International cooperation for student mobility: the case of Umesp and Zuyd

Cooperação internacional para mobilidade estudantil: o caso da Umesp e Zuyd

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ABSTRACT
This paper briefly contextualizes the internationalization of universities, its main concepts, historical aspects, motivations and realities emphasizing the Brazilian and Dutch contexts. It describes the institutional

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cooperation between the Methodist University of Sao Paulo (UMESP) – Brazil and the Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (ZUYD), in the Netherlands. Focus is placed on the exchange of students during the semester mobility program. It presents a narrative since the beginning of the partnership, describing its objectives, the way it evolved and the outcome during the period. Special attention is given to the successes and challenges in operating the program. Student evaluations were analyzed to determine future improvements for the exchange.

**Keywords:** Internationalization; higher education; student mobility; Brazil – the Netherlands

**RESUMO**
Este artigo contextualiza brevemente a internacionalização das universidades, seus principais conceitos, aspectos históricos, motivações e realidades, enfatizando os contextos brasileiro e holandês. Descreve a cooperação institucional entre a Universidade Metodista de São Paulo (UMESP) - Brasil e a Universidade Zuyd de Ciências Aplicadas (ZUYD), nos Países Baixos. O foco é colocado no intercâmbio de estudantes para o programa de mobilidade semestral. Faz uma narrativa desde o início da parceria, descrevendo os objetivos, como evoluiu e os resultados durante o período. Especial atenção é dada aos sucessos e desafios para operar o programa. As avaliações dos alunos foram analisadas para determinar futuras melhorias para o intercâmbio.

**Palavras-chave:** Internacionalização; ensino superior; mobilidade estudantil; Brasil - Holanda

**RESUMEN**
En este artículo se contextualiza brevemente la internacionalización de las universidades, sus principales conceptos, aspectos históricos, motivaciones y orígenes, haciendo hincapié en los contextos brasileños y holandeses. Describe la cooperación institucional entre la Universidad Metodista de Sao Paulo (UMESP) - Brasil y la Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas de Zuyd (Zuyd), los Países Bajos. La atención se centra en el intercambio de estudiantes para el programa de movilidad de seis meses. Es una narración desde el principio de la asociación, que describe los objetivos, cómo ha evolucionado y los resultados durante el período. Se presta especial atención a los éxitos y desafíos para operar el programa. Se analizaron las evaluaciones de los estudiantes para determinar las mejoras futuras al intercambio.

**Palabras clave:** la internacionalización; educación superior; movilidad de estudiantes; Brasil - Países Bajos

**Internationalization of universities**

Over the past decades, internationalization has been one of the great forces of the system of higher education in the world. Stallivieri (2004; 2008; 2014), Rumbley et al (2012) are among the scholars who argue that internationalization is imperative, since there is no region or institution in the world that is immune to it. In order to understand
the process, it is necessary to understand and differentiate it from the process of globalization. Although distinct, they are related processes that are often confused.

Globalization is characterized by the broad economic, technological and scientific trend that directly affects higher education and is inevitable in the contemporary world. (ALTBACH, 2006, apud RUMBLEY, 2012, p.123). On the other hand, internationalization includes the policies and practices carried out by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment. (ALTBACH and KNIGHT, 2007).

There are those who characterize internationalization as a process of globalization of education, placing emphasis on the economic aspects of the process. (ALTBACH and KNIGHT, 2007) It is even a topic of discussion of the WTO (World Trade Organization). It is a fact that the economic path has been one of the main reasons why some countries and institutions have been promoting the internationalization process, aiming very often at recruiting international students for their programs. However, it is important to look at the ethical aspects of this phenomenon, because today the global competition for students’ recruitment takes place in a highly unequal environment. Institutions and countries with more resources will be much more likely to attract students than others less privileged. Moreover, the supply of higher education by central countries that place themselves as educational providers for less developed countries does not always correspond to the national needs of the latter and constitute a highly commercial and exploratory process (RUMBLEY et al, 2012; ALTBACH and KNIGHT, 2007). This adds inevitable conflicts to an already disturbed agenda. The internationalization process, on the other hand, must consider the reality and capacity of each institution, and how it could be incorporated into its policies and practices. (STALLIVIERI, 2008, 2014; KNIGHT, 2003; ALTBACH and KNIGHT, 2007). Killick (2012) has argued about the importance of training students to practice global citizenship, enabling them to see themselves in the world, as well as developing cross cultural capacities and global perspectives that can be applied to their personal and professional lives. There is also some discussion on the importance and benefits of engaging students in intercultural and international activities at home (LILLEY et al, 2015; KILLICK, 2012). Promoting internationalization of curricula, internationalization at home and other forms of internationalization that encourage participation of as many actors as possible, significantly affects the community, besides being objectives that are part of the Internationalization process (GONÇALVES, 2009).

