

Ritwik Swain

British student Ritwik Swain (21) was the first international student representative in the university council. Ritwik who studies psychology is deeply interested in the internationalisation process of not only his own faculty, but also the university as such and hopes that sharing his experiences will help to make the internationalisation of the University of Groningen a success.

Coming to Groningen, Ritwik was a little disappointed about the state of affairs concerning the internationalisation of the university. He realised that many things were still only in Dutch. Opening talks, for example, were still in Dutch and many signs at his faculty weren't translated into English. "I was just overwhelmed by all the changes, all the different things."

During the second year of his bachelor, Ritwik felt more and more detached from his study. Huge numbers of students, impersonal lectures and multiple choice exams demotivated him. It was time for a change.

At that time, the faculty council of Behavioural and Social Sciences was looking for new student representatives and Ritwik just gave it a go. He recalls, "Then in the third year, I got elected as the first international student at the university council. I was really trying to raise attention towards the internationalisation side of the university."

For Ritwik, the university has great potential to become a truly international university. But there is still a lot that can be improved. "I just felt like the people who are running things didn't have an idea, didn't have exposure and didn't have the experience to really know what was needed."

The international classroom is such an example. "Sometimes people think just because you make a curriculum into English it becomes international." But Ritwik stresses that it is also about "how to get people engaged that they share their own personality into what they are learning."

Ideally the international classroom should be more diverse. Ritwik imagines a classroom in which every aspect from nationality, ethnicity, religion, race to physical ability is more diverse. "Generally, global-mindedness is more important than discriminating based on nationality."

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Being abroad himself made Ritwik realise how important it is to get to know different cultures, to engage with other students and to exchange their experiences and ideas. "When I went abroad I realised how much – when you stick to one country – how much dogma you begin to believe about your own country. You actually accept it because you don't have good exposure to something else. When you escape that you really say 'Wow! I can't believe I used to be like that as well.'"

To use the opportunities an international classroom to its best, Ritwik has an advice for all students. "It's not acceptable to switch back to your own language. You should stick to the lingua franca. Out of politeness as well as courtesy, but also because of practical matters. Maybe other students overhear something they can contribute towards."

In the end, Ritwik has a clear message. "Just go out there with a positive attitude and really enjoy it. I mean, there are differences. But that's the whole fun of going to another country. So enjoy the differences."

Nuria Spijker

When Nuria Spijker (25) from Kenya enrolled in the master programme environmental infrastructure planning at the faculty of spatial sciences, she knew that her master was supposed to be international. But she only heard about the international classroom concept in an education committee meeting.

“We were just talking about how to improve the integration in classes and they were like ‘Oh the international classroom, we’ll send you a document about it.’ I had no idea that I was actually already in one.” Nuria thinks that none of her classmates know about the added value behind such an international classroom. It might explain why integration isn’t going too well. “People just cluster and then it’s not an international classroom. It’s just several tiny classrooms that are just on their own.”

Another aspect that might hamper the integration between different nationalities is the level of English language capabilities. Nuria sees that as one of the biggest challenges of the international classroom. “International students are supposed to do a TOEFL exam, but I’m not entirely sure how much that really works as a way to test people’s English ability. Some are really struggling to express what they mean in English.” According to her, it even happens that students don’t communicate at all.

Nuria herself doesn’t have problems to express herself in English, but she feels pressure to excel as a foreign student. “Part of the pressure could be from your family. They just want you to do well anyhow. But a lot of pressure I think is sort of from society in general because you need to prove you are as good as everyone else.” She adds, “You want to show ‘Yes, I am at this level and I am good enough for this level regardless of where I come from.’”

Thinking about the international classroom, Nuria is amazed how an international outlook is often equated with a North American or European outlook. “I think it is a stereotype. For me it is interesting to look at cases

anywhere in the world.” To overcome this, Nuria asks especially her lecturers to get out of their comfort zone. “They should really think about what they mean by international and perhaps stop focusing so much on what is the first thing that comes to their mind. Actually sit down, look at the list of students who are in your class and then ask yourself what might be interesting to somebody who is from there?”

Generally, Nuria likes how student lecturer relationships work in her department. “It’s not a hierarchy. It’s very balanced. It’s mostly first name basis. They’re easy to approach and very easy to talk to. Which, for me, makes it perfect, when you have a question and you don’t feel so hesitant to ask it.”

