

Erasmus at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming students, winter semester 2010/2011

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the winter semester 2010/2011 at BOKU. At the end of their stay the students were given a questionnaire asking them what they liked/disliked about their stay and what could be improved upon. 32 questionnaires were returned.

1. The most appreciated things at BOKU

In the first question, students had to list 3 things they particularly appreciated during their stay. You can see a list of the mentioned things in Table 1.

Table 1 List of most appreciated things at BOKU

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	people and atmosphere (friendly, interested, nice, teamwork, freedom)	14
2	student's and Erasmus events: in Tüwi, in Nachbarn - Stammtisch, welcome days	9
3	good organisation	8
4	facilities of the BOKU University - machines, laboratories, technical base, equipment	8
5	very good information service	7
6	great variety of courses at BOKU, interesting, available courses of other universities, courses in English	7
7	Qualified and friendly professors, good relationship with students	6
8	great support in solving problems, helpful personnel	5
9	BOKU online system (in English), printing	4
10	Beautiful and interesting city, culture	3
11	Multicultural surrounding, exchange of experience	3
12	very useful library	2
13	tandem learning	2
14	Buddy	2
15	scripts for students	1
16	Opportunity to learn the German language	1
17	Field Camp I	1
18	Sport possibilities	1
19	Caffeteria close to the Uni	1

The most appreciated things about BOKU were the nice and friendly people and atmosphere (mentioned by 14 out of total 32 students), events organised for students (Stammtisch, Welcome days, TÜWI events – mentioned by 9 students), facilities of BOKU (laboratories, equipment, technical base – 8 students) and good organisation (8 students). Students were also satisfied with the large variety of courses offered at BOKU (including the courses in English, very interesting content and the possibility to attend courses of other universities – mentioned by 7 students) as well as a very good information service (7 students). 6 students expressed satisfaction with qualification, friendliness of professors and their good relationship with students. 5 students appreciated the great support given by BOKU and its helpful staff. The following things that students like about BOKU were mentioned less than five times: BOKUonline system and printing system (4 students), multicultural experience (3 students),



beautiful city of Vienna and its culture (3 students), library, tandem learning, buddy (each mentioned by 2 students), scripts for students, opportunity to learn German, Field Camp I, sports opportunities and cafeteria close to the university (each mentioned by 1 student).

2. Things that BOKU could do better for international students

Students were also asked what BOKU could do better for international students (open question).

Table 2 List of difficulties

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	More events for erasmus students, stamtmish - more often and some other place, better events and parties, trips, tours of Austria, longer welcome days	9
2	Special attention for exchange students: better information about courses and exams, notes more quickly, More favour to erasmus student and their departure with date of exams, Registration for courses independent of having been at the Dean's office, be able to register for courses from abroad, More courses in English, explanation about how works the inscription fee somebody does not have austrian account	9
3	language courses: greater choice, more places and lower price, more levels, less stress	8
4	better information about other (cheaper) home-associations, not only about OEAD, reduce price, more with austrian students	8
5	improve contact with students: local and from other Unis in Vienna, more intergration with locals	7
6	better selection of buddies(students who really have time to help)	5
7	more places for student's events(Heurigen, BOKU Ball) and more info about it	4
8	better equipment at University, acces of books in library, more space, free lockers	4
9	Better food Facilities - mensa, bakery close by	3
10	printing system - accept not only Quick Cards	2
11	Increase ECTS	2
12	List of supervisors of research project for erasmus students	1
13	Easier worksheet for changing learning agreement	1

9 students out of a total 32 would welcome more events organised for exchange students (trips, tours of Austria, longer Welcome days, better parties and a more frequent Stammtisch with a change of venue). 9 students would appreciate it if BOKU paid special attention to exchange students in several cases: more information about courses and exams, getting notes more quickly, more consideration of exchange students with regard to the dates of exams as they have a set date of departure, registration for courses independently after having already been to the Registration office previously - being able to register for courses from abroad, more courses in English, explanation of how to pay tuition fees if somebody does not have an Austrian bank account. 8 students think that BOKU could improve its language courses (according to students' opinions there should be a larger variety of languages, more places in each course, more levels of each language and lower prices). BOKU should also provide more information about other housing associations, not only the OeAD – students would also appreciate lower rent and the possibility to stay in a dormitory with Austrian students (mentioned 8 times). Students also suggest that BOKU should better support contact and integration between exchange students and locals and also between BOKU students and students from other Viennese universities (7 students). 5 students think that BOKU should



choose buddies more carefully (only people who are actually willing to help and have time should be permitted to be a buddy).

