



Project Agreement Number: 2004-3324 / 001 - 001 ELE-ELEB12

Project funded by the European Commission:



Document Title:	Case Study K.U.Leuven
Document Identifier:	
Date of Issue:	November 23, 2005
Author(s):	Nicola Mrose
Contributor(s):	Steven Verjans, Wim Van Petegem
Contact name:	Nicola Mrose
Organisation:	K.U.Leuven
Address:	Kapeldreef 62
Telephone:	+32 16 32 79 26
E-mail address:	nicola.mrose@avnet.kuleuven.be
Approval Status:	
Number of Pages:	10
Confidentiality Status:	

### History

Version Number	Date	Revised by
1.0	September 14, 2005	N. Mrose
1.1	November 14, 2005	N. Mrose
1.2	November 23, 2005	N. Mrose
1.3	December 5, 2006	N. Mrose

# Case Study K.U.Leuven

## Abstract

This case study gives a short introduction to the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and summarises strategies, facilities and services at the K.U.Leuven in the area of e-learning, quality and student mobility. Most of the information was found on the K.U.Leuven website.

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# 1 Short Outline about K.U.Leuven

Founded in 1425, the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven is a Flemish University of Catholic signature with an international orientation. It has the legal statute of private institution and encompasses almost all academic disciplines.

## 1.1 Facts and Figures (academic year 2003-2004 and partly 2004-2005)<sup>1</sup>

- 30455 students (26671 Belgian, 3784 international: 1555 EU, 2229 non-EU)
- 1396 professors, 3891 researchers, 2730 administrative and technical staff, 8172 university hospital staff
- The K.U.Leuven income in 2004 was 504 million euro; approximately 75% are government subsidies, 25% are private revenue.
- The university occupies a total area of 1,058,445 square metres and it has a total of 26,606 rooms.
- Three campuses in Leuven: Social Sciences and Humanities Campus in the centre of Leuven, Biomedical Sciences Campus in Leuven Gasthuisberg, Exact Sciences Campus in Heverlee-Arenberg, one undergraduate campus in Kortrijk (KULAK)
- K.U.Leuven supports 5 hospitals, 3 affiliated hospitals, with a total of 2,057 hospital beds for the acutely ill.
- Bachelor-master structure since academic year 2004-2005 (see 1.4)
- 14 faculties, 50 departments with about 240 sub-departments
- 45 Bachelor's programmes, with two exceptions all taught in Dutch
- 90 Dutch-speaking Master's programmes and 68 international Master's programmes taught in English
- 102 post-graduate academic programmes
- 2359 publications per year in international peer-reviewed scientific magazines
- 334 Ph.D.'s per year (102 of them by foreign Ph.D. students).

## 1.2 History<sup>2</sup>

- 1425: Founding by Pope Martin V with Latin as working language; K.U.Leuven is the oldest Catholic university in the world still in existence and the oldest university in the Low Countries
- 1797: Abolishment of the university by the French Republic

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Website K.U.Leuven [3].

<sup>2</sup>Source: Website K.U.Leuven [3].

- 1835: Reopening of the university as Catholic university in Leuven
- 1911: For the first time increasing use of Dutch as teaching language
- 1936: Almost all lectures are taught in Dutch and French
- 1965: Founding of the Kortrijk Campus as undergraduate campus
- 1968: Splitting of the university into the Dutch-speaking Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and the French-speaking Université Catholique de Louvain. The Université Catholique de Louvain moves to the newly built campus in Louvain-la-Neuve. The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven remains in the historic town of Leuven.
- 2002: Founding of the K.U.Leuven Association in the framework of the Bologna declaration. The Association consists of 13 Flemish institutions of higher education (see 1.3).

### 1.3 K.U.Leuven Association<sup>3</sup>

Since July 11, 2002, the K.U.Leuven Association has been operational. Thirteen institutions of higher education in Flanders (K.U.Leuven and 12 polytechnics) have joined forces in this association in order to occupy a position of strength within the new European educational landscape and to work together towards quality improvements in education. The main objectives of the K.U.Leuven Association are to offer a wide and varied selection of fields of study, to further enhance educational standards, and to occupy a strong position in the Flemish/European higher education realm. In the academic year 2004-2005 71.385 students were enrolled in institutions of the K.U.Leuven Association, which is about 45% of all higher education students in Flanders.

