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Antonella Storti (ed.)

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Supporting the International Student Community
at Turku University of Applied Sciences



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INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENT GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING – INTRODUCTION

Antonella Storti

There are round 20,000 young people from different corners of the world signed up to commence their studies in various international degree programmes provided by Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences. The number of foreign degree students has doubled over a 10-year period and has consequently also challenged guidance and counselling services provided for them. The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) has produced research and reports focusing mainly on the reasons for this development, and looking at what kind of international degree programmes we provide in Finland and how the education provided will support integration into the Finnish society. The reports, however, deal rather generally with guidance and counselling, and whether it should be focused and organised in a different way compared to Finnish students. Later on when electiveness within the degree studies is increased, the need for tutorials and guidance has become more evident. At the same time, with broader study opportunities the number of students dropping out has increased. The guidance and tutoring offered should include study and study skills support, professional growth as well as ways of coping with both personal and interpersonal problems.

The infrastructure, created in the latter part of 20th century, to meet the counselling needs of exchange students seldom serves the needs of international degree students¹. In addition, the current guidance, information and counselling system which was created to serve mainly native Finns – rather than students of other

1. The report features the terms international degree student and foreigner interchangeably in order to make distinction between Finnish and non-Finnish students (and teachers). *Foreigner* as a term does not mean exclusion and in turn *international student* (or teacher) refers to the person who has lived in more than one culture. (Välilmaa et al., 2013)

nationalities – does not necessarily provide the kind of help a foreign student would need. The social, educational and cultural context of international degree students can be remarkably different and consequently, adaptation and integration into both the educational and socio-cultural environments would require more time compared to native Finns. It would be extremely worthwhile to consider how our current counselling and guidance services cover and meet the needs of our international degree students. Additionally, it is also important to establish which parties are responsible for ensuring that the process is functioning correctly.

In 2009, a project was initiated at Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) to update and study in further detail the guidance and counselling services provided for the students. During 2010 the process was extended to cover guidance and counselling services provided to foreign students studying in international degree programmes at bachelor level. Faculty-based theme discussions with teachers, teacher tutors and international relations coordinators as well as student counsellors proved that the guidance services for exchange students were systematic and fixed. However, there was uncertainty and hesitation about the counselling and guidance services for foreign degree students; what would be the correct party and who would be the one whom to contact? The Degree Programme Manager, Teacher Tutor and Student Tutor were named as parties to help degree students in various matters. The result from the faculty members was comparable to the case study interviews conducted among a few foreign students studying at TUAS. The results were presented in the article (Storti 2011) “Keskiössä ulkomaisen opiskelijan ohjaus – nykytilan analyysin kautta kohti systemaattisempaa ohjausta” as part of the publication *Herkkyyttä ja yhteispeliä ohjaukseen* (eds. Metsävuori & Mäntsälä 2011). As the result of theme discussion, a multi-professional working group was formed and funded by TUAS Agricola programme with the assignment of producing a guidance model that is based on the current TUAS guidance model and that will serve foreign bachelor degree students. The project results, notes and recommendations are presented in this commentary publication. The structure of this article collection mainly follows student’s learning path from the beginning to the very end of the studies.

The multi-professional working group (*Agricola Project Group*) worked on the project for two years. The working process was based on following the bachelor student’s learning path in order to identify the central turning points to be developed. During the aforementioned period, we learned and shared information regarding the structure, practices and challenges relating

to guidance and counselling in international bachelor degree programmes. In addition, the group has acted as a coordinating forum in order to learn about the projects and actions addressed to international degree students at TUAS. In this publication, the purpose is to present notes and results of the working group. While we are not able to provide a very detailed analysis of student's learning path, we aim to illustrate that providing guidance and counselling services for international degree students would require resources to be allocated differently compared to Finnish students.

This article provides a general overview of the bachelor degree programmes at Turku University of Applied Sciences. We then follow the learning path of a student and look at how guidance and counselling services are organised at TUAS. The following article, *Tools for Tutoring International Students* by Marjo Joshi and Päivi Härmä, outlines tools for teacher tutors for facilitating growth and development in individual students in their daily lives and study situations. The article *Survival Guide* presents a practical guide for international students. The guide has been developed by the students and it will be available to all international students prior to their arrival in Finland. The article *Student Tutoring* by Niina Ratilainen introduces the perspective of the Student Union TUO. The article is based on experiences and feedback that TUO and TUAS have systematically collected from tutors, students and teacher tutors.

The article *Course on Life Management and Success in Studies* by Satu Salmi introduces a course provided for foreign students to help them integrate into the surrounding learning environment and society. Next, the article by Hoa Nguyen, Habibul Islam and Heli Söderlund covers the *Survey on Professional Growth Studies and Tutoring in the International Degree Programmes*, which was conducted at the request of Agricola Project Group. The survey was conducted by the students who have subsequently written the article under the supervision of Heli Söderlund, a member of the development group.

The last two articles deal with challenges faced by undergraduates and graduates. When students approach the end of their studies, concerns regarding their future and employability become increasingly important. The article *What is Career Guidance* by Mikko Niskanen raises the differences between foreign and Finnish students when entering the job market. Finally, the article by Kalliopi Skarli, *International Graduate – Catering for the Regional Labour Market or for the Wider Master's Market*, draws our attention to the future as well as employability and challenges in the field of IT.

INTERNATIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMMES AND COUNSELLING AT TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Background

The number of English-taught international degree programmes (hereinafter IDP) has increased in Finland since 2000. In Finland, the most popular study fields are degree programmes in technology and business in addition to nursing. It has become evident that the number of new English-taught programmes is increasing and competition around Europe is getting harder. (Välilä et al. 2013, 20–22). Compared to the early days' of internationalisation, where the main emphasis was placed on building infrastructure in the form of international offices to help students and staff become mobile, we have now entered the stage of providing more and more degree courses in English. The increasing number of programmes alongside the absence of tuition fees has persuaded more and more students to consider studying in Turku and Finland generally.

There are currently 357 international degree students studying bachelor degrees at TUAS. These students can mainly be divided into three degree programmes: Information Technology (Bachelor of Engineering), International Business (Bachelor of Business Administration) and Nursing (Bachelor of Health Care). In addition, there are two master's degree programmes at TUAS. As in other UASs, the international degree programmes are related to the TUAS institutional strategy – the need for IDPs is brought forward in the strategy as the education policy of Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture suggests.

At TUAS, we have three types of international students:

- 1) international students who have lived in Finland before starting their studies
- 2) international students who have entered via entrance exams as degree students
- 3) international exchange students.

It is important to bear in mind that each group mentioned would need different kinds of support and help. Sometimes a teacher can have students from all the aforementioned groups, which represents a significant challenge for teacher tutors. Since 2003, the number of foreign degree students has doubled, and as this number is continuing to increase, it has become evident that the guidance

and counselling infrastructure needs improvement. The students with a limited personal network and cultural knowledge of Finland require more time and effort from the staff. In addition, teachers have found that they were increasingly being asked questions about practicalities and additional study guidance. However, teachers may not have the resources to counsel extensively both in practical and study matters. (Välilmaa et al. 2013, 46.) As in most UAS institutions, Turku University of Applied Sciences has a good and extensive guidance and counselling services in all faculties. However, at TUAS it would be important to define more clearly the roles of the staff that are responsible for facilitating students' learning processes. In the next section, we describe the current counselling and guidance structure.

Learning path of a student

The term *learning path* (*opintopolku*) was adopted in 1994 (Watt 1994). The guidance process of a student is based on a holistic student-centred model where the focus is on supporting students' growth and development processes and guidance in different learning contexts as well as career guidance (van Esbroeck & Watts 1998). The guidance system of TUAS is based on the aforementioned holistic approach. The learning path of a student is comprised of five phases:

The **pre-entry (1)** phase includes the *recruitment and application processes*. The recruitment process includes all informative material regarding the selection process, selection criteria and student guidelines. The application process consists of information about the entrance exam, audits and criteria.

Guidance at the **(2) entry** phase consists of approval for studies as well as starting the course at TUAS. Prior to arrival, approved candidates will receive information related to the acceptance and confirmation of the study place offered. In addition, details are provided on obtaining a visa and information regarding the residence permit and ways of financing studies. The start of studies is a real hands-on experience as a student takes part in the course orientation including the learning environment and new socio-cultural context. The beginning of studies in a new and unknown context can be very challenging and difficult. If it is not organised systematically and not enough time is allocated into it, it is likely

that a student will have difficulties in the learning process and integration into the study community.

The **(3) on-programme** phase refers to the guidance needed during the studies. Some characteristic initiatives include versatile tutorials, individual tutoring, practical training and study plans in addition to follow-ups.

The next phase is **(4) exit** which includes guidance at the end of the studies, including support with the bachelor thesis, postgraduate studies and employability.

The last phase called **(5) follow-up** refers literally to following up on how a student has been employed and integrated into society. (Vuorinen 1998; Moitus et al. 2001.)

It has been proven that providing versatile information about studies and their structure—in addition to the learning objectives and styles—when a student applies has a positive impact in helping to achieve a successful start and commitment to studies. However, insufficient and inadequate information about the study conditions, including information about the socio-cultural context and work opportunities prior to studies tends to be the most general reason for dropouts and delays. (Lerkkanen 2002) In the second phase, it is important to provide a general framework for the learning environment, its options and alternative ways conduct studies. The focus should be in designing an individual study plan. When studies progress further the need for guidance becomes individual and more specific. At this stage, when approaching the work placement, career choices and bachelor thesis students need more guidance and support. (Moitus et al. 2001; Aalto 2003.) In order to be able to develop and improve guidance services it is essential to collect feedback and follow how guidance has helped students to graduate and subsequently integrate into society.

Guidance from the staff perspective

Guidance can be monitored through the job description of the staff members' involved in support services provided for international degree students during their studies in higher educational institutions. In the comparative analysis conducted among EU member states, Watts (1994) outlined the guidance and counselling arrangements as eleven stages that can be linked to the student's learning path:

- (1) **Information services** – how and in what way is relevant and updated information transmitted to the student?
- (2) **Assessment** – comparison of own expectations, life history and learning process in relation to the possibilities offered in education
- (3) **Advice** – answering the questions posed by a student
- (4) **Counselling** – supporting the growth and development process of an individual in his current life situation
- (5) **Career education** – integrating guidance and counselling into the study curriculum so that it will help an individual to learn to reflect and make decisions independently, as well as the ability to understand the consequences of such decision-making
- (6) **Placement** – information regarding employment and employability, careers and occupation
- (7) **Advocacy** – counselling when an individual has personal/academic problems, for example
- (8) **Feedback** – analysis and reviews outside the educational institution, in the labour market for instance
- (9) **Follow-up** – follow-up of graduates and their employability in the labour market
- (10) **Internal consultation** – review and benchmarking guidance and counselling within the educational institution
- (11) **Innovation / system change** – quality assurance of guidance and counselling.

To make students' learning and guidance processes visible, we combined them in the following table. Due to the number of actors involved, it is important that the roles and responsibilities are clear, so that different actors know what kind of guidance will be provided. This information is necessary for both staff and students.

TABLE 1. *The learning path of a student, adapted from the student guidance and counselling structure of Labri University of Applied Sciences (Moitus et al. 2001).*

Recruitment	Student Selection	Acceptance	Entry	On-Programme	Exit/Graduation	Follow-up
Prospectuses; Application and Study Guidelines; Fairs; Marketing; Student Guides	Information about the entrance exams and the process; Organising entrance exams; Entrance exams	Specific information provided for students approved	Orientations; Tutorials; Individual discussions and tutoring	Tutoring; Group dynamics; Individual study plan; Individual Tutoring; Support for professional growth; Work practice and placement; Internationalisation; Career guidance	Guidance and counselling; Postgraduate studies; Employability	Mentor/ Alumni; Employment in the labour market

In the strategy developed by Turku University of Applied Sciences, guidance and counselling aims have been defined along with a number of other issues related to education. Therefore, the aims of guidance and counselling services should be organised and provided in such way that they produce the results desired in the strategy. The current TUAS strategy states the following:

The core task of TUAS is to ensure high quality work-life-based education. Based on the division of labour between universities and universities of applied sciences, TUAS is responsible for professional higher education that provides experts in terms of labour and business needs in Southwest Finland.

The number of foreign students and personnel will be increased.

International counselling and tutoring will be enhanced.

The number of international degree programmes will be increased.

International initiatives to export know-how, increase external funding and improve international competence will also be sought.

International professional publications and journal articles will be increased.

TUAS will deepen its strategic collaboration with Hogeschool Utrecht and, together with business and other institutions in Southwest Finland, broaden its network of strategic collaborators to geographical areas that are important for exports. Teaching, research, and development activities will attain and demonstrate high quality on an international level.

According to the TUAS strategy, the purpose of the organisation is to educate individuals for the labour market of Southwest Finland – individuals who will be able to develop working life and create networks in the region. Consequently, guidance and teaching should take into account the needs of working life. Referring to the strategy, we can interpret that most of the graduates would be expected to remain in the labour market in the Turku region. However, there are few international degree programme graduates who will remain due to limited proficiency in the Finnish language and integration into local society. The absence of these crucial skills represents a real obstacle for employment in the Finnish labour market. In order to meet the criteria stated in the strategy, it would be important for TUAS to articulate clearly how guidance and counselling for international degree students will be organised, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved.

