

The Canada-EU Bridge Project:
Narrative Report to Mobility Program Inventory



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December 2006

A. Introduction

From November 2005 to May 2006 The Canadian Centre for German and European Studies conducted a research project on behalf of the European Commission's Delegation in Ottawa. This work, named The Canada-EU Bridge Project, had two stated goals. First, it was to produce a comprehensive inventory of mobility opportunities between post-secondary institutions in Canada and each of the 25 EU member states. Second, it aimed to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities in international cooperation in higher education between Canada and the EU.

The survey was supervised by Prof. Kurt Hübner, CCGES and York's Department of Political Science, and carried out by Nicole Andrée, a guest researcher at the Centre under the auspices of the Canada-Germany Young Workers Program, with the assistance of Graduate Student Assistant Anna Gradek.

Over the following pages, we will attempt to:

- provide an overview of the main results of our research
- give some analysis of the findings
- offer some recommendations for increasing the participation of Canadian students in international mobility programs

B. Results

1. Methodology:

The Canada-EU Bridge Project set out to gather the following data on transatlantic mobility programs:

- Form of the mobility agreement (*Bilateral agreement, study abroad program, field trip*)
- The partner institution (*if relevant*)
- The target group – (*academic level of participating students and their program of study*)
- The length of stay abroad (e.g. *6 week summer course, single semester or full academic year*)
- The number of placements for Canadian students
- Costs involved and funding opportunities available to help defray expenses
- Contact information for the program's coordinator

This data was gathered in a three-stage process. During the first stage, extensive internet searches were conducted of the websites of Canadian colleges and universities in an attempt to identify relevant mobility programs and their coordinators. In the second stage, the researchers then sent out email inquiries to these coordinators, either staff in the international offices of Canadian colleges and universities or individual faculty members, asking for specific information on the mobility programs identified during phase 1. While this produced some results, the levels of compliance were considerably lower than desired, necessitating a third phase. This involved initiating phone contact with program managers and

coordinators, an approach that yielded considerably more successful results. In the final analysis, this three-pronged data gathering method identified a total of approximately 1700 transatlantic mobility opportunities – most of them bilateral agreements - extant between Canadian post-secondary institutions and their counterparts in the 25 EU member states.

Despite this success, however, this methodological approach had three significant drawbacks:

- First of all, it was often challenging for the research team to gather this extensive data through personal interviews with administrators. This was particularly the case at centrally-organized institutions where an often understaffed international office was charged with overseeing most, if not all, of that school's mobility arrangements. In such situations, employees were frequently, and understandably, reluctant to spend a significant amount of time to produce the precise data researchers were asking for.
- The second challenge facing the research team was the reluctance of some international offices to provide accurate numbers, lest attention be drawn to the relative dormancy of some of their mobility arrangements.
- Furthermore, challenges of inter-organizational communication arose, particularly in cases where institution's had a decentralized management structure for their mobility arrangements (that is, some programs were managed by individual faculty members or departments). Here, it was not uncommon to find that no one at the institution had a complete overview of their school's arrangements, meaning that it was challenging, if not impossible, to guarantee the comprehensiveness of that institutions inventory entries.

2. Results

2.1 Statistical Distribution of Mobility Arrangements with Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions by EU Member State

France	Approx. 443 Programs = 26.1%	}	57.2%
UK	Approx. 312 Programs = 18.4%		
Germany	Approx. 215 Programs = 12.7%		
The Netherlands	Approx. 112 Programs = 6.6%	}	19.5%
Sweden	Approx. 120 Programs = 7.1%		
Spain	Approx. 99 Programs = 5.8%		
Finland	Approx. 66 Programs = 3.9%	}	20.2%
Denmark	Approx. 64 Programs = 3.8%		
Italy	Approx. 63 Programs = 3.7%		
Austria	Approx. 45 Programs = 2.6%		
Belgium	Approx. 44 Programs = 2.6%		
Poland	Approx. 23 Programs = 1.3%		
Ireland	Approx. 22 Programs = 1.3%		
Hungary	Approx. 17 Programs = 1%		
Remaining 11 EU Member Countries share less than 4% of all programs.			