At this moment work is being done to create a shared digital learning environment for the whole association. At the start of the academic year 2005-2006 already 9 institutions are working together with one environment. Other institutions will follow.

### 1.4 Bachelor-Master Structure<sup>4</sup>

In compliance with the so-called "Bologna declaration" concerning the structure of higher education, the K.U.Leuven introduced a two-fold programme structure and two new degree titles: the bachelor's degree and the master's degree. The Bachelor programmes started from the academic year 2004-2005 onwards. At the same time, also some Master programmes started, but one can only register for these programmes when one has already obtained a diploma at a home or foreign institution for higher education. The master after bachelor will start 2007-2008. Furthermore, the former programmes of the type candidature, licentiate, advanced academic programmes continue to exist for several years and will be phased out.

A bachelor degree corresponds to 180 ECTS credits; a master degree corresponds to 60 or 120 ECTS credits (or more). In Flanders, the Ph.D. degree is not yet incorporated in the Bologna reforms and takes about 4 years.

<sup>3</sup>Source: Website of the K.U.Leuven Association [6].

<sup>4</sup>Source: Website K.U.Leuven [3].

## 2 Exchange Students at K.U.Leuven

### 2.1 Student Mobility<sup>5</sup>

K.U.Leuven has been involved in the Erasmus student exchange programme since its launch in Europe in the 1980s; the growing success of the Erasmus programme later on led to the launch of the Socrates programme, and today K.U.Leuven has over 300 contracts under this programme. Each year around 600 international Erasmus students spend part of their study programme in Leuven, while about 500 K.U.Leuven students share the same European experience at a foreign university. For more detailed numbers see chapter 2.2 and 2.3.

The TEMPUS-PHARE programme was set up for students and researchers from Eastern Europe, while contacts with universities in the former Soviet Union are being built up through the TEMPUS-TACIS programme. The co-operation with universities in Latin America falls within the scope of the ALFA programme. About 100 outgoing and incoming students per year are participating in an exchange programme outside Erasmus at K.U.Leuven.

Besides these exchange programmes, the university has set up a number of international academic programmes aimed both at Belgian and international students. Unlike the regular Dutch-language programmes, the international academic programmes are taught in English. Most of these programmes confer graduate degrees: undergraduate programmes are offered in English only in the fields of theology, philosophy and canon law.

### 2.2 Incoming Erasmus Students at K.U.Leuven

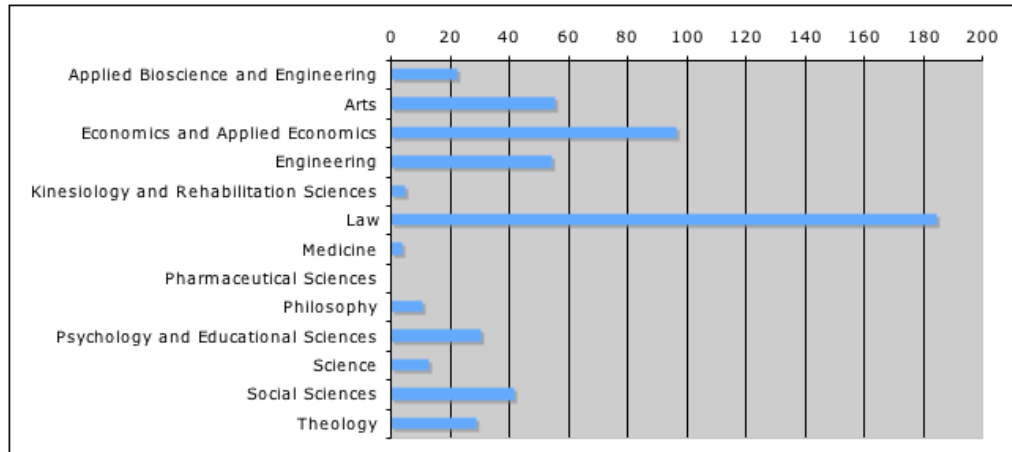
In the academic year 2005-2006, 539 students of another university in Europe (37% male, 63% female) came with the Erasmus programme to K.U.Leuven. 140 of them came from the Coimbra group, 31 came from a Victorious university. The students studied at the following faculties:

