



Bologna & the Erasmus+ charter: from policy to practice

Title of the session: Grading

Speaker(s): Robert Wagenaar, Raimonda Markeviciene, (Frederick de Decker, didn't speak in the morning)

Presentations:

Reporter: Marijn van Grunsven (morning) and Cyril van Es (afternoon)

Main ideas of the presentations:

Fred Jonker

- General introduction, history of grading and conversion (numerical vs qualitative)
- Different options and approaches of grading are discussed. Comparison between grading systems: there is no better or worse system. Different systems work

Raimonda Markeviciene

- Grading scale in Lithuania. New development defining "well performing" students
- There are no rules about grade conversion, no clear appeal policies, hazy policies
- Vilnius university has decided not to convert grades, because conversion cannot guarantee fairness. Also, this is less work for coordinators. In the diploma supplement they indicate the courses. The students need to save their transcript of records as proof of their grades.
- For incoming students a clear table with statistics and explanation is provided, for their home institution to make a fair conversion of grades possible
- Egracons conversion system is discussed. Although skeptical at the beginning, Raimonda is relatively happy with the results

Robert Wagenaar

- Not converting = discrimination between home and host institution
- Grading cultures are very different
- Grade conversion is important for grants and funds
- Transparency and fair treatment is very important
- Fair conversion is very difficult. If for example in the Czech republic 38% of the students gets the highest grade (A), and in Spain only 9%, you already have a problem for fair conversion! You need more information to convert fairly.
- Defining *cum laude* is equally difficult. The principles and rules for this should be published and transparent.
- Why not putting the original grades from the other country in the diploma supplement? It's simple and transparent. Or: use both original and converted grades.

- For all students, Groningen uses in the diploma supplement Dutch grades and the percentage of students that get this grade (so that abroad universities and employers can see their performances).
- GPA calculators don't work very well, because grades always need clarification!
- There is grade inflation in the US
- We need to show the world what good practice is by providing all information necessary to make a fair assessment of a student's accomplishments.
- Netherlands has a conservative grading culture. This can have negative effects when going abroad.

Discussion issues:

- Should all grades of exchange periods be converted? An appeal case is discussed.
- If you have a grade and a distribution scale, this should be enough. Then there is no need to convert the grades. This can also be included in the diploma supplement.
- Sometimes you need to provide a GPA to apply for universities. This is not always fair or possible. How can HEIs help students? → say they belong to the best x% of all students for example.
- How to deal with different grading cultures?
- Netherlands has a conservative grading culture. This can have negative effects when going abroad. Why is it impossible to get a 10? Then why do we have this grade. We should use this part of the grading scale to differentiate between the level of people.
- Credits: if you get all credits you get a diploma. Therefore we have a certain liberty to put grades aside.
- Availability of grade tables is lacking very much. Many institutions have experienced this. It's very easy to make if you have the data. But if the partner doesn't supply it you don't have it. Putting pressure on the partner helps to get them. You need an indicator of what a grade means. Do you demand it beforehand? How do you do this with historical partners?
- People find it hard to understand foreign grading tables.
- From the GPA calculation you can exclude the semester abroad. But the GPA is still a problem.
- Should we accept the collateral damage of unfairly converted grades to make it possible to convert the majority of the grades in a satisfactory way?

Final remarks/ recommendations:

- Make sure you get a grading table from all partner institutions. Without this, it is impossible to fairly convert grades. But there is no commitment from the partner institutions. Maybe Dutch HEI's can work together and lobby together to have partners provide grading tables. Maybe we could also emphasize this issue to other NA's to put this issue to their HEIs. Note: grading tables have to be updated every year. Maybe this is even an issue to take back to the European Commission to have it included in the charter. The EC is still hesitant.
- The discussion about converting or not hasn't been settled yet.
- Transparency is the key