

Erasmus at BOKU

Evaluation of Incoming students, summer semester 2010/2011

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who the 2010/2011 summer semester 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. 76 questionnaires were returned.

1. The things most appreciated at BOKU

In the first question, students had to list 3 aspects of their stay that they particularly appreciated (open question).

Table 1 List of most appreciated things at BOKU

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	Courses (variety of courses in English, big choice, interesting lectures, different cities, good quality, small groups, not to choose from your field of study, applicable)	29 times
2	ZIB (willingness to help, kindness, friendly, great providing of information, checklists, newsletter)	26 times
3	Events (Infosessions, Welcome days, Stammtisch, Salsa, Apfelstrudel, Farewell picnic)	23 times
4	Teachers (High quality, interactive way of teaching, experts, easily accessible, interactive)	20 times
5	Atmosphere: family approach, City, study environment, relation between students and teachers, campus, park	18 times
6	Mixture of different students, lots of contacts, nice people, speak English	14 times
7	Possibility to schedule the classes, flexible, free choose of exam dates, independence, not compulsory	11 times
8	Good organisation at BOKU, for International students, Quite low bureaucracy	9 times
9	Facilities (TUWI, IT, library, study rooms, printing)	8 times
10	Excursions	7 times
11	Buddy, buddy system	6 times
12	Great experience, learning languages, opportunity to know other culture	5 times
13	BOKUonline (English, easy)	4 times
14	Research opportunities, laboratories, modern equipment	4 times
15	Language courses (wide range, German intensive course)	3 times
16	Tandem	2 times

The most appreciated things about BOKU were the courses (wide choice, variety of courses offered in English, interesting lectures, courses are of a high standard) mentioned by 29 students out of a total of 76. Another thing that was much appreciated at BOKU was its Center for International Relations (friendly approach and willingness to help, very good information especially with regard to checklists and newsletters) which was mentioned by 26 students. 23 students appreciated the events organised for incoming students (Infosessions, Welcome days, Heuriger, Stammtisch etc.). Students were also very satisfied with the teachers (mentioned by 20 students – experts in their field, interactive way of teaching, easily accessible); the atmosphere and study environment at BOKU (18 students – “family-style” approach, nice location, good relationships between students and teachers); the good blend of



students (14 students - students could gain a lot of new contacts and meet nice people) and the flexible approach to studying (11 students - possibility to choose courses, schedule the classes and exam dates). Other things appreciated by students were each mentioned by fewer than 10 respondents: good organisation at BOKU (9 students); facilities (8 students - TUWI, library, IT services, study rooms, printing possibilities); excursions (7 students); buddy system (6 students). 5 people stated that their stay at BOKU was a great life experience as they had the opportunity to practice foreign languages and get to know other cultures. Some students also enjoyed the BOKUonline system (4), research opportunities in modern laboratories (4), language courses (3) and Tandem learning (2).

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	Events: more events, trips on weekends, meeting for exchange and local students, invite students of WS to SS party, free time activities	17
2	Information: Provide more information; more clearly at the beginning and at the end of stay, more patient at ZIB, how to rent a car, how the exams work - warn that the exam period is not fixed, more explanations on documentation before coming to Vienna, map for students how to get to ZIB for the first time, how to get from airport, step to step information before arrival, provide info sooner, survival kit	8
3	Courses: Bigger choice of courses, improve quality of courses in English, truly in English, not overlap English classes	8
4	BOKUonline before arrival, so that exchange students are able to register for course or reserve a place for them, Put the timetables online earlier (Home universities require learning agreements as soon as possible, complicated finding courses)	8
5	Give the results of exams quicker, some lectures to the last day of stay	7
6	Lack of communication between Departments/Institutes, more communication with students, lecturers do not answer emails, lectures to help to find suitable courses, more tolerant because of the language	6
7	Better structure of courses - set lecture dates, exam dates, syllabus, State exactly which courses are reachable for Bachelor and Master studies, no overlapping, fixed schedule	6
8	More language courses, more levels, German course for everyone for free, more hours	5
9	Buddies (not willing to take care of incomings, establish better contact, more active)	4
10	Easier administrative procedure, less paperwork, Chaotic procedure for students working on thesis, Administrative documents only in German	4
11	Organization of accommodation, change the dorm office, e.g Wihast - OeAD not good, too expensive, better info	4
12	More practical activities, excursions, research in English	4
13	Special introduction to Institute you are studying, about Muthgasse,	3
14	Longer office hours	2
15	Free printing cards as gifts, improve printing system	2
16	Too low ECTS, ECTS versus hours	2
17	Have coordinator - person to go to with questions, email	2
18	Better food facilities at the campus	1