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TOOLS FOR TUTORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Päivi Härmä & Marjo Joshi

INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher tutor for international degree students gives you an experience of working with students from various cultures while deepening your cultural awareness and giving you the ability to interpret tutoring situations in a cultural context. While the experience is rewarding, it can also bring many challenges. These can be caused by different learning styles, approaches to communicative situations or ways of dealing with difficulties. In addition, based on a recent student well-being questionnaire, although international students seem to have high self-esteem, they nevertheless feel they do not succeed in their studies nor have sufficient support: only 44% of the international students felt they had succeeded in the past month, whereas for the Finnish students the figure was 84%. For example, while 32% of the Finnish students stated they received support from their teacher tutor, the corresponding figure was 46% for the international students (Rantanen 2013).

The purpose of this article is to provide support and tools for tutoring the international students. As part of the Agricola project, it was noticed that there is very little support for teachers tutoring international students, taking into consideration the specific needs of the students. Because of this, we started creating an electronic workspace for the teacher tutors that would provide practical solutions and materials for everyday work. It was also noticed that there is no forum for teacher tutors of international students to share common experiences and to develop the tutoring. This was also noted in the recent evaluation of international degree programmes in Finland (Välilmaa 2013). Therefore we decided to start organising regular, workshop-oriented meetings for all staff supporting international students. Each meeting has a theme, such as Professional Growth Studies or teacher tutor training. The objective is to create and develop tools for supporting the work of the international teacher

tutors. The results of the meetings will be added in the workspace, which will be continuously developed in the teacher tutor meetings, drawing from the experiences of the tutors. Thus the workspace is a living space, growing and changing through interaction and cooperation between those working with international students.

Teacher tutors support and guide the students throughout their studies. We decided to base the teacher tutor's support material on the Study Path Model developed by Reisenberger (1994) and Vuorinen (1998). The following sections introduce different stages of the tutoring process: pre-entry, entry, on-programme, exit and follow-up.

PRE-ENTRY

The role of the teacher tutor prior to students' arrival is to prepare for the arrival of the new students in cooperation with student tutors. Many of the international degree programme (IDP) students come to another country for the first time in their life, and they will experience varying degrees of culture shock. That is why it is important that the teacher tutor and the student tutors are aware of the symptoms and stages of culture shock already before the students arrive. For example, the culture shock can be physical: a student may feel constantly tired due to different nutrition and lack of light during the dark months. Also, emotional side of culture shock can be difficult to deal with: students struggle with feelings of uncertainty, frustration and even anger, as they do not have the ability or knowledge to manage at university and outside of it.

One of the biggest hurdles is the lack of social networks – one student explained that even after several years in Finland, he still had only limited networks. The teacher tutor should be able to recognise and support the student during the different stages of the culture shock. To help the new students adjust to their life in Finland, they are sent a copy of the Survival Guide for International Degree Programme Students (www.tuas.fi/survivalguide) before their arrival. The guide is intended for new international degree students coming to Turku University of Applied Sciences. It was created as part of the Agricola project, and it is based on a questionnaire about new students' needs. It was written completely by students of TUAS. It offers practical information on studies, housing, transport, Finnish culture and other subjects one needs to be familiarised with before arriving to Finland and during the initial days of studies.

Before arrival, the teacher tutor plans the welcome letter and orientation days together with the Student Counsellor and the student tutors. Based on the feedback from international students, the orientation should focus more on group dynamics and less on information-giving. In practice, this means the information is provided in smaller chunks throughout the study year, rather than just in the orientation, as also mentioned in the evaluation of the international degree programmes (Välilä 2013). The objective of the orientation days is to get the students oriented into TUAS as a study environment, to familiarise them with study methods of TUAS and to become aware of the study plan. These topics will all be continued upon in the Professional Growth classes throughout the studies. The teacher tutor should plan the orientation and the Professional Growth Studies taking into consideration the different needs of the international students.

ENTRY

When the students arrive in Finland and TUAS, they are often more concerned with practical matters than study-related matters. They need to get their housing sorted, open a bank account, register at magistrate's for the social security number and get possible health check done. This is why the student tutors have a very important role in the first days in taking the new students around. The teacher tutor may encounter questions relating to things that are not related to studies at all. This is one reason why orientation for international students is better to be spread out throughout the first semester, not only during the first few days. The Survival Guide answers many of these questions from a student's point of view, as it was developed fully as student work.

Supporting the student during the first year focuses on creating an encouraging and positive group spirit, getting started with studies and orienting to TUAS ways of working. The teacher tutor will support group dynamics and create rules for the group in collaboration with student tutors. The students should get to know the degree programme, using e.g. IT systems and curriculum. Explaining competence levels and different stages of study path is part of this, as well as giving examples of future career options. IT systems should be covered in a practical session, to ensure everyone knows what each system is and what it is used for.

The students should become confident in using different study methods that they may not be used to using in their home country. These include independent studying, taking responsibility of one's own study progress and learning to be

self-directive. For example, a Chinese student is likely to be used to a very hierarchical study culture (Hofstede 2010) where the teacher is the ultimate information-provider whose word is not to be questioned and who is not to be approached. Therefore, the student may find it difficult to provide their own opinions when asked, to question and give feedback on other students' performance or even speak to the teacher directly. In addition, as the study culture here is student-oriented rather than teacher-oriented, the amount of independent work comes as a surprise. Time management is another hurdle, as some of the students come from very polychronic cultures (Hall 1990), meaning that their concept of time is flexible, whereas the expectation in Finland is to be monochronic. It may take surprisingly long for the student to adjust to the new study culture. The teacher tutor should try to support the student in the group sessions and the individual meetings from the start.

ON-PROGRAMME

Personal meetings with students aim at finding solutions together to enhance student well-being. The main objective of the personal meeting is to get to know the student and his/her background. It is important to take into consideration cultural factors in the meetings. For example, in some cultures it is not common to have one-to-one sessions with the teacher. Also, not all students are used to sharing and expressing their feelings, real thoughts or their own objectives. It is important to acknowledge different culturally bound communication styles – for example student nodding in agreement does not always mean they understand or agree.

As a teacher tutor for international students, one has to deal with personal issues more often, as their personal networks are not as large and they do not necessarily know who to turn to. This was also one of the results in the Student Wellbeing Survey (Rantanen 2013): the Finnish students had twice as many contacts as the international students. Therefore, students may seek help from the teacher tutor in friendship and family-related issues, health-related issues, legal matters, money and financial issues, hobbies and leisure activities, as well as administrative matters related to permission, such as bringing family members to Finland. The teacher tutor should remember that helping students is part of their role as a tutor, but they should find the balance between the responsibilities – the student ultimately carries the responsibility of their actions. In some cases, it is necessary to intervene and contact the student

outside the personal development planning (PDP) discussions. The teacher tutor should know who to contact in problematic cases: the study counsellor, the nurse or the study psychologist.

Giving and receiving feedback may not always be easy for international students, as their cultural norms may prevent them from giving direct feedback, giving feedback to their peers or someone lower in hierarchy or to someone of a different gender. They may also not be used to receiving feedback and may not know how to process the feedback given. This may even result in feelings of not being valued by the teacher or the peers, as results show in the Student Wellbeing Survey (Rantanen 2013).

Personal development discussions aim at looking at their individual study plan (ISP) together with the student and providing continuous support during studies to ensure reaching objectives and graduating as planned. The student should prepare for the meetings by answering the PDP questions beforehand. In addition to the PDP discussions and individual meetings, the student's path is followed in the Professional Growth class, where the teacher tutor's responsibility is to share information and coordinate the studies focusing on bringing together different sources of information related to studies, working life and society. The teacher tutor will coordinate visits and visitors related to studies, working life and society. The international students often lack the general knowledge and experience of e.g. Finnish society, working life and associations. The objectives of the Professional Growth are defined in the curriculum and are common for international and Finnish students.

There should be regular check-points to encourage the students in different stages of the study path, e.g. work placement + thesis + exchange. The teacher tutor should be able to ask about and show interest in the needs important to the student or the progress of studies at that specific time. For example, a survey conducted with international students regarding Professional Growth and support during their studies showed that there was a greater need for support in getting a work placement.

EXIT AND FOLLOW-UP

Tutoring the students towards the end of their studies focuses on guidance related to thesis work, graduation and future plans. According to a recent study comparing students' future plans after completing Bachelor's degree

at TUAS, it was found that the international students were more likely to pursue a Master's degree, whereas the Finnish students were more inclined to enter working life (Skarli 2013). Also, the Evaluation of International Degree Programmes (Välimaa et al. 2013) found that most international students expressed a wish to stay in Finland, but obstacles for that included finding work or not having sufficient language skills. The same document also states that the support for finding work after graduation is not sufficient: while 94% of students said they were given support in their thesis work and 83% in graduation practicalities, only 28% said they got support in finding a job. During the ISP discussions, the teacher tutor can encourage the student in the learning and usage of Finnish language, and thus support the integration and work opportunities. In addition, the teacher tutor's role is to strengthen the student's work identity and professionalism. The teacher tutor also collects feedback and participates in feedback sessions of the degree programme.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

As can be seen from the previous discussion, it would be essential for the teacher tutor to be trained in cross-cultural communication and cultural awareness skills. Therefore, one development need would be to offer cultural training to teacher tutors and student tutors. Another difficulty we faced in our development work was that most of the documentation was only in Finnish. This meant that both international students as well as English-speaking teacher tutors have not had direct access to the information, which may have affected the work of the teacher tutors in two ways: firstly, the teacher tutor may not have had a clear understanding about the division of responsibilities and roles; secondly, the students may not have asked for help from the correct person. As part of the Agricola project, key documents were translated into English. In addition, it would be helpful to have a common Teacher Tutor's Handbook for both Finnish and international student tutoring. The Survival Guide will be further developed and regularly updated as a permanent part of new students' orientation.

One aspect that we felt could help the students in their integration and adjustment to studies in Finland is longer orientations before the beginning of studies, as also noted in the Evaluation of International Degree Programmes. Optional preparation courses that result in credits might be motivational and useful for new students. One innovative approach could be to offer an online course before the students come to Finland; they would get credits

and feedback for the course. This could have a positive effect on the work of the teacher tutor as they could more evenly divide their resources and offer support throughout the studies instead of only in the beginning. In general, guidance tends to be currently heavily directed towards the first three months and end of studies. (Välilmaa et al. 2013). According to the Evaluation, tutoring international students adds to their workload and changes the nature of their work. Because of this, it would be very important to consider how to support the well-being of the teacher tutor, and how to ensure they can cope with the possible emotional and mental stress that the different needs posed by the tutoring of international students may cause.

There should be more support to offer for work placement, which would help students in integration and in completing their studies on time. In general, the integration of international students should be taking into consideration by various actors in the field, not only the staff working directly with the international students. For example, teacher tutors should enable better networking between Finnish and international degree programme students. Also participation in the RDI work and projects should be encouraged.

Working together with International DP staff means sharing good practices, developing challenging areas and meeting regularly to discuss topical issues in international tutoring. Sharing and caring, working as a team should be encouraged and supported. A network of international teacher tutors can offer advice to each other in challenging situations, and thus save time and effort in many situations. As part of Agricola project, a network of international teacher tutors was set up. They will continue to hold regular meetings organised by a working committee. The committee is formed by representatives of each International Education Area, and each representative should be given some resources by their Education Manager. The meetings will be held once a semester, and they will be workshop-oriented. The themes could be orientation, Professional Growth Studies, ISP, student tutor and teacher tutor training, continuing with the same study group, thesis writing and work placement. The objective is to create and develop tools for supporting the work of the international teacher tutors.

It is our hope that these tools for tutoring international students will support teacher tutors in their important work. Although development needs were identified, many smaller initiatives have already been taken. With collaboration, teacher tutors can create a sustainable model for supporting international students.

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SURVIVAL GUIDE

– A PRACTICAL TOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Marjo Joshi, Kimmo Thai & Erik Lanza

INTRODUCTION

International students face many challenges when they move to Finland to start their studies. Traditionally they were offered advice and support during the orientation days, which were held a few days before the start of the actual studies. When the issue of offering support came up with the international students already studying at TUAS, they came up with the idea of Survival Guide, a booklet that would offer students access to the information already before they came to Finland, thus making their adjustment hopefully a bit easier. It was decided that the guide would be based on information collected by the students themselves so that it would really answer the questions they tend to have, rather than offer them information only from the administration's point of view. It was made for students by students who have also gone through the same things a new student would face. The guide was written by a group of students, and it was first published on our website (www.tuas.fi -> studying). The guide was also sent to all new international students with their acceptance letter, a gesture highly appreciated according to comments from them after their arrival. A second edition of the guide has already been produced. In short, the Survival Guide is a booklet on practical, tried and true methods on studying and living in Turku as an international student.