- Faculty of Applied Bioscience and Engineering: 22 students or 4%
- Faculty of Arts: 55 students or 10%
- Faculty of Economics and Applied Economics: 96 students or 18%
- Faculty of Engineering: 54 students or 10%
- Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences: 4 students or 1%
- Faculty of Law: 184 students or 34%
- Faculty of Medicine: 3 students or 0,5%
- Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences: 0 students or 0%
- Institute of Philosophy: 10 students or 2%
- Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences: 30 students or 5,5%
- Faculty of Science: 12 students or 2%

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<sup>5</sup>Source: Website K.U.Leuven [3].

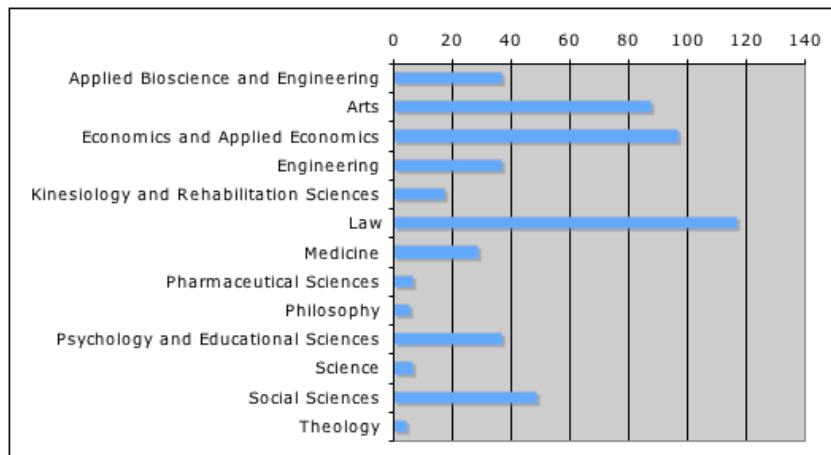
- Faculty of Social Sciences: 41 students or 8%
- Faculty of Theology: 28 students or 5%



### 2.3 Outgoing Erasmus Students at K.U.Leuven

In the academic year 2004-2005, 521 students of the K.U.Leuven (43% male, 57% female) went with the Erasmus programme to another university in Europe. 149 of them chose a university from the Coimbra group, 38 went to a Victorious university. The students came from the following faculties:

- Faculty of Applied Bioscience and Engineering: 36 students or 7%
- Faculty of Arts: 87 students or 17%
- Faculty of Economics and Applied Economics: 96 students or 18%
- Faculty of Engineering: 36 students or 7%
- Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences: 17 students or 3%
- Faculty of Law: 116 students or 22%
- Faculty of Medicine: 28 students or 5%
- Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences: 6 students or 1%
- Institute of Philosophy: 5 students or 1%
- Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences: 36 students or 7%
- Faculty of Science: 6 students or 1%
- Faculty of Social Sciences: 48 students or 9%
- Faculty of Theology: 4 students or 1%



### 3 Teaching and (E-)Learning at K.U.Leuven

#### 3.1 Educational Concept and E-Learning

A few years ago, the K.U.Leuven introduced "Guided Independent Learning" as its educational concept. According to the concept every course should aim at contributing to the development of students' independent and critical thinking. Rather than introducing students in a discipline by reading out ex cathedra or by having them snowed under with a bulk of information, teachers should create a learning environment that triggers students to actively manage learning materials by designing assignments, by providing corrective feedback and by integrating research and educational activities.

Aiming at the efficient support of (formative) assessment and learning, in September 2001 the e-learning platform "Toledo" (TOetsen en LEren Doeltreffend Ondersteunen) was introduced in which the concept of guided independent learning could be realised. Within Toledo three different software products are used: a digital learning environment (Blackboard Learning System™), an electronic assessment tool (Question Mark™ Perception™) and Ariadne's Knowledge Pool System where learning content is tagged with metadata and stored for future re-use.

The university management strongly promotes the use of the e-learning environment as an (additional) opportunity for enlarging support facilities and individualised student guidance, as well as for the active participation of students in a variety of research-related activities and for promoting genuine dialogue and interaction among students and among students and teachers. In several training-seminars faculty members can learn how to incorporate the e-learning platform into their regular teaching activities along the lines put forward by the university's pedagogical concept of guided independent learning [2].