To improve the international classroom project at her faculty, Nuria hopes to see more networking between the different cohorts and especially between the

international students. “There is a small amount of international students who stay. It would be nice to network them back to international students who are just starting.” She adds, “Once I go, everything I know goes with me. I don’t think the university would use me as a resource, even though I’m totally available and open to it. So making a better network would be really good.”

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Irina Chiscop

Irina Chiscop (20) from Romania belongs to the first cohort that studies mathematics in an English bachelor programme at the University of Groningen. She knows that her faculty is still in the transition to become more internationalised and hopes that the support for international students will increase in the coming years.

As one of the few international students in her programme, Irina experienced the first couple of classes as difficult. “Being like the only two [international] people in a classroom and the others were just speaking Dutch that’s quite difficult for us. Like get yourself known and introduce yourself or say hello that can be quite difficult.”

She also expected the programme to be very intensive and monotonous like in Romania, but she was pleasantly surprised. “When I started my classes I just realised that there was such a balance in all, the schedule, in all the courses and the material. Everything is so well interconnected. What you study in one course, it follows immediately in the other.” Irina explains how you follow only a couple of courses in Romania, but then for an entire year. “It can be quite boring at some point.”

As an international student Irina doesn’t feel as supported as Dutch students. She has very good grades, is an Honours College student and tries very hard to do her best, but she doesn’t feel rewarded for her all her efforts. “I do pay a lot for being here and that is the most annoying thing because as an international student you don’t get anything. No sale, no free transport, nothing.”

Irina hopes that it will be better for future international students because she knows that the faculty is trying to change things for the better. “You can see they are really trying to make us international students feel comfortable and we are part of the university as much as the Dutch people are.”

In her free time, Irina is part of an all-Dutch volleyball team. To improve her Dutch, the team only talks Dutch to Irina and she can reply in mix of Dutch and English. For her, volleyball is a welcome break from studying. She has a

lot of fun with the team and gets to see other parts of the Netherlands when they travel to away matches.

To ensure the best experiences for new incoming international students Irina has a tip for them. “They should come here and stay here for one week or two before they really decide to do this degree in this country. I think this is just a good test for them whether they really want to do this.” That way they also get a first impression from the city and also the tough housing market is no longer a bad surprise when the university starts in September.

In the end, Irina is optimistic that the experience for international students will be great. “I think for the future things are quite bright. And if next year there is going to be a new wave of international students, it is just going to be great. Also the study associations, they really try to create some bonds with their events.”

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Rudolf Bakker

Rudolf Bakker, a business and economics student, has not yet been abroad himself, but because his bachelor is taught in an international classroom, he is able to work with many different nationalities within his home country the Netherlands.

Rudolf thinks that it is good that the University of Groningen wants to internationalise. For him, sticking to only Dutch classrooms seems to be a bit outdated in times of multinational companies that also influence the Dutch work field. “It’s good to be prepared on that out of the university.”

In his bachelor programme, the international classroom is not only represented in the English-taught programme and the many international students, but many courses also deal with international problems. Rudolf explains how, for example, a lecturer in international business ethics asks his students to include some kind of international problem in a presentation or a debate.

Being in an international classroom is fun, according to Rudolf. “It’s fun to know about other cultures. If you are working together, you always have this informal talk with everyone. It’s fun to hear how they live their student lives back home or friends of them. I appreciate to get familiar with how they work or how they use to do things.” He adds, “If you just have Dutch students, then your world is quite small actually.”

The programme involves many group assignments and throughout his bachelor Rudolf experienced some differences how Dutch students opposed to international students work on these assignments. While it is easy to get in touch with fellow Dutch

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classmates, it takes longer to start things up with the internationals. Sometimes, international students are shy. Then it is harder to communicate with each other. “But when it starts, it’s quite easy. The people are really open, too.”

Despite the mixed group assignments, there is still a lack of integration between Dutch and international students. Rudolf thinks the groups are quite separate because many internationals also live together in international students houses. When they meet outside the classroom, they often end up at an ESN event and “Dutch students are not doing a lot with ESN.”

To overcome this separation, the international committee of the economics and business student faculty association tries its best to integrate the international students. Rudolf is part of that committee and together with others he guides prospective students around the campus, organises the International Day with a food and information market about every country, or is part of the calling sessions.

During the calling sessions, both Dutch and international students of the University of Groningen call prospective new students to answer questions that might arise. “I’ve found out that these calling sessions are really helpful for them. If we approach them with these sessions, then they find out a lot of information about the university, but also the life around it.”

