), University of Wyoming at Laramie, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Blacksburg)

centre, which provides advice and support to international students and researchers, in order to facilitate their stay.

Student mobility is considered a crucial part of the Technical University of Braunschweig's internationalisation strategy. It allows students to add an important linguistic and cross-cultural dimension to their technical education. By building strong research links with universities in other parts of the world, student mobility also helps strengthen the university's academic output by enabling faculty members to learn from and contribute to research projects conducted in other countries. The importance of credit recognition and transfer for student mobility is acknowledged by the Technical University of Braunschweig, which has developed sophisticated systems for interpreting the credit systems of universities in other countries, including the United States, and creating equivalences between the different credit systems. Today, all courses at the Technical University of Braunschweig make use of ECTS. The use of ECTS began in the late 1980s to enable the University to participate in the developing Erasmus Programme of the European Union. Today, the University uses ECTS to promote academic recognition between Braunschweig and universities in all other parts of the world, albeit with certain adaptations to accommodate the particularities of each partner.

#### **Overall approach to managing student mobility and recognition**

The university maintains a decentralised system for managing student mobility. Although there is an International Office which aims to facilitate international exchanges, each Department within the university is responsible for initiating contacts with universities in other countries (often through joint research activities) and managing the processes of credit transfer and recognition. As a result, there is considerable variation in the procedures used across Departments. The International Office intervenes in order to formalise the contacts made by separate Departments by encouraging the signature of a memorandum of understanding between the universities concerned. The aim of these memoranda of understanding is to help cultivate an environment of trust between the teaching staff of the universities involved in the international exchanges, an important precondition for the mutual transfer and recognition of credit. The Memorandum of Understanding does not, however, contain any details regarding procedural questions, which are left for each Department to decide and implement.

#### **Developing credit recognition with the US**

Efforts to develop credit recognition with US universities have met with a number of obstacles. These obstacles have sometimes been greater than those encountered when cooperating with universities in other parts of the world.

The obstacles include:

- **Differences in the system for calculating credits**

The ECTS is based on a calculation of student workload and this is indeed the way the University of Braunschweig uses it. In the US on the other hand it is based on the number of contact hours purely. As a result, German and US credit systems mean different things, causing difficulties for students when it comes to transferring credits earned across different universities. At the Technical University of Braunschweig different Departments have overcome this problem in different ways. Some of them (including the Department for Mechanical Engineering) have created an equivalence system between US credit hours and ECTS credits based on a 3 to 5 ratio (i.e. 3 US credit hours, which normally reflects three hours of teaching time, are equivalent to 5 ECTS credits at Braunschweig). Other Departments use a different ratio (e.g. a ratio of 1 to 2 was mentioned), and still other Departments prefer to avoid simple mathematical conversions and base the transfer of credits on appreciation of the content of the modules taken by the students when abroad.

- **Differences in credit recognition procedures used across Departments**

The differences in procedures to recognise credits used by different Departments at the University of Braunschweig can present students with difficulties by reducing

transparency and therefore adding a degree of uncertainty to the mobility process. Some Departments, such as the Department of Mechanical Engineering and the Department of Architecture, have a Departmental Co-ordinator who signs off any decisions regarding the equivalence of US courses taken by professors, checking them against pre-defined Departmental procedures. In other Departments, including Business Administration, each professor acts autonomously.

- **Differences in the grading systems**

Germany uses a numerical grading scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the best), whereas US HEIs use an alphabetical system. Moreover, a simple translation from a numerical to an alphabetical scale is insufficient, as the grades are weighted differently (in particular, the German grading system is more rigorous especially at the upper end). In the early days of cooperation with the US, this created a problem both for the purposes transferring the credits, and more importantly for the purpose of reassuring US faculty members of the quality of German students applying to attend US HEIs. This problem was overcome by means of exchange visits between faculty members of US HEIs and the Technical University of Braunschweig, who were able to understand the meaning of the different grading systems. The result was the creation of equivalence tables, which allow for a straightforward conversion of the different grades.

- **Restrictions placed on US universities by ABET**

ABET, a US accreditation agency for college and university programmes in applied science, computing, engineering and technology, applies restrictions to the number of credits that students enrolled in US college or university programmes can transfer from universities outside the US. The maximum number of credits that can be transferred by a US university from the Technical University of Braunschweig is currently 6. So, for students who are enrolled in the Dual Degree in Mechanical Engineering with the University of Rhode Island, only 6 out of the 30 credits that they must accumulate by the end of their Dual Degree can be transferred from Braunschweig (i.e. 24 credits must be based on course work at the University of Rhode Island). The Professors of Mechanical Engineering at the Technical University of Braunschweig are not happy with this imbalance, but have agreed to be flexible about this in order to make the Dual Degree work. The imbalance in the credit transfers between US Universities and Braunschweig apparently has consequences for the number of US students who choose to spend time abroad. The low number of US students, in turn, affects the number of German students who can spend time at US universities. This is because of the mechanisms for financing the exchanges (e.g. through DAAD or Fulbright scholarships), where the number of German students funded to stay at a US university depends on a degree of reciprocity over time in the number of US students who stay at Braunschweig.

- **Differences in the duration of university courses**

The academic semester begins and ends earlier in US HEIs than at the University of Braunschweig. This can present a disincentive particularly to US students thinking of moving to Germany, who may need to use up two US semesters in order to fulfil the requirements of one Braunschweig semester. The Technical University of Braunschweig attempts to overcome this problem by shaping different programmes which might be more attractive to US students. One such programme is the International Summer School in Science and Engineering, which runs from June to August and provides credits which students can transfer back to their home universities. Another such scheme is the Summer Programme offered to students at Purdue University. These students arrive in Braunschweig in January to work as research assistants for three months at the German Aerospace Agency (for which they are awarded with transferrable credits). During this time, the Technical University of Braunschweig offers these students German language classes. In April, the students then begin a full semester at the University. This scheme allows US students to obtain a varied work and study experience using up only one semester at Purdue University. Particular Departments have also attempted to overcome the differences in the duration of university courses by introducing a degree of flexibility in the structure of the courses attended by US students, particularly by providing them with the opportunity to take exams at an earlier stage. It was also noted by interlocutors

at Braunschweig that the earlier semester system in the US also presents an advantage: by allowing US students to arrive in Germany before the start of the German academic semester, it provides them with more time to become acclimatised to their new environment, attend language classes, meet colleagues, etc.

- **Differences in the curricula**

Both the Technical University of Braunschweig and the US HEIs have a curriculum which must be fulfilled by students in order to graduate. When a student spends a period abroad, he or she will need to identify which courses are needed for their Braunschweig curriculum are to be transferred from abroad. The content of these courses needs to approximate the content of the courses at Braunschweig. This needs to be verified and approved by the professor in charge of the equivalent course at the Technical University of Braunschweig. While 100% overlap in the content of courses never exists, professors exercise their discretion in assessing whether the similarities are sufficient.

- **Differences in the quality of universities**

Students are allowed to propose exchanges with universities with which the University of Braunschweig has not signed a formal agreement. However, since the quality spectrum among US universities is wide, the selection committee (more on this below) may find it difficult to decide on the admissibility of certain courses in the US HEIs that are not already known to them.

- **Organisational differences**

Departments at the University of Braunschweig are not always mirrored precisely by the equivalent Departments at US partner institutions. For instance, the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Braunschweig encompasses Chemical Engineering, whereas these are considered two separate disciplines with two separate Departments in most US universities. These organisational differences have sometimes added a layer of difficulty to student and faculty efforts to seek input and approval of the international exchanges.

- **Language barrier**

Whereas German students do not tend to have difficulties fulfilling the language requirements to attend a US university, this is not the case for US students thinking of spending a semester or more in Germany. The proficiency threshold imposed by US HEIs on students who wish to study in Germany is high (a minimum of six semesters of German language training). Engineering students, who already have very packed curricula, often have difficulty meeting this requirement. As such, all of the interlocutors interviewed for this case study concurred that the language barrier represented a bigger problem than any possible difficulty concerning credit recognition. Indeed, the US student interviewed explained that the vast majority of students from Purdue University (where she is based) chose to do an exchange programme at the University of Karlsruhe because all courses are taught in English there. The Technical University of Braunschweig is attempting to overcome this problem by inviting teaching staff from US universities to teach at Braunschweig for one or more semesters. However, it was generally felt that transferring to full English-language education was not an option.

### Implementing credit recognition

The credit recognition approach used by the Technical University of Braunschweig evolved in the context of the Erasmus programme in the late 1980s. This system was then applied to cooperation with US HEIs, and those from other regions of the world. Some new practices were incorporated in order to accommodate the particularities of the US system (mentioned above). Thus, for example, a mathematical system of converting US credit hours to ECTS credits was created and is used by a number of Departments to overcome the differences between US credit hours and the credit system applied at Braunschweig. New requirements were also introduced for certain categories of US students, including those applying to do doctoral studies at Braunschweig. Whereas most Master's degrees in European universities involve a research element, this is less often the case with US Masters. Only US students who have completed a research-based Masters course are eligible to apply for a PhD course

at Braunschweig. Similarly, in order to obtain a Bachelors degree at the Technical University of Braunschweig US high school students are expected to take additional courses. However, besides these modifications, the credit recognition system applicable to US HEIs is based on the same principles as those used within Europe.

As mentioned, the system of implementing credit recognition with US universities was developed at the University of Braunschweig in a decentralised manner, relying on the initiative of teaching staff in each Department. Indeed, teaching staff are actively involved in each stage of the recognition process, with the University administration (in the form of the International Office) playing a facilitating role. This means that the procedures used to implement credit recognition vary from Department to Department, with some professors applying much stricter rules than others when it comes to ascertaining the equivalence of courses in US HEIs. In order to facilitate the process, each Department provides students with a list of pre-defined courses at the US HEIs for which equivalences have already been ascertained. Students can choose courses that are not included in this list. Indeed, they can also choose to spend time at a University that has not signed a formal cooperation agreement with Braunschweig. In such situations, the professor in charge of the corresponding course at Braunschweig makes a judgment based on the content of the US course, the workload required and the teaching style (whether the course includes lectures, seminars and/or practice classes, etc). Some department have a Co-ordinator who approves the decision of the professor.

Not surprisingly, the system depends on high levels of trust between the universities in order to work. According to interlocutors at the Technical University of Braunschweig, the level of trust between faculty members in the US and at Braunschweig is not always as high as one would like, especially on the part of the US HEIs, who face strict restrictions imposed on them by ABET, the US accreditation agency (see above for more details). Efforts to overcome this problem have included visits to US HEIs by academic staff of the Technical University of Braunschweig and vice-versa. The International Office of the Technical University of Braunschweig also plays an important role in the cultivation of trust by encouraging the signature of memoranda of understanding between the respective universities. These cooperation agreements aim to create an environment of trust between academic staff operating in the respective universities and highlight opportunities for students to participate in international exchange programmes.

### Tools to support credit recognition

The Technical University of Braunschweig uses specific instruments to support credit recognition with US HEIs:

- **Memorandum of Understanding:** In the case of the Technical University of Braunschweig's cooperation with US HEIs, these are only signed after exchanges have already been set up between the faculty members of the relevant universities. As such, the MoU is only intended to formalise an existing relationship. The MoU is therefore a document which operates at a political level; it does not contain any procedural information about the exchanges in question.
- **Learning Agreement:** These play a crucial role in facilitating the mobility of students between the Technical University of Braunschweig and US HEIs. Students are asked to submit a draft learning agreement (which they build with the help of their academic advisor) to the Selection Committee which approves their application to study abroad. The learning agreement (or statement of purpose) outlines the academic programme which the Braunschweig student proposes to follow at the US HEI (and vice versa). Because of the differences in the timing of semesters, the list of courses available to choose at Braunschweig is not always available in time for US students at the pre-selection stage. For this and other reasons (including incomplete information about the nature of different courses) students are allowed to finalise / change the list of courses they propose to follow upon arrival at the host university.

- **Course equivalences:** The Department of Mechanical Engineering, which organises the Dual Degree with the University of Rhode Island and accounts for the largest number of international exchanges with the US, has a pre-defined list of courses which students can choose at the University of Rhode Island. These courses are paired up with the equivalent courses (and hence credits) available for Mechanical Engineering students at Braunschweig. The list of equivalent courses is built by the Department Co-ordinator in consultation with the corresponding specialised professors. Whilst the easiest and quickest option for a student is to choose courses from this list, which include all the core courses which a student must complete, they do not need to restrict themselves to this list. Students can choose courses that are not on the pre-defined list but must get these approved by the corresponding specialised professor and the Department Co-ordinator.
- **Conversion tables for credit values and grades:** As mentioned above, the Technical University of Braunschweig's decentralised system of managing student mobility means that each Department operates its own procedures for recognising and transferring credit points and grades obtained by students who have studied in US HEIs. The Department of Mechanical Engineering uses a simple mathematical ration of 3 to 5 for the conversion of US credit points to ECTS, while other Departments use a ratio of 1 to 2. The Department of Mechanical Engineering also uses a conversation table to interpret and transfer the alphabetical grading system used in US HEIs to the numerical system used in Germany.

#### Protocol for credit recognition: Example of a Dual Degree

German students wishing to do the Dual Degree programme with the University of Rhode Island must formally apply during their first year of study at Braunschweig. They must submit an application form, a transcript of records, a draft learning agreement, an application fee, a letter of recommendation and an English proficiency report from their Braunschweig programme co-ordinator. These documents are assessed by a Selection Committee made up of a representative from the International Office and representatives from five different Departments (Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Humanities and Business Administration). The draft learning agreement should indicate the student's dual degree plans, including the courses that he or she wishes to take at the University of Rhode Island and the courses he or she wishes to transfer from the Technical University of Braunschweig (as mentioned above, the maximum number of credits that students can transfer from Braunschweig to the dual degree programme is 6 out of 30). There is a predefined list of 'core' courses that students must complete, either in Braunschweig or (via their equivalents) at the University of Rhode Island. Students can choose other optional courses as they see fit.

Once the Selection Committee has approved the application, the students must finalise their learning agreement and get this approved by both their advisors in Braunschweig and Rhode Island. This agreement, or student programme, serves as a guide to make sure all requirements are met. While at the University of Rhode Island, Dual Degree students must write a master's Thesis (9 credits) in English, and complete 15 credits of course work. Together with the 6 credits transferred from their first year of study at the University of Braunschweig, this completes the required 30 credits to graduate. As long as the courses chosen at the University of Rhode Island are included on the list of pre-defined courses prepared by the Department of Mechanical Engineering, the equivalences are confirmed immediately. If they are not, the corresponding professor and Department Co-ordinator will need to confirm their validity.

#### Perceptions of staff

Staff in charge of the recognition process at the Technical University of Braunschweig is generally satisfied with the process. The University's International Office mentioned it had faced difficulties with some staff members, who have refused to recognise credits earned by their students in other universities, but this, it seems, is an exception to the rule. (On these occasions, the International Office cannot enforce a change but must liaise with the Department's Dean for Studies, who enters into negotiation with the staff member in

question). In the Department of Mechanical Engineering, staff members appear very positive. There is a good, collegial spirit among the academic staff, who coincide in their interest in developing student exchanges with universities that are conducting research of interest to the Department.

### Perceptions of students

Student perceptions also appear to be positive on the whole. The US student interviewed, studying Aeronautical Engineering at Purdue University, expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity she has to study at the Technical University of Braunschweig. She highlighted as positive the flexibility and support shown by her Braunschweig professors (e.g. letting her take her exams before German students in order to return to the US in time for the start of the new US semester) and the opportunity she had to do an internship at the German Aerospace Agency. She also spoke positively about the choice of courses she was allowed to take and about the ease with which the credits and grades she earned at Braunschweig would be transferred and recognised back at home. She was not aware of any students who had faced difficulties getting their credits recognised. If a problem arose, she was satisfied with the channels available for her to seek redress, mentioning both her advisers at Braunschweig and at Purdue.

In terms of difficulties, the student mentioned issues to do with the timing of the semester system (which she felt were managed satisfactorily) and the fact that she would have appreciated a greater amount of administrative information before arriving. The example she gave was some initial confusion which arose when it came to her residency and work status. As a US student in Germany, she was initially told that she did not need a work permit in order to do the internship at the German Aerospace Agency, but upon arrival she was asked for one. This was later clarified. There was also initial confusion regarding her health insurance, where her US health insurance company assured her it would cover her stay in Germany but upon arrival she was informed it did not meet German standards. She was obliged to take out a German health insurance. In terms of the credit recognition system, the one area she felt could be improved was to allow Engineering students to earn credits from taking German language courses at Braunschweig. This is currently not recognised.

### Success factors of this approach

A number of factors can be identified that account for the Technical University of Braunschweig's successful student mobility experience with US HEIs.

- Cooperation between the International Office and academic staff. There is a clear appreciation on the part of these actors of each other's roles and the importance of cooperation. The International Office sees the benefits of allowing the academic staff to spearhead the process of setting up student exchanges with US HEIs, and only intervenes in order to facilitate the process e.g. by encouraging the signature of Memorandum of Understanding. The academic staff in turn look to the International Office to provide political visibility and assistance with the administration of the student mobility e.g. assistance with the student application procedures.
- Transparency of objectives and working procedures. The decentralised approach used by the Technical University of Braunschweig would not work if it did not operate on the basis of transparent objectives and procedures. This applies as much to relations between the International Staff and the academic staff as it does to the students concerned and for relations between the university and the US HEIs. Transparency is facilitated through the use of learning agreements, conversion tables, course lists and MoUs.
- Flexible and gradualist approach. Both the International Office and the members of staff acknowledge that cooperation with US HEIs is often challenging. Overcoming the obstacles, including the credit requirements imposed on US HEIs by their accreditation agency, requires flexibility and a gradualist approach. Student mobility between Braunschweig and US HEIs began with modest exchanges involving undergraduate

students and has today developed into a wide range of exchange programmes, including sophisticated forms of cooperation in the form of Dual Degrees.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

- The Department-led, decentralised approach used by the Technical University of Braunschweig can be used as an example of good practice for other universities. It is clear that unless the academic staff see the benefits of fostering student mobility, no amount of encouragement from central administrators can ensure it will happen. For this reason, it is crucial to enable academic staff to travel and cooperate with colleagues in the US (and other countries), as only when collaborative projects exist at the research level will faculty members see the value of sending their students to attend courses and contribute to another university's research output.
- Braunschweig's flexible use of credit recognition tools (course equivalence tables, credit conversion ratios, etc) is also exemplary. These tools provide templates which facilitate the inevitable bureaucracy that students and staff members need to complete. However, given the variety of degrees and institutional set-ups which exist in the field of education, the use of these tools must not become rigid requirements. Members of staff in particular should be allowed to adapt the tools as they see fit in order to ensure that course requirements are met by the students spending a period abroad.
- The centrality given to the learning agreement. The central role given to the learning agreement in the process of selecting students for exchanges with US HEIs has a number of benefits. It not only allows students to shape the kind of degree which most interests them; it also allows academic and administrative staff to make sure that the students' choices are compatible with the requirements of the degree programme. At the same time, it forms the link between the two universities, as it needs to be approved by the students' advisors in the home and host HEI.
- Political visibility given to student mobility via adoption of memoranda of understanding. The Technical University of Braunschweig's approach to MoUs can be recommended to other universities. The MoUs are used purely as a tool to formalise cooperation which already exists between faculty members/Departments in Braunschweig and US HEIs. The MoU does not attempt to prescribe credit recognition procedures. It gives a signal to students, staff and other interested parties that the University trusts the partner organisation and is interested in international cooperation.



