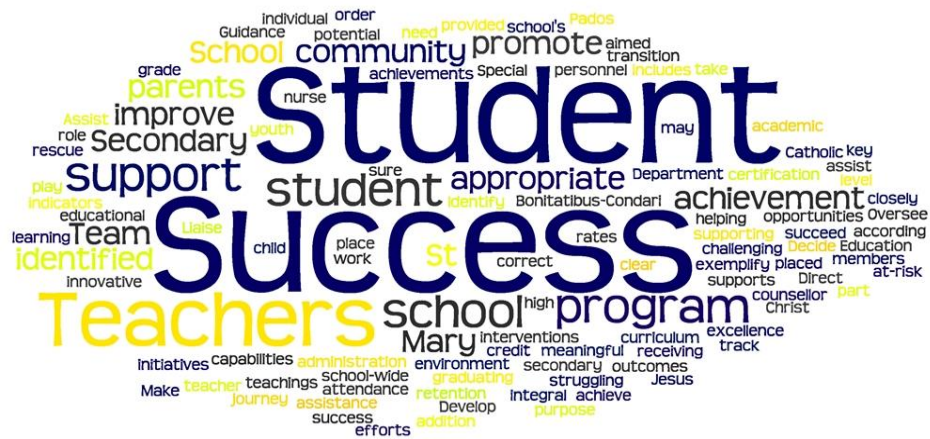## DE HAAGSE HOGESCHOOL

*Bachelor Thesis*

# How can The Hague University of Applied Sciences Maximize Student Success and Student Retention?
## (Specifically, within the European Studies program)

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## Executive Summary

The objective of this dissertation was to find out how The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS) can maximize student success and student retention, specifically how The Hague University can combat the continuously decreasing number of students enrolling and successfully completing their studies in the nominal study time of four and a half years in the European Studies (ES) program.

Considering that this topic revolves around education, one must take into consideration that there are many educational policies that have been implemented at the European, national and institutional level.

Generally, there are several ways of defining and thus calculating student success, however, given that THUAS is a government funded institution that has performance contracts in place with the government, student success is calculated based on two components: the amounts of ECTS credits obtained by the students and the program completion time.

Furthermore, the literature review performed for this research has shown that several studies on student success have been conducted before. Although, these previous studies outline a general concept on what is important in terms of student success and student retention, and although many of the concepts are applicable to THUAS, the issue remains that every institution is different. This makes it a seemingly impossible task to create a universal guideline that would guarantee student success and retention at any university.

The findings of this research suggest that ES students at THUAS face many of the challenges that have been mentioned on a general scale, namely:
- the lack of information on the program's content
- the lack of a clear scope (in academic trajectory)
- the disengagement from the university environment and
- the lack of international students.

It is thus suggested that THUAS addresses these issues with a mix of policies, aimed at improving various interrelated fields, that would be more efficient than a single policy aimed at one specific target.

## Table of Contents

Abbreviations

| Acronym | Meaning |
| --- | --- |
| THUAS | The Hague University of Applied Sciences |
| ES | European Studies |
| FABBS | Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences |
| EU | European Union |
| HE | Higher Education |
| BSA | Binding Study Advice |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| ECTS | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System |
| CITO | *Centrale Eindtoets Basisonderwijs,* → Central End Test for Primary Education |
| VMBO | Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs → Preparatory middle-level vocational education |
| MBO | *Middelbaar BeroepsOndewijs* → Middle-level vocational education |
| HAVO | *Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs* → Higher General Continued Education |
| VWO | Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs → Pre-university education |
| HBO | Hoger Beroepsonderwijs → Higher professional education |
| HE | Higher Education |
| NSE | Nationale Studenten Enquete |

## Definitions

| | |
|---|---|
| **Drop-out** | A student that discontinues his studies during the first year of enrolment |
| **Time-to-degree** | The time it takes a student to successfully complete his studies and obtain his degree |
| **Retention** | Keeping a student enrolled at the faculty, within the same or a different program |
| **Institution** | "An organization, establishment, foundation, devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program, especially one of a public, educational or charitable character" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). |
| **Faculty** | "The entire teaching and administrative force of a university, college or school" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). |
| **Program** | "A planned, coordinated group of activities, procedures, etc. often for a specific purpose, or a facility offering such a series of activities" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). |
| **Tertiary Education** | "Education, following secondary education at school, at a college or university" (Collinsdictionary.com, n.d.). |
| **Higher Education** | "Education beyond the secondary level, especially: education provided by a college or university" (Merriam-webster.com, n.d.). |

## PREFACE

The basis of this research stemmed from my interest in the concept of "efficiency maximization". Regardless of the work industry or environment, efficiency is one of the business' main factors that is going to affect productivity and (thus the business') success. The same logic can be applied to an institution of higher learning, which is a form of business as well. If the students perform better because they are attending a highly efficient institution, the institution and society will be better off. This can be justified by the fact that a higher student success rate usually correlates to a higher position of the institution in academic rankings. However, one should not assume that it is one of the main factors affecting the institutions' rankings, as there are several other components that make up the faculty's overall success.

As an almost ES alumni who encountered a series of hurdles during his studies, I can say that one of the objectives of this report was to improve the experience of future students, in addition to giving a helping hand to the people who are continuously trying to improve the course.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the people that supported me during this writing process, my project supervisor Mr. Philip Koelemij, who steered me into the right direction, my parents of course for their continuous support, and finally my interviewees: three THUAS staff members, Arend Noordam, Rajash Rawal and Dave van Ginhoven as well as one former ES student, Valentina Horváthová.

*Allow me to express my humble wish that this thesis will be of good use and that it will somehow contribute to improving the study experience of future ES students.*

Leon-Martino d'Elia

The Hague, March 2, 2018

## 1. Introduction

In the first section of the introduction, the underlying problem will be discussed and a justification will be provided as to why the problem takes place.

### 1.1 Background

The growing internationalization and globalization trend of the past decade has allowed more and more students to access a wider range of choices when it comes to the selection of a university and a study program. Students are not limited to their home country anymore, but can now allow themselves to study abroad for several years. However, the increasing number of choices at the disposal of students trying to find a program that suits them has possibly made the decision more difficult and the likelihood of switching studies during or after the first year higher. Therefore, more than ever it is crucial for a university to stand out in this crowded and highly competitive market. One of the ways a university can achieve this objective is by delivering high performance and high results in the form of student success, student satisfaction and prospective careers.

This report was written with two specific objectives in mind, discovering how THUAS can maximize student success and how THUAS can maximize student retention. Both elements (student success and student retention) are significant for higher institutions, but not only. Student success and retention of a faculty are also important for governments, as the quality of the student's success will determine their position in the labour market and thus the potential tax return. However, the focus of this report was not the impact on the government, but THUAS and the program of ES specifically, which is suffering from decreasing numbers of students enrolled and students successfully concluding their study in the nominal time of four and a half years.

### 1.2 Problem discussion

On a national level, in the Netherlands the problem is reflected in the low academic achievements of students in the first year, where the dropout rates are high (Dutch Educational Council 2008). Additionally, "the university students' dropout rates result in the waste of taxpayers' money, a lower proportion of the undergraduates and, consequently, lower employment opportunities in highly qualified positions" (Paura & Arhipova, 2014, p.1). For this reason the Ministry of Education of The Netherlands oversees and implements policies on education. On the institutional level instead, specifically within the program of ES, one of the main problems is student retention.

Thus, the number of students successfully completing their studies in the nominal study time is low compared to the number of students enrolled in the first year. "The main problem of higher education modernization is the balance between inputs and relevant outputs, specifically, the right balance of enrolled and graduated students" (Paura & Arhipova, 2014, p.1). The relationship between study beginners and graduated students here is seen as an indicator of university's performance.

The general challenge that can be observed nowadays, partly due to globalization and the diffusion of information, is that when students study a course that they do not enjoy, they are much more likely to switch program or institution, or in some cases even both. This becomes problematic when taking into consideration that THUAS is not the only university in the Netherlands offering ES as a program. In fact, according to both interviewees, Noordam and Rawal, the drop-out rate in European Studies is around 50% after the first year (please refer to Appendix III & V). This presents a serious problem when considering that "completing the first year is more than half the way in persistence to the bachelor's degree"" (Tinto 1988) and therefore, the first months of university are especially important for student retention.

Seidman concludes, "Conversely, students who do not succeed in their first year have a far smaller chance of completing a bachelor's degree in time" (Seidman, 2005).  From the remaining 50%, many will not finish their studies within the nominal study time of four and a half years. This however, is not an exclusive trend for ES but seems to be a trend at the entire university, where approximately 25% of the students have a study delay (R. Rawal, personal communication, November 13, 2017). Out of give or take 25.000 students, this is a staggering 6.250 students. This problem however, seems to be linked to a Dutch culture of non-commitment, where students are comfortable in postponing the conclusion of their studies.

The aim of this report is thus to assess how THUAS can maximize student success and retention, specifically within the ES program. The outcome of the literature review and field interviews will provide a benchmark/base which can serve as an inspiration for THUAS.

## 1.3 Research Questions

After defining the main terms necessary to discuss the topic in the theory and rational section, answering the main research question has been accomplished with the help of the following sub-questions:

I. <u>What determines student success and why is it important for universities to have a high success rate?</u>

II. <u>What are the main challenges in retaining students?</u>  (THUAS and in general)

III. <u>What are best practices conducted by other academic institutions?</u>

IV. <u>What strategies can ES coordinators implement?</u>

V. <u>What initiatives has THUAS already taken to further student success?</u>

VI. <u>What are the main challenges for THUAS students within ES?</u>

VII. <u>What is the role of the different departments in relation to students' success?</u> (Teachers, Supervisors, Support Staff)

VIII. <u>Is there a correlation between entry requirements and student retention/success?</u>

The questions have been answered in different sections of the report.

## 1.4 Report Structure

The report has been split into six sections as can be seen below.



Figure 1. Thesis Structure

Figure 1 displays the structure of this thesis, which is composed out of six main elements. The first element, the introduction, briefly introduces the topic and discusses the problem at hand. The second element, the theoretical framework, explains the terms "student success" and "retention" as well as the European and national policies implemented to further study success. The third element, the methodology, discusses what types of research were performed to obtain information and which limitations arose during that research.

The fourth element, the results, contains the results to the sub-questions asked in section 1.3. In the fifth element, the analysis, the results are taken under a lens and explained. In the sixth element, the conclusion, which is the final section of the thesis, conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of the results and recommendations are made as to how THUAS can improve student success and student retention, not only for ES but the entire university.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The first step that should be taken when discussing the maximization of student success, is defining the term "student success", as the definition of the term varies across the different institutions and countries, depending on several factors, ranging from the faculty's location to the size of the faculty and the national laws. However, since THUAS is a government funded university and therefore has performance contracts in place with the government, student success will be defined based on three criteria:

1) 1st year drop-out rate
2) Timely Completion
3) Number of ECTS

According to HighPoint Technology 2017, in the past, student success was not the primary focus of institutions but rather, the number of students enrolled, fixed long-term jobs for professors and university staff, as well as government grants. However, as time passed, the focus of higher education institutions shifted from success focused on the faculties' infrastructure, to success focused on the students' success. In order to be successful a faculty needs its students to be successful as well, taking into account more concrete and feasible criteria such as, 1st year drop-out rates, timely completion and the Number of ECTS credits obtained.

Additionally, the inclusion of other variables (such as psychological factors) in the calculation of what makes a student and thus a university successful might contribute to deeper insight, bearing in mind the desired final accuracy of these calculations. It might be too broad to define student success solely based on numbers, especially considering that at THUAS, because it is a university of applied sciences, there is a portion of students that only attend the first year of a three or four-year programme, to obtain the *properdeuze* to be able to attend another institution immediately afterwards (Kottmann et al. p. 29, para. 2).

## 2.1 What determines student success?

According to Joe Cuseo, professor Emeritus in Psychology, author of *Student Success: Definition, Outcomes, Principles and Practices* (n.d. p.3) "There are seven most potent principles of student success because they are well supported by higher education scholarship and are firmly grounded in research and theory".

The seven principles of student success according to Cuseo (n.d) are:

**1) Personal Validation:** "The importance of personal validation for student retention is highlighted by an extensive national survey of 947 colleges and universities, both two-year and four-year, in which retention officials on these campuses were asked: "What makes students stay?" Ranking first in response to this question was "a caring faculty and staff" (Beal and Noel, 1980).

**2) Self-Efficacy:** Student success is more likely to take place when students believe that their individual efforts matter (Cuseo, n.d.)

**3) Sense of Purpose:** "Student success is more probable when students find meaning or purpose in their college experience, when they perceive relevant connections between what they're learning in college and their current life or future goals" (Noel, 1985; Levitz & Noel, 1989).

**4) Active Involvement:** "The probability of student success increases commensurately with the degree or depth of student engagement in the learning process, i.e., the amount of time and energy that students invest in the college experience, both inside and outside the classroom" (Astin, 1984).

**5) Social Integration:** "Studies repeatedly show that students who have become "socially integrated" or "connected" with other members of the college community are much more likely to complete their first-year of college and continue on to complete their college degree" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

**6) Personal Reflection:** "Active involvement is necessary for engaging student attention, which enables learners to initially get information into the brain, and reflection is necessary for consolidation, keeping that information in the brain, by locking it into long-term memory" (Bligh, 2000).

**7) Self-Awareness:** "Student success is promoted when students gain greater awareness of their own thinking, learning styles, and learning habits and when they self-regulate or accommodate their learning strategies to meet the demands of the learning task at hand" (Pintrich, 1995; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991).

## 2.2 Indicators and measurements of study success and drop-out

As stated beforehand, it is difficult to give a universal definition of study success given that it is measured differently across countries and institutions. Generally, study success is measured through "drop-out" and "completion rates". However, the literature review has shown that "it is clear that drop-out and completion rates are measured in very different ways" (Hagedorn, 2004, para. 4, p. 12). Therefore, the establishment of a universal definition or way to calculate student success is complicated. Furthermore, there seems to be difficulty in identifying the students who did in fact quit their studies and leave the faculty. There are several possible scenarios that make it difficult to identify who truly quit. For instance, a student could decide to interrupt his current studies to ultimately return to the same faculty in a different program or a student could be enrolled in two programs simultaneously, ultimately deciding to only follow through with one of them: "there is a group of students that enrol in two programs at the time, they just want to combine, or just see what fits the best, it does not cost extra money. And you are allowed to do that" (A. Noordam, personal communication, November 9, 2017).

According to the Kottmann et al. (2015)**:**

> In recent years, different measures and approaches have been developed in the literature. Among the indicators used, the completion rate is the most important indicator. Mostly the completion rate relates the number of students who have successfully completed a study programme at a higher education institution compared to the number of students who started the study programme at the higher education institution (p.12, para. 4).

Additional factors that must be considered are the continuation rates. Meaning how many students re-enrol in the subsequent years of their study program. However, "One major problem in calculating retention or continuation rates is that may include students who are not actively studying for a degree, i.e. they re-enrol but they are not gaining credits" (Kottman et al., 2015, p. 12, para. 6).

As can be seen, there are several ways of calculating and thus defining student success, however, at an international level, the most commonly used way to define student success, are the completion rates in tertiary education, provided by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Here it must be noted that the completion rates are <u>not</u> calculated equally in all countries. This has to do with the fact that not every country can provide the same amount and quality of data. Some countries are unable to provide any data at all.

Additionally, to asses drop-outs in a different manner, to try and increase the accuracy of the statistical outcomes, data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) has also been made use of. What differentiates the PIAAC to OECD's assessment method, is the simple fact that in the questionnaire, "drop-out" is self-reported, meaning that an individual acknowledges himself whether he is a drop-out or not. Additionally, PIAAC's questionnaire has been handed out to people aged 20 to 64, and they were given more time to complete the survey (than those of the OECD calculation).

In fact, "The PIAAC study reports drop-out rates as the share of students ever enrolled in tertiary education. Italy has the highest drop-out rate at 33 per cent, followed by the Netherlands with 31 per cent" (Kottmann et al. p. 15, para. 1). This underlines that high drop-out rates are not only a problem for THUAS, but a national problem.

However, here it must be noted that according to Kottman et al. (2015):

> Countries where students spend longer completing a degree or where students shift programs or institutions more often may be regarded as countries with high drop-out even though this is just a sign of an alternative pattern of degree completion. These are important findings to consider when creating measures for study success" (p. 15, para. 4).

## 2.3 Tuition fees and financial support for students

On a European Level, there are vast differences between European Countries when it comes to tuition fees. Some European countries do not have any tuition fees, while others only have tuition fees for students that need to repeat/start over their study (e.g. Croatia). The Nordic countries, such as Sweden, Denmark, Norway are examples of countries that offer a higher education for "no tuition fees". The Netherlands instead, alongside with the United Kingdom, are "examples of countries with high tuition fees and well-developed student financial support systems" (Kottmann et al. p. 18, para.1). In fact, "expenditure on primary to tertiary education for core educational services, ancillary services, and research and development in the Netherlands account for 5.4% of the country's gross domestic product" (Education at a Glance, 2017).

**Figure 2**
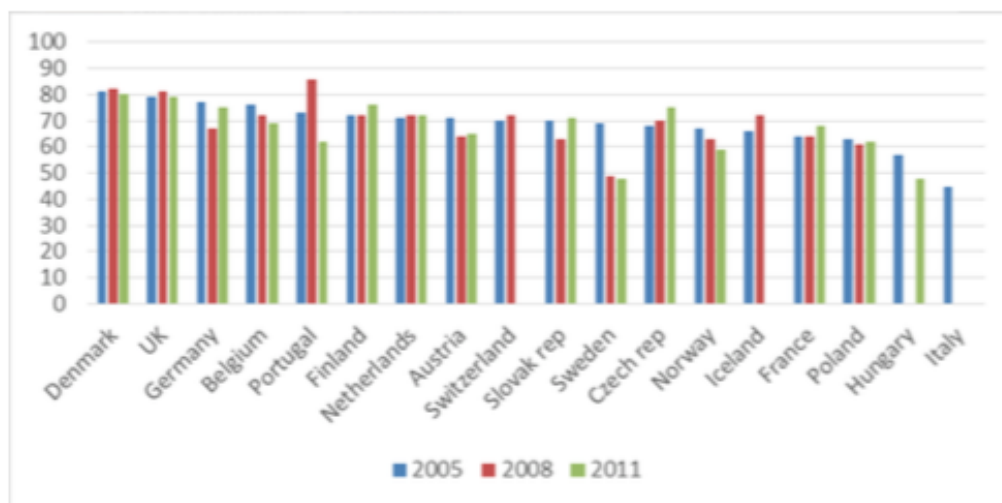


*Figure 2*. Displays the completion rates in European countries from OECD'S Education at a glance, in the time-period from 2005 to 2011. Reprinted from "*Dropout and Completion Rate in Higher Education in Europe*" (p.14), by Kottman et Al. 2015. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

In Figure 2, one can observe that for the Netherlands there was a small improvement from 2005 to 2008 and a very minimal one from 2008 to 2011. All around the percentage of completion rates in the Netherlands is approximately 70%, which is where most countries stand approximately. At this stage, it could be interesting to draw a comparison between countries based on the tuition fees they charge annually. For instance, several of the Nordic countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway offer higher education free of charge.

Denmark's rates have approximately remained the same, only slightly decreasing from 2008 to 2011. Simultaneously, one can observe a detrimental trend for Sweden. In fact, the numbers of student completion dropped from around 70% in 2005 to slightly less than 50% in 2011, which represents a drop of approximately 20% over the course of six years. A slightly better trend can be observed for Norway where the completion rates dropped from approximately 75% to less than 70%. On the other hand, there is Finland, where the numbers remained steady between 2005 and 2008 and then slightly increased in 2011.

Furthermore, if one compares the Netherlands and the Nordic countries to the UK, where tuition fees are around Euros 10,000 annually, one can observe that the completion rates in the UK have been steady at approximately 80% over the course of six years.

## 2.4 Government grants for students

In Europe, in the Scandinavian countries such as Norway and Finland, students have the possibility to convert their loans into grants at the end of their study. This was also the case in the Netherlands from 1996 up till 2015 (for further details one can refer to the table 6 on page 20). However, since 2015 that is not the case anymore. Students that take the loan, will have to pay it back, however, the student travel product (transport with the OV) and grant can be turned into a gift if the student graduates within 10 years. If, however it takes the students longer than 10 years to graduate, then he will have to pay these back as well. This was an initiative taken by the Dutch government to tackle the culture of non-commitment, where students feel comfortable in postponing their graduation.

## 2.5 Main challenges in retaining students

On a general basis, according to HighPoint technology 2017, one of the main challenges that students face when attending their first year of higher education, is the lack of guidance. For students that have been living with their parents until they graduated high-school, this implies that they will have to learn how to be responsible living apart from their parents, while also handling all the new tasks represented by the studies and the life as a semi-independent adult.

Furthermore, according to Robert J. Sternberg, president of the Federation of Associations in Behavioural and Brain Sciences (FABBS), there is a group of psychological factors that explain the drop-out rates in higher-education. Other factors such as, social background factors and institutional factors also play a major role in student retention.

1) **Unfocused Knowledge of Studies Chosen:** Students enter a study without having the full set of skills for it (spotty knowledge).

2) **Misinformation as to what studying at a higher institution means:** Students underestimate the workload because the same amount of work done in high-school will not be enough.

3) **Responsibility:** Many students are unable to cope with the sudden amount of responsibilities, while others are.

4) **Self-efficacy:** According to Albert Bandura and some of his colleagues from Stanford University, self-efficacy is one of the best predictors of success in the working environment. (Strategies and Best Practices to Improve Student Retention and Engagement in Your University, 2016, p.9, para.3)

5) **Mindset:** Mindset is a very important and very often underestimated factor in student success. Carol Dweck author of "Mindset the New Psychology of Success", as cited by professor Sternberg, suggests that students can be classified in two major mindset types: Closed mindset and Growth mindset. Closed mindset means that students believe that their success is predetermined based on their natural abilities and talents, whereas a

Growth mindset is open to learning from mistakes and believes that there is always room for improvement.

6) **Inability to delay gratification:** In a study conducted by the FABBS it resulted that students that were able to delay gratification performed better than the ones that wanted it instantly.

7) **Impaired Ethical Judgement:** According to the FABBS, many students that do not understand the ethical issues behind plagiarizing and cheating on tests, are more prone to taking risky actions that could ultimately affect their opportunity to fulfil the studies.

8) **Disengagement from the University Environment:** According to this dimension, the universities' environment is crucial in fostering student success and keeping them at the institution.

9) **Lack of interest for the course:** Not many people will pursue a career in something they do not like in the first place.

10) **Issues in academic trajectory:** According to the FABBS, students are more likely to succeed if they have a goal in mind, if they have an idea of what kind of profession they can perform once done with their studies.

11) **Psychological Issues:** Anything that can affect the state of mind of a student can be considered a psychological issue/challenge, ranging from relationship issues, to psychological problems.

12) **Financial Concerns:** Some students drop out because they cannot afford going to college, paying their rent, while working part-time.

In addition to the psychological factors, there are two more factors that have an impact on students' success. These are namely, the social background of a student and institutional factors.