To facilitate the first contact with the university even further, international students are assigned to their own home country during the calling sessions. Rudolf explains that they can speak in their mother tongue, which makes it easier to ask questions.

For the future, Rudolf hopes to gather his first experiences abroad. “An internship in Australia or Hong Kong would be nice.” Then he could already apply some of the knowledge he gathered in his international bachelor programme.

Mohamed el Sioufy

Mohamed el Sioufy (24) from Egypt never reflected too much about the international classroom. His master programme in computer sciences is rather small and only a few international students participate in it. Subconsciously Mohamed experienced how positive it can be to meet students with different nationalities. Eliminating prejudices is only one advantage of the international classroom.

For Mohamed, the ranking of the University of Groningen and the student life were important criteria for his selection. “When you study, you almost don’t want to only study. You want to have fun and enjoy the study. That was my criteria to choose like the city itself, the ranking and a lot of internationals.”

Another important reason to come to the Netherlands is Mohamed’s love for music. He is really into electronic music and because most of favourite DJ’s are Dutch, the decision to come to the Netherlands was almost inevitable. Since he started his master, he never skipped a party with his favourite DJ’s at the turntables. He smiles, “To be honest, that’s what I remember. I don’t really remember sitting home and studying.”

Once Mohamed decided for Groningen, the application process via Erasmus started. He was surprised how easy the application process for the scholarship was. “They give you the steps one by one and you follow the steps and the application. I really didn’t find any problem in applying. It was so easy; no mistakes, nothing inconsistent or so.”

Mohamed only remembers one thing that caused quite some headache. Since he never lived in Europe before and relies on the Erasmus scholarship, he was worried about the living expenses. “I didn’t really know if my scholarship, my monthly allowance, would be enough for me or not.” For the future, he suggests to provide international students with an overview over the most important living expenses.

In Mohamed’s master, the international classroom is only beginning to evolve. For him, studying is more about gaining the knowledge he wants to attain than working together with many nationalities. Nonetheless he

appreciates that everything is taught in English. Likewise, it enables him to discuss the developments in his home country and he can also address some still existing stereotypes. “I met a Bulgarian girl and she still thought that Egypt is like in the middle ages. I was like no. She didn’t even believe that we have cars,” he recalls.

Thinking about an international classroom, Mohamed has his very own opinion about clustering, a phenomenon that many students experience when they participate in a multinational group. “Everyone calls it clustering, but it’s more an ‘Oh, I want to talk in my language, feel the environment of my country.’” Personally, Mohamed isn’t in favour of sticking to his fellow countrymen. “I’m here for two years. I know what is going on in Egypt. I better see what is going on here.”

In general, Mohamed is very pragmatic about his stay in Groningen. He didn’t experience a culture shock or felt homesick. He shrugs, “If I don’t like it here, then well it’s going to be worse back in Egypt. I have been to the army, so I learned how to improvise.”

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Returning to the international classroom, Mohamed likes to see a bachelor course that simply focuses on the different cultural backgrounds and experiences of the students. He thinks that such an exchange would enhance the understanding of each other.

Efthymis Panourgias

An international classroom – that is something Greek philosophy student Efthymis Panourgias never associated with his own research master. Although international students are a minority in his programme, he thinks the faculty does its best to internationalise.

Groningen isn't the first Dutch city Efthymis lived in as a student. During his bachelor he already studied for one semester in Leeuwarden as an Erasmus student. So coming to Groningen wasn't a big step it seemed. "I came here excited for what I would meet and what I would see."

He thinks his small, almost family-like faculty is one of the best faculties in the Netherlands. But he also realised that doing his master in Groningen wasn't as easy as it seemed. "Having to speak in a foreign language, having to understand how foreign people work and function in general. Trying to keep track of what's going on here, it was very difficult at the beginning. I felt kind of lost."

For Efthymis many things were different from the educational system in Greece. He recalls, "The orientation, the methodology, the way of working, the essays. Here, it's a lot smaller." He also expected to make a lot more friends, which wasn't the case.

In the end, these difficulties climaxed in one of the hardest times of his master. "It was when I had a burnout. I couldn't do anything. I was like a zombie." Even the weather, the long and cold winter subconsciously influenced Efthymis and he felt that something was wrong.

Then during a time management workshop at the Student Service Centre, he described his symptoms to the instructing psychologist who referred him to a psychological counsellor.