## 10 Student mobility at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands)– A university with thorough quality assurance procedures

The aim of this case study is to provide an overview of the University of Groningen's activities and procedures that were put in place to facilitate student mobility towards the United States. As the University of Groningen comprises of highly autonomous and independent faculties, the case study devotes particular attention to the Faculty of Arts which offers a study programme entitled American Studies both at the levels of Bachelor's and Master's programmes. The study programme is comprised of courses that were completely designed for the American Studies Bachelor's programme. The main feature of the programme is that it offers extensive possibilities to study in the United States for its students during the first autumn semester of the third year of their university studies. There are about 300 BA's students in American Studies with 80 first year students starting every year.

Groningen has a very international outlook. The university and its faculties have built strategic partnerships with higher education institutes across the world, including the USA and Canada. The university has more than 50 either university or faculty level agreements with various higher education institutes from the United States, although the degree and formality varies e.g. there are significant differences between the numbers of student exchanges per agreement. The network of the American Studies programme comprises nine US higher education institutes: Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ball State University, College of Charleston, Furman University, Northern Arizona University, University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, University of Saint Louis, and University of California, Riverside.

The University of Groningen has joint and double degrees with its partners in other countries, but none with American partners. Examples include the Euroculture MA's joint degree programme (1.5 year), in which the University of Groningen and other 10 universities participate. The students can pick any of the universities involved and apply to complete one semester elsewhere. Unlike joint degrees, double degrees are agreements only between two institutions e.g. marketing studies between the University of Groningen and the University of Newcastle in the UK.

Although the majority of student mobility is focused on Europe, North America is a significant player. There are around 70-100 incoming and outgoing BA or MA study programme exchange students every year. There has been cooperation with the US and student exchanges for the past 22 years. The first international relations were based mainly on personal contacts and most of them are still functioning, but there are also new agreements (an increasing numbers) established mainly through official channels such as links between the various international offices. The University of Groningen is also member of numerous international networks such as the Coimbra Group or Asea Uninet, a network of Asian and European universities.

The annual review of the university from 2009 states that there were<sup>172</sup>:

- 2.478 international students from over 102 countries
- 727 outbound exchange students
- 1.828 incoming international degree students
- 1.500 PhD students of which 840 are international

Just in the Faculty of Arts (American Studies) in the past five years there were 109 outgoing students to the United States and 83 incoming US students.

Overall the system used for credit recognition is based on the ECTS approach for which Groningen has a ECTS label. There is in built flexibility in the system for mobility but students are guided in the types of courses they take and also which part of their study to go abroad for, in order to make the process as transparent and transferable possible. There is a system of transferring of credits and grades which is reviewed and moderated in cooperation with the international mobility coordinators, professors and students. There is also significant support for the US students to prepare them for living in the Netherlands. As well as providing a significant number of courses (115) in English (<http://www.rug.nl/ocasys/rug/vak/showpos?opleiding=3333>), the Faculty of Arts also organises the

<sup>172</sup> Source: Annual review of the University of Groningen 2009:  
<http://www.rug.nl/corporate/universiteit/feitenEnCijfers/PDFJaarbeeld/RUGJaarbeeld2009EN.pdf>

Dutch studies programme. This programme was started in particular to meet the needs of the US students. The programmes cover Dutch history, culture and language. The Dutch Studies programme is offered throughout the year (total of 12 courses). One of the courses is called the Dutch Culture and Society Lecture Series which consists of nine different lectures on a variety of cultural topics such as Literature and History but also Film, Media and Photography. There are approximately 100 international students participating in the programme per semester, mainly from the following subject fields: arts, business and law.

Contact: International Office at the Faculty of Arts:  
<http://www.rug.nl/let/voorzieningen/internationalOffice/contact>

International Service Desk: <http://www.rug.nl/prospectivestudents/contact/index>

Dutch Studies: <http://www.rug.nl/let/onderwijs/dutchstudies/index>

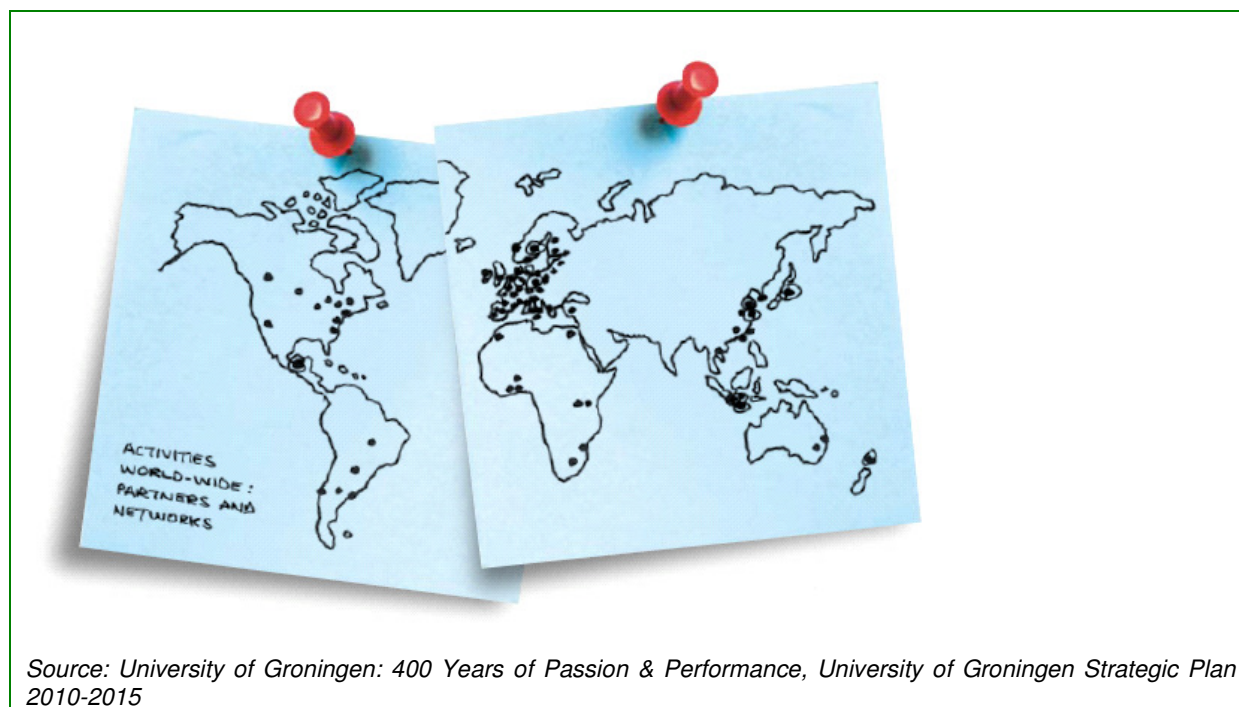
### Context for cooperation with the US

The University of Groningen is located in the Northern Netherlands. The city of Groningen has a population of about 190,000 including a very large proportion (about 25%) of students. The university was established in 1614 and is one of the oldest and largest in the Netherlands. It is structured around nine independent faculties and nine graduate schools who provide higher education for almost 28,000 Bachelor's and Master's degree students. There are 4,897 FTE staff including 413 FTE professors<sup>173</sup>. The faculties of the university cover a very broad range of disciplines: Economics and Business, Behavioural and Social Sciences, Theology and Religious Studies, Arts, Medical Sciences, Law, Spatial Sciences, Philosophy, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Across the various faculties the university offers 58 Bachelor's programmes and 114 Master's programmes. Internationalisation is increasingly important and at the heart of this are student exchanges. This is reflected in the number of English taught Master's (83) and Bachelor's programmes (8). The university also offers among the English Master's programmes 15 double degrees.

The strategy of the university for the period of 2010-2015 puts significant emphasis on internationalisation and strives for increased levels of international student and staff mobility.

*'The number of international students is set to rise to around 5,000 in the coming years and the percentage of staff from abroad set to increase to 20% of academic personnel. At the moment, PhD students from abroad are already in the majority in some parts of the University. Assuring quality will be of essential importance in admitting increasing numbers of students. The admission and selection of foreign students is a task that increasingly occupies those involved in supervising and planning the internationalisation process.'*

<sup>173</sup> Source: Statistics is based on the information provided on the website of the University of Groningen, Facts and figures:  
<http://www.unav.es/servicio/informacion/statistics>



Source: University of Groningen: 400 Years of Passion & Performance, University of Groningen Strategic Plan 2010-2015

The University of Groningen is the only Dutch university to have received both the ECTS label and the Diploma Supplement from the European Union. Five years ago the Dutch HE system put in place a new comprehensive quality control system. As part of this system, when the university agrees on new partnerships there are thorough procedures in place for these quality assurance purposes. The university looks at all the course descriptions; the courses that are available and open for the Dutch students to take when studying abroad; the study books and literature used; in addition in the case of the US universities, it looks at its national rankings.

Proficiency in English is considered a must for staff at the University of Groningen and is a central part of their internationalisation strategy. Therefore, about six years ago the University required all staff to undergo an English language test and teaching staff who did not obtain a high enough mark were asked to take an English language course to improve their language skills.

Facilitating staff mobility as well as student mobility is a core part of the drive towards internationalisation. However there are more obstacles to overcome due to issues such as family commitments and the organisation of mobile periods abroad. Usually it takes quite some time to arrange all the aspects of a staff exchange. The university mainly uses the Fulbright scheme to facilitate staff mobility.

#### Developing credit recognition with the US

There are a number of difficulties encountered in student exchanges and developing credit between the University of Groningen and the US.

It is currently much more difficult to attract US students to the university due to the shrinking budgets available for student exchanges programmes at the partner institutions. US students also seem to prefer to spend shorter periods abroad, such as a few weeks, rather than a full semester. As the student exchanges both at the university and the Faculty of Arts are based on bilateral agreement stating that an equal number of students has to be 'exchanged', this has meant introducing some sort of flexibility.

For example, in the future the universities might be able to negotiate the quota e.g. four American students from a US university participate in a few week long course in the Netherlands and in return the University of Groningen can send a student to the US partner university for a full semester.

### **Structure of the American Studies BA programme**

*'The academic year is subdivided into two semesters. Each semester consists of up to 14 weeks of instruction, with a mid-term reading week, and a four-week exam period after the end of each semester. Normally, students can earn 30 credits per semester, or 60 credits per year. The credit point system used at the University of Groningen is based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which has been adopted by almost all universities across Europe. One credit point corresponds to 28 hours of studying, and most courses within the Faculty of Arts are worth 10 ECTS.*

*The Bachelor degree consists of a Major of 120 ECTS earned in core American Studies courses, as well as a Minor of 30 ECTS and 30 ECTS worth of electives. The elective courses can be chosen from a wide range of Minors offered elsewhere in the Faculty of Arts (or beyond), or you may select various courses to suit your interests. In principle, you will take the designated Minor (consisting of courses in the wider domain of American Studies) at one of our nine partner universities in the U.S. Those students who are unable to study in the U.S. will choose a designated Minor from a list of subjects approved by the exam board.'*

Source: <http://www.rug.nl/let/onderwijs/bachelor/americanstudies/studieprogramma/index>

Another aspect of student exchanges that has to be taken into account is that there are significant differences between the American and Dutch teaching approaches. In the United States education is much more practise oriented compared to the rather theoretical Dutch system. This means that comparing the two systems is not really possible, however it also has significant advantages. The students who experience both systems finish their studies with a good mixture of different approaches and can gain many benefits from their semester in the US through e.g. getting engaged with real projects such as filming something or taking on very narrow and specific courses which are not available at the home institution. Furthermore there is a different type of attitude towards success in Dutch students who generally aim to pass their exams but they do not always aim for the best grades. Getting to know other cultures is motivating and experience shows that students studying abroad, adopted the more competitive attitude and after returning to the Netherlands and they aim more to improve their performance and grades.

The US partner institutions and the University of Groningen apply different schedules and timing for their study years. In the US, partners use trimesters, where the first trimester ends before Christmas and the second starts right at the beginning of January. In the Netherlands the university year is based on a two-semester structure, where the first semester ends at the end of January and the second starts in February. While this difference between the schedules does not cause problems for the Dutch students as they finish earlier in the United States, US students need to return before the official end of the semester in the Netherlands to be able to start the second trimester in January. To overcome the issues caused by the different schedules the University of Groningen has to be very flexible by e.g. allowing the US students to take their exams earlier, submit their papers from the US, or even to organise exams with the help of the US professors after they return home.

The Faculty of Arts uses learning outcomes to describe the courses, including descriptions on the content of the course, expected achievements and the level of the given courses.

The student mobility exchange procedures require a hands-on approach and high-levels of flexibility. US students are 'service-minded' and they need particular attention when they are abroad. Furthermore student exchanges required changes in the curricula, mainly because all students during the first semester of the third year in American Studies programme are abroad. To accommodate the needs of the incoming students the university has doubled the number of programmes taught in English during the past couple of years. Ten years ago all courses were taught only in Dutch.

### **Implementing credit recognition**

The ECTS system provides mainly advantages in terms of European mobility. Previously it was harder to ensure the harmonisation of degrees and the different levels. The US system has significant differences which have been addressed through adapting the ECTS and also through ensuring that students take courses in line with those in the curricula at the

university. Having and implementing the ECTS label is core to facilitating any type of credit recognition on exchange programmes with Groningen.

A full semester load at the University of Groningen equals 30 ECTS, which is about 4 courses, therefore in general a course taken in the United States is considered to be worth about 7.5 ECTS credits.

The students in the American Study programme go abroad during the first semester of the third study year, but the incoming students can arrive either during the first or the second semester to the Netherlands. There was a compulsory course introduced in the American Studies programme in 2005, which limits Dutch students to going abroad only during their first semester of the third year. Students have some freedom in selecting courses from the host university's course offering, but there are also some general restrictions and limitations, such as students need to study subjects in line with their curricula at the home institution preapproved by their home department. The study advisors help with the students' choices if needed. The main rule is that courses have to be in line with the curricula at the University of Groningen.

For incoming students, there is a list of all the English taught courses available and updated annually to help with their orientation.

There are no issues regarding the recognition of the US Bachelor level degrees in the Netherlands. American students with bachelor's degree can continue their studies at the Master's programmes offered by the Dutch higher education institutions.

Setting up and managing the university and faculty level exchange agreements is quite time consuming (this is true for the whole organisation of EU-US student mobility).

#### Tools to support credit recognition

**Formal agreements:** Student exchange is based on formal agreements usually signed for three years. The agreements usually contain:

- The number of exchange students – an even balance for the two universities
- Whether accommodation will be provided by the parties, and the conditions apply
- Duration of the semester
- Description of the credits accepted

Agreements can be initiated either by the teaching staff or by the international offices at the central university or faculty level. The incoming students who come to the university through the agreements of the Faculty of Arts can study any of the courses offered by the whole university. There are no restrictions in the faculty level agreement to only choosing courses taught at the Faculty of Arts.

**The learning agreement:** The learning agreement is part of the application package students have to submit to their faculties when applying for an exchange period. Learning agreements are used to describe the proposed study programme per semester, including the course unit code at the host institution, the course unit title and the ECTS credit equivalence of the courses. The learning agreement forms are also applicable, if the student needs to change the preapproved course selection after arriving to the study abroad period.

**Course equivalences:** Course equivalences are not used at the Faculty of Arts.

**Lists of courses to choose from:** A list of available courses to choose from is only accessible for the incoming students, the outgoing students have to consult the course offering of the future host institutions, but the study advisors of the various study programmes are open and available to provide guidance and help to the students in making their choices.

**Conversion tables for credit values and grades:** To acknowledge the credits gained at the host institution there are further requirements to bear in mind regarding course selection. In general students are allowed to study subjects, which correspond to their study levels. For

example a student in the third year has to take on courses abroad corresponding to third year level studies, mainly courses over the 300 level. There might be some exceptions, but only after considering the quality and workload of the course in mind.

**Course Numbering System at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill**

*'In general, the system of course numbering works as follows:*

- 50–099 First-year seminars and other courses reserved for special purposes
- 100–199 Introductory undergraduate courses
- 200–399 Undergraduate courses considered to be above the introductory level.
- 400–699 Courses open to undergraduate and graduate students
- 700–999 Graduate courses'

Source: <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/requirements.html>

Translating the grades obtained during the study abroad period provides partner universities with major challenges. The US universities use a grading system with letters, while the Dutch system comprises a numeric scale from 1-10, where 10 is the best grade possible. Furthermore the value of the different grades is not comprehensively standardised. To be able to adopt the grades obtained during the semester abroad, the international mobility coordinators of the University of Groningen keep a very close eye on the students and are actively collaborating with the professors from the hosting university to review the students' performance. As a general rule the University of Groningen translates the grades obtained abroad as the following table shows.

US grade			A	B	C	D / E / F
NL grade	10	9	8	7	6	5 and below = fail

There is no distinction made between the various US institutions, the same grade conversion table is used for every exchange student at the Faculty of Arts. The grade obtained during the study abroad period counts towards the final degree of the student.

**Protocol for credit recognition**

This chapter introduces the procedures applied by the Faculty of Art, American Studies department, for a study abroad period to the United States. The first step towards a study abroad period is that the students have to submit their application, including a study plan to the Exam Board. The study plan includes the description of the selected courses and of the aim of the study trip in the form of a motivation letter. The study plan has to be approved by the Exam Board of a given study programme in advance.

The Exam Board comprises two professors of the given study programme and the Student Advisor of (as an advising member) the same study programme. Each study programme has its own Exam Board and a dedicated Study Advisor. As there are approximately 60 BA courses and 130 MA courses at the university, there are almost 200 Study Advisors working at the University of Groningen. The reason for engaging the Study Advisors in the Exam Board is that she / he has a much closer relation with the students, therefore knows them very well and can provide more personalised views on a student including opinions as to whether the exchange programme selected and the choice of the university abroad is adequate. The members of the Exam Boards are appointed for a year.

The selection of the students who can go abroad is based on a ranking system. The students who applied for an exchange period are ranked based on their GPA (average of the grades). The top 20 students, who fulfil all the eligibility criteria – have already completed 1.5 years of studies and have no study delay i.e. passed all compulsory courses – are automatically accepted. In the last year (2010) there were 30 students applying for a semester in the US, but only 20 had passed the required exams, therefore 10 were not eligible for the exchange. Due to the increasing number of students, it might also happen in the future that competition will increase further. Currently those who are unsuccessful in getting a scholarship to the US, still have the possibility to go abroad somewhere else, usually to another European higher education institute or undertake a designated minor at a

different department at the University of Groningen. The central University has many other contacts and exchanges with universities from the US which can be considered.