### 2.5.1 Social Background Factors

When discussing social background factors, there are two possible outcomes: either a positive or a negative incentive, depending on the origin of the individuals. When an individual is born and raised in a developed/prosperous society, the individual will be much more likely to succeed in his education and hence future career, whereas, individuals coming from less developed countries are usually less fortunate. In fact, "Students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds are less likely to complete their study programs and achieve other study outcomes" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014a; HEFCE, 2013).

### 2.5.2 Institutional Factors

According to the U-Planner e-book 2016, higher educations need to be prepared for challenges that foreign students bring with them. In fact, drop-out rates tend to be higher at the institutions that have not developed and/or implemented any student retention strategies. Therefore, it is crucial for any institution to develop student retention strategies to further student success (Strategies and Best Practices to Improve Student Retention and Engagement in Your University, 2016).

### 2.6 The bigger picture

After having defined student success and the main challenges in student retention, it is important to look at "study success" from a broader perspective. There are three interrelated levels regarding education and thus student success. The three levels are: firstly, the European Level, with EU legislation on education regarding funding and stimulation of growth of higher quality learning; secondly, the national level, where depending on the emphasis placed on higher education and the budget available, there will be more or less policies put in place; thirdly, the institutional level. Depending on whether the faculty has contracts and agreements with the government, which is the case for THUAS, there might be some government involvement or limitation, the rest remains up to the institution to deal with.

**Figure 3**



*Figure 3.* Displays the relation between national policies, institutional policies and the final outcome of study success. Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe) by Vossensteyn et Al. 2015, p. 27. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

## 2.6.1 European Level

On the European level, "Stimulating study success in higher education has become a more important policy issue in Europe during the last 15 years" (European Commission, 2010; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). "In order to achieve higher rates of tertiary degree holders, it is not enough just to increase access to higher education; students also have to be encouraged to complete a degree" (Kottmann et al., p. 6, para 1).

On a European level, there are currently "over 170 national and institutional policies that have been identified in 35 countries" (Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p.8, para. 2). Although these policies can greatly vary from each other, it is possible to sum them up into three main ones;

1)  Funding and financial incentives
2)  Information and support for students
3)  Organisation of higher education

Additionally, to address the issue in establishing a universal definition of student success "a recent report on computing and collecting data on completion rates and average duration in higher education concludes that the mentoring of study success and its calculation method need to be harmonized across Europe" (ICON & QUANTOS, 2015).

## 2.6.2 National Level

**Table 1**

*Relevance of Stimulation of Study Success on National Higher Education Policy Agenda*

| Compared to other issues that are currently important in higher education policies in your country, is the stimulation of study success high on the agenda of the responsible national authorities? | Countries |
|---|---|
| '5' very high on the agenda | Greece, England, France |
| '4' high on the agenda | Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Flanders (Belgium), Macedonia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden |
| '3' on the agenda | Ireland, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Luxemburg, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland |
| '2' only very little relevance on agenda | Bulgaria, Cyprus, Island, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Slovak Republic |
| '1' not at all on the agenda | Austria, Latvia, Turkey |

*Note.* Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe", Kottmann et al.,2015 p. 10. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

According to Table 1, the relevance of stimulation of study success on national higher education policy agendas is a four out of five, which shows that the stimulation of study success in higher education is high on the Dutch national agenda. In fact, "Most expenditure on education in the Netherlands comes from public sources at all levels of education; 82% of spending from primary to tertiary comes from public sources, just under the OECD average of 85%" (Education at a Glance 2017)

**Table 2**

*Policies and Regulations on Study Success, Study Success Related to the Funding of Higher Education Institutions*

| Country | National Policies on study success in place | National regulations on study success in place | Funding of higher education institutions related to study success | Most important stakeholders engaging in implementing measures to improve study success* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Netherlands | Yes | Yes | Yes | Universities/other HEI/Governmental Authorities |

*Note*. Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe" Kottmann et al., 2015 p. 11. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

According to Table 2, for the Netherlands there are national policies on study success in place, as well as national regulation on study success and funding of higher education institutions related to study success. Additionally, the table also points out the most important stakeholders in engaging and implementing measures to improve study success. In the Netherlands these are Universities, other Higher Education Institutions and Governmental Authorities.

### 2.6.3 Institutional Level

According to the Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2009 (as cited in Vossensteyn et al, 2015, p.19, para. 4) :

> Evidence from the UK Germany and the Netherlands, identifies institutional commitment to improving study success to be vital. This includes the priority given to study success and the associated expenditure; the choice and organisation of academic programmes; a strong culture of student-centred learning and teacher professionalization.

### 2.6.4 Recent Data from the Netherlands

**Table 3**

*Completion rate in the Netherlands in 2015*

| Country | Completion rate | Method | Time span | Type of degree | Definition | Time series ? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NL | 70,9% (univ.) 65,2% (UAS) | TC | Beginner cohort 2010, after 4 years | BA | The number of national students who get a bachelor degree C years after re-enrolment after the first year of entry, where C is the standard period of study (UAS: 4 years, university: 3 years). | Yes |

*Note.* Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe", Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p. 34. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

With help of Table 3, one can observe that at the end of the period of observation the completion rate for a Bachelor of Arts in The Netherlands for regular universities was 70.9%, whereas the completion rate for universities of applied sciences was slightly inferior by 5.7% at 65.2%. This shows that there is still room for improvement on both academic levels.

**Table 4**

*Time-to-degree Rate in the Netherlands for the Year 2015*

| Country | Time-to-degree | unit | Degree | Year | Definition | Time series available |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NL | 5,1 (UAS) 5,3 (Uni) | Years | UAS: 1st BA Uni: 1st MA | Beginners of 2013 | Expected time-to-degree. | yes |

*Note.* Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe", Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p. 36. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

In Table 4 instead, one can observe the completion rates for the Netherlands in 2015, which are based on the time it took a student to obtain a degree. Interestingly, the time-to-degree completion rate for universities of applied sciences is slightly better with 5.1 years' average, than that of regular universities, with 5.3 years' average.

## 2.7 Education in the Netherlands

The education policy in the Netherlands is coordinated by the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science, alongside with government municipalities. Education in the Netherlands is compulsory for children of all nationalities aged five to eighteen, residing in the Netherlands. This is known as the concept of *leerplicht* (compulsory education). It is important to include this information because the way the Dutch education system is structured, directly affects the type and number of students that will be able to apply at an institution, already creating a noticeable difference between applications at a research university and a university of applied sciences.

In fact, according to van Mameren (2017):

> A 2017 education ministry report, found that Dutch school standards varied considerably and that school choice could significantly impact a child's future, with pupils of equal skill scoring some 10–20 percentage points less on key tests as a result of primary school management and teaching, influencing pupils to enter further education phases on lower levels and making it unlikely to catch up (para. 3).

## 2.7.1 Primary education

Primary education in the Netherlands consists of eight years, after these eight initial years, all students enrolled in a Dutch school take the so called CITO test. This acronym stand for the Dutch

*Centrale Eindtoets Basisonderwijs,* which in English translates to "Central End Test for Primary Education".

This is a so-called aptitude test which determines on which academic path students will be able to embark. The teacher's opinion, combined with the CITO aptitude test, determines the level of secondary education that a pupil will be able to attend.

### 2.7.2 Secondary Education

At the age of 12, pupils choose from vocational or pre-university diplomas based on their ability under the Dutch education system. In the first years, all pupils study the same subjects known as the *basisvorming* (Basic Education), followed by a second stage in which students choose a specialist profile.

In secondary education, there are four different levels. Firstly, there is VMBO, which stands for *Voorbereidend Middelbaar BeroepsOnderwijs* which in English translates to preparatory middle-level vocational education. Secondly, there is MBO. MBO stands for *Middelbaar BeroepsOndewijs,*

in English, Middle-level vocation education. Thirdly, there is HAVO which stands for *Hoger* Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs, in English, Higher General Continued Education. "Senior general secondary Dutch education, which provides entrance to higher professional education (hoger beroepsonderwijs HBO) at vocational universities" (van Memeren, 2017, para. 40).

### 2.7.3 Tertiary Education

Lastly, once a student has concluded secondary education, depending on the academic path the student was able to embark on, there will be two options of tertiary education at disposal. The two options are HBO and WO. The highest level of education being, VWO, Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (in English, Pre-university Education). An education at VWO level "prepares students for academic studies at a research university" (van Mameren, 2017, para. 41). Followed by HBO, hoger beroepsonderwijs, which are all the universities of applied sciences, where there is a focus on vocational skills.

One can refer to Appendix X which illustrates the entire Dutch education system from primary education, all the way to tertiary education.

## 2.8 Government funding in the Netherlands

According to the annual report of THUAS for 2015, THUAS is a government-funded institution, where the faculty receives additional money from the government for each enrolled student. In fact, according to R. Rawal (personal communication, November 13, 2017) THUAS receives approximately Euros 5,000 per student, which in addition to the student's tuition fees of approximately Euros 2,000, is according to A. Noordam (personal communication, November 9, 2017) one of the two main financial income flows of THUAS. Given that THUAS is a government funded university, this means that the drop-out or retention rates have been integrated into the formula that defines student success in higher education. The reason for the integration of both these components into the formula, is that it serves as an incentive for institutions to care about study success and the implementation of policies aimed at improving results. However, given that each institution has characteristics which differentiate it from other institutions, the decision as to what instruments the faculty should implement, are left to the faculties themselves. In the Netherlands specifically, several institutions including THUAS, have so called "Performance Contracts" with the government. These performance contracts evaluate and reward initiatives taken by faculties that implement measures for study success and/or student retention. Within these performance contracts, the number of ECTS credits obtained measures the students' performance.

In addition, according to the Kottmann et al. (2015):

> There are only a few examples of countries where the rate of withdrawal has a direct effect on funding, like institutional funding for teaching in Italy and in The Netherlands considers student withdrawal and study success. However, in the Netherlands timely completion is used as an indicator, and this is related to performance agreements between the government and the institution (p. 33, para 5).

**Table 5**

*List of National Funding Policies Summed Up*

| Student financial support rewarding study progress and (timely) completion | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress dependent financial support for students** | These kind of funding policies for students make the financial support dependent on the progress or achievements of the student. This is mostly done continuously, i.e. students have to prove that they have achieved the required number of credit points after every semester/study year. These policies reward extra funds or bonuses for completion in the nominal study period or even earlier. | Faster study progress and reduced time-to-degree | time-to-degree | Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, |
| **Turning loans into grants** | Student funding is used to reward desired behaviour or to penalize undesired behaviour of students. Rewarding means that loans are turned into grants when a student meets pre-set requirements (for example completing a degree within a certain period of time or passing a given proportion of credits per year). | Faster study progress; more students that complete; more students that complete within the nominal duration of studies and high/outstanding grades. | time-to-degree | Netherlands (1996 - 2015), Norway (since 2003) |
| **Funding model rewarding quality, study progress and (timely) completion** | These funding instruments mostly comprise performance-based funding or performance agreements. Such funding formulas include indicators for the number of graduates (completing in the nominal study period), the number of re-enrolments and achieved credit points. This policy type also includes funding instruments that penalize dropouts. Performance agreements often include a wider set of indicators or areas where institutions seek improvements in order to strengthen education quality and study success. This includes also teaching qualifications, innovative teaching methods as well as dropout, retention and completion rates. | Stimulating higher education institutions to take greater responsibility for developing instruments to better address the study success of their students | time-to-degree | Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Flanders, France, Germany (majority of the states), Greece, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland |

*Note*: Reporting from National Experts (2nd HEDOCE questionnaire, 2014), Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe", Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p. 41. Copyright 2015, European Union. Reprinted with permission.

Table 5, displays all the national funding policies in place to reward study progress and timely completion in the Netherlands and other countries. With the help of the table one can see that in the Netherlands there are three main funding policies in place for rewarding student success. The first policy, makes the financial support for students dependent on their progress, so they only get rewarded if they perform adequately. The second policy instead, which is no longer valid, gave students the opportunity to turn loans into grants. According to this policy, students that are not successful have to repay the financial support provided by the government. Thus, the student's success will determine whether the financial support provided by the government will be considered a loan or a grant. Lastly, the third policy, is a funding model that rewards the quality, study progress and timely completion of students. This is achieved through the performance based contracts between government and institution.

**Table 6**

*National Study Success Policies in Organization of Higher Education*

| Policy | Description of policy | Expected effect | Main study success orientation addressed | Countries implemented |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Allow institutions to restrict access to higher education | Policies that allow higher education institutions to select the best/most suitable students for their study programmes, mostly based on their prior academic achievements. | To stimulate more deliberate study choices among students. To select students with adequate cognitive and motivational competences to complete the programme. To increase students' costs to switch between programmes. | Completion | Austria, Netherlands, Sweden (England/Ireland have this tradition longer) |
| Access - matching students and study programmes | Measures to achieve the best fit of the student's competences, motivations and expectations and the requirements of the study programme | Achieve a better match of students' competences and requirements of the study programme. Stimulate reflected study choices. Stimulating early dropouts. Shorten time-to-degree | Time-to-degree | Netherlands |
| Changes in degree structure | Changes in the degree structure to address different demands of students: e.g. more professionally and vocationally oriented courses; provides students extra time to specialise or to even build their own study programme. | Shorten time-to-degree. Avoid dropout and increase completion by better meeting the demands of students, including more vocationally relevant offers. Allow students to specify their study choice while studying. Avoid dropouts caused by overspecialisation, and allow easier recognition of diploma by future employers. | Time-to-degree | France, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia |
| Curriculum design | Changes in the academic curriculum to better address the needs and requirements of students | Continuous assessment supports students to develop self-awareness of their competences. To force early dropouts/switches rather than late ones. Special design of the early phase of study in HE to help students develop academic competences, to integrate in the program and to inform their choices | Time-to-degree | Austria, Estonia, France, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, Serbia, Sweden |

*Note.* Reporting from National Experts (2nd HEDOCE questionnaire, 2014), Reprinted from "Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe", Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p. 51. Copyright 2015, EU. Reprinted with permission.

Table 6, displays the national study success policies in place for the organization of higher education across Europe. The original table contains several more policies, but since they have not been implemented in the Netherlands, they have not been considered here. In total, there are four policies that have been applied in the Netherlands, however not all of them are being made use of by THUAS. For instance, under the first policy listed, THUAS would be able to be selective when assessing enrolments for the ES course: however, under Dutch law if a student meets the entry requirements the student will be automatically accepted by the faculty. Therefore, unless ES changes entry criteria, it cannot be highly selective. The second point instead, access-matching between students and programs, was first introduced by the Utrecht and inspired a nationwide policy. This way, the institutions try to create a perfect fit between prospective students and the course they applied for. Thirdly, changes in degree structure (which should be one of the strengths of ES) may help keeping students interested and engaged in the program they have chosen by providing a vast list of choices to personalize their own study course. Lastly, the fourth implemented policy is, curriculum design: under this policy, the institutions try to engage with their students and assess their performance early in the program, in order to avoid late switches or encourage early ones.

## 2.9 Performance Contracts in the Netherlands

A performance contract is an agreement between the Dutch government and Dutch institutions of Higher Education, such as THUAS. In these performance-based contracts, "study progress" or "study success" can be measured in terms of ECTS obtained by the student.

Across Europe these contracts are not always existent. Their presence is determined by the extent of government involvement. In Ireland for example, funding depends on the number of students enrolled at the institution. However, to receive funding, these institutions must deliver a yearly summary of the students retained to display their performance. Within Europe, there are namely two countries where the student withdrawal/drop-out rate has direct effect on funding. These two countries are Italy and the Netherlands (Kottman et al., 2015, p. 33).

When taking this statement under the lens, one can observe that in a course such as European Studies, this must have a huge impact on THUAS' funding for students, given that according to both interviewees Noordam and Rawal, after the first year of ES, approximately 50% of students drop out. Hence, for every student that drops out, Euros 5,000 of government funding are lost.

Furthermore, part of the performance contracts in the Netherlands are not only the ECTS credits obtained by a student, but also the timely completion of the study, which relates to whether the student graduated within the nominal study time, usually ranging from three to four and a half years-time from the start of the program. For THUAS the nominal study time is four and a half to five years.

According to Kottmann et al. (2015):

> In the Netherlands, all higher education institutions were included in performance agreements with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in autumn 2012. In 2011, there was a collective agreement made between the ministry and associations of universities and universities of applied sciences. That set the stage for creating performance agreements for individual institutions. Performance agreements contain individual targets for each Dutch institution, based on their unique situations, missions and goals and scores on the indicators (p. 47, para. 3).

## 3. Methodology

Now that the base for an understanding of the topic has been provided, the next step will focus on explaining the research methods made use of. Two main approaches were taken to collect information: desk research and field research. The limitations encountered during the research as well as the motivation behind the research methods will be described separately in the following sections.

### 3.1 Desk Research

Desk research formed the base of this dissertation. It consisted of online research on search engines, such as Google Scholar and the regular Google. Both search engines have been used, as Google Scholar provides more reliable literature, with e-books and scientific papers, compared to the regular Google which was useful in finding links to the university's websites and existing pdfs that have explored the topic before. Furthermore, through the desk research a good understanding of the concept was grasped. This ultimately sparked the initiative of field research in the form of interviews.

### 3.2 Literature Review

The importance of the sub-questions lies within the connection between them. As they are interrelated, answering each question individually enables the possibility of answering the main research question with more accuracy. The first question for example, enables us to define what "success" is and why it is important. This first step must be taken before being able to understand how to improve this point. Secondly, outlaying the main challenges in general and for ES specifically is of utmost relevance as it shows the current issues which hold back the numbers of success. Thirdly, the best practices have been examined because they represent examples of other universities concerned with the same topic, serving thus as a benchmark for THUAS. Lastly, both the initiatives which have already been taken, as well as the question which initiatives THUAS can still consider, have been looked at.

## 3.3 Field Research

Field research was deemed a necessary step to obtain information about the data that cannot be found in the reports, such as the amount of government funding obtained per student, the main pitfalls and challenges of the ES course, initiatives already taken by the faculty and so forth. Additional reasons for the choice of field research in the form of interviews, was reaping personal insight of the interviewees.

The conducted field research consisted of a total of four interviews, three with THUAS staff from different departments and one with a former ES student. The three current employees at THUAS have been working at the university for several years already, which ensured that they were knowledgeable candidates. All four interviews were semi-structured, meaning that some questions were specific and related to findings from the literature review (e.g. THUAS annual report 2015), while some other questions were left open on purpose, to engage in more of a conversation with the interviewee. Leaving room for open questions, offered the opportunity to ask new questions based on fresh information obtained during the interviews.

## 3.4 Limitations

Fortunately, the limitations encountered during the research were few fortunately, the main one being in the phase of field research. An attempt at reaching out to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was made.  Unfortunately, however, a negative response was obtained, stating that they were receiving too many requests and therefore did not have time to meet an additional one. It could have been interesting to interview someone in charge or someone who was knowledgeable about the impact of the policies implemented by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Additionally, in the section related to the competitive landscape, data retrieved from the Nationale Studenten Enquete (NSE) has been made use of. However, the issue/limitation with this data is that every outcome obtained by the survey comprises a vastly varying number of respondents. For example, while ES at THUAS had a total of 695 respondents, comparatively smaller universities such as Leeuwarden only had 70 respondents. While the results are still representative of the faculty and course, they are less accurate than when there is more data available. Here the importance of the NSE should be highlighted. In fact, according to D. van Ginhoven (personal communication, December 14, 2017), "The NSE gets used by all these websites like *studiekeuze*, it is also used by

the media to rank programs. And they rank the programs in the media in terms of quality, but the NSE does not measure quality".

An additional limitation to the research is the precision of the reported drop-out numbers. As mentioned earlier, the drop-out rate of ES at THUAS after the first year is approximately 50%, which means that 50% of students flow to the second year. However, since THUAS is a university of applied sciences, in these 50% "drop-outs" there are several students calculated as real drop-outs, when in reality they successfully completed their first year to obtain the *properdeuze* (1st year diploma) for subsequently moving onto a research university. For many of these students this was a pre-determined objective when they applied for ES.

Note: Extensive data comprising the students' grades and progress was kindly provided by Mr. Noordam on request; however, this data was not properly considered as in the end it was not deemed necessary to discuss the issue at hand. In fact, it could have been interesting to analyse this data in detail in order to, for instance, find out for instance which courses students persistently scored the lowest and at what stage in the program the main challenges were encountered.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Why is it important for universities to have a high student success and satisfaction rate?

If student success determines the faculty's success, then it can be said that student success directly influences an institution's performance. In fact, according to HighPoint Technology 2017:

> Where there is money, so will be the focus. As rankings and funding help keep institutions viable and attractive, the student's success has transitioned merely from graduating to embracing the student's entire educational journey from application acceptance through graduate and alumni status. It is in the institution's best interest to put the student's best interest first and foremost (para. 3, 2017).

Furthermore:

> Strategies for engagement enforce the development of student engagement, then improve the quality of the academic experience in students, help increase student retention and contribute to strengthening the relationship between a university and its students and alumni, which is an important factor of higher education institution reputation (p. 16, 2016).

Moreover, as discovered during the personal interview with van Ginhoven, it is important for universities in the Netherlands to have a high student satisfaction rate, as it directly affects the universities' or courses' rankings. As stated earlier, Ginhoven argued that satisfaction and quality are two very different things. A high satisfaction rate does not guarantee a high-quality course and vice-versa, yet it remains important for institutions.

An additional problem of the NSE is that it is a voluntary satisfaction survey. Usually people with negative opinions take their time to fill in the survey, which becomes problematic when considering that the survey directly affects the program's reputation and ranking, which are used by future employers. "It is actually in your interest, for the results to be positive. It will hurt my reputation if the numbers are low" (D. van Ginhoven, personal communication, December 14, 2017).

## 4.2 What are best practices associated with student success?

According to the National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice, developed at the Indiana University for Postsecondary Research in the U.S. (IUCPR, 2011), there are five national benchmarks that can be directly associated with student success.

1) Level of Academic Challenge
2) Collaborative Learning
3) Student Interaction with Faculty Members
4) Enriching Educational Experience
5) Supportive Campus Environment

In short, the **Level of Academic Challenge** can be described as the time a student needs to invest to study for exams and assignments and in class preparation in general. One can assume that the more time a student spends studying, the higher the Academic Challenge.

**Collaborative Learning** instead, as the name suggests, consists of the students' interaction with each other on a daily base, which however does not limit itself to students from the same class, but students in general. This refers thus to the social aspects of the studies.

**Student Interaction with Faculty Members**, refers support received from faculty members, which helps students feel validated and stay motivated in their studies.

**Enriching Educational Experience** means fostering a healthy relationship between students and student groups at the faculty (e.g. HEBOS at THUAS) as well as relationships with other academic bodies outside of the faculty.

**Supportive Campus Environments.** This dimension refers to the overall opinion a student has about their faculty. This includes their interaction with administrative staff and teaching staff, which in the Netherlands ultimately compiles the results of the NSE.

*If the five elements above were properly addressed by institutions of higher learning, then the right conditions for the creation of student success and retention initiatives would exist.*

## 4.3 What initiatives can ES coordinators take?

According to Joe Cuseo, author of the paper "Student Success: Definition, Outcomes, Principles and Practices" (n.d.), in addition to the seven principles of student success, there are seven properties of successful program delivery.