19	More English books in library	1
20	Some Erasmus classes are too easy	1
21	Make a list of courses taken by previous exchange students or forum with Austrian students and their opinion of it (if the teachers speak dialect, if they take into account exchange students, if the course is understandable) before arrival	1

17 out of 76 students would welcome more events for incoming students (e.g. weekend trips, events mingling exchange and local students, free time activities). 8 students mentioned that BOKU could do better in providing information (especially a clearer and more patient explanation at the beginning and at the end of the stay, more explanations on documentation before arrival – give the information on step by step basis, provide information on how the exams work, give out a warning about the flexible exam period (no fixed exam period like in some other universities), provide a map for students showing how to get to ZIB for the first time, information on how to get to Vienna from the airport or on how to rent a car). 8 students would appreciate a bigger choice of courses with fewer overlaps especially in English – they also state that the quality of courses taught in English should be improved and they should be only in English (as opposed to partly in English, partly in German). 8 students also suggested that the BOKUonline system should be accessible for exchange students before their arrival so that they could register for courses (if this is not possible, at least reserve a place for them). 7 students complained that the exam results were announced very late and that they would like earlier exam dates for incoming students. 6 students mentioned that there is not enough communication between students and lecturers (e.g. lecturers do not answer emails) and between departments/institutes – lecturers should help students find suitable courses and better adapt to the language requirements. 6 students thought that the courses should be better structured – lecture dates, exam dates and the syllabus of the course should be given at the beginning without changes during the semester. 5 students would welcome a wider choice of language courses (especially more levels to choose from), more hours in one course and also a German course free of charge for everybody. 4 people think that buddies should be more active and take better care of incomings. Administrative procedures should be simplified (less paperwork, very chaotic procedure for students working on their thesis, administrative documents in German only – mentioned by 4 people). Practical activities and excursions could be also offered in English (4 students). BOKU should organise accommodation for incomings or at least change the recommended agency (the OeAD was found to be too expensive) or provide more information about renting a room in a flat (4).

3. Motivation and information

3.1 Activities at BOKU

84% of the students who filled in this survey participated in a regular course programme, 11% worked on their thesis/research project, and 5% did their internship at BOKU. The host institutes for the projects and thesis were the Institute of Food Science and Food Technology (4 students), the Institute of Silviculture (2 students), VIBT (2 students), the Institute of Forest Engineering, IFA-Tulln, the Institute of Wood science and technology, the Institute of Mountain Risk Engineering and the Department of Chemistry.

3.2 Factors of motivation

The main reasons for choosing BOKU for an exchange programme were to improve a language and to experience a different environment. Meeting new people and academic reasons were among important factors too (see Figure 1).