One important finding of the survey is the distribution of mobility programs between Canadian post-secondary institutions and the 25 EU member states. France has by far the greatest number of such arrangements with a total of 443 or 26.1% of all identified programs. Mobility arrangements between post-secondary institutions in the United Kingdom and their Canadian counterparts account for 18.4 % of the total (312) with Germany holding down the third position 215 programs or 12.7% of the total. Together, these three countries make up more than half of the total post-secondary

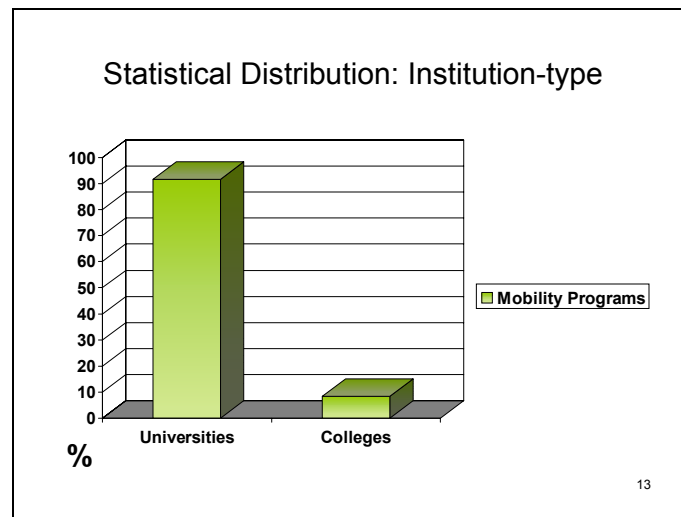
mobility arrangements (57.2 %) that are conducted between Canada and the EU member states.

Our research identified a second group of three nations which each accounted for between 5% and 10% of the total number of mobility arrangements. These are the Netherlands, Sweden, and Spain. Each of these countries have more than 100 programs and in total make up 19.5 % of international mobility arrangements between Canadian post-secondary institutions and their counterparts in the EU.

The third group of countries is made of those which have more than 1% or less than 5% of the total number of programs. Of perhaps the greatest interest here is Finland, a country with only 1% of the EU population but which tallies 3.7% of all the transatlantic mobility programs.

Among the countries in this third group, there are just two new EU member states – Poland and Hungary. Of the remaining eight new member states, none make up more than 1% of the total and all belong to the group of 11 nations whose links with Canadian post-secondary institutions constitute less than 4% of the overall total.

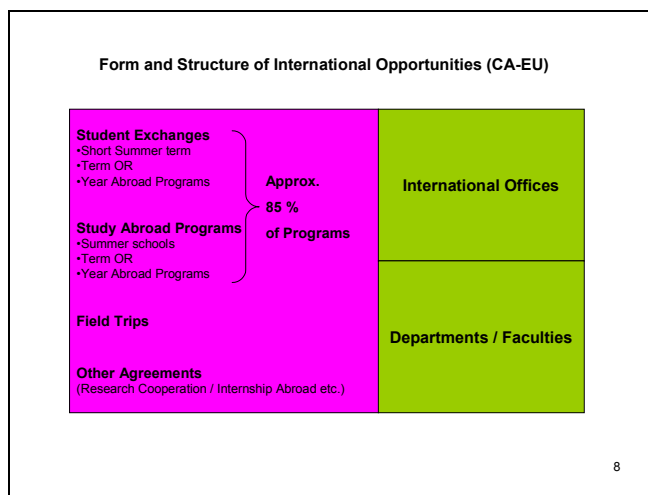
2.2 Statistical Distribution by Institution-type



More than 90% of all the mobility programs identified in our research occur at the university level with colleges accounting for less than 10%.