Internationalization is a process that imposes dilemmas, demands political choices and a conscious effort on behalf of all the involved parties in order to ensure that goals that are good to everyone are
achieved. (MOROSINI, 2005). Senior institution leaders should work to establish clear objectives and policies that focus on preserving local interests, respecting cultures and enhancing the knowledge needed in the area where the institutions are located. Some authors talk about glocalization, or “glocal action”, pointing out to the interconnection between global and local levels (ROUDOMETOF, 2016). Quality, coherence and sustainability are the three fundamental elements that should be at the core of institutional planning and decision makings. (RUMBLEY et al, 2012).

According to Sebastian (2006, apud CENERINO & SILVA, 2008), the internationalization process has two complementary and distinct facets that are represented by internationalization and international cooperation. For Sebastian (2006) internationalization is an objective pursued by almost all universities, it is a goal and yet a process, so it requires active policies. It is something that changes the university structure and roles. International cooperation, on the other hand, is an instrument at the service of internationalization and a means of achieving it.

International cooperation may occur between institutions, in a bilateral or multilateral way, through international agencies or government diplomacy. Regional integration can be seen as part of a cooperation process. A great example of international and regional cooperation was the establishment of the Bologna Process in Europe (RUMBLEY et al, 2012, p. 18) an intergovernmental agreement involving nearly 50 countries that has been facilitating the effort to build the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This cooperation was established with funds from development agencies and governments from different countries. Cooperation enables the mobility of teachers, students and managers, it also develops academic activities such as the production of scientific events, research studies and joint publications.

Cooperation is carried out in the governmental as well as institutional levels. When it comes to the institutional level, it is important to recall the founding principles of university education. According to Stallivieri (2008), the university is international in its origin; its essence resides in an intense exchange of knowledge. The first universities of the world were formed through cooperation between scholars from various regions. The University of Salerno gathered scholars of Medicine, the universities of Orleans and Bologna, scholars of Law; and the University of Paris, of Theology. The common language used was Latin. In order to promote knowledge production and socialization in today’s world it is important to recall the principles that laid the foundations of Western universities. It is important to identify centers of excellence with potential to exchange knowledge. With regards to communication, English has become the lingua franca of the contemporary world. (KNOBEL, 2011).
In order to develop high quality international cooperation, scholars advise institutions to set clear objectives, develop policies and guidelines, as well as keep a system of continuous investment in the form of financial and human resources.

**Cooperation for student mobility**

Student mobility is one of the most visible dimensions of academic internationalization. UNESCO forecasts that the number of students that go mobile in the world will increase to over three times the number of students that enroll in the worldwide higher education system by the year 2050 (OCDE, 2005; OCDE, 2010). Experiences in and out the classroom are considered important to the overall formation of the students of this era. According to Bourn (2010, apud KILLICK, 2012, p.18),

Students today live in a global society, a society where they cannot ignore global independence and global inequalities. How are today’s students going to understand and to respond to the freedoms, problems and responsibilities they are inheriting? How are today’s students going to find their individual roles in a global society? And where do we start?

