

# Zooming in on the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics: A means or an end to internationalization

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### **Tiivistelmä**

Ulkomailla opiskelu on nopeasti kasvava, globaali ilmiö. Vahvat siteet, joita yliopistoilla on keskenään, ovat tehneet opiskelijaliikkuvuuden entistä helpommaksi. Tästä huolimatta edelleen harva tutkimus on koskenut ulkomaalaisia tutkinto-opiskelijoita, vaihto-opiskelijoiden sijaan. Globalisaatio on johtanut yhä lisääntyvään kilpailuun ja monien yritysten tapaan, myös yliopistojen on pitänyt kansainvälistyä jotta he säilyttävät kilpailukykyisen asemansa. Yksi keskeisimmistä ja näkyvimmistä seikoista yliopistojen kansainvälistymisprosessia on monikulttuurisen opiskelijayhteisön luominen. Tämä työ tarkastelee mitä toimia kansainvälistyminen aiheuttaa yliopistoille, keskittyen erityisesti ulkomaalaisiin tutkinto-opiskelijoihin; minkälainen heidän opiskelijakokemus on, ovatko heidän tarpeet ja odotukset tyydytetty, ja minkälaisia ongelmia he saattavat kohdata sopeutuessaan vieraaseen maahan. Keskeisiä teemoja tässä tutkimuksessa on myös perspektiivi opiskelijan näkeminen asiakkaana ja yliopiston, yrityksenä, jonka tehtävä on tyydyttää asiakkaidensa tarpeita. Tämä tutkimus koskee etenkin Aalto Yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulun ulkomaalaisia tutkinto-opiskelijoita, itse korkeakoulun lisäksi. Ulkomaalaiset tutkinto-opiskelijat viettävät vuosia vieraassa maassa ja tästä johtuen pitänee tarkastella myös integraatiota ja pitkäaikaisasumista. Kuten sanottu ulkomaalaiset opiskelijat ovat tärkeä osa kansainvälistymisprosessia, mutta ovatko he vain osa sitä vai onko tarkoitus integroida heidät pysyväksi osaksi yhteiskuntaa vai ovat nämä kaksi seikkaa välttämättä toisiaan poissulkevia vaihtoehtoja?

Ulkomaalaiset tutkinto-opiskelijat edustavat yhä suurempaa osaa akateemisesta yhteisöstä. Mutta yleisyydestä huolimatta heidän mahdollisia erityistarpeitaan (verrattuna suomalaisten opiskelijoiden tarpeisiin) ei pidä aliarvioida. Opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli tutustuttaa Aalto Yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulu ulkomaalasiin tutkinto-opiskelijoihinsa, jotta se pystyisi tarvittaessa vastaamaan paremmin heidän tarpeisiin ja odotuksiinsa. Tämän tutkimuksen tuloksia ei voida yleistää sillä tarkastelussa oli vain yksi yliopisto ja sen ulkomaalaiset tutkinto-opiskelijat.

Kattavan kyselyn sekä laajojen haastattelujen avulla ulkomaalaisten tutkinto-opiskelijoiden opiskelukokemuksesta muodostui selkeämpi kuva. Tulokset viittasivat pitkälti tyytyväisiin opiskelijoihin. Yleisin huolenaihe koski Suomen kieltä ja opetuksen vähäisyyttä. Tämä ei ole kenties yllättävää sillä yleensä Suomenkielen jonkintasoinen osaaminen on tärkeää, mikäli haluaa työllistyä Suomessa. Sujuvampi Suomen kieli, ei pelkästään tukisi työllistymistä, vaan luultavasti auttaisi ulkomaalaisia tutkinto-opiskelijoita integroitumaan, ei vaan suomalaisiin opiskelijoihin vaan koko maan yhteiskuntaan. Parempi integraatio voisi johtaa suurempaan opiskelija tyytyväisyyteen, joka taakseen johtaisi Aalto Yliopiston Kauppakorkeakoulun suosion sekä kilpailukykyyn kasvamiseen.

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**Avainsanat** ulkomaalaiset tutkinto-opiskelijat, kansainvälistyminen, ulkomailla opiskelu

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### **Abstract**

Studying abroad is a rapidly growing, global phenomenon. Strong alliances, that universities share with one another have made it easier for students to move from one country to another for educational purposes. However there is still limited research regarding foreign degree students, as most studies have been about exchange students. Globalization has lead to increasing competition and alike companies, universities as well have had to internationalize in order to withstand against increasing competition. An important part of internationalization when it comes to universities is to diversify its student body by creating a more multi-cultural academic community. This thesis looks at what internationalization means for universities, with a greater focus being on the international students; what is their study experience like, are their needs being satisfied and what problems might they face when it comes to adapting to a foreign country. The perception of regarding students as customers and universities as organizations, trying to satisfy them is also a core theme in this study. The focus of this thesis is Aalto University School of Economics (Aalto ECON) and its foreign degree students. As foreign degree students spend years in another country integration and ultimately long-term stay are important aspects. Are universities recruiting foreign students simply as an indicator of internationalization, or is the goal to integrate these students into becoming permanent members of society, or are these two means even mutually exclusive?

Foreign degree students are starting to represent a large proportion of the academic community, but as common as they are, their needs can still be quite different (from Finnish students, in this case). The purpose of this thesis was to introduce Aalto University School of Economics to its foreign degree students, so that it can better meet their needs and expectations. Results cannot be generalized as this study looks at the foreign degree students of one particular university, Aalto ECON, only.

Through an extensive survey and interviews, a clearer picture on what the study experience for the foreign degree students of Aalto ECON is like, was obtained. Results suggested that, the foreign degree students were mostly content with their overall study experience. The main area of concern was the lack of Finnish language courses. This was understandable as Finnish language skills are regarded quite important, when it comes to attaining employment in Finland. Better Finnish language skills would not only aid in receiving future employment but also in integrating the international students among the Finnish students and thus the whole Finnish society as well. Better integration would presumably lead to increased student satisfaction and ultimately to Aalto ECON becoming an even more prominent and popular destination for future foreign students, and thus increasing its competitiveness.

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**Keywords** foreign degree students, internationalization, studying abroad

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Studying in a foreign country has become a worldwide, rapidly growing phenomenon, whether referring to exchange studies or full degree studies. Political changes and ties universities share with one another have made it easier for students to commute from one country to another. Byram and Feng (2006) mentions another often less considered factor behind studying abroad; cultural interaction. Implicitly, studying in a foreign country can lead to better cultural knowledge (or cultural intellect) for the individual. Ultimately cultural intellect refers to better international relations due to that ability of being able to communicate across cultures. Experiencing other countries and getting to truly know its culture by living there is arguably more insightful and a greater learning experience in total than a short vacation. Several studies (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2010; the Finnish Nordic Graduate Survey 2007) suggest that most students who study abroad have somewhat of an international and often an academic background as well. Meaning students who study abroad might have lived abroad before or at least traveled plenty with their family or they might even be bicultural (having parents of two different nationalities). This would suggest that the more culturally aware and travelled the individual is, the easier it would be to perhaps adapt to a different culture or experience less culture shock. Also more often, as compared to students who study in their home country, foreign degree students have academic parents, which might make studying abroad more possible in terms of e.g. monetary support. (Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2010)

As one is studying in a foreign country with a different culture, some amount of adaptation is often required, which can prove to be quite difficult. Not only that, student life in general, seldom goes without its share of troubles. Furham and Tresize (1983) have divided the possible problems which foreign students might have to deal with in three categories:

1. problems having to do with living in a foreign culture
2. problems having to do with age, late-adolescence
3. academic problems

All students undoubtedly have to cope with some issues concerning with at least one or two of these categories listed above, so it is no surprise that foreign degree students encounter problems. This thesis however will mainly concentrate on the first and third category; problems having to do with

living in a foreign culture and academic problems, of which some might occur as a result of cultural differences.

Studying abroad has become very common. Foreign students are all around us. Seldom, if ever, in today's globalized society can one attend a university course that is only full of home nationals, Finnish students in this thesis's perspective. By definition foreign stands for: "*of, pertaining to, or derived from another country or nation; not native*"

([www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/foreign](http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/foreign)). In this study I will use the same definition while describing foreign degree students. Thus to simplify and clarify even further, the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics are simply students who are not Finnish citizens. Foreign students are greatly a part of the University attendees' everyday lives, so much so that we tend to be quite accustomed to them, meaning that we do not probably even see or realize that we are actually different and thus their special or better yet said, their possibly different needs have to be taken into account or at least be known by the university.

Foreign students have been the target of research for a long time, starting from Carey (1956) who studied how different groups of students adapted to the United Kingdom. Unfortunately a great amount of this literature deals with exchange students, and short term-studies, far less research has been made with the focus being foreign degree students or long term-studies. Foreign degree students differ from exchange students in the sense that their studies last longer, because they are not simply doing courses over one semester or two, but instead their whole degree whether lower (Bachelor's) or higher (Master's, PhD) or both in a different country than their own or than what their nationality is. Still as one of my interviewees described:

*"International degree students are just doing 2-5 years of exchange studies."*

By this (s)he meant that the students are bound to leave eventually, whether it is due to their own free will or most often not being able to find applicable employment. To continue on the previous, the problem is not that there are no suitable jobs, but rather there are no jobs which are easily or even possible to attain by anyone with limited to any Finnish language skills. As mentioned by Vehaskari (2010) Finnish employers are reluctant to hire employees with insufficient Finnish language skills, unless an IT company. An additional concern is the fact that VISAs only last for 6 months in Finland and if one is not studying or working it will not be renewed. Thus foreign graduates are often forced to leave. This I project to being somewhat a dilemma. A student who would like to stay has to leave and the Finnish government, who has provided for the person's

education, gets zero in return, in monetary terms only that is, because the student is unable to stay and e.g. pay taxes. But who is to say students will not come back some time down the line? In other more human terms how does a person feel when (s)he has after perhaps some difficulties adapted to a foreign country, here Finland, and set up a life for his/herself and then has to ultimately leave the country after graduation if unable to obtain a job. Considering the time at hand, with the multiple layoffs being made by more than a few companies, it can be assumed that even finding employment is hard enough, not to mention actually being hired for an open position.

In a highly competitive and globalized world, corporations are almost forced to internationalize in order to sustain themselves and to maintain their competitive edge. Universities are not exempt from this situation. They must follow pursuit as any other organizations in order to be and continue to be, an attractive destination for potential future pupils from all over the world. What is meant by internationalization, when speaking of universities, is something that will be examined in chapter 2.

## 1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM/GAP

Even though foreign nationals are a large part of every academic's life, not much is still known about our fellow classmates and colleagues of different nations. The existing literature is mainly focused on exchange students rather than those who study abroad for a full degree, meaning spending more than one or two semesters abroad. This thesis's main focus is the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics (Aalto ECON). There is very limited information on these students and thus, I recon, my research will serve the purpose of trying to introduce Aalto ECON to its foreign degree students. This thesis is about one University, and thus results cannot be generalized. In reference to education marketing, knowing one's customer is the key to success and thus customer, or in this case student satisfaction, is one of the main goals. This thesis aims in providing the necessary data about this particular customer segment, the foreign degree students, of Aalto ECON, so that their needs can be better taken into account and catered for.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DEFINITONS

To shed some background on how I began my research, and how I finally ended up with a clear set of research questions I would like to shed some light on the initial thought process which I had. Some of the initial issue that came to mind when considering the foreign degree students of Aalto

University School of Economics were the following: who are they, what is their study experience like? Where do they come from and why did they choose Finland, Aalto University School of Economics out of all of the other possible Universities they could have applied to? As a Finnish person, I always wonder why people choose Finland, since the country is often overshadowed by its more know neighbor, Sweden. I was also curious to know which students were already residing in Finland and which came here specifically for educational purposes. Unfortunately there is no data that separates foreigners who have lived in Finland longer from those who recently just moved here. The only data that is present is the total amount per year. This makes “tracking” people’s moves away from Finland and to Finland, very difficult. Also importantly, I was curious to find out what the intentions of Aalto ECON’s foreign degree students are; do they want and plan on staying in Finland after graduation? Are they aiming to find work here, continue their studies etc. or do they consider their stay here simply, as an extended visit, or “*a two-to-five year exchange period*”, as was described by my interviewee, simply serving the sole purpose of receiving an education and nothing more? I also wanted to shed light on what actual problems foreign degree students face while living and studying abroad. The entire aforementioned are questions, which I tried to find answers to with my research, but due to lack resources, personal experience and time, the main research questions became as follows:

1. What is the study experience like for the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics?
2. Could Aalto ECON serve its foreign degree students and their possibly different needs better in any way e.g. are their special needs known and catered for?
3. Does Aalto University’s internationalization strategy support the integration of the foreign degree students or do the foreign degree students mainly serve as a means of internationalizing Aalto University?

What I wish to accomplish with this study is to hopefully find any possible problematic areas, which are mainly related to Aalto University School of Economics in terms of its foreign degree students. Are the students’ expectations met or is there miscommunication or lack of information that can lead to dissatisfaction? After all this information is acknowledged can possible problems and insufficiencies be improved and ideally solved. This thesis serves the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics in the sense that the school can make a strong effort to improve their conditions in all necessary dimensions and in terms of Aalto University School of Economics, the benefit comes from knowing its “customer”. Hopefully with this information Aalto



ECON can satisfy its foreign degree students better and sustain in being a popular destination or perhaps ultimately becoming even a more attractive institution for future foreign pupils.

#### DEFINITIONS:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Foreign/international students:                       | students from another country than that of the university (Non-Finnish students in this thesis's context while speaking of Aalto University School of Economics)  |
| Globalization:<br><br>(in the context of this thesis) | the way we live today (Giddens 1990)<br><br><i>"the economic, political and societal forces pushing 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education toward greater international involvement"</i> (Altbach and Knight, 2007:290)                         |
| Internationalization:                                 | can be seen as the result of globalization (Van der Wende 1997)<br><br><i>"the process of integrating international/intercultural dimensions into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution"</i> Knight and de Wit (1995:8) |
| Cultural Intellect (CQ)                               | the ability to adapt to new cultural settings (Earley and Ang 2003)   |

### 1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

After this current entity we dwell into chapter 2, the literature review. Chapter 2 is divided in three parts; the first one (2.1) concentrates on foreign degree students; living and adapting to a foreign country and its culture. The second part (2.2) focuses on universities as internationalizing

organizations. What does internationalization mean when universities are concerned with and which actions do universities take when internationalizing. The final and third part (2.3) looks into the perspective of viewing universities as companies and students as customers, who should be catered for. Do universities really even know their customers and are the student-customers expecting too much due to false marketing or their own beliefs perhaps? Before going into my research methodology and findings, in chapter 3, I will present Aalto University School of Economics and examine its strategy to see how it supports internationalization.

In chapter 4, I will describe my study methodology. My initial inspiration came from a 2010 International Student Barometer (ISB) survey, conducted by the International Graduate Insight Group Ltd ([www.i-graduate.org](http://www.i-graduate.org)). It consisted of 203 institutions, 19 of which were Finnish schools, including Aalto University. The ISB survey's purpose was to find out how content foreign students are in respect to their arrival, learning/studying experience, living in general, received support services and overall satisfaction with their study abroad period. For universities the feedback from this survey is considered substantial. The information helps improve teaching, research and student services. However the results of this study concerned the whole Aalto University; therefore a similar but more in-depth survey focusing only on the Aalto University School of Economics would serve better purpose. The problem with the ISB study was also the fact, that the survey was taken not only by the foreign degree student of the entire Aalto University, but exchange students as well as host country nationals, in this case Finnish students. Thus, my own study concerning only with Aalto ECON's foreign degree students will portray results in a better sense. This will be one of the focus points of chapter 5 (Findings), in which I will also include results from interviews, which I conducted, as well as some of the ISB survey's results, that were only about Aalto ECON's students. In chapter 6 (Discussion), I will compare results from my own study, the ISB results on Aalto University, to existing literature. This thesis will end with my overall conclusions and suggestions in the final chapter 7.

#### 1.4 BACKGROUND ABOUT THIS THESIS

This thesis was written by a student and therefore from a student's perspective. Thus, it is naturally student-centered. The topic is of personal interest to me, the author, due to my personal background, that consists of having the experience of living and studying in a foreign country. Although I was only a young student in Middle School back then, I reckon that I am aware of certain perhaps

implicit issues better, than someone who has not experienced living in a foreign country. I have also been an exchange student, having experienced a shorter study period abroad. Even though I was much older during my exchange studies, there are certain differences that are very much related to the length of the living abroad period, which has little to do with age. Both periods abroad were also great cultural learning experiences, but quite different from one another. All in all, as a student, with my personal background and therefore high interest of the topic, foreign students, lesser space has been e.g. dedicated to universities as internationalizing organizations in comparison to issues, which are more appertained to foreign degree students. Universities would not exist if there were not students, but then again, there would not be any students if there were not universities. By the previous I only mean to illustrate that lesser dedicated space does not imply less importance in the slightest way to the issue at hand, perhaps it is just not the main focus and center point of this particular study. Also when mentioning university I am referring to any university, but when it is capitalized, University, I am referring to Aalto University School of Economics.