From our conversations with mobility stakeholders, we learned that interest in international mobility is increasing and probably will continue to do so in the years to come. This is true not only for universities, but increasingly for colleges as well. The question for many Canadian schools is how to identify adequate partners in EU countries, a particular challenge for institutions (particularly colleges) without long-standing contacts and access to networks which might help them to find suitable partners.

2.3 Program Forms and Administrative Anchorage



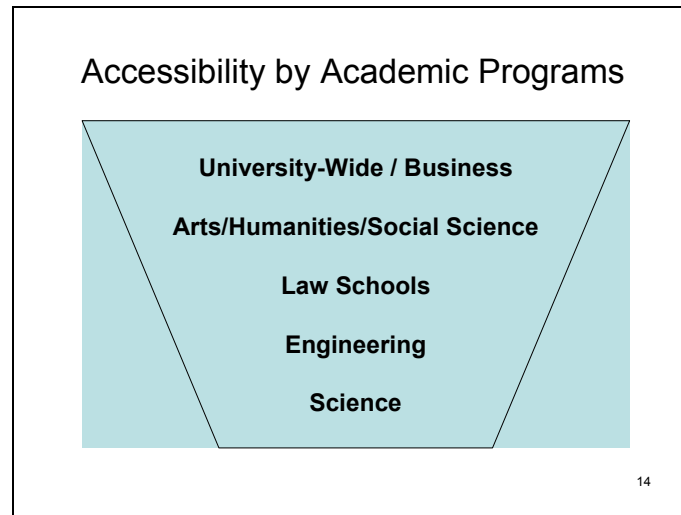
There are three main forms of mobility programs between Canadian and European universities and colleges: **bilateral exchanges**, **study abroad programs**, and **field trips**. Most programs are bilateral exchanges based on the principle of reciprocity, meaning that there is a balance of places for incoming and outgoing students. Most of these agreements are administered in international offices and they are typically open to students of all faculties. Another common program type is the study abroad program, arrangements with content similar to exchanges but which run only one way (e.g. Canada to Europe). These programs are not based on bilaterally balanced agreements. Together bilateral exchanges and study abroad programs make up approximately 85% of all transatlantic mobility programs in Canadian universities. Both of these types of program involve period of study of at least one term but no longer than one full academic year.

Another form of mobility programs are consortia programs. They are amongst the most successful mobilizers of Canadian students for international study experience. The arrangements unite several Canadian institutions with various European and non-European partner post-secondary institutions. These programs are typically targeted

towards either a certain study area (TASSEP, EU-Canada Mobility Programs), a certain region (North2North, OBW/ORO), or a reputation of excellence (Universitas21). However, in terms of the overall numbers, these programs move a relatively small percentage of students.

A third program type is the field trip, something commonly found at Canadian universities. These usually have a duration of between 3 to 6 weeks and are organized by departments or faculties, often as a means of complementing a degree program. Most target students from a certain field of study and often combine second language instruction with more standard lecture content. Typical destinations are Italy, Greece, or European capitals such as London, Berlin, and Prague. A final program type worth mentioning, though small in total numbers, is the research co-op, programs which are typically administered at the faculty level and have no further connection to the international offices.

2.4 Statistical Distribution of Academic Programs



The majority of study abroad programs are so-called “University-wide” arrangements which are open to students of all faculties. Often these are bilateral agreements that are administered by international offices. In rare cases, international offices also manage programs that are specifically designed for students from a specific department or faculty, however the majority of exchange agreements that focus on a certain program of study are typically administered at the faculty or department level. In such cases, it is not uncommon for a faculty to initiate an exchange arrangement itself. This type of arrangement is particularly prevalent at business schools, the field of study which can demonstrate the second largest group of international mobility programs.