Killick (2012) remarks that international mobility activities are usually credited with significant “life-changing” learning and being able to integrate easily in other cultures can also be an advantage students carry by the time they have to find their way to employability. (LILLEY et al, 2015). There is a connection between the soft skills which the employers desire with the benefits of mobility. The author completes stating that education today should and could play a role in enabling all our students to move toward shaping their lives in such an interconnected world, although encountering differences does not depend on crossing of national cultures. The author discusses the need of recognizing otherness in all we may engage with and within ourselves. Universities also play an important role in these matters. Global citizenship learning should be fundamental for the university purpose. According to Freire & Shor (1987, apud Lilley et al, 2015) and Pring (1986, apud Lilley et al, 2015), education based on productivity is critical. A global society needs a transformational education able to deal with the complexities of the world, and in this sense, if well conducted, international mobility can play an important role.

International cooperation has always been necessary for the advancements of Science. The same rational can be applied to teaching when we discuss the comprehensive educational model demanded by the challenges imposed by today’s global problems: greenhouse effect and the search for more sustainable ways of life; the increasing num-
ber of immigrants fleeing from wars, terrorism, religious and political persecution, or environment deterioration; the extreme poverty, food scarcity and uneven distribution of the worldwide resources. These all should be problems that universities could also help bring in evidence and cooperate, shaping sensitive students to cultural diversity and conscious of their role in the world. Student mobility can be an important opportunity for that, providing the students an intensive otherness experience as well as a sense of identifying self with others. (KILLICK, 2012).

Following the worldwide competition scenario, the higher education institutions are also competing in terms of student’s recruitment and quality. On the other hand, cooperation is also in evidence (RUMBLEY et al, 2012). Institutions and researchers have never been so connected. According to the UK Royal Academy of Science, the number of published papers in partnership with international scholars have increased twice from 2001 to 2008 only by cooperating internationally (STALLIVIERI, 2014). This international exposure brings more prestige, student’s attraction and access to funding (RUMBLEY et al, 2012, p.19) Institutions interested in bringing more international exposure and diversity to the campus, are also engaging non mobile students to multicultural environments so they can reach awareness of global challenges and opportunities (LILLEY et al, 2015). Those institutions are making partnerships worldwide and getting their campus internationalized with the presence of international activities, international curricula, guest lectures, etc.

**Internationalization of Brazilian Universities**

The oldest Brazilian higher education institutions date from the 19th century. The first universities were established in the 20th century though, following a European model and influenced by European collaborators (KNOBEL, 2011). The 1970s were marked by a period of great cooperation between the Brazilian government and governments of other countries for personnel training and development of Brazilian postgraduate studies. Hundreds of Brazilian researchers were funded for their MSc and PhD study programs abroad. Visiting professor programs and scientific cooperation agreements were established. This process left a great legacy for public institutions and national laboratories, characterized by strong ties established with foreign researchers.

Perhaps great part of the international cooperation between Brazilian and foreign institutions occurs through work developed in the post-graduate programs of the public universities. Those institutions account for 23% of total higher education student enrollments in the country; the 77% remaining students are enrolled in private or non profit higher
education institutions with very limited access to internationalization programs. More recently, due to the need for technological advance and industrial park innovation, Brazil’s government invested in the largest undergraduate mobility program ever seen in its history. It was named “Sciences without Borders Program” which took over 100 thousand students to institutions all over the world. The objective of this chapter is not to analyze this program, but to mention that it had a clear goal, and although in a much smaller scale, benefited students from the private sector as well.

Nevertheless, the economic-financial crisis in Brazil and in several countries led public financing to scarcity (KNOBEL, 2011). For this reason, educational institutions must seek to qualify themselves in order to develop their own alternatives, if they desire to include the internationalization process in their agenda. Following the definition of Knight, Altbach and other scholars, internationalization is a process that is part of the university’s functions, requires quality and change in its structure, so it should be part of its efforts.

It is known that Brazil has huge educational problems to address and lacks public polices and infrastructure to internationalize the university system. The bureaucracy for applying for visas, renting houses, opening a bank account, the rigid curricula, and the lack of courses taught in English, are examples of situations that prevent foreigners from being drawn to the country and more exchanges to occur (KNOBEL, 2011). This poses great challenges and requires immense efforts on behalf of the Brazilian institutions in receiving international students - both in public and private institutions - and seems to be the reasons for Brazil to be sending more students abroad than receiving. In this sense, broader public policies directed to the institutions is a must, not only public funding.