1) **Intentional:** This means that the programs offered by the institution are student-centred. They do not revolve around a series of given procedures but rather on the positive outcome of students.

2) **Proactive:** The institution is proactive and not reactive in determining the students' needs. This translates in educational adjustments being made for students before they point them out. Furthermore, a proactive faculty attitude should also entail proactive support, especially during the first year, where it is most likely to have a deep impact on the students' behaviour. In fact, according to Noel (1994, p.6), "in retention, a minimal investment can put into place some practical approaches. Our experience shows that even a modest investment in these critical entry-level services and programs can have a high payoff in terms of student retention".

3) **Intrusive:** An intrusive approach is once again a proactive approach. Under this approach, the faculty, staff and teachers are responsible for reaching out to students to help and support them instead of waiting for students to come to them seeking help. Besides ensuring that a greater number of students obtain help under this approach, because some students do not dare to ask out of insecurity or shyness, it will also help the student feel validated and cared for by the institution. Ultimately this can be beneficial to both the students and the institution.

4) **Diversified**: This dimension refers to the course content and teaching style. Teachers and faculty staff need to be able to recognize that each class is composed by students with different backgrounds. The attention to this factor is important as every cultural background leads to a different outcome. Students from different countries have grown up learning things in a different manner, therefore there is no single universal way of teaching subjects. Diversified course programming thus means acknowledging the students' unique characteristics and addressing the challenges they face at the different stages of their academic journey.

5) **Collaborative:** Effective course coordination and student support can only be achieved if there is a high communication between the different departments at the university. In fact, according to Braxton and Mundy (2001, p. 94), "The most meaningful and far-reaching institutional efforts call for collaboration within university divisions and departments. These relationships are imperative to effective retention programs and efforts" .

6) **Centralized:** "When a program is situated centrally and deeply within the institution's structure, the program becomes institutionalized, thereby ensuring its stability and durability" (Cuseo, n.d.)**.**

7) **Empirical (or Evidentiary):** This dimension suggests that, "Effective programming is supported with and driven by assessment data that are used to "sum up" and prove the program's overall impact or value, and to "form" the program as part of an ongoing process of continuous quality improvement" (Astin, 1985, p. 77). In fact, "One common characteristic of campuses with significantly higher graduation rates is that they systematically collect information and continually revisit and rework policies and practices to improve" (Kuh, et al., 2005, p. 156).

This is also the case for THUAS. By now, ES has been offered for around ten years, and the course content and structure has been revised continuously (almost on a yearly basis). Empirical data is also collected by the study delay team, which creates excel spreadsheets with each student's performance over the years. This allows for a yearly comparison of numbers of students enrolled, students quitting, students graduating and students with a study delay, as well as the results and number of ECTS credits obtained by each student.

## 4.4 What initiatives has THUAS already taken to further student success within ES?

According to van Ginhoven, who amongst other things is a member of the marketing team at THUAS, one of the several initiatives taken was to transform the perception of ES as "broad" to ES as "very customizable", by making the option of being able to choose a variety of minors a unique selling point.

Because according to D. van Ginhoven (personal communication, December 14, 2017):

> The labour market of the 21$^{st}$ century is not a labour market that is looking for people that only know how to do one thing. They are looking for people who are able to do a bunch of different things and people who are skilled at adapting to new environments so that they can continue to change and grow.

Students at ES get to choose: - Their specialization - Languages – The courses during exchange - Minors - The kind of placement they are going to do and where (inside or outside of NL), and lastly – The topic choice for the final paper. Which altogether amounts to a large customizability.

Additional steps were taken to narrow down what ES entails, because ES is not as broad as it seems. As mentioned by van Ginhoven during the interview, research was conducted and the team found out that ES prepares people for four very broad types of jobs.

1) **Management jobs**: running or helping to run an organization, company, business, government or institution.

2) **Marketing**

3) **Communications and public relations**, which is similar to marketing but still entails different aspects.

4) **Policy advice**: doing research and advising an organization.

These are the areas where people work, and this is slowly being laid out more clearly in the marketing material promoting the course.

Several years ago ES saw the introduction of "the big book of European studies", which is a booklet written in a style that anybody could use to understand what ES is about. This includes people who are looking at study programs to choose, but also current students and even teachers who want to be reminded of what the big picture of the program is.

A result of the interview with Rawal was that, in addition to the big book of ES, THUAS has invested a considerable sum of money in trying to engage the university staff in "repackaging/refiguring" themselves. 2017/18 was the first year that saw the introduction of a "mission, vision and values document". It entails a new educational vision, which did not exist before. "We had an educational framework before, but we never had a vision, and with this vision, it is hopefully going to remove a lot of the issues" (R. Rawal, personal communication, November 13, 2017).

Moreover, although the *studiekeuze* is not regulated by the university, non-Dutch students will have to start taking it next year. The *studiekeuz*e check will be required when you register in Studielink to complete your registration. The survey asks prospective students if they got enough information before making their decision, it asks questions such as, "did you go to the open day?", "did you visit the trial day?", and more exploratory questions of this kind.

However, according to van Ginhoven the *studiekeuze* is not a very useful mechanism as it is basically just a procedural step where many students regularly just tick "yes, yes, yes" as answer for every question. So even if a student has completed all these steps, this does still not guarantee that the program will be a good match for the student. Therefore, there currently is a project under way where possibilities are being discussed as to what can be improved and/or changed. The objective of this project is to ameliorate the quality of the *studiekeuze* by creating a separate survey which is not regulated by the studielink website. In this alternative survey, questions would be more in relation to the content of the program and the skills of the students, for example "do you enjoy language learning?". In the case of the answer being "no", a direct response would be that ES is not the right course for that student as ES revolves vastly around languages. This questionnaire would have more of a student/university matching dimension compared to the *studiekeuze,* which is more procedural.

Other important initiatives that deserve to be mentioned are the creation of an online community with the help of a Facebook group, the alumni ambassadors project and the change in admission criteria for the work placement.

The aim of the Facebook group was to create a real community for students where they can help each other with matters such exam registrations, but also where debates can be held and topics not necessarily related to the studies can be discussed. Motivation behind the creation of this group was the fact that it is very difficult to build a community, especially because the students at THUAS are very diverse.

The Alumni ambassadors project, is a very recent project I have personally been invited to take part of. It mainly consists in helping the promotion and content clarification of ES for prospective students, and it also entails tasks such as attending the open days, where prospective students come for information.

Lastly, the admission criteria for the placement have changed. In fact, according to A. Noordam (personal communication, November 9, 2017):

> Last year the fourth-year students, only half of them were allowed to go to do their placement. What were criteria, they have been changed now. Last year the criteria were that you had to finish all the second-year courses. This year you only need to have a certain amount of credits.

## 4.5 What are the main challenges for THUAS students within the ES course?

This section of the report was answered through a combination of desk research and field research. The desk research consisted in the analysis of van Ginhoven's paper "Exploring why students leave?" (2017). In this paper, van Ginhoven explored the main causes for students not following through with the enrollment at ES, and the main causes for students who decide to quit ES during the first or subsequent years. The field research instead, was used to obtain more information outside of van Ginhoven's paper, and was achieved by means of personal interviews with three staff members and one former ES student.

In the report "Exploring why students leave", van Ginhoven made use of survey data for both 2016 and 2017, which can be seen reported in Table 8 below.

**Table 7**

*Displays the Number of Respondents per Year, per Question, in theYears 2016 and 2017*

| Number of Respondents | Year | Did you follow through with ES? | Did it meet your expectations? |
|---|---|---|---|
| 263 | **2016** | 73% yes, 15% no, 12% other reasons | |
| 183 | **2016** | | 78% yes, 22% no |
| 100 | **2017** | 72% yes, 14% different program 14% no | |
| 44 | **2017** | | 90% yes, 9% no, 1% other |

*Note*. Information retrieved from "Exploring Why Students Leave", D. van Ginhoven 2017.

As can be seen in Table 7, although the number of respondents varies drastically, the results for the question whether students had followed through with ES are almost identical between data from 2016 and 2017 with around 72% of respondents saying yes, and the remaining 28% saying "no" or having chosen a different program to follow. Additionally, to obtain a fuller and more

comprehensive picture of the issues and challenges that students face within the program of ES, van Ginhoven also distributed the so called "exit survey". The exit survey was only handed out to former European Studies students, and although the number of respondents was low (with 47 respondents), it is still sufficiently representative of students who decided to quit the ES program.

From the 46 respondents, 38 left by choice, whereas the other eight were advised to leave (or expelled) because of a negative binding study advice (NBSA). For the purpose of this research, the respondents that did not leave by choice, were excluded from the remaining research as the focus were students that left by choice.

The remaining 38 respondents provided some information as to why they decided to quit the program, with 11 respondents giving more specific and individual answers as to why they quit.

For the sake of this report, the comments that coincide with the challenges laid out in section 2.5, have been reported beneath. All statements were retrieved from the report "exploring why students leave" and were reported anonymously.

a) "The program didn't turn out to be the way I had expected and didn't fit my vision of what I wanted for myself in the future".
→ **Issues in academic trajectory**: Lack of a clear scope.

b) "There was only theoretical stuff and nothing practical. I was getting bored because of this. The French class was too easy so there I was bored also".
→ **Level of Academic Challenge**: The amount of time a student needs to invest to study for exams and assignments and in class preparation in general, assuming, that the more time a student spends, the higher the Academic Challenge.

a) "I had the feeling that they informed me so badly during the open days, because of the conversations during that day I had with students I decided to do ES, but when I started it was so different".
→ **Unfocused Knowledge of Studies Chosen:** Students enter a study without knowing what exactly it entails and without having the full set of skills for it.

c) "I felt like a number and there was no guidance from the school for my problems. Even after reaching out to teachers/confidential advisors/exam board".

→ **Disengagement from the University Environment:** The universities' environment is crucial in fostering student success.

As can be seen there is strong affinity with the framework laid out in section 2.5 and the comments given by students who quit the ES course.

Furthermore, van Ginhoven's paper also briefly analyses the so called "push-factors", in other words the factors which made students leave ES. Out of 24 respondents, 11 gave reasons that they believe the ES faculty should be aware of. Some of the reasons were already mentioned in the previous part of this section, however, seeing them again, underscores their importance.

a) "Serious negligence from the teacher's side for my problems. Especially for not having the possibility to have a sit down, which feels like not being taken serious".

b) "Study delay because I wasn't allowed to go on exchange multiple times, so I decided to follow my heart".

At this stage, it could be interesting to draw a comparison between the results of van Ginhoven's "Exploring why students leave" as well as other research results and the one personal interview with a former ES student, Valentina Horvathova. The motivation behind this interview was to examine whether there were common points with the report's content and results of the conducted desk research.

The interviewee, 23-year-old Valentina Horvathova, started the ES program in the academic year of 2016/2017 and decided to quit in November of the 1st semester in the second year. When asked why she decided to quit, she stated what has been mentioned multiple times in van Ginhoven's report, namely that the program was too broad and she felt that it did not give her a clear sense of purpose. "Everybody is talking about options but there aren't that many" (V. Horvathova, personal communication, December 11, 2017). Interestingly, she quit the program at the beginning of the second year and not at the end of the first year. This is significant because during the interview she stated that she only obtained 49 ECTS credits in the first year and therefore had a negative BSA which led to her meeting with the program committee. This suggests that although she did not meet the criteria, she was determined to continue her study.

Therefore, to find out whether there were other factors for her leaving in play besides the broadness of the program, the interviewee was asked whether she was an engaged student, and more precisely whether she would frequently interact with peers and faculty staff or not. The response to this question provided new insight as to what led to her disengagement.

She stated that she was very involved during the first year. However, the changes at the beginning of the second year led to her becoming a student that would attend classes, but leave the university immediately afterwards. The biggest change she pointed out was the change in classes, as she ended up being the only international student in a class with other 20 Dutch students.

The interview conducted with V. Horvathova shows that there always is a main motive as to why students leave. However, the conviction behind this motive increases with the influence of other factors, in this case the internationality issue in classes. This suggests that, if a student is uncertain about the continuation of the study, a caring environment could provide the right stimulation for overcoming those uncertainties and foster the motivation to continue.

*All in all, it can be said that the challenges that students are facing within the ES program broadly correspond to the challenges that have been identified on a general scale across Europe.*

## 4.6 Is there a correlation between entry requirements and student success?

Firstly, a brief definition of the term entry requirements is called for. Entry requirements are usually set by the institution to more carefully select applicants for specific programs. Entry requirements can be prior achievements, like high grades in specific subjects, and are more likely to be in place at regular Universities than at Universities of Applied Sciences such as THUAS. This is related to the quality of learning as well as the maximum capacity of classes.

The idea behind the implementation of entry requirements originates in two convictions. Firstly, the belief that the better a student, the higher the probability of the student successfully finishing the program. Secondly, the belief that students will select their study program of choice more carefully, thus resulting in less students dropping out or switching program and/or institution.

 "Experiences have shown that completion rates in selective programmes are higher than in non-selective programmes" (Kottman, p. 54, para. 4). Although selection or restriction policies are not per se study success policies, they have the potential to increase the number of students succeeding. In fact, according to Vossensteyn et al. (2015):

> Broad entry years may help students who were uncertain about the exact direction of their study choice. Matching students and study programmes before entering higher education is an effective 'soft selection' mechanism to get students at the 'right study place'. Matching instruments however need to be able to find the best match between programme and student rather than the best student. (p. 71, para. 2)

However, according to Vossensteyn et al. (2015):

> For The Netherlands, a change in the selection procedures is planned for 2017. Currently 10% of the programmes are 'numerus fixus' programmes for which there is a central weighted ballot system giving GPA ≥ 8.0 giving a 100 per cent acceptance guarantee (centrale loting numerusfixusopleidingen). In 2017, this will be substituted by a decentralized selection mechanisms giving institutions more freedom to select students applying for programmes with limited enrolment capacity. This should increase completion rate because students will then be selected based on school results, their motivation and personality traits as well as criteria that fit the purposes and goals of the institutions or programmes. (p. 54, para. 5)

Increasing student diversity through widening access policies may reduce study success, e.g. as a consequence of lack of study skills or preparation for higher education (Heublein et al., 2003).

Additionally, as discussed during section 2.7 according to the European Commission (2014):

> There are also differences between countries in how many entry routes there are to higher education, which can contribute to study diversity. In Italy, Greece and many of the Central and Eastern European countries there is only one entry route to higher education, while many countries in Western Europe have alternative routes to higher education, other than completion of upper secondary school". (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014: 22).

It is also important to note that, "Alternative routes increase opportunities for more non-traditional students to enter higher education, but these students may not be as well prepared for higher education and this can have a negative impact on retention and completion" (Helland, 2005; Heublein et al., 2003 as cited in Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p. 18).

As discussed during the personal interview with Rawal, this is the part of selectivity that THUAS cannot choose. "So, if somebody applies, and meets the entry criteria/requirements, we have to let them in" (R. Rawal, personal communication, November 13, 2017). Unfortunately, this does not ensure a guaranteed match between student and program.

## 4.7 Competitive Landscape

This section of the report will discuss which other universities in the Netherlands offer European Studies at a bachelor of arts level and how they compare to each other in terms of student numbers and satisfaction on the National Studenten Enquete (NSE) as displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*University Comparison on Student Progression Path for the ES Course*

| University | Total Student Population | Students in ES 1st year | Flow to second year | Diploma within 4 years | Diploma within 5 years | NSE overall satisfaction (2017) | Required ECTS for positive BSA first year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *University of Amsterdam (UvA)* | 32.000 (2016) | 660 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | 4.03 | 48 |
| *Maastricht University* | 16.861 (2016) | 313 | 74% | 83% | X | 4.0 | 42 |
| *Noordelijke Hogeschool Leuuwarden (NHL)* | 12.000 | 144 | 52% | X | 34% | 3.6 | 51 |
| *ZUYD university of Applied Sciences* | 14.000 | 134 | 68% | X | 37% | 3.86 | X |
| *The Hague University of Applied Sciences* | 25.500 (2015) | 436 | 50% | X | 35% | 3.8 | 50 |

*Note.* Own analysis based on data retrieved from various sources (NSE & respective university websites)

The bachelor's programme European Studies in Maastricht is ranked on the 1st place in the European Studies category of the Dutch University Guide: *Keuzegids* 2018.

After careful observation of the competitive landscape, one can see that Maastricht University has the highest flow of students going into the second year with 74% which is a staggering 24% more than ES at THUAS. Additionally, the percentage of students obtaining a diploma within four years is at an astounding 83%, whereas at THUAS it is less than half at only 35% in five years' time.

The higher rate of students passing into the second year at Maastricht University might be related to the required amount of ECTS to pass the first year, which at 42 ECTS is the lowest number compared to all other universities represented in the table. Moreover, amongst the listed courses, THUAS has the lowest flow of students to the second year with 50%, followed by Leeuwarden at 52% and ZUYD university with 68%.

**Table 9**

*THUAS Internal Comparison*

| Course | Students Enrolled | NSE overall satisfaction | Flow to second year | Diploma within 5 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| European Studies | 436 | 3.8 | 50% | 35% |
| Social Work | 302 | 3.9 | 57% | 37% |
| International Business | 433 | 3.8 | 55% | 23% |
| Human Resource Management | 156 | 3.7 | 71% | 23% |
| Accountancy | 172 | 3.8 | 46% | 7% |

*Note.* Data retrieved from NSE website.

The internal comparison with other courses shows that overall, THUAS has low percentage rates of students flowing to the second year, except for the course of Human Resource Management where the flow-to-second-year percentage is 72%. However, here it is interesting to note that HRM has the lowest overall satisfaction rate of the five courses represented, and only 23% of students in HRM will obtain their diploma within five years (Studiekeuze123.nl, 2017), which is less than ES. Additionally, one can observe that out of the listed courses, Accountancy has an even lower flow to second year compared to ES and only 7% of students graduating within five years. This, however, might be because of the more challenging nature of the course.

The data represented in Table 9 suggests that the issue of student retention goes far beyond the ES course, but comprises several courses at THUAS.

**Table 10**

*National Comparison for ES, Based on Dutch Average with NSE data*

|  | **THUAS** (score out of 5) | **National Average** (score out of 5) |
|---|---|---|
| *Student Satisfaction* | 3.8 | 3.8 |
| *Ambiance* | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| *Content* | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| *General Skills* | 3.9 | 3.9 |
| *Practical Research* | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| *Preparation for professional career* | 3.4 | 3.5 |
| *Teachers* | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| *Study Guidance* | 3.3 | 3.4 |
| *Review and Assessment* | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| *Information Provision* | 3.3 | 3.3 |
| *Study Schedule* | 3.0 | 3.1 |
| *Study Load* | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| *Group Size* | 3.7 | 3.8 |
| *Internship and Education* | 3.2 | 3.3 |
| *Internship Experience* | 4.1 | 4.0 |
| *Study Facilities* | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| *Quality Assurance* | 3.1 | 3.1 |
| *Challenging Education* | 3.4 | 3.4 |
| *Internationalization* | 4.4 | 4.4 |

*Note.* Data retrieved from NSE website.

In Table 10 one can observe that THUAS scores are almost identical to the national average, with only a few fields in which THUAS scored lower than the national average (highlighted in purple), and one field where THUAS scored slightly higher (highlighted in green). Surprisingly, while it appeared to be a common complaint amongst students, the aspect of "internationalization" obtained one of the highest scores with a 4.4. This seems peculiar, considering that the split of Dutch/International students is approximately 80/20 during the first year and that several students seem to disagree. (D. van Ginhoven, personal communication, December 14, 2017).

## 4.8 Financial Impact of ES drop-out rates on THUAS

The conducted research has shown that THUAS is a government funded institution with performance-based contracts in place with the government. This means that student withdrawal or drop-out has direct effect on funding. During the personal interview with Rawal it was discovered that THUAS receives approximately Euros 5,000 of government funding per student in addition to the Euros 2,000 of tuition fees paid by the students.

To get a grasp of the effect of withdrawal on THUAS' funding, a brief analysis based on the numbers provided by National Student Enquete (NSE) will be displayed in Table 11 below.

According to the NSE, in the first year of 2016 there were 436 students enrolled in European Studies at ES and the flow to second year rate was at 50%. Here it is important to note that it does not matter whether the enrolments were in the Dutch or English stream or in the ES3 or ES4 program, as what matters here are only the actual numbers of students enrolled at the faculty.

**Table 11**

*Differences in Available Funding Depending on Flow of Students to Second Year*

| Enrolled 1st year (n. students) | Tuition (n. students x 2,000) | Gov. Funding (n. students x 5,000) | Total (tuition + funding) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 436 | 872,000 Euros | 2,180,000 Euros | 3,052,000 Euros |
| **Enrolled 2nd year** | *50% loss* | *50% loss* | *50% loss* |
| 218 | 436,000 Euros | 1,090,000 Euros | 1,526,000 Euros |

*Note.* Calculations based on data retrieved from NSE website.

### 4.8.1 What are the other consequences of drop-out rates on ES

Another finding of the personal interview with Rawal was that Mr. Geluk, the chairman of THUAS, invested a significant amount of money into study success over the course of several years. However, "what the money did was, it allowed us to keep who we already have (students already enrolled). In that respect, we haven't seen an influx of new teachers, (…) actually we have been keeping the staff that we have". (R. Rawal, personal communication, November 13, 2017).

When analysing this statement and drawing a connection with the ES drop-out rates and their effect on funding, this means that although there are less and less students enrolled and the classes become fewer and smaller, the number of teachers remains the same. This suggests that the reduced income flows can potentially have a negative effect on THUAS' finances.

**THUAS does not get any more funding for students who take longer than the nominal study time.**

As discovered during the interview with Mr. R. Rawal, THUAS has approximately 25% of students with a study delay.

This has a negative impact on THUAS's finance as according to A. Noordam (personal communication, November 9, 2017):

> If a student starts with a program, let's say IBMS or law, and quits that in two years-time, then we already have gotten two years funding for him and we only have two years left. So, all students that delay their study finalization, that study more than four years, they cost us money, because we are not funded for them anymore.

## 5. Analysis

As discovered during the research, student success and student retention depend on a variety of interrelated factors, which can be different from institution to institution. For this reason, there has been a call for harmonization of student success indicators and measurements on the European level. However, the task remains complicated and will probably not be realised anywhere soon.

The topic of student success is nothing new and has been extensively discussed in the literature since as early as the 1980's if not prior to that. It is one of those topics that do not grow old and always remain relevant. Compared to 30-40 years ago, however, vast changes such as a continuously increasing population, improved technology, continuously growing globalisation and internationalisation have occurred. These combined factors have contributed to a vast change in how society functions. When it comes to universities, students can now study abroad and chose from endless possibilities, which has made the choice more difficult than ever. This is one of the main reasons for which universities need to stand out in this highly crowded and competitive market. Attracting the best talent is the desired outcome most of the time. To stand out, universities must rank well in national and global rankings, for which they require high student satisfaction and success rates.