3. Analysis

3.1 Distribution between countries

In our analysis of the statistical distribution of international mobility programs between the European countries we considered the following variables to explain the ranking: The impact of language, historical bonds and migration, economic wealth of the country; size of the population; and the extent of engagement in partnership cultivation.

The reasons for the dominant position of France are self-evident. First, the primacy of French as the language of choice for second language instruction across much of Canada means Canadian students, many of whom have some facility in the French language, are more open to considering pursuing studies in France where the language barrier, traditionally one of the highest hurdles for mobility, is lower. Second, there is the factor of the strong cultural and historical ties between Québec and France (33.6% of all EU-Canadian exchange programs conducted in Québec are directed towards France) However, even if we remove Québec from our calculations and include only the remaining nine provinces and territories, France would still lead the ranking, albeit by a greatly diminished margin. With the province of Ontario, for example, France remains the number one partner in terms of overall program numbers, however agreements with U.K. institutions run a very close second. In the Atlantic region, France even drops to the third place behind the United Kingdom and Germany. As this region accounts for only 9% of all programs, however, this has relatively little impact on the overall picture.

As with France, the reasons for the relative prominence of mobility arrangements with U.K. post-secondary institutions include a shared history, migration and linguistic

bonds. In the case of Germany, the presence of large numbers of German ex-patriots in Canada goes some way to explaining the prevalence of mobility arrangements, but a large part of this has to do with the active role the Federal Republic of Germany in cultivating such relationships with international partners, not only in North America but around the globe. Finally, it should be noted that the top three countries of the ranking are amongst the wealthiest in the European Union and make up 41% of its population, factors which also go some way to explaining their relative prominence in the inventory.

Interesting cases are the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, all relatively small countries on the basis of population but with highly successful student mobility programs to Canada. In these cases, the success of their position might have something to do with the widespread facility of their students in the English language as well as relatively high number of English-language course offerings to be found at their post-secondary institutions, something highly attractive for many Canadian students.

Spain on the other hand does not attract with reduced language barriers but more likely with the temperate Mediterranean climate, interesting history and relative popularity of Spanish language instruction at Canadian post-secondary schools.

The rather small representation of new EU member states reflects in a large part the significant economic gap between themselves the rest of the EU. Also, there are few traditional links between post-secondary institutions in these countries and their Canadian counterparts, meaning that the foundations prerequisite for mobility arrangements are not yet in existence and will need to be intentionally cultivated, a process that will undoubtedly demand much commitment and patience.

3.2 Distribution between College and University

The reasons for the disparity between the distribution of mobility programs in universities and colleges are many. However, it seems clear that one important factor is an institution's size, with larger schools having the resources and connections necessary to provide students with a broad palette of program offerings. Another factor which plays an important role is an institution's reputation, with those enjoying high visibility and name recognition often seen as the most desirable exchange partners. This places both colleges and smaller universities, with their more modest resources and reputations, at a distinct disadvantage.

3.3 Structural Anchorage of the Mobility Programs

As shown in the results there are two administrative structures dominant in mobility programs. On the one hand, university-wide arrangements that are administered in international offices; on the other, programs targeted for students from certain study programs administered on departmental level. In the following we are going to discuss advantages and disadvantages of both models.

Faculty or department based agreements have the advantage that the connection to the students is more direct. Therefore, recruitment and support before, during and after the term abroad is easier. For example, the transfer of credits is generally less problematic as the relationship between the two faculties and their understanding of the work done by their foreign counterparts is detailed and thorough, making recognition for work completed abroad less complicated. Another advantage of agreements on the faculty level is that Canadian and European faculties can be matched without taking into account the needs of other departments at their respective

institutions, that is, the international partner is “tailor made” for cooperation. A further advantage is that personal relationships between departments are more likely to develop, facilitating the development of “champions” for the programs at each institution, something that helps guarantee their long term viability and survival.