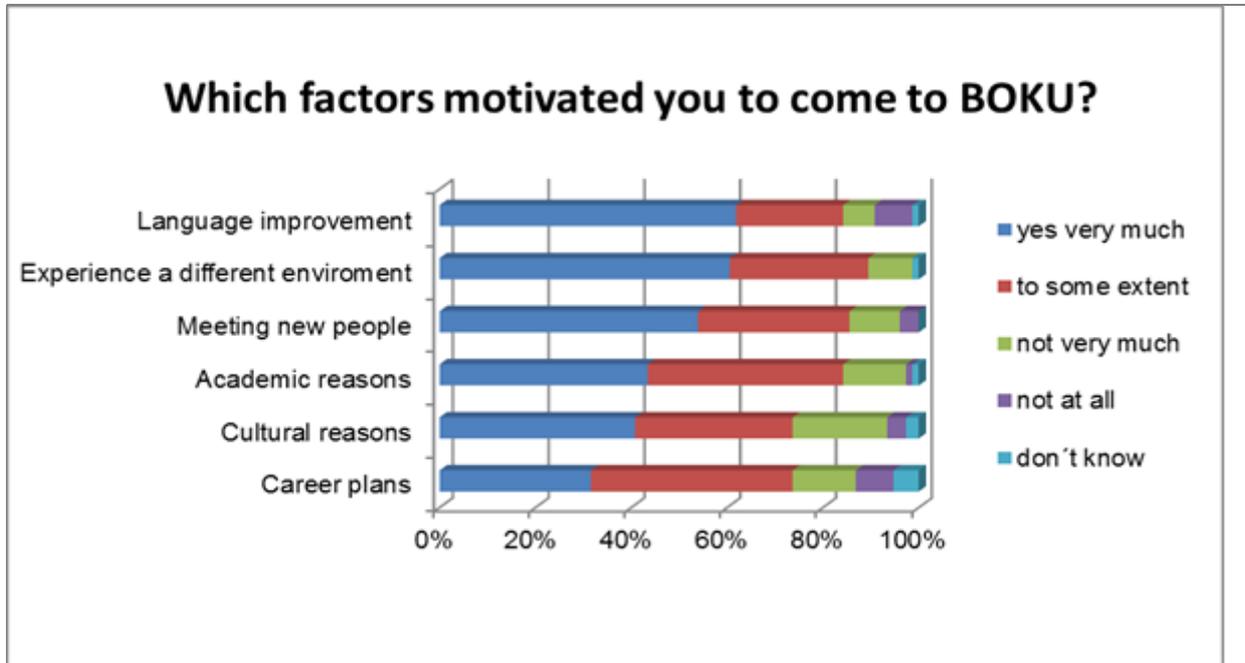


Figure 1 Importance of given factors to come to BOKU

3.3 Information before your stay

All of the necessary information about BOKU was mainly obtained from the BOKU website. The Exchange coordinator at BOKU, Exchange coordinators at home universities and the International office of the home universities were also important sources of information. Fellow students were called up by some to get information, but Austrian exchange students and Departmental coordinators at BOKU were not often mentioned (see Figure 2).

