

One small project inside the overall “FH-Integrative” project addresses an important area of successful and career-oriented studies in the modern, global world, namely the international mobility in students’ undergraduate or graduate main study programmes.

Based on the assumption that international mobility helps develop character and self, forces students to reflect their own cultural values, helps them develop a stable and critical personality and improves their career opportunities – and in general supports their integration into student and working life into Germany and Europe - we have started a sub-project run by the International Relations Office:

Exploring new potentials for students’ international mobility by addressing students with migration backgrounds

A growing number of full-time undergraduate and graduate students in our university has a multi-faceted cultural background – either by personal, first generation migration from another country or region, or by a second or third generation migration background in the history of the family.

A university like Fachhochschule Gelsenkirchen that has, due to location and student intake, a growing number of culturally diverse students, will cater for their needs and learning styles, if required, including preparation for their participation in international mobility. This is one significant area of higher education, namely the international experience, and it needs attention as the target group’s participation in international mobility is below average. The participation of this group of students in any international mobility is lower than the overall percentage of average students, and it is growing more slowly than their general percentage in the whole group of students.

Interviews with students from the target group (spring and summer 2010) have shown the following results:

- a) Students need role models from their own cultural groups,
- b) there is a need for counselling strategies that are appropriate for this target group requires adaption of counselling,
- c) mentoring seems to be the most appropriate key action to address this group and thereby to increase the number of internationally mobile students from the target group.

Their general questions, needs, fears and negative concepts of international mobility are similar to those of German or rather non-migration background students if we compare the answers to the results of general interviews carried out in 2007 and 2008.¹

However, students with migration backgrounds, especially those with Turkish family, look for role models from their own groups (students and graduates that have been abroad), for mediators and facilitators from their own cultural group (professors / staff that promote their own plans and needs). And many of them – especially women with Muslim backgrounds - do not want to go abroad by themselves but rather in pairs or groups. Otherwise, those female students have problems getting the consent of their parents.

¹ Studienbezogene Aufenthalte deutscher Studierender in anderen Ländern, Dr. Ulrich Heublein, HIS, 2007

Students with Russian and Ukrainian migration backgrounds have difficulties with English as the global language, as their own English is mostly worse than control groups' English at the beginning of their studies and they do not improve it appropriately during the first semesters at our university. A semester abroad in a classical region or country where English is the language of study and work is not possible for this target group.

These are needs that have to be taken into account and addressed if these (growing) target groups in our student body are to be looked after professionally.

A more detailed questionnaire and semi-personalized interviews are currently being distributed, their results will be available by the end of the year.
We assume that they will confirm the first findings and put them in the right perspective.

It seems appropriate to state that in order to explore the potential of these target groups, we need

- 1) role models from their own backgrounds (among students and graduates), alumni that have been internationally mobile and have successfully continued their studies or found good (international) employment,
- 2) to adapt counselling strategies in the international office and the administration of the university, addressing the students in a different way, organizing mediators from the target groups cultural backgrounds, and addressing parents to "allow" and support their childrens' international mobility. Students from Turkish culture who are very strongly oriented towards hierarchy tend to look for confirmation of counselling results with senior staff, this leads to frustration in staff responsible for the task,
- 3) to adapt counselling in the departments (professors) to take into account the students' need for authorities,
- 4) we need to take into account cultural dimensions that are different from German's – not only in our contact as services vs client, but also in our relationship between non-migration background staff and staff from the target groups once we employ them. Students from the same group tend to try to fraternize with the staff from their own group and to exclude the other staff, even if they are responsible (service orientation and bargaining).

We hope that awareness of these needs and close observation of students' service behaviour and response towards both adapted services in the university as well as the start of a mentoring project addressing the goals described above will lead to a different atmosphere of discussion, encouraging and reporting in connection with international mobility. If all students – from any background – work together in groups and pairs, integration will be easier and a growing number of students from the target group will see the need for international experience and go abroad.

Thus, they will improve their personal development and intercultural learning as well as their chances to find good employment after their degree.