There are, however, also disadvantages which arise from the structural set up of exchange programs based on the faculty level. The main problem is that they often lack structural administrative support and are highly dependent on altruistic engagement of faculty administrators. Therefore, it is possible that programs die out as soon as responsibilities within the faculty change. Also, synergy effects between departments of one university do not take place. Furthermore, departments that are not very well equipped to pursue internationalization agreements cannot “piggy back” on the success of other, better networked, departments. In summation, in order to ensure the advantages of decentralized exchange programs, careful consideration has to be given to the administrative setup and structural payoffs.

3.4 Advantages of Consortia Programs

Another administrative model are consortia programs, typically exchange agreements concluded between a group of partners with a field/geographic commonality. While consortia programs facilitate the mobility of a relatively small number of students in the overall picture, they have proven to be a very useful tool in the mobilization of the student body.

One of the primary reasons for their success is that their thematic/geographic focus gives them excellent access to their “target audience”, enabling them to communicate

directly to those students most likely to be interested in what these programs have on offer. Another reason for the relative success of consortia programs is that they have been successful in “branding” themselves as the “first address” in their area/field. A key element here is the “word of mouth” of past participants. Often alumni of a program remain present in a department or faculty after their return from abroad, and the information and positive reinforcement they provide can play a key role in motivating a new crop of students to take part in the present.

Given their relative success, it seems likely that consortia programs, particularly, those involving so-called “elite” universities, or faculties, will play an ever greater role in the future of transatlantic mobility. For Canadian students, many of whom consider their university education an investment in the future, the assurances that consortia arrangements can offer in regards to the academic quality and reputation of a partner institution, these programs should only grow in their attractiveness.

4. Participation in Student Mobility Programs: Obstacles and Motivators

4.1 Total Number of Programs and Participation

Going into the project, one of our goals was to determine accurate figures on the numbers of Canadian post-secondary students travelling to Europe for academic purposes in the context of a mobility arrangement offered by their institutions. As our research progressed, however, it became clear that any figures generated here would be inaccurate and/or incomplete. The reasons for this are several: first, we discovered that a number of institutions with centrally-administered mobility arrangements do not keep extensive records on student numbers. Rather, they focus their energies on administering the arrangements and providing support for their student participants. In such cases, providing the exact number of participants in specific programs would have generated a significant amount of work for these offices, something, not surprisingly, few were in a position to do. Another challenge we encountered was reluctance on the part of some International Offices to divulge participation figures for fear that the dormancy of certain programs would be revealed. The final hurdle we faced in producing an accurate count of Canadian student numbers was our uncertainty at the comprehensiveness of our inventory. At centrally-organized schools, we are relatively certain to have covered all the extant arrangements, however, where programs were coordinated at the faculty and department level, we are less confident that our findings are complete.

While we have been unable to produce reliable numbers for Canadian participants in European transatlantic mobility arrangements, our interviews with “mobility” administrators consistently drew attention to the fact that student exchange programs are “out of balance.” This means that these reciprocal arrangements send more

students in one direction (invariably *from* Canada *to* Europe), a situation which causes problems for both sides of such arrangements.