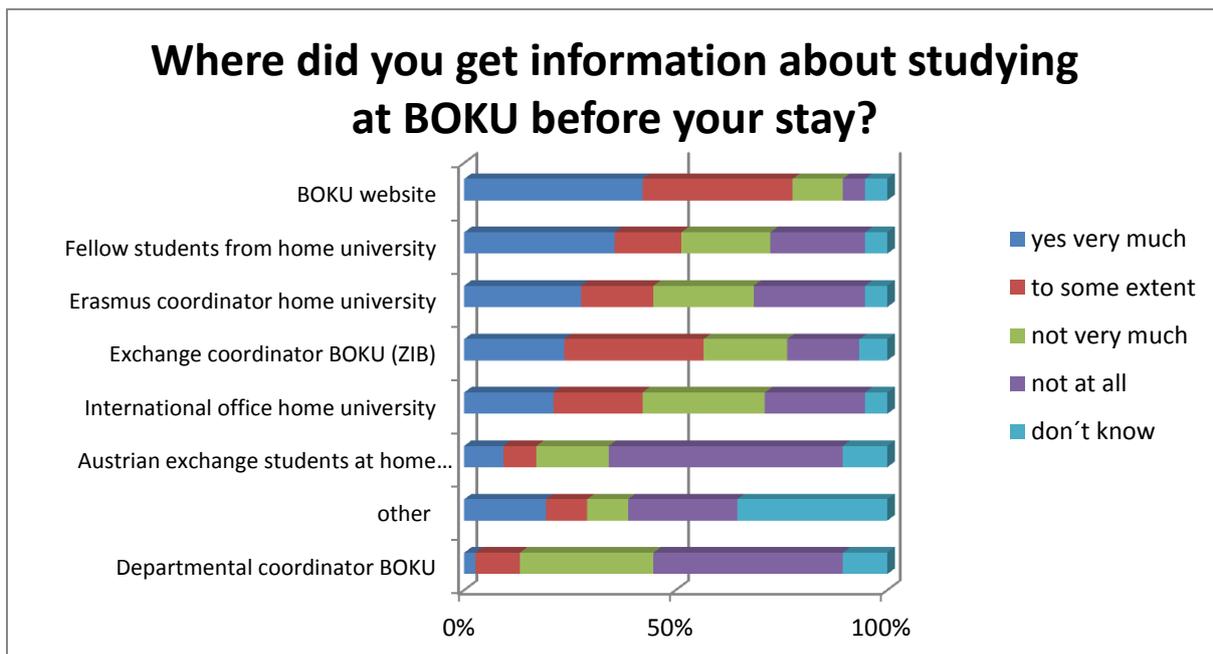


Figure 2 Ways of gaining information used by students

3.4 Information from BOKU

More than 90% of students think that the information provided by the ZIB for planning their stay and also during their stay was very good or good. The information provided by the departments and institutes was marked as good or very good by the majority. Only 32% of respondents thought that the information provided by other services was good or very good (see Figure 3).

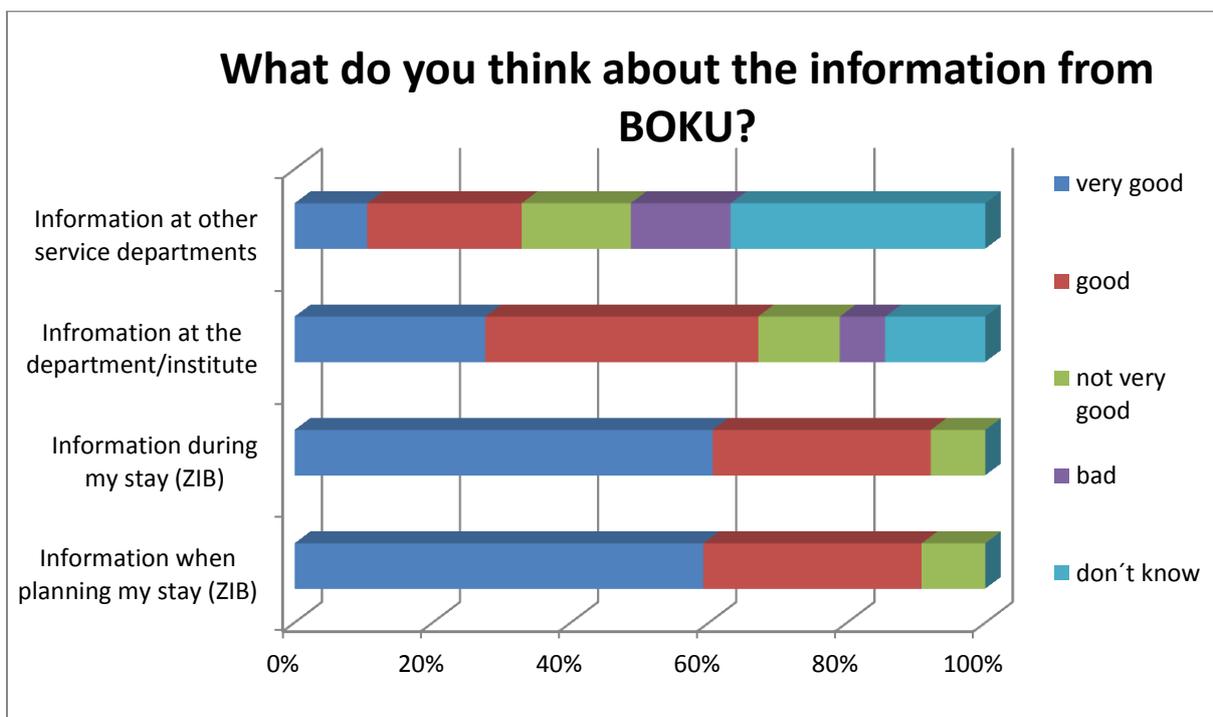


Figure 3 Evaluation of providers of information



3.5 Welcome Days

70% of the respondents participated in the Welcome Days; 94% of them marked the event as very good or good. Students particularly liked the opportunity to meet new people (group work, games designed to meet new people) and obtaining all the crucial information (e.g. necessary registrations, BOKUonline system). Students especially appreciated the Heuriger, the campus tour, the city tour and the visit to the Muthgasse laboratories.

