

# *A Renewed Strategy*

## *Implementation Approaches*

Maastricht University School of Business and Economics



oikos Maastricht  
Bonnefantestraat 2  
6211 PR Maastricht

[www.oikos-international.org/maastricht](http://www.oikos-international.org/maastricht)  
[info@oikos-maastricht.org](mailto:info@oikos-maastricht.org)

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# Executive Summary

This report is written in response to a brief to comment on implementation approaches for the strategy renewal process of the SBE. The report is comprised of two sections which address assessment methods, and community development respectively.

## Key Takeaways from Part One: Assessment Methods

- As students gear up to work in the knowledge economy, we call for an overall shift to “learning to learn” teaching. Examinations should reflect the Problem Based Learning Methods, by revising questions to test conceptual knowledge over rote learning.
- Extra-curricular activities are crucial in creating a holistic student body. The acknowledgment of this by the university, and indeed the provision of an online system which allows student to find, load, track and measure their progress in their own activities, will promote the development of students in dimensions besides academics.

## Key Takeaways from Part Two: Community Development

- Identity with the institution is crucial in creating a strong culture and cohesive student body. We recommend to engage the student body on the revision and clarification of the values, as well as to design an appropriate mascot, something that is their own representation! Everybody should be talking the same language, literally and figuratively.
- Communication channels should be adapted to become more personal and less information intensive, such as through the use of a video which serves to introduce new staff members and applaud students (at individual and aggregate levels) for various achievements. The competitive advantage of regular tutorials that Maastricht holds should be leveraged as a communication channel. There should be no confusion between faculty and external communications, and any irregularities should be smoothed out.
- Rituals should be more of a priority at the SBE as their value is currently understated. A faculty association should be responsible for organizing the events as this creates a more accessible feeling. In addition, rituals should be carefully chosen and planned for quality over quantity.

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# Part One: Assessment Methods

*“Students can escape bad teaching but they can’t escape bad assessment”*

## Assessment Drives Learning

Assessment always leads to learning. The question is, to what type of learning? Every type of assessment sends out a message to students about the way to learn. The way in which an educational institution assesses the knowledge and skills of their students, drives the way they learn for it. Students take into account what type of exams they have to pass, in which depth they need to learn, what professor is posing it and adjust for a maximum cost benefit ratio, aware or unaware. It is moot to argue whether it is more valuable if students really understand the theory they learn, what their effects are, how it can be translated into practice, because, clearly, otherwise it could happen that ‘great’ students, actually know little of what their subject means in practice.

Too often, assessment is led by the needs of summative judgement, not learning, and unfortunately Maastricht University has also fallen prey to this adage. Not only does the examination style respond to the convenience of both setting and marking the exam, but also the metrics that determine the quality of the exam by the student body lead to a ‘preference’ for rote learning exams.

The differentiating factor of Maastricht University is that it employs PBL methods. When one applies to Maastricht University, certainly one reason for doing so is the promise to learn problem based. It is the escape of pure theoretical knowledge; which other Universities think is best for their students to learn. Instead we try to learn theories by studying examples from the real world.

One unpleasant question remains with regard to the PBL system. What is the point in studying problem based, when in fact the exam is entirely detached from this system? Based on our analysis so far the consequence is that the efforts of teaching problem based, will not be implemented by the students, since the exam will be about the book at hand.

### **Multiple Choice Questions**

Firstly, at a bachelor's level, there are many students so MCQ is more a matter of practicality than anything else. In addition, we are aware that the first year in Maastricht is like a second selection procedure. Exams are not easy to pass respectively. The multiple choice questions which are being posed at the SBE often ask for formulas and detailed knowledge. Ergo studying for the exams is focused on knowing each handled chapter in as much detail as possible, without focusing strongly on the deeper implications and interconnections.

In addition, the detail is often constrained by the definitions from the respective book. If students know that to answer a specific question it is often sufficient to simply recall a formula or definition that was hidden somewhere in the textbook, there is less an incentive to actually understanding the concept or trying to pervade it. Although textbooks may be chosen for the high calibre of the content, a remedy for rote learning style questions may be to engage more with open-book exams which force the students to engage with the textbook well, but still grasp the concepts.

The essential question therefore remains: what type of learning does the SBE want to incentivize? And if it is true learning, as prescribed via the PBL method; then we recommend that the rote learning MCQ questions be abolished as far as possible, and that fewer more conceptual questions take their place. Adjusting the testing style leads to two potential difficulties, first that students might perform worse, and that courses might be rated badly by students as a result. These issues are addressed in the next two sub-sections.

