

ERASMUS PROGRAM FOR VETERINARY FIELD AFTER ROMANIA'S JOINING THE EUROPEAN UNION: CHANGING LIVES, OPENING MINDS

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Abstract

After Romania has joined the European Union (EU) in 2007, the Erasmus program opened "new doors" for the academic community all around the county. Nowadays, the education and training are essential in achieving a better Romania, Europe and World. After 20 years of Erasmus program in Romania, celebrated last year, it can be seen the impact of Erasmus generation; former Erasmus students being now European Parliament members or governors in other countries. Moreover, the longevity of this program (more than 30 years) makes the process of internationalization to be most commonly declared aspect of the Erasmus experience.

Incoming and outgoing persons data were collected for 10 academic years, starting to 2006-2007, then it was used the interview technique for exponents from each group: outgoing undergraduates, outgoing PhD students, incoming PhD students and outgoing teachers.

The main purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of the international cooperation in the mobility of persons generally, and of undergraduates particularly. This fact is revealed by the double acceptance Erasmus+ mobility: outgoing and incoming undergraduates.

Key words: Erasmus program, Veterinary medicine, Romania's accession to EU.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of student mobility as European integration model was initiated by Lijphart in 1964, but it started in June 1987 under the European Commission coordination as Erasmus program (Oborune, 2013). This program was named after the Dutch philosopher and catholic monk Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), but, at the same time, Erasmus is an acronym meaning **EuRopean community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students** (Feyen and Krzaklewska, 2012).

At the beginning, the program involved 11 countries, with 3244 students travelling abroad for study stages. Since then, Erasmus program has undergone a series of major changes: increasing the number of involved program countries (more than 33), and including partner countries (from other continents) (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008; Vossensteyn

et al. 2010; González et al., 2011; Feyen and Krzaklewska, 2012).

According to UNESCO statistics, about half a million students studied abroad in the early 1970s, about a million in the early 1980s, and about 1,5 million in the mid-1990s, as a result of Sorbonne Declaration (1998), Bologna Declaration (1999), and Lisbon Strategy (2000) (Otero, 2008).

Around 90% of European higher education institutions (more than 4,000) from 34 European countries are joining Erasmus. The proportion of students in the Erasmus program varies between 0.1% and 1.5% of all students enrolled, with the exception of Luxemburg where the participation rate exceeds 6% (Vossensteyn et al. 2010; Ballatore and Ferede, 2013).

Starting with 1995, Erasmus program became part of Socrates program, and the spectrum of its activities was gradually widened to include educators' mobility and international

cooperation among universities. After 11 years and, more than one million students that studied abroad, the Socrates-Erasmus program collaboration ended. EU replaced in 2007 the Socrates program with "Lifelong Learning Program" (LLP), that was designed to give the opportunity to people at any stage of their educational life (student placements in enterprises, university staff training, and teaching business staff) to develop their skills and training across Europe. Starting with 2014, the activities of LLP continue under the new Erasmus + program (Sigales, 2010; Jacobone and Moro, 2015).

Romania started the participation in the Erasmus program in 1998 (Stoika, 2013). Ten years later, 2.937 of outgoing Erasmus students were enrolled in this program, representing 14% from the total number of students abroad, but less than students enrolled in 2004 (2.960 students). In 2008, there were 863 incoming Erasmus students compared to 602 in 2005 that studied in Romania (Vossensteyn et al. 2010).

For this paper, our purpose was represented by the statistical analysis regarding Erasmus program in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, in correlation to Romania's joining the EU. Another aim was to look through our faculty students' and teachers' eyes in order to obtain an objective opinion regarding this program.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on official data provided by International Relations Department of the University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest in 2017.

Official data of Erasmus program were collected in 2017 for a decade of academic years for the undergraduates, PhD students, and teachers of Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Outgoing and incoming persons, framed as undergraduated students, PhD students and teachers were considered during the study period.

To find new results about the Erasmus program perception, a standard questionnaire was conceived for exponents from each group: outgoing undergraduateds, outgoing PhD students, incoming PhD students and outgoing teachers (table 1).