Once students have been accepted into the exchange programme they then have to apply to the individual US institutions. After the submission of the application and the start of the exchange period, students still have the possibility to change the preapproved programme slightly, but this requires re-approval by the University of Groningen, by their home department. The university applies strict rules regarding the study abroad period to ensure the overall quality of education.

When students return to their home university, they have to submit a report on their activities abroad. To motivate them to do so as soon as possible the university releases the last 1/4<sup>th</sup> of their university grant only after the report is submitted. The students also receive a 'Marco Polo' grant provided by the university, when studying in the US, which covers their airfares but not much more. Students can also apply for a special student loan of up to €10k from Dutch banks, which was designed and made available especially for students who decide to study a semester abroad.

### Perceptions of staff

The majority of the credit recognition and approval is done through the Exam Board and this is transparent. The only issues reported are on a more practical level of the differences between departments and staff members in terms of willingness to teach in English.

### Perceptions of students

To understand the perceptions of the exchange students there was a group discussion organised by the university with participation from five students with different backgrounds.

The first was a junior student from the University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill, studying history and political science double major and women studies minor. She has already done 1.5 years worth college credits even before starting her university studies. She always wanted to study abroad, and when looking for opportunities in the home university's online search engine, based on the parameters and criteria she set (e.g. price range, what and where she wanted to study) the University of Groningen was listed top. She did some more research, talked to former UNC exchange student who spent as semester at the University of Groningen, and decided to apply for a study period there.

A sophomore student from the UNC Chapel Hill also selected the University of Groningen as a study abroad destination. She studies communications as a major and history as minor at her home institution. Her choice of going to Groningen and which programme to choose was influenced by the help she received from an Advisory at UNC and by her personal interest in the country.

The three Dutch students participating in the conversation are studying on the American Studies programmes, therefore their motivation was already predefined by their original study programme choice. Two of them spent a semester in 2010 at UNC Chapel Hill, while the third student went to the Furman University in South Carolina. Their decision on where to apply was partially influenced by their study advisor's suggestions, as the Faculty wants to send the best students to the best American universities, and by their perceptions based on the 'stories' heard from former exchange students.

Both American and Dutch students found the first stage of the application procedure, i.e. getting into the exchange programme at their home institution fairly straightforward, there is help on hand and guidance. The application to the foreign institution and especially choosing adequate study courses is slightly more difficult, but there is adequate information and help available.

In order to select four courses, the Dutch students going to UNC had to select four first and four second choices. The final selection was based on the availability. Exchange requirements regarding the course selection narrow the choices down quite a bit. Furthermore attention has to be paid to the course descriptions, which in some cases was misleading, requiring students to change their original study plan. Another issue is that the

course catalogue available at the time of the application is not necessarily valid for the following study year as well, therefore student need to change their original study plan sometimes. At Furman University the final selection of the four courses, to be studied by an exchange student, is done by the university. Furman University, due to the relatively small number of exchange students, is very well organised and student centred.

All students agreed that the courses they studied and are studying are in line with their studies, and most of the time the courses they ended up with are the same as those indicated on the original learning agreement.

There is however a basic difference in between the procedures of UNC and the University of Groningen: while the courses of the Dutch students are preapproved, American students can only ensure that they get recognition for the courses selected when they arrive back home. They have to go to the specific departments (covering their major and minor) in turn to have it approved by a professor. The professor responsible for the given study programme decides whether you get credits for the courses and at which credit level (100, 200 or 300 credit level). There are no centralised procedures in place, the process is fully dependent on the department. As a result, American students know that their courses will count into their final degrees but are not sure about exactly how much they count at the beginning of the study period. It is more likely that the courses studied abroad will count towards their electives rather than their majors. Unlike the Dutch students, there is no grade translation for the US students, the system contains only fail or pass for the courses completed abroad.

All of the students agreed that going on an exchange period provided with them with many benefits, including academic, social and cultural experiences. Dutch students gained motivation from the American students' mentality: 'Failing is not an option, everyone does the work'. Furthermore the opportunity to study more specific courses was highly appreciated by them e.g. a course on native American rights represents a significant added value for one of the students as she could do more focused, in depths studies, which are highly complementary to her Dutch courses. Another student could take four different courses from four different departments, something that is not usually possible in the Dutch system.

The differences of the teaching methods were also highlighted as an interesting part of the experience on both sides. While Dutch students praised the easier exam period due to the continuous workload during the semester, American students enjoy the freedom given during the semester and the possibility to concentrate their efforts only during the exam periods. Although the same study load is required in both cases the approaches are significantly different: in the Netherlands there is not much time spent in the classroom while in the US there is more work in the classroom and less self study.

Based on the experience with the University of Groningen, one of the American students started to look around to see whether she could continue her MA studies in the Netherlands. She is considering applying to a Master's programme at the University of Amsterdam.

### Success factors of this approach

The approach applied by the University of Groningen can be characterised as being very rigorous, through the quality assurance procedures put in place and flexible at the same time. Flexibility is needed both at the level of institutions and individuals involved. International mobility coordinators pay attention to the differences in the needs, culture and mentality of American and Dutch students to find the best ways to facilitate student exchanges at the level of individuals.

At the institutional level, the university tries to ensure enhanced interfaculty communication, especially between the different international offices to improve the procedures and to facilitate student mobility. There are joint meetings organised to harmonise processes and to increase collaboration between the highly autonomous faculties. The central administration also contributes to the operative tasks regarding student exchanges by providing a dedicated International Service Desk who helps in arranging resident permits and visa applications for the incoming students therefore reducing the workload of the faculties.



What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

**The way in which the exchanges are organised through the exam boards and student advisors:** The Student Advisors have a much closer relations with the students applying to go abroad and can therefore provide more personalised views to a student including opinions as to whether the exchange programme selected and the choice of the university abroad is adequate.

This gives a good structured approach to the period abroad and leaves no doubt for the Dutch students as to what will be achieved during the time on exchange in the US.

## 11 University of Warsaw (Poland) Flexibility and mutual trust

### Key Facts

The students of the University of Warsaw interested in spending part of their studies in the US can contact either the University International Office or their departments to check the possibilities. Generally, the cooperation is coordinated by the University International Office, although some initiatives are undertaken at the department's level. In consequence, some mobility programmes are only open for students of certain department or the students of certain departments have preferential treatment by application.

The University of Warsaw has currently 5 agreements of cooperation with US universities:

- with Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago (the bilateral agreement for students and researchers/lecturers),
- with Indiana University Bloomington (bilateral agreement of mobility of students and workers),
- with University Notre-Dame (bilateral agreement solely on the mobility of workers),
- Garstka Scholarship Programme, available only for the Historical Department (unilateral, study visits of Polish lecturers in the US)
- Oregon Eastwashington University on unilateral acceptance of American students at the University of Warsaw (but there is little interest on behalf of American students).

The mobility of researchers/workers is also possible within the Fulbright Scholarship. With regard to the joint/double degree programmes, there are very few at the University of Warsaw: there is a Global MBA programme at the Department of Management, such agreements are also available for the students of the Department of Law and the Department of Psychology, the Interdisciplinary Institute 'Artes Liberales' and some departments of nature sciences.

The mobility cooperation with Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago is the best-established cooperation and covers the highest number of participating students. It was initiated by the Institute of International Relations (at the Department of Journalism and Political Science) in 2001 (agreement signed in 2003) and is operating since that time very effectively. Cooperation is bilateral and offers yearly 20 places for outgoing Polish students and the same number for incoming American students, although the interest on the American part is much smaller. The mobility cooperation also includes the cooperation of researchers/lectures and short-term study visits for students (currently suspended). The cooperation functions effectively mainly due to the personal contacts between the universities, mutual trust and flexibility in recognising study periods abroad as part of the study in Poland. It helps to overcome the difficulties in transfer of credits.

Contact: University International Office, 00-927 Warszawa, ul. Krakowskie Przedmiescie 26-28, Palac Kazimierzowski, <http://www.bwz.uw.edu.pl/>, +48 22 55 24 010

[WWW.apac.org.pl](http://WWW.apac.org.pl) – information about cooperation agreement with NEIU provided by the Institute of International Relations

### Context for cooperation with the US

The agreement with Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago (NEIU) plays a special role in the cooperation of the University of Warsaw with the US due to its scale, intensity and bottom-up history of its beginning. Even more significance has this agreement for the Department of Journalism and Political Science.

The agreement was initiated by the Institute of International Relations of the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences in 2001 as a result of the student-led initiative of two students. Two friends choose to go to university, one studied at the Institute of International Relations of the University of Warsaw, the other in the US at the Northeastern Illinois

University. Informal student meetings evolved into a formal relationship between the two institutes. In April 2001 the students of both institutes met during the Visegrad Youth Conference organised by the Young Diplomats' Centre Association. As a consequence, several further meetings of students and lectures of both institutes took place: during the conferences at the NEIU 'Europe' (February 2002), 'Asia' (February 2003), 'Student Research and Creative Activities Symposium' (April 2002, April 2003) and during the conference in Poland 'Polish-American Students' Meetings' in November 2002. The formal cooperation agreement was finally signed in May 2003 and includes two forms of mobility for Polish students:

- **Group mobility** – it was organised till 2006, since then this form of mobility is suspended by the NEIU. It was a 3-week study visit in the US during summer holiday, during which Polish and American students participated together in the summer courses organised by NEIU. The courses included selected issues concerning functioning of American political system and current problems of global economy. Each course corresponded to 30 teaching hours at the University of Warsaw and 3 credit points. The courses were recognised as part of the study programme at the University of Warsaw. The Polish students participated as well in visits in American public administration institutions. This form of cooperation was open only for students of Institute of International Relations and is currently suspended by the American partners due to financial restrictions.
- **Individual students' mobility** – the students have possibility to spend one semester of their studies at NEIU. They can study free of charge, but are obliged to carry the travel and accommodation costs in the US. The period of study in the US is recognised as part of the study in Poland. This form of cooperation is open for students of Department of Journalism and Political Science and for all students of other departments, which show interest in participation.

Due to the special role of the Institute of International Relations in initiating this mobility agreement, the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences has preferential treatment in sending students and researchers to the US, although mobility is open to students of all departments. In total there are 10 places each semester for student exchanges between the University of Warsaw and the Northeastern Illinois University. In total six places are reserved exclusively for the students of the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences and four places are distributed by the University to students from other departments. Interest in the agreement from the University of Warsaw is high and applications for a limited number of places are often oversubscribed. The American partner in fact very often accepts 1-2 more Polish students than the limit set in the agreement. On the American side, interest is much smaller with only 1-2 students participating yearly. Participating students study free of charge in the US, though no financial assistance or scholarships are available. According to the participating students however, the costs of living and studying in the US are lower or at the comparable level as in Europe for Erasmus students.

Cooperation with US HEIs plays different roles in the internationalisation strategy of the University of Warsaw and of the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences. Although the cooperation with US-universities at the University of Warsaw is increasing in scale and numbers, the University prioritises developing cooperation with EU and neighbouring countries. The reasoning behind this is that the US-universities show little interest in cooperation with Poland (indicative of a small number of American students showing an interest in mobility). Furthermore, from the University of Warsaw's point of view participating in the mobility programmes with EU universities is very often facilitated by the access to EU funding programmes (including scholarship programmes such as Erasmus or various research programmes).

On the opposite, collaboration with the US and with Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) is very important for the Institute of International Relations and the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences. This is their main collaboration agreement and it enables the mobility of students, the mobility of researchers and lecturers, as well as joint research projects. There is at least one US lecturer visiting Poland each year who delivers lectures for the Department's students. The Polish lecturers participate in the academic conferences

organised by the NEIU and have established personal contacts with US staff. For several years work has been underway to organise a joint diploma programme with NEIU. Delays in developing the joint diploma programmes are mainly associated with procedural difficulties at the NEIU. This is a public university obliged to conform with the state law, accreditation of courses is one of the most important problems to be solved and the shifts in the American university policy towards international cooperation. Other difficulties can be attributed to the credit transfer issue discussed in further detail in the following sections. Although the Institute for International Relation is initiating contacts with other US-universities, progress has proved difficult to date. It would seem that the American universities are generally not eager to participate in mobility programmes with Poland and also American students are not especially interested in studying in Poland/Europe. The institute is also currently planning to take part in the EU Atlantis project. The idea behind it is that it should encourage more American students to study in Poland.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

The recognition of studies in the partner university and transfer of credits is the most difficult and challenging part of the cooperation between US and Polish partners. Generally, the recognition practice is not a finite process, but it is evolving all the time and more effective solutions are searched. With the planned participation in joint Atlantis project, the problem of effective rules for recognition of credits is increasing in significance.

The main difficulties that the University of Warsaw had to overcome to pursue this cooperation include:

- **Differences in system of calculation of study workload** - The main difficulty in comparing US credit points to the ECTS is that one course in Poland typically lasts for 30 hours, whereas at NEIU - 45 hours. At the same time, there is a difference in the workload of self-study required in both cases. It is not possible to recognise the courses in the simplest way 'one Polish course = one American course'. Generally, the University of Warsaw claims that each ECTS point is worth 2 American credit points. In effect, Polish students usually gather 24 ECTS points when studying at NEIU and this is accepted although the number is lower than the usually 30 ECTS credit point workload required in Poland. American students studying in Poland however also usually take 24 ECTS credit points.
- **Differences in offered courses at both universities** - other differences include the fact that the subjects at the American university are also much more diversified in their level of advancement. The courses at the NEIU are ranged from '100' to '500', where the '100' courses are the least advanced. In fact, the courses '100' are not advanced enough to be recognised as university courses at the University of Warsaw. They are regarded as to be at the high school level. Besides, not all courses required as obligatory part of studies in Poland are available at the NEIU. In consequence, Polish students sometimes must sit some exams after going back to Poland. Finally, the NEIU sometimes restricts access to the most popular courses for international students. From the other side, due to the language problems American students can in fact only choose between courses in English, what means that their choice is very limited. Students in politics are in relatively good situation, as they can choose between set of undergraduate and graduate courses in political science, international economics and international relations (<http://www.uw.edu.pl/en/page.php/stud/dge.html>). American students studying other subjects have less choice, such as mathematics and natural sciences or even socio-economic subjects (e.g. sociology, economics, etc.) and humanities (e.g. history, philosophy) in particular at the undergraduate level. Limited choice of courses in English is one of the main factors discouraging American students for coming to Poland.
- **Differences in the grading systems** – the Polish grading system includes numbers '2 to 5' with '5' being the highest grades, whereas the American system includes letters. This problem is however the simplest to overcome, especially as the University of Warsaw has similar experience during Erasmus programme.

- **Differences in duration of semesters** – the semesters at the University of Warsaw and at NEIU are not equivalent in time. Usually, the Polish students going back to Poland have longer winter holidays. Although these differences may cause problems and confusing, they facilitates Polish students the recognition of their studies in America in Poland. They have time to eventually sit additional exams and are not delayed with regard to other students.
- **Differences in organisation of studies** – the duration of undergraduate and graduate studies in the US and in Poland is different. The undergraduate studies in Poland last 3 years, whereas at the American university it lasts for 4 years. The problem was overcome by definition the number of courses the students can choose at NEIU and not the year of study this course should belong to. 2<sup>nd</sup> year Master students from Poland are registered as graduate students in the US and are obliged to follow 3 courses with minimum 9 credit hours. They can choose courses '300' or '400'. Other students (including 1<sup>st</sup> year Master students in Poland) are registered as undergraduate students in the US and are obliged to follow 4 courses per semester with at least 12 credit hours. They can choose courses '200' and '300'.
- **Language** – this is not a problem for Polish students, however this is a factor diminishing the interests of American students in the cooperation.

### Implementing credit recognition

The process of implementing credit recognition is evolving all the time. The whole process is based on the mutual trust between the University of Warsaw and the Northeastern Illinois University which is coupled with a dense net of personal contacts between two universities. Apart from this, the University of Warsaw bases on its experiences in Erasmus programmes and organises the mobility in similar way. The participating departments, in particularly the Department of Journalism and Political Science, are also very flexible in recognition of studies at the US HEIs. They focus more on the number of courses the students have to follow in the US than the number of credits to gather. They are also flexible in recognition of American courses as equivalences of Polish ones and if it is not possible the student has a possibility to sit exams with repetition of courses and/or semester.

This approach to credit recognition developed in practice and only later was formalised in the rules available for students (<http://apac.org.pl/docs/regulamin.pdf> - the most updated regulations for recognition of credits within the cooperation with NEIU, dated 18.04.2007). However, as written above, it is very flexible process and not everything is clearly formalised. The approach to credit recognition in the cooperation with US NEIU is still developing and more effective solutions are searched.

### Tools to support credit recognition

The University of Warsaw uses a certain tools to support credit recognition, although the process is very much dependent on the Dean's and international coordinators' decisions and counselling.

- **Memorandum of Understanding:** In the case of the University of Warsaw's cooperation with US HEIs, the MoU is only intended to formalise an existing relationship. The MoU is therefore a document which operates at a political level; it does not contain any procedural information about the exchanges in question.
- **Learning Agreement:** learning agreement plays a crucial role in facilitating the mobility of students between the University of Warsaw and US HEIs. After being accepted for taking part in the mobility, students are obliged to submit a draft learning agreement. The process of drafting the learning agreement must to be consulted with the department's or university international coordinators. This is crucial to avoid further problems with recognition of study periods abroad. For various reasons students are allowed to finalise / change the list of courses they propose to follow upon arrival at the host university.

- **Course equivalences:** this is not available. The practice is that either professors teaching certain subjects or Deans decide if the course at American and Polish institutions are equivalent (by comparing the curriculum of the certain subject).
- **Lists of courses to choose from:** Students can choose from the whole offer of the partner universities with only few exclusions imposed by the American university (e.g. most popular courses at NEIU, courses than require pre-requisite). The Polish university doesn't not impose any restrictions regarding the choice of courses by international students.
- **Conversion tables for credit values and grades:** Although the system of managing student mobility is decentralised at the University of Warsaw and each Department may apply its own procedures for recognising and transferring credit points and grades, the general rule applied by majority of departments and suggested by the university international office is that 1 ECTS is worth 2 American credit hours. However, as mentioned before the numbers of credits acquired at American university do not need to be equal to 30 ECTS points per semester regularly required in Poland.

#### Protocol for credit recognition

Among Polish students there is substantial interest in studying in the US and competition for places both at the University and the Department's levels is high. The recruitment process is separate at the Department of Journalism and Political Science and at the University of Warsaw (for students of other departments), thus the procedure is similar. The recruitment process commences twice a year (May and December). Depending on the number of applications, the University/Institute either organises the selection of documents and personal interviews with the applicants or selects participants according to the documentation provided. Usually, there are 2-3 persons on the waiting lists in the event of cancellation. Individuals on the waiting list are required to prepare all of the necessary documentation (including an American visa and confirmation from the bank regarding the availability of sufficient funds). Very often students on the waiting list are also invited to study in the US, as the American side tend to accept more Polish students as set out in the formal agreement.