### **A More Descriptive Grades Bell Curve**

At the public meetings of the 'Strategic Renewal' process, often the issue of grade inflation came up. Many fear that it has become too easy to obtain high grades, which we cannot comment on. If, however, this problem is going to be tackled, our suggestion of changing the focus of the exams might be of help. By shifting the focus of exams to more qualitative assessment instead of the rather quantitative, as it can be witnessed right now, would question 'Who has learned most' instead of 'Who has learned best'. The new examination would act as a filter, rewarding those who could apply the theory the best.

### **Combatting “Deteriorated” Course Ratings Due to Difficult Exams**

A constraint of our implementation suggestion might be that it is not in line with the rating criteria to maintain the triple crown accreditation, which seems to be of importance for the SBE. Since we have no insight in those criteria, we wanted to simply point out the possibility of such a problem.

However, should we shift the metric of course assessment through adjusting some of the questions we might bring about a more representative or useful understanding of the student’s perception of the course and the material covered. We propose teasing up the metric of fairness or quality into the following dimensions, which students can agree or disagree on:

- The exam was predominantly “concepts – based”.
- The exam was predominantly “recall”.
- I found the exam difficult.
- I feel that if I had obtained a high grade in the exam I could comfortably and confidently be deemed an ‘expert’ in the topics covered.

### **Lessons from LSE: Learning to Learn**

With ever increasing speed of technological progress, knowledge becomes more and more consumable. Every detail can be looked up, in every part of the world, at all times. The challenge professionals will face in the future is therefore less to know details of their profession, but rather to manage and process the flow of information. How can universities use and handle this change?

One answer is that universities have to shift their teaching and assessment from just imparting knowledge towards enabling their students to doing and adapting. A famous example is the London School of Economics. According to them, the knowledge gained while studying has partly become obsolete by the time of graduation anyway. Consequently, their approach is to teach students how to learn. After graduation they might be less armed with formulas and definitions, yet they face less difficulties to adapt to the new in their profession.

We believe it can be valuable for the SBE to gradually shift their teaching approach at least partly towards “learning to learn”. By doing so, the students become more flexible and better prepared, for what will follow after graduation. The difficulty of such shift would be, that every subject would have to alter their approach individually. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to implement our advice. Yet, despite the fact that it would challenge staff as well as

students, we believe it would add great value to the academic work of the SBE and will ensure and strengthen its position as one of the best business schools worldwide.

To conclude, the SBE could improve and match their exams to the PBL system. We recommend to make exams less specific and more about the core concepts, as well as development of the ability to transfer knowledge between the core concepts. By doing so, it can change the level of difficulty with the effect that students learn more problem based and the exams become less predictable. Students that understood the theory in practice would then be rewarded with good grades, not those who knew the book the best. The great effort of trying to impart knowledge in a problem based way might be inhibited by the fact, that the exam is not respecting the way the theory has been taught. In order to incentivize students, so that they actually pervade the theories, apply them into real world problems and maybe even advance them, would require an examination which asks for the respective knowledge. Such assessment lets even the ablest students find it difficult to apply the knowledge gained. When thinking of the quality of the studies at the SBE, we should think more about the quality of its exams.

## **Measures of Non Academic Performance**

Academic achievement is the most visible metric of success at university level. Although grading systems are evolving to account for different learning methods and skills, ultimately what emerges from a student's time at university is a set of single digit numbers indicating their performance. In the workplace, success has classically also been quantified into performance measures derived using quotas, however we are seeing a shift into a more holistic measure of assessment via the balanced scorecard. The Balanced Scorecard attempts to complement the quantifiable aspects of an employee's performance with measures of their contribution to operational processes, customer/client satisfaction, and furthering their own development. These methods are widespread in corporations today, and are employed in order to reap the organizational benefit from having holistic and happy employees. We see the application of these concepts at a university level, especially within the School of Business and Economics.

Which traits and skills beyond the syllabus should be actively cultivated and rewarded? This section does not address skills such as soft and presentation which are already incorporated into the SBE grading system, instead we attempt to address the reward for students in participating in 'extra-curricular' activities. Currently, we see that a number of organizations already exist which cater for the diverse interests of the student body, ranging from an active

sports centre, and language centre, to human rights activism, environmental awareness and the prolific study association SCOPE. Involvement in these bodies is purely rewarded at a personal level, not in any formal arrangement. The reasons for this can be broken into two dimensions: firstly, typically universities, although they provide the platform and infrastructure for such engagement, are classically involved in academic teaching and learning and secondly, that the interest sets of the students are so heterogeneous that analysis and assessment becomes impractically complex.

Despite these issues, this section addresses how we might reward non-academic or extra-curricular activities in a formal manner at the SBE, and attempts to leverage off the already existing infrastructure at the university. We propose a formal measurement system of extra-curricular activities to be implemented on ELEUM. In short, this system allows for transparency in terms of which organizations exist in the town, what their aims and ‘associations’ are, as well as which positions and projects are available within those. The system will allow each student to develop their own unique ‘extra’ learning portfolio wherein they can design their own development.