Before going any further I would also like to touch upon a few style issues. Theses can be somewhat described as novels, whether shorter or longer they are stories in a sense. I wish to write the kind of story that I would personally like to read, especially as I am very likely the person who reads this thesis the most often. My first issue relates to academic writing. The often-preferred style of academic writing, I find, can be very clinical. As I am mainly writing about people, a humane topic, I feel that the style can be too cold for this subject. Another reason why my writing might be a bit different is that I feel that academic writing can often be quite discriminating. I do not want to exclude anyone. My audience is everyone who is interested, not simply targeting a small proportion of academic professionals, who almost by nature are familiar with jargoned terms and language. Most academics I suspect will probably disagree with me in this issue, as things that have always been done in certain ways, are to be done in that way. But why is that I ask? Why not allow more freedom? I urge to read Helen Sword's article: *Writing higher education differently: a manifesto on style* (2009). She makes an excellent point concerning academic writing. If that does not change your opinion on style issues at least a bit, then bare with me. I will point out that this is only to make the text more understandable and relatable. I rather risk not sounding professional, smart or competent, than to feel that I have to prove any of those characteristics to anyone. As Albert Einstein said:

*“Things should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”*

A final issue I wish to mention before moving into the next chapter (literature review) is the nature of how e.g. opinions are expressed. My aim is to always illustrate both sides of any issue and often opinions will be from one extreme to the other. This, I feel, is perhaps the easiest way to portray all opinions, as everything else falls somewhere in between these two extremes. I also cannot stress enough the fact that these are not my opinions. My own thoughts and suggestions will be expressed in chapter 6; the discussion chapter, as well as chapter 7; conclusions. In those chapters will I share my personal views on the matter and what it is that I have learned during the course of my research. Strong opinions, I think, are also good since they are more thought provoking. This, I think will engage you, the reader more, to start to formulate an opinion of your own and really get into this “story”, and hopefully not be bored.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter is divided in three sections. The first section, 2.1, will concentrate on foreign degree students. Studying abroad means moving abroad, thus I will begin with adaptation issues (2.1.1). As the education experience and adaptation are not mutually exclusive, but rather they go hand-in-hand, one perhaps affecting the other. Thus I will discuss them in one entity. The following subchapter (2.1.2) focuses on foreign students' post-graduation plans. Section 2.2 focuses on universities as internationalizing organizations. The third and last section of this chapter (2.3) explores the perspective of considering students as customers and universities as companies, providing a service for them. As this is a controversial topic, I shall shed light on some of the opposing comments as well. As universities are competing for students from all over the world, education marketing is a central issue, and successful marketing requires knowing who ones customers are. Therefore I find the perspective of universities as service providers and students as customers an important one to take a closer look at. This section (2.3) also links foreign (degree) students to the internationalization of universities. The chapter will end in a brief summary.

### **2.1 STUDYING AND LIVING ABROAD**

Studying and living abroad tend to go hand-in-hand with the exception of virtual studies or something similar. Students moving abroad for educational purposes, is a widely growing phenomenon. Political changes and ties universities share with one another have made it easier for students to commute from one country to another. Exchange students as well as foreign degree students are becoming more common by the day. There is also an economic rationale for studying abroad, especially when students from Asian and African countries study in Europe or North America (Byram and Feng 2006). These students are after a more status worthy diploma than what they could obtain from their home country. Byram and Feng (2006) also mentions another, often less considered factor behind study abroad; cultural interaction. Implicitly studying abroad can lead to more cultural knowledge, also known as cultural intellect (CQ) for the individual (not to forget about all the people who interact with this person from a different culture), resulting in better international relations. Perhaps that is why it is more common for students with abroad experience to obtain international jobs as opposed to those students who have not studied abroad (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen 2010). Experiencing other countries by living there is arguably more

insightful and a greater learning experience in total, than a visit per se, which brings us to the living abroad aspect.

Living abroad, relocating is naturally a part of studying in a different country. Several studies (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2010; the Finnish Nordic Graduate Survey 2007) imply that most students who study abroad have already had some amount of intercultural experiences; whether through travelling, living abroad with one's family or maybe even being bicultural (having parents of two different nationalities). Moving to different surroundings often requires some kind of adaptation on the foreigner's part. However, students who study abroad as implied by many studies (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2010; the Finnish Nordic Graduate Survey 2007) already have somewhat of an international background, which might be helpful when adapting to a new culture. They have prior experiences and are aware of cultural differences, which could imply having less culture shock

One could easily presume that the bigger the cultural shock, the more adaptation is being required. This however does not apply in all cases. Adaptation might depend on how "strong" one's cultural background is; Ayona (2006) who studied Japanese students going to the United Kingdom found that throughout their abroad experience they suffered psychological problems. While in comparison, Pearson-Evans (2006) who dwelled into Irish students in Japan noticed the students' level of confidence increase over the course of their abroad studies and also succeeded in cross-cultural adjustment. Thus in retrospective, it could be argued that some nationalities, with perhaps not as strong cultures, have the ability to adapt to cultures more easily, than those with stronger or more specific cultures. What is interesting about the aforementioned is the language perspective. English being such a universal language one might easily assume that going to an English speaking country would be easier than to a country with a less common spoken language, but apparently not, at least in the case of these two studies by Ayona (2006) and Pearson-Evans (2006).

Foreign students are often isolated from society (Byram and Feng 2006), mere speculation but perhaps this explains some extent of the psychological problems, which they might encounter, as reported by Ayona (2006) above. Byram and Feng (2006) also write that foreign students often interact with other foreign students or tend to float towards students of the same nationality. This would also imply that native students are often harder to get to know as international students are commonly mingling with one another and native students in contrary perhaps in their own groups. Although in some cases international students are separated from the native ones due to language issues, e.g. some courses are not taught in English.

An International Student Barometer (ISB) from 2010 also supports the fact that natives are hard to get acquainted to. The ISB study was conducted by the International Graduate Insight Group Ltd ([www.i-graduate.org](http://www.i-graduate.org)), consisting of 203 institutions, of which 19 were Finnish schools. It revealed that only 62% of foreign students were satisfied with the amount of local friends they made. The study also revealed that more social events should be thrown for the fundamental purpose of contact making with local students. (CIMO 2012) This would also help the foreign degree students not to feel so isolated and/or simply spending most of their time with other foreign students instead of Finnish ones.

### 2.1.1 Adaptation and communicating across cultures

As students pursue their education in another country, they will simultaneously have to adapt to their new surroundings as well as a different culture. Communication is a key element in adaptation. Even if people speak a mutual language, it does not necessarily mean that things are understood in the same way. A perhaps inevitable part of moving abroad is culture shock. The term was first introduced by Oberg (1960) and it is often associated with negative feelings, resulting from unpleasant surprises that occur when living in a new culture. Literature seemingly implies that everyone will suffer somewhat of a culture shock, but as Adler (1975) and David (1971) have argued, culture shock is not always to be associated with negative outcomes. They suggest that in small doses culture shock can actually enhance a person's character, resulting in self-development; the adoption of new principles, behaviors and values. The more one is able to experience the aspects of human diversity the more one will learn of oneself (Adler 1975:22). Culture shock is not necessarily a one-time occurrence, but instead it can happen every now and then, throughout the entire time spent adapting to a new culture. Oberg (1960) lists the following six aspects of culture shock:

1. Strain (due to needed psychological adaptation)
2. A sense of loss (due to what is left behind: friends/status/possessions)
3. Being rejected by/rejecting members of a new culture
4. Confusion (in terms of role expectations, values, self-identity)
5. Surprise, anxiety, even disgust (after becoming aware of cultural differences)
6. Feelings of failure (due to inability to adapt)

One symptom and also a way of dealing with culture shock, is to develop relationships with one's own nationality, if possible (Oberg 1960). This could explain the previously mentioned argument made by Byram and Feng (2006), that foreign students tend to interact and "hang" with one-another. The group cohesion might aid in adaptation or perhaps provide some comfort. Barker (1997) also points out that many international students are partially driven by the fear of failure, not to forget about financial pressures. Although Murphy-Lejeune (2002) suggest that international student often have academic parents and thus more financial support, which however is presumably not the case for everyone.

Furnham and Tresize (1983) have divided the possible problems which foreign students face in three categories: problems with living in a foreign culture, problems having to do with age, late-adolescence and academic problems. Reviewing this list of possible difficulties it almost seems self-evident that foreign degree students are bound to face some troubles during their studies. All students undoubtedly have to cope with some issues related to one or two of these categories. The first problem is the one I will mainly deal with as it namely concerns only the foreign students, but some academic issues will also be discussed.

Adapting to a new country and culture can be a slow and hard process. It can be argued that whether or not the student comes from a similar or different culture makes no difference in overall adaptability. Brewster (1995) and Brewster et al. (1993:27) have argued that assigning expatriates to a similar culture as opposed to a very different one, can be just as difficult. The reasons behind the equal amount of adaptation problems all comes down to expectations. Those who assume that not much adaptation is required due to similar cultures can actually have a harder time getting accustomed to their new surroundings. This is simply due to the reason that they do not realize that they are indeed somewhat and somewhere different. But oppositely, someone who is going to a very dissimilar culture and thus expecting many cultural differences and therefore is perhaps more prepared to the fact of having to adapt.

The argument made above, is also supported by Selmer (2007), who studied American business expatriates going to either Canada or Germany. He concluded that cultural dis/similarity plays no significant role in the adaptation of an individual, but being aware of differences helps. Selmer (2007) also mentions that when going to similar cultures some issues that are actually related to bad adaptation are thought to be e.g. problems with one's own work skills. Selmer's (2007) study results also support the role of expectations, in that they lay a groundwork, which helps one to obtain the kind of mindset of being either open- or closed-minded towards differences.



The aforementioned can be related to the foreign degree students of Aalto University as well; the ones who expect Finnish culture to be similar to their own can just as likely have a harder time adjusting to Finland than those who come from very dissimilar cultures. Expectations have been recognized early on as being a crucial aspect of adaptability, as they were already an important theme in the earliest studies done by Carey (1956). But even when being prepared and expecting a very different culture there will still be some kind of a shock, whether good or bad (Adler 1975; David 1971). This is also supported by Pearson-Evans's (2006) study concerning Irish students going to Japan who were seen to gain more self-confidence during their period abroad. But as mentioned before, the study results were almost the exact opposite in the case the Japanese students who moved to the United Kingdom (Ayona 2006). Some of the Japanese students suffered psychological problems such as depression. Thus, it can be argued that similar or dissimilar cultures is not perhaps as crucial of an issue as is the role of expectations and the mindset of the person who is locating to new surroundings. Perhaps the expectations of the Irish students were merely more accurate, in other words, they might have been more aware of the dissimilar cultures, starting from language to food to what not. While perhaps Japanese students who went to the United Kingdom, thought they already knew the spoken language, so perhaps they were expecting simply some mild issues to become accustomed to. Or then it was simply the case of maybe a strong culture going to a, not as strong culture which made adaptation difficult. Whatever the true reason, both Irish and Japanese students exemplify how culture shock can be either a good or a bad thing as mentioned by Adler (1975) and David (1971).

Martin Cortazzi and Lixian Jin (1997) who write about communication for learning across cultures, provide a better explanation as to why the Japanese students had perhaps a hard time adapting to the UK. They claim that quite often the element of culture is underestimated. Students and staff do not only portray cultural behavior and concepts, but they also rely on their own cultural background when interpreting and assessing other people's actions and spoken words. Lewis (1984) in addition mentions that problems with international student-teacher relationships often arise from different expectations. To clarify, what the international student/teacher has become accustomed to in previous educational experiences is what is expected to occur in the present situation as well. An important cultural aspect when it comes to universities is academic culture, which implies to:

*“the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically.”*

(Cortazzi and Jin 1997:77)

Academic cultures can often be the cause of friction as academic staff simply acts accordingly, as to what is expected, but international students on the other hand, might expect something quite different. This is why academic culture should be made more explicit. It is not as obvious to others as to e.g. how to behave in class; where Chinese students might prefer to listen in silence, could easily seem passive from the perspective of the teaching British professor. (Cortazzi and Jin 1997) Lewis (1984) however points out that staff's perceptions can differ immensely; where one professor assumes students are being passive, another will assume it is due to their cultural background. Yet both could be right and wrong at the same time. Students could just as well be indicating withdrawal due to social insecurity, which is a personality issue, not a cultural one and not related to passive behavior, only shyness. When speaking of cultures not everyone will fall into the same group trends and act according to the generalized ways. Also cultures are not as black and white as portrayed while trying to explain cultural differences. Keeping this in mind, Cortazzi and Jin (1997) also mention that while the UK is an individualistic country, expecting students to be original and develop their own opinions, students from collectivistic countries (e.g. China, Japan) do not share the same expectations, rather they strive for harmony and agreement within a group. Simply knowing and remembering the aforementioned could help in solving some misunderstandings. We are not all from the same pallet and thus have different manners and ways we have learned in the pasts and are only acting according to them.

There are many other important academic cultural related differences that perhaps would aid not only foreign students in adapting to a new study culture, but their teaching professor as well in being more aware of certain aspect and thus able to help and guide the students in a better way. Students from opposite sides of the world might be accustomed to different styles of written expression, deductive or inductive; either expressing the main idea first, followed by background information or vice versa. In western countries it is custom to use deductive styles in speech and writing whereas South- and East-Asian countries tend to use inductive style (Young 1994).

Also the notion of deductive and inductive styles, in speech and writing can cause misunderstandings as e.g. Westerners see Asians as “drifting” and not getting to the point whereas Asians feel that Westerners are too blunt by going straight to the point. When it comes to academics the differences in styles can ultimately lead to poor grades, where the professor will feel that the student is “drifting” not knowing the main point or vice versa. (Cortazzi and Jin 1997)

As stated before, the aspect of English, while often being one of, if not the most commonly spoken languages among two different nationalities, understanding English is not always as easy and self-

explanatory as one might think due to different styles of speech (deductive/inductive) or what not. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) make an excellent recollection of the fact that cultural ways of speaking are transferred into English and thus communication could be trickier across cultures even with a shared spoken language as English. Everything from vocabulary, pauses, intonations, body language to eye contact might differ depending on one's nationality. A good example is the way people use pauses in their speech. They found that Scandinavians, especially Finns often pause for a second or two, while Greek students often do not pause at all. This leads to the situation that Greeks, who are not familiar to pausing, tend to "interrupt" other people. Or at least that is what it appears like for e.g. Scandinavians, who are merely just taking a breather. More known are perhaps the uses of words such as "yes" and "no". A person from e.g. Japan will not say the word "no" because it might cause losing face and friction which might then could jeopardize group harmony. Also by saying "yes" the Japanese do not necessarily mean to agree, but instead imply that they have heard what was said, more in the "I understand what you are saying"-sense. (Cortazzi and Jin 1997)

A counter argument comes from Lewis (1984) who states that the "real" problems between intercultural relationships are often disguised by language issues. The actual cause of friction often comes down to different expectations, moreover cultural differences. Lewis's (1984) argument seems somewhat obvious, but then again, cultural differences and language issues are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Although Cortazzi and Jin (1997) forget the notion that nationality does not imply where one has e.g. learned English. Some might speak perfect American English learned in America, yet still be for example Chinese. So the spoken language could be perfect yet still lost in translation due to differences of culture. Although Lewis (1984) did discover through one interview that some students willingly fall back on the fact that English is not their mother language and use it as an alibi, thus using it in masking the real cause of communicational problems. The above opinions perhaps underplay the part of a person's personality, which can be the result of so much more than culture or nationality.