4 students think that there should be more places available at events for students and there should be more information about the events beforehand (Heurigen, BOKU Ball). 4 students see place for improvement as far as the facilities are concerned (more modern equipment, free lockers, more space, availability of books in the library). Food facilities should be improved too (better mensa or bakery nearby) according to the opinion of 3 students. 2 students would welcome a simpler printing system (not only accepting quick cards); another 2 students think that the ECTS should be increased (as the courses are very demanding). 1 student suggested that there should be a list of supervisors available for research projects for exchange students. 1 student thought that the Learning Agreement changing worksheet was too complicated.

3. Motivation and information

3.1 Activities at BOKU

78% of the students who filled in this survey participated in a regular course programme, 19% worked on their thesis/research project and one student did not answer this question. The host institutes for the projects were the laboratory of Downstream processing, the Department of Economics and Social Science, the Forest Patology, the Institute of Wood and the VIBT.

3.2 Factors of Motivation

The main driving factors influencing students' motivation to come to BOKU were above all academic reasons, a wish to experience a different environment and possibility to meet new people. Language improvement and career plans were also considered quite a lot. For exact results, see Figure 1.

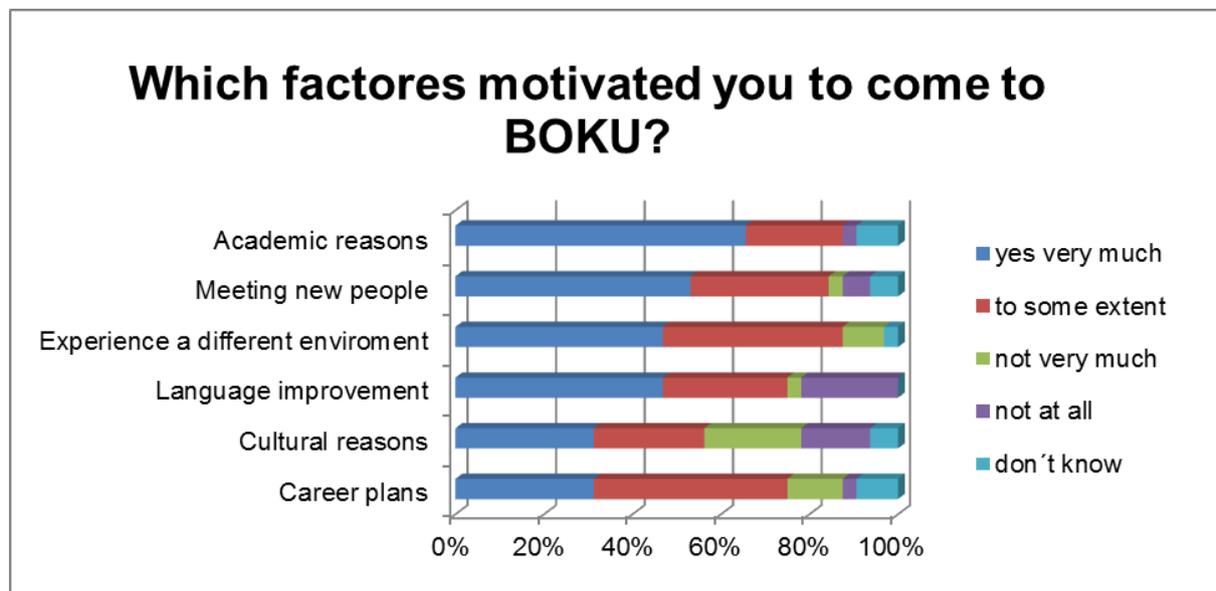


Figure 1 Importance of given factors to come to BOKU

3.3 Information before your stay

All the necessary information about BOKU was obtained mainly from the BOKU website. The exchange coordinators at students' home universities, the Erasmus coordinator at BOKU (ZIB) and fellow students were also used a lot as sources of information. Students did not



source the information from Austrian exchange students and Departmental coordinators at BOKU much (see Figure 2).