### **A Unique Learning Portfolio on ELEUM**

Already, when students apply for university there is some cognizance of their non-academic achievements, at both Bachelors and a Masters Level. Already there is some engagement with the student’s individual capacity before he or she has even been admitted. This should be further leveraged and developed on, and translated into a tangible framework which the student can adapt as they develop. The widely-used already personalized ELEUM system provides a strong starting off point to develop such unique learning portfolios. We propose that an additional feature be loaded on to the ELEUM system which has standardized methods of loading personal extra-curricular activities for the students own review and assessment.

The system will allow for existing organizations such as SCOPE, for example, to register, and to load and update their own visions, staff, projects etc. This will make for a more transparent and accessible spectrum of extra-curricular activities, which will be easier for students to navigate. The portfolios should have the potential to indicate personal interests as well as to load ad hoc activities as well, subject to approval. This will require a committee to approve and upload items. In addition to loading the activities themselves, the system should provide some sort of measuring and commitment capabilities so that the students can map their own progress levels, goals and outcomes. These points are discussed in more detail below.



## Dimensions of Extra Curricular Activities

The broad range of development activities on offer at the University, and the varying level of personal engagement make it difficult to develop a spectrum of “value” extracted for the individual. We draw on the assessment measures for extra-curricular activities in use at the University of Dublin. The activities can be categorized as either:

- Extra Training and Learning.
- Professional Development and Formal Work Experience.
- Community and Volunteer Work.

Students need not excel in all of these areas, but their interests become transparent and measurable. Not only does this aid the students’ personal development but it also assists potentially in linking students to relevant groups and associations.

## Metrics of Performance

Instead of being goal-oriented, the extra-curricular framework is more about understanding how to create value from your interests, and integrate them into the processes of your daily life. Thus, the metrics are geared towards extracting long term value. A preliminary suggestion would be to assess:

- Level of Involvement: Understand to what degree the student is involved in the activity, and their role as a leader, administrator etc.
- Length of Involvement: Each time unit the student is involved must be logged and verified. Long term commitments must be made visible and recognized officially.
- Competencies: At a personal level, students should be encouraged to understand for themselves both what they aim to gain from being involved in the activity, and also what they have gained.
- Self-reflection, ethics, and values: Lastly, we allow the student space to reflect on successes and failures within the activity for that time unit. What are the key takeaways? What lessons can be applied going forward?

### **Further Aids to Implementation and Success**

It is possible that the students will not engage with the tool on offer in ELEUM because they are not aware of the value that is offered to them through it. In order for the university to ensure that there is a meaningful uptake of the tool, there needs to be some indication that it is a priority at a university level as well, which we truly believe there should be.

#### *Automatic Loading of Known Possible Activities*

Increased measurement of interests and engagements will make it easier over time for the university to link students with student bodies relevant to their interests. This process will require time and some effort. However, in the short run, there are some simple more superficial connections to be made. For example, we have seen in the strategic report that the Exchange Semester is extremely successful and popular amongst students, why not then, propose the learning of the related language to the individual student based on his or her own exchange destination?

#### *Skills Training Adjustment*

Twice a year, all the students of the university engage in a Skills Training Course which earns them 4-4.5 ECTS. We propose that a 0.5 point for each of these sessions be diverted into the creation and upkeep of the extra-curricular calendar. This 1 credit point is not significant enough to skew the performance of the student but indicates the dedication the university has to engaging with the students efforts in engaging with extra-curricular activities. This incentive is targeted at students who are already willing to participate but do not manage to find the time. This incentive, then, provides the push to make the leap. We do not make this quite extreme recommendation casually, it is our belief that rewarding students, even slightly, for more holistic behaviours leads to an ultimately more successful and active student body.

In short, this system will allow for students to input interests and skills they wish to develop, and will allow them to find the organization/association or centre that applies to them. This also allows a transparent indication of which student bodies already exist and are associated with the University, instead of more opaque social media links, which goes on to create a more cohesive student body ultimately.

## Part Two: Community Development

Compared to plenty of other business schools, SBE is a relatively young school. While this provides SBE with many possibilities to implement modern learning approaches and be recognized as a dynamic and energetic business school, it also poses some challenges. To us students, it is not always clear who we are as students at SBE, and what makes us special; the identity of the SBE itself and the way students identify with it is somehow vague.

A good sense of community helps students to feel “at home” at SBE and in the academic community. It supports students to engage more in learning and with the faculty. Furthermore, students develop more caring relationships with each other and become role models for new students in supporting each other during the academic journey and even beyond. This might lead to better academic achievement and decreases negative behavior among students.