SURVIVAL GUIDE – THE PROJECT

The project team

The original team of Survival Guide 2012–2013 included the following members: Teacher Tutor of first-year students Marjo Joshi, Project Manager Basanta Acharya as well as project members Shovit Thapa, Jeewan Bhusal, Ira Bhattacharai, Kimmo Thai and Bethlehem Burka. The two latter members also worked as graphic designers in the project. The nationalities of these members are Ethiopia, Finland and Nepal. The project team was formed through a formal application process, and the students were given 3 ECTS for the work.

The questionnaire and data collection

The project team decided to start by collecting some key questions that would need answering when starting higher education studies in a new country. The team felt their experiences were not enough to produce anything reasonable, so they needed to gather a more comprehensive list of needs and challenges faced by students. A survey was conducted in various campuses in both Turku and Salo for students studying in the international degree programmes. The questionnaire had questions about challenges they faced in Finland. An analysis of the answers revealed that the problems were often related to student budget and free time. Therefore it was decided that in addition to information about studying and getting started at the university, there should be information on e.g. second-hand shops, grocery shopping, leisure activities and managing life in a different environment in general.

The writing process

The writing process was divided into different categories. The project team researched each topic and collected key points to be added into the Survival Guide. Research included places and maps, contact information, IT systems used at the university and tips for living in Finland. For example, University of Oulu (Guide for International Students) had a really well made guide. However, the team wanted the TUAS guide to be produced by themselves, so it was decided that the Oulu guide would be a good model but details relevant to TUAS students would make this Survival Guide something specific to our own international students. In addition, the International Office at TUAS

had produced a similar guide to exchange students. However, as exchange students have somewhat differing needs and tend to stay for only one semester, it was decided that the Survival Guide would be something that was needed specifically for degree programme students.

SURVIVAL GUIDE – THE CONTENTS

Finland, Turku and Salo

The first thing to do was to introduce Finland, Turku and Salo. Though it might seem unnecessary – as the information is widely available everywhere – it is always nice to have basic information about the country the student is going to live in. In addition, the city information was really directed at what students needed to know about the city, such as transportation to campuses by bus. Also, it was felt that it was important to introduce both Turku and Salo as a place to live for an international student, which is something you might not get in general information leaflets about the cities.

TUAS and its services

The next logical thing to introduce was TUAS itself and its services. The team wrote about the university's IT systems, such as Messi (TUAS intranet), Optima (online learning platform) and SoleOPS (online study planning system). Also, study-related matters such as credits, grades and practical training were explained in more detail. These were seen as something very important for a new international student to know and understand already before starting the studies at TUAS. In previous years, it has taken students some time to remember all this information – based on student feedback, it is very difficult to absorb all the information that is given to them in the orientation and the first days of their studies, and it was felt that the guide could really support the learning as well as cut down the information load of the orientation days.

Student life

Part of integrating to Finland is getting to know other people. That is why the project team decided to include a section for student life as it was thought that taking care of social needs is equally important as the study-related

matters. Moreover, based on students' experiences one of the things that causes difficulties in adjustment is lack of social networks. Therefore it is important that international students are told of the possibilities they have to take part in social life and activities in their campus and city. The Survival Guide introduces TUAS Student Union (TUO) and Erasmus Student Network – International Action Club (ESN-IAC). Both are important to any new student, but ESN-IAC activities are more popular among the students as they are aimed more for international students.

Practical information

A section on other practical matters includes medical information, legal matters and coping with homesickness. Students often feel that they are not sure where to ask or find a contact, and therefore it was seen as important to include some helpful contact details with brief instructions, such as the nurse or magistrate's office. Another thing that the project team thought was important was the fact that although the beginning of studies is always exciting, it is good to be aware already beforehand that at some point one might get homesick or suffer from a culture shock.

SURVIVAL GUIDE – THE FUTURE

The Survival Guide was first published as a pdf file in spring 2012. It was also sent to all international students starting their studies at TUAS in the autumn of 2012. A second, updated version was made in the spring of 2013 by a new project member Erik Lanza, and the second version was sent to all international students starting their studies at TUAS in the autumn of 2013. The guide will be updated every spring to reflect changes at the university level as well as relating to updates for maps, web links and contact details.

An exciting future development involves the development of a mobile application of the Survival Guide. This work has already been undertaken by current IT student Erik Lanza. The idea for the application is simple: to have an easier way to reach the information at any time. He first thought of the idea because he missed some important things he was supposed to do when he came to Finland, such as registering as a citizen of Turku, and he thought having a mobile application could have been really handy at that point. Last spring he

took part in a “hackathon”, a contest where many people with different levels of knowledge in programming and designing skills come and do their best to create an application. There he was able to test some preliminary ideas for the application, including a ‘where to go’ app that will open a map and guide you where to go. More work is needed for the final version before it is ready for full launch, but it is hoped a test version will be out next year.

CONCLUSION

The Survival Guide has been integrated successfully to the orientation program by ensuring all students get a copy of it before coming to Finland. Students are also sent a link to it, and some key details are also mentioned during the orientation programme. It is a useful addition to the support given by student tutors once the students are in Finland. The guide has been complimented for its usefulness, ease of access and student-centred approach by teachers and students alike. It is hoped that the Survival Guide will continue to grow and change with the needs of new international students in the years to come.

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STUDENT TUTORING

Niina Ratilainen

INTRODUCTION

As described elsewhere in this publication, student counselling is a broad subject area and there are many ways in which universities can provide support for students in their studies. In this article, Student Union (hereafter TUO) describes one way of tutoring: students tutoring other students at Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS).

When students tutor other students, the aim is not only to provide mentoring in their studies but also support individuals in their ability to cope with their new student life. Students experience many life changes upon starting university.

Nowadays, we believe in modern education and individuality in teaching and counselling. Tutoring is always based on the individual needs and situations in each student's life. Every relationship between student and tutor is unique. At TUAS, tutoring has now become a common feature of student life.

The students' union TUO at TUAS is responsible for student tutors in degree programmes, while TUAS itself organises tutoring for international exchange students. The entire community of the educational institution agrees that student tutors play a crucial part in our tutoring cycle and consequently, we find ourselves at a turning point in tutoring. The need to place increasing focus on looking at new methods of tutoring international students has been recognised. For this reason, in this article we intend to provide information on our current situation, and also examine future developments.

This article is written from the perspective of the students' union and is a product of our experiences as well as feedback that the union and TUAS have systematically collected over the years from tutors, students and mentors. We explain how student tutoring works at TUAS, examine the history of the current system and explore opportunities for the future as well as why we have focused so greatly on students tutoring other students.

THE MAIN IDEA BEHIND STUDENTS TUTORING OTHER STUDENTS

The main reason why such emphasis is put on student tutoring is because students who have received tutoring have reported that it was important to the completion of their studies at TUAS. The main task for student tutors and the main goal of the students' union is to increase students' feeling of team spirit and sense of community. If students enjoy their time at university, they cope better with their studies and their professional self-esteem is strengthened. The key consideration for the students' union is always that every part of a person's life is closely related to other elements. Student tutors aim to enhance the lives of other students in broader sectors than simply those that are directly related to studies alone.

Student tutors often have a deep impact on the students they mentor. Officially, we simply ask for one year's work and a plan from tutors, but we have encountered many students that have formed deep friendships with either their tutors or with other students through their tutors. This demonstrates the effectiveness of our tutoring system. According to the students' union, the word "tutor" means trust, guidance, support and pleasure in doing things together.

When it comes to international students, needs for tutoring are varied and slightly more extensive which means greater flexibility is needed. International students are similar yet different to Finnish students. Later in this article, we explain the differences that we have observed in regenerating our tutoring system.

As detailed in the objectives of the tutoring course study module, student tutoring aims to increase students' well-being at the university. This is the basic premise on the basis of which we are encouraged to organise and develop student tutoring and what makes students want to become tutors.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TUTORING FINNISH AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences SAMOK published a research paper in 2007 regarding international students at Finnish universities of applied sciences. One third of foreign students at Finnish universities of applied sciences thought that student counselling was

sufficient. Only one in ten regarded student counselling as inadequate. It was clear that foreign students have been very pleased with counselling. However, Finnish students did not have such a positive impression of counselling. The main reason established was that Finnish students are more aware of the counselling they should receive and expect more from the university.

According to the survey, international students are more likely to contact their teacher tutors when they feel the need for study counselling. Other students are not considered important in problem-solving. Among Finnish students situation was quite the opposite. Finnish students are significantly more likely to seek a reply from each other than from their teachers. If we consider these results from TUAS' point of view, it is not that surprising since Finnish students have received more tutoring from other students than their international counterparts. It could be said that at TUAS, we teach Finnish students from the outset to work in groups and support each other. From this survey we can also reach the conclusion that we need to put more effort into student tutoring for international students so that they have an equal basis in comparison to Finnish students and rely more readily on other students.

As important as it is to us that every student should have a student tutor, we also recognise that we cannot have the same system for Finnish degree students, international degree students and exchange students. We are of the firm belief that all the students should be connected to each other, so that Finnish and international students feel that they are members of one community. Nevertheless, we have paradoxically had to build different tutoring systems for the students in order to have this happen.

STUDENT TUTORS IN TUAS

The students' union TUO suggested in 2005 to TUAS that the university should start to build a stable tutoring system. It included a contract whereby TUAS would provide the resources of one employee to the students' union and the students' union would take care of tutoring. Since those days, the basics have not changed a great deal. In Finnish degree tutoring, TUAS provides resources, and the students' union recruits and educates the tutors and organises tutoring, and a student counsellor works with tutors on campuses.

The students' union and TUAS have a contract for student tutoring, and its content has become very stable over the years. Within the students' union, tutoring is organised by a tutoring adviser and one board member. They ensure that tutors for degree programmes are educated while TUAS meets the requirements for international tutors. However, we are currently at a turning point where tutoring is set to take a step in a new direction. The intended development will see a more collaborative approach. In future, international students will have two tutors: degree tutors and international tutors.

EXCHANGE STUDENTS' TUTORING

Exchange students come to TUAS twice a year. Each student has their own international tutor, even before arriving in Finland. "International tutors" are always Finnish students. According to TUAS' international coordinator Hanna Peussa, this is relevant because the intention is that every international student should have at least one Finnish contact. International tutors have from one to three students to tutor. Unlike degree tutors, these students can study in any academic year – in other words, studying experience is not emphasised. Many of the international students tutors come back to tutor again next semester or year.

International tutors advise on practical matters in international students' everyday life. Practical things that are specifically linked to cultural aspects are especially important for international students. This is the biggest difference between the job descriptions of degree tutors and international tutors. The questions asked by international students most often relate to the Finnish health care system, student housing, Finnish study methods and leisure time activities.

Exchange student tutoring includes orientation and assisting with the student's basic questions. TUAS advises tutors to talk about the Finnish concept of time, eating habits and language problems. International tutors receive support from TUAS' international coordinator. TUAS states that "Anyone can be a top tutor. The most important thing is to try to empathise with the other student's situation and be yourself". International tutors receive 3 ECTS when they have tutored twice and written a report about their experiences. Each time, they tutor one to three students from the same country or culture.

From research conducted by SAMOK it is clear that international students have very different needs in terms of student counselling than Finnish students. More

precisely they have wider and more specific needs. International students often feel that they have particular difficulties in getting to know Finnish students. They mentioned that Finnish students are often very shy and reluctant to have international students participate in team work.

An important part of the international tutoring system that aims to solve this problem is TUAS' three-credit course, Get Finternational. Get Finternational involves workshops where students get to know different cultures and events where different, usually particularly Finnish things, are done together. Students are also given tasks such as writing articles or helping language teachers. The primary purpose of the course is to give Finnish students some international experience and vice versa. The course is very popular and events are now also organised by the students' union and student associations.

International tutoring is vital for both exchange students and Finnish students. The next stage will be to broaden the scope of international tutoring to include international degree students.

INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS' TUTORING

In the past, international degree students did not have the opportunity to get tutored at TUAS, and both the students' union and the university were dissatisfied with the situation. To better the situation, TUAS launched several internal projects regarding international students, and many plans and preparations to revise student tutoring system have also been made.

At the time of writing this article, further decisions with regard to tutoring international students were made. TUAS has three English degree programmes and until now, tutoring has been organised quite differently in each programme. We have one programme in which Finnish students participate almost exclusively, one where there are many international students from many corners of the world and one where there are several immigrants.

Degree tutors sign a contract so that all the responsibilities are clear. This is also because tutors obtain 3 ECTS credits from tutoring. The students' union organises tutoring courses every spring and autumn, where each tutor attends for one day. All the tutors are second-year students. Additionally, there are also a few tutors who have greater responsibility, for example in planning the tutoring

year. These students have been tutors themselves and their responsibility is to guide new tutors in their job. Tutoring courses focus on group dynamics and on how a tutor can help the students in grouping.

Tutors from all campuses get to know each other right from the beginning. This is crucial as we hope that tutors will organise activities together and encourage students to get to know students from other fields of study. All student groups have two to five tutors, so there is always a tutor team instead of an individual tutor. In tutor training, we discuss various difficulties that may occur with students and teach tutors about how the university works and what leisure time activities there are for students. Practical matters are also discussed: how to organise events and put up a schedule and plan for whole year. Subjects relating to supporting the student group and getting students to feel comfortable at the university and in the group are also covered.