The internationalization and the student mobility at the Methodist University of Sao Paulo

It is possible to say that Methodist Education in Brazil is the result of an international cooperation process, which took place in various parts of the country with funding and work from selfless missionaries for the purpose of salvation, offering quality education for all. Being international depends on maintaining cooperation practices and structures that support internationalist educational polices, embodying them in all dimensions of university activities.

The Methodist University of Sao Paulo always maintained international cooperation with institutions abroad, especially in the Theology field, but in 2006 it established the International Relations Office, aiming at developing comprehensive sustainable programs and policies that
could be applied to the entire university. The first policy developed was the student exchange program. Aiming at enhancing the exchanges, it was decided that students taking a semester abroad through the cooperative programs would have the tuition waived, so would the students coming through the established international cooperation programs. It partially solved a problem of recognizing all the courses students were taking abroad, since the rigid curricula seemed to not facilitate the exchanges. The first partnerships for student mobility were established with Europe (Portugal and Spain, and Latin America). Exchanging students with English speaking countries has always been challenging, firstly because of financial restraints, lack of financial support to cover the expenses and difficulties to establish reciprocity since English speaking students do not learn Portuguese at school they were not able to handle lectures in Portuguese. UMESP started working with American institutions to exchange students but the exchange was always uneven. Outbound students were more frequent than the inbound. In 2015, UMESP started cooperating with Zuyd University and both sides made efforts to work on a reciprocal exchange.

**International cooperation for student mobility: Brazil and The Netherlands**

Dutch universities have a centuries-long tradition of cultivating international learning environments and attracting scholars and students from all over the world. Yet the effort to establish concrete partnerships with foreign institutions is in fact a relatively recent phenomenon born of a distinct set of historical circumstances. The increased focus on international cooperation and exchange in higher education began in earnest in the Netherlands during the period between the World Wars, when the nations of Europe and the United States in particular were concerned with promoting peace in the spirit of the League of Nations.

But with the advent of the Cold War, this interest in international cooperation in higher education took on a different focus, that of foreign policy and national security. And these fields were seen as dependent upon individuals with proper foreign language training and intercultural knowledge. European programs such as Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), established in the late 1980s, were part of this new strategic approach to internationalization in higher education. Throughout the 1990s more and more institutions began taking part in these types of programs, thus setting the course for the internationalization approach we see in Europe today and in the Netherlands in particular. (De Wit et al, 2015, p. 42-43).

Another shift in the rationale behind increased internationalization took place in the late 1990s. With the waning of the Cold War, national
security concerns gave way to greater interest in competing economically on the world stage. The focus thus turned to preparing students for work in a global labor market and recruiting foreign students in an effort to enhance the domestic knowledge economy. Hence, for the last decade or so European countries have concentrated their internationalization efforts in the area of mobility; that is, increasing the numbers of incoming and outgoing exchange students.

In recent years, however, a more comprehensive model of internationalization has been taking hold within European institutions of higher education. The objective is now increasingly to seek strategic partnerships with foreign universities that can engage not only in student exchange, but also in teaching collaboration, research and service (De Wit et al, 2015, p. 44).

European programs such as Erasmus and Tempus (Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies) have had a significant impact on the rate of internationalization in Dutch institutions of higher education (HEIs). This has manifested itself, for instance, in the proliferation of English-taught study programs aimed at an international student body. There are currently 281 bachelor’s programs and 1,172 master’s programs (as well as most PhD programs) taught in English in the Netherlands. This constitutes the largest such offering in continental Europe (EP NUFFIC, 2015).

Since the 1980s student mobility in the Netherlands has been steadily growing. Nevertheless, in the context of European Union member states, the Netherlands’ rate of incoming and outgoing student mobility remains in the middle range (De Wit et al, 2015, p. 127-128).

**Incoming**

The number of incoming foreign students to the Netherlands is significantly higher than that of outgoing Dutch students, with a ratio of about three to one. This rate is less than that of Germany, France, and Sweden, but higher than Finland, Belgium, and Denmark, for example.

The total number of incoming international students in the academic year 2014-15 was more than 90,000, with Germany, China, and Belgium constituting the top three countries of origin. This number represents a 70% increase in incoming students between 2006 and 2014, revealing a steady growth of about 4-7% per year (EP – NUFFIC, 2015).