Another perception on aspects that can affect an individual's ability to adapt comes from Hofstede and Hofstede (2005). They list the following cultural dimensions, which can be used to characterize the different backgrounds that people have: level of power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, level of uncertainty avoidance and long-/short-term orientation. More adaptation might be needed if a student is from an extremely different cultural dimension compared to the country (s)he moves to. E.g. if an individual who is not used to too much power distance between e.g. student and teacher could have a difficult time adapting to treating teachers like gurus,

who always know best. As this thesis is concerned, Finland is a small-power-distance country, as compared to for example China and other Asian countries. In countries with a small-power distance the educational process is revolved around students, who are expected to find their own educational paths. Whereas in large-power-distance countries the educational process is teacher centered, meaning the teacher outlines the paths that students should follow. To illustrate further, looking at another example of the different cultural dimension; students from strong uncertainty avoidance countries (e.g. Germany) expect the professor to have all the answers and teacher who use “cryptic” language are regarded as competent gurus. While in comparison, students from weak uncertainty avoidance countries do not expect the teacher to know everything, issues can be argued about and student and teacher can have differences of opinions. Also academic language is refrained from, and plain basic language speaking teachers and books are accepted. (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005)

Keeping the aforementioned in mind one can assume that some students expect teachers to give more specific guidance, while other expect to be treated as equals and individuals, who “walk” their own paths. In Finland students are quite individual in the sense that they have freedom in deciding their own educational paths from which courses to take and which not, although having to follow a few set of guidelines.

All of the above seemingly implies that students, who come from very different cultural dimensions than Finland, are more likely to encounter issues that require adaptation and therefore change while trying to get accustomed to student life and life in Finland in general. While in comparison e.g. other Nordic country nationals who are more similar to Finns perhaps share certain types of similar behaviors by start. The amount and type of culture shock has also been shown to be related to how different the foreigner’s culture is in comparison to the country (s)he is going to; e.g. how much do values and behaviors differ from one another (Furnham 1997).

As was previously stated, an opposing argument for all this, made by Brewster (1995), argued that assigning expatriates to a similar culture can be as straining as sending them to a very different culture. When going to a similar culture expatriates failed to recognize actual differences, which can easily lead to problems that are not realized to being simply the result of cultures clashing. On the other hand being assigned to a very different culture one is naturally aware of possible dissimilarities.

Expectations played a key role in whether or not the individual was able to adapt to the foreign country in Selmer’s (2007) study as well. When commuting to Canada the American expatriates

expected that there were no huge differences in culture and therefore thought that adaptation was not something to even consider. This was the problem. Although Canada and the US are neighboring countries there are differences in for example how people talk to one another. The Canadians often regarded the American expatriates as arrogant and rude. Meanwhile those American expatriates who moved to Germany knew they were going to a very different country than their own, and expected to have to learn the “way to live and do things” in Germany. These expatriates faced less difficulties adapting since their mind was already open to change from the very beginning. And importantly they were aware that some problems were due to e.g. miscommunication, while as the Americans in Canada did not realize that even though everyone was a native English speaker, there were still differences in styles of speaking which caused miscommunication. Thus, Selmer (2007) concluded with the notion that it could be as difficult to adjust to a similar as to a dissimilar culture.

Foreign degree students can in some sense be related to self-initiated expatriates. They were not sent to a foreign country by a company, instead they left by their own free will (Inkson et al. 1997), looking for employment, or getting an education in this case. When it comes to expatriates however, many have at least the possibility of receiving some kind of proper training or guidance in helping them settle and adapt to their new surroundings. Foreign degree students, as well as self-initiated expatriates, do not receive training. On the other hand in this case, when discussing foreign degree students, a company, a University, is pulling the students in, thus the University often, if not always offers and more over, should offer the training/orientation.

### 2.1.2 After graduation

What happens after the foreign degree student graduates? Who stays and who leaves? The experience of living and studying in a foreign country impacts a young person’s life in such a strong way that the impression can last throughout their entire life. For a few the abroad experience is a negative one and they can remember having feelings of isolation and rejection, but for most the experience is an enlightening and pleasant one. As to the extent that the students do not want to return home or leave, but instead continue living in the foreign country. (Furham 1997)

Life and school life are not the only areas where Finnish and foreign students differ. They are often not on the same level when it comes to home/host country (Finland) employability. Even in a very international and globalized world, where international experience and multi-cultural knowledge are

valued, many Finnish employers still consider mastering the Finnish language a necessity and often something that cannot be overlooked. In other words, exceeding other applicants performance-wise is of little use if there is a deficiency in satisfying Finnish language skills. (Vehaskari 2010)

Small to medium size corporations (SMEs) especially tend not to see past insubstantial Finnish language skills. Knowing this country's language is often considered a necessity. SMEs perhaps consider, that hiring even a very talented foreigner, will most likely result in more bad than good. They fear the possibility of miscommunication due to inadequate language skills, whether the regard is their own English skills or the foreigner's Finnish. The negative and biased attitudes that SMEs' possess towards foreign employees is very much a downside for themselves. Many big corporations already use English as an official corporate language and thus have no problems hiring foreigners. The Information Technology sector is also often a place where language skills play a smaller role, one's know-how and qualifications are more important. SMEs have a lot to gain by hiring foreign professionals, especially if their intentions are to internationalize or if they already have some business in foreign markets. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that a company's ability to internationalize is considerably enhanced if it employs individuals who have studied, worked or lived abroad. (Vehaskari 2010)

An excellent example comes from Medikro Oy, a Kuopio-based company which develops, manufactures and markets medical instruments and systems. As part of the International Practicum-initiative which aims at offering foreign students as trainees for local business, Medikro hired four foreign student-trainees to outline different business environments within four different countries. Each student was given the task to make an outline of his/her own home country's business environment, with the help of a tutor-teacher. The results of this experiment were surprising to Medikro Oy. They report to have gained new local cooperation partners who treat them as locals, and thus offered Medikro Oy the best deals. But for quantitative proof, numbers speak for themselves; sales in the four countries grew over 40%, while overall exports only increased 2%. (Kuopion yliopistolehti 2/2009)

Thus, foreign students should be viewed as huge assets. They are at least somewhat familiar with Finnish culture, yet they also have their own unique backgrounds and not to mention they possess the qualities that are often obtained by living, studying or working abroad. They possess e.g. the experience of having had to adapt to unexpected and unusual situations and thus, will probably survive and fit in today's work-life, which could be characterized by fast-pace, uncertainty and surprising occurrences. Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen (2010) argue than studying abroad ads

more to a person's "skill-base" than just education. Language and cultural skills are also learned, which could easily increase the individual's attractiveness in the labor market.

Vehaskari (2010) sees a perplexing issue with the Finnish school system; if it has no intention or desire to keep these foreign students here after they have completed their degrees then why is it even recruiting and welcoming them to Finnish schools and paying for their education in the first place? Making a significant investment with zero return does not seem like a plausible idea from this point of view, but this is the other end of this spectrum, there are two sides to every story.

There is also the moral issue concerning "brain drain", which is a term used to describe students moving to more developed countries. If no one would return after receiving an education abroad, a country would be entirely responsible itself to educate individuals. As is almost self-evident some countries do not have the capacity to do so, but yet need educated individuals (who maybe have international connections), to function well. (Woodfield 2010)

Vehaskari (2010) however, fears that in a larger perspective and perhaps worst case scenario, if most international students have to return to their home countries or other countries due to the fact that they could not attain a job in Finland then it might even result in less students coming here in the future, which then leads to a significant decline in Finland's image as an innovative and international destination. All of the aforementioned can ultimately lead to the fact that this country will slowly start to lose its competitive edge and miss out on the perhaps simplest ways to develop and internationalize businesses due to the fact that we can no longer attract professional foreign labor. Universities could, and more over should be setting the example as Vehaskari (2010;16) continues:

*"What is alarming is that if tolerant, multilingual, outward-looking institutions like universities are unable to solve this problem, then what chance does the rest of the society have?"*

The aforementioned, statement(s) can be located at very much the other end of the spectrum of opinions. What Vehaskari (2010) also forgets to consider or mention is the aspect of cultural intellect (CQ), not only for the foreign students coming to Finland, but rather the whole Finnish society itself. CQ is also a factor for fellow Finnish classmates, who gain a better international learning experience when there is a multicultural educational atmosphere. As was mentioned before, there is the often less considered factor that comes with living abroad, which is the cultural aspect. Getting to know different people with different backgrounds is a great learning experience

and as said, not only for the foreigner but everyone else around them as well, it is a two way street where everyone learns from the other's differences. (Earley and Ang 2003)

Another perception comes from Gibbs and Maringe (2008), whom state that today's students are future leaders and powerful business-people. Investing in them, whether they leave Finland or not, is thus hardly as negative as Vehaskari (2010) makes it seem. Also importantly even if some do in fact leave Finland after graduation due to their own will or not there is always the chance they will some day return. Living abroad makes a strong impact on a young individual and this experience will hardly be forgotten (Byram and Feng 2006). Also as time goes by, people tend to forget the negative and remember the positives, the good times. Who is to say these people would not someday be in a significant role, perhaps doing business with a Finnish company for example.

Many universities use international programs to provide cross-cultural knowledge and perspectives for their students (Siaya and Hayward, 2003). What better way to obtain this than to have a multicultural learning environment? The main concern is not always monetary profit making, rather the profit can be simply a learning experience and whether or not monetary profits come in the future through knowledge and better understanding, will be seen. Another interesting argument can be found by exploring the VALOA-initiative (VALOA-hanke). Heli Turha's interview (<http://www.valoa-hanke.fi/Default.aspx?tabid=533>) with Anita Bisi from Aalto University School of Electrical Engineering provides some points to consider. Anita Bisi talks mostly about foreign staff but her words could be related to foreign students as well. The interview states, that if and when there is an opportunity to interact with foreigners, Finns tend to prefer speaking English. The interaction is seen as an opportunity to practice foreign language skills and most will be perplexed if the foreigner were to switch to Finnish language. Anita Bisi makes an excellent point when stating that Finns are not used to hearing bad spoken Finnish, while on the other hand most Finns do not speak perfectly fluent, non-foreign accent based English themselves. Perhaps native English speakers are more accustomed to hearing different accents and levels of fluency, but as Bisi adds, it is polite to let others (foreigners) practice on their language skills and only switch to English when asked. Another perhaps even somewhat self-evident issue which Anita Bisi adds, which can easily be forgotten, is to remember to regard the educational community as international instead of a community with international people.

All of the above raises a question: is Finnish language really such a necessity as Vehaskari (2010) insists (at least as it seemingly is when it comes to Finnish SMEs)? The notion seems somewhat controversial as English is such a universal language and as more and more companies are adapting



it as their corporate language due to the amount of internationalization. Wiers-Jenssen (2008) writes that most mobile students return home sometime after graduation. Whether or not returning home was a preplanned agenda or not, is not the decisive or perhaps even important factor, since plans change and can be changed quite easily. Given an opportunity that is not easily turned down, such as a promising job, might be the likely instigator that would get a foreign graduate, who planned to return home to reconsider this originally contemplated course of action and do the opposite instead.

Statistics Finland reports that 20% of all foreign graduates absolutely want to stay in Finland and 40% would like to stay here if they find suitable employment or education. On that note, the statistics also indicated that of the foreign graduates of 2007, 67% were still in Finland one year after. In comparison 98% of Finnish students stay in Finland after graduation. Looking at employed Finnish students to all 2007 Finnish graduates and comparing that to employed foreign students to all 2007 foreign graduates, comes the brutal truth; 86% of Finns compared to 49% foreigners are working in Finland. This clearly indicates that over half of the foreign students do not or mainly cannot put their acquired educational knowledge to actual practice here in Finland, but rather take their intellect and know-how elsewhere. (CIMO 2012) But perhaps this is not simply the case of being foreign; today it might be hard for anyone to be employed due to the bad economic situation.

## 2.2 INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This subchapter dwells into the internationalization of higher education, what it actually means for universities, what are the motives behind internationalization and what it entails. Universities like any other organizations are affected by globalization, but what does internationalization mean specifically in the respects of Higher Education, since after all, universities have their own unique qualities and cannot thus, be compared to basic business corporations. Tichy (1982:71) has stated that in order for a company to be successful, its culture needs to support the kind of business which it is, not to forget about an appropriate strategy in regard to that. The “kind of business” which universities fall into can be characterized by some of the following qualities:

1. Universities have goals which are sometimes difficult to measure (e.g. level of internationalization)
2. Staff is highly diverse, and goals are sometimes hard to achieve due to the necessary standards in relation to a variety of wanted outcomes

3. Conflicting values between professors and administrator which can hinder innovation and change
4. Universities operate in a complex and rapidly changing environment

(Sporn 1996)

In addition to how Sporn (1996) has characterized universities years prior, the fact that universities have become more marketing orientated, there has risen the notion that “*higher education isn’t something you buy like bananas or cars*”, and also “*universities must be open not just to those who can pay but to all those who deserve to go there.*” (Daniel 2002:6) Universities are thus rather unique when it comes to the markets which they operate in. As knowledge is not something that should perhaps be restricted, rather open for all. Also there is the notion of what universities should even be producing; wisdom or utility? (Gibbs 2008)

As the term “internationalization” has faced scrutiny and been an issue of disagreement in previous research, it is of no surprising nature that there is a lack of consensus to what the internationalization of higher education means and simply stands for (Knight 2003). One commonly used definition is “*the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution*” (Knight and de Wit 1995:8). Another type of definition for the internationalization of higher education comes from van der Wende (1997:19): “*any systematic sustained effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to globalization*”. Looking at the two definitions, it can be seen that the latter associates the internationalization of HE as being a response to globalization, while the prior defines it as being a deliberate action.

As mentioned in the introduction, internationalization is the result of globalization, and globalization thus as well often linked to with the notion of internationalization of higher education. It pushes towards changing to an international outlook (Altbach and Knight 2007). Thus, as a natural outcome, internationalizing higher education is an ongoing global phenomenon working towards adopting an international focus. Some questions however, still remain: What makes a university international and what activities does a university do or pursue in order to become international?

### 2.2.1 Internationalization of universities, key motivator and actions

Behind the internationalization process of universities are numerous motivator and behind the different motivators there are many actions to be undertaken to achieve the wanted internationalization goals. Gibbs and Maringe (2008) link globalization to the internationalization of higher education in the sense that the effects of globalization on the external environment can be seen as pushing universities to become international; adopting international approaches and ideologies. Globalization is seen as being the most important driver behind internationalization, but other motivators include knowledge and language acquisition, new technology (e.g. internet) which facilitates teaching, learning etc., the lack of capacity in certain countries to cater for all prospective students and enhancing the curriculum to prepare students for work life (Gibbs and Maringe 2008; Altbach and Knight 2007). Another important reason is to expand their market to attract more students from foreign countries as well, in order to be able to stand against competitors (Gibbs 2010). The increased competition of universities and similar to corporations, universities expand their “customer base” by internationalizing. Basic activities that many universities undertake as means of internationalization are cross-border collaborative arrangements, students and staff mobility, English degrees and programs for international students as well as online learning or (international) branch campuses (campuses not located in the main campus area, can be in another country). (Altbach and Knight 2007)

As the term internationalization is debated upon, so are the procedures involved in the internationalization of universities. They are not one dimensional self-explanatory issues. The clearly defined goals and methods written in a university’s actual internationalization strategy should not be confused with e.g. some international operations or means that are somewhat miscellaneous, which include; different international connections, contacts that staff members might have. Internationalization in universities is simply a process that is striving and working towards meeting the distinct set of strategic goals that it has clearly expressed in its internationalization strategy. (Altbach and Knight 2007)

An important part of internationalizing education in Europe is the Bologna process, which started in 1998. The main goal of the process is to create a common educational area with a focus on improving the overall competitiveness of European Higher Education in contrast to e.g. US universities. The following six functions outline the methods undertaken by the Bologna process:

1. Easily readable and comparable degrees

2. Uniform degree structures
3. Establishment of a system of credits – such as the ETCS system
4. Increased mobility
5. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
6. Promotion of European dimension in higher education
  - a. closer international cooperation; language and cultural education

The Finnish Ministry of Education has declared an internationalization strategy for the following years' course of action to be undertaken by Finnish Higher Education institutions. Some aspects of the strategy are to increase the quality of education as well as the attractiveness of Finnish Universities, support a multicultural society and aim for an international academic society, consisting of foreign staff and students.

Probably the most visible aspect of internationalization is the recruitment of foreign students, whether exchange or full degree students. Another important issue that comes with exchange studies is the transferability of one's studies. Also the mobility of staff increases their cultural knowledge as well as giving new perspectives e.g. on teaching methods. (The Finnish Ministry of Education 2009:21)

### 2.3 UNIVERSITIES AS ORGANISATIONS, STUDENTS AS CUSTOMERS

Today, higher education is facing increased competition and rivalry, not to mention the profits that can and are to be made. Students have a wide selection of universities and courses to choose from and are in a sense customers of a global market.