WHY IS IT BENEFICIAL TO HAVE STUDENT TUTORS?

In student tutoring everybody wins. Students value their tutors and want to become tutors themselves. International students integrate better into the student community and feel comfortable during their stay in Finland. From the point of view of the students' union, all the students feel better, gain new skills and are more confident about themselves and their future in working life.

The vast majority of feedback received tells us that tutors also find the experience to be very positive. Tutors learn skills that are important in working with people and directing a group. Some of the positive benefits that are often listed include: better social skills, loss of stage fright, confidence in public speaking and greater preparedness for responsibilities.

From TUAS' point of view, students who find the studying environment comfortable and caring want to continue their studies. The same applies for international students: positive experiences of their exchange university encourage them to study further in Finland and consider working in Finland upon completion of their studies. It is clear that exchange students always talk about their experiences to fellow students at their home universities. Many international students come to Finland and to TUAS because they have already heard about someone else's positive experiences.

TAKING TUTORING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

TUO's vision for student tutoring of the future is to take all our strengths as described above and integrate them with new and more effective approaches. TUAS' degree tutoring system and international tutoring system for exchange students already stand in good stead. Nevertheless, we have decided to put more effort into tutoring international degree students. In international degree programmes, we have always had very good tutor teachers, but they have had too much counselling responsibility to handle everything on their own. Some tutors have participated in the students' union's degree tutoring system, but only Finnish students. The plan is that from now on all international degree students will have both an international student tutor and a degree student tutor. Our system does not require much alteration to accommodate this. It will still be the case that international tutors are Finnish, in order for students to have at least one Finnish contact. International tutors are there for students to help them with practical matters. On the other hand, degree tutors will still have the same responsibility for supporting student groups throughout the entire first year. These tutors may be international themselves, since the students' union will run one of the training sessions partly in English. In the half-English training programme, we would like all participants, both Finnish and international tutors, to have the opportunity to get to know each other. That way Finns have an opportunity to learn English and international students can acquire Finnish. International degree students need more support from the entire university community. It is for this reason that we seek to build up a comprehensive student tutor system, which includes international tutors and degree tutors. This element together with study counsellors, tutor teachers etc. will, we believe, make studying at TUAS a completely new experience for international degree students.

COURSE ON LIFE MANAGEMENT AND SUCCESS IN STUDIES

Satu Salmi

WHY?

The idea behind this course is linked to situations in which degree students at Turku University of Applied Science (TUAS) are known to need more guidance, a sense of community and support than there is currently available (Metsävuori & Mäntsälä 2011). Many students come from outside Europe and their connections to their home country are limited. The most important support resource for students at TUAS is their family, friends and other close connections (Rantanen, Niemi & Elenius 2013) and this is exactly what foreign students lack, at least at the beginning of their stay in a new country. In addition, many of them work regularly alongside their studies in order to finance their stay in Finland, which makes their daily life very busy and means they have limited opportunity to create social networks and participate in different activities or hobbies.

WHO AND HOW?

The course was planned and implemented by a study counselling psychologist and lecturer from the health care faculty. The themes of the course were based on their experience of important issues in a student welfare context. All applicants had to write a brief presentation about themselves and describe why they wanted to enrol on this particular course. In addition, the applicants were interviewed for several reasons. Firstly, the teachers wanted students who could commit to the group as the structure was based on group meetings, tasks done between the meetings and a learning diary. Secondly, this kind of course was very different from the courses available at that time; the interview was an opportunity to provide further information and examine the motivation and suitability of the applicant.

The theoretical frame was constructive learning, in which the students and their conceptions and schemas form the most important basis for the learning process. Students were seen as active subjects who connected their own targets, experiences and ideas to the themes within the course, developed their understanding through personal growth and through sharing their own experiences and ideas with other students, in other words, mutual learning. One of the main objectives of the course was to provoke reflective thinking. Self-reflection and meta-thinking is not innate, but a skill which needs to be acquired and practised. However, for a student at university level, it is extremely important to be able to analyse one's own thinking, processing and actions. From the point of view of graduates, working life will include tasks and situations in which clearly defined routines are rare. On the contrary, academic tasks demand the ability to analyse situations and problems, and subsequently find different possibilities to solve the problems. In addition, a student needs to be capable of evaluating solutions and proceeding, and if necessary, to find new solutions and strategies. This applies to personal growth and well-being as well as professional life.

Another principle for the course was solution-based therapy. This meant that many tasks, homework and other similar assignments emphasised solutions for problems instead of analysing their reasons or background. Focusing on positive aspects in thinking, including happiness and possible resources available, was an ongoing theme. This kind of approach is suitable for group like this, when the aim is not to go "too deeply" into students' problems in a therapy-like manner.

The working forms were discussed, and different tasks were undertaken alone, in pairs or in smaller groups, along with psycho-education and small lectures given by teachers and homework for each meeting. While this was not considered a therapy group but rather a study unit, this kind of process demanded that students were devoted and committed to the project and able to work in a group without becoming too anxious. The working form was a suitable for a small group size; eight students from countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, China, Nepal, Spain and Finland were chosen. But why were Finnish students selected? There are approximately 8300 native Finnish students studying degree programmes at TUAS. However, the mixture between nationalities in daily study life is sometimes complex; students tend to seek out their own national groups. Two suitable and motivated Finnish students were included on this course in the hope that they could bring integrative elements for the group process related to Finnish culture and mentality.

PRINCIPLES, STRUCTURE AND THEMES

The group met eight times once a week with each meeting lasting 1.5 hours. Every meeting started with a period of “conscious presence”, as recognising and regulating stress was one of the leading themes of the course. These forms of simple meditation are known to be very effective in stress reduction. The repetition of the movements makes learning by conditioning possible, and it is used successfully in groups suffering from tension and stress. The amount and duration of stress is strongly linked to the ability to study and work and general well-being, so all the themes of the meetings were more or less related to the issue of stress. Another routine was a course diary. Everyone in turn wrote a story or description of the meeting and this was read aloud and discussed at the beginning of the next gathering.

The meetings and tasks were planned so that communication between every group member was facilitated throughout the course. This was a concrete act in order to facilitate the sense of community, break boundaries between nationalities and improve the atmosphere in the group so that it would be as safe as possible. The more people know about each other, the better the sense of security within the group. Feeling secure improves mutual learning, which is one of the most effective learning forms. Too little emphasis is put on the importance of a positive and safe atmosphere in learning situations (Lonka 1991; 1997). Learning is far from pure intellectual processing. Emotions are strongly involved in learning and a favourable emotional state makes learning more effective and productive.

The first meeting consisted of getting to know each other, clarifying the themes and targets of the course, creating rules for the group and starting the follow-up for time management. This was a concrete issue which is known to be difficult for university students. Many of the following questions handled in the course were examined within the context of time management.

The second meeting dealt with daily rhythm, the amount and quality of sleep. Like many people, a number of group members suffered from a lack of sleep. Psychoeducational information was provided about the fact that a lack of sleep leads to many negative physical and mental consequences. Studying is hard work in itself – the student is required to learn new things all the time, there are very few routine actions and the student is constantly evaluated. This lasts for four years (the time required to complete the degree). Studying demands

a lot of energy, but time should also be allocated for relaxing and recovering. Many of these students were working up to two jobs a day (cleaning jobs on the ferries) alongside their studies, which made daily rhythm issues very challenging. The follow-up of the schedule was extremely informative; in this task everything from sleep and daily routines to study tasks was analysed. Some of the students realised how poor their sleeping habits were and how little time they had to recover and relax. Discussion and sharing of experiences in this regard represented a very important preventive approach with respect to mental and physical health and ability to study. A number of follow-ups on these issues were conducted during the course.

The third meeting continued with the previous, essential themes. Nutrition was included, and again, a lot of important ideas regarding these very basic issues were contributed by the students. As teachers we had noticed in our work with the Finnish students that eating a well-balanced and regular diet was not apparent. The connection between nutrition and mood in general is very important. Very often students are surprisingly unaware of this fact and they do not take care of themselves properly. In the case of foreign students, information on concrete issues like the right amount of vitamin D (extra is needed in countries with scarce sun in winter) was useful to repeat and discuss.

Mood, mental health and general well-being were the themes for *the fourth meeting*. Different kinds of tasks and exercises were conducted and music was listened to. This gathering had a very intimate, therapeutic, nurturing and confidential atmosphere. The idea of constructive learning crystallised in this meeting, and this could be found also in the learning diaries afterwards.

The fifth meeting was devoted to stress in a very specific and concrete way with emphasis on stress throughout the course. Stress was examined by making an analysis of a stressful situation: what was the situation like, what thoughts and beliefs were connected to it, how did it make you feel, what physical reactions were experienced, what actions were taken and what could the person have done in order to make the situation easier? Again, the sharing of experiences was very useful and important; the development of self-reflective thinking among the course members could be seen very clearly. The next two meetings, *sixth and seventh*, were clearly directed at study issues.

FEEDBACK COMMUNICATION – A CORE SKILL IN WORK AND STUDY LIFE?

Feedback was the theme for *the sixth meeting*, as it is one of the most important aspects of learning. Feedback is a very important tool in studies and in working life, and this fact came across very keenly in the discussions within the group. Feedback communication was not that easy for the students. One reason for difficulties was cultural differences. For example, according to the African students, the feedback in their own educational system and in work life was very strict with no explanations or suggestions for improvement included. In Asian countries, it is important to keep up appearances, which probably makes the evaluative feedback discussions challenging. The task-based (organisational) work and study culture emphasising equality in Europe and North America is very different from the hierarchical Asian and African cultures, in which personality and status are intrinsic. This is why a more detailed description of this course theme is also provided here.

In fact, feedback is the prerequisite of learning. Feedback tells us in which direction and how learning and skills should be directed so that the learning targets may be reached. It is possible to measure the level of skills and understanding through feedback. Positive and constructive feedback is important for a person's favourable perception of himself and provides a sense of achievement. Giving feedback is a way to show positive affection and express care – when someone (teacher, co-student, supervisor, co-worker) gives you feedback, he/she has seen you, has devoted thought and energy to you. Scarce feedback is easily interpreted negatively. Expressing constructive feedback, on the contrary, usually improves the atmosphere. The content and style in which feedback is given say a lot about the person giving the feedback. Appropriate, constructive and friendly feedback is often experienced as pleasant and trustful, feelings which are then transferred to the person giving this kind of feedback. Through feedback it is easier to understand grades, decisions and arrangements at work. Justifiable decisions with respect to the things mentioned, which include feedback, are simply more informative and thus easier to accept. Feedback is the guiding light for educational and professional growth and provides direction for a student. Also, the feedback received by the student when doing practical tasks is feedback for the teacher and TUAS, illustrating how the basic task, learning and professional development is fulfilled by TUAS.

The seventh meeting was devoted to the lack of study skills and procrastination, which are both very common problems for university students. Studying at university differs considerably from previous educational levels and completely new skills are often needed. Again, time management is the core issue: the large amount of material which needs to be learned and the objective of acquiring a deep understanding (the opposite of learning by heart with a more superficial understanding) demands that sufficient time is allocated to study. The students had prepared this meeting so that everyone had the chance to search the internet for useful sites concerning learning. In the meeting they introduced these sites and explained why this particular issue was meaningful to them.

HOW WAS THE COURSE EVALUATED?

The eighth and final meeting was reserved for evaluation, feedback and farewell. Instant feedback in this meeting was very positive, but the atmosphere was somewhat melancholic too. The group worked well and participants considered the Monday evening meetings to be an opportunity to devote themselves to their own welfare. The course was not theoretically that demanding, but analysing one's own life as a whole and concentrating on "managing" daily life activities – studying, working, relationships with other people, own welfare etc. – seemed thought-provoking for the participants. Some suggested that this kind of course should be compulsory for every student. Others suggested that a longer course and additional time would be beneficial. All the participants reported that they had benefitted from the practice at the start of each session concentrating on breathing and staying in that particular moment, in other words, mindfulness skills. In the learning diaries, the students analysed the course themes carefully from their own point of view. Some of the learning diaries were touching to read and revealed more personal and deep processes related to the course. The structured meetings with clear targets guaranteed that all the desired topics of the course were included and that the course was not considered therapy. However, the learning diary made it possible for each student to familiarise themselves with particular themes which were essential for them to become personally meaningful.

The background principles for a solution-based approach, such as appreciative, respectful contact between people, the idea that everyone has something good in them, paying attention to positive exceptions (not everything is negative,

there has to be something else too), leniency towards yourself and others, and normalisation were very apparent in the course context and developed the group culture and atmosphere towards permissive and optimistic. Positive feelings and optimism can serve as a resource for self-management and a means of coping with difficult situations. This was manifested very well, especially in the learning diaries. It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up and ask the students about their experiences some time after the course; how they are taking care of themselves, and to what extent they feel that they are managing their life and studies. In processes like this course, it is usual that the meetings can be a starting point for positive personal development, which can be activated or manifested later, when circumstances or life events function as a positive trigger. It is also possible that the students' good insights disappear and are forgotten. A follow-up might serve as a reminder and repetition of a fruitful learning process.