#### 3.2 Teaching Quality Control

Quality control at K.U.Leuven is organized on different levels. On the basis of the university's pedagogical concept of "Guided Independent Learning" (see 3.1)

the so-called permanent education committee<sup>6</sup> of each major discipline develops and implements the curriculum.

At least every 8 years an extensive internal self-evaluation of each curriculum takes place in preparation of an external evaluation.

Every 8 years the external visitation commission<sup>7</sup> evaluates each curriculum on the basis of the self-evaluation report, other relevant documents, and the dialogue with representatives of the discipline. The visitation report forms the basis for the further accreditation of a programme.

After the publication of the visitation report a follow-up is performed. Representatives of the discipline will discuss the results of the evaluation with a delegation of the educational council and decide about the actions needed and how to tackle them. Later on a report is given to the academic council about the actions taken.

To further improve quality of teaching, student course evaluations are organized annually and study-time measurements are performed. All instructors of the university have the possibility to take training courses on pedagogical or ICT issues.

### 3.3 Student Counselling and Computer Infrastructure<sup>8</sup>

For counselling and tutoring students can rely on tutors available at each faculty, who help the students individually or in small groups. The study advice service provides assistance with choosing a programme, re-orientation, training in study methods etc.

In Leuven students can make use of several pc classes, of the pc rental service, and of KotNet, a project that started in 1997 and offers students and personnel the chance to connect from their homes or from their "kot" (student room) to KULeuvenNet and the internet, in order to enhance the possibility of study and research.

The threshold for using KotNet was chosen by the K.U.Leuven to be low, with respect to the entrance fee and usage costs, as well as the ease of use and the support of installation. A wide internet access, in terms of bandwidth and application, at a price that is kept as low as possible, is another goal set by the KotNet project.

To achieve this goal, negotiations have been made with several suppliers in order to get the best conditions. Agreements with several partners were made, so that the interaction of supply and demand could eventually provide the best services to everyone taking part in the K.U.Leuven community.

### 3.4 (E-)Administration

Students who want to register for the first time at K.U.Leuven have to submit a non-binding online application, and they have to register in person at the university hall for the programme they want to follow. From the second year on

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<sup>6</sup>The permanent education committee consists of representatives of academic staff and students of a discipline.

<sup>7</sup>The external visitation commission consists of independent experts of the discipline and its didactics.

<sup>8</sup>Source: Website K.U.Leuven [3].

online registration for the following academic year is mandatory at K.U.Leuven at least for Belgian students.

With the start of the academic year 2005-2006 the so-called "flexibility decree" becomes effective making the step from a year system to a credit system at K.U.Leuven. Until now students took a well-defined package of courses with limited possibilities of choice in the master years. They did not have to register for the obligatory face-to-face courses and chose their elective courses on a form; only for parts of courses that were offered on the digital learning environment Toledo, registration was done online. From now on, together with the registration, students also have to choose between three sorts of "contracts": the diploma contract to obtain a certain diploma, the credit contract to obtain certain credits as part of a diploma, or the examination contract just to take an examination. The average student will choose the diploma contract and follow a "model path" very similar to the former system. However, now it also is possible to study part-time which gives more options, for example to persons who want to combine studies with a job or family or who want to resume their studies after a break. From now on, after registration, students have to arrange their individual study programme in their student dossier on the internet. This programme is sent to the responsible faculty for approval.

Students have the possibility to see their personal details, financial issues, timetable, student career, and year results in their online student file. Also notice boards with announcements from lecturers or departments are more and more replaced by their electronic equivalents in Toledo.

## 4 Support for Exchange Students<sup>9</sup>

### 4.1 ECTS Label

K.U.Leuven has recently been awarded the ECTS Label<sup>10</sup> for the period of 2005/06-2007/08. K.U.Leuven has a website in English for international students and scholars, featuring:

- a general introduction to the university
- the academic calendar
- a comprehensive overview of admission procedures
- the organization chart with information about the structure of the university and its governing bodies
- the most important examination and teaching regulations.