Efthymis has a tip for other international students. "Be patient. Give it some time. There is this adjustment period that you have to go through and be open."

Thinking about the international classroom, he acknowledges the efforts of his faculty. "I think the faculty, on its behalf, is doing the best it can to create an international orientation. I think it's something that takes time."

But he also suggests two ways to improve his experiences in the research master. "If I could wish for one thing, it is to have the opportunity to work more with certain people here, to do more collective work, rather than only individual." Also an academic writing class at the beginning of the programme would have made things easier for Efthymis.

Despite his difficulties, he made some very good friends in the student house he lived in. He enjoys the reading group at his faculty, which broadens his horizon beyond the curriculum of the research master. And he even contemplates to do his PhD at the University of Groningen. "It's a very good faculty in terms of research, in terms of quality, in terms of opportunities."

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Garima Raghuvanshy

Doing her master in the Netherlands, Garima Raghuvanshy (22) experienced for the first time to be in a classroom with only white students. The Indian student feared to be an outsider, but she quickly learned that colour doesn't matter. Neither at the faculty of theology and religious studies nor in her research master in religion and culture.

Before Garima came to Groningen she made sure to learn some Dutch so she could at least understand the language and fill out forms if needed. Apart from that, she didn't prepare much. "I was very okay with coming here and taking everything as it goes."

Starting her programme, she still remembers the first time she walked into the classroom. "It was a little bit weird. Everyone in the class was white. International here means there are a lot of Europeans, but there are not too many Asians or Americans. So for me it was little bit like 'Okay, I am going to be the new Indian kid that no one talks to...'"

But all her fears were needless. "Even within the first class, the first introductory lecture, everyone was really friendly and I didn't feel like an outsider at all. Here it doesn't matter at all."

In general, Garima observed that integration in the classroom is something her lecturers encourage. They want her to share her thoughts, for example, on Christianity and ask for parallels or differences.

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Not only is the integration between students important, but also the student lecturer relationship is strengthened by meetings outside the classroom. Occasionally, the group meets for dinner or a drink and Garima likes how she is treated like an adult.

Although she didn't choose the master because of its international classroom, she appreciates it. "In our field, you can keep talking about cultural difference or about intercultural interaction, but unless you really experienced it...The ideas I had about things like migration, minority rights, integration, when you come here it gives you a completely different perspective because you are on the outside. Usually at home we speak as the majority, here it is completely different."

What Garima also likes is how organised the courses are. According to her, the course manuals give her a great overview. As an international student she also wants to travel and with the course manual she knows exactly when she has to do assignments and when she is free.

One thing that bothers her is how friendships work in the Netherlands. She explains, "In India it's like you meet someone in class and by being in class you just become friends. Here that obvious relation does not happen." She adds, "So I guess the tough thing is to be consciously aware that you have to work to make friends and you have to work to get to know people, which at home is kind of effortless."

She warns her fellow countrymen that might want to study here. "Don't expect things to be like home. Get ready to spend a lot of time in the library because you will have to prepare for class, you will have to read."

In the end, she still has a tip for the university to improve. "Be very explicit about documents needed. Especially for Indian students because it takes time; it is a big country and we have to travel to the capital or to big cities."

Charlie Guo

Looking back at her one-year master in finance, Chinese student Charlie Guo (22) feels that her stay at the University of Groningen improved her self-esteem. “In terms of experience I feel like I am more independent than I was when I was in China because when I was in China I was living with my parents. They take care of me all the time, so I think I feel like a stronger person now.

In her master programme, the international classroom only exists on the language level. While Charlie explains that about 20 to 30 international students are in her classes, she doesn't think the content is international. “Here they don't pay much attention to international differences.”

Although she thinks that Dutch students are very friendly and always willing to help, she also thinks that Dutch students prefer to work on their own. “For me it would also be easier to work with just Chinese students, so for them sure it is easier to work with Dutch students,” reasons Charlie.

But for her part of the international classroom is to challenge herself. “Working with other students is more challenging, but that's the point of going abroad. If you just want to work with Chinese students, you just stay in China. It's more challenging, but you also learn a lot.”

In an international classroom, you not only work with different people and get to know more about different cultures, but also get to practice your English, which Charlie sees as another advantage of going abroad.

At the University of Groningen, Charlie likes particularly the open atmosphere during classes. She explains that in China it is deemed rude to interrupt the lecturer during class. Here, she is always able to ask questions or give them feedback.