We believe that there are three key elements that play a role in fostering a sense of community at SBE: identification with the school, the rituals that are shared at the school, and the communication methods at play both from an institutional to individual level, and amongst individuals - and we cover these three notions in the next sections.

### **Identity of students: “We are SBE?”**

An identifying feeling of “I am SBE!”, or even “We are SBE”, does not yet exist. Identification with the faculty is important to students and the faculty itself: to define oneself, to know one’s strengths, to distinguish from other business schools and thus to gain a competitive advantage. Furthermore, a strong identification and pride of the school needs to be enhanced so that “I am at SBE” can become a “We are SBE”.

The methods suggested to improve the identification of the students with the SBE require strong feedback and communication loops between institution and individuals, as well as regular meaningful rituals to engage with the notion of the SBE and meet fellow community members.

### **Improved Visibility of Core Values and Motto**

Core values give students actual values, they can identify with and the unifying effect of following these values creates a platform for community. In this context, SBE could improve its

current strategy of communicating its core values. Asking around the student body, the officially stated core values are not very clear among students. Some students even name completely different values and others do not even know that the SBE has core values. Of course, this fact might be caused by a lack of interest for their faculty by some students, but it also shows that there is room for improvement concerning the communication of the core values of SBE.

The SBE's core values are officially stated on the website: the school's mission is building an international network school where students and staff look towards the future and beyond borders, where inspiration and the exchange of value lead to success. In addition, SBE follows the school motto "Sharing Success", which is supposed to be implemented throughout the whole academic life and curriculum. Despite this 'clarity', we have seen that these values and this motto are not propagated truly through the student body and faculty staff. To this end, we recommend the following. First that the values themselves, and their link with the motto, be revised and clarified by members of the student body. Second, there should be improved visibility of the values and/or motto.

Perhaps to start, the section "Mission, Values and Strategy" of the SBE website should be updated and improved. This part of the website could be built in a more interesting and appealing way, so that current students are interested in informing themselves about the core values of SBE, especially in the beginning of their studies. At the moment, it is only a bullet point list of partially vague information without any further value. This part could be improved by adding personal statements of students and academic staff or even videos in how far SBE implements its values throughout student life. Furthermore, the school's motto "Sharing Success" is missing here and should be added. These suggestions might sound of marginal importance, but as the faculty's website serves as one of the first sources of information about the values of the school, it is important to provide an updated and appealing overview to students.

Following from this, the core values need to be communicated directly to students and faculty staff. In this context, small actions can already make large changes, so that the core values are constantly present and students and faculty members can be made aware of them. For example, as an act of university branding, the motto and the core values could be stated more directly on official documents of SBE as well as on their websites as an addition to the SBE "logo" (comparable to: "Maastricht University – Leading in Learning"). Moreover, the core values could be stated "physically" in the entrance of the SBE in terms of a banner, a sign or

even an artwork that represents the values. Of course, the core values should also be included and explained in opening presentations at official SBE events as the Opening of The New Academic Year or other relevant events.

### **Define an Appropriate Faculty Mascot**

To enhance identification with an organization and its values using a mascot is maybe not an innovative, but can be a very effective means. Currently, SBE uses “Andre Preneur” to approach younger individuals, e.g. high school students, to explain what studying at SBE is like. As an initial approach to SBE students it is useful, but “Andre Preneur” should not be considered as an official mascot of the faculty as its use does not go beyond a first contact with prospective students. In this context, choosing a real mascot or symbol for the faculty could be a step towards strengthening the identification of students with the faculty. A well-chosen mascot reflects the values of the faculty and can even be rooted in the faculty’s history. For example, it can be an animal or a certain icon that is linked to the faculty’s history. Hereby, it is important to elaborate that a mascot is not necessarily a comic figure, i.e. an animal designed in an exaggerated and almost ridiculous way, that one might know from US-American sports matches. In an academic context, a more sophisticated and mature design of mascot could be chosen.

Moreover, its application should also be thoughtfully designed. The possibilities range from using a mascot as a symbol or coat of arms, i.e. on official documents of SBE, over brand merchandising to having an actual mascot for certain events. The chosen mascot can actively be used for representation reasons of SBE at external events as case competitions, possible sport matches (e.g. faculty fight) or other competitions, but also indirectly on official documents of SBE.

Additionally, it is strongly suggested to include students in the decision process about the final mascot as well as its application. Students can also be encouraged in participating in its design and possible application. This action would not only strengthen the feeling of identity, but also directly communicate the mascot to the students and – very important - prevent it from being rejected by the student body.