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FINNISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Jaana Szinovatz

LEARNING LARGE LINGUISTIC CONCEPTS

An immigrant can cope in Turku without using Finnish language for many years. Many city dwellers can speak foreign languages very well, and they tend to switch to English when talking with foreigners. This makes it quite difficult for a non-Finn to learn the language. In addition, many Finns do not have the patience to listen to foreigner's poor efforts of speaking Finnish. However, many leisure activity groups provide possibilities for learning and exercising Finnish outside Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS). The practice has shown that the more a foreign student participates in the activities of the surrounding Finnish community, the faster their language skills will improve.

Whether foreign degree students and exchange students feel themselves successful in their studies (Rantanen et al. 2013 59) may significantly be affected by the fact that the structure of Finnish language differs from the one of Indo-European languages. Due to structural differences, both the Finnish students and the staff may expect too much of the non-natives and wish for fast results in learning. However, results are only accomplished after learning the main concepts of language.

Finnish is spoken by almost 5.5 million people. The roots of the Finnish culture are in the national epic, Kalevala. Although the modern Finnish society has alienated itself from the language and mindset of the Kalevala era, the epic still lives on in our culture, e.g. in company names. During the last two decades, Finnish has faced changes, for example, in the vocabulary, in the speech style of young females, and in the new expressions brought by immigrants.

WORKING LIFE CALLS FOR INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE SKILLS

At TUAS, degree students who study business, nursing or information technology instructed in English are provided with Finnish language courses in the range of 6–10 ECTS credits. In the working life, the language proficiency should be at least at CEFR level B2. Theoretically, if the student puts much effort into TUAS language courses, it is possible to reach level B1 language proficiency. At JAMK University of Applied Sciences, courses of Finnish as a Second Language are offered approximately in the range of 20 ECTS points. This guarantees that the student reaches the proficiency level required in the working life.

The CEFR divides language learning into understanding, speaking and writing. The following chart sums up the objectives of each CEFR sublevel. The higher the level, the more skilled the learner is.

Developing Elementary Language Skills A.2.2

The student understands the main idea of the conversation although repetition is still needed. The student masters the basic everyday vocabulary and language structures.

First Stage of Elementary Language Skills A.2.1

The student understands simple, clarified, standard language messages. The student understands the main idea of a message and begins to master the most simple linguistic structures and grammar.

Functional Basic Language Skills A.1.3

The student understands short expressions related to his/her own personal experiences and can utter his/her personal needs. However, it takes long for the student to read and understand even short texts.

Developing Basic Language Skills A.1.2

The student understands short questions, orders, and sentences if the context is clear. Pronunciation issues may cause false interpretations.

Learning the Basic Language Skills A.1.1

The weight of learning is put on familiar words and phrases, the alphabet and numbers. The student resorts to his/her mother tongue in communication. The student spells some words and phrases correctly.

At level B1, the language skills become more functional. C2, the highest level of CEFR, corresponds to the skills of a native speaker and is not included in this chart.

First Stage of Advanced Language Skills C.1

Although foreign accent and dialects may cause problems, the student can handle idiomatic features and demanding, detailed information.

Functional Independent Language Skills B.2.2

The student can cope independently in communication situations and be understood.

First Stage of Independent Language Skills B.2.1

The student is able to follow news and other magazine programmes on television. The student can describe events, experiences and feelings.

Fluent Elementary Language Skills B.1.2

The student understands the main content and can distinguish the details in informal speech. The student is able to connect things and express oneself easily.

Functional Elementary Language Skills B.1.1

The pronunciation is understandable. The student can discuss common, familiar everyday things.

Learning calls for commitment and time. Therefore, reaching a new proficiency level is slow. Often, results are to be seen only after months of exercising. In the working life, the language skills must be at least at the level B1, the same level required from persons applying for the Finnish citizenship. The level B2 is required from applicants of the universities for applied sciences; in universities, the minimum requirement is C1. If the applicant does not measure up to these standards, the academy must provide the student with the possibility to improve their language skills. In basic education, it takes 4–6 years for the Finnish pupils to develop language skills to a more abstract level. The YKI language test uses a 6-step proficiency scale. To get the Finnish citizenship, the applicant must show at least satisfactory Finnish (or Swedish) skills on level 3 of the scale. It takes approximately 10 years for an adult learner to reach the YKI level 4 and B2.

As working life requires sufficient language skills, special weight is put on improving the Finnish skills of persons with a foreign background in the metropolitan area (City of Helsinki 2013). However, it remains unclear what is meant by “sufficient skills”. If it is sufficient to know how to use the Swedish expression “ett ögonblick» («just a moment»), are the Finnish skills at the same level if the speaker knows the same expression in Finnish («hetkinen»)? In situations calling for independent language skills, this expression alone would not be enough.

IMPORTANCE OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP

A foreign degree student or exchange student may face a culture shock when studying Finnish language or vocational subjects because of the cultural differences of the learning conventions. The student’s mother tongue and cultural experiences influence the way they deal with different matters. In addition, cultural values influence how things are being proportioned and how the student’s learning and studying practices differ from the Finnish ones (see Härmä & Joshi in this publication).

The teacher must reflect upon how to keep the student interested and how the senses can be utilised in the learning process. To learn a language, both visual and auditory learning is required. A kinaesthetic learner applies the things he or she learned through speaking and writing. Foreign language lessons are not conducted as lectures but as exercise courses. The best results are produced in groups with less than 20 members. More often, these exercises do not only take place in classrooms but also other places such as libraries, market places, IT companies or sheltered homes. Of course, simulated classroom teaching is still required along with authentic learning situations. In any case, the teacher must give enough time for guidance and feedback.

In Europe, studying still mainly concentrates on repetition following the principles of teacher-centred instruction. This style imparts traditions and reinforces cultural viewpoints of the society. Foreign students in Finland may feel themselves lost when they encounter behavioural conventions unfamiliar to their own culture and cannot get in genuine contact with Finns because of their imperfect language skills. Although the Finnish education system allows

space for creativity and new ideas, the student may feel insecure, because in their own culture the conventions of speech are usually different – some subjects may be regarded as taboos.

There are lots of exchange students at TUAS. Sometimes, an exchange student is so interested in the Finnish language that he or she takes part in the studies intended for degree students. These study groups offer lots of informal knowledge which can be used as teaching material. When searching for new teaching methods, a tandem language programme with Finnish students might work very well. The tandem students would introduce their own culture, native language and home towns to each other. For example, geographical information could be a good starting point for learning Finnish equivalents of state and city names. After learning the basics of Finnish and with the aid of other languages, the foreign student is able to participate in many productive conversations. Experience-based learning relies on common knowledge consisting of both formal and informal professional knowledge (see e.g. Lehtinen & Palonen 1998). For example, after having learned some useful spoken language, students acquire lots of informal knowledge which is nowadays very central in teaching.

Although Finnish pronunciation is fairly simple (with some exceptions there is a high correspondence between letters and sounds), the written and spoken language differ greatly from each other. For example, the written version of the question *What is your name?* is *Mikä sinun nimesi on?*, while the colloquial version is *Mikä sun nimi on?* Conscious learning helps to connect the new and the old knowledge. (Mitchell et al. 2013). The phrase *Mitä kuuluu?* (*How are you?*) is sometimes understood as a greeting, not as a question. The student may have interpreted the foreign expression according to their own mother tongue. Therefore, it is sometimes advisable to correct misinterpretations in language learning.

Because of communication goals, main weight of language teaching is no more put on grammar but on context-based and pragmatic teaching. To express politeness when asking for a cup of coffee, either the conditional mood (*Ottaisin kahvia.*) or potential mood of the verb (*Lieneekö sinulla kahvia?*) can be used. The latter form is, however, nowadays quite uncommon for many Finnish students and is almost extinct. To form the question *Do you want some coffee?* one can use the informal singular form of the verb (*Juotko kahvia?*) or the formal, more polite one (*Juotteko kahvia?*). Also, an impersonal expression can be used: *Saako olla kahvia?* This variety of possible expressions is not available in all languages. It is challenging to translate specific nuances and creative features, such as

onomatopoeic expressions. In language teaching, it is common to discuss the different variants with students as they translate Finnish expressions into their own mother tongue in their mind (compare Mitchell et al. 2013). It takes time to reflect upon things and absorb new information.

The following example from the practice shows how the methods of language teaching have become more diverse. The passive participle is not always covered in the courses of Finnish basics. In a student-centred approach, new learning situations bring forward surprising issues. Patterns can be revised and carried out in different ways: When the students had to practice their skills in a cafe environment, it turned out that it was not enough for them to know how to order something in Finnish. They also needed to practice the use of the objective case because the cashier bombarded them with further questions: *Maustettua vai maustamatonta? Assamia vai Darjeelingiä?* (Flavored or non-flavored cappuccino? Assam or Darjeeling tea?) As the conversation went on in the cafe, new worlds were embraced, which seldom happens in a classroom environment.

The German language makes a distinction between EU citizens (*Inländer*) and citizens of other states (*Ausländer*). Although hate speech has increased in our society, a Finnish student asked why such a distinction is needed: why not just speak of “Finns” whatever their colour or accent is. Skin colour would be a strict standard when defining a Finn. Although the Finnish National Board of Education has for a long time organised education aiming at integration of immigrants, funded e.g. by the European Social Fund, there is no neutral expression for the word immigrant in the Finnish language. *Mamu* (short for *maahanmuuttaja*, en. *immigrant*) has negative connotations, and the noun *uussuomalainen* (en. “*neo-Finn*”) sounds odd when speaking about persons who have lived in Finland for decades.

ENTERING THE WORKING LIFE

Many immigrant women feel themselves integrated to the Finnish society through working life (see Sivonen et al. 2010). Imperfect Finnish skills are not an obstacle for entrepreneurship or civic activity. However, the immigrants are rather in touch with the Finnish state than the culture. (Toivanen 2013). Why does the education of immigrants in Turku University of Applied Sciences call for attention and why must new things be emphasised in the studies? During the upcoming years, the next generation of immigrants should enter TUAS, if the integration in Southwest Finland has been successful. In education and the

labour market, the success of immigrants' children is often used as an indicator for evaluation of long-term effects of alien and integration policies (Toivanen 2013). To get the best results, the whole school community should support the foreign student in language learning.

To reinforce the sense of togetherness, frontal teaching is used in study programmes conducted in English, because the foreign students are often used to this method in their own cultures. E-learning can also reinforce the sense of togetherness at its best, but it calls for resources as well. It is good to reflect upon how the decreasing resources are spread among the non-native and native students. For example, summer courses have produced successful integration results.

Over 50 percent of the world population is at least bilingual, and bilingualism is also ordinary in Finland Proper. Bilingualism and multilingualism could be treated as a matter of fact at our university. However, learning is not instant but a long-lasting process: the student learns the small concepts first and then the larger ones. To pass a language proficiency test, the skills must be at a functional level, which is required in the working life as well. It is essential how the language is used in interaction and how the person understands and uses the language.

Many degree students of immigration background or degree students from foreign countries may be afraid of being different and not being socially accepted in the eyes of the Finns. If both sides learn about each other's backgrounds, it helps to reach mutual understanding. Immigrants may have faced extreme difficulties during their lives. At the beginning of 2013, the Finnish National Board of Education published e-learning material which is partly made by Sirpa Rajala who teaches Finnish and communication studies at TUAS. The material reflects the Finnish society and everyday life very well: free education attracts international students to Finland, and if they possess good knowledge about the Finnish society, they are likely to be motivated to stay here.

Quality must never be sacrificed in teaching. The students appreciate that due performances are demanded from them. Faster completion of the studies must not lead to lower requirements. Quality is preserved by the principle of "less is more", i.e. by concentrating on smaller study entities and deepened know-how. The teacher must keep a tight grip on the students, because foreign degree and exchange students are used to the sense of togetherness and control in their own cultures. For them, it gives an appearance of caring. The students need guidance and security. TUAS has the resources to develop studies of Finnish as a second language on a large scale.

In the today's changing environment, we have to reinforce the feeling of stability and confidence to attract foreign students also in the future. Foreign degree students wish for more Finnish language courses in order to cope in the working life. At the end of the studies, instruction in Finnish should be increased, which would help the students to stay in Finland and integrate into the Finnish working life. When the student has learnt the basics of Finnish, the language studies should be integrated also inside TUAS with the vocational subjects.

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SURVEY OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH STUDIES AND TUTORING IN THE INTERNATIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Hoa Nguyen, Habibul Islam & Heli Söderlund

Professional Growth Studies and tutoring are generally considered to have an important role in the degree programmes at Turku University of Applied Sciences due to the fact that they help and support students to organise and manage their studies effectively. This is why the Agricola TP2 (Guidance and Counselling of International Degree Programme Students) team decided to conduct a survey on student satisfaction with regard to the Professional Growth study unit, tutoring and other related matters. The survey was planned and implemented as project work by two international degree programme students during the period October–December 2012.