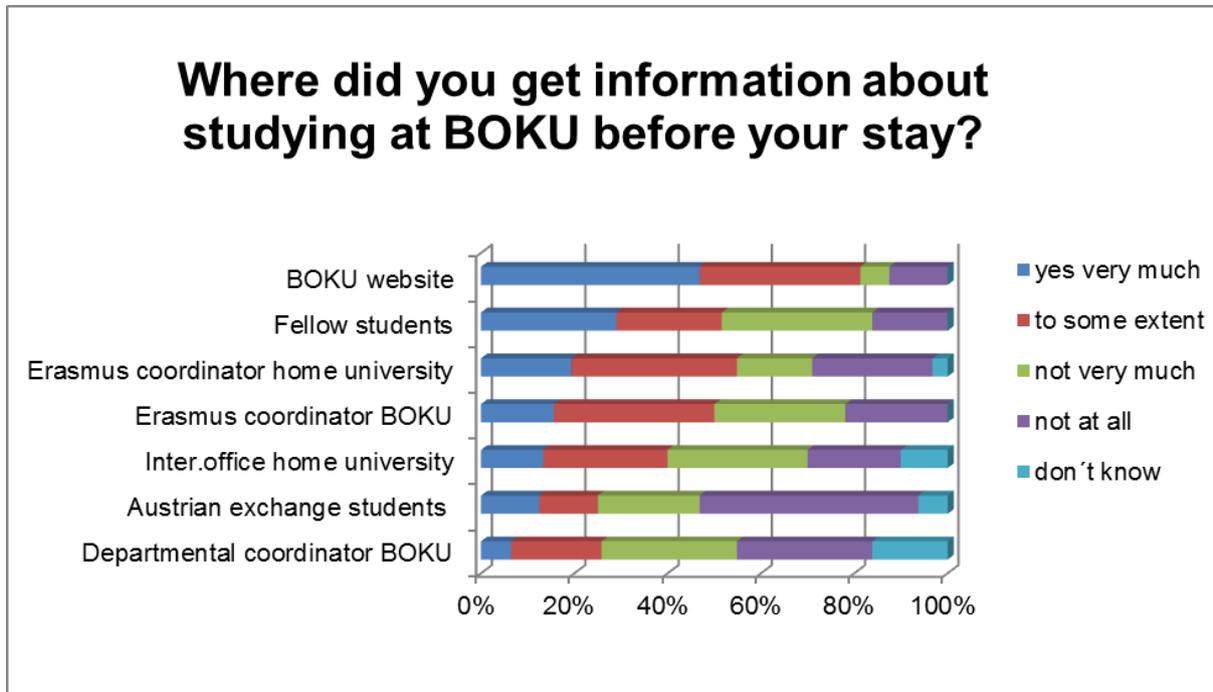


Figure 2 Ways of gaining information used by students

3.4 Information from BOKU

All of the respondents regarded information from the ZIB during their stay as excellent (60%) or good (40%). 87.5% of students also think that the ZIB provided them with information very well or well before their stay. The majority of information from departments/institutes was also regarded positively (60%). A lot of students did not answer this question as far as the service departments were concerned or they chose the option “I do not know” (see Figure 3).