### **The Aspect of One Shared Language**

A further important aspect is the identification as an SBE community in terms of language. As one of SBEs core values consists in value exchange in an international community to learn and add value from a network of diverse nationalities, it is obviously important to keep the

community diverse and international. In order to guarantee the appointed knowledge flow, it is important to find a channel, i.e. interpersonal communication, and build a well-functioning network, i.e. community. In this sense, a major aspect of identity and community is a shared language. For example, an individual never fully identifies with a country or a community, if it does not speak “its language” and directly feels excluded. This effect hinders community building and its resulting benefits. SBE already has rules and guidelines to achieve this, but there are still a lot of sub-communities among the students that may weaken the overall feeling of community at SBE.

As stated above, SBE already incorporated guidelines in the university life that promote English as the lingua franca at SBE, as well as tries to raise awareness of the negative effects on community of not following these guidelines, but unfortunately the goal of English as the ONLY language has not been reached so far. A lot of students only fulfil the language requirements in their tutorials, but escape to their mother tongue in the tutorial breaks already – or sometimes even during the tutorial. As these students do not have immediate negative consequences, they are not incentivized to follow the language guidelines, although it would not mean a lot more effort to them. But as language is a powerful device to build a feeling of community and also fosters the development of other aspects as the knowledge flow to fully use its international potential, it is important, that SBE continuously encourages its students and staff to ONLY speak English at the SBE Campus. SBE should further raise the awareness of the language aspect among students and promote it more throughout the studies (and not only during PBL Introduction week). It should be regulated more strictly, if people do not follow the language guidelines; It should be considered as “not worth striving for” to speak another language than English at the SBE Campus. It could actually be seen as “forbidden” to speak another language on the campus, as it is mainly a result of laziness of students to step out of their comfort zone and not of incapability. Furthermore, tutors should take care of it during tutorials (also during breaks) and speaking exclusively English could even be included in the participation grade, as not following these guidelines can be seen as “disturbing behavior”. Furthermore, tutors should guarantee that groups in tutorials always consists of different nationalities. In this context, the scheduling office should already take care of creating multinational tutorial groups before.

Of course, one might argue that listening to different languages on the campus might raise the international aspect of the SBE. But the extent to how far speaking different languages negatively affects community building and knowledge flow between students refutes this argument. Actually, it would contribute to the international character of the SBE, as students

share a channel to share their international values and opinions. Speaking English does not make you lose your nationality, it just gives you a channel to communicate it to others and add value to an international community.

## **Communication**

Communication has many faces. From an institutional perspective in today's world, with many different media channels available besides the classical written or face-to-face communication, information flows are vivid and active in constantly trying to capture the attention of receivers. Because in such a one-sided communication scheme it is not possible to exactly know what the counterpart wishes to know, institutions tend to provide unnecessary information flow.

As it is currently the situation, SBE primarily uses digital channels to communicate to its student body. Whereas Facebook and Twitter seem to be used for a more informal communication, EleUM and especially numerous E-Mails are used to communicate on a more formal and professional basis to students and the SBE community in general.

The sheer quantity of information delivered through these many channels, might lead many students to, for instance, delete E-Mails before actually reading them and to develop a general disinterest. Even though much information is provided, one often does not know where to check for information once it is missing. The point we want to make here is that communication channels at the Faculty are one-directional, occasionally overwhelming, impersonal, and ultimately ineffective.

The effect of using many different communication channels that mostly provide very similar informational elements has many implications. With respect to our report, the most important one is the following: As long as the information flow of SBE is not streamlined in a smart way, students will have difficulties identifying themselves with the faculty. As a result, the community building process will become even more challenging.

### **Tools for streamlining communication**

The main goal of communication, besides purely informing individuals, should be to let students feel as a part of the SBE community. To achieve this, SBE has to re-think its way of two-way communication and work on enhancing its digital channels as well as moving towards a more individual way of communication generally.

### Digital but Personal Communication

To facilitate the identification process between students and the faculty, SBE may think about introducing a new way of communication. This certainly sounds odd, after we have criticized the current information overload that is provided to SBE students. Yet, it is important to understand that it is not necessarily the number of communication channels or ways of communication that create this congestion. Rather, it is the fact that the information that is earmarked, be it in the latest newsletter, often resembles the information presented in another communication medium. Hence, there is no incentive to be interested in more than one communication channel because one is mostly enough to get all the key points.

One way of introducing a new way of communication and streamlining the overall communication in parallel, would be to send out a quarterly video. This video could be attached, for example, to an EMail that is sent out anyways in the interval mentioned. Of course, the content of the video should not be a spoken version of the news that can be found in text form in the EMail itself. Rather, it should be an extension, an enhancement of the written content.