The selected students are obliged to prepare learning agreement prior to departure with all of the subjects he/she is willing to study in US. The subject choice is usually discussed with the department's international coordinator or the students' Dean. The semesters in Poland and US are not fully comparable and Polish students studying in the US are sometimes required to complete and pass additional exams once back in Poland regarding some core courses not available in the US. The requirement for students to sit additional exams does not occur often, this is largely because the participating departments appreciate that the study programmes and system in Poland and in the USA are not the same. The key assumptions of this exchange, confirmed in the cooperation agreement, is that the students will have their studies abroad recognised in their home universities and therefore will not be required to repeat the study year. The Polish students choose courses from the full catalogue of the American university, though it would seem access to some courses is limited for Polish students, in particular in case of popular courses. It also happens that access to a certain course is dependent on completion of its prerequisite.

The system of recognition of credits and conditions of participating in the mobility exchange is decentralised at the University of Warsaw and depends on the department. At the Department of Journalism and Political Sciences, the international coordinator plays the most important role in counselling students on the choice of the courses at the American university. The general rule is that students should not take the '100' courses (the level is comparable to the Polish high school level), rather they are encouraged to take variable courses that also correspond to their year of study. As written above, the graduate students must take courses '300' and '400', undergraduate – '200' and '300'. The information on the current courses run by the NEIU is available online at the website of NEIU ([www.neiu.edu/Current%20Students/Current\\_Students.html](http://www.neiu.edu/Current%20Students/Current_Students.html)). The detailed information of the

content of the courses is not available before departure, however the student organisation APAC (Association of Polish-American Cooperation) tries to support the choice of courses by students, provides syllabuses of courses and shares experiences of other students participating in the exchange. It would seem that the Polish side is not focused on the accumulation of credit points, but rather requires from students a certain number of courses to be graduated from during the study in the USA. The undergraduate students are required to pass 4 undergraduate courses and 1 course for international students per semester. The graduate students are required to pass 3 graduate courses and 1 course for international students per semester. The chosen courses must be related to the field of study and possibly also vary in their thematic.

It would seem that there are no problems in the recognition of courses as elective ones (in particular in the final years of study the programme consist mainly of elective courses). In the case of obligatory courses, the curriculum is compared with the compared with the NEIU curriculum offer. The Director of Studies then decides if description of the content of the course delivered by the American partner is comparable to the content of obligatory course in Poland and if it can then be recognised. If not, students participate in distance learning and then sit the exam. They do not need to prolong their studies in this situation.

Out of 20 participating students, typically one student per year is required to pass some additional classes once back in Poland. It happens usually in the situation, when the courses graduated abroad cannot be recognised as equivalents of obligatory courses in Poland. This is rather rare situation, as the outgoing students are usually in their final Master years and their study programmes include mostly elective courses. The recognition of study at American university at the University of Warsaw is decentralised and much dependent on the department's authorities of the student. However, most departments are flexible in recognising the American courses as equivalents if it is possible by comparison of courses curriculums and accept almost all courses as electives.

#### Perceptions of staff

The perceptions of staff engaged in the implementation of the mobility cooperation of University of Warsaw with Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago are definitely positive. Their attitude is that although there are differences and problems, the right attitude with some flexibility could easily overcome them. The Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago is also regarded as well-ranked university, so there is little concern about the quality of courses. The staff of the Institute of International Relations is in particularly engaged in further developing the cooperation with American partner, as they see many important advantages for both students and researchers/lecturers. They include first of all, joint conferences and research projects, but also lecturers given by American professors for department's students. The Institute of International Relations is currently planning to start a joint project within Atlantis programme, as well as for some time they are trying to start a joint degree programme with NEIU (no success due to problems at NEIU's side). They hope that participation in joint projects/degree programmes will help to encourage American students to study in Poland.

#### Perceptions of students

Student perceptions also appear to be positive on the whole. The students of the Institute of International Relations are very much engaged in promoting this mobility agreement, supporting the outgoing and incoming students and promoting the knowledge about American politics among the students. They are organised in form of the student organisation called APAC (Association for Polish-American Cooperation, [www.apac.org.pl](http://www.apac.org.pl)). They do not only provide information about the realities of living in the US and about the organisation of studies and courses at NEIU, but they also provide similar assistance for American incoming students and try to encourage them that it is worth to study at the University of Warsaw (e.g. at their website they publish a blog of incoming American student currently studying at the Department). At the website of APAC, Polish students interested in the exchange can find information about the recruitment procedure, organisation of studies at NEIU and available courses, rules concerning the choice of courses and recognition,

formalities and costs, information about prolonging the study period at NEIU or finishing the study at the American university. The Polish students are generally very interested in taking part in this cooperation and the competition for places is very intense. In practice, there are also no complaints about the system of recognition credits gained abroad by the Polish students. Neither the university's or department's international coordinators received any.

Ok but this does not say much about aspects such as: how are they informed about what courses they can take? How do they know how these will be recognised? Any issues? What about those who have to sit additional exams?

#### Success factors of this approach

Clear rules together with a flexible approach taken by the departments and good communication are the key success factors of this cooperation agreement.

Flexibility and mutual trust reflect a long and well established cooperation between the Polish and US participating institutions. However these factors are sometimes compromised when the issue of comparability of studies and the transfer of credit points between both partners is considered. Overtime, faculty members from both sides have developed and maintained strong personal contacts facilitating greater mutual trust and respect in addressing concerns associated with the transfer of credit points for example. This in turn has led to high success rates for participating students.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

- **The bottom-up initiative of initiating the cooperation.** Due to the fact that the cooperation was initiated not by the university authorities but by the students and department's staff, there are many personal contacts between the two institutions. In consequence, mutual trust facilitates implementation of the agreement and overcoming all occurring difficulties.
- **Flexibility by recognition of credits.** The difficulties in lacking comparability of studies in US and in Poland are overcome with the flexible approach to recognition of credits. The focus is more on the content of the studies and not on the accumulation of credits points. This approach appreciates that the exchange has not only a learning objective, but it also serves as getting to know other country, starting academic and friendly personal contacts, checking other study systems.
- **Important role of learning agreement.** The role of the learning agreement is not only to facilitate the selection of courses, but it also helps to plan the study abroad and avoid problems with recognition of credits after return.
- **Important role of international coordinators in counselling students.** The role of the international coordinators is very important in recognition of studies abroad for Polish students. They support outgoing Polish students (and incoming also) at all stages, in particular before their departure and help them to choose courses which could be easily recognised at the home university.
- **Promoting and supporting the exchange by student organisation.** The role of student organisation is not to overestimate. They do not only provide information and help to share the experience between students, but they also promote the exchange among both Polish and American students.



## 12 University of Navarra (Spain) – excellence as the cornerstone of student mobility with the US

### Key Facts

Internationalisation has always been a key priority of the University of Navarra, since its foundation in 1952. In particular, cooperation with the United States of America was developed as soon as 1964, in the form of support of the Harvard Business School for the set up of the MBA programme of the International Graduate School of Management (IESE). Other schools then developed their own framework for cooperation, including exchange of staff, teachers and students as well as project-based agreements or other ad hoc cooperation.

With regard to the exchange of students, cooperation with US universities is implemented through exchange agreements only. There are no free movers outgoing to US universities or incoming to the University of Navarra. Also, no joint degrees were developed with US universities. Therefore, this case study looks at the issue of credit recognition within the scope of exchange programmes.

It must be noted here, that there are various forms of cooperation agreements for the exchange of students, which are detailed in the fiche: some are formal and set up at the institutional level, some are informal and developed for each individual student. In addition, the study programmes of some schools have a strong international focus (such as the International Media Programme (IMP) developed by the School of Communication), and the exchange period is a prerequisite for the completion of the degree. Other schools such as, ISSA - School of Management Assistants, have developed specific schemes enabling students to continue their studies in the US.

The University of Navarra has several campuses: in Pamplona, San Sebastian, Madrid and Barcelona. With regard to the departments of the campus of Pamplona, a total of 25 agreements were signed with US universities: except for 1 which is general for all the schools, signed with the Yale Summer University, all the 24 other ones are signed between schools or departments. For example, the School of Economics and Management developed 6 agreements, the School of Communication and that of Engineering – respectively 5. The School of Medicine has agreements with 4 universities, School of Humanities and Social Sciences – 2 and the School of Law and that of Pharmacy and Nutrition – 1. Table below shows the detail of agreements between each department.

Agreements between the University of Navarra – Pamplona campus and US universities

Schools at the University of Navarra	Nb. of agreements	Universities
School of Law	1	Chicago-Kent College of Law
School of Medicine	4	Boston University Columbia University Rochester University Wayne State University
School of Communication	5	George Washington University University of Missouri University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University of North Texas University of North Texas at Austin
School of Engineering (TECNUN)	5	California Polytechnic State University California State University, Fresno Colorado State University, Dept of Electrical and Computer Engineering Pennsylvania State University University of South Florida
School of Economics and Management	6	Bentley College Goizueta Business School - Emory University New York University - Stern Business School University of Washington University of Southern California

		University of Waterloo
School of Pharmacy and Nutrition	1	University of Florida
School of Humanities and Social Sciences	2	Washington&Jefferson College Presbyterian College
General agreement	1	Yale Summer University

The University of Navarra was composed of a total of 13,197 students in 2008/2009, amongst which 214 were international students. In addition, 272 students of the University of Navarra took part in a mobility programme abroad<sup>174</sup>.

As shown in table below with regard to the schools at the campus of Pamplona, 90 students are taking part in a programme of exchange between the University of Navarra and a US university in 2010/2011, as compared to 95 in 2009/2010. In 2010/2011, there are more students going to the US than incoming from the US, with a total of 56 outgoing students and 35 incoming ones. This is a change from the previous academic year where a majority of students (51) were incoming and 44 were outgoing. In 2009/2010, the schools which had more incoming students than outgoing ones were the School of Communication ( 18 vs. 6) and that of Economics and Management ( 20 vs.12). This is due to the high number of classes that are taught in English, and therefore attracts US students.

In 2010/2011, the department with the highest number of exchange students is the School of Economics and Management, with 17 incoming students and 19 outgoing ones. The School of Medicine and of Communication count 14 exchange students: in Medicine, there are 6 incoming students for 8 outgoing, in Communication there are 5 incoming for 9 outgoing. Finally, the School of Law has 6 outgoing students, and no incoming ones for this year.

Number of students taking part in exchange programmes between the University of Navarra and US universities: 2009/2010 and 2010/2011

Schools at the University of Navarra	2009/2010		2010/2011	
	Incoming <sup>175</sup>	Outgoing <sup>176</sup>	Incoming	Outgoing
School of Law	1	5	0	6
School of Medicine	3	7	6	8
School of Communication	18	6	5	9
School of Engineering (TECNUN)	9	14	6	14
School of Economics and Management	20	12	17	19
School of Humanities and Social Sciences	3	1	1	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>59</i>

The international relations of the University are centralised at the level of the university where the office is particularly responsible for:

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.unav.es/servicio/informacion/statistics>

<sup>175</sup> Incoming students from the USA

<sup>176</sup> Outgoing students to the USA

- managing and maintaining university-wide international agreements;
- supporting the individual departments in their international relations, with regard to international mobility of professors, researchers and students as well as providing information about university and pre-university systems of other countries, their grading systems, etc.;
- providing assistance to international students through the International Student Assistance (with an International Mentoring Programme, development of cultural activities for international students, production of an informational newsletter for international students);
- managing exchange programmes (such as Erasmus/Socrates, Leonardo etc.).

The individual departments deal directly with inter-department cooperation agreements: this includes the development of the agreements through contacts with potential and actual partner universities, the management of those agreements, and their implementation. The departments are also concerned with practical issues related to the mobility period of students, including daily life issues, as well as funding questions. Finally, it is the responsibility of the departments to ensure that the mobility periods are validated upon return. As such, each of the department developed its own strategy, based on the different types of existing agreements and the field of study. They each developed their own tools which enable them to assess the studies in the fairest way.

#### Contact information and list of people interviewed

<http://www.unav.es/servicio/internacional/intro>

#### Context for cooperation with the US

Excellence is at the heart of the policies of the University of Navarra. Founded in 1952, its mission is to 'serve society, to train good people and good workers'. Cooperation with high ranking international universities has been crucial in achieving this objective since the foundation of the University.

In this context, the main objectives of the internationalisation strategy of the University of Navarra are to:

- increase the number of international students in full-time undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. International students currently account for 16% of the students at the University, coming from 85 countries. The target of the internationalisation strategy is 25%;
- increase the number of international staff and professors, who currently account for 6%, to 15% of the staff of the University;
- increase the number of bilingual degrees and programmes, with at least 50% of credits obtained from English taught courses;
- increase the number of agreements with top ranked universities (for student and staff exchange, or research);
- guarantee international experience to all students (in the form of exchange, internships, research etc.)

As such, cooperation with US Universities is crucial with regard to the quality of education provided on the other side of the Atlantic. The International Graduate School of Management (IESE) was the initiator of cooperation with US universities. Under the guidance of the Harvard Business School, it launched the first two-year MBA programme in Europe in 1964, based on the American Model. Cooperation then evolved in the form of agreements for exchange of staff and students, at the university level and even more within each department. The box below presents an example of the development of cooperation with US universities in the field of law.

## Development of cooperation within a department: the School of Law

The School of Law has a long and intense cooperation with high level US universities. The internationalisation of the department first started with the development of 3 programmes in English (the Anglo American Law Program, the International Business Law Programme and the Global Law Studies), for which 20 US professors go to the University of Navarra to teach every year. Through contacts between professors from the respective universities (18 visits have been organised with US universities since 2007) mutual interest rose heavily to include students in the exchanges.

The department develops its internationalisation strategy through the participation at the conference of the Association of Law schools, which is attended by 3,000 professors of high level universities every year. Universities contacted tend to be open and welcoming to new partnerships. The challenge of communicating in English both for staff and students had also been overcome in time.

Notwithstanding the eagerness for cooperation, the School is facing an issue of reciprocity in the exchange for US universities. Amongst the difficulties to develop the cooperation with the US remain the following:

- It was particularly difficult to develop the exchange of students in the field of law, which has a very regional focus and is concerned with individual legal systems;
- Few American students are interested in Spanish law;
- Students prefer to go to a bigger city such as Madrid rather than to Pamplona.

However, the School of Law has developed agreements with 264 US universities, most of which are informal agreements. These informal agreements are signed between academic staff on an ad hoc basis and are not institutionalised at the level of the department. The conditions of mobility within such an agreement vary, but students who take part in such mobility periods are often welcomed by the host institution as a visiting scholar: this prevents the student from paying the usual tuition fees asked from free movers. At the same time, it is up to the home institution to decide whether or not to validate the studies taken abroad and on which basis. Most of the relations with American universities tend to remain informal: they take less time to formalise than formal ones and do not lead to similar administrative issues and legal implications which can sometimes create a strong burden for the set up of the formal agreement. At the same time, the informal agreements tend to be more precise in their content and more effective in their implementation than wider formal agreements.

In addition, the American system has had a strong influence on the governance/management at the University, in particular in the following regards:

- promotion of English language at all levels
- set up of a strong Alumni association;
- well developed relations between students and academic staff;
- role of a mentor in providing personal advice and orientation about academic matters;
- influence of the American culture of effort and open-mindedness.

The mobility of students of the University of Navarra is therefore highly promoted, for them to obtain international experiences, understanding and skills which will enable them to evolve in an increasingly globalised world. At the same time, it is important for students to make the most out of their mobility period, and to ensure that it is of high quality and is part of their curriculum. Therefore, the validation of the credits obtained abroad is a crucial part of the mobility period.

### Developing credit recognition with the US

Although cooperation with American universities has evolved in a way of ensuring easy recognition of credits obtained abroad, a few obstacles remain to improve the process:

- **Differences in the structure of the academic year:** traditionally, the first semester at the University of Navarra was starting in October and finishing in January, with the

second semester running from February to May. Exams were organised in June for the first session, and September for the second one. The American system was divided in two semesters before and after the Christmas break, starting in September and ending in May. The system was beneficial for teachers who could go and study abroad during their holidays - which would appear to be a teaching period in the other university. At the same time, it was more difficult to articulate the study periods of students abroad. In 2009/2010, a new structure for the academic year was introduced at the University of Navarra: the first semester now starts in September and ends in December. The second semester starts after the Christmas break and ends in April. The first session of exams takes place in May and the second one in June. This new system has made it easier to match study periods in Spain and in the US;

- **Differences in the structure of degree**, in the field of law for example: the study of law starts at the bachelor's level in Spain, whereas this is a postgraduate degree in the US. US universities were at first reluctant to host students with a lower degree than their own students. However, the quality of achievements was soon recognised to be sufficient and it ensured further cooperation between the universities. Credits are now valued as validating studies of equivalent quality.
- **Length of courses**: in some instances, courses are year-long. In case a student participates in a mobility period for a semester only, this highlights issues about the validation of the second semester. An example of a Law student presented in this study, shows that the student had to prepare this course in the US and take the exam once back home, with no possibility of replacing some or all of the credits of this course by some obtained from another course. It must be noted that with the introduction of the semester structure under the Bologna process, this issue would disappear for future students.

### Implementing credit recognition

Up to 15 years ago, the degrees at the University of Navarra were quite monolithic and were composed of a strict curriculum. In order to validate their degrees, students were required to take courses from a very closed catalogue. There was little intra-and-inter university mobility. However with the increase of mobility, both within the university between departments and with other national or international universities, the curricula have become more flexible: elective courses can be taken in other departments and overall students have greater freedom in selecting the courses of their interest. In changing the structure of the curriculum, the development of a credit system has been crucial to ensure that an adequate number of prerequisite is taken and that the students can not only take advantage of the offer of the other departments but also that it will be recognised at their home department.

The use of ECTS credits has been developed at the University of Navarra since 1994. As such it was the first university to adopt ECTS in Spain. Before the adoption of the ECTS, the University was already using a system in which one Spanish credit would equal ten contact hours. The implementation of ECTS was smooth and each department structured it according to its curriculum. The system was highly supported by staff and student, as it made mobility easier.

In terms of the recognition of credits from US universities, as from other universities not using ECTS, no university policy was defined. Each department has its own policy to recognise credit, which rely heavily, and more than anything else, on trust between cooperating universities and quality assurance. Some of the approaches used by the departments are presented in the sections below.