Students suggested that the programme of the Welcome Days should be completely split between English and German speaking students because explaining everything in both languages to the many participants took very long. Students even suggested forming small groups according to the study programme for the interactive activities. Students would also appreciate meeting more Austrian students and more current BOKU students so that they could ask them questions. Students would also welcome some information about Wifi at BOKU during the info sessions. The programme of the Welcome Days should not overlap with intensive German courses.

3.6 Information session about BOKUonline

50 students (66%) attended the information session about BOKUonline and 94% of them responded that it was very helpful or helpful to some extent.

Some students expressed the opinion that the session was too long, too abstract and complicated. Some students preferred their buddies to show them how to look for courses practically with useful hints e.g. how to link their BOKUemail address with their private email address and where to find additional information on courses.

3.7 Buddy

87% of the respondents (66) had a buddy and 13% (10) did not. Some of the respondents did not want to have a buddy because they preferred to handle things themselves, were proficient enough in German, already knew Vienna or had friends there, but others unsuccessfully contacted their buddies as these were not interested or too busy to meet up.

The buddies were very useful, especially in regards to the first steps after the arrival, but also for getting used to BOKU's academic life. Nearly 60% of the respondents' buddies were rated as not very much or not at all useful in getting introduced to Vienna's social life (Figure 4).

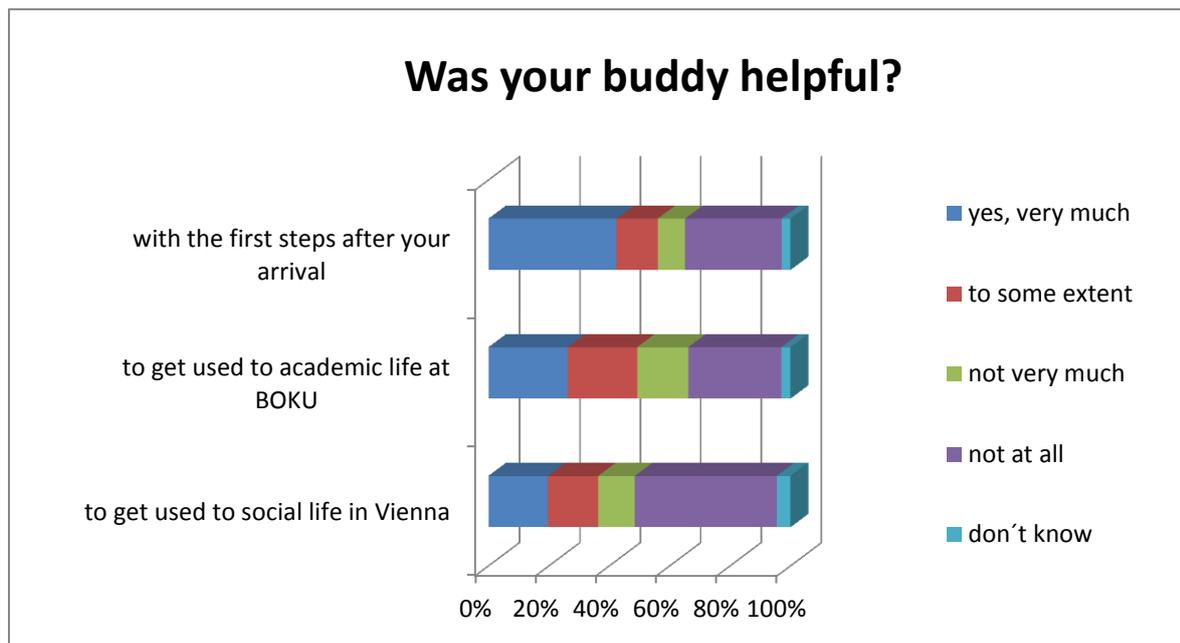


Figure 4 Helpfulness of buddy

Some students never met their buddies – the buddies did not answer their emails (5) or were too busy (9). Some students complained that they just met their buddies once and that the buddies did not help them because they were away during the Welcome Days (5).

3.8 Newsletter

75% of the respondents read the newsletter regularly, while 25% read it only now and then. All questioned participants read the newsletter at least occasionally. 96% of the people who read the newsletter found the information at least useful.