The analysis is written based on the following interrelated sub-questions:

I. What determines student success and why is it important for universities to have a high success rate?

II. What are the main challenges in retaining students? (THUAS and in general)

III. What are best practices conducted by other academic institutions?

IV. What strategies can ES coordinators implement?

V. What initiatives has THUAS already taken to further student success?

VI. What are the main challenges for THUAS students within ES?

VII. What is the role of the different departments in relation to students' success? (Teachers, Supervisors, Support Staff)

VIII. Is there a correlation between entry requirements and student retention/success?

For a better overview, some of the questions have been pooled together as it allows to give more coherent answers.

## 5.1 Why student success and high satisfaction rates are important for universities

As discovered during the research and writing process, there is no universal definition or formula for student success, as the way it is measured varies across countries depending on a variety of factors, ranging from the size of the faculty to the location of the faculty. However, given that the focus of this research is THUAS, which is a faculty located in The Hague, in the Netherlands, and given that there are several research findings related to the Dutch national policies on education, it is possible to define how student success is measured in the Netherlands. According to this definition, student success can be measured based on two primary means, the amount of ECTS credits obtained by the student, and time-to-degree, which translates to the amount of time it takes the student to conclude his/her studies. This means that student success is determined by the performance of the student and the required time to obtain their diploma.

The importance of student success for universities lies within the fact that universities need successful students to be considered successful as well. A university cannot be successful if the number of graduates decreases each year. Therefore, student success is one of the factors determining a university's reputation.

Moreover, as discovered during the personal interview with van Ginhoven, it is important for universities in the Netherlands to have a high student satisfaction rate, as it directly affects the universities' or courses' rankings. "The NSE gets used by all these websites like *studiekeuze*, it is also used by the media to rank programs. And they rank the programs in the media in terms of quality but the NSE does not measure quality, it measures student satisfaction" (D. van Ginhoven, personal communication, December 14, 2017). Therefore, it is important for universities to have a high student satisfaction, although it is argued that satisfaction and quality are two very different things. A high satisfaction rate does not guarantee a high-quality course and vice-versa.

## 5.2 What are the main challenges and what can be done?

To successfully answer this question two approaches were taken, an analysis of main challenges in the education sector and an analysis of challenges solely within THUAS and ES. For this section, extensive use of van Ginhoven's report "Exploring Why Students Leave" was made.

The literature review has shown that the challenges in retaining students are several and that they depend on a multitude of factors which can range from institutional challenges to personal challenges.

On a general premise, the main challenges that lead to students dropping out are: Misinformation and unfocused knowledge of the chosen studies, which on a regular basis leads to students applying for a course they do not know enough about. So they end up being disappointed with their choice, which results in lack of interest for the course and thus increases the probability of the student changing course or institution during or by the end of the first year.

This is one of the main issues, specifically within the program of ES. In the interviews for this report, misinformation or lack of information, was one of the most recurring issues. In fact, according to R. Rawal (personal communication, November 13, 2017), 2017/18 was the first academic year in which ES offered prospective students a booklet with the course's vision, mission and values, with the objective of removing this lack of information and making it more evident for prospective students to know what to expect from the ES course. This appears to be a good initiative, considering that the most cited words used by students describing ES are "broad" and "vague". This shows a clear lack of knowledge of the academic trajectory, where students do not exactly know what to expect from their future as an ES graduate.

Additionally, the level of academic challenge is frequently mentioned in van Ginhoven's report. According to several students, the course of ES is not challenging enough. This however, is very difficult to determine, as R. Rawal (personal communication, November 13, 2017) pointed out, "if several students say that the course is not challenging enough, why are their grades not all nine out of ten and/or above?".

This example shows the vast differences amongst the level of education of students attending the ES course.

### 5.2.1 Challenges summed up

1) Confusion about the nature of the program. Some students feel it is too practical while others think it is too theoretical. This suggests an unclear identity.
   This should be explicitly addressed in the promotion of the program, in order to make sure that the identity and the didactic approach is clear and that expectations are managed.

2) Students have repeatedly suggested that they do not find the program challenging enough. This should be examined and taken into account in the ongoing design of the new ES curriculum.

3) Disappointment with the international classroom. Many students have complained that their groups had few or no international students and that the program was "more Dutch" than they expected.
   **Note:** Internationalization was where ES scored highest in the NSE with a 4.4
   This must be addressed by taking measures to create a better mix of international students with Dutch students.

4) Students are not satisfied with how ES responds to evaluations and complaints.

5) Some students have suggested that they felt the program was lacking in the support and supervision that they needed, noting difficulty getting help with specific issues.

*Student mentoring should also be looked at as it receives a fairly low score in most surveys. Effective mentoring could help with a wide range of issues relevant to this research, including:*
   a) *Career perspective*
   b) *Study success and*
   c) *Personal attention.*

## 5.2.2 What could have been done differently according to former ES students

Students who participated in the surveys portrayed in the report "Why students leave" were also asked what ES could have done to change their minds. Out of 24 respondents, 14 said that there was nothing that ES could have done, whereas the other ten respondents gave suggestions as to what could be changed and or improved. Out of convenience, suggestions given by the interviewee Valentina Horvathova were also included in this section.

The suggestions given by the students were the following:
- Advertise more clearly what the first-year entails and inform that there are not very many international students
- More information about future work places
- Maybe bring out the cultural aspect of the course more
- The workload should meet the ECTS
- Make language courses optional, or let HAVO graduates decide whether they want to follow the beginner or intermediate language courses
- Make sure that during exams supervisors speak English properly (V. Horvathova)
- Teachers should not be reading from the slides during classes (V. Horvathova)
- The teachers and faculty should engage more with students (V. Horvathova)

The suggestion of making language courses optional becomes very interesting when taking into consideration a statement made by D. van Ginhoven (personal communication, December 14, 2017):

> What happens is that, because of all the different target groups, there are also different entry requirements. European Studies has always had for a long time this expectation that Dutch students who come in with a HAVO or VWO diploma, so that's any Dutch person in ES3 and most of the students in ES4, they are required to do a language at an advanced level, they have to do a second language, German II, French II or Spanish II. International students, are not subject to that requirement, they are allowed to choose, if they want to do a 0 level, a beginner level language, or an advanced language. We form the groups based on what languages the people in that group follow, so you see where this collides? If all the international students are picking zero level, and all of the Dutch students are by definition doing advanced level, they end up in different groups sometimes.

Changing these requirements could effectively lead to a more balanced mix between Dutch and International students.

## 5.2.3 What could have been done differently according to the interviewees

A. Noordam (personal communication, November 9, 2017):

> Students are grown up, they are responsible for themselves but, I think you should call all the students with some missing credits and you should put them in a room in September of the new year, and remind them, listen you have to do this and this, this is the exam schedule, those exams are then and then, this module will change, so there is a last re-sit this year. Next year you will have to do another module again, please finish it this year. Things like that. And that has to be done more carefully.

To achieve this objective, Noordam suggested that the division of roles should be done more carefully and that a small team of staff should be appointed for the respective years of the ES course.

In addition, R. Rawal (personal communication, November 13, 2017) suggested that:

> People want to talk more, so students need to be able to talk, if I ask you of your opinion or something, maybe you will give it, maybe you won't, it depends but, I should be trying to find out what you think, more. So, I think if we would do that, that would help a lot (…) One thing that we should try and do is talk to people like yourself, on the verge of going out, to find out how you have experienced what we have done.

Furthermore, as discovered during the interview with Rawal, exam registration for first year students is not necessary anymore, however, there is no penalty for not turning up either, which is not ideal because "Too soft is also not good" (R. Rawal, personal communication, November 13, 2017). This area should also be examined.

### 5.2.4 Addressing the lack of international classroom

To address this issue, one should observe the two tables below concerning the internationalization of the European Studies program at the university of Amsterdam. The tables show the evolution in terms of numbers of students enrolled and percentages of Dutch and international students in the program, from the academic year 2012/13 to the academic year 2017/18.

**Figure 4**
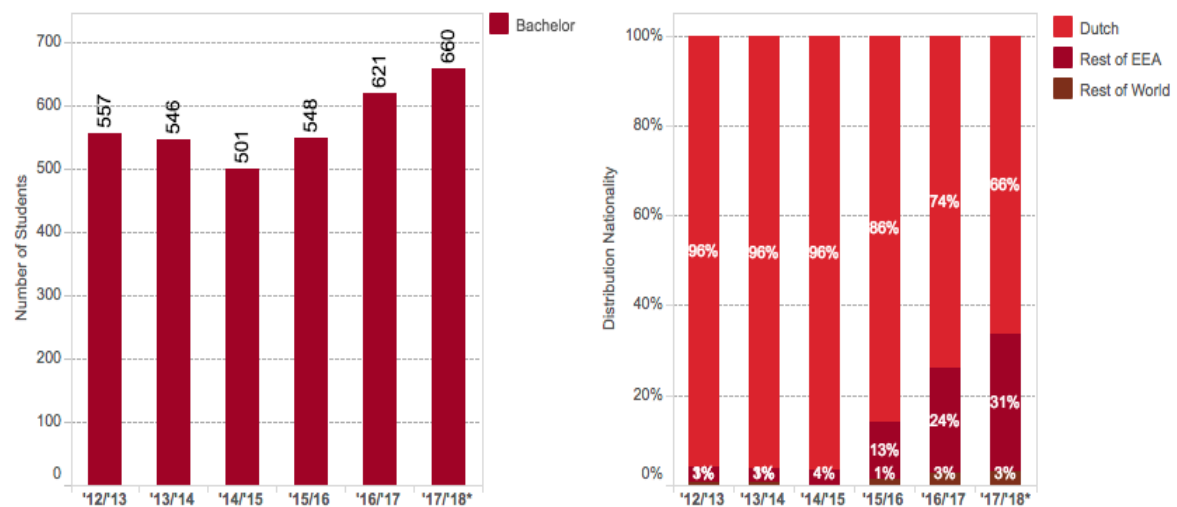


*Note. Number of Students Enrolled in ES course from 2012 to 2018 and Percentage of International and Dutch students.* Data retrieved from http://public.tableau.com/views/FeitenenCijfers/Students

Alongside with the trend of increasing enrolments, one can observe a successful trend of internationalization within the ES program. In 2012/13, there were approximately 96% of Dutch students, a clear majority. Through the process of internationalization however, this number has declined to 66% in 2017/18, which has led to a current total of 34% of international students. This represents a 30% increase in approximately 5 years, translating to +/- 6% increase of international students per year (although one can see from the data that this was not the development as there was no steady trend, but rather rapidly changing numbers from 2015 to 2017/18).

According to D. van Ginhoven (personal communication, December 14, 2017), "The ratio of Dutch/International students at THUAS is give or take approximately 80/20 in the first year".
This means that if 50% of student drop-out by the end of the first year, there will be approximately 10% of the international students left in the second year, and potentially even less by the end of the studies.

Considering that Amsterdam has achieved an international ratio of 34%, THUAS should strive to do more. For an in-depth understanding of how these objectives were achieved, one can refer to the strategic plan titled "Oog voor talent" only available in Dutch.  It provides an extremely exhaustive description of the measures applied in which "internationalization" is laid out as one of the core themes.

## 5.3 Best practices conducted by other academic institutions

According to Vossensteyn, et al. (2015), in the Netherlands, the first university to implement so-called "matching" policies, was Utrecht University. The objective of these matching policies was to increase the fit between prospective students and university programs. The motives behind the implementation of these matching policies were to solve three issues. Firstly, reducing the number of students that drop out, during or after the first year. Secondly, increasing the match between the student's choices and abilities and a university program. Lastly, starting a dialogue with prospective students from the very first interaction between the student and the faculty.
The student matching takes place in two different instances, at the moment of registration and after the orientation/open days. The procedure consists of three main elements.

The first element consists of a questionnaire which asks students about their previous experience with the topic of the study they are applying for. In addition to the questionnaire, students need to provide a motivational and an expectation letter. Furthermore, these students are usually expected to attend at least one of the practical classes offered by the course they are applying for. Generally, they are asked to prepare an assignment beforehand, so that the tutors can evaluate the student and discuss the next step with them accordingly.

The second element instead is a more classical approach under the form of an interview. The interviews, however, can be conducted either individually or for entire groups and they determine a non-binding study advice (NBSA) for the student's study choice. Generally, students are allowed to enrol in any course they like, however, in the spirit of the efficiency of these matching policies, prospective students who do not participate in the matching activities organized by the study program they chose to follow, are not allowed to enrol in that program.

The third and last element is a "continuous" check-up, which entails that the matching efforts do not end once a student has successfully enrolled in a program that suits him but continues throughout the first year of the program. This is where the study advice comes back into place, this

time however, under a binding form and not non-committal like in the first step. Now the ECTS the student has obtained during the first year do matter.

The example of Utrecht University is shown because the effectiveness of the matching policies has been measured in a survey. According to this survey, there are two main benefits resulting from the implementation of matching policies. Firstly, "students believe that the matching helps them make better informed study choices" (p.75, para. 5). Secondly, it increases the student's expectations regarding the program.

Moreover, Utrecht University is also noteworthy for one other initiative that has started spreading in the Netherlands. Utrecht University, for many years already "has given high priority to the teaching qualifications of its academic staff, mandatory courses in university pedagogy are provided to members of academic staff (Vossensteyn et al., 2015, p. 80, para. 2)". In fact, according to Vossensteyn et al (2015):

> The success of this initiative inspired a national policy towards the implementation of qualifications for teaching staff in the Netherlands. Today, in many different higher education systems there is a focus on the teaching skills of academic staff as a means to enhance study success (page 80, para. 2).

**Why did Utrecht University introduce the matching procedure?**

The University states that they want fewer students to stop their studies, as currently one out of four students leaves in the first year. Therefore, all 39 programs without a lottery or selection mechanism have a matching procedure.

**The initiative was successful, but what are the results in numbers?**

*"What do we know from our drop-outs? 2013"*

- 5,908 Brutto registrations
- 4,517 Applicants participated in matching
- 4,164 Applicants for course with matching procedure → 15% (+/- 624) Withdrawn after matching registration → Possible effect of matching procedure

March 2014, "catch up" telephone interviews → Demand for influence of matching on choice

- 47% No influence, choice already made
- 31% Did not start doubting their choice because of matching

- 22% Started having doubts because of matching

*"What do we know about our drop-outs?"*

- Question: what are you going to do now?

- 37%: I do not know yet

- 27%: I go to higher professional education (mainly Social Sciences)

- 29%: I am going to another WO program

<u>What do prospective students think about matching?</u>

- Matching gets a 7.7 on a 10-point scale.

- Teachers get a 4.4 on a 5-point scale.

- The usefulness of matching averages 4.0 on a 5-point scale.

**How many credits did the first-year students get in block 1?**

The number of credits obtained by first-year students in the first block of the academic year 2013, where the program matching was applied, show a slight increase compared to the two previous years. The percentage of students who obtained 7,5 (or more) credits during the first block, saw an increase from 64% (2011), to 65% (2012) to 67% (2013). Whereas simultaneously, the percentage of students with zero credits, shows a decrease from 16% (2011) to 15% (2012) to 13% (2013). While these patterns are evident for the faculties of Geosciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, they are not for the faculty of Sciences, where the number of credits obtained in 2013 is lower compared to the two previous years.

**Table 12**

*Descriptive Display of Credits Obtained by Students After the Introduction of Matching Procedures*

| Percentage studenten dat 0 of meer of minder dan 7,5 studiepunten heeft gehaald in blok 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 0 studiepunten | | | 0< – ≤7,5 studiepunten | | | >7,5 studiepunten | | |
| | n (van 2013) | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Geowetenschappen | 533 | 13% | 11% | 7% | 15% | 15% | 11% | 72% | 74% | 82% |
| Geesteswetenschappen | 1.337 | 15% | 13% | 11% | 19% | 19% | 23% | 66% | 68% | 66% |
| Sociale Wetenschappen | 634 | 12% | 13% | 10% | 27% | 28% | 25% | 60% | 60% | 65% |
| Bètawetenschappen | 856 | 12% | 12% | 19% | 14% | 15% | 19% | 74% | 73% | 62% |
| Totaal | 3.675 | 16% | 15% | 13% | 20% | 19% | 21% | 64% | 65% | 67% |

*Note.* Data reprinted from "Behaalde Studiepunten", M. de Bakker, 2013. Copyright 2014, Matching UU. Retrieved from: http://matching-uu.wp.hum.uu.nl/studievoortgang/behaalde-studiepunten

Although positive, the results must be looked at cautiously. Despite the decreasing number of students obtaining no credits during the first year, and students dropping out early, the successes

cannot be attributed solely to the introduction of matching programs, as other initiatives to improve study success were taken by Utrecht University

How many students have stopped before February 1st?

**Figure 5**
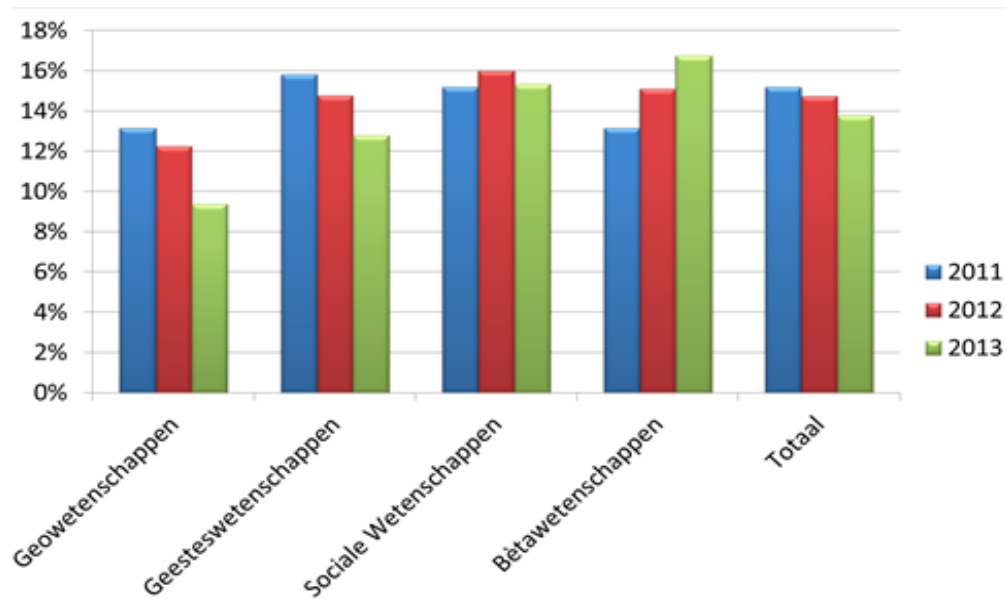


*Figure 5. Percentage of Drop-out Rate per Faculty for the Years 2011, 2012 and 2013.* Data reprinted from "Voortijdige studieutival", M. de Bakker, 2013. Copyright 2014, Matching UU. Retrieved from: http://matching-uu.wp.hum.uu.nl/studievoortgang/voortijdige-studieuitval

With help of Figure 5 one can observe the impact of matching programs on the number of drop-outs across the different faculties from 2011 to 2013. The total number of drop-outs has decreased from approximately 15% in 2011 to approximately 14% in 2013. Furthermore, when taking a closer look, it can be seen that while the faculties of Geosciences and Humanities saw a decrease in drop-out rates, the faculty of Social Sciences saw an increase from 2011 to 2012 and a decrease from 2012 to 2013, whereas the faculty of Social and Behavioural sciences has seen a considerable increase in drop-out rates, from approximately 13% in 2011 to almost 17% in 2013.

*This suggests that matching procedures can have a positive impact on student success and retention.*

## Windesheim University of Applied Sciences

The focus of this case study conducted by L.J. te Wierik et al., (2014) was "career guidance in terms of student success". This means that the direct correlation between career guidance and student success was examined for the Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle. Career guidance was first introduced in 2006. "The guidance is offered by a small professional staff together with specially assigned faculty and is a comprehensive system which spans the entire four years of student life from admissions to graduation" (L.J. te Wierik, Beishuizen and Van Os, 2014). This guidance consists of a variety of instruments, such as intake procedures, personal development, personal portfolios. Interestingly, a self-reflection portfolio was present as part of ES previously, however it got discontinued because of the lack of enthusiasm from the students.

**Table 13**
*Descriptive Statistics on First-year Student Success of WUAS*

| Cohort | M | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2004 | 39.37 | 13.50 | 1942 |
| 2005 | 38.16 | 13.62 | 2089 |
| 2007 | 45.23 | 15.52 | 1510 |
| 2008 | 47.72 | 15.31 | 2267 |
| Total | 42.60 | 15.05 | 7808 |

*Note.* M= Mean. SD = Standard Deviation. Reprinted from "Career guidance and student success in Dutch higher vocational education", L.J. te Wierik et al., 2014, p.1957. Copyright 2014, The authors.

In Table 13, one can see the comparison of numbers two years prior the introduction of career guidance and two years after the introduction. To further establish whether the introduction of career guidance was the reason behind the improved numbers, an additional step was taken to analyse the same number of credits obtained by students across three faculties, as displayed in

**Table 14**
*Descriptive statistics on first-year student success taken by faculty*

| Faculty | Cohort | M | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Work | 2004 | 43.06 | 14.15 | 469 |
| | 2005 | 41.18 | 15.11 | 470 |
| | 2007 | 50.53 | 13.76 | 214 |
| | 2008 | 54.10 | 11.01 | 517 |
| | Total | 46.91 | 14.60 | 1670 |
| Business & Economics | 2004 | 39.06 | 13.20 | 506 |
| | 2005 | 38.25 | 13.67 | 570 |
| | 2007 | 40.88 | 17.43 | 705 |
| | 2008 | 44.78 | 16.38 | 659 |
| | Total | 40.94 | 15.69 | 2440 |
| Information Sciences | 2004 | 36.15 | 10.44 | 185 |
| | 2005 | 35.10 | 10.01 | 152 |
| | 2007 | 53.68 | 9.31 | 69 |
| | 2008 | 53.49 | 8.42 | 132 |
| | Total | 42.36 | 13.00 | 538 |

*Note.* M= Mean. SD = Standard Deviation. Reprinted from "Career guidance and student success in Dutch higher vocational education", L.J. te Wierik et al., 2014, p.1957. Copyright 2014, The authors.

Table 14 above displays the mean of credits obtained by faculty from the two years prior to the introduction of career guidance (2006) and two years after the introduction.

While the numbers see a slight decline from 2004 to 2005, they see a noticeable improvement in 2007 and 2008. These findings suggest that the introduction of career guidance in 2006 has had a positive impact on improving student success and retention.

Although the results suggest a positive correlation between career guidance and student success, other factors must be considered.

## Level of prior education as a factor in student success

As discussed in section 2.7 (Education in the Netherlands), there are different entrance ways into secondary higher education, and considering that in the Netherlands there are noteworthy differences between the pre-university levels of education, the report written by L.J. te Wierik et al., (2014) has also examined whether the academic background of students attending Wendesheim UAS had an impact on the number of ECTS credits obtained by students during their first                                                                                    year.

Table 15 displays the number of ECTS credits obtained during the first year by students of the different levels of pre-university education (MBO, HAVO, VWO, Other) for the two years prior and post introduction of career guidance in 2006.