The perspective of regarding students as customers and universities as organizations, trying to satisfy their needs, is a highly controversial one (Gibbs and Maringe 2008). Many academics disagree whether or not the comparison is applicable. Some of them fear the "McDonaldization" of higher education, which suggests that universities are then easily lured into investing in subjects that will be most profitable to them (Daniel 2002). Academics that support the claim see it as a matter of increased trade through student and staff mobility, where cultures are brought closer together. Whether for or against, it could be argued that more agreement would be behind the notion that if the university knows its students' needs and desires, it is more likely to succeed in catering

for those needs and desires. Thus hopefully resulting in more satisfied and educated students, which is undoubtedly beneficial for any university as well as the society.

The word “customer” is often used to describe a person who purchases goods/services from a seller. Education however, is not something a student can simply buy from the university in a similar manner. Sometimes students do pay for their education (tuition fees) but yet they still do not have all the privileges and rights of typical customers, e.g. they cannot return broken or defected goods or get their money back or other compensation if they are not satisfied with the delivered service. All this seems somewhat not comparable to students but an opposing argument comes from Litten (1991) and Mintzberg (1996), who have argued that students can in fact be viewed as customers in the sense of a simple and direct purchaser. They have stated that students can be seen as to wearing one of the following hats in relation to which role they have with the university:

1. Client hat (e.g. receiving guidance)
2. Customer hat (being critical towards teaching, facilities etc.)
3. Citizen hat (behaving as a campus member would)
4. Subject hat (having obligations, e.g. must pass a test)

The different hats are not mutually exclusive. What is important, in order to build good relationships with students is for professors to understand which hat a student is wearing and in what stage of her/his education. (Gibbs and Maringe 2008) Similar as to what service providers would try to do when trying to improve their customer relationships in order to be able to satisfy their needs better.

The problem with using the customer label on students and what academics fear is the often used belief in business that “the customer is always right”. For example the increased tuition fees have resulted in more students suing universities due to poor quality of teaching or teaching that fell below the failing students’ expectations. (Gibbs and Maringe 2008) When it comes to evaluating service or product quality, the most important view has traditionally been that of the customer (Gerson 1993). But as critics point out, education is not something where students are passive parties; rather they actively take part in the consumption of teaching, using their own minds in understanding and analyzing received information and new knowledge (Lipsett 2005).

The perspective of viewing students as customers does however give some benefits to universities. It enables the university to really understand which areas need improvement and being considered good and valued in the eyes of its customers, students, can ultimately result in improving service

quality and gaining a better image. After all, satisfied customers, students, tell happy stories and thus become free promoters of the university and as the most powerful marketing tool for university recruitment is said to be word of mouth, it is a win-win situation. (Gibbs and Mariage 2008; Bennett 2005)

Gibbs and Maringe (2008) list six different dimensions as to what universities should acknowledge if regarding students as customers in order to achieve student satisfaction:

1. Demographics and psychographic (who the students are)
2. Their motives for studying at that certain university
3. Learning and teaching modes (what the students expect to learn and how they expect to be taught)
4. The knowledge and skills students expect to acquire by studying at the university
5. Likes and dislikes about the university and its programs
6. Progression through studies and post-qualification needs and expectation

The first dimension on the above lists is an excellent starting point. It is good for a university to recognize where its students come from and their cultural background which can also affect the third point: what kind of teaching and learning methods they are accustomed to and expect. The university should not however try to cater and fulfill every student's desires, which even as a thought seems highly impossible. But the important thing is to be aware of them, and do what can be done concerning the issues that can be changed for the better. The third and fourth dimension both have to do with expectations. What is typical of expectations is that they change and thus should be reviewed periodically. Also it is important to make a clear and explicit distinction between negotiable (e.g. teaching methods) or non-negotiable (e.g. assessment) issues, so that students would not have false expectations to begin with e.g. concerning issues that are non-negotiable and students have no say on. (Gibbs and Maringe 2008)

Another important dimension of the list above is the sixth one, especially the first part: "progression through studies". Channell (1990) suggests that feedback is the key element in student-teacher relationships not to mention how essential it is in order for the student to know how (s)he is progressing, which areas need improvement and which (s)he is good at etc. Perhaps universities have been more focused on the end goal; students receiving their diploma and/or securing a job. Many universities are simply responding to the demands of the "working world" and thus, teaching has become more appertained to the securing of future employment. The end goals of a diploma or

work are not however qualities which students use to rate universities. Students appreciate good teaching delivery, being introduced to different teaching styles with real-world examples/situations, receiving fair assessment, being respected and valued and not to forget, having fun while learning (Gibbs and Maringe 2008). Those are qualities that are linked with the university. Thus, securing a job post-graduation is not something that a student will give the university credit for. The period spent in a university is what is judged; meaning e.g. bad (learning/living) experiences during university, do not suddenly become happy times due to receiving a job. Thus, the end product here, diploma, might get you a job, but studying and being in a university is a far greater learning experience than a diploma can portray.

In respects to internationalization, in order to attract students universities have to exemplify that they can cater for students' needs and expectations. For example very little structured support is offered to international students and to stress in many countries support is mainly offered primarily to foreign exchange students. The support for foreign degree students mainly falls down to individual staff members' good will and helpfulness. In terms of viewing students as customers universities should try to see all of their operations as a service to students, not only the teaching and service aspects. This could result in a students-minded and -centric vision, ultimately leading to a better understanding of serving (international) students. (Kelo 2012)

To sum up this chapter, the internationalization of universities and the increasing amount of studying abroad, international students seem similar to the "which was first the chicken or the egg" –dilemma. Which is the cause which is the effect? Perhaps it can be seen as a simultaneous phenomenon, as globalization is seen as increasing the level of internationalization, thus both are effects of globalization.

Regarding students as customers is a fairly controversial issue. Many who appose this notion link it to the fact that universities cannot be compared to e.g. traditional service companies. However this concept does bring in the important factor of satisfying the key "players" and how satisfied customers/students can become free word-of-mouth marketers of the business/university, which is said to be one of the most powerful marketing tools, as people place the highest amount of trust in other people's opinions ([www.marketingcharts.com](http://www.marketingcharts.com)).

### 3. AALTO UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Aalto University was established in 2010, by the merger of the Helsinki School of Economics, Helsinki University of Technology and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. Thus, the Helsinki School of Economics became Aalto University School of Economics. Most Aalto ECON campuses are located in Helsinki, Finland (apart from its International Business Campus situated in Mikkeli).

The Helsinki School of Economics (now: Aalto University School of Economics) stands with over 100 years of history. It was established in 1904 and received University standing in 1911. Aalto ECON is one of the prestige few, that has “Triple Crown” status, with all three key accreditations (AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS). It is not only an indication of the quality of the school but is also important for global applause and brand recognition.

The merger which became to be Aalto University can be viewed as an example of dealing with the competitive nature that exists between Higher Education institutions as well as a collaboration effort in order to create synergy value. Today there is strong competition over students, whether foreign or domestic and one way of trying to tackle the problem of increasing competition is to widen a university’s offering. Aalto University therefore can be viewed as an attractive institution for art, business and polytechnic students alike. The university thus has a wider segment of potential students to whom it can cater for and market itself to.

Aalto University is tuition-free, which is undoubtedly one of its greater competitive edges as opposed to e.g. UK and US universities that charge high fees and even higher fees for international entrants (<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk>). Countries such as Germany, which is also tuition free for international students, are seeing a major increase in international students’ recruitment (Gibbs and Maringe 2008). At the time of writing this thesis Aalto University School of Economics stated that a name change will take place and starting from August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, Aalto ECON will be Aalto University School of Business. But in this thesis the old name is still used due to all gathered data being from that period.

Aalto University’s mission:

*“Aalto University works towards a better world through top-quality research, interdisciplinary collaboration, pioneering education, surpassing traditional boundaries, and enabling renewal. The*



*national mission of the University is to support Finland's success and contribute to Finnish society, its internationalization and competitiveness, and to promote the welfare of its people”*

(Aalto University’s strategy)

### 3.1 AALTO UNIVERSITY’S INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY

Aalto University’s internationalization strategy states the following on why it is important to for them to internationalize:

*“Top level experts, the producers of pioneering inventions and expertise are required to cater for society’s needs. The University’s competitive position is determined by its capacity to attract the best students, researchers and leaders. Through internationalization, universities expand their range in recruiting both researchers and students and participate in solving major global challenges together with other experts in their respective fields.”*

(Aalto University’s strategy)

Currently Aalto University’s internationalization strategy has six main focus areas. Aalto University is working on improving its (1) international visibility, (2) international recruitment, (3) international mobility of staff, (4) language strategy, (5) international teaching and studying, and finally, (6) international partnerships. The table below, (Table 1) illustrates which activities are being made in order to achieve the development of the six key areas.

Table 1. Aalto University's internationalization strategy: focus areas and activities

| <b>Key areas of development</b>          | <b>Activities involved in development</b>  |
|--|--|
| 1. University’s international visibility | invest in research and education and improve its visibility among relevant stakeholders through systematic marketing and communication |
| 2. International recruitment             | offer employees, students, and their families support in adapting to Finnish society and working life                                  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 3. International Mobility of Staff     | develop international competence of local staff through training and offer better support services to advance mobility  |
| 4. Language strategy                   | adopt English as a third language, teach the Finnish language and culture to foreign employees to facilitate their adaptation   |
| 5. International teaching and studying | integrate student exchange into the curriculum and support it with flexible credit transfer and scholarships, work abroad periods for teachers and researchers, and development of double degree programs                 |
| 6. International partnerships          | enhance cooperation with universities and research institutions in the Nordic countries and Russia, try to develop closer partnerships with top universities in Europe and North America and pursue opportunities in Asia |

(Aalto University Strategy)

As can be seen in Table 1, there are multiple activities to be made, but as often in strategy statements activities often remain quite vague. An important aspect of internationalization is how it is measured: The IMPI project (see <http://www.impi-project.eu>) which concentrates on measuring internationalization of higher education institutes has developed a set of indicator to suit all European institutes, but as it states “*so far no European-wide approach has been made to measure internationalisation.*” Different indicators are mostly used for self-evaluation, benchmarking to see where the university stands in terms of its competitors as well as rankings. (See full list of possible indicators developed by IMPI in Appendix 1)

Simply to point out how Aalto has done when it comes to internationalization, Table 2 below, portrays the often used indicator of proportion of international students (note amount of foreign degree students only, exchange students not included):

Table 2. Enrolling foreign degree students of Aalto ECON 2007-2011

**Foreign degree students enrolling in Aalto University School of Economics 2007-2011**

| Starting year | BSc | MSc | PhD |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| 2007          | 11  | 9   | 3   |

|             |    |    |    |
|-------------|----|----|----|
| <b>2008</b> | 18 | 24 | 1  |
| <b>2009</b> | 42 | 41 | 6  |
| <b>2010</b> | 38 | 54 | 10 |
| <b>2011</b> | 37 | 74 | 5  |

(Aalto Oodi-raportit)

As Table 2 indicated the total amount of enrolling students has increased every year from 2007. There has been decreasing between certain years and certain study levels (e.g. enrolling PhD students in 2010 vs. 2011) but the overall amount of enrolling students has steadily grown within each year. And as Table 2 does not indicate the total amount of foreign degree students present each year (simply the amount who were granted a place in the university) it can be argued that the foreign degree students as a whole has also increased each year.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The previous chapter focused on the literature that forms a framework for my study. This chapter presents the methods I used in my research and how I collected the data. My research focused mainly on finding out what the study experience is like for the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics and what are their plans after graduation?

## 4.1 RESEARCH METHOD

*“Measurement issues are among the most critical in scientific research because analysis and interpretation of empirical patterns and processes depend ultimately on the ability to develop high quality measures that accurately assess the phenomenon of interests.” (Alwin 2007:1)*

Initially I figured a survey would serve better purpose as it would capture a larger audience, but taking note of Alwin (2007:1) I realized that a survey does not portray feelings or give me the possibility to go deeper into a subject matter, so therefore, I decided to conduct some interviews as well. Through interviews I was able to get better real-life examples of what student life and life in Finland in general can be like for some foreign students. With the help of interviews I could answer my first research question; what is the study experience like for the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics, in a better way.

In order to keep the interview sample as diverse as possible, my interviewees were most of different nationalities, educational level, age, gender, and also they had lived in Finland for short and longer times. Most direct quotations used in the next chapter (5. Findings) come from one longer interview. In addition to my own research, I used some of the results from the International Student Barometer-study conducted in 2010 by the International Graduate Insight Group Ltd. This I did in order to bring in more data and give my research more validity, by having a similar survey to compare results to, not to mention having open comments from Finnish students as well as foreign degree students.

### 4.1.1 Survey

The term survey is used in portraying many different research approaches, but generally the word refers to: *“the selection of a relatively large sample of people from a pre-determined population followed by the collection of a relatively small amount of data from those individuals”*

(Kelley et al. 2003; 262)

My focus group was the whole population of foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics. The focus group of the survey consisted of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral students who have started their studies at Aalto University School of Economics somewhere between the years 2007 to 2011. I contacted the whole sample via email, which Aalto University School of Economics was kind enough to provide me with. The survey was sent to a total of 290 foreign student of Aalto ECON. Larger samples give a better estimate of the population, but it can be difficult to obtain an adequate number of responses (Kelley et al. 2003). It is seldom that everyone who is asked to take part in the survey will in fact do so, and as I quickly found out, even after three reminders the total amount of surveys started was 78, while 58 completed the entire survey. During one of my interviews, it was brought to my attention, that some of the foreign degree students I had sent the survey to, had no longer access to their Aalto University email accounts. So, therefore it is unclear as to what the actual sample size truly was (something less than 290) which in a way jeopardized my entire surveys liability. However, looking at responses they do portray an adequate sample of the foreign student population, yet I was fully aware not to make too many generalizations in order to refrain from sampling bias. That is why I also used some of the results from the International Student Barometer (ISB) survey from 2010 conducted by the International Graduate Insight Group Ltd to give a comparison to my own results, as well as perhaps support them. Through this I believe results The ISB study consisted of 203 institutions, 19 of which were Finnish schools, including Aalto University. The ISB survey consisted of five different categories in relation to foreign students': (1) arrival, (2) learning/studying experience, (3) living in general, (4) received support services and (5) overall satisfaction with their studies abroad. The ISB survey consisted of exchange students and Finnish students as well as foreign degree students from Aalto University as a whole. I have data concerning Aalto University School of Economics as well as the University as a whole, but there will be clear indicator of which data is of which focus group.

My survey consisted of 42-49 questions; depending on previous answers some additional questions were asked, therefore the variance. Most questions were multiple choice, but many of them offered the chance to specify or comment one's answers. Also up to (depending on answers) 14 questions were open-ended. Initially I was concerned with which questions to make mandatory and which not. But as the survey is quite long I decided not to have a single compulsory question. This allowed me to see which questions were disregarded, simply seen as futile or irrelevant or even seen as being too personal or what not.

The basis of my survey came from Gibbs and Maringe (2008) who lists six different dimensions that should be recognized while regarding students as customers (to be satisfied) in higher education. The dimensions are as follows:

1. Demographics and psychographic -who these students are
2. Their motives for studying at that certain University
3. What they expect to learn and how they expect to be taught (learning/teaching modes)
4. The knowledge and skills they expect to acquire by studying at the University
5. Likes and dislikes about the University and its programs
6. Progression through studies and post-qualification needs and expectation

In my survey I decided to disregard the fourth dimension since I believe it can be seen as also belonging to the sixth dimension. Post-qualification expectations in my view entail what skills one expects to gain through studying at the University. Thus I had five different groups of questions in order to grasp who the foreign degree students at Aalto University School of Economics are and also importantly what kinds of needs and expectations they have concerning the University. The five different categories of questions were as follows:

1. Basic and background information
2. Why choose Aalto University School of Economics
3. Learning/Teaching delivery modes and expectations
4. Likes/Dislikes about the University and/or its programs
5. Progression and Post-qualifications.

#### 4.1.2 Interview(s)

Interviews are a great tool when it comes to grasping feelings (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000). In my first research question; what is the study experience like for the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics, feelings play a centre and important role. Those are something that cannot be retrieved from a survey, thus I conducted some interviews, in order to go deeper into

certain issues. As Alwin (2007) also points out that using a survey to measure certain issues such as education can present difficulties as the focus is in a subject matter that is non-observable.