This simple but direct way of communication has a number of advantages. Firstly, each quarter, a different member of the academic staff could be broadcasted. This would be a good opportunity for faculty and students to *get to know each other*, to create a more personal relationship between faculty and students. Students could get to know who is behind this rather bureaucratic apparatus that creates challenging hurdles to jump. Members of the SBE community would then better be able to answer questions like: Who supports us, the students? Who are the people working behind the scene for our academic reputation?

The videos could begin with a short introduction of the person in the video, and then continue with important achievements by the SBE community of both the students and the staff. The topics should not be about current recruiting events or the opening hours of the library for example. The focus should really *only* lie on the relationship between students and faculty, and such should incorporate a semi-informal or light-hearted tone.

Secondly, this way of communication can be used, as shortly mentioned already, to acknowledge students and staff for their latest achievements in a personal and honest way. This could and should, ultimately, lead students to view the SBE community as a team. In our opinion, it is currently very hard to establish such a sense of spirit at SBE. As an example, consider incoming first year students. Within the first weeks, everyone sooner or later has to



realise, that it is all about grades and the ranking that goes along with them. At this point, we do not criticise the accompanying incentives that are created by this. Rather, we would like to use this scenario to point out why it is so hard to create a team spirit, a sustainable community at SBE. As the faculty creates the image of being very selective and challenging, it also never communicates a word of welcome for the ones who are able to jump this hurdle (for example at the end of the first year).

For purposes like the one just described, videos would be extremely useful. It seems that SBE needs a more natural and personal way to communicate than to its standard E-Mails. In addition, participating in the creation of the video, either through technical assistance, or recommending students or staff for various achievements, should also be encouraged and accessible to all students and staff members. Next to annual events, as outlined in our Rituals section, where an even more important face-to-face communication is established, videos could enhance and further develop this kind of two way communication, when skilfully and professionally implemented.

### **Build on what you have**

#### *Tutorials as a Communication Channel*

Given the educational system of Problem-Based-Learning, all students have to be present at tutorial sessions at least once a week. In terms of communication, this can be seen as a clear competitive advantage as opposed to other Universities that follow a different educational approach. To take advantage of this construct, the faculty could develop clear communication guidelines to not only allow course coordinators to let their tutors make an announcement at the beginning of a tutorial session, but also allow other members of the academic staff (or primarily the dean) to use this top-down approach to effectively communicate to the student body. For example, the quarterly videos described before could be shown at the beginning of tutorials or the lectures in a particular week. This way, one is able to maximise outreach.

Within the communication guidelines, however, one should set clear rules on who is allowed to make such announcements. For instance, it would be a mistake to allow third parties, e.g. study associations, to use this tool for communication (as it would probably be for advertisements). If this was allowed, it would again harm the community building process as it would interfere the growing, rather personal, relationship between the faculty and the students.

#### *Contact between Staff and Students*

Also, an easy to implement way of improving the personal way of communication is to extend the contact between course coordinators and students who are enrolled in a particular course. While it is not the case for masters students or students who are part of a subgroup within a specialisation of their studies, the vast amount of first and second year students do not ever talk to their course coordinator. This does not mean that they cannot do so, as there still is the opportunity to approach the course coordinator during the lecture breaks. Nevertheless, it would be an incredible valuable gesture to offer regular open office hours. During these hours, students could have the possibility to approach the course coordinator for whatever they are concerned about. Here, again, it makes sense to establish clear guidelines for this. For instance, the faculty could establish the rule that there is exactly one hour on a certain day of each week on which the course coordinator is available in his or her office. Despite the fact that we believe that this offer would not even be exploited by a large amount of students, it is our opinion that it is the invitation that counts. It enables SBE to open up more direct and personal communication paths that instantly add value.

### *Personal Calendars*

The university already has the calendar infrastructure in place, why not include event invites to faculty events – as often news of the event reaches the students too late. This could be a quick and effective way to get ‘the word’ out there for faculty events and other ‘Rituals’ as described in the next section.

### **Associations**

In many cases, we feel that there is no clear boundary between faculty communication and the communication by individual associations. This leads students to be confused about the true initiator of the information, which again makes identification difficult. Sometimes, the problem arises even before the actual information flow: Students are unsure about the role and the influence of certain associations within the faculty.

In particular, as well as an example of, this opacity arises with respect to Scope and its affiliates. Here, it is often difficult to say whether or not this association is actually an independent institution or rather the helping hand of SBE. As we heard from various fellow students, it often seems that Scope receives more support than other associations do. Generally, it seems that the faculty and Scope have intermingled to such a large extent that it has been increasingly hard for students to identify the *real* initiator behind events, study trips, or simply an Email. Of course, this hurts the community building process because it takes away the possibility to identify with the faculty and the characteristics that go along with it.