One student expressed the opinion that the newsletter was too long, another student would appreciate if the newsletter was sent out earlier (to be able to participate in all the events) and one student would prefer more information about Vienna as opposed to just BOKU.

3.9 “Stammtisch”

The “Stammtisch” was regularly visited by 5% of the respondents, while 65% attended now and then. 30% of the students never took part in it. According to the students' opinions, the “Stammtisch” could be improved by changing the venue every week (Irish pub, dance club), whereas others would appreciate cheaper drinks. A few students suggested merging the Stammtisch with the one hosted by the University of Vienna ESN. It would be also nice to play some games, have a different theme every week or hold presentations on participants' home countries/towns/universities.

3.10 Other events

The Heuriger was attended by the majority of respondents (79%), on the other hand the other two events were attended by the minority (26% participated in Apfelstrudel and 41% in the Farewell picnic). The majority of the students who participated in these events enjoyed them.

3.11 Suggestions for improvement at BOKU

Students were very satisfied with the information provided. Only a few improvements were suggested, such as:

- to publish the timetables earlier and provide students with further advice on how to choose and schedule the courses and more information on BOKUonline
- to enhance the use of Facebook and send reminders for the events
- to produce a “step to step” online comic with calendar that would make the administrative procedure easier; less bureaucracy
- to send information earlier
- to select only the buddies who really have time and really want to help
- to not recommend OeAD

For some students the Welcome Days and the first information and orientation took place too late, on the other hand other students suggested that the Welcome days should take place at the beginning of March (as they had their accommodation only from this date).

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

The greatest satisfaction can be seen with the facilities at BOKU. On the other hand, students were the least satisfied with the food supply at BOKU (only 53% expressed satisfaction, see Figure 5).

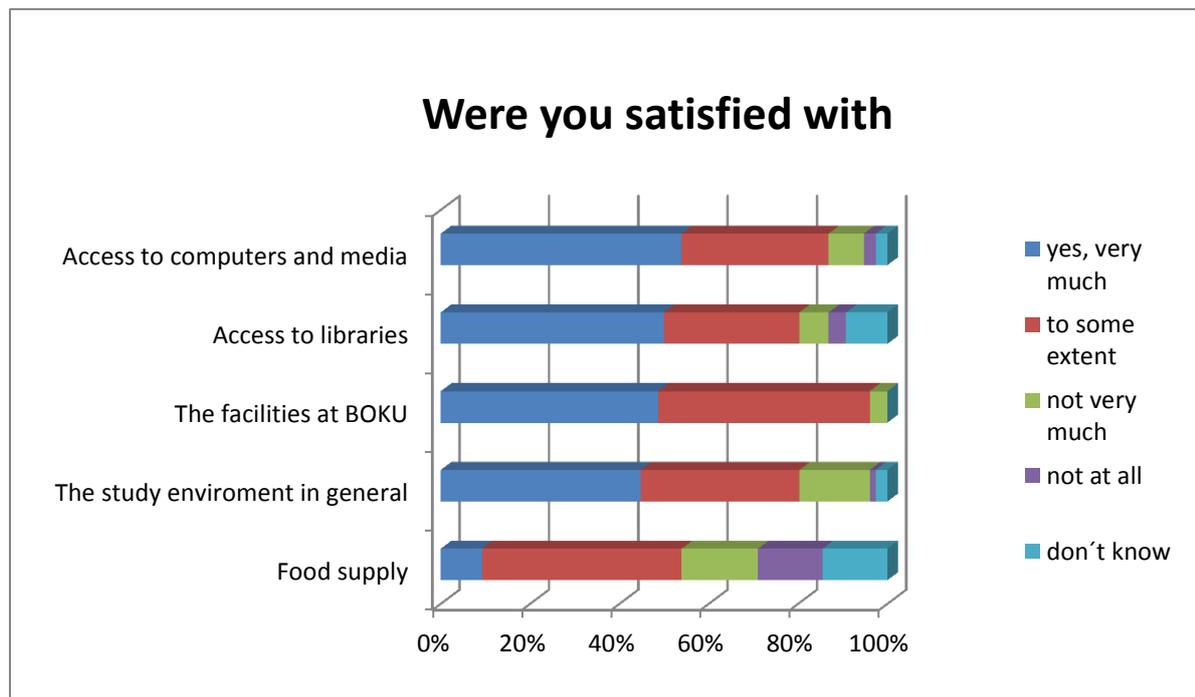


Figure 5 Satisfaction with infrastructure

Some people stated that the Mensa at BOKU was too expensive and that the meals were not good. The food at TUWI was appreciated but it was sold out quickly. Another missing point was a small grocery shop nearby. Some difficulties were seen in the printing system as it was considered as too complicated and the use of library was difficult. There were also suggestions that the offer of USI and the Wifi areas at BOKU should be advertised more. Another student found it difficult to find the buildings and the classrooms. 1 student stated