**Outgoing**

In 2012-13, more than 35,000 Dutch students were enrolled in foreign institutions. The three most popular destinations were Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Of these 35,000 students abroad,
4,033 were enrolled at institutions outside Europe. Similar to the rate of increase in incoming students, outgoing student numbers have gone up by 80% between 2006 and 2014. And it is estimated that 22% of all Dutch graduates of higher education have studied or done internships abroad at some point during their studies (EP – NUFFIC, 2015)

Brazilian students in the Netherlands

Although in the ranking of incoming students Brazilians do not fall within the top 10, there is significant interest from Dutch institutions in attracting and receiving Brazilian students. Nuffic, a non-profit organization that promotes Dutch higher education abroad and fosters institutional cooperation, has identified Brazil as a strategically important focus for Dutch higher education (together with China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, and Vietnam). Nuffic actively works to inform and advise both Brazilian and Dutch institutions about each other’s existence in order to facilitate partnerships and student exchange.

Nuffic’s rationale for targeting Brazil is that it has a growing youth population together with a high demand for higher education opportunities. It is thought that attracting talented students from Brazil to study at Dutch universities in turn raises the Netherlands’ international profile in the knowledge economy. In part through Nuffic’s efforts, the majority of Dutch universities presently have some form of partnership with at least one Brazilian university (RICHTERS et al, 2012, p. 87).

In the academic year 2011-12, roughly 300 Brazilian students were studying in the Netherlands, which represents a 44% increase from 2007-8 (RICHTERS et al, 2012, p. 88). However, as this figure does not account for Brazilians with European passports, it is estimated that the actual number is higher, by some measures about 1000 students per year in bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate programs. Up to and including 2014, the Netherlands received a significant number of undergraduate “Science without Borders” scholarship students from Brazil. But as the program has now been limited to funding postgraduates, this stream of students has diminished.

Recent interest among Dutch universities in creating partnerships with Brazil has been driven in large part by its status as an emerging economy and as one of the BRIC nations. It has been anticipated that increased prosperity in Brazil would yield greater numbers of students financially able study abroad – and that Brazil’s economic boom would create opportunities for Dutch students. As Brazil is the Netherlands fourth largest trading partner (exporting raw materials such as soya, vegetable oil, fuels, minerals, ore, fruit, and meat to Brazil, and importing Brazilian petrochemical and agricultural products and industrial
many institutions have hoped that businesses in these areas would be potential employers or internship hosts to their students. This excitement about enhanced cooperation between the two countries was reflected in the widely publicized Dutch economic mission to Brazil in 2012. This mission was attended by the King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima, as well as business leaders and academics from science and technology research institutes. The focus of the visit was corporate, but aimed also at strengthening ties between academic and research universities (THE NETHERLANDS, 2013). Brazil’s present economic downturn has lessened the intensity of these efforts to create connections with Brazil, but it nevertheless remains a focus of interest for universities and the business community alike.

It would be reductive, however, to explain this interest in partnering with Brazilian universities to the size of the country’s economy. An integral part of the overall project of internationalization within Dutch HEIs is to train students in intercultural understanding and “global citizenship.” That is to say, the objective of having Dutch students study or intern in Brazil is that they develop through this experience an in-depth understanding of the country and culture, as well as build fluency in the Portuguese language. In this way, they acquire concrete intercultural communication skills which make them better prepared for living in a globalized world. Similarly, staff and faculty exchange and collaboration should result in a better understanding of educational practices in this region and greater cultural sensitivity.

*Internationalization of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences (and the Faculty of International Business)*

When the International Business Faculty of Zuyd University of Applied Sciences first proposed a plan to seek out a partner university in Brazil, it was with the aim of establishing a strategic partnership, the reasons for which were similar to those described above. That is to say, Zuyd IB sought to identify a Brazilian HEI with which it could cooperate in a meaningful and comprehensive way, resulting in an improved international profile for the institution and enhanced intercultural knowledge for its students and faculty. This was coupled with the desire to establish an additional specialization for Zuyd IB students in Brazilian studies and Portuguese language that would provide them with unique expertise for the global labor market.