Coming back to the international classroom, she hopes that more international students will be recruited into board positions and make their voices heard. “Maybe if there are international students in the board or in study associations, they would think more about international students.”

She adds, “There is not much chance for us to express our own ideas.” For example, many career events that are organised are only available for Dutch students, like visiting a company. So there is still room for improvement.

Another part that Charlie thinks could be improved are the Dutch classes. Although she was eager to learn the language, she had to drop out because of the teaching method used. “It is really different from our own language. When I was in class, everybody just started reading the text...but it is impossible for us. How could you teach Dutch in Dutch? If we don't know any Dutch how could we...?”

Not being able to understand anything made Charlie feel homesick. “I think part of that is because of the food, the weather and it is always different...to feel alone in a foreign country, all talking in a language that you don't know.”

But she got used to it. Thinking that the Dutch food culture doesn't have that much to offer, she started to cook for herself and together with her friends she

no longer feels far away from home.

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Julia Echanove Gonzalez de Anleo

Argentina, Chile, or England – these are just a few countries Spanish-born Julia Echanove Gonzalez de Anleo (22) lived in. It almost seems logical that she now follows a bachelor in international European law at the University of Groningen.

According to Julia, her bachelor programme is super international. Students from all over Europe come together in an English taught international classroom and Julia only sees advantages of this form of education.

“You get insights into everyone’s background and everyone’s legal system, for example. This is quite relevant for us.” She adds, “Just last week, I had to do a presentation on what the criminal system in my home country is. It is just a five minute presentation. But still, you know, it was 16 nations that we had to discuss, so that was really interesting.”

Although she also sees that different nationalities sometimes stick together with their fellow countrymen, she thinks that this is a natural process. “I am very lucky to say that the people in my year at least are very dynamic. It is a natural process, it is easily broken. It is easily approachable.”

Next to the varied composition of the classroom, Julia also has the opportunity to make use of diverse, also non-Western literature, which is another part of an international classroom. She explains how it is up to the students to find literature for their assignments. As long as they are consistent with translations of texts they can use literature that is written in their mother tongue.

Being in an international classroom will also help her with her professional life. “I think that just by being offered this sort of international classroom model you are able to portray that in the future. If you are able to see things in an international perspective, it would definitely help you in the future.”

But while Julia thinks the university is doing quite well in the internationalisation process, there is always room for improvement. She urges the university to be more approachable and flexible. “International students come from different backgrounds, come from different cultures. Maybe they are not so quick and fast when it comes to things that have to do with paperwork.” She smiles, “Being a little more calm and flexible about it would be great.”

One thing that needs major improvement is the housing situation in Groningen. Julia points out that especially international students are vulnerable when it comes to that. “I mean it’s a joke. You have all these real estate agencies that take advantage of you as a student. And then you find yourself in a situation where you shouldn’t find yourself in.”

“Be ready to be surprised and also to be disappointed with people that you meet. If you are meeting people from lots of places be ready for both.”

Many international students just left high school, they leave their families behind and travel long distances to study in Groningen. When they come here, housing shouldn’t be one of their problems, says Julia. She thinks the university could provide for information in regard to international housing.

Finally, she has three tips for new international students. “Really look into what you are doing. Know what you are getting into in terms of study and especially in terms of housing.” Secondly, “be ready to be surprised and also to be disappointed with people that you meet. If you are meeting people from lots of places be ready for both.” “Try to get out of your comfort zone. When I have done it, it worked out great and it is quite a good experience to do it.”

Josefine Geiger

For German psychology student Josefine Geiger (24) the University of Groningen wasn't her first choice. A bachelor degree later, she still lives in Groningen and studies social psychology in her masters.

Although it wasn't her plan to come here, Josefine had no choice. In Germany, she couldn't study psychology because of the strict admission regulations. She decided for the University of Groningen because the bachelor in psychology was offered in English and also the educational level in the Netherlands is quite good, according to her.

Starting her bachelor, she didn't have many expectations about the programme or the international classroom. Although she thinks there are too many Germans in the bachelor, she likes that there are a few students from other countries like Spain.

Josefine thinks that having the opportunity to get to know students with different nationalities is not only important for personal development, but also on a societal level. "I think it is important to get feedback and evaluation on the system you have for a healthy society. But also for your own, to get to the point that you have to accept that there are many opinions and perspectives that are not congruent."