### Tools to support credit recognition

Each of the departments of the University uses its own tools and measures for the recognition of credits. The most common ones are:

- **Cooperation agreements**: different forms of agreements exist to formalise the cooperation between the University of Navarra and a US university, including a

memoranda of understanding. They are very general and mention information such as tuition fees, administrative and visa issues, status of the student etc. They usually do not mention the validation of studies or the recognition of credits. The informal agreement signed between the School of Law and American partners merely confirm the acceptance of the student by the host university;

- **Choice of courses:** students are not provided with a strict curriculum they have to study in the US in any of the departments. Two other approaches usually apply:
  - Some departments provide the students with a **catalogue** of courses from which they have to choose their compulsory courses. Usually they are free to choose their elective courses. This is the case of the International Media Programme for example. In addition, students are provided with support from the international coordinator in their selection.
  - The students **are not provided with a list** of courses and they need to look for relevant information themselves:
    - For compulsory courses, for example in the case of the School of Law students need to take courses which are the same as those provided by their home school. Students need to find equivalent courses on the basis of the information available on the websites of the host universities;
    - For elective courses, the student can usually choose the courses he/she is interested in. As the host universities are selected on the basis of their reputation and ranking, the University of Navarra can be assured of the quality of the courses. It must also be noted that in some departments, such as the School of Economics and Management, as students go to the US during the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year of study, they have usually validated all of their compulsory courses and only take elective courses abroad.
- **Equivalence of courses:** some departments have developed structured procedures to assess the equivalence of each course and recognise the relevant credits. For example, the School of Communication with its International Media Programme, developed a full process for the recognition of credits which include a thorough assessment of equivalence of individual courses (see next section). Another example is that of the table which provides equivalence to each individual course within the scope of the cooperation between the ISSA - School of Management Assistant and Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3): at the beginning of the mobility period of the ISSA student at TC3, TC3 validates all the Spanish courses as TC3 courses and allocates the relevant credits. The box below presents further details of this approach

### ISSA cooperation with TC3: Transfer equivalency

The ISSA School of Management Assistants of the University of Navarra developed an agreement with the Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) of the State University of New York (SUNY) based on a system that 'allows [the] students to have their credits recognised and continue their studies in the U.S.A.'<sup>177</sup>

The ISSA is a 4-year degree programme. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, students can go to TC3 to study one semester, allowing them to obtain an 'American Associate Degree'. After receiving this degree, students can go back to ISSA or continue their studies of any subject in any US university. In particular, TC3 has an agreement with Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) which allows students to transfer directly from TC3 to RIT. After three semesters at RIT, students complete a Master's degree.

The most important characteristic of this programme is that when a student enters TC3, all the courses he/she had taken at ISSA are validated as courses of TC3, and the equivalent credits are allocated to them. Therefore, the student has the status and transcript of a US student during the studies at TC3 and obtains the American Associate Degree on the basis of validation of US courses. This full transfer of credit also serves as the basis for the

<sup>177</sup> <http://www.issa.edu/internacional/estudios-en-EEUU.php?menu=6&lang=eng>

application for the Master's degree at RIT. The following table shows examples of transfer of equivalent credits from the ISSA degree into the TC3 system.

Table 12.1 ISSA to TC3 : Transfer equivalency –example of equivalences

Transfer course ID	Minimum grade	TC3 Course ID	TC3 Course Name	TC3 Credits
Biology	C	BIOL101	Principles of Biology I	3
Calculation	C	BUAD104	Business Mathematics	3
Accounting I	C	ACCT101	Principles of Accounting I	4
Informatics I	C	CAPS111	Introduction to Word Processing	1
Informatics I	C	CAPS121	Introduction to Spreadsheets	1

- **Learning Agreements:** Each student going abroad needs to prepare a Learning Agreement. It is prepared upon departure and confirmed when the student arrives in the US. The Learning Agreement is checked by the academic staff and validated by the board of the school. Although most schools develop Learning Agreements as the sole basis for the validation of studies and recognition of credits, the school of Communication within the IMP complete it with the use of an 'Arrival to host institution' form (developed further in this fiche).
- **Conversion table for grades:** each of the departments has defined their own table for the conversion of grades. The IMP of the School of Communication for example developed the one below:

Table 12.2 Table for conversion of grades: example of the School of Communication - IMP

US grade	Equivalent grade at the School of Communication
A+	9.75 – Very High distinction
A	9.5 - High distinction
A-	9 - High distinction
B+	8.5-8.75 - Distinction
B	7.5-8 - Distinction
B-	7 - Distinction
C+	6.75 - Pass
C	6.5 - Pass
C-	6 - Pass
D+	5.5 - Pass
D	5 - Pass
F	4 - Fail

At the same time, within a department, several tables for conversion can exist, to match the perceived level of the US universities with which cooperation was developed. The School of Economics and Management would for example not rate similarly an A+ obtained from different universities.

- **Conversion table for credits:** it seems that the various departments do not use tables for the conversion of credits. Usually, when the US course is validated it is assessed against equivalent course of the University of Navarra: if the department considers they match, the student receives the same number of credits as he/she would have obtained at home.

- **Mentor system:** the University of Navarra developed a mentor system which provides support and advice during all the education of the student and to answer any questions. These can include issues related to credit recognition.

### Protocol for credit recognition

Overall, the system for credit recognition takes a similar approach in all departments. Before the mobility period, the student prepares a Learning Agreement on the basis either of a catalogue of courses or information available on the website of the University. Based on the options possible for compulsory and elective courses (see above), the student proposes a list of courses to be followed in the US, which is submitted to the international coordinator. The coordinator ensures compatibility of courses and also takes the workload into account in order to make sure that a relevant number of credits can be validated at the US University. Once accepted, the Learning Agreement serves as the basis for the validation of the study period abroad.

Upon return, the student provides the international coordinator with the official transcripts of his/her achievements. The extent to which the content of each US course matches the courses of the University of Navarra is assessed individually. On the basis of conversion tables as described above, the coordinator processes the grades and credits. Another aspect which is also often taken into account is the overall performance of the student as compared to the other members of the group.

Although the approach to credit recognition is quite similar in all departments, it varies according to the type of exchange programme, the field, and the duration of mobility. Below is an example of the detailed procedure for recognition of credits within the International Media Programme of the School of Communication.

## Procedure for credit recognition: School of Communication – IMP

### Background for the programme

The International Media Programme (IMP) was created 6 years ago in order to develop the international profile of students in the communications sector, enabling them to deal with international and multicultural audiences. This 3-year programme has the following characteristics:

- requirement to spend the full third year of the programme abroad, in the US, EU or Asia;
- academic staff from national and international universities;
- classes taught both in English and Spanish;
- requirement to carry out three-month experience project in an international print or audiovisual media organisation, advertising or communication company.

The IMP has agreements with 5 US universities: George Washington University, University of Texas, University of Missouri, University of North Carolina, and the University of North Texas. Each year, an average of 1 to 2 student(s) takes part in each exchange programme, 4 students in the case of exchange with the University of Missouri.

Although American students are interested in going studying to Spain, they tend not to have the required minimum level of Spanish language. The attractiveness of the IMP is that it provides many classes in English. As such, US students usually take part in one semester of the programme: the content is decided by their home university and they take most classes in English.

### Recognition of credits

A 4-year degree at the School is awarded upon the validation of 300 credits. The IMP is valued at 106 credits, out of which 90 need to be taken in English, at least 60 of which abroad.

The Learning Agreement (LA) prepared for a mobility period within the IMP does not serve the same function as in the other schools and is completed with a 'Arrival to host institution' form (AHI).



Students define their LA in August or September: it reflects the classes from the IMP programme that the student wishes to study abroad. This document serves as the basis for what the student is required to achieve and is submitted to the School of Communication. The total number of credits foreseen is 30 ECTS per semester.

Upon arrival, the student prepares an 'Arrival to host institution' form which presents the courses the student will be following at the US university: the student selects courses which match the LA. The number of credits obtained should total the required 15 credits per semester required by US universities. The form is prepared with the support of the host institution, signed by the International coordinator overseas and is sent to the School of Communication for approval.

Upon return, the School of Communication confronts the LA and the AHI and proceeds to the following steps:

Match of US courses from the AHI with those of the LA;

The School of Communication checks the workload and course content, and assesses each of them on an individual basis;

This approach is also completed by information about the student, his/her progress in the class and grades achieved.

The credits of the Spanish course in the LA are given for the US courses which are validated in the AHI (as such there is no conversion of US credits into ECTS, but the ECTS credits of the equivalent Spanish course are validated);

There are usually fewer courses in the AHI than in the LA, because of the number of credits to be obtained in the two systems. Once the credits of the equivalent courses are validated, the school assesses the points which are missing to obtain 30 ECTS per semester. It then allocates an average of the 'missing' credits to each of the courses for which credits were not associated.

#### Transcript

The grades obtained in the US are transferred into Spanish grades following the conversion table presented as an example above. There are usually fewer courses in the AHI than in the LA, because of the number of credits to be obtained in the two systems. Therefore, an average of the grades is calculated and associated to each of the courses in the LA for which no equivalent class was taken.

At the end of the IMP, the student receives the transcript with the credits validated, associated to the Spanish courses. The name of US courses is not mentioned. The transcript takes the following form:

Table 12.3 example of transcript – School of Communication - IMP

Courses validated at the University of Navarra	Courses studied and validated abroad	Grade obtained abroad	Equivalent grade at the University of Navarra
Newspaper Design	Introduction to Digital Media Production	A	9.5 - Very High distinction
Ethics	History of Investigative Journalism	B+	8.75
Technology of Information	Politics and the Internet	A-	9
.....	....	....	....
International Relations	AVERAGE		9
Spanish Journalism History	AVERAGE		9

With regard to the recognition of credits obtained by US students at the School of Economics and Management, the approach is the same as that describe above for EU students. In preparing the Learning Agreement of those students, the home university ensures the

equivalence of courses, and that compulsory classes are taken as they would have been in the US.

At the same time, not all US universities put the same value on the importance of credits obtained abroad. For example, in the case of exchange in a law programme, US students are required to validate 10 credits of legal courses abroad. The credits are not recognised individually, on a course by course basis, but as a whole. Rather, what has significant weight in the quality of the study period abroad of US students is the production of papers and the experience they obtained from their stay at the University of Pamplona.

### Perceptions of staff

Overall, staff perceives the process of credit recognition as being smooth and working efficiently. The students who take part in the exchange programmes are amongst the best: there is little worry that they would not validate their studies abroad. Therefore, it is of crucial importance for international coordinators to ensure the students are not penalised when going abroad and that the courses they took are valued for what they are worth. Staff recognises the process in place as enabling this, providing opportunities and solutions for each individual case.

Recognition of credits is based heavily on good cooperation with partner universities, cooperation which is enhanced and strengthened through frequent visits to each other. This mutual understanding and the acknowledgement of the quality of the studies of the partner universities which are strictly selected as amongst the best, ensure a high level of teaching provided and the resulting learning outcome for the students.

### Perceptions of students

Students from the University of Navarra met for this study (from the School of Law, Communication - within the IMP, Humanities and Social Sciences), welcomed the opportunity they had to study at prestigious US universities (Harvard University, University of North Carolina, and University Pennsylvania). Overall they were satisfied with their mobility period, including recognition of the credits they had obtained in the US. They reported having obtained clear and sufficient information about the procedures in place and had adequate support both from the host and home university: before, during and after the mobility period. This support was particularly appreciated by the student from the School of Communication in selecting the courses to be included in her Learning Agreement. She also reported clear information about the process of recognition of credits and allocation of average grades to missing ones (as described above).

With regard to the student from the School of Law, although her mobility period was arranged through an informal agreement, and thus she did not have the status of a US student at the host university but that of a visiting researcher, she was considered by the University of Navarra as an exchange student. As such, the articulation of her mobility period was the same as any other exchange student. Amongst the difficulties she mentioned, she had to make a thorough arrangement and planning of courses she would follow in the US, and of those of the University of Navarra she would need to prepare overseas. Indeed, some of the compulsory courses of the degree were year-long courses and they had to be validated through an exam home to ensure that she could obtain her whole degree.

In terms of transfer of grades, it was unclear to her how it had been processed: indeed, the host university, Harvard University, recently deleted the grading system to replace it by a 'pass or fail' system. She did not receive information as to how this had been translated into her Spanish transcript. However, this appeared as not being of crucial importance as the credits themselves were recognised.

### Success factors of this approach

The following factors explain the success of credit recognition within the scope of cooperation with US universities:

- long-term cooperation with US universities. The long tradition of cooperation with US universities has made mobility at US universities a crucial part of the curricula of the University of Navarra. Throughout the years, within the exchange of teachers, staff and students, mutual knowledge and understanding of the system has increased and enabled the development of well-grounded strategies validating mobility periods for the degrees of the students;
- quality assurance. On the one hand, the exchange programmes were developed with well known universities of high rank. On the other, mobile students are selected amongst the best of the universities (of Navarra and of the US). As such, and with the support of the long term cooperation between universities, there is assurance that the teaching and learning outcomes are of high quality, and that credit can be valued at least as good as those obtained from the home university.
- tailored strategies for credit recognition. Various factors can influence the systems for credit recognition: e.g. the field of study, the type of arrangements (formal or informal), the inclusion of the mobility period in the curriculum (suggested or compulsory). The fact that each department develops its own system ensures the best match of the content of the study period with the overall degree. At the same time, department show flexibility in validation of studies, which are assessed on an individual basis;

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

This fiche shows the main characteristics of the practice of credit recognition within the scope of cooperation between the University of Navarra and US universities. The following three elements can be drawn out of this example as a good practice in recognising credit:

- The strong cooperation with US universities. Both formal and informal contacts ensure mutual understanding and acknowledgment of quality, and develop overall trust between each university. In taking part in international conferences of HEIs as well as by making direct contacts with relevant authorities within the universities, universities set up a network of contacts which enhances the development of cooperation through agreements. This network is also crucial for all issues related to credit recognition which require additional information on the content of the course, achievements of the individual students etc.
- The development of practical tools which are adapted to each department and each curriculum. The Learning Agreements, tables for the conversion of grades and catalogue of courses are all key in ensuring the consistent transfer of grades and recognition of credit. They allow a structured approach which ensures the reliability of the process. At the same time, the use of tools does not mean that the process is rigid, but on the contrary is very flexible and adaptable to each individual case;
- The transparency of the process. The information and support given to students, through the department coordinator or the mentor ensure the students of the fairness of the process. It also enables them to better plan their study period, in a timely manner, making arrangements if necessary, upon departure (e.g. foreseeing additional exams to take back home). Finally, the system reassures the students of the validation of the mobility period and inclusion into their curriculum.

## 13 Lund University (Sweden)– A university with an innovative approach towards student mobility

This case study on the Lund University aims to present the university's activities and procedures to facilitate and increase student mobility with a special focus on two faculties: Faculty of Sciences and the Faculty of Engineering (LTH).

The Faculty of Engineering provides education to about 7,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students. It awards around 650 degrees every year and it has approximately 440 outgoing and 440 incoming students annually. The faculty is part of a large number of international networks and exchange partnerships. It offers mainly advanced level third and fourth year courses for international exchange students, and requires them to have in-depth subject-related knowledge to join the courses. The Faculty of Engineering has five faculty exchange agreements with US partner institutions, with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of Connecticut, Temple University and the University of Texas at Arlington.

The Faculty of Science offers intermediate and advanced courses for international exchange students giving them the opportunity to engage with the research activities of the faculty. In addition to the agreements held by the central administration, there are also many faculty exchange agreements offering exchange opportunities for students. The university is also a member of the Trans-Atlantic Science Student Exchange Programme (TASSEP) through the Faculty of Sciences. The faculty has agreements with the more US higher education institutions: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Texas at Austin, University of Virginia, University of Washington, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Franklin and Marshall College, Purdue University, University of Oregon, University of Wisconsin, North Carolina State University and University of Florida.

The university has a large number of joint and double degrees with various partners. The first exchange agreement of the university was established between Lund University and the University of California in the 1960s and a significant number of exchange students still study in California. There is a Swedish international mobility coordinator at the University of California who guides incoming students through the application processes at the different campuses. The coordinator also provides assistance with the accreditation procedures for the outgoing students after their return to the home university.

According to the university's statistics on student mobility for 2010, there were:

- 997 outgoing exchange students
- 1767 incoming exchange students
- 4268 incoming independent students i.e. not part of an exchange programme

studying at Lund University. This is a significant increase from the previous year in the number of individual incoming students studying at the university (3,741 in 2009), and a slight decrease in the number of outgoing (2009: 1,043) and incoming (2009: 1,836) students. In terms of countries of origin for the incoming students 11% of all incoming exchange students are from the US, and 13% of the independent MA incoming students are from the United States. Of the outgoing students, 18% go for a study abroad period to the US.

One significant factor as to why there is a large proportion of incoming US students to Lund is that the university is certified by the US Department of Education and the Department

gives students a federal allowance to pursue their studies in Lund.

There is an online database available containing information on all agreements the university has in a country level split. In total Lund university has 65 central and faculty level agreements with US partners. (Link to the online database:

[http://cfsrv10.cfadm.lu.se/avtal/search\\_results.lasso?Partners%3A%3AB\\_univ\\_country=US\\_Nothing=Search](http://cfsrv10.cfadm.lu.se/avtal/search_results.lasso?Partners%3A%3AB_univ_country=US_Nothing=Search))

Contact: The university has a centralised International Student Mobility Group in addition to faculty level international coordinators. <http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/global-cooperation/student-exchange/contact-the-student-mobility-group>

#### Context for cooperation with the US

Lund University, established in 1666, is one of the largest higher education institutes in Scandinavia. The university operates eight independent faculties, a number of research centres and specialised institutes at three campuses: in Lund, Malmö and Helsingborg. It offers around 315<sup>178</sup> study programmes and 1600 different subjects, of which approximately 300 are taught in English. There are also more than 70 international Master's programmes. The university has around 47,000 students and 6,300 staff from around the world. The university applies open staff recruitment procedures, through which anyone can apply to a vacant position from any country. Additionally, international staff work at the university through staff exchanges in the framework of bilateral agreements or such programmes as Erasmus Mundus or various Nordic agreements. Internationalisation is of very high importance at the university: the board of governors of the university adopted an Internationalisation Policy for 2008-2011 which takes a multi-pronged approach to embedding internationalisation across the university.

#### ***Educational Provision of the international policy of the Lund University***

- *International perspectives will be incorporated into all educational programmes with an increased degree of internationalisation in educational provision at Lund University as a result. Various means can be used to achieve this: course literature, guest lectures, lecturer and student mobility, foreign work placement and by utilising the international experiences and multi-cultural perspectives of students and staff - Responsibility of the Faculties*
- *Master's programmes will be expected to recruit students both nationally and internationally with Swedish and foreign students being integrated into these programmes. Joint programmes, joint course development, summer schools and projects of international cooperation are to be initiated - Responsibility of the Faculties and University Administration*
- *All faculties are to offer a range of attractive, high quality courses that enable exchange students to participate in the normal programmes of study together with Swedish students - Responsibility of the Faculties*
- *Scandinavian Area Studies (SAS), which is one of the profile areas of the university, should be developed and expanded and be seen as a complement to the normal range of courses on offer. All faculties can initiate SAS courses - Responsibility of the University Management and Faculties*
- *Clear administrative procedures must be put in place to deal with accreditation - Responsibility of the Faculties*

Source: Lund University, Board of Governors: Decision: Reg. No.: RÅ 2007/357, 17th December 2007

The university has exchange agreements with more than 680 universities across 50 countries including more than 400 within the EU through the Erasmus programme. Furthermore the university participates in international networks, such as the Oresund Network, the North California network and the Maui network with partners from the United States. The international focus is considered to benefit both education and research, it helps in developing ties with international institutions, and contributes to improved overall performance.