In order to properly contextualize Zuyd’s rationale for seeking out a Brazilian partner, the process by which the search was conducted, and the motivation for ultimately partnering with Universidade Metodista, it will first be necessary to briefly explain the structure and functions of Zuyd as a Dutch HEI.
The Netherlands has a binary system of higher education, which means that one can either follow a research or profession-oriented education. The former is typically offered by a research university (wettenschappelijk onderwijs, WO) and the latter by universities of applied sciences (hoger beroepsonderwijs, HBO). Universities of applied sciences, such as Zuyd, offer more practically-oriented programs that prepare students for specific professions (EP NUFFIC, 2017).

With a total student body of roughly 13,500, Zuyd offers 34 bachelor’s programs and 13 master’s programs in ten fields: Life sciences, Economics and management, Health care, ICT, Arts, Education and society, Language and communication, Engineering and construction, Leisure and recreation. Zuyd also has 33 research centers in which professors and lecturers conduct practically-oriented and socially relevant research aimed at contributing to the business sector and connecting practice with education (ZUYD, 2017).

Nearly 11% of Zuyd students are non-Dutch. The majority of these are from Germany and Belgium due to Zuyd’s proximity to the borders of these countries. All faculties also accept a steady stream of exchange students via the Erasmus program and Magellan Exchange as well as other partner universities. Zuyd offers seven master’s and five bachelor’s programs taught in English, of which International Business is one. For these, among other reasons, Zuyd was awarded the “distinctive feature internationalization” from the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) in 2016. This distinction recognizes Zuyd as a particularly internationalized HBO within the Netherlands.

As evidenced by these aspects of Zuyd’s organization, one of the pillars of its institutional strategy has been “growing internationalization.” And this is particularly the case for the faculty of International Business, as developing students’ global mindset and providing them with international experience are fundamental components of the IB study program. In addition to conducting all classes and department business in English, IB students are required to do a third-year semester-long internship in a foreign country and have the option to also study abroad for one semester. Thus, broadening the geographic field of possibilities for these experiences is viewed as a priority within IB. It is furthermore the opinion of the faculty’s management team that certain gaps in our international relationships need to be pro-actively addressed. Although students are able to study and intern in Mexico, Colombia, and Costa Rica, it was felt that Brazil, as the largest country and economy in Latin America, still needed to be an area of focus for IB students.
The case of cooperation between Zuyd University and Universidade Metodista

The first step in locating an appropriate partner institution for Zuyd was to understand the Brazilian higher education system and to identify parallels with the Dutch. The objective was to find a school that was similar to a Dutch HBO; that is, one with a more practical orientation. Furthermore, Zuyd wanted to ensure that such a partner would have a genuinely applied focus and be able to provide its students with a real-world understanding of Brazilian business. However, in researching Brazilian federal, state, for-profit and non-profit HEIs, it was soon apparent that there was no clear-cut distinction between WOs and HBOs, as there is in the Dutch system. Thus, each school’s individual faculties and course offerings had to be assessed in order to determine which ones provided study programs like that of Zuyd IB.

After an extensive on-line search of Brazilian universities, consultation with Brazilian academics, phone conversations and email exchanges with international officers, visits were arranged for Zuyd at eight institutions in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo for October of 2013. The target schools for this visit were IBMEC, UERJ and UFRJ in Rio de Janeiro, and Mackenzie, UNIFESP, ESPM, PUC-SP and Universidade Metodista in São Paulo. It was decided that the search would be limited to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo for the very practical reason of this region’s high concentration of quality schools and industry.

As Zuyd IB had the goal of establishing a comprehensive partnership that would include not only student mobility but faculty exchange, joint curriculum building and research, it was also essential to find a Brazilian partner whose faculty members were genuinely interested in cooperation. Thus Zuyd requested at each visit to meet with business, administration, finance and marketing faculty in addition to international officers.