The results were published in March 2013 and introduced to the tutoring teachers of TUAS' three international degree programmes (Information Technology, International Business and Nursing) in April. They will be used to provide improvement and development suggestions for Professional Growth Studies and tutoring in the future.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted with TUAS international degree programme students. Both closed and open-ended questions were used. The questionnaire was structured with sixteen questions covering the following topics related to the Professional Growth study unit and tutoring:

- general background information on the respondents
- receiving information about the curriculum, degree programme and study environment
- study skills and methods
- support in planning the Individual Study Plan (ISP)
- support in practical matters (e.g. facilities, equipment, library, data systems)
- support during the work placement process
- support when facing difficulties
- persons who provide guidance and support concerning the studies

The first six questions concerned the general background of the respondents: degree programme, campus, sex, study year, region of origin and number of years the respondent has lived in Finland. There were 107 respondents, of which 33 studied in the Degree Programme of Information Technology, 56 on the Degree Programme of International Business and 18 on the Degree Programme of Nursing. The regions of origin of the respondents were: Asia (42 students), Europe (54 students), Africa (9 students) and America (2 students). Forty-three respondents were first-year students, 40 were second-year students and 24 were either third or fourth-year students. In total 50.9% of them were female and 49.1% male.

The first seven questions related to their satisfaction with Professional Growth Studies. They were formulated as multiple choice questions where the respondents could express their satisfaction on the aforementioned topics on the following scale: completely dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, fairly satisfied, completely satisfied. If the respondent was completely dissatisfied, they were asked to describe the reason for their dissatisfaction.

Question 8 concerned the importance of different factors as part of Professional Growth Studies (e.g. team working skills, time management, IT skills, meeting teacher tutors and student tutors, getting information about work placements and living in Finland) and question 9 related to the people who had guided and helped the student when needed. Question 10 was an open-ended question about what kind of guidance, help and advice an international degree programme student would need during their studies.

RESULTS

Satisfaction with Professional Growth Studies in general

Some 64% of the respondents were fairly (47%) or completely satisfied (17%), but one quarter (24%) did not have a clear opinion and answered “Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”. Some 11% were fairly dissatisfied. The reason for 1% being completely dissatisfied related to changes in tutoring personnel over the years leading to occasional confusion among the students.

Satisfaction with the curriculum and information provided about the study environment

The majority of the students (58%) were fairly satisfied and 11% were completely satisfied.

Some 21% did not have an opinion. Of these students, 77% were International Business students. Responses showed that 9% were fairly dissatisfied and 1% completely dissatisfied. The reasons given were that they had been confused with Sole-OPS, Messi and Winha platforms and they thought that some of the teachers were not able to offer enough information about them.

Satisfaction with study methods

Some 52% of the students were fairly (40%) or completely (12%) satisfied with the study methods. The number of students who were not sure about their satisfaction was very large in this case, 38%. Some 9% were fairly dissatisfied and 1% completely dissatisfied. The only reason given for being completely dissatisfied was the time management of courses.

Satisfaction concerning support for planning the Individual Study Plan (ISP)

Responses showed that 59% of the students were fairly (51%) or completely (8%) satisfied with the ISP support. Some 25% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 15% fairly dissatisfied. Again only 1% of students were completely dissatisfied. The reason given was that the students had not been told to advance faster in their studies or find more courses.

Satisfaction with support in practical matters

The majority of the students (72 out of 107 respondents, in other words 67%) were fairly or completely satisfied with the support received in practical matters such as facilities, equipment, library and data systems. Nobody was completely dissatisfied. However, there was still a group of 25 students (23%) who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with support in the work placement process

Unlike in the previous questions, nearly a half of the responses (47%) belong to the category “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”. In addition, more students were not very satisfied with the support provided for work placements (14% fairly and 5% completely dissatisfied). Only 24% were fairly or completely satisfied (14% vs. 9%).

The reasons given for complete dissatisfaction were the following:

- insufficient information
- difficulties in finding a work placement in Finland without knowing people “on the inside”
- the university and local companies have not considered the benefits that foreign full-time students will bring when they have practical training in national and local companies
- all information about work placements sent to university email was in Finnish, which posed issues for foreign students
- lack of detailed instructions on how and when to prepare for a work placement application
- some students were unable to meet the coordinator responsible for their practical training and therefore had no clue about how to fill in their report and get the credits, or whether it was possible to complete the professional training in their work placement
- university lacks image awareness with companies – if the awareness were improved, it might be easier to get a work placement in local companies.

Both in the category fairly dissatisfied and completely dissatisfied, the majority of the responses came from the International Business students (73% vs. 75%). The Nursing students did not express any dissatisfaction, but were either completely satisfied (50%) or fairly satisfied (29%).

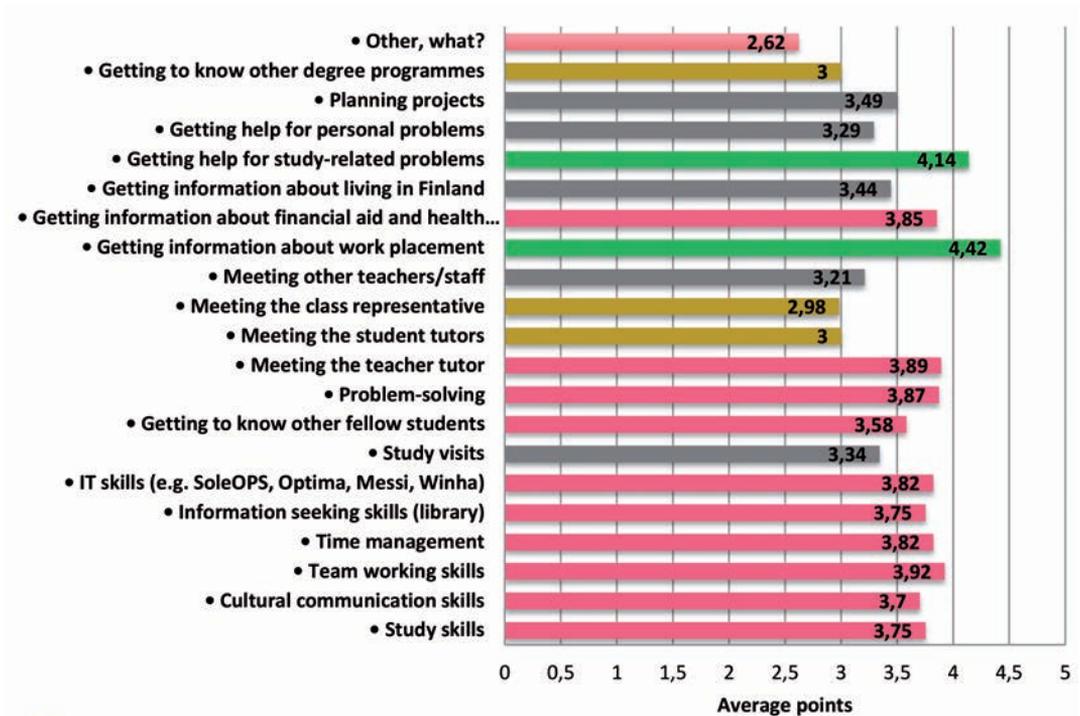
Satisfaction with support when facing difficulties

Some 61% of the respondents were either fairly (43%) or completely (18%) satisfied with support received when facing difficulties. In total 33% did not specify any satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and 5% were fairly dissatisfied. The given reasons for complete dissatisfaction (1%) were a lack of information that could help students in open universities who have been studying for 2 years and have more than 100 credits, and that teachers and student offices were not able to help with any questions.

The importance of different factors as part of Professional Growth Studies

The respondents were asked to score the factors using the scale 1–5 (1 = not important, 5 = very important).

TABLE 1. *The importance of different factors as part of Professional Growth Studies.*

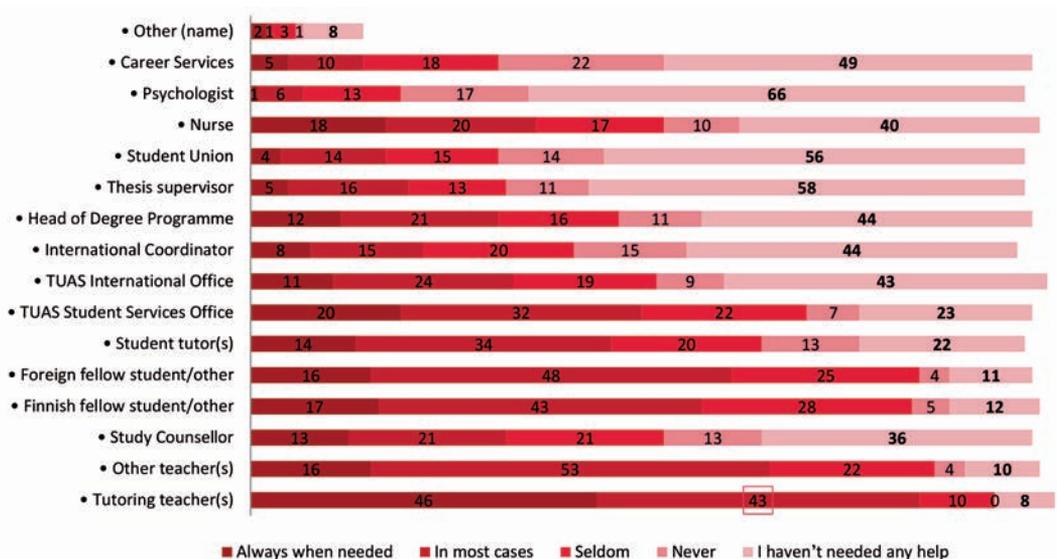


Receiving information about work placements (4.42) and getting help for study-related problems (4.14) were considered as the most important methods of support for the students. Also team working skills, meeting the teacher tutor, problem solving, getting information about financial and health issues, time management, IT skills, study skills, research skills (library) and cultural communication skills received a high score (3.92–3.7). Meeting the class representative and getting to know other degree programmes and meeting student tutors were not considered so important.

Guidance and support received concerning the studies

The respondents were asked to answer the question “From whom have you received guidance and help concerning your studies when needed?” related to different counselling parties (e.g. tutoring teachers, fellow students, nurse, psychologist, students’ union), selecting one of the following: *always when needed, in most cases, seldom, never, I haven’t needed any help*.

TABLE 2. *The question “From whom have you received guidance and help concerning your studies when needed?” related to different counselling parties.*



As shown in the figure, students most often received support from the tutoring teachers, which is the option that received the highest score (*always when needed*: 46 students and *in most cases*: 43 students). Other teachers, Finnish or foreign fellow students or the TUAS Student Services Office were able to help the students in most cases. In comparison with the other supporting parties, there were more students (22) who had never received help from the Careers Services when needed. In addition, many of the respondents (40–58 students) had not needed the support of the Career Services, nurse, students' union, thesis supervisor, Head of Degree Programme, International Coordinator or TUAS International Office. In particular, the services of the psychologist had not been used (66 students).

Comparison between the dissatisfaction of Asian students and European students with regard to the Professional Growth Studies

One interesting aspect in the questionnaire was whether there was a difference between the dissatisfaction levels of Asian students and European students. It can be seen in Figure 3 that in general European students tended to be dissatisfied or uncertain about their satisfaction with regard to the Professional Growth Studies compared to the Asian counterparts.

TABLE 3. Comparison between the dissatisfaction of Asian students and European students with regard to the Professional Growth Studies.

	Asian students		European students	
	Dissatisfied	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied
Getting information	1	6	8	15
Study methods	0	18	10	21
Individual Study Plan	1	8	16	18
Support in practical matters	1	12	9	13
Work placement	9	19	4	28
Support when facing difficulties	2	13	4	18

Guidance and advice needed during studies

The last question was an open-ended question, where respondents could freely express their suggestions and recommendations concerning the development of Professional Growth Studies. The following comments about work placements, studies and other support were raised by the students.

Work placement / practice

- Introduce some related companies to students when we are looking for training.
- More help and information for international degree students who would like to do their practical training in Finland.
- There should be proper guidance about getting jobs and placements and sufficient Finnish language training.
- Guidance on how to apply for practical training.
- Professional IT-based work opportunities during studies.
- The school should organise some work placement opportunities for foreign students in particular.
- Frequent job fairs with companies that are interested in taking on international students could be organised every semester.

Studies

- Optional courses students should take.
- Support in study planning.
- More guidance, help and advice from the teacher tutor or student office especially regarding studies, health care or any problem related to the rights of students.
- Organising courses or events for personal development training.
- Courses are supposed to focus a bit on theory because having a strong theory background will make it easy to go along to practical things.
- Organising studies so that they are more closely related to work opportunities.
- A clear picture of which courses students can take and which should be saved for later studies.
- New students need clearer guidance due to the fact that they often get confused about new studying methods and the process. Proper analysis on each matter is preferable.

- Organising more Finnish courses or building groups of students to help foreign students improve Finnish language skills.
- Organising events or gatherings with both international and Finnish students, who are interested in cross-cultural communication, and supporting one another in language skills. This can also be an environment for international degree students to exchange information on work opportunities and future studies.
- When starting to write the thesis, there should be clear discussion about who can be contacted for help and who will supervise the thesis.
- Cross-cultural communications: organising courses or presentations about Finnish working methods due to the culture gap between Finland and other countries.
- There should be a proper language test for Finnish, or at least a test to see how motivated the student is to learn Finnish, at the entry exam stage. That would help the student to understand how important the matter is and why it is important.