4.2 Statistical distribution: Mobility as a one way street

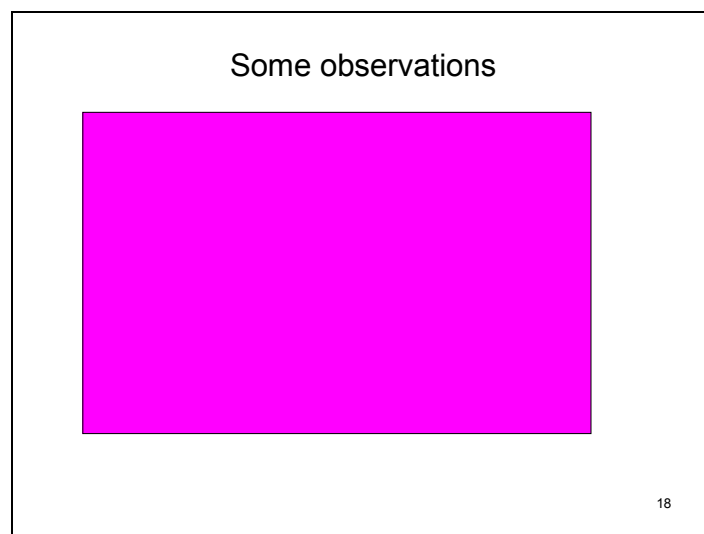
EU Country	Incoming 2003-2004	Outgoing 2003-2004	Incoming 2004-2005	Outgoing 2004-2005
Belgium	30	24	59	36
Czech Republic	5	1	1	6
Denmark	12	10	6	4
Finland	2	-	2	1
France	1747	325	1778	282
Germany	33	5	39	4
Italy	6	4	2	6
Lithuania	2	1	-	1
Spain	4	8	3	9
Sweden	11	20	12	20
United Kingdom	10	22	4	20
Total	1862	420	1806	389

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A striking example of this imbalance is illustrated in figures for the period of 2003 to 2005 as provided by CREPUQ, a consortia program operating between French and Québec post-secondary institutions. While this program has been very successful in the facilitating the mobility of significant numbers of students, the table above shows the striking imbalance between incoming French and outgoing Canadian students. In 2003-2004, French schools sent 1747 students to their Québec partners, however, only 325 students were sent in the opposite direction. In 2004-2005, this discrepancy grew with 1778 incoming students from France “balanced” by only 282 outgoing students from Canada. If one considers that participating Québec participants are eligible for a generous degree of provincial funding and that there is no language barrier between the partners, the persistent imbalance here suggests that the actual reasons for non-participation are not to be found in the oft cited reasons of funding and language

concerns. Though no clear conclusions can be drawn, perhaps the imbalance can be explained by a lack of information and awareness about the CREPUQ program and available funding amongst Québec students. It seems likely as well that many students may not be aware of the benefits that a foreign education experience will provide their education and future career options. Furthermore, in Québec, as in the rest of Canada, there is no strong culture of internationalization in higher education which would make participation in a mobility program a “given” as opposed to an option. In such a context, the impact of positive “word of mouth” would have can scarcely be overestimated.

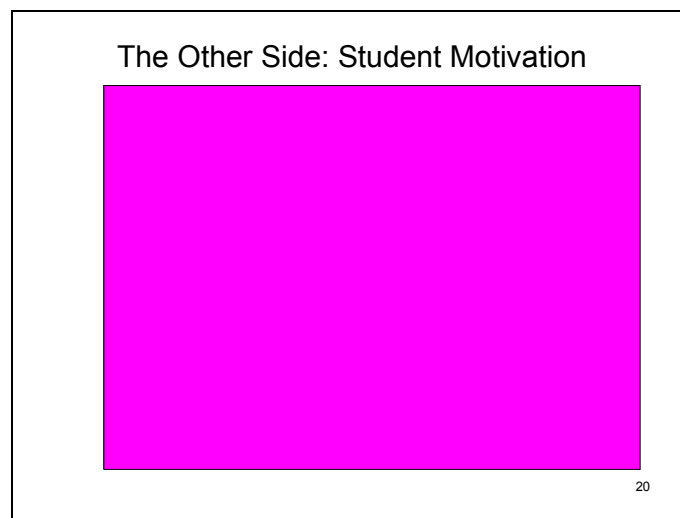
4.3 Obstacles to student mobility



A further aspect of our research sought to identify the obstacles and motivating factors that Canadian students most frequently cite when justifying their decision to spend part of their studies abroad. The obstacle most commonly mentioned by mobility administrators was the cost factor. The second most popular answer was the language barrier. The third most frequently mentioned obstacle was students' concern

that a term abroad might slow their degree acquisition should credit transfers from the European institution not be successful. Another factor frequently cited by administrators for relatively low levels of student participation is a general lack of awareness, not only about international study opportunities, but also about funding and scholarships. Another important reason administrators offered was the observation that many students are simply unaware of the advantages of a European study or research stay would have for their degree work and future career.