**Table 15**
*Overview of First-year Students by Level of Preliminary Education*

| | | | Level of preliminary education | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | MBO | HAVO | VWO | Other | All |
| Cohort | 2004 | Number | 476 | 547 | 76 | 67 | 1166 |
| | | % | 41 | 47 | 6 | 6 | 100 |
| | 2005 | Number | 478 | 564 | 80 | 79 | 1201 |
| | | % | 40 | 47 | 7 | 6 | 100 |
| | 2007 | Number | 581 | 767 | 71 | 78 | 1497 |
| | | % | 39 | 51 | 5 | 5 | 100 |
| | 2008 | Number | 606 | 919 | 93 | 59 | 1677 |
| | | % | 36 | 55 | 5 | 4 | 100 |
| Total | | Number | 2141 | 2,797 | 320 | 283 | 5541 |
| | | % | 39 | 50 | 6 | 5 | 100 |

*Note.* M= Mean. SD = Standard Deviation. Reprinted from "Career guidance and student success in Dutch higher vocational education", L.J. te Wierik et al., 2014, p.1958. Copyright 2014, The authors.

As can be observed in table 15, the numbers remained fairly steady, without any drastic changes in academic performance. Therefore, it could be said that (at least for the case of Windesheim UAS), the level of pre-university education, has no negative influence on first-year student success.

**Table 16**

*Descriptive Statistics on First Grade Points of First Year Students of WUAS*

| | Cohort | M | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Withdrawals | 2004 | 6.36 | 0.72 | 105 |
| | 2005 | 6.38 | 0.72 | 100 |
| | 2007 | 6.29 | 1.28 | 91 |
| | 2008 | 6.11 | 1.39 | 16 |
| | Total | 6.33 | 0.95 | 312 |
| Persisters | 2004 | 6.46 | 0.74 | 1030 |
| | 2005 | 6.52 | 0.88 | 1075 |
| | 2007 | 6.81 | 1.00 | 1386 |
| | 2008 | 7.05 | 1.38 | 947 |
| | Total | 6.71 | 1.04 | 4438 |
| Total | 2004 | 6.45 | 0.74 | 1135 |
| | 2005 | 6.51 | 0.87 | 1175 |
| | 2007 | 6.78 | 1.03 | 1477 |
| | 2008 | 7.03 | 1.38 | 963 |
| | Total | 6.69 | 1.04 | 4750 |

*Note.* M= Mean. SD = Standard Deviation. Reprinted from "Career guidance and student success in Dutch higher vocational education", L.J. te Wierik et al., 2014, p.1957. Copyright 2014, The authors.

Table 16 illustrates the variation in numbers of withdrawals and persisters (students continuing with their studies) at WUAS, from 2004 to 2008. As can be seen, the mean (M) of withdrawals has decreased after the introduction of career guidance, while simultaneously the mean of persisters has increased.

This indicates that students who followed through with their studies not only obtained more credits after the introduction of career guidance in 2016, but also obtained higher grades during their first year of studies.

All in all, the numbers for the case study of Windesheim University of Applied sciences, suggest that career guidance is an important step in fostering student success and that it can help contribute to students achieving higher scores.

## 5.4 The pivotal role of faculty departments in fostering student success

In relation to student retention, involvement and engagement of the different departments of a university play a very important role. As mentioned in section 2.5 "main challenges in retaining students", disengagement from the University environment can have a very negative impact on the students' performance and feeling of belonging. Therefore, it is important for the different departments to address issues of students, as this would provide a sense of integration.

On a general basis, there is one important step that the different departments of a university can take to increase their engagement with the students:

The university should create a collaborative environment. This is especially the case for THUAS, which is a vocational university and thus group work is generally emphasized more than at a research university. Collaborative learning is important, as it determines the amount of interaction between students and teachers, which is important when it comes to making someone feel involved or part of something. The interaction between teachers and students is especially important, as students need to feel "acknowledged" and validated to continue their studies. If a student attends classes every day for several weeks, but gets the impression that the teacher does not care about him/her particularly (because, for example, he doesn't ask him questions), the chances of the student disengaging with the course increase. The student will feel unimportant to the course, in turn leading to the course becoming unimportant to the student. Enriching the educational experience means fostering a healthy relationship between students and student groups at the faculty (e.g. HEBOS at THUAS) as well as relationships with other academic bodies outside of the faculty.

## 5.5 Correlation between entry requirements and student success

The results of section 4.6 have shown that there is a correlation between entry requirements and student success. In fact, the success rate in programs with more selective entrance requirements is higher than in less selective programs. This is especially true on large-scale programs, such as ES. It seems an easy claim for ES to simply be more selective when going through student applications, however, as mentioned by R. Rawal (personal communication, November 13, 2017), THUAS cannot be selective regarding the match between student and program when a student meets the general entry requirements.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The conducted research has shown that THUAS is suffering from a decreasing number of enrolments in the program of European Studies. This, however, is not the only challenge that the ES program is currently facing. European Studies is a course that has been offered at THUAS for over ten years and has undergone a variety of changes since its first introduction. However, the main challenge persists, which is a low number of students transitioning into the second year and subsequently a lower number of students obtaining their diploma within the nominal study time of four and a half years. Research has also shown that student success and student retention do not have a universal definition, as both depend on a variety of factors, from individual, to institutional, national and European level.

Starting from the top, research has shown that:
- On a European Level there are several policies in place to foster study success in higher education.
- These policies are useless if countries do not emphasize "study success" at the national level.
- In the case of the Netherlands, student success in higher education is highly emphasized on the national agenda and therefore the conditions for improving study success and retention are present.
- Considering that THUAS is a government funded institution with performance contracts in place with the government, this leaves the institution some freedom as to what policies to implement at the institutional level.

At the institutional level, research has shown that:
- It is important to create a community with a commitment culture.
- The students should feel validated and cared for by the faculty, especially during the first year, where many students struggle to cope with all the changes in their life.
- Education is a two-way stream, meaning that the institution can encourage a culture of commitment, but unless the students commit as well, the results will remain low.

This leads to the next point, the individual level.

At the individual level, research has shown that:

- A student's socio-economic background has a direct effect on the successful completion of studies.

- Teaching at THAUS should become more inclusive, giving students from different backgrounds the same attention and opportunities.

A few recommendations have been elaborated aiming at improving the student success based on the research findings and the analysis of the several interviews:

1) <u>Implement measures finalized at breaking through the culture of non-commitment</u>

   Make education mandatory, challenging and interesting. Following these steps can make education more efficient.

2) <u>Watch the first semester closely</u>

   Given that THUAS makes use of the Binding Study Advice, the first semester of ES should be set up in such a way that students either fully participate or drop out within the first half of the year. This is because it would allow students to acknowledge whether their skills and interests match with the study program, thus helping in the decision of pursuing the studies or switching course.

3) <u>Adopt a realistic information policy</u>

   Make sure that the information provided about courses is realistic so that students can form a correct image of the study and what it entails. This seems not to be the case just yet, but might change with the introduction of ES mission-vision-values booklet.

4) <u>Binding Study Advice (BSA) to be monitored closely</u>

   Several universities across the Netherlands have introduced the BSA, with the expectation that this would alleviate the many problems in the field of study success. However, it has not exactly worked out that way. Therefore, the BSA should be used as a tool to refer students who are obviously not a good match with the program they have chosen.

5) Do not divert the focus from social and academic integration in later years

As mentioned several times, commitment must become a key word at the university. This entails commitment from the different departments towards students in the first year. Commitment, however, should not be limited to the first year but should also be monitored in the subsequent years as an additional retention tool, as not all students drop out during the first year.

6) Manage diversity in a constructive way

Research has shown that THUAS is a highly diverse institution (in terms of student origins) and that the social backgrounds of students can have a strong impact on their performance during the studies. Therefore, students that lag behind should not be immediately stigmatized based on their failures, but should receive additional guidance from the faculty. This could prove in itself a useful tool in retaining students that lose their motivation early on.

7) Reward performance and support teachers' training

As shown in the best practices section of this thesis, the University of Utrecht has inspired a nationwide policy in which there is a focus on training teachers. This ensures that teachers not only know what they are talking about but also remain interested in what they are teaching. Additionally, giving students rewards for obtaining high grades could serve as an extra incentive to perform at a high level.

8) Provide support to programs and faculties

It makes sense to set up a committee that supports programs and faculties in their plans. In any case, it seems important to provide expert support.

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## 8. Appendices

### Appendix I: Student Ethics Form

**Student Ethics Form**

**European Studies
Student Ethics Form**

**Your name:** Leon-Martino d'Elia

**Supervisor:** P.M. Koelemij

**Instructions/checklist**
Before completing this form you should read the APA Ethics Code
(http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx). If you are planning research with human subjects you should also look at the sample consent form available in the Final Project and Dissertation Guide.

a. [ x ] Read section 3 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1.
b. [ x ] Complete sections 1 and, if you are using human subjects, section 2, of this form, and sign it.
c. [x] Ask your project supervisor to read these sections (and the draft consent form if you have one) and sign the form.
d. [x] Append this signed form as an appendix to your dissertation.

*Section 1. Project Outline (to be completed by student)*

(i)  **Title of Project:** How can The Hague University of Applied Sciences Maximize Student Success and Student Retention? Specifically within the European Studies program.

(ii) **Aims of project:** Defining how THUAS can maximize student success and student retention within the ES program. With the objective of removing hurdles for future ES students.

(iii) **Will you involve other people in your project – e.g. via formal or informal interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, internet surveys etc. (Note: if you are using data that has already been collected by another researcher – e.g. recordings or transcripts of conversations given to you by your supervisor, you should answer 'NO' to this question.)**

YES

Student's signature _____*Leon-M. d'E*_____ -      date : 03.03.2018

**If yes:  you should complete the rest of this form.**

*Section 2 Complete this section only if you answered YES to question (iii) above.*

**(i) What will the participants have to do? (v. brief outline of procedure):**

The participants were invited to discuss the topic in an informal interview setting. During these interviews, namely challenges that students are facing and initiatives that the faculty has already taken to tackle the issues at hand were discussed.

**(ii) What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited?**

The participants comprised three THUAS employees who have been working at THUAS for several years and are thus a reliable source of information. In addition to the three employees, a former ES student was also interviewed with help of a questionnaire, formulated to discover the pitfalls encountered by the student during the study.

**(iii) What sort stimuli or materials will your participants be exposed to, tick the appropriate boxes and then state what they are in the space below?**

**Questionnaires[ x]; Pictures[  ]; Sounds [  ]; Words[ X ]; Other[  ].**

**(iv) Consent:** Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. Either verbally or by means of an informed consent form you should state what participants will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. You should also state how they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. A standard informed consent form is available in the Dissertation Manual.

**(vi) What procedures will you follow in order to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' data?** Personal data (name, addresses etc.) should not be stored in such a way that they can be associated with the participant's data.

The only personal information of the interviewees is their name. No addresses nor confidential data were included in the transcript of the interviews.

**Student's signature:** ...*Leon-M. d'El..*...... **date:** 03.03.2018

**Supervisor's signature** (if satisfied with the proposed procedures): ............ **date:** ..............

## Appendix II: Informed Consent Form Mr. Arend Noordam

### Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

1) Research Project Title

2) Project Description (1 paragraph)

If you agree to take part in this study please read the following statement and sign this form.

**I am 16 years of age or older.**

I can confirm that I have read and understood the description and aims of this research. The researcher has answered all the questions that I had to my satisfaction.

I agree to the audio recording of my interview with the researcher.

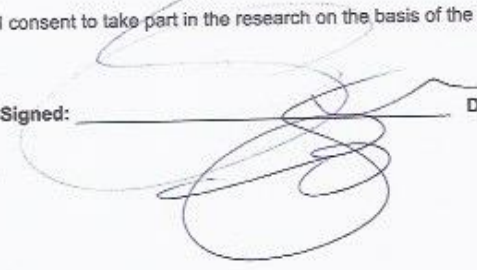I understand that the researcher offers me the following guarantees:

All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. My name will not be used in the study unless I give permission for it.

Recordings will be accessible only by the researcher. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured at all times. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions.

I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and anything to be deleted from it.

I consent to take part in the research on the basis of the guarantees outlined above.

Signed: _____          Date: 9 nov 17.

## Appendix III: Interview Transcript Mr. Arend Noordam

L: Good Afternoon Mr. Noordam, thank you for your time. My very first question for you would be, Mr. Koelemij told me that you are a team leader? Or you were a former team leader?

N: Oh yes, I have been for several years, I have been a program manager for Communicatie for four years.

L: Could you tell me what your function is?

N: At this moment?

L: Yes, in this very moment.

N: I'm a lecturer, nothing serious actually, but some research modules, some project management, some things like organizational behavior, things like that. But lecturing is not my biggest task, I am coordinator of the study delay group, that's part of my task, I have been working for two days a week for the workers' council of The Hague University.

L: Could you maybe tell me something more about the workers' council?  Because I did not find anything in regard to it actually.

N: There should be some information in English as well but,

L: I have looked at the Annual Report of THUAS for 2015 and there is a lot of information, but it is a bit scattered so.

N: Ok, I would like to find out about that in another situation

L: No problem

N: I would like to have a clear information stream to all the students. Well the worker's council there are three levels: 1) There is the program committee (at program level) and 2) There is the faculty council (at faculty level) 3) There is the Hogeschool council. I am in both the faculty and the hogeschool council, and I am in the board of the university council.

L: So that also means you oversee the programs, specifically the management and organization?

N: Well, it's not actually about the content of the program, because that is on faculty level but, let's say starting a new program or a starting a new master, or defining the budget about the policy plans for the university about the educational policy plan that has been newly written, things like that, we discuss them.

L: Okay, that actually brings me to my next point, now my research showed me that THUAS like many other universities of Applied Sciences, is government funded.

N: Yes

L: And I know that there is a strong correlation between drop out rates and how it affects THUAS, now for instance it says: "There are only a few countries where the rate of withdrawal has a direct effect on funding" and one of the examples is for instance "institutional funding for teachers in the

Netherlands". Could you maybe confirm that or add something to it? I mean the direct correlation between student droup-out rates and the funding of the university.

N: No, it's not actually the student drop-out rates, but the number of students that (do in fact attend it) **inaudible.** Because we are being funded by every student that studies over here, so that is enrolled in the program, and we are only being paid for the max of four years, there is one extra diploma year, something like that, so there is an extra fund as well. So, if a student starts with a program, let's say IBMS or law, whatever, and quits that in two years-time, than we already have gotten two years funding for him and we only have two years left. So, all students that delay their study finalization, that study more than four years, they cost us money, because we are not funded for them anymore.

L: So you are funded for four years per student basically?

N: Yes, it is not entirely four years, but four years plus a bonus.

L: Okay, now actually a more general question, which also I did not find in the annual report, how does THUAS define student success? Because I have seen that there is a lot of different ways of calculating it, from the number of drop-outs to the period of time it takes to conclude the studies, to psychological factors as well.

N: There are the numbers on one hand and the analysis of that, the reasons for that, on the other hand. There are of course the psychological factors. But, first, how to measure it, how to calculate it? It is about how many students do start the program, how many continue after years one. Because year one is an important year.

L: Especially because of the properdeuze.

N: Yeah right, and there is some restriction. What are you doing actually?

L: I am a European Studies student.

N: Four or three year?

L: Fourth year, four years program.

N: So, you know that there must have been the Binding Study Advice at the end of year one. That has changed a little in the last two years, for now it is that you have to get 50 credits (ECTS) out of 60, in order to be able to continue. That is one way to measure it, then in the past we had a second restriction that if you did not get your properdeuze in two years time, you had to quit. But that is not the case anymore. But yet of course, that makes it possible that a student at the end of the study career, still has courses for the properdeuze to do. And that of course, is not very wise, or not good to advise. That is one thing, and then of course how many years the main phase will take, we think that four years is the nominal time, four and a half is no problem, 5 is no problem at all.

There could be all kind of reasons, if you go on exchange, sometimes exchange is a cause for delay, because the semesters are not equal, and you miss some course, things like that can happen.

So, four and ½, five years time is no problem, but longer than that, is definitely something that is not good for the students and not good for the faculty. Although there is a financial aspect that most of the time is not mentioned, but it is still there, I mean every student that wants to study here only pays 2000 euros, we get 2000 euros. **Small Interruption, colleague leaving the office**

N: Being a coordinator of the study delay group, from September on, we had I calculated that in October, we had 325 students, who were 5th years or higher students.

L: Fifth year of any specific course?

N: No, all kind of courses. But we have fifth year students, sixth year students, we even have got one seventh year student.

N: Consider 325 students on average of course, 325 students who pay 2000 euros each, that is a lot of money. And they are not doing that much, I mean they cost us not much, because a lot of them have jobs, some of them don't show up in a year time, so there is some benefit for the program for students who delay and do nothing. Although we don't get any funding from the government. Because there are two financial streams, one is the funding from the government and the other is the funding from the student tuition fees.

L: Now there is a question that I don't expect you to have a direct answer to. What is the cost of student success for THUAS? I mean this is related to what you just said, about the funding. It's not the clearest of questions I know.

N: The costs? In what way? What kind of answer would you like?

L: Well, there are costs for society, so I looked at the governmental level and all the government funding.

N: Definitely, there are costs for society. To be honest, just to elaborate a bit on certain aspects. three years ago, or four years ago, the director of the board, Mr. Geluk, announced in the newspaper that he would invest, that THUAS would invest 40 million for study success in THUAS, divided over the couple years. So, at this moment every year, the different faculties and different programs, get about 12 Million extra, and that is taken out of the reserves of The University. And actually he, had expected, that this would make it possible, this extra investment, make it possible to get rid of some of the big group of delay students. In order to get more progress in the study, to make it more easy to continue, because if you got 26000 students in the university and you only have funding for let's say 17000, **this is just an example, these are not actual numbers**, let's just imagine, that is not good, you need room space etc., there are plenty of costs you can take into

account. But let's say the cost is for society and the student, it is better to finish your program within five to six years, instead of ten. I mean, that would be better for the as well.

L: I have seen actually that there are a lot of practices implemented to recruit students, but when it comes to student retention, I did not find much. I don't know if that is a coincidence or not, because obviously recruiting students is important to increase the numbers, more funding maybe and all of these things.

N: Well, I might be a bit critical of that. My colleagues know that I am, maybe they also agree with that as well, the ECS students they ought to be there to help students find their way, getting the right information, supporting group activities and cohesion. And getting rid of all the obstacles that make good programs not easy. But we are such a complicated program, with such a lot of choices, languages at all levels, the private the public, you can go on exchange. So that, we in this room, my colleague and I think, that there are only a few colleagues that have a good overview of the entire program. If you don't have that, how can you support students, we know of ECS students who are not able to advise their students well, I mean there are all kind of aspects that sometimes my colleagues don't see. Last year I noticed, because I had already done some preparation to take this role and I was doing some analysis on this program. I noticed that for the fourth year students. What year are you?

L: Fourth, yeah.

N: Yeah, you are in forth this year?

Y: Yes

N: Okay, well last year the fourth-year students, only half of them, were allowed to go to do their placement.

L: Because they did not meet the criteria or?

N: What were criteria, they have been changed now, they have been altered.

L: Oh, that's why.

N: Last year the criteria were that you had to finish all the second-year courses. This year you only need to have a certain amount of credits. And then I noticed that students once they were in year two and then continued into year three, were not advised, were not informed, or motivated, to take care of the delay from the year two. There were students in year four, that hadn't been doing their missing credits, missing modules, in year three, just continuing year three and four, and then were not allowed to go do their placement. Those things, I mean you could say, students are grown up, they are responsible for themselves but, I think you should call all the students with some missing credits and you should put them in a room in September of the new year, and remind them, listen you have to do this this this, this is the exam schedule, those exams are then then and then,

this module will change, so there is a last re-sit this year. Next year you will have to do another module again, please finish it this year. Things like that. And that has to be done more carefully.

L: Yeah I agree, so in the end one of the main things would be the communication to the student.

N: Yes, let's be honest, maybe you have no missing modules?

L: I just have one subject.

N: What is it?

L: German.

N: No legal dimension or things like that etc?

L: Thankfully not.

N: Okay so you just have to pay attention to one module. But, I am responsible now also for the overview of the program, and that is what we call in dutch the OLP, it will be on the student net as well. OLP stands for Onderwijs Leer Programma, it means Educational Learning Program, so it's about your exam program. And every year, the exam programs are all changed. And I wanted to make it more clear that if you have for example, started the main phase in 2012, what the consequences are for now, if you still have to do resits, that is what we call conversion tables. So, I want to publish more in that, if you have to do that module, it is not existing anymore, and you have to do this instead, and the exams are in that period, that term etc. That information was not there. It was all asked by students, who had some delay, to go by all the different departments and ask, I have to do something, can you wait for me? That is not the proper way of doing things.

L: I have an experience with that as well actually.

N: Okay, then you know what I am talking about.

L: From my own experience, I think that one of the problems, that I have observed at least at this faculty, is probably the communication between the different departments. I believe there is a bit of lack, because it happened to me that someone sends me to this department, then I go there and they ask me "why are you here?" and then I tell them, "yeah this person sent me here" and they tell me "oh no, you have to go back there and then I am running around ten minutes and I cannot find anything.

N: I would like to have, this is going to be organization advise for the organization itself, I would like to have teams, committed to one of the years or one of the main phases.

L: That would be ideal actually.

N: Yes, and now, the different departments have quite a lot of autonomy. I mean the French department is taking care of all the French lessons and they don't pay any attention to other courses. But we expect that students become an integrated European professional, so we should have some examples of that as well.

L: Well, I think this is actually a very good answer, especially considering that one of the main findings that I have for student retention was the involvement of the faculty/institution towards the students. So how much they make the students feel validated and engaged.

N: Sometimes it's because it's just too much. Too complicated for them. Then we should organize, but okay.

L: Now this might be a bit of a numerical question but, which course at THUAS has the highest drop.out rates?

N: Oh I can inform you about that, I can find out and I can easily tell you.

L: That would be great, to have data to actually work with.

N: Then we have to agree, to have some understanding how to deal with this data, and then we can set another appointment for later on. Then I will find out, what year are you most interested in?

L: I think ideally first year and then just to see how long on average it takes students to complete their studies. Because it is an institution of 25000 students, so if everyone takes more than four years, as discussed.

N: Of course, the difference from program to program to program, I can have some of the main obstacles in the program, I can show them to you.

L: So, the challenges that students face?

N: Yeah.

L: Okay, I think I am actually done with questions for today, I will definitely contact you again for the remaining information. Is there anything you would like to add maybe? I will just repeat my research question one last time: "How can THUAS maximize student success? Specifically, within the program of European Studies.

N: Well, the first part of the question is of course much broader than what we are doing in the university, there is a project. Look, my focus is mainly on those who already delayed. So, the phase 1, the properdeuze phase, is not actually my thing, although I think we got a lot do there, because drop out in the first year is 50%, and I think that is not acceptable. I have been saying that for years now. I know something about year one as well, I have been dealing with figures for years, I know something about it. Look, when you know that you are a broad program, not very specialized/specific, that means that students don't get a clear insight of what is the possibility with this program, it means you have an idea of this program. It means you think its purple and then it turned out to be light blue, and then you think well, it's not my cup of tea, I quit. Things like that. So, the vagueness of the program, is part of the drop-out in year one. Second, there is a group and it's more than ten, it might be more than 20 or 30, I don't know exactly, but there is a group of

students that enrol in two programs at the time, they just want to combine, or just see what fits the best, It does not cost extra money. And you are allowed to do that.