Other support

- Financial aid
- International matters such as organising the exchange year
- The university should organise an intercultural programmes for better integration
- Building a gym in the ICT building
- Ensuring a Muslim meal is available for lunch
- International degree students need guidance, help and advice regarding how to live in Finland, finding accommodation, things related to study like the way to submit homework. It would also be a good idea to build a Facebook page for Professional Growth Studies where all stakeholders can share information with each other.

CONCLUSION

Generally, there was a high number of students who were fairly or completely satisfied with Professional Growth Studies (about 60% on average), and a very small group of them who were completely dissatisfied (generally 1%, except in the case of satisfaction regarding the work placement process, where the percentage of dissatisfied students amounted to 5%).

However, about one quarter of the respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, in other words they were uncertain about their satisfaction. Support for the work placement received the lowest degree of satisfaction, while support when facing difficulties received the highest rating.

According to the respondents, support for the work placement and study-related problems were considered very important during their studies, as well as meeting the teacher tutor, team working skills, time management, cultural communication skills, study skills and planning projects. However, meeting the class representative and getting to know other degree programmes were not considered as necessary as the other factors.

The support from tutoring teachers was highly appreciated by the students. Other teachers, Finnish or foreign fellow students and TUAS student services had helped the students in most cases. However, the degree of support from the Career Services was felt to be low, and some students never received it. In addition, most students did not seek support from the TUAS International Office, students' union, Head of Degree Programme or the psychologist.

More students from Europe than Asia were dissatisfied or uncertain about their satisfaction with Professional Growth Studies. The majority of the students in the Degree Programme in International Business were dissatisfied or uncertain about their satisfaction. Most suggestions for the development of the Professional Growth Studies concerned guidance on how to apply for a work placement or a job in Finland. The students also wished to have more support in study planning and getting to know the new study methods. Finnish language skills and cross-cultural communication were also emphasised as part of Professional Growth Studies.

WHAT IS CAREER GUIDANCE

Mikko Niskanen

INTRODUCTION

Career guidance has not been defined exactly. It consists of various tasks and methods used in helping people to achieve a career that they desire, or – more often than not – as a means to create visions of possible future professions and career paths leading there. In most organisations many of these tasks are performed as a part of something that is not called career guidance. A very good example is making a study plan: every student must have a study plan, which lists the courses he or she is planning to take. This, of course, should be very much related to their career plans. In fact, this is usually seen as a major process on its own; it may include writing a simple career plan, but I have yet to see a degree programme, where the study plan is seen as a more detailed part of the whole career plan.

In my own vision, the career planning of a student should start from the present, and extend to the future far beyond their studies. Typically, I advise students to think about the job they want to do in 2–10 years after graduation, depending how ambitious their plans are. Career planning should actually start (and sometimes it does) already far before the individual starts university. The earliest decisions that people usually make are in their teens, when they decide between the high school and vocational school. But in fact, for most of those who choose high school, they do not consider this decision actually making a definite career plan. Their first real career decision is when they choose the university where they start their studies, and that may well not be the one they had actually planned – the most desired universities and faculties accept only a small number of applicants. As a result, in many degree programmes a relatively large proportion of new students are studying at a university or faculty that does not form part of their primary career vision. In fact, the majority of the first year students may not have exact career plans, but instead they have come to see what the faculty they have been accepted to might be able to offer.

This contributes to a number of problems in the field of motivation. In the worst case scenario, students come to their first courses only to tell everybody else that they actually want to study in a much “better” faculty than this, and they certainly do not intend to be staying more than a year, maybe not even that. The result is disastrous for the group dynamics and self-esteem of the young students. Furthermore, most of those unhappy, disappointed new students are wrong. Few of them will actually move to more desired faculties, and most of them could find a completely satisfactory career by finishing their current studies – if they only knew their possibilities.

KNOWING THE POSSIBILITIES

Here, we have the first problem we face in career planning: People do not generally know the real possibilities their studies might open to them. However, this strongly depends on the faculty. In some faculties, the profession and work may be very clear to most of the students. This is the case in careers where the professions are commonly familiar to people in general, for example the police, fire service, armed forces, teaching, even nursing or medicine. By this, I do not mean that there are no other possibilities for a nurse other than taking care of patients in a hospital, but the work of the nurse is generally well-known compared to some others. In these faculties the problems start a bit later, generally after the first period of work experience, when the actual work does not seem to correspond to that which the student had in mind.

Other fields are more problematic, because most of the professions are less known to public, and the variation in different jobs is much larger than described above. These include commercial and technical faculties. For example, an engineer may work in far more different professions than a new student might believe, and most of them are “hidden” from anyone not familiar with the industry. A good example is *key account manager*, a position in sales that may require a commercial or technical background, but has little to do with accounting. Moreover, jobs change faster than educational institutes can follow as technology changes.

Thirdly, the situation is even more challenging in degree programmes that do not have a well-established reputation on the job market. Many small degree programmes in universities of applied sciences fall into this category, where neither the employers nor the students know what the graduates could do for a living.

Foreign students differ somewhat from their Finnish counterparts in this respect. Generally, someone who is willing to start studies abroad is more prepared for uncertainty and has perhaps already planned what they might be doing when they graduate, but this is not always the case. Nevertheless, there are other aspects of being aware of opportunities where foreigners certainly have less awareness than local students.

The largest aspect of this is knowledge of the local economy and employers. This becomes a problem when the student needs to find his first work placement. First-year students generally have limited professional networks, and without them finding a placement is much harder. Related to this are networking, social and job hunting skills. These are strongly based on the local culture, and this represents an increasingly difficult challenge when students have only spent a short amount of time in Finland. This also relates to the cultural and geographical distance of their home country from Finland. The dilemma is further enhanced when foreign students are isolated into their own groups without mixing well with local students. Occasionally, this is compounded by the fact that they only participate in courses that are taught in English.

PRESENT KNOWLEDGE

Our second problem is our ability to recognise existing knowledge. Not only the professional knowledge of the industry about which we are studying but also the above-mentioned skills and networks. Of course, language skills represent a major obstacle when a new degree student comes into Finland.

The present level of knowledge is important in two ways. Firstly, we should be able to participate in only those courses that are relevant to us, and avoid listening passively to something we already know. This is a problem we must take in account when making the study plan, and when looking for work placements and other jobs during the studies. Secondly, and if we are considering career guidance more importantly, we should know what kind of knowledge is required in the jobs that the student is interested in – what he/she should learn during his/her studies. When considering the students who have come to a university or faculty other than the one they actually desired, this information is crucial. If students find out that they can learn all or even the majority of what is needed to obtain the job they had planned for, then they would probably be motivated into studying at the current faculty. If not,

students must either revise their plans or find a way to enter the education programme required for the job. This is one of the real challenges for career counselling.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

For foreign students, there is one major challenge they must consider in their career, and this relates to Finnish language acquisition. There are two possible views on this; either a student plans to stay in Finland after graduation or not. If there are no plans to stay in Finland, language acquisition is probably not an issue, unless the student needs to work during his/her studies, either as a trainee or to earn money. Those students who plan to leave Finland after graduation may well be guided to obtain traineeships in their home countries; it would even help them after graduation, if they had a network already in place. However, for anyone planning to stay in Finland, learning at least the basics of the language is essential. Even if the official language of a company was English, a basic understanding of Finnish is usually required. This is especially true with professions that require contact with clients, and in health care it is required by law. Therefore, it is often more difficult for foreign students to get their first work placement or any additional work than it is to get a permanent job after graduation. Entry level jobs are commonly customer service tasks and some of the workers at that level do not speak English, so knowledge of Finnish is more essential in this context than it is when working in a team of graduate professionals.

We have now covered two basic elements that, according to Professor James Sampson of Florida State University, form the basis of any career planning: self-knowledge and knowledge of the job markets. Additionally, and we have identified some differences between local and foreign students, though for the most part they are facing the same problems.

The two upper “floors”, decision-making and motivation, do not pose such a challenge for career planning. They certainly differ between people from different cultures, but the task of the career guidance is not to tell the student how to make a decision or motivate them, but to make the student consider these aspects in his own mind and find his own answers. Those answers should, of course, then affect his career decisions.

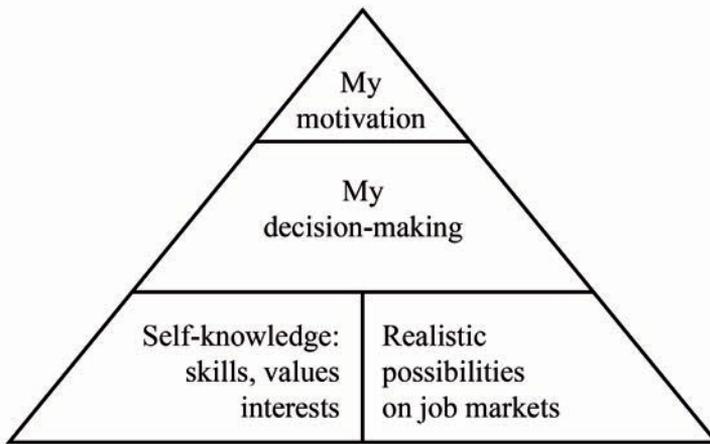


FIGURE 1. *Parts of career planning (Prof. James Sampson, Florida State University).*

CAREER GUIDANCE WITH FOREIGN STUDENTS

How should we support the career planning of foreign students? Can we use the same methods that we use with our local students, or do we need to employ a different approach?

The first, and probably most important, difference is not in the field of career counselling, but in the marketing of our studies and choosing our students. It is very important that all our students get a realistic picture of our courses and the opportunities they provide for the job market before they choose their field of study. This is partly the responsibility of study counselling in high schools and vocational schools, but this should also be recalled in marketing the university, especially with foreign students who have basically no other sources of information available. Giving foreign students the impression that it is easy to establish a career in Finland if you just can speak English is probably going to backfire during their studies. Also, the students should only be chosen in degree programmes from such backgrounds where they have realistic possibilities of graduating and establishing a career afterwards.

Once the students have started, their guidance will be a more or less similar to the local students, if for no reason other than cost issues. Already at the beginning of studies, students should make contact with employers in the area so that they can obtain information about the jobs, skill requirements

and real job possibilities within the industry. This should also help to increase motivation, if they realise they could have an interesting career. At the same time, this also represents an opportunity to help foreign students become accustomed to the way in which Finnish people make contact with companies.

It is also important for foreign students to mix with Finnish students. Remaining isolated within groups of their own culture is too easy and only leads to frustration. This may require them to participate in courses that are partly in Finnish. These courses should at least partly consist of projects that are made for companies and employers, preferably in mixed groups of people from different backgrounds. To promote this, the degree programmes should have a strong group of employer contacts that are willing to consider non Finnish-speaking students as trainees. It is true that in Finland it is possible to get a job without networks, but it is hard to make an Asian student believe this, so efforts should be made to help them.

The above should prove helpful in allowing foreign students to familiarise themselves with the local job market, and the related activities indeed should be carried out in groups together with Finnish students.

The second base for career planning, awareness of one's present knowledge level, requires more personal contact with students. Therefore, there should be specialised career advice available for them, partly because personal counselling may consume lot of resources, and partly to ensure that personnel have the cultural knowledge required. It is also important to choose suitable tools for them, taking into account their culture and language skills. Therefore, many tools that are developed for the Finnish students are not suitable for foreign students without some development work. It is not just a question of language but in many cases the difference in ways of thinking which pose a problem. A good example was a brilliant Chinese student, who was just graduating as a software engineer, and wanted to work with Finnair. He believed that an international company like Finnair would certainly require a Master's level graduate, and therefore wanted to get into the technical university, while in truth his bachelor level degree would have sufficed easily. In other words, understanding the connection between the "right" company and "right" education is essential!

INTERNATIONAL IT GRADUATES – CATERING FOR THE REGIONAL LABOUR MARKET OR FOR THE WIDER MASTER’S MARKET?

Kalliopi Skarli

INTRODUCTION

According to Finnish Ministry of Education, universities of applied sciences are geared to train professionals in response to labour market needs and conduct research and development which supports instruction and promotes regional development. Consistent to the Ministry’s definition, Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) aims to offer multidisciplinary higher education and conduct applied research and development to meet the needs of working life and businesses in the region (Strategic Plan of TUAS 2010–2013). In my opinion, this applies to the native born graduates, depending on labour market demand. However, is this also the case for the international IT graduates? The answer is not a straightforward yes or no. There are several factors affecting the employment of international IT graduates in the regional labour market. Competition and context matter as well. Do the international students start their studies on an equal base with the Finnish students in terms of aspirations, competences and experience, for example? To answer such a question, we need to compare the international students and graduates with their Finnish counterparts to understand the general context. A good starting point would be a comparison of international and Finnish IT students in the beginning of their studies.

FINNISH VS. INTERNATIONAL IT STUDENT PROFILES

In my experience and according to previous research conducted (Skarli 2012), both groups of first year IT students are in their majority males in their early 20s. The Finnish students mainly come from the Turku region, have completed their secondary education in Finland and their families are in Finland. In their majority (85%) these students had previous general work experience in Finland. Of those with work experience only 2% had work experience outside Finland and 20% had field-related work experience. When asked about their future plans after graduation, half of the Finnish students would stay in Turku (51%) or in Finland (56%) after graduation. The majority of Finnish students would see themselves working for an IT company (79%).