We propose to set clearer boundaries in terms of communication from the faculty and communication from the associations that enables students to easily determine the intention of information and further enhances the community building at SBE. This could be partially dealt via the “Unique Learning Portfolio” described in Section One, as the various organizations one subscribes to would have equal channels of communication, separate from the faculty.

## Rituals

Rituals are habitual activities that structure the lives of communities and are shared by many of the members. They are significant because they reaffirm the identity of those and often take place at special times and places and remind a community of aspects of its worldview, history and self-perception (UNESCO, 2016). In a university setting, rituals are said to have a moderating effect on the sense of community among members (Mahan et al., 2002, p.125).

The current situation at SBE is that we students have plenty of opportunities to attend events, like the ICC@M, guest lectures, workshops or drinks at the recently opened SBE Bar. However, it is not clear how these events relate to our SBE community. Students usually only interact within small groups and there is no strong feeling of a SBE community. Probably a lot of students do not even have an idea why a strong community is good for them and SBE as a faculty.

Transferring the idea of rituals to the specific application at SBE, SBE could use rituals to remind and share with students how SBE sees itself and the world (“How do we do things around here”), and thus help students to identify with the faculty. In the setting of SBE, events are the key to establishing rituals. Students, faculty members, and maybe even alumni, come together to experience SBE and its community, and together shape the identity of our institution. More specifically, these events should be repeated regularly, e.g. annually, and always serve the same purpose.

### **But what kind of events could SBE establish as rituals?**

#### **Opening of the New Academic Year**

One example of a ritual could be a formal opening of the new academic year. Bringing both students and academic staff together, this would give the Dean an opportunity to outline points on his agenda for the upcoming academic year. As there already is an opening of the

academic year organized by UM, this event could be used as a starting point to organize such an event on a smaller scale at SBE. One highlight of the opening could be to invite an alumnus to hold a speech and motivate students for the upcoming periods. Students should be reminded and given the feeling that SBE is glad to have them back and that everyone is here to support them during the upcoming academic year. The formal opening ceremony could be followed by more informal welcome-back drinks at the new SBE Bar.

### **SBE Campus Festival**

Another possible event could be a SBE campus festival. This event could best be organized during the summer months (preferably June or September) to make use of the large garden at SBE. This event could be accompanied by a barbecue or different food stands that are organized by students. For instance, different food stands for food of different countries could be present to underline the international background, of which SBE is proud.

### **Competitions**

Another foundation to establish a ritual is given by competitions. “A healthy community is one in which essential but often competing values are maintained in tensioned balance” (McDonald, 2002, p. 3). This means that groups with a high sense of community effectively balance competing ideas, like tradition and innovation, or self-interest and self-sacrifice. One of these tensions is presented by cooperation versus competition. If balanced properly, “cooperation multiplies the power of excellence” and competition helps members of a community to reach new performance levels (McDonald, 2002).

A great example that balances cooperation and competition which is already established at SBE are case competitions. SBE students have achieved outstanding results at international case competitions, however, success stories are rarely communicated to other students. It could become a ritual to once a year honour students who participated in case competitions and give them the opportunity to present their ideas to their fellow students. This would prevent students who did not get the chance to compete themselves from feeling left out of the achievements of our community. Furthermore, the opportunity presented by SBE’s own case competition ICC@M to foster community should be underlined. Observing and supporting our own fellow students during such an international competition would underline and foster SBE’s sense of community to a great extent.

### **Frequent Events**

In contrast to rituals, which are only repeated on a yearly basis like the opening of the academic year, SBE could think about smaller events which occur more frequently. A great starting point is the recently opened SBE Bar and the idea to open it once a week on a regular basis. We have heard many positive comments about it and it offers many possibilities to strengthen the sense of community.

### **How to organize rituals at SBE?**

Perhaps the next question, then, is how to organize and implement such rituals at SBE. We believe that it is important that such events are organized by the faculty itself and are communicated as events of the faculty. For instance, there could be a “floating” events committee of the faculty, comprising out of students and staff that organizes ritual events on behalf of the dean. It should be prevented that the organization is taken over by a single study association which communicates such a ritual as “their event”. This fails the purpose of shaping and fostering a sense of community of the entire faculty. Students might feel left out of the community and develop reservations to attend. Like mentioned earlier, rituals are shared events by many of the members of a community; that is why it is important that the event is organized by the community, or a part of the community, and not by a rather independent already established association of students. Furthermore, students should be involved in the organizing process because then students are more likely to identify with an event and encourage the student community to attend. This idea ties back to the beginning of this report and the idea to reward students for extra-curricular activities. If students had an incentive to support fostering the sense of community at SBE through the organization of rituals, they would be more willing to participate and bring in their own ideas.