L: So that means you don't have to pay two separate tuition fees?

N: No, you don't have to, so if you are enrolled in European Studies, you can do Public Management at the same time. Of course, you still have to get 50 ECTS for both programs if you want to continue. So, we noticed now that there are students now that are in classes in year one and are registered but have not done any exams, probably they did it as a second choice. We don't know that exactly, we can't find out. So that has to be taken into account as well. But at the same time we don't do enough to retain students in year one, to help them find their way, and I think partly it is because of the new management for two years now. I think that, one of my critics, I criticized them because, they have shared, they have divided their roles in portfolios, but not for the important phases in the program. I mean I should say, make one team leader responsible for year one, two three etc. I don't' know things like that. But now one does ECS, one other does the other. And I don't think that is wise, but that is my opinion. So, first is the focus and second is appointing a group of people who would be responsible for student retention and student success in year one.

L: Is there currently no department responsible?

N: There are two coordinators that work for year one, and two coordinators that work in the main phase. They are doing their best, they are doing their job, they organize kick-offs, they organize some focus groups, things like that. But they haven't been made responsible for study success. So, they never paid attention to that, that you should do. We should try to make all the ECS students of year one, it's a group of let's say 40-50 people, make them together responsible for satisfaction of the students, we got the National Student Questionnaires (NSE). I mean pick out some of the elements, and work on that, discussing with students, what could help you be more motivated or be more successful? Things like that. We still have a lot to do. But again, my main focus is the study delay, and for that we got some project groups in THUAS that work for that as well. There is a faculty project group, but I don't think you will find a lot of extra information in there. You can come to me for anything you need, but there might be some university wide projects that might be interesting for you. There is one colleague working on what they call "Powerhouse construction" and that is especially focused on students who still have to do their dissertation. In those programs, the dissertation is the main obstacles, so they have a special way of approaching students that are fighting with that. I think that in our program a lot of students have to do their thesis as well, there is a problem with that, and I want to have some activities to support them and motivate them, I think you should not be on your own with that, if you are not every day in the program. Make a group of students with the same interests, assign a thesis supervisor to them and make them work

together. Of course, they have to write their own thing, but they are supported/motivated by each other now. Things like that should be organized as well. And we have got the aspect of the unclearness of the program.

L: Now I wonder, is this this unclearness of the program a theme that is mainly present in the program of European Studies or is it recurring within other programs. I mean for European Studies I know from my experience as well that it is very vague, I remember when I applied, okay I like the fact that I can chose between private and public in the second year, but once I made the choice, I was still wondering what exactly I would be able to do. So, it is quite vague, so is it also other courses?

N: No no no, other courses have more describe roles of their future career, and that of course helps, and that is partly one of our issues. Being a European Professional, means that you are not a specialist in anything at all, but you are very useful for organization.

L: You are equipped for everything, but I believe especially for European Studies that, one needs to have a masters degree once completed the study, in order to be able to do some specific afterwards.

N: It would be wise, but at the same time I have been supervisor of students with an internship in an organization, a moving broker or something like that, international, big company and they work worldwide. And this is the fifth student that that the internship there, and the four predecessors all got a job there, they love to have them. Because having someone Indian on the phone who says well "pay the government and deal with this" they think that you can bribe people just to get things done "visa" etc. so they deal with that and they are communicative, they know how to find a way to go to the IND, they know these things. That is also something that some organizations need. Some organizations need people being capable of being fluid everywhere and being able to work with other people and do things, and that is for European Studies definitely the case. We are more communicative then other programs.

L: I can see that, and I can agree with that. I mean personally, personal development, since I came here, I am pretty sure that I have learned quite a lot as a student, I don't necessarily have an idea of what I can do after, but some of the tasks that I was taught I am sure I improved at.

N: Stay interested, stay open for whatever occurs happens in the world.

L: Definitely, okay thank you, I think that for today this is probably enough. I will surely contact you again for some more empirical data.

N: Yes, I will find out some information about blockades in the program.

L: Yes, thank you very much, this was very useful.

N: Okay, you are welcome.

## Appendix IV: Informed Consent Form Mr. Rajash Rawal

### Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

1) Research Project Title

2) Project Description (1 paragraph)

If you agree to take part in this study please read the following statement and sign this form.

**I am 16 years of age or older.**

I can confirm that I have read and understood the description and aims of this research. The researcher has answered all the questions that I had to my satisfaction.

I agree to the audio recording of my interview with the researcher.

I understand that the researcher offers me the following guarantees:

All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. My name will not be used in the study unless I give permission for it.

Recordings will be accessible only by the researcher. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured at all times. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions.

I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and anything to be deleted from it.

I consent to take part in the research on the basis of the guarantees outlined above.

Signed: _____     Date: _13|11|2017_

## Appendix V: Interview Transcript Mr. Rajash Rawal

L: From my research and by looking at the annual report from 2015, which is also the latest one. I did not find any other versions. I have seen that THUAS invests a lot of money in recruiting students.

R: Yes

L: now I wouldn't even know what exactly to do with this information, but I think it is always useful to know in my opinion, how much does it cost to THUAS to recruit students, compared to retaining one, if that is not too technical

R: It's a tough one to answer, because it's something that, again in "education land" you go through phases, right? So, several years ago there were no real strategies to find students. So, in the end what happened, is this internationalization of education. The market has grown, there are new markets, students do not have to stay in their home-country anymore, mobility is not an issue. So, you generally go out and recruit students because again, despite the fact that education is a nice business, it's a business.

L: Almost everything is a business at the end of the day.

R: At the end of the day yes, so obviously, what happened, people went there and recruited, and recruitment meant income because the more students you had the more money you would make. The difficulty of course became that you weren't necessarily been picking people on the basis of their suitability or whatever. That's where the dilemma came in, because what happens is that people take longer and longer, because they were not necessarily suited or whatever, or for example a student that comes from abroad needs to find work, plus home students need to find work, financing students has changed. So, you start looking in different ways, and you start telling yourself, is not so much how many people we have in our classrooms it is the quality that matters inside of those classrooms. And that is where you start getting that debate.

For us the optimal life of the student, in the university, is that they don't take longer than 5 years. If they take longer than 5 years, they start costing you know, it's not like they cost us money, because they pay fees and most people that are in 5$^{th}$ year don't come to class, in which case they pay 2000 euros a year, and you are not really doing anything for them, but for your social baggage this is an issue. If you have more students, seven, eight, nine, ten-year students than you have first year students, than that's not such a good thing. So, in that respect there is no technical financial equivalence, if you like, but it's still more attractive to look at how students' progress through the program.

L: Yes, on a similarly note Mr. Noordam, who you probably know, I interviewed him last Thursday, he was telling me that, obviously, I looked it up and everything, THUAS is a government funded institution.

R: Yes

L: There are performance contracts, there are several things set in place.

R: Yes.

L: So, one of the things that Mr. Noordam was telling me is that students are funded for four years, so the expected study time, plus a bonus. But, my question is now, he also told me that there are students that are enrolled in two courses simultaneously, as at this university you do not have to pay for both, and then they can sort of, either do both if you get the credits, or choose which one you like most. Now does that affect the funding numbers? Meaning, do you get double the funding for the student?

R: No, we don't.

L: Does THUAS get funding for all 25000 students, or just partially? Because it is a decent amount.

R: Unfortunately, we have a lot of people who have taken longer, so students with a study delay and this is kind of horrific to say, but 25% of our students have a study delay.

L: 25% of the entire faculty?

R: Yes, 25% of the entire university. And to be honest we are represented as that, as a faculty that's the case as well. And that eats into our financial factors.

L: Because I remember Mr. Noordam was actually telling me something in these regards, he was actually telling me, although these students stay for a prolonged time-period , so longer than the four years planned, when they attend those extra years, there is some sort of financial benefit.

R: Well, there is and there isn't, it is like I said, they pay, for example a year eight students enrolled in September

L: Yes, so they pay and they don't attend.

R: They don't go to classes yes, but the fact of the matter is, the more people you have doing that, the more failure your curricula has delivered, that is not a good thing. So, I mean that is ironic Mr. Noordam is actually the faculty council, we often have a discussion about this, because he says, "yeah but these people are generating income", but yeah it is the kind of income you don't want. You know, it is 2000 clean absolutely, but you know it's not good for me to say that our fastest growing student numbers are the once that don't pass. So, I have a hard time with that, the problem is you can't invest too much into it, because technically they are not paying tuition, they are paying half, I mean yeah, the average student pays 2000, the government subsidizes another five, so we get like 7000 per head. That pays more or less for somebody to **inaudible**. It's not making money, it is not like in the UK, where it is 9000 pounds a year that a student would pay, and yeah that's something. So, in that respect, it is a very tough thing to make ends meet.

But I just don't think its morally acceptable that you have more people failing, not passing. Plus, someone who graduates after ten years of starting a program, for example European Studies, the first year course on European integration that they gave, well that might be very different by the time they graduate. I mean in two years-time there might not be a Member State in there, there maybe not be a Spain as we know it. So how valid is that degree? So, in that respect I also think that is not good. We should not look at them as money, we should aid them, getting our students through as quickly and efficiently as possible, and by that I don't mean not paying attention to them, but taking obstacles out.

L: Well obstacles and government funding, here I have another question which is basically, might be a bit not exploratory, but could you tell me something about the best practices of retaining students that THUAS has implemented? I have read that it is mostly left to institutions to decide what instruments they implement, and like I said before, there are the performance contracts in the Netherlands, for instance the Negative Binding Study Advice, or just Binding Study Advice, says here that it has more effect on a large-scale program which is less selective. Now when I read this sentence I kind of thought that one could say that exactly about European Studies. It is a very big course, especially in the first-year, between the English and the Dutch stream, a lot of students get accepted and according to Mr. Noordam, the drop-out rate after the first year is 50%. My question is, besides what are the best practices to retain the students, is it in the first year maybe because of the properdeuze, because people want to obtain the properdeuze and go to another faculty? Or does it really have to do with the vagueness of the course and all the challenges that students encounter?

R: Both, for me the fact is that it is a general program. It gives people a rough idea of what it Is they might want to do. When you are 17-18 years old, very few people actually know what they really want to do. In that respective it is a good program to open up different opportunities and so on. But there are a couple of things that are very important, one, people think it is super cool or sexy to learn languages, it is, but you need to put the time into it. What happens is after year one you realize, actually I don't want to put that time in, or maybe it is not for me. And it can be, not for you. And again, I don't say either of those two things with negativity, it is simply true. I mean sometimes it is not for you, sometimes you actually think one language is enough for me and not two, but unfortunately European Studies requires you to know languages. So that is the part of selectivity, now in the Netherlands we can't choose. So, if somebody applies, and meets the entry criteria/requirements, he have to let them in. The fact that it is so negative in that respect is a good indication of whether people will go on and pass the course in four years or not. And there are always cases of people getting through, because they don't, because they have extenuating

circumstances and so on. Statistically it has been shown that if people don't get the first-year diploma in time, or close to it, 50 credits, then they tend not to graduate on time, or at all. It is a good mechanism. There is another two factors that come in, sort of the modern element of life and I'm going to sound incredibly old when I say this, but I don't mean it that way, young people tend to grow up very quickly, but stay very young. What happens is that as a 12-year-old, you probably have seen far more of the world than what I have seen as a 12 year old. But, I chose to go to university and I chose my degree program, and a great many of our first years, that is not the case, their parents chose. Well that is a motivational factor, I always think, that once you become an adult, we will talk to you and not your parents. Most of the time when people have a problem, why did you pick this program? Yeah, my mom told me. And that is not the reason to do it, and in many cases, it works.

L: Yeah parents are very influential.

R: But it many cases it does not work. In which case then that's also a factor. So, first year selectivity is a good tool for us. The problem is with focusing on those that don't want to study, and for me the problem in this country, is that we focus a lot on the people who either have just failed or either have this, we don't focus on enough people that are achieving. We are very busy telling you what you will do when you will graduate, but we don't tell you what you will be doing during your four years that you are here. We missed the boat, we don't focus on what we are doing and I am trying my best to get people to change that, but I think what happens here is that we should listen, we should try, and this is all a question of investment, we should talk to every single first year, and find out what it is that they want from this program.

And how we can help you achieve that. When we personalized it, then its far more, there is a far greater chance that people will succeed, because they will know why. And you know it's okay if you get something wrong, we are here for you to learn, and you know most times you learn from something that went wrong. When it works, it works. Right? No one is going to try and find out why, because that's not human. But when it goes wrong, we analyze it. What could we have done differently and so on? So, it's not a problem if you fail, it's not a problem if you get something wrong, the problem is that we stigmatize it straight away. I think if you have bigger modules, and more testing, and not tests or exams, but more moment to find out if you did something right or wrong. You will increase and improve study. Also, the intrinsic motivation behind the student. If you have a bad day, you have a bad day, everyone has a bad day or you have bad luck when you are trying to do something important, but it can happen. I think that if we focus on those side of things, as opposed to the retention, so purely numbers, then we will have much higher numbers.

L: On a side note, are you familiar with Holland's framework?

R: Yes.

L: Because I was just thinking, when I first started doing my research, I found out about this framework and I was trying to find a way of applying it to students, basically entering the university. Because this framework focuses on your compatibility for future jobs, and one could apply the same for the students and studies, to see more where a student has strengths and weaknesses.

R: Yeah, but the problem is in the Dutch System you are effectively labeled at around the age of 11-12. For example, you will get advice as to whether you are going to get VWO or HAVO, when you are ten.

L: So, it is like the German system with, Fachschule, Hochschule and Realschule.

R: Yes, so when you are ten you know virtually what your pathway will be. And that you know, ten, ten. You remember when you were ten? That was not important to me when I was ten. I did not really care, the important things to me were, when can I go out and play football? And when do I have to go to bed? That is what concerned me when I was ten. I am not from the Dutch system, in the UK system it is slightly different, in that we choose more or less our pathways at the age of 14 onwards. That I think is more acceptable, I still think that it is early, but it is more or less acceptable, but ten, I don't think we should be pressuring ten year olds into this, but this is the system that we are in, that's what we have. We are very good at putting people in boxes in this country. It is very hard to change a box, it is very hard to go from one box to another, and that is very worrying.

L: I will actually just add something to what you just said. You were saying earlier that many times parents are, let's say responsible for, what their son is studying, now I saw that one of the recruitment policies of THUAS, is talking to parents directly, so parent involvement. After what you said, might that not be sabotage to some extent?

R: Yeah but we can't get student if we don't. Let me give you one little example, where unfortunately I have been proven wrong. The European Studies information on the website is entirely in English. And a couple of years ago our Marketing department said, no no no, we need to put stuff in Dutch, and I was like, no it is an English program, but yeah not everyone speaks English, so I said that if a 17 year old does not speak English, and besides they can't read it, then they won't be able to graduate in this program. And they said, yeah but it's for the parents and the grandparents, and I said, yes but we are not recruiting parents and grandparents, I am recruiting 17-18 year olds. Our numbers our down. Why are our numbers down? Parents are not looking. So, it will have to be in Dutch, because we need our numbers and therein lies the problem, is that when they come on an open day, time and time again you will have a fresh face in front of you, and you ask, have you got any questions? They say no and then parents ask, what can they do with this study? Well why can't the student ask me that question? I will deliberately try and talk to them,

but yes, so I genuinely don't think it's a good idea, but that's what we have, and to let you know, I have two kids myself, I have an 11-year-old and a soon to be 14, 14 on Saturday, and to be honest, I look after them, I won't say that my parents did not look after me, but they had far less technical freedoms than I had. And I grew up in central London, you know we live in sleepy-ville, it is ridiculous, but that is modern society, we can't escape that, we look after, kids are far better, that's what I said, they grow up more, they have a phone, they have this and they have that but, yet you know, big decisions, parents take those. We can't avoid that, that's how it is. But of course it has an impact on the study.

**L**: Well, this is going to be more of a statement than a question, Mr. Noordam told me that three or four years ago, the chairman or CEO, Mr. Geluk, announced in the newspapers that he was going to invest 40 to 50 million euros in student success at THUAS, divided over a couple of years. So assuming that this investment took place in let's say 2013, by now 4 years ago, I also reviewed the numbers of the annual report of 2015, and it did not look that promising, besides internationalization, meaning that the intake of new students decreased, the student population decreased, market share decreased.

**R:** Yeah.

**L:** So that investment, was probably, if, because I don't know much about this investment, my question to you basically is if it has taken place, if one can already measure the impact of it, because I assume 2015, is way too soon to measure.

**R:** Yes, it did but, no it hasn't. So, what happened was he said that each year over the course, and it wasn't in 2013, he announced it in 2015. So, each year we invested ten million euros in teachers, new teachers, extra teachers.

**L:** Faculty and staff.

**R:** Yes, problem with that is actually what happens that student numbers, funny that you said numbers have risen (probably misunderstood me, I said they all decreased), but they haven't risen across the board. So, at this faculty for example, what the money did was, it allowed us to keep who we already have (students already enrolled). So, in that respect, we haven't seen an influx of new teachers, it just meant could we afford the numbers, actually we have been keeping the staff that we have.

Investing in study success is a very difficult thing to do, because I could spend huge amounts of money, but if you don't pick up the book, the ingredient, then I am doomed. That is the problem.

For example, we have in the NSE, the national student enquiry that goes out every year, our students are very critical of our teaching. Our students say, actually what happens is our teachers aren't inspiring them, they say the material they are studying is not challenging enough. On the

other side, I as an academic in that case would say, why is everyone's grade then not a nine. I mean I have here a pile of essays (points at essays) and the top one is a grade eight, haha okay second one is a grade eight as well, bugger! Aah this one, okay this is a grade six, not everyone is getting top scores. But you can also say, if I am not inspired then I am not going to do my best. My impression is that the gap between what people are getting in secondary school and what they are getting here, is big. And because the two don't come together, because that gap is too big, it is very difficult for people to say their expectations. First year students are the ones filling in the NSE the most, first year students tend to think okay there is a big gap between what High-school was like and here. Some of it is natural, sometimes you go to a high-school and is small, everyone knows your name, then you come here any nobody knows your name, so it is not personal and connected. That's not true, it's just how it is. There is no different things that come into it, but the fact maybe is that we need to modernize our education, but that's an incredibly complex procedure.

**L:** And a long one as well.

**R:** Yeah, I mean for example, people believe TV far more than they will believe me, that's life, that's how it works right. So, I should try to incorporate video material into my lectures, not because I am not telling the truth, but because it is a way in which we can engage with people. People don't pay attention for 90 minutes, no one pays attention for 90 minutes. Maybe we should look at different ways of that, engage with using technology in the classroom, I mean what are the biggest difficulties, it's the temptation to not look at your phone, but if you are using it for the class, then you can't look at it.

People want to talk more, so students need to be able to talk, if I ask you of your opinion or something, maybe you will give it, maybe you won't, it depends but, I should be trying to find out what you think, more. So, I think if we would do that, that would help a lot. The problem with that is that it is a lot of effort from our side, because it is not in control. If I go into class, okay today we are going to less to what you want to say, and no one is going to say anything, it is going to be the worst 45 minutes of people's lives.

**L:** You can take the first step, but you still need the students to take the second one.

**R:** Yeah, but if we are in it together, I mean that's the point, we are in it together, and I think we need to do that far more, and that investment means talking to teachers. My mission is to talk to as many teachers and try and get them to see that this is how it is. We also have a lot of older people that don't really want to hear what the challenges are.

**L:** Older students?

**R:** Older staff members, and that makes it difficult, So I think what we have done, we have invested money in trying to engage our colleagues, in repackaging themselves if you like, refiguring

themselves and ironically this document here (points at document) is our new educational vision, which we never actually had before. We had an educational framework before, but we never had a vision, and with this vision, it is hopefully going to remove a lot of the issues.

**L:** So, this is sort of a Mission, Vision, Values of the University.

**R:** Yes, and it is far more based on the fact that we want students to be engaged in their learning, you only learn something if you are interested in it, and that wasn't the case ten, fifteen years ago. If a teacher at university told me I had to read something, I read it, did I like it? No, but I read it, because we did what we were told because if we didn't, it wouldn't work out. You know you wouldn't get your financing or you wouldn't do this, you know we live in a world with lots of lots of choices.

**L:** Yeah, I think I will actually go onto a last question already, you have already been giving me some very useful answers. I am going to ask an open question, is there anything that you know about, that particularly stands out, especially in regard to European studies, as to student completion rate, or challenges or just something that really stands out.

R: Well look, the completion rate isn't great but that's because it is such a broad program. And because of the opportunity that it gives you, ironically the opportunity is the drawback. Many people will go on exchange, what we noticed over time, is that there are less and less people that get their full 30 credits (ECTS) while on exchange. We can look at our partners and say, ah it is because of this, it is tough, no it is just that life is different. Students when they go, they take more opportunity whilst they are abroad to do bigger palate of things than just studying, and that is fantastic, that is absolutely brilliant, but they have to be aware of the fact that they will have to pay catch-up when you come home. That catch-up is an issue, in that respect, that's certainly one of the challenges that there is that needs to be looked at. That's why there is ended up more people having a study delay.

**L**: That is what Mr. Noordam told me as well, that a lot of students end up having a study delay because they go on exchange, because of schedule differences or many other factors.

**R:** Yeah, now the irony is that exchange is one of the best opportunities that you can give somebody. Take it out of the program, and you lose something magical. Therefore, I really thing you should not do that (remove the exchange from the program), but we need to look into that differently. Or perhaps maybe finding a way that we can give more credits to the reflection, it lowers the study load, not because the study load is not important, but because there are other parts to learn to in exchange.

**R:** One of the things that I would certainly like to see more, over the course of time is, that we make use more of that "voyage". Students from year one through to year four.

**L**: So really, engage in the journey with the students.

**R:** Yes, in a way, it is a learning process. And that learning process is very important. Whatever discipline you do, it is very important to realize why you go from one place to the other. And ironically that is the skill that employers are looking for most as well nowadays. Very rarely people will somebody have a job, they start that they will retire. People change careers, people reinvent themselves, it is the ability of knowing that. We can do a lot to set people on their way there, we need to find the space to be able to do that. And it's not always in words, it can be in pictures and different things.

**L:** Thank you very much.

**R:** You are welcome.

**L:** I think that for today that is enough.

**R**: Okay, I hope so.

**L:** If I have any more questions

**R:** Then you will know where to find me

**L:** Yes, I will probably contact you again.

**R:** No problem, and good luck! Don't get lost, it's a study, you have to finish it! Do you have a study delay or?

**L:** No, no.

**R**: So, you are on time.

**L:** I am on time yes.

**R:** So, what made you want to do this then?

**L:** Well, this thesis topic you mean? Well Initially I had proposed two subjects that got turned down, slightly maliciously as well, so not with the greatest of answers, so I kind of, let's say I was a bit angry to some extent so when they proposed this topic, I kind of looked into it, and said okay I will just do it, so I don't have to deal with anger issues now. And yeah, I mean now that I am actually doing this topic I think that it is quite interesting.