that the classrooms were not large enough (he experienced a situation in which students had to sit on the floor).

5. Language

5.1 Experiences with language problems

61% of the respondents experienced language problems now and then while 30% never did. 9% of the respondents experienced language problems regularly. Students who experienced language problems mainly did in private life situations or in during class. Sometimes, there were language problems in their contact with Austrian students.

5.2 German language course

20 out of 76 respondents attended the Intensive German course before the semester (90% of them were very much satisfied with it). 30 of the respondents took part in the German course during the semester and 27 of them found it very good or good. 25 people participated in the Tandem learning and 16 people attended other German courses (VHS, Deutsche Akademie, Universität Wien). All types of German languages courses were ranked as very good or good by the majority of respondents who attended them.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Kind of accommodation

63% of the respondents stayed in a student residence managed by the OeAD, 16% of the students lived planned their student residence themselves. 22% stayed in a private accommodation (e.g. a shared flat).

The majority of students were satisfied with their accommodation.

Some students complained that the accommodation was too expensive for them (the OeAD, especially, was said to be overpriced); 4 students thought that there were too many rules in the dormitories (Base 19, Tiergasse). OeAD also claimed a high deposit and fees for some cleaning job that was never done (3 students). 2 students were forced by OeAD to move during a semester to another dormitory and to pay the fees twice. 1 student did not get his deposit back. 3 students encountered problems with the cleaning lady at the dormitory (disrespectful behaviour, false accusations). There were also complaints about defective internet connections, noise and discomfort, insufficient laundry machines (Tiergasse), too much bureaucracy, the fact that OeAD decides where students will live (each by 1 student) and accommodation being a great distance from BOKU (2 students). 6 students think that BOKU should not recommend OeAD for getting a place in a dormitory, but instead recommend an organisation like WIHAST, as well as help students find an accommodation in a private shared flat, e.g. by sending information about this type of accommodation before the semester starts and by putting advertisements on its webpage (students that stayed in private accommodations thought that they were cleaner, cheaper and better located).

6.2 Most important things about accommodation

It is obvious from the Graph 7 that, for exchange students, the most important characteristic of any accommodation is its price. Other very important aspects are condition, proximity to the city centre and proximity to BOKU. The possibility of staying together with other foreign students or Austrian students is also taken into account but does not play a decisive part.

7. Academic and personal outcome

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

The majority of the students (89%) judge the academic outcome of their stay as either very good or good. An even bigger percentage of respondents (96%) see their personal outcome as either very good or good.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

82% of the respondents would like to come back to Austria for work or for an internship. More than 70% of the respondents would like to extend their stay at BOKU or return to BOKU for further study. There is a slightly smaller interest in going to another Austrian institution for further study - 60% consider this an option (see **Figure 6**).