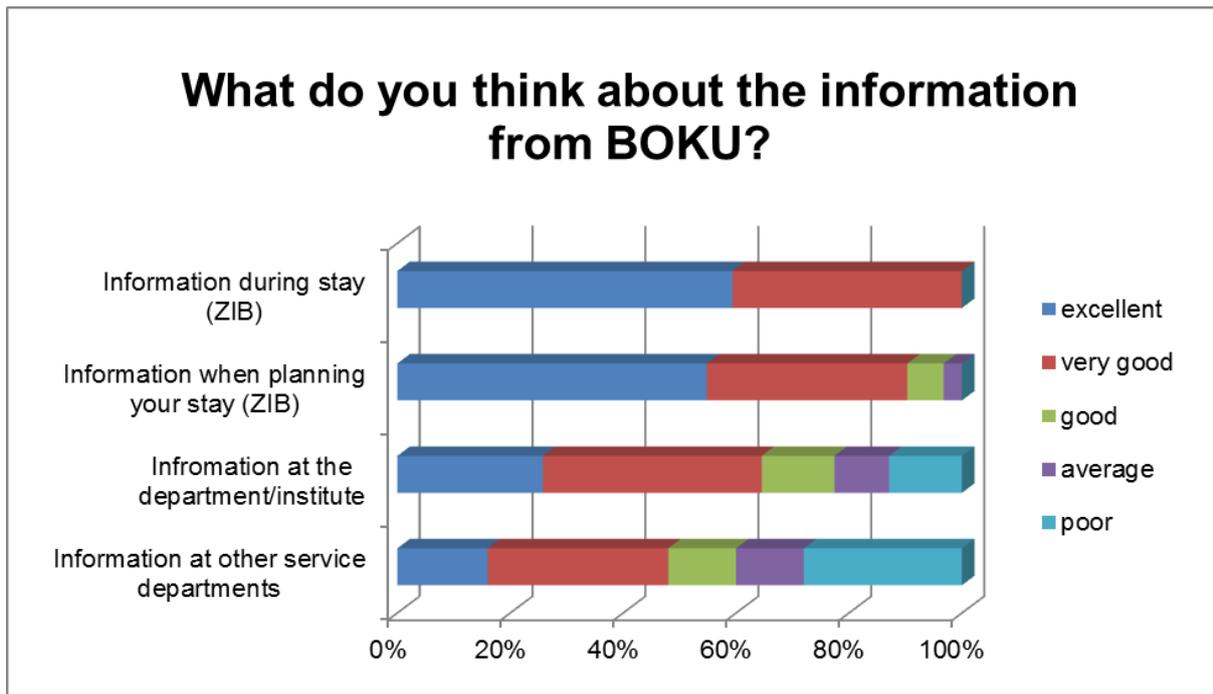


Figure 3 Evaluation of providers of information

3.5 Welcome Days

66% of the respondents participated in the Welcome Days, 32% did not attend this event and 1% did not answer this question. 43% of the participants noted that they liked the event very much and 57% liked it to some extent. Students particularly appreciated the opportunity to meet other students (6 students), the guided tour of Vienna city centre (4 students), the helpfulness and friendliness of BOKU staff and other students (3 students), specific and detailed information and well-prepared scripts (3 students), and also the visit of Muthgasse laboratories (1) and tour of the university with a teacher and a current BOKU student (1). On the other hand, some students mentioned that certain things could be improved: there could be a more flexible schedule, improved structure, more places at the Heurigen, playing games for integration, both German and English versions, handing out lists with information about what is necessary to do and lists of people from the departments and their office number (1 student each). For 1 student there was too much information to take in at one time.

3.6 Information session about BOKUonline

23 students (72%) attended the information session about BOKUonline. 39% regarded it as very helpful and 61% of them responded that it was helpful to some extent.

3.7 Buddy

62.5% of respondents had a buddy and 37.5% did not. The reasons for not having a buddy were mainly that the students thought it was unnecessary or that it was thrilling to discover things on their own.

The buddies were especially useful within the first steps after arrival (see Graph 4). Some students expressed dissatisfaction with their buddies: some of the buddies did not answer emails (4), did not help (2), could not help with courses because they were not BOKU students or contacted the exchange students too late, when they had already organised everything. In one case, a student and buddy only exchanged messages and one buddy stopped replying to his exchange student after two emails.