**R**: And where did you go on exchange?

**L:** I did not go on exchange.

**R:** Because you are from Germany?

**L:** Luxembourg actually.

**R:** Oh okay, and what would you say are the biggest obstacles? Also that you faced?

**L:** For me it's also what Mr. Noordam was saying, that quite often there is a lack of information, for instance as we discussed, European Studies is a very vague course. When I applied here I was actually in Rotterdam the year before, I was at the Erasmus University doing economics and business, but that didn't go to well, so I had a friend who was here and how it happened I ended up here as well. And while I was looking at the course, I wasn't too convinced either, then I saw this video of one of the girls speaking, saying like "oh yeah in the second year you get the choice between private and public", and that sort of convinced me at that stage, and then I came here. But the main challenges are really the fact that half of the time I don't know, or I forget that I have to register for something, which is also something I don't understand, why does someone have to register for exams.

**R:** That's going now. I have to say I have never understood that too, you register yourself for a module, in which case then you are going to the exam.

**L:** Exactly!

**R:** Why would you do the module without doing the exam? Well actually that is a choice. If I give you the module, but I don't make you do the exam, I will only do it when I feel like it. This is a big delay factor. Get rid of that. That's gone.

When you go, I will have a meeting at 11 o clock. We will rubber stamp that decision and that has gone. The only thing you will have to register for will be the re-sits.

**L:** That is great news!

**R:** But for modules the minute you signed up for it, you are signed up for the exam. If you don't do the exam, grade 1.

**L**: I mean all of my friends all of the sudden, as well, when I tell them, "oh yeah I have to register for exams", they always look at me like "what do you mean?", "Oh yeah I am not registered".

**R:** You know, we used to do it, I don't remember what the rule was, "because then we know how many people will be coming for the exam", but I must say that is absolute rubbish. I mean I was in class and I heard somebody say; "I'm so confused I registered for everything" so I answered but you don't do German, why would you register for it? "Just for the safety".

L: **laughing**

**R:** And it's true, how many times does that happen?! You register for everything because then you don't make a mistake. So, that's gone. As of next academic year, that is gone.

**L:** Well that is great, because that happened to me once, I was in Luxembourg during the Christmas break and I was studying for exams, I wake up one morning and I think to myself, "did I register for exams?". I go and check, and I hadn't registered. So, I had to take five resists at once, thankfully I

passed everything immediately, but yeah, I was really stressed. I felt bad for not registering, at the same time I was angry at the fact that we had to register in the first place for no apparent reason.

**R:** Yeah, I never did understand that, but luckily, we have reversed that. The only thing, as I say, if somebody does miss an exam because they are sick or something like that, then we will have to reverse the grade 1, but that is an after procedure that comes later. Hopefully it's easier.

But they should also make people turn up for exams. Sometimes you will set up an exam, and 1 person shows up. Yeah, and there is no penalty for not turning up either. That is also not good. Too soft is also not good.

**L**: It's basically about finding the right balance between the two.

R: Yeah, why would anybody not have to do the exam? If they have done the module, it means they should also be doing the exam. So that was one challenge, anything else?

L: Well, personally, might just be me, might just be a point of view that I have. But, in my years here, every time I asked and seeking for support, just questions to the different departments, I am going to encounter people that are going to be incredibly helpful, as they should be (given that it is part of their job and working environment) or they are going to be the exact opposite of what you need, and that has happened to me way too often. If you go to one department they will tell you "oh yeah you should go to this other department", then you go there and they ask you "why are you here?", well that person from that department specifically told me to come here and talk to you, "oh but I am not responsible for this, you have to go there" and then I end up walking around university for ten to fifteen minutes, not resolving anything, feeling like nobody cares to help me either and then I get home and I am demotivated because I didn't achieve what I wanted to, it was an easy task. So yeah, that's also one of the challenges.

R: Yeah, that's one of the things that I think also, one thing that we should try and do is talk to people like yourself, on the verge of going out, to find out how you have experienced what we have done. You know that tells you a lot, I mean I can recognize what you tell me. To a certain extent that is life, it happens everywhere, trust me!

L: Of course.

R: It happens everywhere. But that's not an excuse, we should provide good advice.

Yeah, I don't want to ask you who exactly and how. But it is something that is a recognizable trend, maybe I should ask you who and how. But it's very difficult to make sure that everybody knows the right information, that's the problem. But that's also because there are so many different scenarios and rules, maybe there is too many rules. You know, is lot simpler if there only is three rules to abide by.

L: The again the thing is also, especially now for people telling me "go to this room, no, go to that room", I was telling the same thing to Mr. Noordam, he was telling me that to some extent obviously he agrees as he has seen certain things as well, but, the main thing behind is the communication between the departments. I remember him telling me that all the departments are very autonomous. So, he was saying for example, the French department takes care of all the French lessons, so for instance they do not care for any of the other lessons.  When a program, especially for ES, everyone has to be integrated, so he way saying "especially for you, because we are expecting you to be/become European professionals there needs to be integration but we are not being a role model at that, because between the departments the integration is not the best.

R: Yeah no, but again.

L: I mean yeah it is normal to some extent.

R: If you have a big multinational company, it's the same thing.

L: It's never going to be easy.

R: So no, but yeah, we have higher standards for you than we do for ourselves, that without a doubt. What we also see is that, we had a lot of change in the institution over the course of the last few years and that has had an impact. But the type of professional today that we hire, also has to change, you know you need a bit more of an all-round player.

**Time stamp min 34**


 **34:51 R:** And as much as I hate to say it, there are also professionals who don't really want to help, which I find really weird, because they are in education, they should want to help?

L: Yeah, it makes you wonder "why did you chose that path if that's not what you want to do"

R: It's like somebody works at a help-desk but doesn't wanna help.

L: **laughing**

R: Why? Why, why and why? But that's how it goes. Anyway, if you need me again, you know where to find me.

L: Thank you very much.

Appendix VI: Informed Consent Form Mr. Dave van Ginhoven

## Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

1) Research Project Title

2) Project Description (1 paragraph)

**If you agree to take part in this study please read the following statement and sign this form.**

**I am 16 years of age or older.**

I can confirm that I have read and understood the description and aims of this research. The researcher has answered all the questions that I had to my satisfaction.

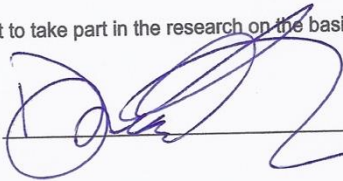I agree to the audio recording of my interview with the researcher.

I understand that the researcher offers me the following guarantees:

All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. My name will not be used in the study unless I give permission for it.

Recordings will be accessible only by the researcher. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured at all times. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions.

I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and anything to be deleted from it.

I consent to take part in the research on the basis of the guarantees outlined above.

Signed: _____  Date: 14-12-2017

## Appendix VII: Interview Transcript Mr. Dave van Ginhoven

L: First, thank you for coming and meeting me. I believe this should be a very brief interview. I am going to start by giving you some information. For instance, I have met Mr. Noordam already and Mr. Rawal, and they have both provided me with different types of information. So, I am going to try to make some questions based on that, but I have also read your report "Exploring why students leave" and I have also taken some information from that, which maybe I would like to go a bit more into depth.

G: Sure.

L: The very first thing is for instance that, Mr. Noordam told me that 3-4 years ago, Mr. Geluk, chairman/CEO announced that he was going to invest a hefty amount of money in the courses at THUAS for study success, divided over several years. The data that shows for 2015, 2-3 years ago, which is the only annual report which I could find, or at least the most up to date one. It said for instance, that the intake of new students decreased by 9.5%, yet for instance the intake of international students increased. Now, in your report about European Studies, "exploring why students leave", one of the main themes that appeared between complaints amongst students, was "the lack of international classrooms", now according to the data, international students have increased, which is in line with the objective of "internationalization" of THUAS, but let's say, within European Studies, students don't seem to agree that that is the case. Also from personal experience I would agree as well. Because when I first enrolled and I started studying, I was expecting there to be a good split between international students and Dutch students, especially considering that there is a Dutch and an English stream of the course. Which for me would be an automatic filter of like, ok" the Dutch people that would like to stay within their Dutch circle, they are just going to pick the Dutch stream", whereas, the once that are more open to working with internationals, will choose the English stream. Now the thing is for instance, out of personal experience, during my first year, within two or three months, I was left as the only international student in my class, and it pretty much advanced like that up until the fourth year. Now, to the actual question, in your report it says, "that is an issue that must be addressed, either by taking measures to create a better mix of international students with Dutch students, or by more careful management of expectations" and here you suggest "perhaps, the international classroom should be left out of the marketing material". Now, my question would be, would that even be remotely smart considering the nature of European Studies?

G: This is an interesting and somewhat sensitive area. I did not know that anybody would show that report to a student. I don't have a problem with that, I don't think, but if I knew the report would have been shown to a student, a might have been more careful in how I chose my words.

L: Okay.

G: That observation came from, to some extent from a personal perspective, because I do the Marketing for European Studies. Which means that on the open day I stand there and tell the story about this program, I write the brochures, marketing material. Which makes me responsible for a lot of typos that are really embarrassing, but that is another story. I used to promote the international classroom very heavily in those presentations and then we found that here and there, there are situations where people don't end up in a classroom that meets that description. And then they walk around with the feeling that I promised them something that I did not deliver. So, I decided, that I have to be more careful when promising that. What I do now for example, whenever possible we try to create a truly international class. But there is a reason for this problem, and I can explain, it is a complicated one. It has to do with the languages. European studies got roughly 80% Dutch and 20% international students. In theory, there ought to be enough international students to sprinkle around and make every group a little more international, but what happens is that, because of all the different target groups, there are also different entry requirements. European Studies has always had, or not always, but for a long time, has had this expectation that Dutch students who come in with a HAVO or VWO diploma, so that's any Dutch person in ES3 and most of the students in ES4, they are required to do a language at an advanced level, they have to do a second language, German II, French II or Spanish II. International students, are not subject to that requirement, they are allowed to choose, if they want to do a 0 level, a beginner level language, or an advanced language, the second language. Unfortunately, this is one part that is beyond our control, it seems like the majority of international students chose beginner level languages. The groups and the schedule are made to facilitate language learn, because language learning is hard, right? It requires a lot of practice. So, we form the groups based on what languages the people in that group follow, so you see where this collides? If all the international students are picking zero level, and all of the Dutch students are by definition doing advanced level, they end up in different groups sometimes. That is a real problem. That said, we have always also tried to communicate that the international classroom is also partly up to the students, to create and maintain to some extent. You know, if you have a group, and unfortunately, we have had that once or twice over the years, if you have a group where there is a lot of Dutch people, they continue to speak Dutch to each-other, although there are internationals in the room. That is just not cool. It ruins the experience for those international students, and even it ruins the international education that

these Dutch students are supposed to be getting. That doesn't always happen, we had completely Dutch groups who end up in for example Mr. Kuijper's class, and when he finds out they are all Dutch, he will ask you "Should we just do this in Dutch?" and they say "no".

L: I have had that happen to me as well, and I thought it was just very incorrect towards anyone who is not Dutch in the classroom.

G: I don't think they mean it that way.

L: Yeah no, I don't think so either.

G: But it is not about what you mean right? I am in this big argument on Facebook about wearing jogging pants in school.

L: Yeah, I saw.

G: And I keep trying to explain to people that it is not about who you are, but about what your project. And it is the same with that, when you are in The Netherlands and you are Dutch and you are around ten other Dutch people, there is a natural instinct to go towards that common language. But you can't just do that in an environment like this. I do hope that it is something that we can address, but it is complicated, because we promise the labour market when it comes to language skills, but we also want to bring in more international students. So, we created different requirements for them. And that makes it a very complicated thing to solve, that means that either you have to look at the language requirements or look at how you make groups and the schedule, and to do either it involves a lot of people and a lot of paperwork.

L: Ok, thank you for that answer. Also, additionally, you have mentioned that maybe you would have written things differently if you knew that a student was going to read your report, and under one section for instance you wrote that "Efforts are already on the way to make the career perspective of European Studies students clearer, but clearly more work needs to be done in order to get the message across to the target group". Now, for instance, in regards to the subject, Mr. Rawal told me that this is the first year that there will be a booklet for the Mission, Vision and Values of European Studies students, but my actual question would be, you said that "efforts are already on the way to make career perspective clearer", could you maybe name some of the efforts that are on the way".

G: Yeah, sure. I mean that's the thing. European Studies, just to give you the background of that. ES has never promised a specific career. When I took over doing the promotion of ES, I wrote a strategy document in which we sort of, together with few other people, we sort of made decisions about how we want to position ourselves in the market. And one of the key aspects, the most important part of that process, I wanted to look at how ES is perceived. The word that people most commonly use when describing ES, is "broad". And I hate that word. It's not an accurate word for

what we are, it is also a word that carries a negative connotation. It's not that broad but, it is interdisciplinary and my strategy was to pivot and stop letting people see this as a weak point, but actually showing people that it's the best thing about ES. It's the unique selling point. Because they labour market of the 21$^{st}$ century is a labour market that is looking for people that only know how to do one thing. They are looking for people who are able to do a bunch of different things and people who are skilled at adapting to new environments so that they can continue to change and grow. I think that makes us like, we are like 10 years ahead of our time, I think. That's not marketing publicity, I wouldn't say this if I didn't believe it. But that's harder to communicate to people, it is always going to be difficult to communicate to people. I mean for example if you go study nursing down in the slinger, it is very clear what you are going to be, you will be a nurse. If you study accountancy, you will probably become an accountant or something like that. The people, especially moms and dads who bring their kids here to the open days, they want to hear a specific career perspective, and ES our perspective, you can be a lot of different things, 100 of different things, but that is still not clear enough for people. So, what I have tried to do, my team, my colleagues, the past few years, is to narrow that down and be more specific, because it is not as broad as people think. We have done some analysis and what we have found is that ES, prepares people for basically four types of jobs, four very broad types of jobs. Management jobs, either running or helping run an organization, company, business, government, institutions. Marketing, tons and tons of marketing. Communications and public relations, which is very similar to marketing but often different, and policy advice, doing research and advising an organization. I recently took, we had this list that I am not allowed to share, we have a list of alumni data, it has got like 3500 alumni in it, and it has got 1995 job titles. I am going to control and search for some of these keywords, like 500 of these people, 500 times we see "manage" somewhere, 300 times communication, 300 times communicatie, 200 maybe times marketing so and so on. Those are the areas where people work. And we try to lay that out a little bit more clearly in all the marketing materials, on the website in particular but also in this thing that I started writing a few years ago, "the big book of European studies" and that's a booklet that, I wrote it a few years ago because I wanted to have 1 book that, anybody could use to understand what ES is about and that meant like externals, people off the street, people who are looking at study programs to choose, but also current students and even teachers who want to be reminded of what the big picture of the program is. And in there we try to provide a little bit more of that perspective. We also talk about it on the open days and stuff. What I am getting at is that in the report you are mentioning, is that its more than that, I think what happens with the students a lot of the time, especially with study success, is that they lose sight of the big pictures. Which is kind of a normal thing. Just yesterday I

was talking to 2$^{nd}$ year students, and they were all grumpy, it is almost Christmas vacation "I don't like the second year, I don't like any of my courses", you know that's natural to blow of a little bit of steam. What happens to them is that, they are kind of far away from the enthusiasm they had when they first started here, they are also really far away from the end. You know, you are sort of in this nether region, and what happens is that people lose sight of what they are doing. It is easy to sit in the second year and find yourself frustrated, you are doing a lot of skills like negotiating policy, "why do I have to do this?". It is easy to forget that you are doing this for a reason, this is a professional skill that you will need in any job, and you know one thing that I think would help with study success a lot, would be if, making sure that students are always aware that everything they are doing on a day today, has a purpose in the big picture. Now some of that responsibility for that is on you guys. It is on students, to read the damn manual for example, almost every course manual mentions somewhere why this is important for your career. We have a joke amongst teachers, if you want to hide something from the students, just put it in the course manual. But yeah, every teacher should also in the room be able to say at any given moment, when somebody raises their hand to be a smartass "why do he have to do this?" , the teachers needs to be able to explain the relevance of the topic for future career opportunities. I try to do that in my classes all the time, I think most of my colleagues do as well, it is almost like in a way you got to constantly, you have to see each thing you are doing, each time, explain how it fits in this bigger puzzle. A long time ago there used to be, the standard for like SLB, where students had to keep an online portfolio on blackboard. It was kind of horrible and cheesy, but it was kind of like a portfolio like a CV, they had to update it each semester with new things. That format never worked, but I liked the idea of it. Sometimes I wish we could go back to that, trying to make students aware that everything you do, you are working on a portfolio of knowledge and skills, you are building a CV. Hopefully that would help you keep in mind what the purpose is of what you do, and on top of that, another aspect of this when I say, "efforts are on their way", one thing about ES, it is kind of unique compared to a lot of other studies. It is very customizable. I only recently had someone point out to me that I should use this more in the marketing material, so I am going to do that. People think, "why do I have to do legal dimension, I am private student", yes because businesses have to deal with the law. You get to choose your specialization, languages you get to choose what courses you are going to do in exchange, you get to do minors, you get to pick what kind of placement you are going to do and where, and you get to pick what kind of final paper you are going to write. That is a ton of customizability. That means that you can decide for yourself, after that first year, what you like most. You can make choices and say, "marketing is what I want to do", so I will fill my portfolio with as many marketing classes as possible. The thing is that this does require, it gives you the power to

decide what is going to happen to you, with your studies and career. But with great power comes great responsibility. I think we have to make students more aware of that opportunity, but also the responsibility that comes with it.

L: Yeah it is up to the student to shape their own path. That is something that from what I have seen as well, from all the people that have quit ES throughout the year, everyone was complaining that it was too vague or too broad, like you said for instance, I took this vagueness, obviously removed the negative connotation of it and made it into a strength. So now when I applied for the internships, I was always just saying how ES has prepared me for everything, but because I have always liked economics, I have chosen the private sector and I was better at marketing subjects than other public ones and I believe it has worked out great for me.

G: Well yeah, that is kind of what we are going for, I mean you want to lead young people to find the access of like, you know when you are looking for careers and stuff there is a VANN diagram sort of, what am I good at? What can I get paid for? What do I enjoy? And ideally you want something that links all of those things together. Right now, we live in a world where a lot of young people expect that they are going to find their passion, which is great. But, you are also at the mercy of every opportunity that is out there. It is a bit of a separate discussion. But your abilities and the opportunities that are out there also have to match. The thing is that a lot of the people who quit, often, which was also shown in that report ("Why Students Leave", 2017), often they did not know why they quit. I mean, one group of people says the program is not challenging enough and another group tells me it is too hard. I think sometimes people leave more because of what we are talking about, that they lose sight of the big picture, lose sight of the career picture, and there is other stuff about the way that they feel here. But that might be one of your other questions, so may e I will wait for that. I do think we got to do more to make sure that that stuff is always explicit to people and make them aware of the choices and responsibilities and what not. It is one of those things you mentioned that is mentioned in the report, that people leave because the program is too broad, but the funny thing is that a lot of people who said it is too broad, go on and leave to go study international studies at Leiden university. It does not seem any less broad to me, let's put it that way.

L: I think that there it would probably matter more the fact that there is a difference between the VWO and HBO education, some students just want to attend a university.

G: There is a perception out there that the one is necessarily better than the other and that perception is really outdated, maybe 20 years ago it might have been true, but right now we are living in a world where it is not about what is better, but it is about what is better for you. And that is the thing, I went to university, I was the kind of kid that liked to sit in a big lecture and just listen

and take notes, write an essay and be left alone. And I got a great education, but it did not teach me how to do anything. If you are the kind of person who likes that sort of old fashioned, practically medieval version of teaching, then you should do that. But you have to be the kind of person who can then go out and learn to do things on their own. If I was hiring people right now and I had to choose between an HBO and VWO graduate, I would choose an HBO graduate first, because they usually know how to do stuff.

L: Yeah, it is a more practical experience.

G: University graduates often know a lot about the subject, but don't know how to give a PowerPoint presentation or write a marketing report. Those things, they matter. People have really got to choose the program that is right for them. If you are an independent learned who can develop the practical skills on their own, university might be the way to go, but if you are somebody who needs more personal attention, and who needs to be able to be doing things, then HBO is better for you. But that is also kind of the thing, a lot of study success problems have to do with picking the right study in the first place.

L: Which is actually a good Segway how they say, basically I have seen best practices for Utrecht University and Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. Utrecht, what they do they have soft selection mechanism which is matching between students and the faculty, and that is a…

G: I am roughly familiar with what Rotterdam does.

L: Well, basically, in short, increasing the match between students' choices and abilities of the university program, but I have also talked to Mr. Rawal, and he had told me that from the selection in the Netherlands, if a student meets the requirements, you cannot reject him.

G: Right.

L: So even if the student wrote a motivational letter which is not in touch with the course, but his requirements meet the course requirements, you have to accept him.

G: That is true. Those programs, there are programs out there, but the most any Dutch institution can do, is tell somebody "we don't think this is right for you", but that is it. You can't stop them, the law says that if you have the right kind of diploma, we have to let you in, the only institutions in the Netherlands that can get around that are the "university colleges", because they are kind of elite, elite is not the right word, but they are kind of special institutions and they charge a different tuition fee, up to 15 thousand a year. So, they are allowed to select. Programs that are really popular, so popular that there is not enough space, are allowed to have other selection criteria. If for example you want to do nursing, nursing is very competitive, it is a hard program to get into because so many people want to do it that they have a limit and they do what they call a

"decentralized" selection. You can try to do things like what Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences does, they often do intake meetings with each student.

L: They also have, sorry for interrupting, during the preparation days for instance, if a student wants to apply for a course but does not attend the preparation days for it, then he is not allowed to finally enrol. So that is also their way of making sure that students know what to choose.

G: Yeah, that is probably their way of filling in this thing called the *Studiekeuze* Check. I don't know if you know about that, are you Dutch?

L: No, I am not.

G: The *studiekeuze* non-Dutch students don't have to do it yet. But they will have to next year. The *studiekeuze* check is required, when your register in Studielink and everything, in order to complete your registration, you have to do this thing called the *studiekeuze* check. It is like a survey that basically asks if you got enough information before you made your decision, it asks like, "did you go to the open day?", "did you visit the trial day?", stuff like that. It is not a very useful mechanism, it is basically just procedural, people say "yes, yes, yes". You can be a student that has been to all of these days, but that does still not mean that the choice is right for you. I am involved in a project right now where we are talking about ways to maybe improve that.

L: Interesting.

G: I would like it if each program had a *studiekeuze* check that was more about the content of the program, so asking questions like for example, "do you enjoy language learning?", because if you don't, then European Studies is not for you. You know what I mean?

L: Yeah.

G: Both projects are worth trying, things like what Rotterdam does are difficult. Intake interviews for example, I would love to do them, but the scale we are talking about is insane. The thing is, one of the big challenges that I deal with is that you have every year a certain number of people that applied for ES. There is a difference between applications, what the Dutch call "anmelding", and the registrations. An application means, the student went on studielink and selected "I want to do this study program", a registration means, that they have uploaded their diploma, they paid, everything is in order and they have confirmed that they are doing this program. The number of registrations every year, is way less than the number of initial applications. Students in the Netherlands can apply for up to five or six programs.

L: Oh, okay.