While Zuyd was received very well at all institutions, Universidade Metodista proved the most impressive and compatible with Zuyd for several reasons. The first was the highly pro-active international office and enthusiastic faculty members who immediately expressed interest in precisely the model of comprehensive partnership Zuyd had in mind. Furthermore, the course offerings and general orientation of Metodista mirrored Zuyd in many ways. It was therefore felt that HBO students would both feel comfortable in the university environment and be able to study topics that complimented their home program. It was also clear from this profile that faculty exchange between programs and joint projects were a realistic possibility.

The campus and facilities at Metodista were also notable in that they were technologically very well equipped and the surroundings were
aesthetic. The location of the university in the ABC region, the outskirts of Sao Paulo, was also attractive in that the amount of industry suggested potential for real-world access to Brazilian business environments in the form of visits and internships.

The single factor that seemed an impediment to the partnership was the relatively small number of course offerings in English. While it is typical for the instruction language at Brazilian universities to be exclusively Portuguese, the Dutch tend to have the misguided expectation that English-taught higher education programs can be found in most places in the world. Managing these expectations and finding solutions is thus one of the challenges of internationalization for institutions like Zuyd.

It was nevertheless viewed by Zuyd as very positive that Metodista expressed a willingness to offer more English-taught courses in the future – and that Portuguese language courses would be available to Zuyd students both prior to and during their studies at Metodista. Zuyd, for its part, made a commitment to begin training students in the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture in preparation for their study abroad as well.

Implementation of the Zuyd-Metodista partnership

Since the signing of the MOU in 2014, six students from Zuyd and two students from Metodista have undertaken semester-long exchanges at the partner university. (A seventh Zuyd student undertook an internship combined with study.) Another six Zuyd students have selected Metodista for their exchange destination in the coming academic year. In terms of cooperation beyond student mobility, Zuyd received a visit from Metodista faculty at the Maastricht campus in 2015, and a delegation from Zuyd is currently working on an entrepreneurship-themed seminar to hold jointly with Metodista this coming year. In addition, several teachers from Zuyd have expressed interest in setting up a faculty exchange at Metodista.

Although the number of Zuyd students choosing to study abroad in Brazil is modest, it actually reflects a very successful implementation of a Brazilian Studies and Portuguese language specialization developed within IB following the partnership agreement with Metodista. Being largely Dutch, German, and Belgian, Zuyd IB students generally do not have extensive knowledge about Brazil and therefore tend not to select it by their own accord. They are also easily intimidated by the prospect of taking a full program in Portuguese, even if they already have knowledge of Spanish. (The exceptions are the Zuyd students from the Dutch Caribbean nations of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao who often speak both Spanish and Papiamento.)
The Brazilian specialization - which begins half way through the first year and continues through the second – has been highly effective in exposing students to Brazilian culture and providing them with the fundamentals of the Portuguese language. Most importantly, however, this program has served to cultivate a deeper interest in Brazil among the students involved and a genuine excitement about how expertise in this geographic area can enhance their lives and advance their careers. This year the Brazilian specialization will be combined with the Spanish in an effort to expose a greater number of Spanish language students to the possibility of studying in Brazil and acquiring Portuguese language skills.

Overall the Zuyd students who have returned from their semester at Metodista have been very positive about the experience. All remarked upon the friendliness of the Brazilian students and university staff and expressed a feeling of being welcomed warmly. They had generally positive experiences with their living arrangements, enjoyed the neighborhood around the Metodista campus as well as their travels around the region. They were informed well in advance that they could expect to have at most one or two courses in English and the rest in Portuguese - and with only a basic level of Portuguese upon arrival this would be a challenge. Based on their periodic reports, this was indeed the case, though comprehension and comfort level improved over time with the increase in their language skills. They also indicated that Metodista students and teachers were very willing to help them with English whenever possible and often sought them out to join in study groups.

One difficulty that arose for the students was the calculation of Brazilian credits into ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer System). As Brazilian course catalogues list only contact hours and not preparation and study time (as Dutch ones do), it can be difficult to determine their weight. Anticipating this, a suggested course load was developed by Metodista and approved by Zuyd prior to the previous group’s departure. Some of the courses were developed in English and also benefited the Brazilian students that could participate in the classes. They were “Sustainability in Brazil”, “Business in Brazil”, “Brazilian Arts & Culture”, and also “Complementary Portuguese as a Second Language” that completed 100 hours of classroom, a part of the extra class activities.