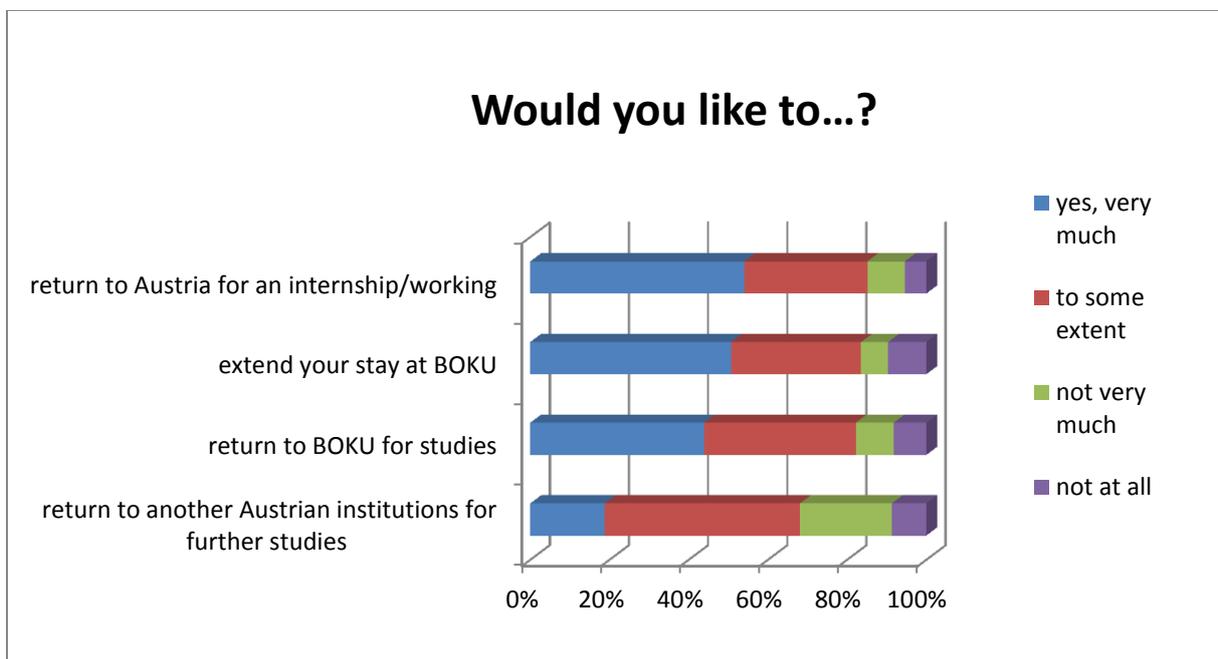


Figure 6 Future plans

7.3 Situations that needed special attention

2 students needed to visit a doctor during their stay and complained that it was quite difficult to quickly find a suitable doctor with the required language skills. So they suggested that BOKU should provide a list of English speaking doctors or give further information on how to rapidly choose a doctor. 2 students experienced problems with the international office at their home universities (complicated bureaucracy in regards to their stay, some mistakes). 1 student was frustrated that the exam dates were not set in advance. 1 student had difficulties with getting a residence permit (as a non-EU student staying longer than 6 months).

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

3 students would have appreciated it if BOKU organised more sports events for students on a regular basis. Another 3 students thought that BOKU should organise more events for both exchange and local students in general (parties, activities at the start of the semester). There have also been suggestions to have more promotion of the events on Facebook, to have better places to eat on campus and to make the timetables more flexible. Staff at the ZIB should be more patient and friendly (1 student) and should provide information on essential things to do

before leaving Vienna (1 student); there should be somebody that exchange students could go to with all their questions (1 student) and also there should be a special advisor for non-EU students (1 student). 1 student complained that the admission fee and the language courses could not be paid in cash. The e-mails about German language courses should have been written in English. There was also an idea to organise a donation of objects that students do not want to take back home with them.

8. Background information

79% of the respondents were female and 21% were male. 53% of the respondents stayed at BOKU for the summer semester 2010/2011 (from 28th February to 2nd July), 42% spent the whole academic year at BOKU (from 1st October to 2nd July), 5% (4 students) were at BOKU for a different period of time.

Table 3 Country of origin

Nationality	Answer	%
Poland	12	15.79%
France	10	13.16%
Czech Republic	9	11.84%
Spain	9	11.84%
Germany	5	6.58%
Croatia	4	5.26%
U.S.A.	4	5.26%
Sweden	2	2.63%
Hungary	2	2.63%
Slovakia	2	2.63%
Turky	2	2.63%
Finland	1	1.32%
Italy	1	1.32%
Serbia	1	1.32%
Greece	1	1.32%
Ireland	1	1.32%
Romania	1	1.32%
Australia	1	1.32%
Estonia	1	1.32%
Ukrain	1	1.32%
India	1	1.32%
Russia	1	1.32%
Bulgaria	1	1.32%
Lithuania	1	1.32%
Puerto Rico	1	1.32%
Belgium	1	1.32%
TOTAL	76	100,00%