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**Promoting international cooperation and
mobility under / after the pandemic**

Ulrich Grothus
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ACA – European umbrella organization of national funding agencies for internationalization

I will speak from, and draw on, their collective perspective

ACA Think Pieces by renowned experts, published weekly in the spring and summer

Immediate Impact of the Pandemic

Short-term and credit mobility

- Practically no short-term mobility / travel
Much of it replaced by Zoom conferences
- Decrease of credit (Erasmus) mobility by 20 to 100 per cent
- Limited student interest in „virtual mobility“

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Students are interested in the international / intercultural experience and do not want to have it reduced to a foreign professor and stamp-size images of fellow students on their notebook screens. May also be in an indication that students are not as eager to use online formats as many policy makers presume.

Immediate Impact (2) Degree mobility

- More moderate decrease in applications and admissions
- Scarce data on actual enrolments:
New enrolments in the US down 43% (half study online from *outside* the US)
- Few students cancel study plans altogether, many postpone (38%) or switch destinations (14%)

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For instance: numbers of applications were *up* in the summer in Sweden and only 20% down in Germany (after several years of two digit increases)

US data published earlier this week by IIE „Fall Student Enrolment Snapshot“; first year students actually traveling to the US down by nearly 75%

Survey of 2,700 prospective international students by educations.com in October 2020; similar results in March; 75% expect to start their program abroad within the next two years.

Immediate Impact (3) Challenges and Responses

- Travel and visa obtention, in particular beyond / outside the EU
- Remarkable flexibility of institutions, funding agencies and EU commission

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Short Term Outlook Academic Years 2020/21 and 2021/22

- Probably no fundamental change to the better until (at least) the summer
- „Mobility windows“ closing (and/or being overcrowded)
- Patience of potential degree students and their parents strained to the maximum
- Young researchers not being able to build and expand their networks

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And After the Pandemic: The (New) Normal?

- Will things get to anything like normal any time soon?
- Rôle of international cooperation in finding solutions for global challenges emphasized: health, climate, ...
- But also a lesson in losing trust, closing borders (and minds), weakened interaction

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After the Pandemic (2) The (New) Normal?

- Online communication and learning much more prevalent (cumulative effect of Covid19, climate change, inclusion, return of nationalism)
- Can the virtual substitute the real, unexpected, and sometimes unwelcome, experience?

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Covid accelerating trends that had already been there before the pandemic

Examples of the unexpected: social interaction outside the classroom (and even within),
registering with the aliens office / foreigners' administration

After the Pandemic (3): The „New Normal“: Challenges Ahead

- Convince students, parents, and governments, that the international experience is worth the money and time?
- Integrate inter-cultural / inter-national aspects into virtual interaction?
- Provide online platforms for students and (younger) researchers

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The more the „hard“ academic content is separated from the „soft“ cultural environment through online teaching, the more people may wonder if the „soft“ side alone is worth the effort

Not *only* strengthen the narrative that international interaction *is* worth it.

Consciously foster interaction between students from different backgrounds, learn about different cultural and national approaches to the subject matter (e.g. different rôle of mathematics in French and German engineering training and practice)

Final Remarks

- The backlash to globalization: will we educate our students for an „ever more globalized world“?
- The inter-cultural is next door
- Travel to uncharted territory: the importance of discourse and networks like UNICA and ACA

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References

- ACA Think Pieces and Newsletter:
www.aca-secretariat.be
- „Fall Student Enrolment Snapshot 2020“:
www.iie.org

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