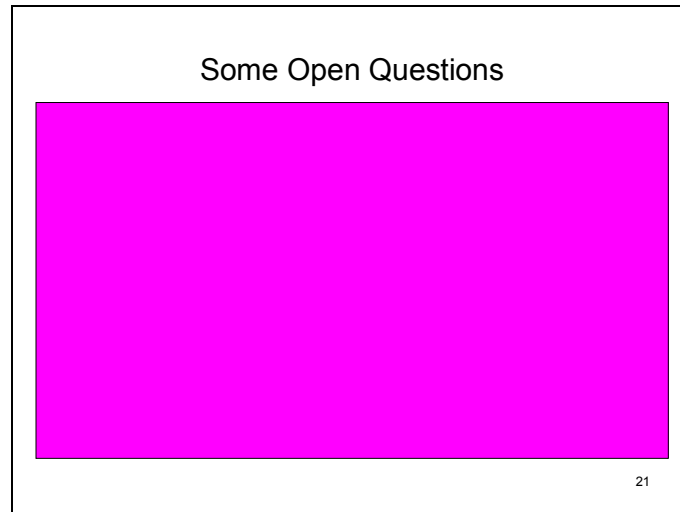
4.4 Student Motivation



Having presented some of the obstacles that affect students' decisions to participate in mobility arrangements, we now turn our attention to the factors which motivate those who do in fact take part in these programs. While for European students, the desire to have a 'personal experience' is still a significant motivating factor for participation in a mobility program, at Canadian universities and colleges, this factor is decidedly less prevalent. Due to high tuition fees and a widely held belief that higher education is an investment in future success, other motivators play a more decisive role than a

desire to have “an experience” abroad. For Canadian students, gaining language proficiency is a central objective. Students consider this an asset in the job market, something which offsets the perceived risks of participation in a mobility program. Many Canadian students who take part in transatlantic mobility arrangements do because their participation is mandated by their degree program, a setup which does an excellent job “encouraging” mobility. Another important factor that facilitates higher international mobility is the degree to which a program allows students to integrate courses they took abroad into their domestic degree work. This factor explains why strong relations between partner institutions on the faculty or departmental level help to work as a catalyst for student participation. Another salient factor that motivates students to participate in a mobility program is the reputation enjoyed by the partner university/college or indeed the city/town in which it is located.

C. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations



Recommendations for Better Structural Coordination:

- There has to be a balance between centralisation and decentralisation: Faculty and department administrators have to work efficiently with international offices to ensure administrative quality and to reach out for students.
- Also, the structure of the university has to be set up in a way that ensures quality management of credit transfer. In order to provide this, it seems advisable that departments and faculties play a greater role in identifying partners for mobility programs, so that credit can be assured.
- Best practices have shown that more specific programs are better able to mobilize the student body.

Recommendations for Better Information Distribution of Risks and Benefits:

- Stronger use of organized “word of mouth” as an information distribution mechanism. This might lead to a strategy that deploys students abroad and in

their home universities as “ambassadors” for programs in which they participated.

- It seems advisable to involve the community in demonstrating how foreign study experience can lead to increased career opportunities.
- A concerted effort to “brand” programs can play a major role in the distribution of information. *Erasmus* in the European context has proven to be very successful from this perspective.
- Furthermore, it is important to communicate funding opportunities for mobility programs more successfully so that students recognize the support available to them.

Next Steps

Based on our experiences in compiling this report, we feel further research should look at the following issues:

- the imbalance between incoming and outgoing students
- the identification of best practices in promoting mobility arrangements and the funding opportunities available to support them
- The impact of the Bologna-process in European higher education upon student mobility