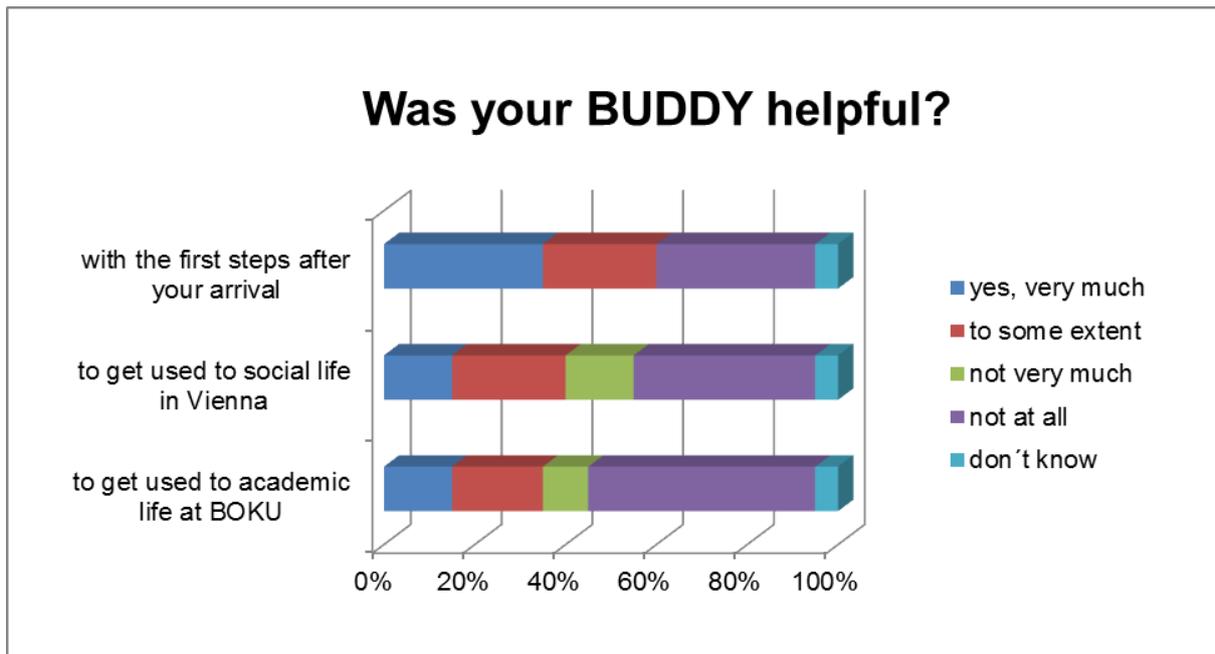


Figure 4 Helpfulness of Buddy

3.8 Newsletter

60% of the respondents read the newsletter regularly, 34% read it only now and then and 6% never read it. 77% of the respondents found the information in the newsletter very useful or useful to some extent. One student would welcome information about football matches and the Champion's League.

3.9 "Stammtisch"

The "Stammtisch" was attended regularly by 19% of the respondents and 62% visited it now and then. 19% of the students in the survey never attended the "Stammtisch" – 1 student stated that he was too busy to come, 2 students went to cheaper places, 1 student stopped going to the Stammtisch after several weeks because the majority stopped going there and 1 student preferred other places with live music. Students suggested that there should be a change of location for the Stammtisch (3 students) and that a different theme for each Stammtisch should be chosen to improve students' knowledge of different aspects of other countries (1). 1 student would welcome cheaper drinks in the Nachbar and 1 student did not like the Stammtisch because students were drinking a lot.

3.10 Heuriger and Advent party

44% of the respondents (14 students) attended the Heuriger. All of the students who participated stated the event was very good or good. The Advent party was attended by 31% (10) of the students. 3 students liked the event very much and 7 liked it to some extent.

3.11 Suggestions for improvements at BOKU

In the survey students suggested the following improvements:

- more cooperation between home and receiving universities
- to provide more information about BOKUonline before arrival and to improve BOKUonline system in general
- to provide more information about ECTS and hours of the course
- to increase the number of ECTS
- to support the contact between exchange and Austrian students,

- to keep organising the Stammtisch meetings
- to hold the Welcome days later or several times or give some introduction to people who arrived later

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

Students were asked about their satisfaction with the access to libraries, access to computers and media, the facilities (e.g. classrooms) at BOKU in general, the study environment in general (e.g. social events, student clubs, sport facilities) and the food supply at BOKU. The results are shown in Graph 5.