Most interviews took place at Aalto University's campus areas and a few in near by cafés. Interviewees were mostly selected at random. People I met during class, in school halls etc. Some were scheduled, while others were not. Few interviews were longer, one up to two hours, while others lasted about 5-20 minutes. Some interviews were one-on-one while others happened in a group. All in all I talked to at least 11 people (estimation is due to the fact that in group discussions not all gave their opinion). Finnish students were interviewed in Finnish, but only when one-on-one, and all international students and group interviews were interviewed in English.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000) have listed some of the benefits of using interviews as a method of study. Their points also support my reasons for conducting interviews; having humans as the subject, there are feelings involved; and clarifying some responses in surveys, as well as going deeper into perhaps even sensitive issues, where the interviewee can always remain anonymous. (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000)

Alasuutari (1995) mentions, that an interview is not simply a set of questions but an ongoing, constant interaction between interviewer and interviewee(s). The interaction between two people is seldom if ever the same as between two other people which brings up reliability issues and possible biases. It is said that two different people could come up with two different types of results, but the main idea is, that if these two were to discuss their results, they would be able to not even compromise, but come to a mutual understanding (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000).

Thus, in addition to the survey, I wanted a few more in-depth and concrete examples of what studying in a foreign country is actually like for some of the foreign degree students of Aalto ECON. Through these one-on-one and group interviews with students I was able to get a much better comprehension of what the study experience and life in general can be like for some of them. That is why I wanted the students to be as different as possible from one another; different nationalities, study levels, gender, age etc. so I could get a more diverse set of opinions, results that is.

I had 45 tentative questions (see Appendix 2) serving as a basis for the interviews, but as they were more like open discussions I made follow-up questions whenever I felt necessary. Also people could speak freely of any topic as much they wanted and often that was when I made some "true" discoveries on issues that had not even entered my mind. The main area of contemplation about the

interview was whether or not to record them. I finally decided not to. I figured this way the interview situation is more laid back and the interviewees can discuss all aspects especially problematic areas in more vocal terms. Especially in some cultures criticism is not something that is openly voiced and given. Simply to mention, that even though I did not record the interview, some comments were still made in an “off the record” nature. Openly criticizing certain aspects about Aalto University School of Economics was not something anyone wants to put their name on, even in what I would consider small issues. But the main idea was that most were quite pleased and thought that complaining is not justified as most issues were just fine. Due to the nature of the interviews, I truly believe that I got a more accurate and definitely more truthful information, than if they were more official, controlled, as to say recorded. I sometimes made notes simultaneously during the interview, but if not I did that straight after we had finished conversing, I typed everything down. To reaffirm that I had all the facts in order, I double checked all the unclear answers with each one. This way if there was anything false, or something they wished not to say on record or simply a misunderstanding it could be corrected early on.

The interviews will not be reported separately nor will I share personal data on the interviewees in order to respect the students’ wish to stay anonymous or simply to make sure the persons behind certain opinions will not be identified, just in case any third party would to try and do so. I will point out however, that most were Master’s students as they are the easiest for me to meet simply due to my own studies. All persons will be referred to as interviewee or him/her.

Alasuutari (1995:155) also points out that the nature of scientific studies is of so that the single main question or issue remains hidden. Thus subjects are not able to give perhaps the answers they feel the researcher is anticipating for.

All results are of Aalto University only and thus cannot be generalized. Also it has to be noted that certain samples used are too small to make overall generalizations about any certain group. As mentioned before, I am a student and thus have very little experience analysing or conducting surveys. It is also important to keep in mind that thus, results are reported from one student’s perspective, as to what I consider important. Also importantly, all my information is based on the belief that interviewees were speaking the truth.



## **5. FINDINGS**

Very little is known about Aalto University of Economics' foreign degree students. Statistics on where they come from, does not give proper let alone adequate information about them; who are these students; why did they choose Finland; how have they adapted to Finland in terms of the culture, the Finnish people and overall attitudes and atmosphere?

As stated in the previous chapter, I conducted a survey as well as shorter and longer interviews. Results of the survey will mostly be reported in this section and I shall use answers from my interviews to give additional points of view either for or against what the surveyed sample suggested. I will also use the International Student Barometer data concerning Aalto University School of Economics as something to shed perhaps more light on certain matters as well as include some Finnish students' opinions on e.g. their fellow foreign classmates. I will present the data mainly in overall results.

The following sections are organized by the different categories I used in my survey: (5.1) Basic and background information, (5.2) Why choose Aalto University School of Economics, (5.3) Learning/Teaching delivery modes and expectations, (5.4) Likes/Dislikes about the University and/or its programs and finally (5.5) Progression and Post-qualifications. Also note that all direct quotes are open comments from students. I have only corrected spelling errors or translated them from Finnish to English, nothing else has been altered.

What was interesting to see was the fact that the only four questions which were answered by everyone (78 students), were not, in fact, the first four, as one might easily presume. The questions which received 100% response rates were: "age", "current course level", "before starting your studies at Aalto University School of Economics, would you consider yourself to having somewhat an international outlook or background" and "what mostly influenced your decision to study somewhere other than your home country".

## 5.1 BASIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This category, 'basic and background information' was designed to find out the basic demographics, distribution between course levels and majors, as well as shed light on the level of cultural awareness or cultural intellect (CQ) the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics possess. The survey results indicated that the foreign degree students represented a very multinational group: respondents were from 20 different nationalities, including four

respondents belonging to another “unknown” nationality, than the 41 (see list in appendix 3) which were given in the survey or then they simply did not want to answer the question. Also respondents represented the different study levels quite accurately (see Table 2, pg.32), with 36% BSc, 50% MSc, and 14% PhD students. The division between the different study levels, quite well, represents the actual difference between the amounts of foreign degree students belonging to each level.

Bachelor level students were, perhaps not surprisingly the youngest students with 83% belonging to age group 18-22. Almost half of them did not consider themselves as to having an international background or outlook, meaning they had not travelled abroad, did not have international friends nor bi-cultural parents. Master’s students belonged mainly in the middle 23-27 age group, most had traveled and had international friend, and thus only 20% considered themselves of not having an international background. Doctoral students were slightly of older age than the average, and all had an international background, and a third, 33% of them were bi-cultural.

Most of the foreign degree students described themselves as to having somewhat an international background; 56% have lived or traveled abroad, 41% had many international friends and 14% were bi-cultural (have parents of different nationalities). Only a mere 27% regarded themselves as not having an international background or lacking the experiences of knowing different cultures.

When asked what mostly influenced your decision to study somewhere other than your home country; 12% replied that they like to travel and this was a way of extending their travel experiences. My interviewee also stated that:

*“It is a great opportunity to experience different cultures especially since you have this opportunity during your studies. Later in life it might be a lot harder once you have started “climbing the corporate ladder” and have set up your life somewhere. You are kind of stuck in one place then. Sure there are always expatriate assignments, but you get the point. Studying and working in a country are two different things I think. It’s kind of a dual learning experience, you learn business and you learn about Finns and Finland and other cultures as well because of international students.”*

One of the most common reasons however for studying abroad given by 29%, was simply the fact that one’s home country did not offer the study possibilities students were looking for. Perhaps the most common reason to study abroad however is due to family or friends; 18% reported that having family/friends in the foreign country influenced their decision the most. In addition most of the students who replied; “something else” specified their answer as the reason being a Finnish

boy/girlfriend, Finnish wife or having lived in Finland for many years due to immigration (with their family). Thus, I arrived to the conclusion, that family and (boy/girl)friends is, if not the most common reason to study somewhere other than one's home country, with then 32% of all respondents, it is at least one of the top reasons. Another important factor that influences the decision to study in a foreign country is economic and political unstableness, with 14% of students mentioning that as their main reason to get their education elsewhere.

Among the top culture shocks the students have experienced were, the Finnish weather (dark and cold), Finnish (drinking) culture, people and language, as well as the student environment and study methods. Luckily however 69% report that the shock is something they will or have gotten used to and thus not a permanent fixture affecting adaptation. Also interestingly Chinese and Vietnamese students mainly mentioned qualities concerned with Finnish people (timidness, coldness and drinking culture) while German and Russian students biggest shocks were to do with education; workload, professors and teaching methods.

My interviewee also mentioned being most shocked by the "bad" weather. Stating that in Finland you have to check the weather report daily and usually will have it bookmarked in your computer. My interviewee said to have gotten lucky to have been given the opportunity to take part in a Finnish orientation course (organized by another University) during his/her first summer in Finland. This course played an important role in adapting to Finland and getting to know and understand the country's culture and ways people behave and act.

## 5.2 WHY CHOOSE AALTO UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Over a third (36%) of foreign degree students chose Aalto ECON because of the University's reputation and to add, almost 9% made their decision based on a specific study program that Aalto ECON offers. Thus it can be concluded that almost half of the survey takers were more concerned with academics than e.g. free education, which was why 27% chose Aalto ECON. Out of that 27% whose main decision for choosing Aalto ECON was free education, surprisingly 15% would definitely and 38% would maybe consider paying a tuition fee while the minority would not even consider the issue. For many having better professors would be a reason to consider paying tuition.

Most students (79%) looked at ranking positions, but this 79% was split in exactly equal groups with one half not being, and the other half being influenced by rankings. All in all it can be argued

that a larger amount of students (21%+39,5% = 60,5%)\* do not care or give too much emphasis on universities' ranking positions.

\*(21% did not look at rankings, while 39,5% represents the half of students that looked but were not influenced by them)

Also in regards to nationality common alternative reasons as to why Aalto ECON was selected was said to be by Russians location, Vietnamese (lack of) tuition fee, Germans a specific study program and Chinese also mentioned the possibility of getting work.

The more typical and common "places" where foreign degree students were first introduced to Aalto ECON was the internet (40%), through a friend (25%) or family member (16%).

Most (81%) students listed Aalto ECON as being their university of first choice, while only 19% applied primarily somewhere else. Some of the other, first choice universities that were: University of Helsinki, Hanken School of Economics, Boston University, America University, Jacobs University, Temple University, University of Illinois, Nanyang Technological University and University of South California. As can be seen, many of the above Universities are located in the United States and two in Finland, which would then imply the want to study at least in Helsinki, Finland.

Out of all foreign degree students 77% moved to Finland because of their current studies, quite a large amount, 23% of students had already lived in Finland from some months even up to 21 years. Some had lived here due to prior studies and others had come because of family or a loved one. Looking at the facts mentioned above, it can be argued that a great proportion of the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics move to Helsinki, Finland, simply for educational purposes.

Some of the first words that came to the foreign degree students' minds when hearing Aalto University School of Economics were as follows:

*"Best in Finland, competitive in Europe"*

*"Excellence"*

*"Innovation, Integration, Audaciousness"*

*"Quality, Prestige, Class"*

*“Inferior brand to HSE”*

*“New, experimental, in transition”*

*“Prestigious. Outdated”*

*“International, Finland, quality, friends”*


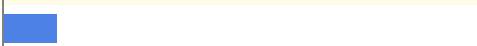
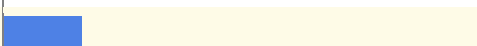
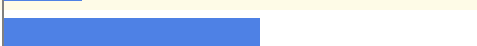
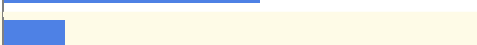
*“I miss HSE. Aalto University doesn’t really mean anything outside Finland”*

Most gave praising words, while some showed to not really know “what/who” Aalto ECON is, which is understandable since the University is in its fairly early stages.

### 5.3 LEARNING/TEACHING DELIVERY MODES AND EXPECTATIONS



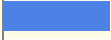


This part of the survey was designed to see whether gives teaching methods support the foreign students’ own personal styles of learning. Below, Table 3 show the grades students gave for the teaching methods at Aalto University School of Economics.

Table 3. What grade would you give the teaching methods at Aalto Econ? (1 lowest, 5 highest)

| #    | Answer |  | Response | %    |
|------|--------|--|----------|------|
| 1    | 1      |  | 3        | 6%   |
| 2    | 2      |  | 6        | 11%  |
| 3    | 3      |  | 9        | 17%  |
| 4    | 4      |  | 29       | 54%  |
| 5    | 5      |  | 7        | 13%  |
|      | Total  |  | 54       | 100% |
| Mean |        |  |          | 3.57 |

And to illustrate how well the teaching methods support the students’ personal way of learning Table 4 below.

Table 4. How well do the teaching methods at Aalto ECON support your personal way of learning?

| #    | Answer |   | Response | %    |
|------|--------|---|----------|------|
| 1    | 1      |  | 3        | 5%   |
| 2    | 2      |  | 9        | 16%  |
| 3    | 3      |  | 13       | 22%  |
| 4    | 4      |  | 25       | 43%  |
| 5    | 5      |  | 8        | 14%  |
|      | Total  |   | 58       | 100% |
| Mean |        |   | 3.45     |      |

As both Table 3 and Table 4 indicate, mean values in both cases were over the average possible grade (3). This would indicate that overall students are quite pleased with the teaching methods that are used at Aalto ECON. The International Student Barometer results also indicated that international students were pleased with overall learning, giving a 3.75 mean average comparable with Table 3 and Table 4 scores. German students in general expected a larger workload, while Russians thought there were too many assignments. What can be said of these two points of views other than perhaps some cultural differences is that, which I am sure most if not all student of Aalto ECON will agree with, there is a huge gap when it comes to courses and workload; some have a lot and some do not.

Students were also asked to indicate what type of lectures, exercises and class sizes they prefer, which can be seen in Table 5, below:

Table 5. What kinds of teaching methods/exercises do you like/dislike?

| #  | Question   | Like :) | Ok :/ or does not apply to my major | Dislike :( | Responses |
|----|--|---------|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 1  | Interactive lectures   | 46      | 11                                  | 1          | 58        |
| 2  | PowerPoint lectures: teacher teaches, students listen              | 23      | 23                                  | 14         | 60        |
| 3  | Teaching that includes more real life examples, not so much theory | 42      | 16                                  | 2          | 60        |
| 4  | Theory based teaching  | 20      | 18                                  | 22         | 60        |
| 5  | Group work   | 29      | 23                                  | 8          | 60        |
| 6  | Individual assignments   | 34      | 20                                  | 6          | 60        |
| 7  | Projects instead of exams  | 40      | 16                                  | 4          | 60        |
| 8  | Exams instead of projects  | 4       | 37                                  | 19         | 60        |
| 9  | Essays/Article reviews/Reaction papers                             | 26      | 18                                  | 16         | 60        |
| 10 | Less than 50 students per course                                   | 42      | 16                                  | 1          | 59        |
| 11 | More than 50 students per course                                   | 2       | 28                                  | 29         | 59        |

What is interesting too see from Table 5, is the fact that all offered teaching methods/exercises on average are very much on the “Like” and “Ok” side. The only criteria what almost half the students “Dislike” is the “More than 50 students per course” aspect. Also “Exams instead of projects” is not as liked as the other ones on this list of criteria. But all in all, students seem quite satisfied. In addition to these preferences students were asked whether they can think of any other type of teaching methods or exercises which they would have like to have but the University does not use. Some of the made suggestions were:

*“Seminar-style courses and a lot more student-teacher interaction in ALL courses”*



*“Haaga Helia UAS has been using a teaching model that I'd be interested in. Students in groups have to read books, prepare PPT and other materials for lectures. After each session like that, the teacher would summarize, give more insights and suggest areas for further self-study.”*

*”More interactive sessions, workshops, discussions”*

*”Trainee programs”*

*“That is true that presentation is a great way of transferring information, but my experience shows that some lecturers take it as the ONLY and heavenly way of teaching. Teachers use way more of this method while they should have many board writings, step by step examples, questions and answers and all other ways that have been developed during the past some thousands years in the history.”*

*“Interactive, friendly , fun”*

*“Lectures filmed and place online. Class time used for discussion between teacher and students. Perhaps group work and assignments that need to be done during class time. Engage the students!”*

Online lectures were mentioned by a few, but interaction between teacher and students was mentioned by many as something that they wished more of.

Below Table 6 speaks for itself, showing answers pertaining to whether students wanted more or less Finnish language courses:

Table 6. Would you have wanted more or less Finnish language courses?

| # | Answer                 | Response | %    |
|---|------------------------|----------|------|
| 1 | A lot more             | 41       | 67%  |
| 2 | Slightly more          | 7        | 11%  |
| 3 | No more, no less       | 10       | 16%  |
| 4 | Slightly less          | 1        | 2%   |
| 5 | A lot less             | 1        | 2%   |
| 6 | I speak fluent Finnish | 1        | 2%   |
|   | Total                  | 61       | 100% |

As Table 6 clearly indicates, the majority of students would like to have a lot more Finnish language courses. I was also told by one student that the signing-up times for Finnish language courses often take place during holidays or other school breaks and thus, many might miss out on them due to that reason. Others stated that there is a huge gap between some courses; e.g. one is too easy while the next level course is too difficult for them to be able to follow. Also my interviewee, who at one point spoke Finnish quite well, “gave up” on learning the Finnish language. After coming to the conclusion that good language skills are not enough, Finnish needs to be perfect to secure a job, so, it seemed like there was no more point as it was “too much work and no use” as to why keep studying something which could never be perfectly mastered.