G: Sometimes they do that and they decide later, and usually the don't bother to tell us until much later. So, what I like to do, from November, as soon as registration is open, I started writing to the people that have applied for the program. But I don't know how many of them are really going to

be here in August. Just to give you an idea, this past year, it was, we had somewhere around 640 applications, which is actually a decline, that turned into about 380 ES4 students and about 20 ES3 students. So, there was a drop-off of a little less than 40%. That is an improvement from the previous year. The previous year there were 1000 thousand applications.

L: Oh wow.

G: Yeah, if you add up both programs. And that turned into 380 students, total. So, I lost like 60% in there somewhere, I am trying to get those numbers up, but the thing is if I want to do something like intakes, I have to invite all 1000 of those people and I have to figure out how to do an intake interview with 1000 applicants. And granted they are not all going to come but still, if it is 500, I still have to find that many people that can do it. If your program only has, I think the "user experience design" has like two classes in the first year, 42 students, you can do an intake with 42 students, but you cannot do an intake with 400. So, we have this thing called the "meet and match", which is supposed to be an event where you bring people out and confront them with the reality of the study and make sure it is a good match, but my research shows that it doesn't really have that much of an effect. Most people have already decided before the meet and match anyway.

L: And also in the Netherlands, since I am not sure, I cannot remember the year for sure, but the requirements to send out applications has been set much earlier, so students have to apply by the first of May. So that probably also influences the fact that they apply to many more institutions, because they are not certain in May.

G: No I don't think there has been an increase in that, I think it is about the same number. The 1 may deadline I don't think is helpful however. Back in the day it used to be 1st of September, that was the official deadline. That was a nightmare for me. But I don't know why it couldn't be you know the 1st of July for example. 1st of May, especially Dutch kids are busy with their final exams, it is not real convenient, but I would like it if either they limit it to let's say, you pick one study or at least make the final decision at some point. But this is a matter of national law, so I have nothing to say about it.

L: Yeah, I have already written a lot in regard to the national policies in place.

G: Choosing a wrong study is a big thing, I think a lot of people don't necessarily put that much thought into it. I am often surprised, when I hear someone say after a few weeks "I don't like this program, it's not about the things I am interested in". Then I feel like asking them, "why are you here at all? Why did you not pick something else?".

L: It's all in your report actually, data for 2016 and data for 2017, although the number of respondents was different, there was pretty much the same percentage of people saying that they were not satisfied with the studies within the first two months after starting.

G: That is usually the case, when you talk about these things, during the open days for example you have to deal with people asking, "what is the drop-out rate", the thing is, there isn't really such a thing as a single drop-out rate, because there are different kinds of drop out. I told you about the registration vs. applications, even among the registrations there are people that never showed up. Some people for instance register for two programs at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, and according to OSIRIS, everything is in order, they have what is known as the "code 4", but they are actually in another program. We don't really know until October exams, and even that doesn't give us a fully scientific picture. There are always going to be some people who end up on the list, who were never here. Like ghosts. But beyond that, a lot of research that has been done in other programs, has also shown that a lot of drop-outs are people that leave with less than 10 or 20 credits, so they are people that quit fairly early on. They have sort of decided after three-four-six weeks, this is not the right thing for me and then leave. But beyond that, you also got sometimes what gets counted in the drop-out rate, you got people who got a negative BSA. On top of that you sometimes have people who just, it is not really exactly drop-out rate, but it is sometimes factored in, first year students who get their first-year diploma and then leave. I wish that more of them stayed, but you know, some of them are kids who always really wanted to go to university with a specific program in mind, and they came here to make that happen. And you know, if that was their dream, who the hell am I to stay in the way of their dream you know. So those numbers are a bit misleading, but in most cases, it has got to do with people not thinking their decision through. They are 17 you know, who thinks anything through at 17? I worry that it is going to become worse next year, when the Dutch changed the study financing system, I don't know how much you know about that, basically they used to get free money and now it is not free, it is a loan. It's a good loan with like no interest, but it's a loan, and we thought that that is going to make students stop and think hard about what to choose, because now it is going to cost them more money. However, it has not really worked out that way. It might also get worse because the current Dutch government has announced in their latest plans that, they want to keep this loan system, but in order to make studying still attractive to people, to not scare them off with the costs, they are going to cut the tuition for the first year in half. So, I worry that that this is going to make more people go like "oh it is only half price", and then you get more people choosing a program that they are not right for, who are going to drop out, and on top of that, they are paying less money so we are going to have less budget to throw around, but that is speculation.

L: Then again, on the international aspect, you briefly mentioned earlier that in the first year the split between Dutch and International students is 80/20.

G: Give or take yes.

L: I remember Mr. Rawal, telling me that he was arguing for the marketing material being in English, as a result it was only published in Dutch, and that affected the number of international students enrolling.

G: There was a time when, I have been here 10 years, when I first came here 10 years ago, ES was one of the only English language programs. It used to be, 10 years ago, ES3 was the English program, ES4 was in theory a Dutch program. I say in theory because in practice it wasn't really all that Dutch. Eventually we created a four-year version in English, so we were running three versions of the program. But the four-year program had a Dutch version, again in theory, because what happened often times they had the same teachers and some of the teachers don't speak Dutch, so they taught the classes in English anyway. So, we just decided to make one English program. For a long time, everything around here was in Dutch, none of the stuff was available in English, the website for instance was only available in Dutch. Then eventually they opened up the website so that there would be an English version and a Dutch version. And now for the last couple of years we have an English version of the text for European Studies. Now for instance, if you are on the Dutch version of the website, like if you haven't started out in English, the very first introductory text is in Dutch, but if you click on it, you end up on the same English page. That was an important step to me, because I write those texts and I am incredibly picky about them and I don't like them when anybody messes with them or translated them, because I want the meaning to be as clear as possible.

L: Moving on, you briefly mentioned you might have some information on how students feel, for instance one of the main things I found during my studies, in general, when it comes to student retention, is the engagement between the faculty and the students themselves. For instance, some students have suggested that they felt that the program was lacking in support and supervision that they needed and this is where you got I think the name for your report "feeling like a number".

G: Yeah.

L: It says in my research that, disengagement from the university environment is basically one of the biggest push factors in pushing students away.

G: This is another observation that makes me wonder why anybody would show you this report.

L: It was Mr. Koelemij for full disclosure.

G: Yeah, he is above me, so he can make this decision. I just don't want to come across the wrong way, because what I am getting at there is that people talk to me, you know I handle the Facebook page (so I am approachable) and what I think is true that many students do feel like they are not getting the personal attention or mentoring that they desire. What they feel like teachers don't care about them, but that doesn't make it true exactly. It is more complicated than that. I have

been working with all these people for a long time, and pretty much everyone who works here, really cares about their students. I think sometimes we come across the wrong way. I think that has to do with the scale of the program, the work pressure that everybody is under, I think what happens is that too often a  teacher is so busy that they don't answer an e-mail fast enough, or when somebody comes to see them at an inconvenient time we can be like "I don't have the time", and we don't mean to be like that, it is not like we are trying to be mean, we do care,  but it takes a little more effort to go "I can see that you are really upset about this and that it is important, but I am really busy right now, can you come back tomorrow at 10:30 so I can give you my full attention". And I think what I am getting at there, that is a thing that we should all do. I also think that the SLB, the supervision used to be throughout the whole program, I would like to see us go back to that. But that is not a simple task. That is a manpower budget issues and also there is something to be said for the fact that, in theory you are supposed to guide students a lot in the beginning and then let them become more independent so they get ready for their career. So, finding the right balance there is very tricky.

L: Yeah, I think a lot of things, especially within ES, are about finding the right balance. Because in your report it said that a lot of people complain that the first semester was too practical while others complain that it was too theoretical, so obviously one has to find the right threshold, but what is the right threshold.

G: They experience it differently. What is also true is supervision to some extent. I was the ECS supervisor years ago, I don't do it anymore, but I had students who needed a lot of supervision and I had students that didn't need anything at all. I think it is important, that feeling like a number things is something we don't want. I think sometimes it really is a perception issue, because I think you get more individual/personal attention here than in other a lot of other programs.

L: That is something that I was going to say as well, I think that the difference between a VWO university and HBO university is also probably the level of engagement from the faculty towards the student. I believe that in a VWO they expect you to be a loner, do your own thing and find your own way, whereas at an HBO university, since it is a practical university and some students come from a HAVO education or whatever, they expect more help.

G: That feeling like a number can be provoked by the size of this building

L: The 25 thousand students.

G: The complexity of the program. ES is a complex program, there are a lot of classes, a lot of teachers, a lot of things going on at once. The bureaucracy is not a ES thing exclusively, this is the Netherlands, we have a paperwork fetish that can really drive people nuts. Things like registering for exams. All these rules and regulations they usually exist for a good reason.

L: But the registration for exams is gone, now right?

G: Yes, it is for the first year. For the other years, it is still necessary. All of these things create frustration. You go on Osiris and then blackboard and then you get lost in these systems, and that is a thing that we must work hard to avoid. But engagement is a bigger problem than that, this is also the thing with study success which is really hard for us, there are several aspects that we have nothing to do with, one of them is the level of student engagement. We try to do stuff to encourage student engagement, that is why that Facebook group exists, where I talk about things not necessarily related to the studies, we created it so that people would have a real community where they can help each other with stuff, for instance "hey when is the exam registration" but also where we can talk about Game of Thrones and European Politics and stuff, we also had a debate about Zwarte Piet and stuff, as long as people are being nice to each other. And that is meant to give people a sense of what the Dutch call "binding" a real community. We created that because it is hard to build a community, especially because students are very diverse, but like say, in regards to the Dutch-International devise. If you are an international student, chances are that you came here to do your program, so in a way it's a bit like when I went to college, when people went to school back in the day, you kind of left your old life behind, you left your town behind, your friends behind and you started something new and you built your new life around this new thing. For many international students, school is the central point in their life because that's what they came here for. They build everything else around it. But for a lot of Dutch students, the days of moving out and going to live in a student room are kind of over, a lot of Dutch students live at home, they often live in a smaller town and they kind of stay in their social circle. School instead of becoming the centre of their world, becomes an addition to the world they are already living in. That is where you see these kids that are out of here at five, like they are going to turn into a pumpkin if they stay in the building a minute longer. Get those people to hang out and be engaged is difficult, it is kind of how, there is so many cool events going on, I mean I don't go to most events in the evening because I have little kids. But getting students to show up to some of this stuff is really tough, the idea of hanging around school, is not very appealing to everyone. All of these things that factor in. How do we get students to fully engage? A similar case for a different thing. You got about 20h of classes a week, you got a lot of these hours in-between, students are always mad that they have to wait around all day. And we think "you are in a building full of books and computers and we gave you all kinds of assignments to do", do the math, like do something with the time. Students experience it as just "free time". What I sometimes see, especially because of how people got through high-school, a lot of people are conditioned to just spend as little time on school work as possible, to sort of see what they can get away with. You know when I went to school there were

no "re-sits", you re-sat something by coming back the next year. A lot of students have this sort of mentality, "I am going to put in as little effort as possible the first time and see how bad it is, and then maybe I will work a bit harder". And that kind of attitude really messes with success. I don't know how you encourage better habits.

L: I mean the thing with success and student engagement is that it is a two-way stream, you can make efforts, but if the student doesn't make any efforts, then your efforts lose value.

G: We can encourage you, but I personally don't believe that I can motivate students, I can do my best not to screw up the motivation you have, but motivation is a very personal thing, I can try to make my classes as exciting and engaging as possible, but if you do not care, I cannot make you care. We have to find ways to meet each other and find ways to build an environment, hopefully this will come out of your research, there are bound to be some interventions that can make the environment more conducive to success, I mean the jogging pant thing (on the ES group), it is a silly example but it also is not. I brought it up, I was really just kidding when I made this post, but people lost their mind. I was kidding but I also mean what I say, I do not wear suit and tie, only on graduation day, the only day in the year. But how do you dress reflects your attitude towards people, if you are at school with dirty jogging pants and hair that hasn't been washed in a week, it has this vibe of "I don't care" and that can have an effect on the atmosphere. If you are in class, and everyone in the class has this "just out of bed look", then that class is not going to be as meaningful as it could be, if people all made an effort to look neat, then things are going to be more productive.

L: Yeah exactly, for example, a Harvard student is probably not going to show up in jogging pants at university, because he or she knows what they represent and who represents them.

G: Yes, one of the things that I rolled out of that discussion was that several people have said why do I have to dress up it's "only school", and that was kind of my point. This is the issue, it is not the jogging pants, it's your engagement, it's the fact that you think that "this is only school" as if it was something not important, like it's not the pathway to your career or careers or future you know.

L: Okay, well I think I am going to move onto my last question which is in regard to the satisfaction of ES students from the NSE. European Studies scores average or slightly above average in many categories, which I personally thought was kind of surprising. I was personally expecting lower grades considering the amounts of drop outs, but then in the end it is probably just students that decided to continue that fill out the NSE.

G: That is an interesting one. The NSE is a challenge anyway. It is not my favourite survey, period. I teach advanced research skills sometimes and I made the video about questionnaires, which you might have watched once upon a time, the excel video, but as a survey I don't think much of it. It

has questions that solicit negative answers and I am not a huge fan, that is also because the stakes are incredibly high. The NSE gets used by all these websites like *studiekeuze*, it is also used by the media to rank programs. And they rank the programs in the media in terms of quality, but the NSE does not measure quality, it measures student satisfaction. It is also an important thing, but it is not the same thing as quality. You can have a program where everyone is satisfied but the quality is garbage and the other way around. We try to get the response rate up as much as we can. What I have seen is that, I have seen years where the rating was way lower than it is now. At the same time the response rate was around 12-15%, getting students to fill it in is always a huge problem. If you have a satisfaction survey that is voluntary, who fills it in?

L: Usually the people that are not satisfied.

G: Usually, yes, people with strong opinions, strong negative opinions. There are very few people that get the e-mail about this survey, "uh I can't wait to take 30 minutes to tell the school what a great job they are doing". Which is unfortunate, because it is actually in your interest, for the results to be positive. Because, it will hurt my reputation if the numbers are low, but I'm not going to have there tomorrow and tell people I graduate from this program and ask them to give me a job. If you are out there and you say, "I went to ES", they look it up and see "everybody thinks it sucks" you know, it is not going to be good for you. But we tried in the last couple of years, we worked really hard to get the response rate up. I always tell students I post on Facebook about it, and last year I posted 26 times to remind people to fill it in, and I promised them things. I always talk to them and say, "I don't care if your opinion is positive or negative, they are indifferent, the information needs to be accurate". Obviously, I am hoping for a positive result and I do think it is smart for students to be aware that if they put positive answers it would benefit them, but it is unethical of me to manipulate that, so I just say, "whatever your feelings, give us an honest and accurate picture". I promise things, "if we get a response rate of 50% or more I will post an embarrassing photo of myself as a teenager" and if you can get it up to 80% I think I offered to dye my hair to a different colour, the promises just get more and more ridiculous because I know that it is impossible that it is going to get that high. We got a little over 50% this year, one of the highest in the school and I posted an embarrassing prom photo. So, I think that the numbers are more positive because we have a slightly more representative sample, I think also that like, ES is a good program, we got accredited in 2016 with one of the best accreditations in the country, like it was really good. Like I wanted to hang the report on my fridge, show it to my mother. And I think that a lot of students are more positive than you might realize but because of what I just said, positive people don't open their mouth and talk about it very much, it is the negative people that stand out. That is how it always goes, you know if you are a teacher and you are doing a course evaluation and you have 25

people who fill out a survey and think that you did a great job but two people said this teacher sucks, you don't care about the ones who liked you, you only think about those two who did not and think "what is their problem? What did I do?". The attention tends to go towards the negative. About 1/3 of our students get their *properdeuze* in one year, and a little more than half get 50ECTS or more, and many go onto the second year and many go on and have really great careers and work placements. You know, the negativity sometimes comes at different moments in the study. I always talk about second year students, that is a good example, but you know people who are on exchange are usually really content and people who are on a work placement are usually also very positive, they enjoy doing the internship, because that is when all of these things come together. So, if you get a representative sample that brings people from all these different moments together you are more likely to have a better response. But on top of that it is also just normal to complain, you are in a class and you have to write an essay in APA style again, it is natural to kind of vent and throw that stuff out, but that does not really mean that those people think that everything really sucks.

L: Now actually, talking about the delays, there was a number that stood out with the interview with Mr. Noordam, which was saying that, I don't know how accurate that is as I don't know where he got his data from, but I assume it is, given his position as leader of the study delay team. He said that, "25% of our students are delayed" and I asked as response "25% if the entire faculty?" and he said yes "25% of the entire university", which surprised me, personally I felt that could have been far-fetched, ¼ of a university being delayed seems excessive.

G: Yes, excessive but not unrealistic. I don't know that for a fact, I prefer not to know these numbers, you know when people ask me questions on the open days, I would rather not know these numbers. But it sounds feasible to me for a couple of different reasons. One of them is that the Netherlands has long had a culture in which people seem to think it is normal not to finish your studies on time, that is not the case, I grew up in Canada and went to college in the US where college is very expensive, I was very lucky that I came from a privileged background and my old man could pay for tuition for a fancy college. Which you better believe I was scared to death of failing, because the idea that I had to go back to my dad and ask for more money, I wasn't going to do that. I was quite naive when I went to college, I did not know how much it cost only until later. In that kind of culture, you finish on time, period. But in the Netherlands, it has been sort of a tradition especially at universities, at universities it is very common for people to take a longer time to finish their studies. A few years ago, when they started reducing the amount of study grant that a student could get, there was a lot of controversy surrounding that, because the government officials who made that decision, the different ministers, they were all guys who took like six or seven years to finish a four year program. For instance, I think Alexander Pechtold, I think it was

him, I could be wrong. He leads the D66 party, that guy took 11 years to finish an Art & History degree. That used to be more normal, and now it is only in the last few years that the Dutch educational culture has been moving towards saying, it has been moving more towards a balance sheet of profit and loss culture, "we want you in and out in four years". And of course, it affects a lot of things. There are also a lot of other explanations that could be valid. For other programs including ours, this is a very diverse institution, THUAS has a more diverse population then just about any other school in the Netherlands, it also has a very large number of first generation students. Students whose parents do not have higher education. They face different challenges. I am not saying that they are not smart, because that is not the case. But there is plenty of research that shows that if you grow up in a background where there is less education, higher education will be more challenging for you. It gets easier, but that can mean that the path for some people is a little bit longer. Social problems, there are several kids in our program that I have talked to over the years that have serious personal baggage that would astound you. I mean to the point where you think, how is it even possible that out of such a small sample of the population there are so many people with these problems. But it is a real thing.

ES often runs into it because of the exchange, for example. You don't go on exchange on time, you have a delay. There is no way around that. It is also ES is such a complicated program, we have, like I talked to a student from safety and security management the other day, he said they have nine hours of class a week, and we got about 20. Not every year, but certainly in year one. There are so many different courses and different tests that if you fall behind, it is very difficult to get caught up. A lot of people do fall behind. It is not a good thing, it is not necessarily a staggering bad as you might think, because it is the way that Dutch people have done things for a really long time.

L: I actually found something that was quite interesting amongst the data that I have researched for this report, actually on average it takes students at a VWO university more time to complete their degree compared to HBO students.

G: I think, again this is my personal opinion. There is a class issue in there as well. The Netherlands has a less visible class system than let's say England, but it is there. For a long time the universities and the VWO they catered to a specific segment of the population, and they tend to be people who are a little more comfortable and able to enjoy their four or seven years of their study, enjoy the student reunions and life. There is a certain amount of elitism involved in that. That is sort of an aspect of the culture that you know, you join a fraternity, you join Minerva and you will network your way up to a good job afterwards. Which is not to say that there aren't good universities with smart people, but there are also more likely to be able to do that. That is the thing.

When they changed the study financing, a lot of angry young people would make this argument they would say "only rich people will study". But there actually is plenty of research to indicate that kids that come from poorer backgrounds, working class backgrounds, they are more likely to finish on time anyway. Because they were acutely aware of what were the costs. Some of them were struggling to pay those bills in the first place. So, they weren't going to stretch it out to five or six years anyway. They were going to graduate on time and go get a good job.

L: Well I think that you gave me more than necessary, a great deal of information and qualitative information, thus I think I can conclude the interview here. Thank you for your time.

G: No trouble, good luck with your research. I would like to read it once you are done.

Appendix VIII: Informed Consent Form Ms. Valentina Horváthová

## Informed Consent Form

**Informed Consent Form**

1) Research Project Title

2) Project Description (1 paragraph)

**If you agree to take part in this study please read the following statement and sign this form.**

**I am 16 years of age or older.**

I can confirm that I have read and understood the description and aims of this research. The researcher has answered all the questions that I had to my satisfaction.

I agree to the audio recording of my interview with the researcher.

I understand that the researcher offers me the following guarantees:

> All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. My name will not be used in the study unless I give permission for it.

> Recordings will be accessible only by the researcher. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured at all times. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions.

> I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and anything to be deleted from it.

I consent to take part in the research on the basis of the guarantees outlined above.

Signed: *Valentina Horváthová*       Date: 19.12.

Appendix VIII: Informed Consent Form Ms. Valentina Horváthová

Appendix IX: Copy of Questionnaire Ms. Valentina Horvathova

**1) Gender?**

Female

**2) What is your Age?**

22

**3) What are you studying?**

European Studies

**4) What made you chose your studies?**

Because it was easy to get in (no exams basically, international student) → No entrance test.

**5) Did your parents influence your decision? Who influenced your decision? (Family, Friends, School, Reputation/website) if yes, which of them?** Private agency found school for her, convinced you.

**6) What type of secondary education did you attend? Havo. VMBO, HBO, EB, IB, other?**

Slovakian System → Gymnasium → English B2 (condition to go to ES)

(→ Biology and French)

**7) In which year are you?**

Second year

**8) How many ECTS credits did you obtain during the first year? Do you have your Properdeuze already?**

→ 49 ECTS first year → Negative BSA → Meeting with committee

**9) If applicable, why did you decided to quit your studies?**

November of 2017, in the second year.

**10) What made you quit?**

ES really broad. (First year is okay, expecting it to be general)

→ 1st semester not focused enough on private → Very superficial courses, that expect you to do a great final product without teaching you properly how.


ES helped me start doing what I want to. Realized through dislike that should do something else.

**11) What was your least favorite part of your program, (so far)?**

Group Projects.

**12) What was your favorite part of the program? If any.**

Research Skills, writing aspect.

**13) What were the main challenges you encountered during your study?**

Policy Writing → Presenting in front of group.

**14) What could be improved?**

During the exams, people that don't speak English properly.

Teachers reading from the slides.

Should engage more with students.

**15) Do you feel validated by the faculty? Do you feel like you matter to them?**

Not really. Feeling more like just a number. Only international student in a class of 20 Dutch students.

**16) Does your course give you a clear sense of purpose? (Do you perceive relevant connections between what you are learning in college and your current life or future goals?)**

Everybody is talking about "Options" but there aren't that many.

**17) How engaged are you with THUAS? Do you interact a lot with staff members and peers?**

First year yes, very engaged. Second year drastic class change. Only international student in a class of 20 Dutchies. Became in and out student.

Appendix X: Overview of the Dutch Education System