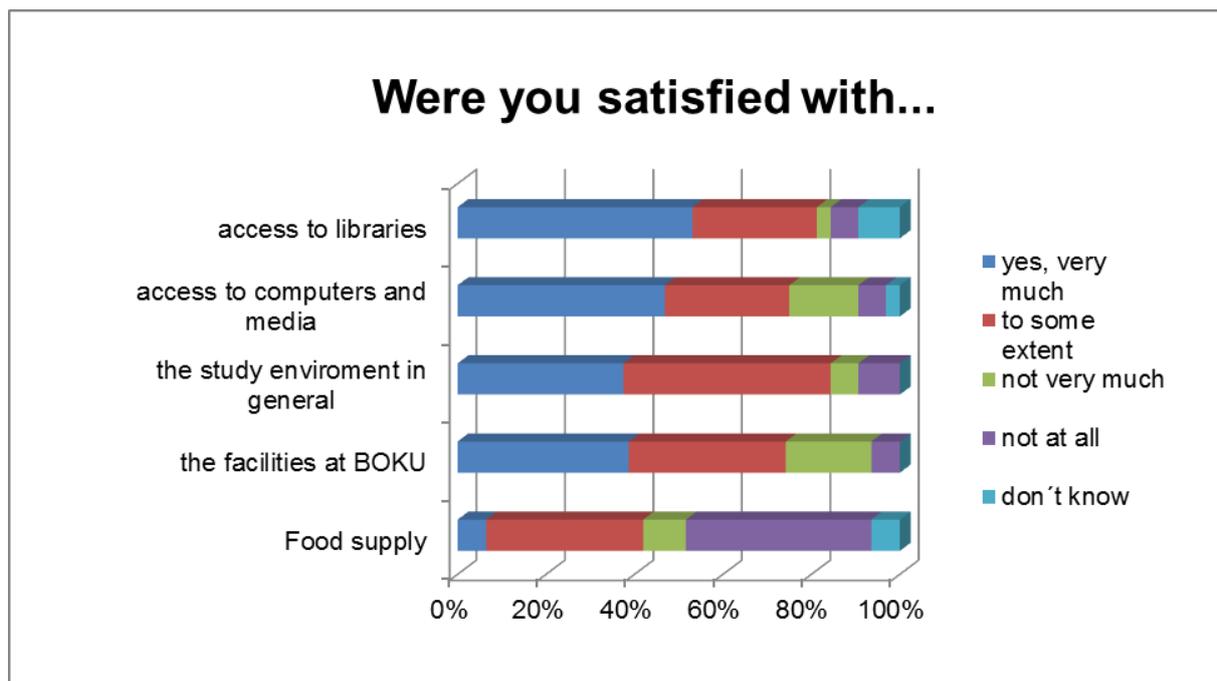


Figure 5 Satisfaction with infrastructure

More than 80% of students were satisfied or highly satisfied with the general study environment at BOKU. Access to libraries, access to computers and facilities at BOKU were also graded as very good or good by more than 60% of students. The majority of students were very dissatisfied with the food supply at BOKU.

2 people complained about the library - especially that the opening hours are too short, but also that the system is old-fashioned and complicated. There were also comments about the classrooms: 2 students think that there is too little space for big groups of students and the chairs and desks are uncomfortable. 3 people expressed their dissatisfaction with Mensa, in particular short opening hours, too high prices and poor quality food.

5. Language

5.1 Experience with language problems

44% of the respondents experienced no language problems, 41% experienced them only now and then and 15% encountered language problems regularly.

5.2 German language course

8 out of 32 respondents attended the Intensive German course before the semester (7 of them were satisfied with it). 11 of the respondents took part in the German course during the semester and 9 of them found it very good or good. 8 people participated in the Tandem learning.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Kind of accommodation

69% of the respondents stayed in a student residence organized by the OeAD, 28% stayed in private accommodation (e.g. in a shared flat).

As for the students staying in the residence organised by the OeAD, 60% were satisfied with their accommodation very much or at least satisfied - in private flats it was 67%.

Among written comments, a lot of dissatisfaction with the OeAD was expressed: high deposit and very high rent (the price via the OeAD is higher than the Austrian pay, which is unfair; prices not reflect the housing quality); the rooms too small, old and dirty; the dormitory in bad condition; the staff very unfriendly; no chance to change bookings. On the other hand, two students expressed high satisfaction with the OeAD and its professional and helpful staff. As for the private accommodation, 2 students had bad luck with their flatmates, 1 student had higher costs than had been promised and was not refunded the whole deposit.

6.2 Most important about accommodation

The most important characteristic of accommodation was considered to be its price. Other very important aspects are the condition, proximity to BOKU, being together with other foreign students and also proximity to the city centre. The possibility of staying together with other Austrian students is also taken into account but does not play such an important role.

7. Academic and personal outcome

7.1 How do you in general judge the outcome of your stay at BOKU?

94% of the students judge the academic outcome of their stay as very good or good. The same percentage of respondents sees the personal outcome as very good or good.

7.2 Would you like to return?

75% of the respondents would like to come back to BOKU for further study. More than 60% wish to return to Austria for study at another institution or for an internship or work. Half of the respondents would like to extend their stay at BOKU.