I also asked questions related to group work. While many prefer to work with friends up to 35% would like to be in groups where there are Finns as well. Many also indicated the desire to meet new people, random selections and mixed groups all together. It was also clearly indicated that nationality plays no significant role in group cohesion. Mutual chemistry and understanding are rather the more important factors. My interviewee pointed out that even if it may be easier to work with people from the same nationality as yourself, it is far more beneficial to work in mixed groups. Students were also asked if they made friends easily or not. A total of 82% pointed out that Finnish students were hard to get to know, while comparing that to 51% stating that all international students were easy to get to know. In relation to that, a huge 78% would have wanted to meet more Finnish students. Some students even mentioned the perplexity of coming to Finland yet not meeting any Finnish people. Students were also asked to give suggestions if they could think of anything the University could do in helping them meet Finnish students. Below some suggestions:

*“Some kind of mentoring (by a Finnish student), but not related to studies or career, rather Finnish culture and city life”*

*“Different clubs which are only held in English”*

*“Don’t separate the students already in orientation week..”*

*“More teamwork”*

*“Lecturer should select students to groups”*

*“Events”*

My interviewee also pointed out that Aalto ECON should maybe focus on its Finnish students, when it comes to improving integration. The University should show Finnish students what they can learn and gain by mingling and integrating with the international students. Another suggestion was to organize housing in a way that there is at least one Finnish student with international students, preferable all from different nationalities, in order to help students become more integrated with one another.

The ISB survey also indicated that Finnish students alike would prefer to meet more international students as can be seen from the open comments some had made:

*“With reference to the last question ‘Studying with people from other cultures’, in response to dissatisfied meant that there are too few opportunities to study with people from other cultures in school ..”*

*“There are not many chances for Finnish students to get to know to people from other cultures.”*

These comments indicate that the feelings are mutual, when it comes to Finns meeting foreign students and vice versa, both would like to have more interaction. However I feel it is necessary to illustrate some opposing internationalization and the integration of foreign and Finnish students:

*” Referring to ‘Studying with people from other cultures’, I have been horrified by the level of English of some foreign students. They cannot speak or understand English very well, which causes that they are not able to follow classes. Besides, they most certainly cannot write academic texts in English, which results in a lot of extra work for us who really are fluent in English. I, as well as many other students I’ve talked with, think that a Master’s programme is not the place for coming to*

*learn to speak a new language, especially when it affects negatively on the studies of those people who need to work with them. If Aalto wants to make the student experiences more positive, they should apply the same language requirements to every student they take in, so that everybody has equal chances of getting the most out of the studies. Teaching English for others is certainly not what I was expecting to experience when I applied to a programme that was supposed to be of high quality.”*

International students (who are not exempt due to e.g. background studies) that apply to Master’s programs have to take a proficiency test (TOEFL, IELTS, CAE/CPE or the Pearson Test of English Academic) to ensure a required level of English. This would seem as to somewhat solve the language issue this Finnish student seems worried about. Although I must just say from my own experience, from being a student at Aalto ECON (and HSE) for many years, that this is not simply an issue that can be related to foreign students, Finnish students have problems with the English language just as well.

Another critique by a Finnish student concerning language and teaching is as follows:

*“I wonder why almost all master's level courses have to be lectured in English. Finnish professors I think would have a lot more to offer in the Finnish language, than with the forced English-language lectures. Is it here in Finland important to provide for exchange students a large number of course options rather than provide the vast majority of students with high quality teaching in their mother tongue? English will become familiar with the vocabulary of written material even while teaching would be in Finnish. ”*

To comment on the statement above, many foreign degree students expressed that there was a limited selection of courses offered in English and often the desired course was only available in Finnish. Thus, hard to decide what the truth of the matter is.

#### 5.4 LIKES/DISLIKES ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY AND/OR ITS PROGRAMS

When asked what the best part about Aalto University School of Economics is, the two most commonly given words were: *“Reputation”* and *“Flexibility”*. My interviewee also praised the University for being very flexible; having re-exams and also a good-course selection. (S)he also pointed out that flexibility is not something which can be said of other universities and should thus really be emphasized since it is such a positive and rare quality. Just to shed light on a simple

comparison to universities in my interviewee's home country: there are no re-exams and if you do not receive a higher than class-average on your exams, you automatically fail the course.

As for the worst things about Aalto ECON, the most common answers were: workload, bad IT facilities (too few free computer, broken printers) and bad teachers/teaching styles. Also a few other comments:

*"The organization for international students - e.g. when we arrived in our first week, there were only 3 days left to register for some courses. When we complained that this information could have been told us earlier via email or so, it was admitted that it is bad organization, but still nobody has done anything about it. As well I got only 1 week before my arrival to Finland the information about the orientation week. As I had to quit my job and apartment in Germany, I was quite unsure about everything and would have preferred to get more information earlier!"*

*"It's an outdated building, outdated teaching philosophy and they've shown no commitment to change (say, integrating to the joint campus in Otaniemi). HSE will remain disconnected, irrelevant and obsolete as a result."*

*"Teacher don't give a damn about you, too focused on research work instead of teaching."*

*"No Finnish language and culture courses"*

There was also criticism about courses from the other Aalto University's branches; why even after all these universities merged, into Aalto University, it is still impossible to for example take design courses.

When it comes to student services 54% were content with the help they were given while 46% would have wanted some which either the University does not offer or the students simply did not receive. The most common answer on what students wished but did not receive was *"Finnish language courses"*. From what I heard, PhD students are not offered language studies. Some other wants included:

*"There should be tutorial groups where the very good students volunteer to teach the not too good student in any course"*

In the ISB open comment section concerning services, many stated the desire for having religious facilities.

As Aalto University is tuition free, it perhaps is no surprise that 44% stated they would not even consider paying, 47% might consider while only a mere 9% would definitely be willing to pay in order to receive e.g. better services, teaching or facilities.

Orientation was said to being good by 61%. The criticism that was made about orientation was mostly about the lack of useful information, unhelpful tutors and the separation of international and Finnish students. Some stated that a simple tour of each campus building would have been very helpful, in terms of future “navigations” in them.

I also asked how students would feel about having another (non-Finnish) student/graduate acting as a mentor and someone that could be approached about any questions or problems. Table 8 below shows what students thought of the idea of having a mentor.

Table 7. How would you feel about having another (non-Finnish) student/graduate acting as a mentor and someone you could approach about any questions or problems?

| # | Answer  | Response | %    |
|---|---|----------|------|
| 1 | I would like it, another student is easier to approach than ex. a staff member. | 29       | 52%  |
| 2 | I would like it but would prefer the mentor to be Finnish.                      | 19       | 34%  |
| 3 | I would not like the idea or would probably not approach the mentor.            | 8        | 14%  |
|   | Total   | 56       | 100% |

As can be seen in Table 7, 86% would like the idea of having a mentor. My interviewee also liked the idea of having a mentor. It was also pointed out by him/her that for first year students it would be more beneficial to have a mentor of the same nationality if only possible, since that person perhaps knows better which issues are important and can relate to them. While after the first year it

would be good to have a mentor that is not the same nationality, simply to again support interaction between all nationalities.

My interviewee was curious to know whether international students have been on exchange during their Aalto ECON period and whether or not that exchange study period affected their perception regarding Aalto ECON in any way. Out of 12 responses; three said to appreciate Aalto ECON more after their exchange, two said the opposite, while the rest were not affected. The two who said to have now a more negative perception of Aalto ECON, were affected by the exchange university's relaxed atmosphere and overall care for its students.

## 5.5 PROGRESSION AND POST-QUALIFICATIONS

The ISB study results concerning Aalto University and Aalto ECON both indicated that students, international, and Finnish ones as well, would have desired much more feedback. One of my survey takers mentioned the fact that (s)he even overestimated his/her math skills due to lack of feedback. Students give teachers feedback at the end of every course, stating what was good and what was not so good about a course and perhaps even making suggestions on how to improve the course in the future. Similar feedback might be helpful for students as well, instead of only having a final grade to look at.

Of the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics 37% have found work in Finland, while 28% are still looking for employment, the rest are not looking, and one student was even working for a company outside of Finland. The 28% that are looking for employment were asked to give percentages according to which attributes they think affect their employability, or lack thereof, the most. The following average scores were retrieved among the three different categories that were given:

1. Personal skills and qualifications 18,5%
2. Lack of work experience 18,7%
3. Insufficient Finnish language skills 62,8%

The above figures correlate again well with the facts on Table 7 that 67% wanted a lot more Finnish language courses while a mere 4% (only two people) wanted less.

But as employment is concerned with, 20% said it is not the University's task to help students find work, while 70% hoped for some help, surprisingly almost 10% expected the University to either give the student a job or secure an open position for them on their behalf. Employment is an important issue as 81% were planning on staying in Finland long-term applying for work or further studies after graduation and of those who planned on staying short-term stated work as being the number one reason they would change their plans, as to stay. Over half (56%) of replying students indicated Finland as being their primary location of future job hunting. Of the rest, 20% planned on going back to work at their home country, while 24% planned on going somewhere else. Of these 44% (20%+24%) who did not consider Finland as being their primary location of future work, again many stated the reason being the Finnish language, which stood in the way of getting work that matched their education. The ISB survey also revealed that 78% of foreign students find it important to obtain full-time employment after their studies and 74% hoped to receive a permanent living permit in Finland, implying their wish to stay long-term.

In the open comment section, on suggestions what the university could do in order to help students find and get jobs, I received a surprisingly large amount of answers. Over 63% gave suggestions and comments on the matter, which I find to be an indication (as many open questions were often not answered by that many students) that this is an issue that has been thought about. That is also why I felt it is important to present quite many of the given comments. Below are direct quotes on some of the suggestions that were made:

*“University does enough in terms of helping me personally find the job, but it has to work on bigger picture - promote its foreign degree students among Finnish companies. University has influence as a provider of future labor and transferor of knowledge of the society, and if its willing to transfer this knowledge to foreign students, it is logical to put some efforts into marketing those students, because eventually it will pay back if a foreign student stay in Finland after graduation.”*

*“Well, the school can try to reach multinational corporations that in need of foreign workforce through its own professional connections. The service should be introduced and exposed more to foreign students who want to apply for a job in Finland. Creating events, conferences engaging foreign students to the Finnish market should be more focused.”*

*“The school can offer more real-life business projects for students.”*

*“Teach FIRST YEAR foreign degree student: 1. Importance of Finnish language as job requirement  
2. Where to find internship/summer job opportunities”*



*“What needs to be changed is the attitude of Finnish hiring companies towards hiring non-Finnish speakers”*

*“Maybe providing more info on jobs/internships that can be performed in English in the Arena fair, why not a workshop during that day? maybe have a stand with previous international students who did manage to find a job and let them tell us what they went through, etc.”*

*“Make it a mandatory part of the studies to learn Finnish.”*

*“Involve students more with companies during the course of the studies, by real life projects, research etc.”*

*“Partner with companies that are less stuck on the use of Finnish language and make competition / projects just for FOREIGN people, where someone will get a job by completion of the project.”*

*“Trainee programs/internships with partnering businesses”*

*“Letter of recommendation from professors more often. - Workshop with companies to tell them about the huge benefits to get from international students by giving them work.”*

*“Offering basic level Finnish courses (yeah, it is often important to know Finnish for work and when I move to a country for studying it would be nice to get the opportunity to also learn the language at university)”*

*“I guess there's finally Aalto People or whatever, but if that's the best online network of alumni then it's sad that it took so long. make that network robust and popular and use that as a key vehicle for making connections. Also have HSE get active on linkedin and build ground/presence there if not already.”*

*“To launch a service specialized on help for foreign students to find a job, providing jobs available where Finnish is not a requirement, some trainings what Finnish employer might expect from you...”*

*“Make partner programs with companies to give job for graduates. Give recommendation letters. Give employment within university.”*

*“Offer intensive and helpful Finnish courses! I now go to Kesäyliopisto, they are really good and it would be great if Aalto could promote them and pay for them. All the people who go to Haaga-Helia say that's just for credits and they don't learn it on a sufficient level.”*

*“More and stronger contacts with businesses to make recruiting pipelines. An office just for tracking and helping students find jobs, including outreach to potential firms as well as alumni.”*

One student from the ISB studies results expressed the following concern: *“What purpose are we (foreign degree students) here to serve? Is it just to meet the quota's placed on university to have a certain amount of foreign students or are we to become future employees of Finland? Would be nice to know what mission we are here to fulfill so one can be prepared accordingly.”*

My interviewee expressed the interest to know where other previously graduated foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics are at the moment. Have they found employment in Finland, and if so, where and importantly how. This information would be helpful and also beneficial when it comes to recruiting new foreign students. (S)he proposed the idea of having some kind of database where there would be information about a university's students' employability. It was pointed out how this would be a great asset especially if results are favorable. My interviewee suspected that many international students would appreciate this information as well as the University much more, if it knew how previous foreign degree students have performed after graduation. It would also give them comfort as well as proof that the University is good, students get hired after attending it.

Finally I asked whether students would recommend Aalto University School of Economics and/or Finland and what overall grade they would give Aalto ECON. The equal amount would recommend Aalto ECON and Finland as opposed to only 7.5% saying they would not recommend either. As for what overall grade students would give Aalto ECON is shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8. What overall grade would you give Aalto ECON?










| #    | Answer |   | Response | %    |
|------|--------|---|----------|------|
| 0    | 0      |   | 0        | 0%   |
| 1    | 1      |   | 0        | 0%   |
| 2    | 2      |  | 2        | 4%   |
| 3    | 3      |  | 2        | 4%   |
| 4    | 4      |  | 1        | 2%   |
| 5    | 5      |  | 1        | 2%   |
| 6    | 6      |  | 3        | 5%   |
| 7    | 7      |  | 14       | 25%  |
| 8    | 8      |  | 22       | 40%  |
| 9    | 9      |  | 9        | 16%  |
| 10   | 10     |  | 1        | 2%   |
|      | Total  |   | 55       | 100% |
| Mean |        |   | 7.31     |      |

Table 9

Table 8, above, uses quite a large scale, starting from zero. Thus the mean average of 7.31 can be thought of as being very high. Especially since the majority of foreign degree students gave a grade of 8, with only a few giving grades below the average grade in this scale (5).

The survey ended with an open comment box where students could give any comments and feedback to Aalto ECON (or me) if they wished to do so. To conclude my Findings chapter, below I have included at least a few of the comments which I thought should be voiced:

*“I think, as a foreign student, I would like to know more about what Finnish (and Aalto's) policies are towards foreigners. It is not very clear if we are seen as a problem that must be integrated into the society (like the refugees), or if they want to attract more of us, and if so, is it for money (tuition fees, as students, just study here and go away afterwards), or for talent/labor (study here, then try to find a job here). It would be great to know where we stand so we can try to market ourselves better.”*

*“Finnish classes at the school would be great; going to Haaga-Helia for classes can be annoying. Also, perhaps a tutor program for us to have one-on-one sessions with a Finn to practice the language with.”*

*“It all comes down to work opportunities really. Why would you spent 7 years studying in a country where you can not work after? Its a lousy investment.”*

*“More business projects for foreign students to take part in.”*

*“Language courses are a must to make integration easier - understanding sth here and there is always nice. Fostering group work with mixed groups, i.e. Finns and non-Finns. Have activities which do not include drinking, since some international students (e.g. many Asians) do not like taking part in those activities. Provide more logistical help to foreign degree students before or shortly after they have arrived, e.g. in terms of housing, opening a bank account etc. (maybe have different arrival packages the students could chose from - so the service could be adapted to individuals' needs)”*

*“One last time: please offer possibilities for Master's students to take (basic level) Finnish courses (I am sure a lot of people would like to take those, even though they are not part of the degree program.)”*

*“As I already mentioned, the most important thing is also to make the international student feel good about Aalto BEFORE arrival. The organization before my arrival and the lack of information made me at some point feel like the university is maybe not so good or unprofessional. But these thoughts fade away when I arrived - but still, I guess Aalto doesn't want to have their future students feel bad about their uni before arrival, so they definitely should improve their organization!”*

*“1 - Information related to the School and its activities should always be in English as well, not only Finnish/Swedish (not talking about official information only, but also the small things like signs on the wall, warnings, etc) 2 - Enhance awareness of international "etiquette" for Finnish students and staff - for example, in the presence of a non-Finnish person (or non-native person in any country) it's extremely rude to speak only the native language among a group of native speakers and leave the foreigner totally off track of what's happening or what people are talking about. 3 - More support for foreign students in terms of practical issues of living in Finland (information on website is not enough, perhaps information sessions) 4 - Provide help in finding internships, part-time jobs and similar, e.g. at Universities and other places where Finnish is not mandatory. There might be no tuition fees but living in Helsinki is expensive and a student needs to cover living expenses (for me help means advisory personal help, such as advising about places*

*where to look for a job, places suitable for foreigners, not only a career forum on the web with job posts).”*

*“I am staying in Finland this summer (learning Finnish), and I also wanted to take some summer courses in Aalto that could be included in my degree (non-language), but there were not any! I wanted something from BT and Finance, but only basic courses were offered and mostly in Finnish. I just thought that more major/minor courses could be offered in the summer, I am sure that i.e Finance courses would definitely attract a lot of students.”*

My interviewee also pointed out that during summer time, there was not that much to do, unless you went to visit your home country. (S)he also proposed as to having perhaps internship possibilities during summertime. It was also implied that summer can be quite a lonely period for some students, especially if their friends go back home for the holidays and they stay in Finland.