<sup>178</sup> Source: Exchange students at Lund University 2010/2011, Sweden, brochure: <http://www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc> - [www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc](http://www.eurunion.org/eu-usedpolforum-oct8-9-09.doc)

### Developing credit recognition with the US

**Difference in the nature of programmes:** Swedish university students specialise from an early stage in their studies, which might cause some barriers for incoming students with less robust subject-related knowledge during the latter stages of a degree programme. However, most of the English taught courses are offered during the third and fourth years, which requires incoming students to have academic security, and therefore to be mature enough to handle the different culture and study environment.

**Differences in planning:** Among the partner institutions of Lund, there are many different schedules and systems which apply. As this has the potential to cause problems in the accreditation of the study abroad period, the university takes a flexible approach. Students are required to take on a study load which equals 30 ECTS per semester when going abroad, that means 15 US credits. However, the US systems does not recommend to take more than 12 US credits, therefore students returning with 12 US credits are allowed to then take on heavier load with more courses at the home institution in the next semester or later on to make up for the missing credits. Students also have the option to study for a whole year at the host institutions, however as student exchanges have become more popular, the university prefers to send more students for shorter periods, to be able to provide as many students as possible with the opportunity of studying abroad.

**Learning outcomes:** learning outcomes are widely used at Swedish universities and at Lund University.

**Recognition with professional bodies in engineering:** With regard to exchanges in the fields of engineering studies, the American accreditation body, ABAT plays a crucial role. ABAT accreditation is essential to US engineering schools, which makes it difficult to establish exchanges and joint study programmes.

### Implementing credit recognition

Lund University has been using credits since 1977 and a national Swedish system was established ten years later to keep track of credits. The University has since adopted the ECTS system under Bologna, but not the grade system.

Students are involved in establishing the exchange procedures of the Faculty of Engineering, at which a representative of the student union works full time in the international office. Students submit transcripts and course descriptions, including a list of literature used to get credit recognition, and the final decision is made only after they have returned home. This makes the organisation and choice of course and duration very important for the students and they have to make individual decisions on whether to study core subjects, take faculty electives or take full electives which are not related to their core subject.

Establishing credit recognition procedures across the very diverse higher education institutions and systems is key, especially with the increasing number of exchange students. The US universities are not standard, with a mixture of semesters or trimesters. For this reason Lund allows different amounts of credit to be undertaken in the period abroad which approximately equates to a full time student workload but which can be topped up on the return home. 12 to 15 credits are the requirements for visa and residence permits. There are other systems, such as that used by the University of Illinois, where different faculties use either 128 or 134 credits as a requirement for a four year study programme. As long as this is understood it can be incorporated.

Due to human resource limitations, programme directors no longer have the time to review all the courses and their content meaning that that working on trust plays a crucial role in student exchanges.

The Transatlantic Science Student Programme (TASSEP), launched with an initial grant from the US Department of Education in 1993, provides another formal mechanism between universities. The current members of the programme include 7 Canadian universities, 19 European partners and 10 US universities. Universities work together to facilitate science student exchanges between the partnering institutions. The programme uses ECTS system.

*'The credit transfer system is governed by the European Credit Transfer System or ECTS. Is based on three ingredients. Each participating institution provides a list of courses with a detailed course content and work load in the form of course credits. Additional information includes a typical four year course programme for science majors in the specified field of study. Secondly, the ECTS system is based on a nominal and generally agreed upon full course load at each university, which has been assigned to be 60 credits. This permits each university to assign an ECTS credit rating to its courses. Finally, the ECTS uses a common application form and provides a transcript of student grades with a well defined ECTS grades for each course taken.'*

*Most US and Canadian universities are based on a full yearly load of 30 credit hours for undergraduate courses. Thus, 1 US/CA credit=2 ECTS credits. Most courses meeting 3 hours per week thus have 6 ECTS credits. However, graduate students generally take just 3 courses per term, rather than the normal 4 or 5 courses for undergraduates. A full load for them is thus 18 hours per year. In general, these graduate level courses require considerably more work than the normal undergraduate courses. Such courses should count for 9-10 ECTS credits. Since in the course catalogue of most universities, little distinction is made between graduate and undergraduate courses, European students planning their course load need to inquire about the nature of the course before deciding how many courses they can take. European universities also differ in the structure of their courses, but the 60 ECTS credits per year is standard.'*

Source: website of the TASSEP programme, <http://studyabroad.unc.edu/tassep/apply.cfm>

### Tools to support credit recognition

**Exchange agreements:** there are several types of agreement used by Lund University, such as network agreements or bilateral agreements. The different agreements contain the detailed arrangements regarding the exchanges. Usually they last for five years and they are automatically renewed. Setting up new agreements is time consuming. In exceptional cases it might even take three years to set up a new agreement and get it running.

The agreements aim for a balanced number of incoming and outgoing students, though in reality there are more incoming students than outgoing. On the one hand this contributes to maintaining the high standards of education and helps offer a broad array of courses for all students. On the other hand it creates a continuous challenge for the faculties to maintain and even broaden the number of English taught courses as well. The university's strategy aims to deepen existing agreements rather than looking for a greater number of new ones, so as to increase the quality of the existing relationships.

**Learning Agreement:** this is a key part of the application procedure for the future exchange students. Learning agreements contain information that is completed by the departmental international coordinator as well as the students. The learning agreement includes information regarding the current studies and language proficiency of the student, and a detailed study plan, covering course codes, course titles, the name of the department giving the course, the priority of the course and the credit value in ECTS. The application itself is processed through the university's online application system.

**List of courses:** the lists of courses are only available for selection by incoming students. This information is provided on the websites of the various faculties. Detailed course descriptions are available including information on the level of the given course and the prior knowledge required to undertake the course. The following box gives an example at the Faculty of Engineering how different departments present the courses they offer, while Annex I provides an example of a more detailed course description.

**Department of Construction Sciences**  
[Department Homepage](#)

Course (click for course description in English)	ECTS	Level	Lang	Study period			
				Autumn		Spring	
				HT 1	HT 2	VT 1	VT 2
<a href="#">FHL025 Project - Solid Mechanics</a>	7.5	A	E	x			
<a href="#">FHL110 Biomechanics</a>	7.5	A	E	x			
<a href="#">VSMN25 The Finite Element Method - Flow Analysis</a>	7.5	A	S	x			
<a href="#">ADPA01 Digital Tools 1, Sketch tools</a>	1	G1	S		x		
<a href="#">VTAF05 Acoustics</a>	7.5	G2	S		x		
<a href="#">FHL025 Project - Solid Mechanics</a>	7.5	A	E		x		
<a href="#">FHL066 Finite Element Method for Non-linear Systems</a>	7.5	A	S		x		
<a href="#">VSMN30 The Finite Element Method - Structural Analysis</a>	7.5	A	S		x		
<a href="#">FHL025 Project - Solid Mechanics</a>	7.5	A	E			x	
<a href="#">FHLN01 Structural Optimization</a>	7.5	A	S			x	
<a href="#">VSMN10 Structural Dynamic Computing</a>	7.5	A	S			x	
<a href="#">ADPA05 Digital Tools 2, Presentations</a>	1	G1	S				x
<a href="#">FHL063 Finite Element Method</a>	7.5	G2	S				x
<a href="#">FHL025 Project - Solid Mechanics</a>	7.5	A	E				x
<a href="#">FHL090 Fracture Mechanics, Advanced Course</a>	7.5	A	S				x
<a href="#">VSMN15 Integrated Design: Structural Design Architectural Design</a>	7.5	A	S				x

Incoming students apply directly through an online system to the potential host department. Usually the first and second year classes are taught in Swedish, and during the third or fourth year the different faculties start to teach advanced level courses in English. However in order to facilitate access to the university courses there are less specific studies which have been designed and are called 'special area studies'. These courses, which are open to all students, are offered in addition to the core fields of studies by three faculties. The courses cover Swedish and Scandinavian culture and society, for example Swedish film or Swedish politics – past and present. Other courses include the European and other dimensions, and global issues of contemporary interest. The courses are usually worth 7.5 ECTS credits and include exams and / or assignments as in any other course. The key difference with these courses compared with regular courses is that they are structured towards exchange students and they do not require previous knowledge in the field. For example, the survey of Swedish literature approximates to a Swedish A level, but for a non-Swede without previous subject related knowledge, it represents a much heavier workload. (Link to the SAS courses: <http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s/24827>)

Lund University uses the ECTS credit system. There are general guidelines applied by the university for the conversion of credit values and grades for the exchange students to the US. The guidelines are based on consensus, but the values indicated are approximate and they are not binding, especially regarding the grading system, as the different faculties of the university apply different grading scales.

Conversion table of Lund University



*Very approximately*, therefore, 1 ECTS credit could be considered equivalent to 0.5 U.S. semester credit hours. However, even this standard should be applied with flexibility, as many European countries do not base their academic systems on the same contact-hour principle that is the U.S. standard.

ECTS Credits	Approximate U.S. Equivalent
10	5
20	10
24	12
30	15
32	16
40	20
60	30

At Lund University, exchange students are required to follow a full-time term study plan of 30 ECTS credits or maximum 45 ECTS credits per semester.

#### GRADING SCALE

The Swedish grading scale does not lend itself to US equivalency. Grading will depend on what department you are in at Lund University. Some courses are solely graded on a pass/fail basis, while others use the ECTS grade scale.

ECTS Grade Scale	US Equivalency
A	A
B	B+
C	B
D	C
E	C
FX	F
F	F

### Protocol for credit recognition

Application by students to the university level exchange agreements incorporates a number of steps, handled both by the central administration and the faculties.

Students who wish to go for a study abroad period can apply twice a year through an online database to the central administration.

The information is processed by the central administration and then sent on to the individual faculties for reviewing and assessment. The faculties are responsible for generating a ranked list of applicants.

There are differences in the way the faculties approach the application procedure. Some are more record oriented, while others use a mix of criteria, including the assessment of motivations for going abroad.

The ranked lists of applications are returned to the central administration which controls the allocation of places to the partner universities. The final decision, placing students with partner universities, is then made by the central administration taking into consideration the information from the faculties and the provisions of the agreements.

The full application procedure takes almost a whole year for the students. The university aims to harmonise the procedures applied by the different faculties in the near future, and the new system will possibly include the allocation of available semesters to the faculties. The allocations will be based on prior knowledge and statistics, including how many students have applied, and with what preferences.

The most important phase of the application process in terms of credit recognition is the preapproval of the students' study plans. Students need to discuss their study plans with a study councillor or study advisor to ensure that the selected courses are in line with their main field of study. Accrediting courses studied abroad is always the task of the departments.

The application procedure for incoming exchange students also comprises two stages. First they are nominated by their home institution based on the institutional agreements, then a second round of applications is sent off to the future host university. The main screening process is again done at the home institutions, with a tendency to favour the better students. The university pays particular attention to the incoming students after their arrival. In general

incoming students arrive two weeks before the others, so they can have some time to accustom to the Swedish education system. The university provides them with them a short course in Swedish language and culture, which is worth 3 ECTS credit.

### Perceptions of staff

The main issue with student exchange is the transfer of credits: it has to be ensured that students can use their study period abroad as part of their degree studies. This requires trust between the universities and a thorough understanding of each other's education system so that they provide high quality teaching and learning. There also needs to be the flexibility to use the courses offered by the other universities the best possible way.

The Faculty of Engineering is aiming to introduce a five-year integrated engineering studies with a mobility window. The faculty developed a study programme with its partners which contains a preapproved study abroad semester. The whole study programme including all the courses to be studied abroad were developed together with the partners, meaning there is no need to have an accreditation procedure after the students return home. As students follow a predefined set of courses - completely in line with their studies at the home institution – exchange studies are already quality assured by the partners in advance.

This new fixed programme structure has recently been piloted by the first 12 students, who will return to Sweden at the end of the 2011 spring semester. The main reason for developing such a programme was that there is a very high level of student mobility at the Faculty of Engineering in some study programmes, with 60% of the students already spending a semester abroad. Therefore to introduce the exchange as part of the curriculum would be beneficial to all. Professors intend to try and offer even more choice for students in the future.

### Perceptions of students

A Swedish student in his third year of business studies spent a semester at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. The desire to go to the US was about experiencing college life. Living abroad, getting to know the culture of US students, being part of a different educational system made the exchange period a very positive experience for him. His ultimate goal in studying abroad was getting to know the culture, not just to study at a good university.

There are several partner schools in the United States, but only a few business schools including UCLA and UNC Chapel Hill. Although he was accepted at UCLA first, there were only full year exchange programmes available, so he decided to study at Chapel Hill. A year would have been too long as it would not have left him any time to complete his Bachelor's degree, given that the Business School at the University of Lund applies a fixed programme structure allowing students to go abroad in the 5th semester of their Bachelor's studies. In terms of selecting his courses at the host institution he talked to his home faculty, enquiring which courses the host university offered, and whether and how the courses will be accredited.

Selecting courses with preapproval made it much easier to get accreditation after returning home. When he came back to Sweden, he submitted his grades to Business School's international office. There is no grade translation applied, only pass or fail at the Business School. As the final selection of courses is always dependent on the availability of free places at the host institution, he may only get recognition for 3 out of the 5 courses he took at UNC. He was aware of the fact that he might not be able to take 100% business courses at UNC, as he went abroad based on a general agreement, not a specific faculty level agreement. For this reason he took extra courses before the study abroad period to ensure that he has the required numbers of credits at the end.

Another Swedish Masters level student with a background in industrial engineering management studied for the whole fourth year of his studies at Berkeley at the University of California. He explained that the selection procedure and criteria for going abroad were different when he initially applied to the exchange programme. Selection at the Faculty of Engineering was based on grades (25%), extra curricula activities (25%), ambassadorship –

how suitable the student would be to represent the faculty abroad, based on the review of the statement of purpose and the curriculum vitae, and the final 25% was dependent on the motivation letter and the study plan. The students were actively involved in developing a new, more objective, academic performance oriented system, where the grades account for 80% of the merit value and 20% is based on the assessment of the statement of purpose e.g. choice and motivation and the added value a study abroad period. Additional points can be gained (3 to 5) for extra curricula activities. While studying abroad he took courses at two Berkeley departments: industrial engineering and business. The courses he took were a mixture of MBA courses with American MA students and BA courses. He had to take Bachelor's level courses as the University of California does not admit fourth year Master's students as graduates but undergraduates. This is due to the differences between the 3+2 and 4+1 structured higher education systems. Students have to opportunity to clarify that they are Master level student while being abroad, but it is done on a case-by-case basis and students are admitted as undergraduates.

This student has not yet applied for the accreditation of the credits as he has only returned to Sweden. He knows that the courses studied are relevant to his specialisation, but according to the first review by the programme director the subjects might be accredited as electives, but he needs courses to take into account as part of his specialisation as well, otherwise his studies might be prolonged. To gain accreditation he needs to construct a whole plan of this education showing how he plans to use the courses studied abroad, supported by a syllabus of the course and the literature used.

Both students agreed that there are significant differences between the teaching methods at US institutions and at Lund, where there is significant emphasis on the final exams and fewer additional compulsory assignments. In the United States there is a continuous and heavier workload during the semester, with multiple assignments and requirement to attend classes. Active participation in the classes is part of the grade, but in return there are hardly any exams left at the end of the semester.

#### Success factors of this approach

The university applies many innovative solutions to overcome the barriers of student mobility including the development of special courses to serve better the needs of exchange students; the organisation of welcoming and orientation weeks for incoming students; the new fixed structured study programme developed at the Faculty of Engineering with the preapproved semester abroad.

Furthermore Lund University has a very large number of international relations and well-established procedures for managing them. There is a large amount of information available on the website of both the university and the individual faculties, effectively guiding the applicants through the most difficult procedures.

The university offers high quality education through advanced level English taught courses with the engagement of a large proportion of international staff.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

The detailed course descriptions provided by the faculties enable incoming students to comprehensively understand whether a course is adequate for them. Descriptions contain information on the level of a given course, its credit values, the content and requirements of the course and the prior knowledge required to undertake the course.

Preapproval of the study plans for an exchange period hugely facilitates credit recognition on the return to the home university. This concept has been further developed at the Faculty of Engineering into a five-year integrated engineering study programme with a mobility window. During the mobility period students can study at a US partner institution with a completely preapproved study abroad semester in line with their main fields of study.

One additional area that can be recommended as a good practice from how student mobility is organised at Lund University is also focusing on incoming students. The university developed a broad selection of 'special area studies'. These courses, which are open to all

students, are offered in addition to the core fields of studies by three faculties and are structured towards exchange students and they do not require previous knowledge in the fields.

#### ANNEX – Example course description

Syllabus academic year 2011/2012  
Proposal, not approved yet!

#### **FRACTURE MECHANICS, ADVANCED COURSE FHL090**

**Credits:** 7,5. **Grading scale:** TH. **Cycle:** A (Second Cycle). **Language of instruction:** The course might be given in English. **Optional for:** M4bem. **Course coordinator:** Professor Per Stahle, Per.Stahle@solid.lth.se, Halfasthetslara. **Recommended prerequisites:** FHL013 Solid Mechanics, Basic Course or FHLA01 Solid Mechanics, Basic Course or FHL105 Solid Mechanics, Basic Course. **Assessment:** Education is given as lectures, seminars, supervised training and self studies. The primary aim of the teaching is to encourage and support the student's self studies. Emphasis is put on the selection of models and the execution of calculations. Written examination. The grade is given for the entire course. The grades are: not passed (0) and passed (3 to 5). **Home page:** <http://www.solid.lth.se>.

#### **Aim**

The purpose of the education is to provide the need for fracture mechanical competence to judge risk for failure and to compute stiffness reductions due to cracks. The aim is that the student should gain knowledge of linear and non-linear fracture mechanics and to serve as an industrial resource with the ability to analyse failures, suggest models for calculation and suggest structural improvement of engineering structures.

#### *Knowledge and understanding*

For a passing grade the student must

- understand and be able to explain basic fracture mechanical concepts and have knowledge of ongoing fracture mechanical research.
- understand the principles behind the derivation of the most common fracture mechanical theories focusing on judgement of risk of failure.
- be able to explain stress intensity factors and J-integral methods.
- be able to explain the foundation of non-linear fracture mechanics.
- be able to propose engineering solutions that increase the reliability of a structure regarding risk of fracture and fatigue.

#### *Skills and abilities*

For a passing grade the student must

- demonstrate knowledge of a quality sufficient for participation in a research and advanced development project in fracture mechanical or similar projects.
- be able to examine, identify and analyse the mode of failure given a fractured structure or structural member and be able to propose a structural improvement or modification of an existing structure.

#### *Judgement and approach*

For a passing grade the student must

- understand the possibilities and limitations of different fracture mechanical models.

#### **Contents**

Crack tip solutions, displacements of fracture surfaces. Stress and strain fields and path-independent integrals. Basic tensor algebra. Concepts of dissipated energy, stiffness reduction and compliance methods. Materials testing, test specimens for fracture mechanical testing. Limits of linear fracture mechanics, stress intensity factors and fracture toughness. Fatigue, Paris' law and stress corrosion laws. Non-linear fracture mechanical concepts and fracture resistance curves.