In her master programme, social psychology, they talk about different cultures and the classroom is more diverse than only Dutch and German students. But with the international classroom, Josefine also encountered some problems.

"The disadvantage of internationalization is that you are not anymore forced to speak Dutch. I mean, when I went to Spain and I didn't know what the Spanish name for stamp was, I had to look it up and then I went to the post office. Here you just go and speak English."

Since many Dutch students stick together with their own compatriots, Josefine thinks that learning Dutch is still important, despite the good English level of both staff and students. For her, it could even go as far as having a mandatory

Dutch course in the study programme. "You get in contact with people via language. So in order to get in contact with Dutch people and with the culture it might be good to at least know some Dutch."

Therefore, she advises fellow German students that want to study at the University of Groningen to learn some Dutch. "Learn it beforehand." Having the different grading systems in mind, she smiles. "Don't look up these grading transfer tables. And have in mind that you probably will finish your studies here." She explains how difficult it is to transfer to a German university because of the different grades.

As an international student, whose decision to study in Groningen was rather spontaneous, she sometimes felt lost in the new educational system. Josefine explains that the literature in English, the workload, and the multiple choice exams were something she had to adapt to.

For future international students, she thinks that practical skills lessons at the beginning of the bachelor might be helpful. "Just to get practical advice on how to read an article and what is important in a multiple choice exam." She adds that more contact with other students, also from the second and third year, and with professors would have improved her experiences.

Despite those points that could be improved to make the experiences in an international classroom even more fruitful, Josefine is sure that she changed her own opinion because her own perspective was challenged and she opened up to different versions of reality.

"We exchange experiences. You get new input and you compare the two cultures and even though you think it is quite similar, there are still many differences."

Anas Madani

In 2010, Anas Madani (22) was one of the first Saudi Arabian students to start the new International Bachelor in Medicine with a Global Health profile (IBMG). Since then, the programme has been a challenge – but a positive one.

Coming from a Muslim family and being abroad for the first time, Anas remembers his first days in the Netherlands vividly. “I was 18. It just sucked. It was like an instant culture shock.” What struck him the most was the freedom he was surrounded by. “From my background not everything is allowed. And then here you don’t have any parents, you don’t have anyone telling you what to do. You are on your own. It’s like between you and you. You and your conscience.”

Although the international profile of the university wasn’t as international as it is now, many different nationalities came together in Anas’ classroom and together they were confronted with medical situations not everybody wants to talk about.

For example, in his coach group, a group designed to discuss topics such as cultural ethics or professionalism, they had to discuss pregnancy and Anas realised how interesting it can be to discuss topics like that from various cultural backgrounds. “I discovered that there are a lot of differences. You don’t know anything about this culture and they don’t know about your culture. So it’s mutual; they want to know and you want to know.”

But it is also challenging to confront each other’s views. As a Muslim, Anas sometimes feels his religion is attacked. He explains how he learned to cope with situations like that. “You cannot just go there and say ‘I’m going to convince you that my opinion is right.’ You have to be more open. You have to find a common ground. But at the same time, you don’t just disregard your values.”

In his experience, being in an international classroom makes you think differently. For him, it is an advantage that his own opinions are challenged. It makes him more open to accept difference.

Nonetheless, Anas thinks that integrating into Dutch culture should have its limits. It is hard for him to see fellow Saudi Arabian students who come to Groningen and forget their own cultural, but also religious backgrounds. He advises them “Don’t try to be Dutch. Learn the language, learn what’s good from the culture, but don’t take everything. It’s good to be integrated – but you have to have your limits.”

Considering the differences of the educational systems in Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands, Anas likes the challenges of the Dutch system. Not everything is spoon-fed and he is encouraged to look for the knowledge himself. Because of the smaller groups, it is easier to ask questions and the lectures are more interactive, another part Anas likes.

Being almost done with his bachelor programme Anas is not yet sure whether he starts his master immediately. But he knows that it will be an advantage for him that he studied in an international programme such as IBMG.

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Willemijn Jonkheer

For Dutch student Willemijn Jonkheer (20) her bachelor international relations and international organisations (IRIO) at the faculty of arts is close to an international classroom that broadened her horizon. But the concept and advantages of the international classroom need to be more emphasised, according to her.

“The classroom within IRIO is super international. International in terms of nationalities also very much because IRIO people have almost all been abroad for some time. You have a lot of direct and direct contact far away or close by.”