## 6. DISCUSSION

I think before I go deeper into discussing my research, the literature and my findings, I should make note of some issues. As a student of Aalto ECON I feel that it comes almost naturally, that I agree, understand and sympathize with the foreign degree students in many issues. Even though we are of different nationalities it does not mean that I have not experienced similar problems. As stated in the Introduction, I have studied and lived abroad as well. Also I know what it is like being a student of Aalto ECON regardless of nationality.

As international students come to Finland from all parts of the world there is some amount of adaptation involved. As Oberg (1960) listed the different aspects of culture shock, I believe the ones which Aalto ECON can have a positive affect on in respect to its incoming foreign degree students are: (3) being rejected by members of a new culture and (4) confusion (in terms of role expectations, values, self-identity). As 82% of foreign students pointed out, Finnish students are hard to get to know and 78% would have liked to meet more of them. This as well as my interviews imply the same as was said by Byram and Feng (2006) that international students tend to “hang” with one another. Thus better integration would aid in having feelings of being accepted by “members of the new culture” instead of rejection. I think the ideas that were posed about having tutor groups (where a student helps another student in a subject) and Finnish students to practice the Finnish language with, are both excellent ways of integrating Finnish and foreign students. Both are great opportunities to meet new people.

The mention of proper “etiquette” which was brought up in the open comments of the survey also made a great implication as for Finnish students to always speak English, when there are people around who do not understand Finnish. I think the same goes both ways; Finnish students probably do not understand e.g. Chinese, so every student, staff member, everyone, should always speak a language that is understood by all who is at ear length. Here, I think it is also good to mention that comment which was made by one Finnish student (found at bottom of pg.48) where it was expressed that sometimes international students have inadequate language skills, and how e.g. group work, can be difficult as a result of that. Sometimes this is in fact the case, as is common, everyone is not as competent in some skills (here English) as others, that is normal and everyday life I think. Another perspective towards this issue was made by Cortazzi and Jin (1997) who mentioned the underestimation of cultural differences. Culture is not only something that is portrayed through behavior and unique concepts, but rather it affects interpreting and assessing other people’s actions and spoken words. Thus, miscommunication can be a result of speaking a

language differently, not to forget about personalities as well. When it comes to communicating even between a close friends or family members, there are still misunderstandings, which I'm sure all people have encountered. Thus miscommunication between people who do not know each other, regardless of background or nationality, is no surprise. The only ways to try to avoid them is make sure you understood what the other one really meant, if there is even a slightest chance you did not.

Expectations play an important role in adaptation as has been portrayed by previous literature (Brester 1995; Brester et al. 1993; Carey 1956; Selmer 2007). Simple confusions as to what is expected of a student are easily fixed through better communication and information flow. Lewis (1984) also argued that different expectations are often the cause of problems in international student-teacher relationships. To clarify, what the international student/teacher has become accustomed to in previous educational experiences is what is expected to occur in the present situation as well. One does not have to change personalities when moving abroad and lose a sense of self while trying to fit in. That is why basic information about the certain culture is important. Simply so you know how to act and not to offend people, by doing something that is e.g. considered inappropriate at that certain country. It might cause additional strain and embarrassment to become aware that you have maybe insulted someone simply because you were not aware of the "ways" of the country.

What I see as being critically important, as was mentioned in the survey a couple of times as well, is the given information before arrival. It is in a crucial role as to molding expectations, which literature (Brester 1995; Brester et al. 1993; Carey 1956; Selmer 2007) suggested played a key role in adaptation. Foreign students already might gain a better idea on what Aalto ECON and Finland are like if they were supplied with thorough information. In this case I do not see that there is the possibility to supply too much information. Certain things could simply be distributed in a manner that those who want extra knowledge on an issue, can read it and those student who do not want to e.g. familiarize themselves too much about Aalto ECON and/or Finland do not have to. Just better communication overall, will go a long way I believe. It also shows that students are cared for, not left on their own to figure things out. I personally have always had to rely on my friends when it comes to finding out where to go, to do what not in relation to Aalto University. New incoming students from abroad probably do not have that luxury of friends who already can guide them. This is where a mentor would be very handy. As most implied, a student mentor is much easier to approach than a staff member. And I'm suspecting that there is also the fact that staff members are often busy, cannot relate to students the same way as a fellow student and there might be the sense

of being afraid of looking stupid in the eyes of staff member if e.g. posing a dumb question. I also think that a student mentor would be extremely busy, especially during the fall enrollment times. This could be at least something to try out. I'm sure some students would not mind helping new coming students for a little pocket money. And this is something that foreign degree students could do as well. As my interviewee pointed out that for first year students it would be good if the mentor were the same nationality, or even another foreigner I think would be better than a Finnish student. They simply know better all the steps to take when just setting up life in a new country. With that said, Finnish mentor would also be handy, but perhaps later on as my interviewee suggested.

As many studies imply, international students often have previous international experiences (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Wiers-Jenssen et al. 2010; the Finnish Nordic Graduate Survey 2007). Some might have even lived in a foreign country before and thus might be well aware of certain amount of adaptation which is required. But it should be noted that even if a student has lived abroad before with one's family, things might have been quite different then due to e.g. age, and thus, having one's parents take care of practical matters instead of having to deal with them one's self. So simply again to ease this transition from country to another, someone, a mentor, who knows what it is like, would undoubtedly be helpful and perhaps even comforting.

When it comes to internationalization, what is somewhat perplexing is the means and ends of Aalto University's language strategy, which is one of its key areas of development. It states the following:

*“The University will formulate a separate language strategy to enable internationalization. English will be adopted as the third language equal to Finnish and Swedish in Aalto University. The teaching of the Finnish language and culture for foreign employees will be intensified to facilitate their smooth integration in to the Finnish society.”*

(Aalto University's strategy)

I am left to wonder why, if Finnish language and culture has always been taught for the students (now internationalization strategy is focusing on employees as well), then why so many commented on the lack of language and cultural studies? Many universities use international programs to provide cross-cultural knowledge and perspectives for their students (Siaya and Hayward, 2003) and so does Aalto ECON. The basic course which is offered, *Get to know Finland*, is either during the whole fall semester or the whole spring semester, and there is only 1 credit (CR) to be made



from this once a week session, lasting for half a year. The only problem I can think of with this is probably the fact that it should be more intense. Committing to such a course when there is only one credit to be made, might seem like a lot of work for nothing. But mostly, I speculate, that the reason might be the difficulty of simply integrating a course that last one whole semester into one's other mandatory studies. There is also, I think, the strong possibility that students are not aware of this course. At least that is what impression I get in regards to my study result. No one mentioned as to have taken part in it. And so I did not even know, until very recently that a certain course even existed. Perhaps what a few students said about making Finnish language courses mandatory offers a relevant point. There was another comment which stressed the importance of doing so early on. First year students perhaps do not yet realize how important having some amount of Finnish language skills is, if they are to seek future employment in Finland.

In my point of view the student have a lot gain by learning the Finnish language and about Finnish culture. They are perhaps more likely to stay here as a result. As Statistics Finland reports from 2007 that 20% of all foreign graduates absolutely want to stay in Finland and 40% would like to stay here if they find suitable employment or education. Yet more ( 67%) were still in Finland one year after but only 49% were working. (CIMO Faktaa Expressen 2/2012) Today I'm sure the figures are different. As my survey indicated 81% of foreign students were planning to stay in Finland long-term, before starting their studies. But as where to apply for future jobs only 56% said that their primary location is Finland. And like reported the main reason behind this was inadequate Finnish language skills. Seems like there is a self-evident solution to this problem; as 82% of survey takers implied, offer more Finnish language courses. I think the only factor probably affecting the "non-availability" (there are Finnish language courses offered quarterly, but perhaps there should be more) of Finnish language studies at Aalto ECON comes down to budget. Whether that be the case, I'm sure students can come up with cheap or free solutions. Like the idea of having a Finnish student to practice the Finnish language with. And what if the Finnish student was given a few credits maybe for this? I think something like that could easily be added to e.g. communication studies.

I think there is a dilemma here. These might be the issues why perhaps foreign degree students themselves wonder what Aalto ECON's intentions for having them here are. I was really struck by the comment made by a student, wondering what purpose they are here to fulfill; simply to meet quota or to be integrated into Finnish society to become future employees. The question itself is rather upsetting as to say that someone has even gotten the feeling of simply being part of a percentile. As to whether students are to be integrated or to make quota, I guess the answer is both,

but really importantly so much more. All in all, it has to be recognized, that having a multicultural study environment is very enriching. Everyone learns so much more as to what is taught during class, simply from each other.

Channell (1990) suggests that feedback is the key element in student-teacher relationships not to mention how essential it is in order for the student to know how (s)he is progressing, which areas need improvement and which (s)he is good at etc. The ISB study results concerning Aalto University and Aalto ECON both indicated that students, international and Finnish ones as well would have desired much more feedback. My survey indicated the same concerning foreign degree students. I personally thought one comment was excellent; asking why do we not get back our graded work. I mean this would already make a huge difference, in my opinion, instead of just receiving a final grade. It would be good to know what was good, what was bad/in correct in order to learn and improve one's skills. Now you are just left wondering and perhaps even questioning whether you were understood correctly or not. As has been already mentioned numerous times, culture affects how we understand each other, writing and interpreting it (Cortazzi and Jin 1997).

I agree with the notion of feedbacks importance and receiving it. I have personally often thought that the situation in elementary, middle and high school, were you were given back your graded work was excellent. You look at the answers that were marked wrong, and perhaps the teacher made some comments as well. So why does the university not give feedback in this similar way anymore? Perhaps it is because of larger class sizes, time-limitations or what not, but I think as students give teachers course feedback, it would be fair for them to receive feedback just as well, regardless of nationality.

Traditionally education has been viewed as an institution where past and current knowledge has been transferred from teachers to students. Meaning, the teacher is the guru who possesses all the required knowledge students need in order to be prepared and succeed in life. This point of view is rather old, but could be somewhat typical in countries with a large-power-distance e.g. China (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). In today's universities, students are finding and creating their own academic paths, instead of "a one-size fits all". Thus to say, education is no longer teacher-centered. Students form their own opinions and meanings and act as active participants and collaborators in the actual learning process (Lipsett 2005). This shift in orientation can be related to services, where customers often engage in the actual delivery process of the service instead of just receiving it. Services, especially solutions, that tend to be the existing trend at the moment, are often co-created with the customer. Thus engaging students more in the creation of these services, courses

everything the University offers would perhaps increase satisfaction. I argue that it is much harder to criticize something that you helped create.

One of Aalto University's strengths in comparison to e.g. other European universities is the fact that once a student is admitted then (s)he is not kicked out because of insufficient, bad grades. They are admitted until they have finished their degree or either dropped out or quit their studies. In many European countries it can be argued that admission can seem somewhat easy even but in order for one to be able to continue studying and advance to the next year, they have to "pass" the first year and each year onwards. In order to pass, one has to receive adequate grades. Thus, I argue that in these universities there is a greater stress involved in schoolwork than at Aalto University. At least that is what I hear from many of my friends who have studied in the UK. It is also supported by John Barker (1997) who points out that many international students are partially driven by fear of failure and financial pressures.

Aalto University's plan is to increase its foreign Master's students to representing 50% of all of its Master's students. Mere speculation but I contemplate if decreasing the amount of Bachelor's level foreign students versus the increasing number of Master's level students could be an indication of targeting education on students who can be attained to Finland's workforce after they graduate. If that be the case, the University needs to pay closer attention to its career services and make the necessary improvements in order to help those students who wish to stay and work here in regards to Vehaskari (2010). The ISB survey revealed that 78% of foreign students find it important to obtain full-time employment after their studies and 74% hoped to receive a permanent living permit in Finland. This clearly indicated that the majority of foreign pupils would like to stay here after their studies. So why is it not a priority, to give these students the necessary tools in order to make this desire to stay and be employed more of a possibility? Giving a bit of guidance on "Finnish ways" of working and how to act in a job interview might already do wonders.

I believe that interaction with different cultures gives perspective and hopefully gradually will start to build a more accepting atmosphere among the society as a whole. Thus, saying that recruiting foreign degree students is "a lose-lose" (as Vehaskari 2010 implied the SMEs view) situation is highly the case here. This is simply the situation at the moment, but I believe that with time, as foreigners become more and more spread among, not just the university's community, but throughout society, attaining adequate and suitable employment will hopefully become easier for them. Today's students are future employers and employees, thus the Finnish students today, who have been surrounded by different nationalities throughout their education process might and most

probably will have a different attitude when it comes to recruiting and hiring foreign nationals. Vehaskari (2010) also mentions that universities should be setting the example, but indeed are they not in a sense? Universities are recruiting foreigners to be part of their academic community, for students, staff and all to learn from each other and learn how to communicate with one another, accepting or rather welcoming differences and letting them flourish. This is already changing the Finnish society, especially its future.

In my understanding what Vehaskari (2010) was mainly trying to shed light on, is that foreign highly educated degree students are unrealized assets and unused opportunities for many companies in Finland. Why should Finland not snatch them before some other country does?

Vehaskari's (2010) words can be related to Aalto University School of Economics' foreign degree students. They are a valuable, but perhaps a somewhat unused resource. A group of professionals who are eager to work but still quite often will not be employed simply due to attitudes and biases. Understandably knowing a country's language is an important issue, but is it really the decisive factor when it comes to recruitment? If so, would it not be possible to offer more Finnish language courses. It should not be overlooked that foreign degree students are people who already have abroad experience and could easily gain information that is much more challenging for Finns as the case of Medikro Oy showed.

I think that any school should be an institution that is always preparing students for the future. If elementary school is preparing its pupils for high school and high school is giving the fundamental tools that are needed to be accepted to a proper college or university, then what is a university's function if not to educate and foster its students to attain the kind of jobs and careers they have been educated on or moreover help them realize what it is they really want to do in the future and what kind of life they want to live? Some (Vehaskari 2010) might consider it being futile to educate these individuals if they cannot put their knowledge to practical use in Finland. But like expressed by many foreign degree students, this is a concern for them as well. There is of course the concept of cultural intellect, studying in a different country is a greater over all learning experience than university studies alone (Earley and Ang 2003). Also today's students are future leaders and powerful business-people, building international relations early one can play a huge role in the future (Gibbs and Maringe 2008). Thus even if some international students do in fact leave Finland after graduation due to their own will or not, there is always the possibility that they will return some day. The experiences a person has at younger times make a strong impact on an individual and those experiences will not be easily forgotten (Byram and Feng 2006).

What seems more difficult is deciding who is responsible for what. Students coming to Aalto University School of Economics are all adults. Is adulthood then not a time to start being responsible for one's self? After all, even the University cannot be blamed for everything. Some foreign students felt that they were left on their own with their studies and everything else. They would have preferred more guidance and help, while in comparison some other foreign students enjoyed the fact that they were regarded and respected as adults and not patronized like children. Thus in this retrospective the University has quite a tough positioning in between opposite expectations and desires. But when it comes to work-related issues, I believe the foreign degree students would benefit from perhaps receiving extra help and services from the University. They do not possess some of the connections and have the networks that Finnish student might have due to family, friends, previous colleagues etc. Also due to the inability to speak (adequate) Finnish, foreign degree students already have a limited amount of possible jobs available for them to even apply to. Finnish language courses would serve the purpose of enhancing employability. My own survey supports this argument as well as Vehaskari (2010). A great deal of the written feedback concerned employment, more over, the lack thereof.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

During my research I found myself shifting back and forth opinion-wise, but mainly just realizing that everyone is, or should be on the same side. But as of now, I believe I can at least somewhat answer my research questions:

1. What is the study experience like for the foreign degree students of Aalto University School of Economics?

As is to say with any experience, since feelings are hard to portray to another person and thus measure, my overall conclusions represent only the image that I got through my research. And that is, that most students are quite content, with the majority of issues in regards to their student life. My interviewee suggested to me that the only way to really get a better knowledge of international students, one should make a little documentary; where foreign students are followed around for a certain period of time, all day long. This would according to him/her portray what it can be like to live in a country where you do not maybe know that many people and thus, the university might play a crucial role, when it comes to everyday social contacts. So in terms of what exactly the study experience can be like, Aalto University School of Economics plays a substantial role. But as to say, the foreign degree students are all adults and perhaps that is exactly why they were reluctant to give criticism. Many issues after all, are things that anyone can personally affect, and thus, take responsibility for. Making friends, especially among other international students was regarded as being “easy” for most. The only issue with friends was that the majority wished they had gotten to know more Finnish students. And from my perspective as a Finnish student I’m sure many would like it also to meet international students.