Overall it seems that the course load was appropriate and commensurate with their Zuyd requirements. Three students also did an independent marketing project with the direct aim of facilitating and promoting the Zuyd-Metodista exchange for which they received academic credits.

This first group of five students all decided after the first semester that they wanted to stay in Brazil for their third-year internship, preferably at one of the companies in the region. The first obstacle they
faced in this regard was the fact that student internships in Brazil tend to be 30 hours per week in conjunction with at least one course at the university. The initial response from Zuyd was that internships of less than 40 hours per week were unacceptable. However, upon further consideration by the IB management team, it was agreed that Zuyd needed to adapt to the Brazilian norm and allow the students to take such internships. The students later encountered another challenge in securing an internship, which was that many companies wanted to retain their interns for a period much longer than what is required for the Zuyd IB program. Ultimately, the students were not able to stay in Brazil for internships as they had hoped and instead returned to do them in Europe.

The study semester itself was viewed as an overall success by the Zuyd students who participated, despite having been unable to extend their stay another semester. This is evidenced also in their recommendation to the current Brazilian specialization students that they should indeed attend Metodista for their exchange.

Another challenge faced by the Dutch students was the fact that most of the regular classes they wanted to take were held in the evening. Staying up until 11h p.m. was a very different experience, which they overcame with the help of the international office that found housing for them very close to campus.

Students from Metodista who took the semester at Zuyd knew in advance about the credits they would take, and had their classes in English rather than in Dutch, so there were no problems to adjust. Zuyd waived tuition fees due to the reciprocal exchange and gave them all necessary support for practical matters while living in the Netherlands.

**Future perspectives**

Based on the experience of this first pilot group, it is clear that in establishing an exchange between cultures and educational systems as distinct as those of Brazil and the Netherlands, preparing students properly and setting correct expectations is key. Dutch students must be made aware that English does not dominate in all spheres, and that struggling with the language is an intrinsic part of the study abroad experience. Furthermore, it is important that students first be trained in the fundamental aspects of the target language and culture at their home institution. Although the current course load at Zuyd does not allow for a thorough education in these aspects, basic exposure appears to make a significant difference in students’ intellectual preparedness and general enthusiasm about the experience ahead.

International business students, particularly those who study at an HBO, tend to be very practically-oriented in their thinking and thus
sometimes struggle to see the relevance of developing a deep understand-
ing of a given culture when their ultimate goal is to interact with
foreign people exclusively on a business level. Thus, exposure to culture
and language at a steady and consistent pace prior to their departure is
essential to fostering an open and receptive mindset while abroad. This
process should ideally include involving incoming Brazilian students in
the classrooms of outgoing Zuyd students, setting up regular Skype con-
tacts with the partner university before and after the semester abroad,
and eliciting presentations and discussions from returning students for
potential outgoing ones. This all seems to be working well and fostering
students from both sides a differentiated type of education that place
high importance in their global citizenship formation.

Conclusions

When the objectives of the exchange programs are clear and efforts
are made both sides reciprocal benefits are reached and genuine exchan-
ges are made possible. Although Brazil faces many difficulties to receive
international students it is an important site of the world and Dutch
universities want to prepare their students to the opportunities they
might take in the future. Brazilian institutions must prepare themselves
in order to be able to attract English speaking students. They also need
to work on the necessary infrastructure to help foreign students in their
needs and adaptation. Having an international office is a must, but also
preparing their faculties and staff. Language support is also necessary
as well is the cultural preparation before the mobile experience occurs.

At a fundamental level, cooperating institutions must be open
to the inevitable structural and policy changes that come with true
internationalization. These manifest themselves not only in practical
matters concerning credit transfers and course offerings, but also in an
underlying belief that institutions improve by stretching to accommo-
date other cultural perspectives and requiring their students to venture
beyond their comfort zones. They must be committed to the idea that
internationalization is not about targeting rising economies or following
ephemeral global trends, but about creating a genuinely international
institutional profile and producing students with strong cross-cultural
skills, profound respect for diverse ways of life, and a healthy sense of
their own place in the global context.

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