The advantage of such a diverse classroom as in IRIO is for Willemijn clearly the opportunity to broaden her own horizon beyond her own culture. She likes how she has friends who are from abroad and whom she meets somewhere else abroad. “You have a lot of opportunities to expand your horizon just by meeting people.”

What she finds disappointing about the international classroom is the current level of integration. “Sometimes it is just because seminar groups are divided too randomly. I think there should be a lot of attention paid to make actually every classroom international. Sometimes you are in an English seminar group, but they are still 90 % Dutch. Or other seminar groups are 90 % foreign people.”

One way to improve the integration among the students could be to cancel the Dutch seminar groups that still exist during the first year of the bachelor. Willemijn explains that these groups exists because the department doesn't want Dutch students to feel insecure or fail because of their English, but she thinks speaking English from the first day is the best way to overcome insecurities.

In general, the concept of the international classroom and its benefits could be much more emphasised. “I think there should be a lot more awareness how much an international classroom can actually bring you.” Lecturers could make much more of it, according to Willemijn. She smiles, “It is actually quite special that you are here with two German girls, a Swedish guy, and this guy and that guy.”

To strengthen the bonds in an international classroom, Willemijn has some tips for fellow Dutch and international students. First, she thinks that working in a study association committee helps to mix with different nationalities. “It is good to be part of it because you work together on something.”

“It made me much more confident and even though I thought my horizon was already quite broad and open, it doesn't get broadened until you see it in practice.”

Furthermore, she encourages people to move out of her comfort zone and meet new people. “Really try, in each seminar group you are in, to meet the people who could broaden your horizon. That is the best thing ever.” She also advises to be open about possible language issues and not to be discouraged if you have English problems. Finally, everybody should invest some time to get to know a little bit more about Dutch food, people, associations or sport.

For Willemijn, the international classroom concept worked out perfectly fine. “It made me much more confident and even though I thought my horizon was already quite broad and open, it doesn't get broadened until you see it in practice.”

Ari Purnama

As a research master student at the Faculty of Arts Ari Purnama didn't experience much of an international classroom. Now five years later, the Indonesian holds a PhD position at the University of Groningen and knows how important internationalization is.

For Ari, the three core elements of internationalisation are firstly the content, secondly the people who work in an international setting, and thirdly the institutional framework and policy makers. In an international classroom, it is not the number of participating nationalities that matters. "It's not about how many passports of international students you can get within one classroom. It's about how you bring in this transnational dimension to the discussion."

He adds that everyone who participates in such a classroom should have an "internationalisation of the mind," which includes intercultural sensitivity and an international attitude.

But having experienced the Dutch educational system as an international student himself, Ari still thinks the internationalisation is sometimes mistaken as a Western or Eurocentric approach. "There seems to be an implied attitude that when you approach a case, you have to look at it from a Western point of view. It's rarely that they would go outside of that and look how that particular case study is approached in Asian or African perspectives. That's what I didn't get."

Nonetheless Ari sees the added value of an international classroom. Students, but also lecturers are forced to leave their comfort zone and have to accept that a particular case is more nuanced than just looking at it from one perspective. Moreover, Ari thinks that in this globalised world you have to have a "multifaceted, multi-layered understanding of a problem" in order to solve it. Coming out of an international classroom is a plus point and makes you more employable, according to Ari.

When Ari first came to Groningen in 2009, he expected to be welcomed with open arms by his fellow classmates. "But it was not until the maybe the second year that the ice broke. It was a totally different approach to let's say inclusion and embracing attitude that I didn't expect."

To make it easier for fellow Indonesian students, Ari advises them to manage their expectations realistically. "You have to know that you have to do most of the work yourself. I think that is the idea of at least the Dutch philosophy of education: independence and self-reliance. Ari explains that in his culture, it is normal that people do a lot of things for you because labour is cheap. So when students come here, they are not prepared to work.

To increase the contact between international students and local residents, Ari could imagine that something similar to Host UK could bridge the gap. Host UK is a programme where families can invite and host international students for a day or a weekend to spend time with them. "It would be great to have something like that."

Ari doesn't know yet what he will do after his PhD. But he feels good about being employed by the University of Groningen. "The university is growing to become very vital in Europe and the world. So to be here at an exciting moment academically, I think that

"It's not about how many passports of international students you can get within one classroom. It's about how you bring in this transnational dimension to the discussion."

is exciting."