Table 1. The questionnaire for the Erasmus program exponents

Questions
1. Do you consider that the Erasmus program is sufficiently well promoted in our university/faculty?
2. Do you consider easy to get an Erasmus internship?
3. Do you consider that the financial support is sufficient for this internship?
4. Would you like to have a double funding (Erasmus program and university)?
5. Do you think there are enough universities abroad to choose from for an Erasmus internship?
6. Do you consider the information gathered in this internship is useful?
7. Regarding the equivalence of ECTS after returning from the internship, do you think it is difficult?
8. You think you have been disadvantaged as a Romanian at the internship/mobility?
9. Do you think that Romania's entry into the EU has brought advantages to the Erasmus program?
10. Regarding the experience gained from this internship/mobility, would you recommend to other people to apply?
11. Would you repeat this experience? And if so, at the same center or another one?
12. Do you think you left a good impression after completing the internship?
13. Do you think that you had stimulated the curiosity of foreign students / teachers to follow a similar internship within our University?

There were 13 questions the subjects had to answer with "yes" or "no".

The number of people who coordinated this program in the faculty and the number of bilateral agreement were taken in consideration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After analysing the data of outgoing undergraduates during the last 10 academic years, it can be said that after 2007-2008 academic year till 2016-2017 academic year, the number increased from 1 to 4. During this 10 academic years, the total number of outgoing undergraduates was 42 (figure 1). The highest number of outgoing undergraduates was 6, between 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 academic years.

The incoming undergraduates started to come in 2010-2011 academic year, increasing progressively from 3 to 10 in 2015-2016 academic year. An essential mention is that all

the incoming undergraduates were from Italy. Regarding the incoming teachers, the number was more or less constant, starting with 4 in 2010-2011, to 5 in 2016-2017 academic year. A similar situation was observed for outgoing teachers, from 1 in 2006-2007 academic year to 2 in 2007-2008 academic year, but this number varied until 2016-2017 academic year.

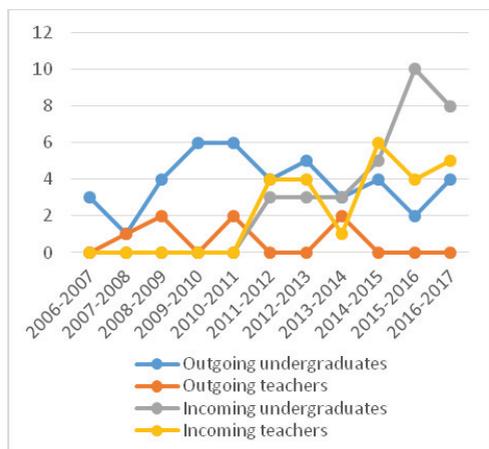


Figure 1. Graphical representation of outgoing and incoming students and teachers from 2006 to 2017

In 2016-2017 academic year it was a premiere for our university, when a Romanian undergraduate started as an outgoing Erasmus undergraduate, graduating in the outgoing country, then starting the PhD program in the same country and, finally coming in our faculty as incoming PhD student. Starting with 2003-2004 academic year up to present, just 3 persons were Erasmus program coordinators for our faculty.

At this moment, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest has 8 bilateral agreements (Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Turkey).

Regarding the questionnaire's answers, probably the most interesting one is at the first question („Do you consider that the Erasmus program is sufficiently well promoted in our University/Faculty?“), where 75% of the exponents answered „no“. At the question „Do you think that Romania's entry into the EU has brought advantages to the Erasmus stage?“, half of them answered with „yes“ (table 2).

For all exponents the financial support was not enough, a double founding being considered a need. For all of them, the information gathered

in this internship was useful, and for the future they would recommend to other people to apply for the Erasmus program.

Table 2. The Erasmus exponents' answers of the questionnaire

Question number	Undergraduates outgoing	PhD students outgoing	PhD students incoming	Teachers outgoing
1	Yes	No	No	No
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	No	No	No	No
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	No	No	Yes	No
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes	No	No
8	No	No	No	No
9	Yes	Yes	No	No
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/Yes	Yes/No
12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	No	Yes	No	Yes

CONCLUSIONS

Following the above results, the first conclusion is that the number of incoming students is continuously increasing, while the amount of outgoing students decreased starting with 2009-2010 academic year. Another important conclusion is that the subjects didn't neglect the financial support. To correct these deficiencies, the University will double the places and the amount of money for outgoing students in 2017-2018 academic year. The highest number of incoming students was in 2015-2016 academic year, when 10 students came in our faculty to study. As a crowning achievement of this program, in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, it was implemented the English language program in 2013-2014 academic year.

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