When it comes to integration, most (69%) had gotten used to whatever their initial culture shock was. The only thing that might help integration is to have better Finnish language skills, which brings me to my next research question.

2. Could Aalto ECON serve its foreign degree students and their possibly different needs better in any way e.g. are their special needs known and catered for?

The language course aspect, as in offering more of them, is definitely something to consider in terms of different needs and to aid integration, especially in regards to a student’s long-term stay in Finland. Also the possibility of an international student mentor would provide the extra help and

guidance for new students. An international student would better understand the situation the new foreign students are living in and thus provide better comfort.

3. Does Aalto University's internationalization strategy support the integration of the foreign degree students or do the foreign degree students mainly serve as a means of internationalizing Aalto University?

Aalto University is focusing on language matters (internationalization key areas of development, see Table 1. pg.30), which as was mentioned by many students would be an important concern to solve when it comes to integration and finding work. Naturally, foreign degree students do play an important role when it comes to internationalization, as that is something that many universities use to measure their level of internationalization. But more over, the international students (employees as well) of Aalto ECON make the University's academic community more diverse and therefore enriching, especially for us, Finnish students (and staff members). Employment-wise it is hard to say as could the University do more. The main issue again was the Finnish language, which many employers find somewhat necessary to have at least a certain skill level of. Aalto University already has well functioning and helpful career services, CV-clinics and what not. Many foreign students even mentioned that Aalto ECON is already doing a good job, thus there seems to be little more they can do in that perspective. That it is the students' responsibility to gain the knowledge that they need in order to secure a job in the future.

In my opinion the whole academic community of Aalto ECON would benefit from open two-way communication. Like stated, everyone is on the same side. Through my research I got the feeling that many students, myself included, do not even know about everything which Aalto ECON offers to them course- and service-wise. As well as to say, expectations and need change, thus, active communication would enable to follow with the current desires.

A university should be a functioning community of students and staff members alike. I see that since Aalto University is still in its early stages, it would be great to use students' help and really integrate them in building the future of the University. I think that Aalto University could definitely exploit and utilize its inner intelligence, bright students, much, much more and bring them on board, to be part of the internationalization process. Students reported as not even knowing what is going on, what purpose they are serving. Change happens a lot more easily if everyone is on the same

page and knows what is happening and why. And what they can do to help. Thus, information has to reach everyone. Also in my opinion, including students would show them that their opinions are valued and they are respected. Faculty and students are at the end of the day, the people who make the University what it is.

What I saw during my research was the fact that the people who are thinking about an issue the most are not used in solving the matter. For example the foreign degree students themselves are living in a certain situation, would it not make sense to have someone like that help in solving the issue, instead of a Finnish person who has not got a clue to what it is like, being a foreigner in Finland.

When it comes to adapting to Finland a student might find it helpful to read e.g. André Noël Chaker's *The Finnish Miracle* or Roman "Finland's most well-known foreigner" Schatz's *From Finland with Love*. These books are written from a foreigner's perspective. Both writers have lived in Finland for many years and observed the nation's people's habits and peculiar ways. Finns who read these books, I suspect, will most likely nod their heads in agreement with the writers' claims. I argue that because most of the observations, which the writers make, are quite obvious to Finns, we would not be able to tell them ourselves. It is implicit knowledge. Everyone (generalization, as is made with cultures) in Finland as stated about cultures previously, knows what is expected of them and therefore, how to act accordingly. While for foreigners these books can be very insightful and educating. The books explain Finnish behaviors extremely well and thus could be used somewhat as guides, which could help a foreigner to adapt to Finland. Knowledge to as to why people, in this case Finns, act a certain way might ease culture shock, since there is no longer the element of surprise involved.

As Aalto University is a relatively new merger, the University cannot rely on its old image. Aalto ECON is no longer the Helsinki School of Economics, which I'm sure Finnish people will still relate it to, but as it comes to international markets and students Aalto ECON's image might still be some what fuzzy and unknown. To build it and make the University attractive and prestige it has to rely not only on partnering universities, but in its own foreign students. Word of mouth marketing is the most affective marketing tool. The foreign students of Aalto ECON play a crucial role in what word is spread and what the image will become. They either will or will not, recommend the University to their friends, family members, acquaintances or what not. Some message will no doubt spread through time, and what ever the spread message may be, can be affected. Listening to



the students and engaging them is crucial, if the desire is to build not just an image, but a university which students in the future will be attracted to.

I believe strongly that engaging students more, becoming a University that has been built with the help of students, would be one of the greatest competitive edges at this current time.

Aalto University is quite young, therefore the fact that it is not yet working like a well functioning machine, is perhaps no surprise. It is still at its “testing phases”, but as one student expressed:

*“Aalto listens to suggestions and makes changes and it keeps the ones that work and looks for better solutions for those which do not. So they are constantly trying to improve matters, and eventually they will succeed.”*

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[www.valoa-hanke.fi/Default.aspx?tabid=533](http://www.valoa-hanke.fi/Default.aspx?tabid=533)

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. IMPI Internationalization goals and list of indicator

Goal: to enhance the quality of education

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| Out of all students in the unit, what proportion studies abroad in a given year?   |
| In a given year, out of all international students in the unit, what proportion is in programmes taught in the national language?            |
| Out of all Bachelor's programmes offered by the unit in a given year, what proportion is taught partially in a foreign language?             |
| In a given year, what proportion of the unit's academic staff members follows an English language course?                                    |
| Out of all degree programmes offered by the unit in a given year, what proportion are international joint/double/multiple degree programmes? |
| In a given year, out of the unit's total budget for scholarships, what proportion is dedicated to scholarships for international students?   |
| In a given year, out of all academic staff members in the unit, what proportion has a foreign citizenship?                                   |
| What proportion of students from the unit participates in outgoing exchange or mobility programmes in a given year?                          |
| Out of all courses offered by the unit in a given year, what is the proportion of courses taught in a foreign language?                      |
| Are the foreign language skills of staff members taken into consideration for promotion and tenure?  |

Goal: to enhance the quality of research

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| In a given year, what proportion of researchers in the unit is involved in at least one research project with an international partner?                                    |
| In a given year, what proportion of research projects with which the unit is formally associated is internationally funded?  |
| In a given year, what proportion of research projects with which the unit is formally associated involves international partners?  |
| Does the unit provide travel services for staff members going abroad for professional purposes?  |
| In a given year, what is the ratio of conference presentations delivered abroad (or in the context of international conferences) to the number of researchers in the unit? |
| In a given year, what proportion of international joint/double/multiple degree programmes does the   |

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| unit offer at the Doctoral-level?   |
| Does the unit have a defined strategy for international communication, promotion and marketing?   |
| What proportion of the unit's staff members was recruited from abroad?  |
| Does the unit participate in international networks and organisations in the field of internationalisation?   |
| In a given year, how much external funding does the unit receive for international cooperation projects?  |
| Out of all the researchers in the unit in a given year, what proportion was originally recruited from abroad?   |
| Out of all the researchers in the unit in a given year, what proportion are considered to be international visiting researchers?  |
| In a given year, what proportion of published pieces (books, journal issues, articles, etc) is produced through international collaborative activity involving the researchers in the unit? |
| In a given year, what proportion of researchers in the unit author (or co-author) pieces (books, journal issues, articles, etc) is published internationally?                               |
| In a given year, what proportion of articles authored (or co-authored) by the researchers in the unit is published in internationally refereed journals?                                    |

Goal: to well-prepare students for life and work in an intercultural and globalising world

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| Out of all students in the unit, what proportion studies abroad in a given year?   |
| Does the unit have a clearly defined strategy for internationalisation?  |
| Out of all international students in the unit in a given year, what proportion are exchange or mobility programme students?                  |
| Out of all courses offered by the unit in a given year, what is the proportion of courses taught in a foreign language?                      |
| In a given year, what proportion of the unit's academic staff members follows an English language course?                                    |
| Are all facilities provided by the unit to domestic students also available to international students?                                       |
| What proportion of students from the unit participates in outgoing exchange or mobility programmes in a given year?                          |
| In a given year, out of all academic staff members in the unit, what proportion are visiting staff members from abroad?                      |
| Does the unit provide a mentoring or "buddy"-system for international student support?   |
| Out of all degree programmes offered by the unit in a given year, what proportion are international joint/double/multiple degree programmes? |



Goal: to enhance the international reputation and visibility of the unit

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| Does the unit have a specific organisational structure to support internationalisation?   |
| Does the unit monitor its international visibility?   |
| Out of all students in the unit, what proportion is in international joint/double/multiple degree programmes in a given year?   |
| In a given year, what proportion of international joint/double/multiple degree programmes does the unit offer at the Doctoral-level?  |
| Does the unit participate in national, regional or local networks supporting internationalisation?  |
| Out of all degree programmes offered by the unit in a given year, what proportion are international joint/double/multiple degree programmes?  |
| In a given year, what proportion of international joint/double/multiple degree programmes does the unit offer at the Master's-level?  |
| Does the unit provide international students with comprehensive pre-arrival information (covering such topics as visa procedures, cost of living, tuition fees, accommodation options, university services, sports and cultural activities);? |
| Does the unit have a defined strategy for international communication, promotion and marketing?   |
| In a given year, out of all of the unit's academic staff members, what proportion is involved in international joint doctoral supervision / co-tutelle?   |

Goal: to provide service to society and community social engagement

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| Out of all students in the unit, what proportion studies abroad in a given year?  |
| Does the unit have a defined strategy to develop the participation of staff in internationalisation activities?             |
| In a given year, what proportion of research projects with which the unit is formally associated is internationally funded? |
| In a given year, what proportion of international conferences is organised by the unit's staff members?                     |
| Does the unit maintain an international alumni database?  |

Appendix 2. Interview questions:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Nationality
4. Your current course level
5. Major subject
6. Where did you receive your most recent education prior to Aalto University


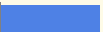

7. Did you move to Finland because of your current studies or were you already residing here
  - a. if already residing in Finland, how long have you lived here and why
8. Why did you choose Aalto University School of Economics
  - a. how did you find out/hear about Aalto, what were your main choosing criteria
9. Did you look at international ranking positions when deciding on which universities to apply to
  - a. if yes did they affect your decision
  - b. if no and also what other facts did receive attention
10. Was Finland your first choice of international study
11. Have ever lived abroad before
  - a. if yes how long and in what country
  - b. also if yes, do you feel that that previous experience made it easier for you to adapt/deal with a different culture as well as simply moving abroad again
  - c. if no, have your parents lived abroad
12. Did you consider studying in other countries, if so which
13. Did you apply to other universities, Finnish or International and was Aalto your 1<sup>st</sup> choice
14. What are the first words that come to mind when you hear Aalto University
15. How would you describe adapting to Finland, was it hard and if so, why/what presented difficulties for you
16. Before coming to Finland did you think that you are culturally similar or different and therefore perhaps have more or less difficulty adapting here
17. Would you have wanted/needed better orientation or was there something wrong or missing from the orientation you received
18. Have you ever wanted a course but it was only offered in Finnish, if yes which course (if you remember)
19. What are your thoughts on Finnish language courses (if you took part in them)
  - a. adequate/insufficient/did not take part/does not apply to me because...
20. Would you have wanted more or less Finnish language courses
21. Do the teaching methods differ from what you are used to or what you would have preferred
  - a. if yes what are you accustomed to
  - b. if yes what would you have preferred
22. Has the teaching you have received so far supported your personal way of learning
  - a. if no, why
23. What types of exercises/teaching suits you best

24. When it comes to doing group work, do you prefer to work with your friends or do you try to get into a group with new people/other nationalities
25. Also do you find it easier to work with people from the same nationalities or does it matter?
  - a. good/bad experiences? biases, avoidance
26. Did you find it hard to make friends here
  - a. Finnish vs. foreign (same/different nationality to your own)
27. Did you expect the university to help you out when it comes to meeting new people/making friends
28. What are your thoughts on student services and support
  - a. if bad why
29. Would you have wanted better guidelines/information on what services are available and where can info/service be attained from
30. What services do you regard as being the most important
31. Would you be willing to pay a tuition fee in order to receive better (support) services
  - a. if yes, (how much and) what would you expect then
32. How would you feel about having another foreign student/graduate acting as a mentor
33. Would this person be easier to approach than let's say a professor or other staff member
34. Would you have liked more individual/personal support or group/overall guidance
35. Is there a service that you would have wanted/needed but did not get or the school does not offer
  - a. if yes what
36. Would you prefer a centralized information office for international students or do you feel that it alienate from Finns
37. Have you had any false expectations in terms of any aspect of your studying experience
  - a. if so negative/positive, what
38. And also, what do you believe is the reason/source for the wrong assumptions
  - a. received false info, from whom/where
  - b. own biases/assumptions
39. Have you tried to find work in Finland
  - a. if yes did you get a job and how many places did you apply to
  - b. if yes and you did not get a job, what do you think is the main reason and how many places did you apply to
40. How do you finance your studies/living
  - a. savings/parents/working/scholarship/student support

41. When applying for a job in the future what do you consider as your primary choice of location
  - a. international/Finland/home country
  - b. and has your thoughts changed due the course of your current studies
42. Before starting your studies, were you considering to stay in Finland long-term?
  - a. Has your opinion changed and if so how and why?
43. What are you planning on doing after graduation
44. When considering your overall study/living experience here so far, how much do you blame the university for bad experiences and how much would you take responsibility yourself, e.g. would your own pro-activity had had a positive effect on matters? (give % for who is more to blame?)
45. Would you recommend Aalto University School of Economics to others
  - a. if no, would you recommend it if your experiences thus far would have been better?
  - b. Recommendations(1-5)
  - c. for learning, teaching, support, living/life, overall

### Appendix 3. Nationality, list of countries and distribution

|    |                    |  |    |
|----|--------------------|--|----|
| 1  | Australia          |  | 1  |
| 2  | Austria            |  | 1  |
| 3  | Belgium            |  | 0  |
| 4  | Bulgaria           |  | 0  |
| 5  | Canada             |  | 1  |
| 6  | China              |  | 8  |
| 7  | Denmark            |  | 0  |
| 8  | Ecuador            |  | 0  |
| 9  | Estonia            |  | 0  |
| 10 | Ethiopia           |  | 0  |
| 11 | France             |  | 0  |
| 12 | Germany            |  | 8  |
| 13 | Ghana              |  | 1  |
| 14 | Hungary            |  | 0  |
| 15 | India              |  | 0  |
| 16 | Iran               |  | 1  |
| 17 | Italy              |  | 2  |
| 18 | Japan              |  | 0  |
| 19 | Korea(Republic of) |  | 2  |
| 20 | Latvia             |  | 0  |
| 21 | Lithuania          |  | 0  |
| 22 | Mexico             |  | 1  |
| 23 | Nepal              |  | 0  |
| 24 | Netherlands        |  | 1  |
| 25 | Nigeria            |  | 2  |
| 26 | Norway             |  | 0  |
| 27 | Pakistan           |  | 1  |
| 28 | Poland             |  | 0  |
| 29 | Portugal           |  | 2  |
| 30 | Romania            |  | 2  |
| 31 | Russia             |  | 13 |
| 32 | Singapore          |  | 0  |
| 33 | Spain              |  | 2  |
| 34 | Sri Lanka          |  | 0  |
| 35 | Sweden             |  | 0  |
| 36 | Switzerland        |  | 0  |
| 37 | Turkey             |  | 1  |
| 38 | UK                 |  | 0  |
| 39 | Ukraine            |  | 0  |

|    |         |   |    |
|----|---------|---|----|
| 40 | USA     |  | 6  |
| 41 | Vietnam |  | 16 |
| 42 | other   |  | 4  |