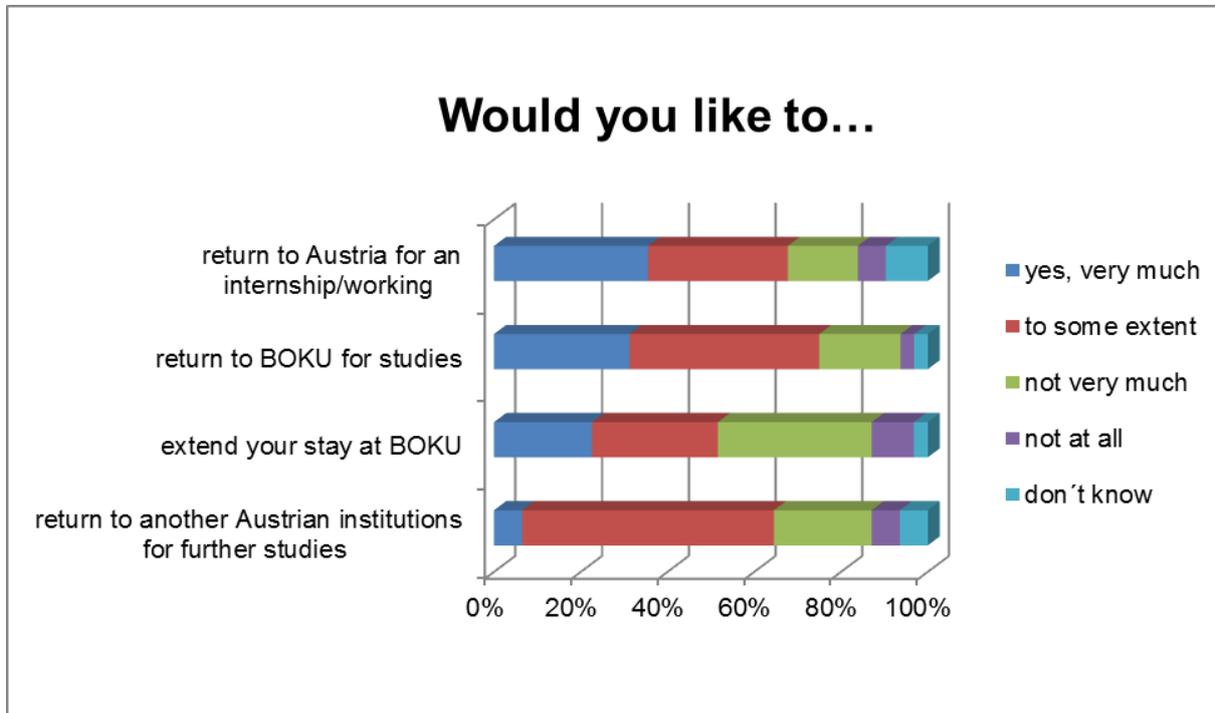


Figure 6 Future Plans

7.3 Situations that needed special attention

Some students had problems with cash machines and bank cards and therefore had to open a new Austrian bank account. One student's daughter fell severely ill. Another student did not have a room to stay when he arrived (because of dishonesty). The rest of the respondents stated that there was no such situation or did not answer this question.

7.4 Recommendations for the ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students coming to BOKU

There was a recommendation to prolong consulting hours of ZIB and to give better travel guidance. There should be more activities organised by BOKU, e.g. sport activities and above all more activities bringing exchange and Austrian students together.

Exchange students would also appreciate more support from their teachers – especially with regard to the online exams (students would like more time), and also that they should answer their emails and take into consideration the departure dates of exchange students when scheduling the exam dates. There was also a suggestion of having one student residence for exchange students only as living with Austrian students is sometimes difficult (they have their own lives and friends, they are not interested in tours of Vienna or Erasmus parties).

Better planning of courses on the part of BOKU is necessary according to the opinion of one student. As some courses take place in an irregular manner or overlap, the scheduling is really difficult and it is not good that the students have to skip some lessons to be able to attend others.

One student expressed an opinion that collaboration and interest in group projects should be supported more (due to the fact that every student has a different timetable and follows different courses and thus cannot create a group of study friends, exchange students may feel alone in their studies). Another student would welcome more excursions during the courses.

8. Background information

62,5% of the respondents were female and 37,5% were male. 81.5% of the respondents stayed at BOKU for the winter semester 2010/2011 (from 1st October to 30th January), 18.5% (6 students) were at BOKU for different period (usually one or two month longer than semester, e.g. from October to end of February or March) – these were usually people working on their thesis or research project.

Table 3 Country of origin

Nationality	Answer	%
German	9	28.13
Polish	5	15.63
Turkish	4	12.50
Finnish	2	6.25
French	2	6.25
Italian	2	6.25
Croatian	1	3.13
Czech	1	3.13
Hungarian	1	3.13
Lithuanian	1	3.13
Romanian	1	3.13
Slovak	1	3.13
Spanish	1	3.13
No answer	1	3.13
SUM	32	100,00