#### **Literature**

Fred Nilsson, Fracture Mechanics - from Theory and Applications, Dept. of Solid Mechanics, KTH, 2001.

Source: [http://www.lth.se/fileadmin/lth/internationellt/engplaner\\_11/FHL090.html](http://www.lth.se/fileadmin/lth/internationellt/engplaner_11/FHL090.html)

## 14 Student mobility at the University of Essex (United Kingdom): a centralised approach

### Key Facts

Study abroad is organised centrally at the University of Essex through the Study Abroad office. The main focus of the study Abroad office is student mobility and not on joint degrees for example, of which there are none with the US.

The University of Essex has been sending students abroad for over eight years. Its first experience with sending students abroad came from the ERASMUS scheme. This inspired the university to start a Study Abroad office to widen this opportunity to a full student mobility scheme. The US was the first country Essex developed cooperation agreements with, and this soon blossomed into agreements with 36 countries across the world. In 2010 the University of Essex sent over 130 students on student exchanges, of which over a third – by far the largest category – went to the US.

The University of Essex is a leading academic institution spread over three campuses, with academic departments that span the humanities, social sciences, science and engineering, and law. There are now more than 10,000 students who study there, with students drawn from more than 130 countries.

Student mobility is central to the University's internationalisation strategy. It has a global aim to increase student mobility of both incoming and outgoing students and has a Key Performance Indicator (KPI)<sup>179</sup> on 'Levels of Student Mobility', which predicts a 'year-on-year increase in the number of students studying abroad of 10%-15% taking numbers from a baseline of 88 in 2009-10 to 140 in 2014-15.'

Contact: Study Abroad Office, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ, United Kingdom, saoadmin@essex.ac.uk. Website: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/studyabroad>

### Context for cooperation with the US

The University of Essex is a newer university in the UK, founded in 1964. It is a diverse institution and 40% of its students come from overseas. It has a key mission to be globally competitive and internationalisation is a key part of its strategy.

The University created the post of Dean of International Development in 2009 in order to provide strategic leadership, and to develop and implement a new International Strategy that was approved in July 2010. Mobility is a central part of the University's internationalisation strategy.

'Strategic Aim Four - To continue to be a leading UK university of choice for international students and to further develop the international dimension of our research, educational and cultural activities.

The University has been committed, since its inception, to internationalisation. This is reflected in its character, outlook and values - in the international perspective that characterises much of its teaching and research and the large proportion of students and academic staff who are recruited from outside the UK. The University draws its students from 130 countries and has staff from more than 70 nationalities.

Increasing participation levels, and diversifying modes, of student mobility is a key aim. Moving the university from a largely student-interest-driven study abroad agenda towards an institution-strategic student-mobility agenda is the responsibility of a new Student Mobility Committee that works pro-actively with the Study Abroad Office, the faculties and

<sup>179</sup> Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are a set of indicators set in advance, which are used to measure managerial performance, these help an organisation define and measure progress toward organisational goals.

departments.'

Virtually all of the departments in the University of Essex offer the opportunity to go abroad and because the impetus to initiate placement schemes came from the Study Abroad office, there is a high degree of coordination on how the exchanges are organised across the University. One of the key features of the exchange scheme at Essex is that the grades earned abroad are converted using a centrally set conversion tables and incorporated into the final grade.<sup>180</sup>

The internationalisation strategy is not just about credit recognition but also highlights the benefits of personal development, access to different cultures, teaching methods and also employability.

The central organisation of mobility at the university through the study abroad team enables Essex to set in place some significant structures to facilitate mobility and ultimately credit recognition as part of this. The Study Abroad team are responsible for choosing the Universities that Essex partners with. In order to ensure that the Universities they choose are compatible with the needs of all of the departments they prefer to have a variety of Universities on their books, which are known for having different strengths and by having open contracts that allow themselves and the partner Universities access to most of the courses on offer. In the US, Essex has over 20 institutions that it partners with, including the University of New Mexico, Pitzer College and the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. They are:

- University of Arkansas (Fayetteville)
- Brooklyn Law School (New York City, Law students only)
- California Polytechnic State University (San Luis Obispo)
- California State University, Chico
- The Catholic University of America (Washington, DC)
- University of Connecticut (Storrs)
- University of Hawai'i at Hilo
- Hawai'i Pacific University (Honolulu)
- The University of Kansas(Lawrence)
- Le Moyne College (Syracuse, NY State)
- Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge)
- University of Miami (Coral Gables)
- University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) not available for 2011-12
- The University of Mississippi (Oxford)
- Mount Holyoke College (South Hadley, Massachusetts : women only)
- University of Mount Union (Alliance, Ohio)
- University of New Mexico (Albuquerque)
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff)
- Old Dominion University (Norfolk, Virginia)

<sup>180</sup> This is explained on their website: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/studyabroad/outgoing/assessment.aspx>

- Pitzer College (Claremont, near Los Angeles)
- Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana)
- The University of Utah (Salt Lake City)

#### Developing credit recognition with the US

Study abroad at the University of Essex is distinctive in that the grades earned abroad are not reduced to a pass or fail mark but are fully incorporated into student's final grade. The Study Abroad Office believe that the process of incorporating grades earned abroad into the final mark make the degree assessment 'more robust,' and that it serves as an incentive for students to do their best while abroad, which makes the process 'fairer'.

Essex has its own credit system in which a full academic year consists of between 120 to 135 workload credits and 35-40 hours of academic work per week in term-time (there may be some variation between different schemes of study). Each individual course has a credit value, which indicates the proportion it contributes towards a student's full year of academic study. In the ECTS system one full academic year consists of 60 credits: therefore, to make the conversion from the University of Essex credit value to the ECTS credit value of a course the Essex credit value should be divided by two.

Essex has two ways of accommodating a study abroad period into the degree design. The student can either choose between doing a semester abroad within a three-year course, or a full year abroad within a four-year course. The duration of the US placement is not a problem in terms of exam times in either case. This is because the US year starts earlier than in the UK, usually at the end of August, and finishes by the end of May. This means that the grades are ready to be incorporated into the final degree mark by the time the exams are graded at home regardless of the duration of the student's study abroad period.

The way that the grades are incorporated into the final degree mark is also dependant on the length of the student's stay. If the student only goes for one semester then the module results are incorporated directly. For example, a B is translated according to a centrally held conversion table into a 2:1, and an A into a 1st and so on. If the student goes for an entire year then the Grade Point Average (GPA) is converted instead. For example, 4.0 would be a first or 3.3 would be 63%.

Because the systems vary slightly depending on how long the student is abroad for, the way the stay abroad is weighted is also slightly different. One semester abroad covers the time a student would have spent doing one term at home, which would be worth 60 'Essex' credits. This means the grades earned abroad need to fit these 60 credits. If the students do four modules abroad as they would at home then each module is worth 15 credits. If the student only does three modules, then each module is worth 15 credits and the last 15 credits is taken as an average of the three modules. If there are more than four modules taken abroad the issue is dealt with centrally and attention is paid to how much the modules were worth in the US institution.

The system for weighting the stay abroad is much simpler if the stay abroad is for the entire year. In this case, the US institution has already calculated the Grade Point Average and a conversion table is used to translate that into the grade to be used at Essex. Nonetheless, the way that the years are weighted still has to be adjusted to incorporate the extra year. For example, in the American Studies degree, on a three-year course, the 2nd year is worth 40% and the last year is worth 60%. On the other hand, on a four-year course the 2nd year is worth 30%, the 3rd (study abroad) year is worth 20% and the last year is worth 50%.

Although Essex moved to a credit-based system four years ago, it makes no attempt to convert credits from one system to another. This is mostly because the need is rendered redundant by the translation of grades, which carry more information. As a result, credit is only used to a limited extent. As discussed, if the student travels for a semester the Study Abroad office uses the number of modules taken and fits these into the credit structure used at home. If the student travels for the entire year the Study Abroad office check that the



student is taking a full workload by checking that the student is taking an appropriate number of credits (between 12 and 18).

### Implementing credit recognition

The University of Essex has been sending students abroad for over eight years. Its first experience with sending students abroad came from the ERASMUS scheme. This inspired the university to start a Study Abroad office to widen this opportunity to a full student mobility scheme. The US was the first country Essex developed cooperation agreements with, and this soon blossomed into agreements with 36 countries across the world. In 2010 the University of Essex sent over 130 students on student exchanges, of which over a third – by far the largest category – went to the US.

The grade recognition system has evolved over that time period and although there has been strong bottom-up interest in many cases, the impetus mainly came from the top. This has many advantages. It means that the system of grade recognition was developed centrally and adopted by the departments as they joined so that it is now uniform across the entire university. It also makes the study abroad scheme very tractable for students, who can look up the information they need on the central website and can call a dedicated Study Abroad Team if they need help. It also means that all the departments in Essex have the opportunity to send their students abroad regardless of how strong their ties are to a particular country. Although a few links to partner institutions have been cemented through networks built up within departments, the majority of these links are completely new and have been organised by the Study Abroad office. The way that the Study Abroad office ensures that the choice of partner universities suits all of the departments is by selecting a wide variety of universities with a range of specialities likely to suit more than one department.

### Tools to support credit recognition

There are specific instruments to support credit recognition with US HEIs:

- **Memorandum of Understanding:** The way that the University of Essex has set up cooperation agreements with US partner universities is not identical to what is done in Europe. Essex does not use Memorandums of Understanding because they can be very general agreements. Instead, the University of Essex tends to sign contracts which define very clearly what each university will provide including how many students can be exchanged, the duration of the stay, whether the exchange excludes tuition fees, whether on-campus housing is provided, and so on. The Study Abroad office think it is important that the contracts are as open as possible, so that students are free to choose the courses they want and the choice of partner universities is more likely to fit the needs of the departments. If there are exclusions to this principle, for example, business schools are often excluded because they are over-subscribed or medical schools, because building an exchange year into such a technical degree can be too involved, then this is written into the contract.
- **Learning Agreement:** For the same reason, the students sent on exchange programmes at Essex are not required to sign learning agreements, as the Study Abroad Office considered this to be more of a mainland European phenomenon, where bilateral agreements are set up between two courses or departments. The students are expected to clearly set down what modules they intend to take once they are abroad but this is for mainly internal use to ensure the students study what they agreed to.
- **Letters of Motivation:** Likewise, Essex does not forward Letters of Motivation to host universities. Students are required to write a personal statement, which helps the Study Abroad office decide which students should be allocated to which US universities when places are limited, but this is not forwarded on to the host university. The University of Essex does not need to see the personal statements that some of its incoming students bring with them, as long as the students keep the courses that have been agreed upon.

- **Course equivalences:** Whether or not a student is obliged to take some mandatory subjects is set at the department level. Most departments will insist on some mandatory subjects being taken, especially if the student studies for an entire year. However, any course lists would be prepared by the departments and be completely idiosyncratic.
- **Lists of courses to choose from:** See above.
- **Conversion tables for credit values and grades:** As described above, the University has a completely centralised system for converting grades from the US system into the UK system. This procedure does not involve converting credits. If the student travels for a whole year then the need for calculating credits is obviated as it is simply assumed that the student has completed a full year's workload (and this is checked before the student leaves for the US.) If the student only travels for a semester then the grades are weighted according to the number of courses taken. Once the grades have been achieved they are converted using a centrally held and updated conversion table which functions for all disciplines.

#### Protocol for credit recognition

The first step for a student at the University of Essex who wants to go abroad is to speak to their lecturers within their department about suitable ideas for what kinds of subjects they want to study and to look on the website for which universities they want to go to. The second step is to decide what three universities the student might want to attend, and to construct an extended list of what modules are on offer, including enough options in case any of the modules are full.

The students are also asked to write a personal statement explaining why they have chosen the universities they have, which allows the Study Abroad office to allocate limited university places to the most appropriate students.

The Study Abroad office takes responsibility for ensuring that the modules the students have chosen are at a suitable level, generally this is achieved by making sure they are in an equivalent year. It also has responsibility for ensuring the students has chosen a full workload, which is assessed by looking at the number of credits chosen. The departments also look at the modules chosen and makes sure that they sufficiently complementary to the students' course structure, that there is no duplication with any modules taken at home and that any compulsory courses have been included.

#### Perceptions of staff

The staff responsible for the design and management of the American Studies course, find the system of student exchange at Essex a huge success. Student exchanges in the American Studies degree are in fact compulsory, although the student is free to choose whether they would like to do a three or a four-year course, and the degree structure is designed to make full use of their time abroad. One of the key features of the American Studies degree is that it asks its students to work on a research project while they are abroad, which they will base their dissertation on when they get back. To equip them for the project they will do in the US they are inducted in research methods before they go. This includes a whole range of techniques including survey and interview and field research techniques.

Examples of students' projects completed to date have included one student who wanted to understand presidential libraries better and went to Chapel Hill in North Carolina in order to study the archives held there. Another student was fascinated by American Wrestling and has since moved to America to become involved in the industry. Once the students get back they write up their research projects and submit it as a dissertation, and they also develop their oral techniques by giving presentations on what they have learned. This learning process is excellent preparation for students to move into postgraduate work later.

Other perks of the Study Abroad option is a photography prize open to any Essex students who have been on a student exchange and which is displayed on the Essex website and in the main building.

One area where course content could become an area of tension that some of the courses offered were quite unusual compared to courses offered at home. This means it is particularly important for course coordinators to check course content offered at US universities before accepting them as viable modules. Examples include practical courses in funeral services, or the history of Hip Hop. For this reason it was eventually made mandatory for students to take three courses in something appropriate as well as one 'wild card'. Students tended to choose subjects such as American History, English (American) Literature, film studies and other similar cultural exercises. However, students often appreciate being able to experience one option in something unusual that would not be offered in the UK.

The Department of American Studies sees the experience of going abroad to be a significant boost to students' ability to find work after graduating because of the skills it develops and demonstrates in the students. Many students from that department have found ways to return back to the US.

### Perceptions of students

The students interviewed loved their year abroad, and found that it gave them a new sense of confidence. They all found that the US education system was very different from the one they were accustomed to at home and had a lot of good things to say about it. In particular, they liked the way that most of the lectures were given in small classes, by an experienced professional lecturer. They also liked the format of the seminars, which were always taken by the lecturer and which placed the emphasis on the students giving presentations and debating.

None of them had any problems with the way the exchange process was handled and they were happy with the universities they were allocated to. Indeed one student was recommended a university by the Study Abroad office, which they ended up going to and enjoying. There was some confusion about why the grades they acquired in US were not translated into higher marks. For example, one student achieved a 4.0 grade, which was converted to 75%, a clear first. However, arguably the US system does a disservice to its top students by awarding full marks too freely, because this leaves no room for them to have a grade for outstanding achievement. One could also say this is an issue of the UK (English) system because grades are not used in a standard way across faculties and disciplines in any case. For example there is a tendency within mathematical subjects to use the full grading scale up to 100%, and a tendency for Arts subjects to be capped at 70%.

### Success factors of this approach

A number of factors can be identified that account for the University of Essex's successful student mobility experience with US HEIs.

- A centralised approach. Clearly, the biggest success factor is the highly centralised approach adopted by the University of Essex. This has avoided a situation where each department that wishes to send students abroad has to negotiate its own bilateral agreements with US partner institutions. It also means the process for sending students abroad is very tractable for the students, who can find all the information about how to apply in a single and prominent place on the University website. It also means that the students can easily understand how their grades will be transferred if they travel abroad because this is also clearly advertised on the University website.
- Clear cooperation agreements between universities. The University of Essex only accepts cooperation agreements with US partner institutions that allow them access to the full range of courses on offer at the host institution. This is an important factor in enabling the study abroad process to remain centralised. The Study Abroad

Team can manage the large number of departments that want to send students abroad by allowing them to manage what courses they want to send their students on, and this is achieved by having contracts that allow their students access to the full range of courses on offer. This has also generally obviated the need for Memorandums of Understanding or other tools such as learning agreements, because these issues are all covered by a contract between the two universities.

#### What aspects of this example can be recommended as good practice

- Conversion tables for translating US grades. These tables are simple and successful mechanisms that have allowed the University to have a method for converting US grades into home grades. In particular, the conversion tables have been worked out for every country it deals with including with the US, for both the grades and the Grade Point Average. It also has a simple mechanism for fitting modules taken during a semester abroad into the number of credits needed, thus obviating the need for a lengthy discussion about how credits are accumulated and how workload is measured. Because the study abroad system is centralised, the conversion tables have been tested and it has been shown that these tables can withstand translating grades across the range of disciplines from the sciences to the liberal arts.
- A dedicated Study Abroad Team. The individual in Study Abroad Team are well connected, including the head of the Study Abroad Team chairing the British Universities Transatlantic Exchange Association (BUTEX). This team has been responsible for the majority of the momentum behind Essex having a study abroad scheme and they have succeeded through collaborating with the staff at the University of Essex and through a high degree of transparency.