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<sup>9</sup>Source: Website K.U.Leuven [3].

<sup>10</sup>The ECTS Label is awarded to institutions that are able to demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:

- Apply ECTS credits correctly in all degree programmes offered.
- Make accessible, through its website an ECTS Course Catalogue in the local language of instruction and in English (or only in English for programmes taught in English).
- Use all other obligatory ECTS tools (e.g. Learning Agreements, Transcripts of Records, proof of recognition) properly for Erasmus mobility.

For the convenience of international students, English translations of the Dutch course descriptions are provided. When applicable, information about internships is listed at the appropriate place within the degree programme.

## 4.2 Student Services for International Students

The Office for International Students and Scholars forms the integral administrative body of the K.U.Leuven's policy for all its international students. Its responsibilities include the administration of applications for enrolment from international applicants for all university programmes. It also takes charge of the administration regarding study grants awarded in the framework of development co-operation, exchange agreements or research activities, and the administration of the payments of these study grants. Finally, this office is responsible for the reception of international students and guests, working in close co-ordination with other services within the university. International students can find useful information in the brochures "Studying in Leuven [4]", "Travelling to Leuven [5]" and "Living in Leuven [1]".

For more information about the international programmes in which the university participates, students can contact the International Relations Office. The International Relations Office is responsible for the administration concerning Erasmus and other exchange students. The university also provides a number of student services:

- the social services office for international students can provide information about the cost of living
- the international housing office gives advice on all aspects of accommodation in Leuven
- the student employment office
- the medical centre for students and the psychotherapeutic centre
- DEPO, the support centre for sustainability and student participation
- Pangaea, the international meeting centre of the K.U.Leuven.

Two times a year in September and February orientation days are organized for international students. Here they get practical information about how to register, about the computer facilities, about everyday life in Leuven (traffic, transport, waste etc.), about student employment, and how to open a bank account. They get a Dutch survival kit, a historical and practical tour through Leuven, the university and its sports facilities, and lectures about K.U.Leuven, Belgium, and Europe. Finally intercultural games and sports, a presentation of a Flemish film, and a day-trip to a Belgian city are organized.

Erasmus students who want to learn Dutch and follow a culture course can do so for free at the Institute for Modern Languages. The fee is paid by the Erasmus programme.

### 4.3 Administration and Computer Facilities for Exchange Students

K.U.Leuven only accepts exchange students from universities that it has an exchange agreement with. The application process for exchange students is administered in the faculties and departments. Students contact the K.U.Leuven faculty or department of their choice through the exchange programme coordinator at their home university. The K.U.Leuven faculty or department will provide them with all the information they require, including information on courses and programmes, and with the appropriate application forms. Students can also download the application form from the K.U.Leuven website and send it to the faculty or department coordinator at K.U.Leuven in charge of the exchanges with their home university.

Until now foreign students, apart from exceptional cases and unlike the Belgian students, have to register in person every year. Registered students get a student card with student number, library number and passwords as login for the digital resources. Work is done to make the different facilities work with the same login; a Shibboleth - single electronic sign-in - project has just been initiated. An exchange student that has been accepted at K.U.Leuven will receive a permission to register. As soon as he has registered at the university, he can make use of the same facilities (libraries, student restaurants, computer classes, e-mail, digital learning environment, KotNet, dial-in, . . .) as a regular student in Leuven. Manuals for the computer facilities are available in English and Dutch. On October the first of each year, students lose their login to the university's facilities unless they register again for the following academic year. That means that exchange students will not retain their login after they returned home as well as they cannot get access to the facilities, which require a login before they actually arrive in Leuven. The only possibility for students to retain (restricted) access to K.U.Leuven facilities after their studies is to join the alumni association of the K.U.Leuven, which has now about 27.000 members. Special arrangements can be made with agreements of a professor for his or her course.

Exchange students get the first two weeks of the semester to "shop around", after which they make a "Learning Agreement" with their local coordinator who forwards the chosen programme and the course descriptions to the home coordinator for approval. Students who are registered for a course are normally also registered for the corresponding exam. No online registration is necessary for examinations.

Theoretically all examinations of courses given in Dutch must be taken in Dutch. However, most professors will allow foreign students to take the examination in English. Courses with English as teaching language have examinations in English.

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