

Student Interviews



Student Interviews

Aims



“To investigate student experiences of ICT when studying abroad”

- Returners from an Erasmus or other exchange visit
- Students arriving to begin a period of study at another university

Student Interviews

Methods

- Depth and breadth –interviews first to inform survey
- 2 - 7 student interviews conducted at each partner university
- Most were video recorded
- Individual or group interviews
- Key areas: culture, access, support, resources and information
- Expediency – what worked in each context



Student Interviews

Analysis

- Analysed individually and themes identified
- Data from 17 universities
- Video clips identified
- Issue of permissions - needed follow-up
- Some variations in approach/interpretation



Student Interviews

Findings

- Preliminary results
- Home institution and campus sets the standard in their minds for comparison
- ICT now an integral part of the Erasmus experience
- Many good experiences noted



Student Interviews



Video Clip 1



Organisational:

Our research considered – tech orientated, indifferent, bureaucratic, controlling, flexible

- Full range of cultures encountered.
- Can vary **WITHIN** a university.
- Depends on student's individual experience.



- In some cases very integrated, streamlined system - services, support and information is thought of as one entity
- Great variations – even within 1 university. Eg. Good PC labs, but some lecturers had no email!
- VLEs, course notes, exam marks – wide spectrum of availability
- E-learning resources & tools not always fully used, even when available
- Some depts had courses online, others on paper only – depended sometimes on subject cultures
- Laptops – widespread use amongst most students



Student Interviews

Enablers & Barriers to Student Integration

Enablers

- Information before arrival
- Proper student inductions
- All universities have range of ICT
- Many ICT systems international
- Students adaptable
- Some helpful tutors, students
- Well organised courses

Barriers

- Poor communication between departments & students
- Lack of flexibility – rules & regulations
- Culture shock between experiences in home univ. and expectations in host univ.
- Social isolation
- Only mixed with Erasmus students
- Incompatibility of programmes
- Lack of course organisation



Student Interviews

Positive feedback

- *“The university was very well prepared for foreign students, many activities were organized and there is a housing service especially for them...”*
- *“Students received all information before they went to the host university: subject, credits, etc....”*
- *“They had a welcome day when she was assigned to an older student who showed her around, she gave her email address, showed her computer rooms, ID, password, login, library.... [had] cultural welcome day.”*
- *“The Helpdesk was almost always available and very helpful”*



Student Interviews

Some issues raised

- *“sometimes the examination date and time could be changed on the spot!”*
- *“...bureaucratic...intercultural introduction would have helped.. it was a culture shock”..*
- *“Exchange students should not live separately in a different dormitory that inhibits integration seriously”*
- *“she was offered a 10 a free ten week course but it was not helpful, involved watching the Simpsons in [the language]!....”*



Student Interviews



Student Interviews

Access to digital resources / services

Structures:

- Pc rooms
- Libraries and Digital Libraries
- Computer centres / helpdesks
- Computers in student rooms

Services:

- E.mail (access to)
- Web resources (access to)
- E.learning platforms / courses / materials
- Personal Digital Information (grades / ECTS credits)
- Facilities: Printing, Disk space, Downloading, saving to pen drive etc.



Student Interviews

Resources: Pc rooms

- Usually available / very different access modality
 - From 24hours a day / no queue / fast connections
 - To restricted opening hours / time limits /queues / slow connections
- Sometimes difficult to get a password / find permission to use a PC room
 - “I needed a special card, but the office I could get the card from was open only when I had to attend classes”*
- Use of PCs is felt as a necessity
 - “I was part of an Internet Project before leaving .. but I had no connection ...”*



Student Interviews

Resources: Libraries and Digital Libraries

- Information not always in English
- Induction not always given
- Access to PCs / catalogues /journals sometimes requires a password / LAN
- Many students don't feel it as a priority, but many find online resources very useful when they realize they are available

“ I didn't know I could read journals online ... I hope I can do it also when I go back to my university”



Student Interviews

Resources: Helpdesk

- Normally friendly and useful, when available or requested
- Some cultural problems / web access restrictions
 - “I think the man in the computer lab can see what we do online”*

Resources: Computers in student rooms

- Students think they are very useful when available,
- They don't seem to expect this kind of service, yet.



Student Interviews

Services: Email (access to)

Main issue: all students need access

“I couldn’t read my mail .. Because hotmail was among the websites you couldn’t browse”

“when I found a useful document on the internet, I had to email it to myself then go to an internet café to print it”



Student Interviews

Students don't use e-mail address of host university:

- Login problems
- Temporary access
- Preference for personal e-mail address (hotmail, gmail, yahoo, etc.)
- E-mail not in English
- **However, host universities sometimes require it**
 - e.g. access to e.learning / forums / mailing lists)
- **Therefore - need for induction (eg. Forwarding)**



Student Interviews

- Students also use other communication programs (sometimes offered by the university)
 - MSN Messenger
 - Skype
 - AOL Instant Messenger



Student Interviews



Services: Web resources (access to)

Another main concern: students see browsing the web as an essential part of their lives abroad

Sometimes complain about time / browsing restrictions

Web used and needed to contact banks, buy tickets, fill in forms, download articles / learning materials etc.



Student Interviews

Services: E-learning

Students normally have access to the same courses and materials online as local students

Access issues:

- Not easy, not immediate
 - *“No Web CT [VLE], no portal just traditional noticeboards”*
- Credits / exam digital information not always available
- Requiring visiting students to find the right person to ask for permission / sign documents / give information

Need for induction

“The VLE is too complicated to use. ... it has too many functionalities which are not being used”



Student Interviews

- Problems with VLE:
 - Different systems in home and host university
 - Not used by everyone:
 - Difficult systems (usability)
 - Teachers and students not familiar with the system
 - Sometimes easier and better to give information on paper
 - Login problems





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A richiesta dell'interessata, visti gli atti d'ufficio, si attesta che la studentessa
di nazionalità nata a il inviata presso questa
università per l'A.A. 2005/06 dall' Università di nell'ambito del programma
ERASMUS della Unione Europea svolge attività di studio nel periodo 29.08.05-01.07.06
presso la Facoltà di LETTERE E FILOSOFIA.

Si rilascia la presente attestazione in carta libera per gli usi per i quali la legge non
prescrive il bollo.

Siena, 7 settembre 2005



IL RESPONSABILE
SOCRATES/ERASMUS

Kate O'Connell

Student Interviews



Discussion points on access

- ***Erasmus students need Ict services and structures even more than local students***
- ***They need information on access as soon as they arrive (or before)***
- ***Do we need to adopt special access / standards / policies for Erasmus students?***



Video Clip 2



Student Interviews

Some Conclusions

- Institutions exhibit diverse practices in relation to ICT
- Conflicting levels of access, information and services (even at same University)
- Practices from home university, department and campus influence expectations
- Local and Erasmus students use same services, and find same ways of informally solving problems
- Opportunities - equally available to Erasmus students
- Websites and other information should offer alternative languages including English



Student Interviews

Some Conclusions

- Induction and early support are very important - not enough to treat Erasmus students the same as others
- Erasmus students' experience is *time-limited*, so achieving access should not be *time-consuming*
- Students appreciated integrated ICT provision where this was offered
- Conversely, some students found fragmented services frustrating (eg. Separate passwords)
- Access to the Web, email and general ICT services are felt to be essential for Erasmus students
- **What should be the standard/minimum level of ICT provision in Coimbra Group universities?**