# ANNEXES

## Annex 1 Additional data about EU-US student mobility

Table 14.4 Numbers of US students abroad, per country (only countries with more than 500 US students were included) in 2000-2001 and 2008-2009, and evolution

Country	2008-2009	2000-2001	Change between 2000-2001 and 2008-2009
United Arab Emirates	955	5	19000%
Uganda	611	28	2082%
Panama	757	96	689%
Peru	2,163	356	508%
Turkey	1,261	234	439%
China	13,674	2,942	365%
Egypt	1,781	436	308%
South Korea	2,062	522	295%
South Africa	4,160	1,107	276%
Argentina	4,705	1,258	274%
Brazil	2,777	760	265%
India	2,690	750	259%
Vietnam	672	188	257%
Morocco	865	245	253%
Ghana	2,030	607	234%
Taiwan	597	182	228%
West Africa	2,855	893	220%
Thailand	1,462	496	195%
Tanzania	863	295	193%
Czech Republic	3,664	1,273	188%
Chile	3,503	1,233	184%
Dominican Republic	1,448	527	175%
Denmark	2,244	817	175%
Guatemala	1,242	473	163%
New Zealand	2,769	1,120	147%
Hong Kong	1,155	470	146%
Switzerland	2,004	827	142%
Belize	1,333	556	140%
Japan	5,784	2,618	121%
Ecuador	2,859	1,311	118%
Poland	595	273	118%
Belgium	1,447	670	116%
Sweden	1,150	543	112%
Greece	3,616	1,754	106%
Hungary	897	439	104%

Country	2008-2009	2000-2001	Change between 2000-2001 and 2008-2009
Costa Rica	6,363	3,641	75%
East Africa	2,694	1,552	74%
Ireland	6,858	3,973	73%
Italy	27,362	16,127	70%
Germany	8,330	5,116	63%
Israel	1,958	1,248	57%
Russia	1,798	1,152	56%
Jamaica	704	462	52%
Spain	24,169	16,016	51%
France	16,910	11,905	42%
Netherlands	2,318	1,635	42%
Australia	11,140	8,066	38%
Canada	1,264	1,040	22%
Austria	2,836	2,396	18%
Kenya	881	846	4%
United Kingdom	31,342	30,289	3%
Mexico	7,320	8,360	-12%
<b>Total US students studying abroad</b>	<b>260,327</b>	<b>154,168</b>	<b>69%</b>

Source: Institute of International Education (Open Doors)

Table 14.5 Numbers of US students in EU-27 countries in 2000-2001 and 2008-2009 and evolution

Country	2008-2009	2000-2001	Change between 2000-2001 and 2008-2009
Austria	2836	2396	18%
Belgium	1447	670	116%
Bulgaria	76	30	153%
Cyprus	171	37	362%
Czech Republic	3664	1273	188%
Denmark	2244	817	175%
Estonia	73	18	306%
Finland	335	182	84%
France	16910	11905	42%
Germany	8330	5116	63%
Greece	3616	1754	106%
Hungary	897	439	104%



Country	2008-2009	2000-2001	Change between 2000-2001 and 2008-2009
Ireland	6858	3973	73%
Italy	27362	16127	70%
Latvia	14	14	0%
Lithuania	86	23	274%
Luxembourg	372	407	-9%
Malta	95	118	-19%
Netherlands	2318	1635	42%
Poland	595	273	118%
Portugal	240	77	212%
Romania	219	71	208%
Slovakia	27	26	4%
Slovenia	88	20	340%
Spain	24169	16016	51%
Sweden	1150	543	112%
United Kingdom	31342	30289	3%
<b>Total US students studying abroad</b>	<b>260,327</b>	<b>154,168</b>	<b>69%</b>

Source: Institute of International Education (Open Doors)

Legend: Green shading: countries with relatively important numbers of US students with more than 100% growth; Stripes: major receiving countries of US students

Table 14.6 Numbers of foreign students in the US, per country of origin (only countries with more than 500 students in the US are included), in the period 2000-2001 and 2009-2010, and evolution

Country	2009-2010	2000-2001	Change in the given period
Libya	1,064	39	2628%
Vietnam	13,112	2,022	548%
Burkina Faso	680	112	507%
Nepal	11,233	2,618	329%
Kazakhstan	1,936	540	259%
Saudi Arabia	15,810	5,273	200%
Mongolia	1,258	442	185%
Iran	4,731	1,844	157%
Cameroon	1,881	870	116%
China	127,628	59,939	113%
St. Lucia	529	267	98%
India	104,897	54,664	92%

<b>Country</b>	<b>2009-2010</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>Change in the given period</b>
Angola	615	348	77%
Nigeria	6,568	3,820	72%
Dominican Republic	1,400	869	61%
Southern Africa	5,313	3,304	61%
South Korea	72,153	45,685	58%
Central Africa	2,872	1,859	54%
Sri Lanka	2,957	1,964	51%
El Salvador	1,208	825	46%
Qatar	663	463	43%
Honduras	1,337	974	37%
Côte d'Ivoire/Ivory Coast	867	637	36%
Chile	2,055	1,553	32%
Ethiopia	1,553	1,205	29%
Mexico	13,450	10,670	26%
Australia	3,296	2,645	25%
Peru	3,279	2,660	23%
Uzbekistan	513	418	23%
Philippines	3,815	3,139	22%
Ghana	2,951	2,469	20%
Costa Rica	1,089	928	17%
Italy	4,072	3,490	17%
Bolivia	1,039	897	16%
Portugal	1,015	884	15%
Mali	500	439	14%
New Zealand	1,103	971	14%
Uganda	852	754	13%
Turkey	12,397	10,983	13%
Ireland	1,212	1,086	12%
Canada	28,145	25,279	11%
Ecuador	2,232	2,028	10%
United Kingdom	8,861	8,139	9%
France	7,716	7,273	6%
Hong Kong	8,034	7,627	5%
Zambia	641	613	5%
Bahamas	1,828	1,762	4%
Myanmar/Burma	695	673	3%
Colombia	6,920	6,765	2%
Egypt	2,271	2,255	1%
Haiti	1,012	1,012	0%

Country	2009-2010	2000-2001	Change in the given period
Brazil	8,786	8,846	-1%
Netherlands	1,830	1,856	-1%
Denmark	989	1,007	-2%
Singapore	4,051	4,166	-3%
Belgium	845	881	-4%
Spain	3,971	4,156	-4%
Venezuela	4,958	5,217	-5%
Guatemala	992	1,050	-6%
Germany	9,548	10,128	-6%
Austria	994	1,062	-6%
Taiwan	26,685	28,566	-7%
Poland	2,264	2,432	-7%
Jordan	1,995	2,187	-9%
Ukraine	1,727	1,909	-10%
Panama	1,082	1,217	-11%
Kenya	5,384	6,229	-14%
Senegal	624	732	-15%
Jamaica	3,530	4,225	-16%
Trinidad and Tobago	2,402	2,901	-17%
Israel	2,778	3,402	-18%
Lebanon	1,608	2,005	-20%
Kuwait	2,442	3,045	-20%
Croatia	623	782	-20%
Malaysia	6,190	7,795	-21%
South Africa	1,656	2,106	-21%
Bulgaria	2,495	3,270	-24%
Thailand	8,531	11,187	-24%
Pakistan	5,222	6,948	-25%
Czech Republic	828	1,112	-26%
Finland	663	893	-26%
Romania	2,204	2,976	-26%
Tanzania	1,098	1,528	-28%
Albania	790	1,118	-29%
Russia	4,827	6,858	-30%
Norway	1,467	2,098	-30%
Switzerland	1,284	1,850	-31%
Argentina	2,165	3,172	-32%
Zimbabwe	1,159	1,703	-32%
Sweden	3,116	4,598	-32%

Country	2009-2010	2000-2001	Change in the given period
Greece	1,837	2,768	-34%
Bangladesh	2,619	4,114	-36%
United Arab Emirates	1,653	2,659	-38%
Indonesia	6,943	11,625	-40%
Morocco	1,120	1,917	-42%
Hungary	664	1,174	-43%
Japan	24,842	46,497	-47%
Cyprus	586	2,217	-74%
<b>TOTAL Foreign Students in the US</b>	<b>690,923</b>	<b>547,867</b>	<b>26%</b>

Source: Institute of International Education (Open Doors)

Table 14.7 Numbers of EU students in the US in 2000-2001 and 2009-2010 and change as well as numbers of intra-EU/EEA and candidate countries mobility and change.

Country	EU students in the US			EU students in other EU-27, EEA and candidate countries		
	2009-2010	2000-2001	Change in the given period	2000	2009	Change in the given period
Austria	994	1062	-6%	9200	11600	26%
Belgium	845	881	-4%	7800	9500	22%
Bulgaria	2495	3270	-24%	8400	22400	167%
Cyprus	586	2217	-74%	7300	11600	59%
Czech Republic	828	1112	-26%	3300	10800	227%
Denmark	989	1007	-2%	4900	5400	10%
Estonia	220	287	-23%	1400	3600	157%
Finland	663	893	-26%	8600	8300	-3%
France	7716	7273	6%	34600	47600	38%
Germany	9548	10128	-6%	34100	80500	136%
Greece	1837	2768	-34%	59600	33100	-44%
Hungary	664	1174	-43%	5400	8200	52%
Ireland	1212	1086	12%	16000	23800	49%
Italy	4072	3490	17%	30500	41100	35%
Latvia	286	383	-25%	1100	4200	282%
Lithuania	361	493	-27%	2300	8800	283%
Luxembourg	56	73	-23%	5200	7100	37%
Malta	32	61	-48%	500	1200	140%
Netherlands	1830	1856	-1%	9300	14600	57%
Poland	2264	2432	-7%	14300	42900	200%
Portugal	1015	884	15%	8500	16400	93%
Romania	2204	2976	-26%	6600	25100	280%

Country	EU students in the US			EU students in other EU-27, EEA and candidate countries		
	2009-2010	2000-2001	Change in the given period	2000	2009	Change in the given period
Slovakia	466	539	-14%	4200	29400	600%
Slovenia	192	207	-7%	1900	2600	37%
Spain	3971	4156	-4%	20500	22300	9%
Sweden	3116	4598	-32%	8900	12700	43%
United Kingdom	8861	8139	9%	11000	11800	7%
<b>Total EU-27 students /in the US and in EU/EEAC and candidate countries</b>	<b>57323</b>	<b>63445</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>325400</b>	<b>516300</b>	<b>59%</b>

Source: EU-US mobility: Institute of International Education (Open Doors); mobility within the EU, EEA and candidate countries: Eurostat

Legend: green shading: countries with growing numbers of national students in the US; diagonal stripes: countries with more than 50% growth in intra-EU,EEA and candidate countries mobility; horizontal stripes: countries with negative trend in intra-EU,EEA and candidate countries mobility

## Annex 2 Interviewees' profiles

To be completed

## Annex 3 Topic guides for interviews

### Topic guide for initial interviews

Discussion topics for **institutions which act as intermediary organisations in supporting mobility (with the US)**:

- Contextual information about the role of the given organisation in supporting mobility with the US
- Basic information about the scale of exchanges between HEI in the country where the organisation is based and the US:
  - Do many HEI have student exchanges with the US
  - Do many HEIs have joint programmes with the US
- Overall appreciation of the role of credit systems in these exchanges:
  - Is it common that there would be problems with recognition of credit for students who have studied in the US? What are the main issues?
  - Does the fact that HEIs in the country have a credit system in place support mobility with the US and how?
- Existence of policies/ guidelines/ good practice:
  - Are there policies/guidelines for HEIs to enable them to develop an institutional approach to recognising credit in their cooperation with US institutions?
  - Are there examples of good or best practice in recognition of credit from the US available?
  - Are there standard approaches for credit transfer (when it comes to cooperation with the US)?
  - Does the organisation advise HEIs in development of policies for credit transfer?
- Institutional approaches:
  - Is it common for institutions to have a common approach to recognition of credit/ credit transfer (namely when it comes to cooperation with the US) or is this left up to the different departments?
  - In general, is there transparency about approaches to validate and recognise credit from the US?
- Assessment of the current practice:
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of how credit from abroad (mainly when it comes to the US) is being validated and recognised?
  - Are there institutions/ departments whom you would recommend as examples of good practice?

### International mobility coordinator

Note: the interview guides will be adapted by the interviewer to the profile of the interviewee.

Context:

- The cooperation arrangement with the US partner institutions
  - Importance of cooperation with the US compared to other countries and how does it link to the internationalisation strategy
  - Objectives of cooperation with US HEIs and short history

- What governance structures are in place for this cooperation and what is their role
- Basic facts: number of agreements, fields of study, length of agreement(s), numbers of students concerned
- The extent to which credit recognition is perceived as an important element of internationalisation strategy

#### Recognition arrangements concerning student mobility and joint/double degrees:

- What type of recognition arrangements exist with the US (joint degrees, organised mobility, etc.)
- What is the basis for recognition:
- The role of credit points; comparison of learning outcomes; comparison of curricula; transparency of assessment; quality assurance, validation etc.
- How has this recognition arrangement been designed (management of this process, organisation)
- Did it require changes to the curriculum or to the assessment in one of the institutions? How resource intensive was it (e.g. documents produced, meetings);

#### The role of credit system in the process:

- Did the institution use credit systems before, what about credit system in the US institution, how have the differences been overcome; what aspects of credit systems are most crucial for the agreement (learning outcomes, points, assessment, etc.)
- What are (or were) the main difficulties with this arrangement
- What are the main advantages of this arrangement
- What process would they recommend to an institution that wants to use a credit system to facilitate recognition with a US partner institution?

#### Use of credit for programme design (joint or double degrees):

- How do you use credits to articulate periods of studies in different institutions? E.g. joint degrees
- What is the added value of using credits?
- Any obstacles that had to be overcome?
- Specific issues concerning trends?

#### Credit transfer related tools

If these aspects have not been discussed above please cover:

- Do you systematically sign MoUs with US institutions and does credit recognition figure there? What is the added value for credit recognition
- Do you systematically use learning agreements? What is the added value for recognition?
- Do you have lists of equivalences of lists of courses to choose from? How were these set up? By whom? How are they updated?
- How do you decide on the credit value (credit points) when transferring credit:
  - Conversion tables, the same value is assigned as what an equivalent course has in your institution?



Added value of this approach? Any issues?

- What is the role of the international coordinator in ensuring recognition?
- Other tools

Recognition of degrees for students with US degrees coming to study in your institution

- How are US degrees recognised for continuation of studies in your institution?
- Any particular problems and how are these overcome?

Credit transfer with US institutions compared to other countries

- What are the particularities related to credit transfer from / towards US compared to other countries?
- What are the main obstacles?
- How were these overcome?

Implementation of this approach

- How was the approach designed and implemented?
  - Did they learn from another institutions or develop the process themselves?
- What were the main difficulties in implementing the described approach to credit recognition with the US?
- What are the views/feedback of teaching staff?
- What are the views/feedback of students

Quality assurance

- Is the credit transfer and recognition approach regularly reviewed?
- Is feedback collected?
- Do students have the possibility to appeal or complain?

## Person in charge of credit recognition (if member of teaching staff not an international coordinator)

### Context:

- The importance of cooperation with US institutions in your department
- The importance of credit recognition for mobility within your department

### Organisation of credit recognition

- Can you please describe the process through which in your department credit recognition is organised.

#### Cover these points:

- Memorandum of Understanding;
- Learning Agreements;
- Lists of courses to choose from - how are these decided and updated
- Equivalences – how are these decided and updated
- Information of students before going abroad
- Visits of teaching staff or other forms of contact to develop trust
- Any aspects that are specific to the cooperation with the US?

### Use of credit for programme design (joint or double degrees):

- How do you use credits to articulate periods of studies in different institutions? E.g. joint degrees
- What is the added value of using credits?
- Any obstacles that had to be overcome?
- Specific issues concerning trends?

### Credit recognition in practice

- Does credit recognition with the US concern:
  - Optional courses
  - Core courses
- How much choice do students have?
- Describe the process for converting the value of credit
- Describe the process for converting the grades

### Credit transfer with US institutions compared to other countries

- What are the particularities related to credit transfer from / towards US compared to other countries?
- What are the main obstacles?
- How were these overcome?

## Group discussion with students participating in Europe-US mobility

### Contextual information

- Could you please introduce yourself and your studies briefly?
- Period of study abroad (how long, when)
- Why did you decide to study in the US / in Europe?

### Application and selection procedure:

- How did you select the institution abroad? Did you receive help from the home university? From which unit / department?
- Could you please describe the application and selection procedure? What type of administrative processes did you need to undertake? (various forms, learning agreements) Any difficulties, problems in particular?

### Recognition of the study period abroad:

- How did you decide what would you like to study aboard?
- Was there a course catalogue or any guidance available to help to you in choosing the most suitable subjects?
- Did you have free choice in selecting subjects for your international exchange period?
  - If free choice: Why did you study these subjects and not something else?
  - If not a free choice: Do you know why weren't you allowed to take on other courses?
- Did you have to make a decision before the study period abroad? Was there any flexibility to change once the decision has been made?
- Was the period fully recognised by the home institution?
- What were the requirements to get recognition for the study period abroad? How was this organised (step wise process)?
- Any difficulties with recognition in terms of accepting credits or translating grades? (Do you know of other people who had difficulties)
- Did you think that you have a comprehensive understanding on the credit system employed and system of learning outcomes?
- If you do, what do you think of the system? Is it useful / beneficial / fair for the students
- Do they know what the teaching staff / support staff has to do in order to ensure recognition of credits?

## Annex 4 US Examples

- Example 1: Michigan State University searchable transfer credit equivalency system (<http://transfer.msu.edu/Institution.asp>)
- Example 2: University of Kansas static listing of credit articulation with the Danish Institute for Study Abroad ([http://www.studyabroad.ku.edu/\\_customtags/ct\\_FileRetrieve.cfm?File\\_ID=0407724870770300700203721A00077301140301730A1C007607010E077471027170057004730A](http://www.studyabroad.ku.edu/_customtags/ct_FileRetrieve.cfm?File_ID=0407724870770300700203721A00077301140301730A1C007607010E077471027170057004730A))
- Example 3: University of Minnesota Academic Planning form for study abroad approval before departure ([http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/PeopleSoft/Common/AcademicPlanning\\_web.pdf](http://umabroad.umn.edu/assets/files/PDFs/PeopleSoft/Common/AcademicPlanning_web.pdf))
- Example 4: University of Indiana Overseas Study Advising Plan for study abroad approval before departure (<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/docs/Forms/AdvisingPlan.doc>) and directions for student use (<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/docs/Forms/IUBAdvisingPlanInstructions.doc>)
- Example 5: Virginia Tech College of Engineering Transfer Credit Request Form for pre-approval of a study abroad plan ([http://www.eng.vt.edu/sites/default/files/pageattachments/study\\_abroad\\_transfer\\_credit\\_form%20revised%206-2-2011.doc](http://www.eng.vt.edu/sites/default/files/pageattachments/study_abroad_transfer_credit_form%20revised%206-2-2011.doc))
- Example 6: Penn State University process for student application to recognise credit from abroad as an equivalent course at Penn State ([http://gpglobalea.gp.psu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent\\_ID=E7701F1-939F-962A-3B62D18230899758&Link\\_ID=EF7F3C3D-9FF5-AAC7-25DC67128D29658C&pID=5&IID=19](http://gpglobalea.gp.psu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent_ID=E7701F1-939F-962A-3B62D18230899758&Link_ID=EF7F3C3D-9FF5-AAC7-25DC67128D29658C&pID=5&IID=19)) and online form for student to upload information and documents from the host course for evaluation (<https://www.global.psu.edu/ea/CEquiv/>)
- Example 7: Bentley University-Tilburg University Sample Dual Degree Curriculum Map that lists the semester by semester courses recognised for dual degree study at consortia partner universities ([http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Bentley\\_Tilburg\\_Cadre\\_1\\_curriculum\\_List\\_08-26-10.pdf](http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Bentley_Tilburg_Cadre_1_curriculum_List_08-26-10.pdf))
- Example 8: Bentley University International Bachelor's in Information Management student handbook for students studying at Tilburg and Deusto Universities ([http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Sept\\_2010\\_academic\\_handbook\\_v2.pdf](http://legacy.bentley.edu/IBIM/Documents/Sept_2010_academic_handbook_v2.pdf))
- Example 9: Michigan State University grade and credit conversion for the Department of English programme with the University of Aarhus, Denmark ([http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP\\_Aarhus.pdf](http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP_Aarhus.pdf)); grade and credit conversion for MSU College of Natural Science with Lancaster University, United Kingdom ([http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP\\_Lancaster.pdf](http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP_Lancaster.pdf)); grade and credit conversion for Department of Psychology with Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany ([http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP\\_Giessen.pdf](http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/PDF/CSSAP_Giessen.pdf))
- Example 10: University of Manchester Appendix IV: Grade Conversion Supplement Form: The University of Manchester Exchange Student given to the host instructor to complete for the exchange student at the end of an abroad course to assist in the conversion of grades to the home university (<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=9801>). The entire report entitled "Framework for credit transfer and grade conversion of study abroad" provides the policy and procedures for study abroad in both US and other EU countries.

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