The international students were of nine different nationalities and respective mother tongues. In their overwhelming majority, they came from Asia (82%), and the rest from Europe (7%), Africa (7%) and North America (3%). None of the international students had completed their secondary education in Finland and the majority of them (97%) had lived in Finland for less than a year. Only 15% of the international students had family or relatives in Finland. As for previous work experience, only 36% of them had worked before. Of those respondents with work experience, 30% mentioned that this experience was general and the rest did not mention what kind of work experience they had. Their work experience mainly took place outside Finland (90%). Concerning their career plans, the international students tended to select further studies abroad (50%) followed by working for an IT company (46%).

In short, even from the first year of studies there are distinct differences in the student profiles. The Finns already have more work experience and aspire to enter working life upon completion of studies, whereas the international students have considerably less work experience and favour further studies as a career path.

PROJECT WORK AND WORK PLACEMENT

In their subsequent years of studies, both groups of students have to take part in projects and complete their compulsory Work Placement, worth 30 ECTS. Work placements and projects provide the students with field-related work experience, develop technical and “soft” skills, and strongly correlate with the transition to

working life. The more students are involved in projects, the smoother the links to industry and the stronger the possibilities for employability are. The question here is how this works in practice and what the reality is.

As far as projects are concerned, it is a fact that the number of courses involving project work has increased compared to 10 years ago, for example. This is also in line with the principles of innovation pedagogy at TUAS, in particular innovative teaching and learning methods as well as research and development linked with teaching and learning (Kettunen 2009). However, there seem to be differences in the number of compulsory courses involving technical project work. The Finnish programme starts quite early with this kind of work which is integrated in more courses than in the international degree. One reason for that may be that the Finnish degree has more members of staff with more specialisations than the international programme. Another reason may be that more teachers on the Finnish programme are involved with RDI projects with the industry. Although these projects are not part of the compulsory curriculum and not all students can be involved in a particular project, it is clear that such projects offer valuable links with industry and form the basis of a professional network to which Finnish-speaking students have considerably more access than international students.

Other issues relating to RDI projects with industry are language and cultural differences. Although most company representatives and Finnish students can speak English, they are reluctant using it because it is much easier to operate in Finnish. In terms of cultural differences, the most challenging areas concern punctuality, consistency and reliability; for instance, some international students are constantly late, miss project meetings and deadlines or deliver poor quality results. Having referred to the language and cultural differences, it is worth mentioning that the new curricula 2014–2018 implement more streamlined and integrated courses between the Finnish and English language degree programs. Hopefully, the new curriculum will offer the international students more equal opportunities for competence acquisition and basic professional networking.

Work placements play a key role in the completion of studies and the transition to working life. The ideal scenario is that students complete their work placements in a company, the company commissions a thesis and the students eventually become employed by the same company. This may well have been the case before the financial crisis, but currently getting employed has been

challenging. The Finnish students stand a much better chance for several reasons. First, they have more previous work experience than international students; second, they have already established professional networks through personal contacts, previous work experience or degree programme projects; third, they have a better idea of where and how to search for a job; fourth, they are familiar with the dominant work culture so they “fit in” smoothly in the work environment. On the other hand, the majority of the international students have less work experience and lack the wider network, links with the industry as well as job search and communication skills that are latent to the native born. In fact, it has been extremely challenging for them to find work placements and this is one of the reasons for extending the standard length of studies. It is quite common that the basic work placement they do is mismatched with their field of studies. As a result, some international students can invent their own project and some others have to carry out their advanced work placement in a third country or in their home country. This phenomenon raises many questions such as:

- a. How can we ensure the quality and follow-up of the work placement abroad?
- b. Is it realistic to claim that the purpose of this education to train students for the regional labour market needs?
- c. Can we realistically expect these students to find meaningful employment in Finland after graduation when they cannot even get a work placement here?
- d. Are we as education providers doing enough to support these students at this critical stage?

So far, we have seen that the international students have different orientation profiles from their Finnish counterparts from the very first year of studies; they have fewer opportunities for participating in projects and find it challenging to acquire work experience in Finland. The question now is: what happens after graduation?

LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

To answer the question of what happens to international students after graduation, I chose to investigate the students who started their studies in 2006 and graduated between 2009 and 2013. In total, there are 23 graduates from that cohort, 21 male and 2 female students. I chose this cohort for the following reasons:

- a. That group was representative of the nationalities typically found in this degree programme. Namely, 2 Finns (who are not studied here), 3 Europeans, 1 American, 10 Asians and 9 Africans, in total 23 international students.
- b. That group was the first group to experience the loss of their part-time jobs at Nokia in 2007. Up until then, it was quite common for international students to standardly get a part-time job as assemblers in Nokia, Salo.
- c. Since students started graduating in 2009, there is a time frame of 6 months to 3.5 years after graduation. The majority of students had graduated by the end of 2011.
- d. This group did not graduate such a long time ago that getting in touch with them would be challenging.

The aim of this survey was to locate the students and establish what their status was one year after graduation (with the exception of the last graduate who graduated in 2013). This was achieved through personal and professional networks, such as LinkedIn.

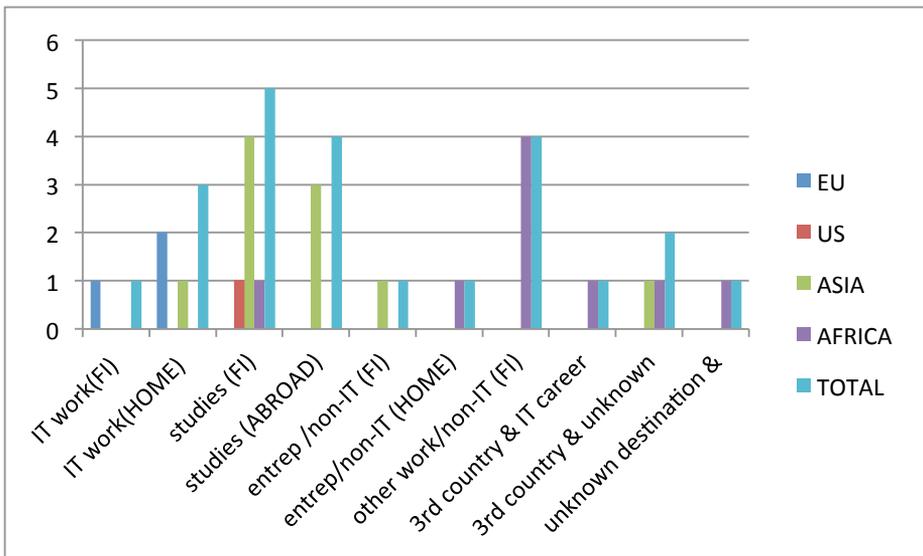
THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The aggregated results of the survey can be summarised as follows:

- 48% of international graduates were in employment one year after graduation
- 39% continued with further studies
- for the remaining 13% there is no information.

As for their Finnish counterparts, some indicative data was obtained from the TUAS Recruitment Service (Ritvanen, Personal Communication). Only 17% of the Finnish graduates had responded to the employment survey by the Recruitment Service. This percentage is very small to draw firm conclusions, but it still gives an indication of the trends. Out of this 17%, 67% of Finnish graduates were in employment one year after graduation, 17% continued with further studies and 16% were unemployed. These aggregated results indicate that the orientation profiles of the students also continue after graduation – in other words, that the majority of Finnish graduates would be in employment. However, it was unexpected that the international graduates continuing with further studies would be 39% and their percentage of employment would be 48%. The expectation was that a higher percentage was expected to continue with further studies and a lower one with employment. A further analysis of the results can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Career paths of IT international graduates (cohort 2006) according to ethnic origin one year after graduation.



1. All European graduates transitioned smoothly to IT-related jobs although one out of three stayed in Finland.
2. Asian graduates (80%) and the American graduate continued with further studies mainly in Finland.
3. African graduates (67%) were employed but not in their field of studies (56%).
4. The majority of international graduates (52%) stayed in Finland, 35% returned to their home country, 9% moved to a third country and for 4% there is no information.
5. A small percentage of graduates (9%) started their own non-IT business.

CONCLUSION

This article attempted to answer the question whether the international IT graduates cater for the regional market or the wider Master's market. In order to answer this question, the paper gave a glimpse of these students from the beginning of their studies through to life after graduation, with simultaneous comparison of their Finnish counterparts. The results of the 2006 cohort survey are a portion of the results of the total international IT graduate population, thus more investigation needs to be carried out. Nevertheless, from the studied population we can conclude that the majority of international students stay in the region and cater for both the region's labour market and the Finland's Master's market. However, there is a vertical mismatch of qualifications and there exist career patterns according to ethnicity. As educators, we need to further look into the reasons for the vertical mismatch and the international graduates' career patterns as well as their implications on the purpose of the education we provide.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Antonella Storti, Marjo Joshi, Päivi Härmä, Satu Salmi & Elia Elenius

The strategic approach adopted by most higher education institutions (HEIs) in Finland is based on the *Strategy for Internationalisation for Higher Education Institutions 2009–2015* issued by the Finnish Ministry of Education in 2009 and Government's five-year Development Plan for *Education and Research for 2011–2016*. Both documents underline the importance and need to aim for a genuinely international higher education community, increase quality and attractiveness as well as support a multicultural society. Multiculturalism – foreign exchange and degree students, teachers, researchers and other foreign personnel – is considered to be a remarkable resource promoting internationalisation at home. Through these documents the international degree programmes are shown to be an important instrument in reaching the objectives of institutional internationalisation and as a core element of HEIs functions.

It is important to remember that international degree students are not a homogenous group and diversity can be seen for instance in the variety of learning styles. Many of the foreign students have difficulties adapting to Finnish learning styles, the Finnish study culture and Finnish society and language. Therefore special attention should be paid to supporting learning and study skills as well as integration both in the study environment and society. Special attention should be paid to providing opportunities to learn Finnish. Insufficient language skills are a real problem for students as their employability in the Finnish labour market will remain minimal if they cannot speak Finnish.

Via these articles we have presented our achievements achieved during the two-year process. The Agricola Project Group has introduced a number of initiatives, as seen below, but has also collected information regarding the actions and activities related to guidance given to international degree students in order to avoid overlapping work. The project has highlighted important

issues related to international student's path at TUAS, and mapping out the different types of support and guidance they are offered during their studies. Through this project we are able to see more clearly where international students need more support and how they are already being supported. This has been an interesting journey where we have learned a lot from one another but also brought together all those staff members who will take a part in the international students' learning process. We have covered some fields but there is still plenty to do!

RESULTS OBTAINED DURING THE TWO-YEAR PROCESS BY THE AGRICOLA PROJECT GROUP

- Student's Survival Guide and materials related on orientation at TUAS. It is produced and updated by students of TUAS. The guide is intended for new international degree students coming to Turku University of Applied Sciences. It offers practical information on studies, housing, transport, Finnish culture and other subjects they need to be familiarised with before their arrival in Finland and during the first few weeks of their studies.
- Survey on Professional Growth in order to develop and target the way in which courses will meet the special needs of international students. The survey was planned and implemented as project work by two international degree programme students.
- Teacher tutor manual provided for teacher tutors in order to facilitate their work but also help teacher tutors to create a sustainable model to support international students.
- The International Teacher Tutor meeting forum (*Get Together*) has been created: during 2013 there have been two get-togethers with international teacher tutors, which were an opportunity to share and discuss the challenges and best practices among other things. In TUAS intranet Messi, a shared working space has been created where teacher tutors, degree programme managers and student counsellors can add and share material and best practices but also develop cooperation. It has been agreed that student counsellors from degree programmes will take turns in updating the working space. The changeover point is after one semester.

- The Agricola Project Group also collected information regarding the actions and activities related to the guidance of international degree students in order to avoid overlapping work.
- Questionnaire and study on international degree student well-being.
- The student union TUO has decided to put more effort into tutoring international degree students. International degree students will have both an international student tutor and a degree student tutor.
- As a result of the project, teacher tutor training was arranged by the study counselling psychologist in English. Providing a course concerning student counselling and promoting group work was the first initiative and specifically addressed at teachers working with our international degree students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work division between the TUAS International Office and student counselling and guidance provided for international degree students. A student counsellor specialised particularly in guidance and challenges international students have – study problems, emotional and culture shock, legal and administrative issues, in addition other questions which are not related to the subject specific studies – would be a simple and cost efficient solution. A clear support service system will allow teacher tutor to concentrate to supporting students' learning process instead of helping students with everyday matters. Taking into consideration current limited financial resources, it is recommended that a mechanism introduced above would facilitate and speed up students' graduation.
- Pre-arrival services and marketing would require clearer work division and cooperation between the admission office, the international office and the particular department providing the tuition.
- Incorporate Finnish language teaching as integral part of professional studies. When a graduate has better language skills and knowledge of Finnish society, there is a greater chance that the graduate will remain in south-west region of Finland. In addition, an introduction to Finnish ethics and study culture will also be included.
- Cooperation and work division between TUAS and Satakunta University of Applied Sciences.