Concerning the timing of events that are treated as rituals, it is important to give students time and space to attend the events. For instance, the opening of the new academic year could take place on the Monday morning and during that time, no lectures or tutorial meetings should be scheduled, if possible. The key to establishing rituals is “quality over quantity”. SBE already offers a lot of events, like the ICC@M, but students are generally not able to attend all offers because their studies are so time-demanding. Instead of offering plenty of events, SBE should rethink their current offers and try to focus on the most important events. It is better to have a handful of meaningful events which support SBE students in building a sense of community and on the same note ensure that students are actually able to attend such rituals.

Furthermore, rituals should be planned and carried out carefully. Instead of implementing and holding an event as fast as possible, the organizing committee should put time and effort into developing a ritual that really shapes the sense of community. One major hurdle during the planning phase will obviously be how to finance a project. We recommend to prevent charging entrance fees as much as possible, and rather try to finance the event in another way. Because students are already so busy with their studies, an additional fee to attend a ritual would probably make them hesitate to attend a ritual. This is especially true if a ritual is organized for the first time. If an event really establishes in the long run and is renowned by students, fees could be charged at a later point, but they should be kept to a minimum. Rituals play an important role in developing a culture of community at SBE and the possible benefits through improved caring relationships among students and staff, improved academic achievement and encouraging students to engage in learning and with the faculty should outweigh financial hurdles.

In conclusion, rituals are one of the keys to foster the sense of community among students at SBE. Rituals in form of regularly repeating events, like a formal opening of the academic year or a summer festival, could be implemented at SBE. Next to the kind of ritual to implement, it is maybe even more important how to implement a ritual. It is essential that rituals are organized by the SBE itself and are communicated as faculty events. Rituals cannot be organized and tied to an individual study association because that would make a lot of students feel left out of the community. Moreover, it is important to communicate rituals to students in an effective way and to underline why they are important for our community, and why our SBE community is important for all of us. The findings from the previous part about how to streamline communication at SBE could be applied in this case as well.

## Conclusion

To conclude the report on the SBE's strategic renewal, we here summarise our main suggestions.

With regard to Assessment Methods we have two main suggestions: Firstly, we suggest that the SBE redefines its way of assessing students to create a more holistic image of an individual's knowledge and skills developed throughout the program. We believe that this can be achieved by redesigning exams so that the deep knowledge of key concepts is required, instead of details that have a limited value to students. More generally, one should focus on inferring the practical skills needed to apply knowledge to real life scenarios.

Secondly, the SBE may implement a formal measurement system of extracurricular activities that not only incentivises students to become involved in tasks besides studies, but also allows for more transparency in terms of existing possibilities that can be rewarded within the system. Along with accurate measurement and rewarding, one has to re-think the role of skills courses as well as the general incentives that are given by the current way of grading and examination.

With regard to community development, we discuss three core ideas - identity, communication, rituals - that we believe will assist in more robust and personal community development.

We believe that SBE has not yet found its own character traits it can communicate to staff and students. To tackle this issue, the faculty has to carefully rethink the role of its mascot as well as the implementation of its lingua franca. The SBE is perceived by many students as "impenetrable", and this could be combatted via more personal, fluid, two-way communication channels. The current, rather digital way of communication should be streamlined towards developing a fundament for identification and therefore community building. SBE already has many possibilities to increase the value and the effectiveness of its communication: we suggest that the unique compulsory tutorial groups be used as a top-down information channel. Lastly, we emphasise the role of rituals as they can be powerful in the creation of team spirit and, more generally, to a feeling of community. Here, we outline the possibility to introduce regular, carefully chosen events that not only enhance the personal communication between the faculty and the students but also the more personal relationship that is being created between students.





## About the Authors

**Clemens Schröer** is a first-year International Business student. Well-equipped with insights from various international companies in different industries, shaping the strategy at his own faculty came along as an extremely interesting challenge.

**Marijana Novak** is currently studying her Masters in International Business (Sustainable Finance). With several years' work experience, Marijana is interested in optimizing the value gain students can gain from tertiary education towards their own personal development and success in the workplace.

**Meike Büns** is a Master student in International Business. She participated in this report because she believes it is important to highlight the importance of sustainability in education, for both students and the faculty, in the course of the strategy renewal of SBE.

**Laura Thiel** is an International Business Master Student majoring in “Strategy and Innovation” and “Information Management”. Having studied at very different Universities in Germany and the US, she liked to contribute with various insights and ideas to the oikos project.

**Paul Butzlaff** is a first year Economics student. By making an exchange to New York and working, among others, in the German Parliament and the Ministry of Finance of Rwanda, he gained numerous experiences prior to his studies.

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