

7 things you should know about...

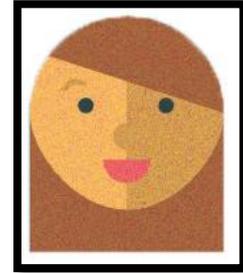
# Virtual Exchange



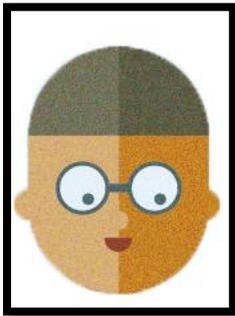
# Examples of Virtual Exchange students

## Judith

- Is a 3rd year bachelor student Sinology at Leuven University
- Did the 2 EC course 'Law, Development and Innovation in China' from Leiden University as part of her Honours Program
- The course ended with a paper and pencil exam, which she took at her own university



*"I applied for the course 'Law, Development and Innovation in China' from Leiden University, because it will help me to build a unique CV. Besides, learning to learn online will help me to prepare for a career at a multinational company."*



## Alexandre

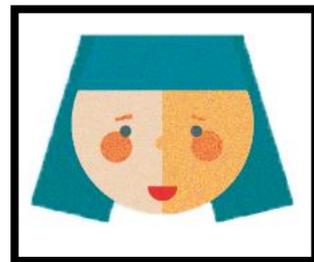
- Is a master student Physics at Sorbonne University
- Passionate about astronomy and theatre
- Followed the 4 EC course 'Plasma Physics' from EPFL as an elective

*"Following the course 'Plasma Physics' from EPFL through Virtual Exchange allows me to specialize in astronomy. I love that I can do the course online, because it allows me to study in between the rehearsals of my theatre group."*

## Maria

- Studies International Studies and European Institutes at the University of Milan
- Applied for the 5EC course 'EU Policymaking and decision' from Leiden University, which she will follow as extracurricular
- The course will be assessed with an oral exam, which will be done over Skype

*"I applied for the course 'EU Policymaking an decision' at Leiden University, because I'm thinking of doing my masters at Leiden University. By doing a course at Leiden University I can see what it's like to study there, which hopefully help me in making my decision."*



### 1. What is it?

Universities worldwide stimulate students to study abroad, usually for a semester. New is the possibility to go on *virtual* exchange. This could be one or more courses that the student takes online at a partner university. Like with physical exchange, for virtual exchange students receive credits.

### 2. How does it work?

Virtual exchange for credit comes in many forms. Some courses are self paced, and finished with a pen and paper exam. Other courses are offered in a (non-open) small sized group with the usual amount of teacher guidance. We see courses at all levels from undergraduate to graduate, and ranging from 2 up to 10EC. Most courses are offered as electives. Even minors can be taken online in this way. Virtual exchange offers the student more choice in medium, subjects and teachers. As with physical exchange, students have to get approval from their exam committee or study director. Only courses that universities offer online to their own students for credits can be opened for virtual exchange students. In that way, the same rigor and quality assessment procedures apply to online as for face-to-face courses.

### 3. Who is doing it?

The first initiative was a pilot to explore how the many SPOCS or MOOCs of the partners, having been designed with so much care, can be integrated and exchanged within degree programs. Two consortia have started it, one European including Leiden and Sorbonne, alongside EPFL, TU Delft, Madrid, Louvain and Wageningen, and one [global](#), with a part of the European consortium extended to Asian (HKUST), American (Rice), and Australian (ANU, Adelaide,

Queensland) partners. Although both started with MOOCs, the consortia soon opened up also for other types of online courses like SPOCs.

After one semester of promising experiences with virtual exchange for credits, Leiden and Sorbonne launched the idea of a LERU virtual exchange. The trust between the LERU partners, as well as the high-quality level of the education, made that the project was embraced by 6 LERU universities, and a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) has been signed in November 2019 to start exchanging students virtually.

On other continents we see comparable initiatives, like the three renowned [Latin American universities who launched a collaboration](#) opening up to 100 courses for each other's on campus students, using the Coursera platform.

There are two related but different projects in Europe. Quite some years of experience has [The Bavarian Virtual University](#). Students from all Bavarian universities can enroll there for courses taught by different Bavarian universities and financed by the Bavarian government. A second related project is the [Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange](#), offering intercultural learning experiences. The big difference is that they are not for credit.

### 4. Why is it significant?

Innovation happens when various new developments come together. Apple did not launch the first mobile phone; its great merit was to combine various new technologies into a user-friendly and appealing device, and with that, creating the breakthrough for smartphones that have changed daily routines for all of us. In the same way we see several developments coming together in virtual exchange for credit, creating a potential pivotal momentum: (a) Student exchange is daily practice at all universities; (b)

Many universities already offer MOOCs to a worldwide audience; (c) Several universities already offer online degree programs, like Lund, Freiburg, Sorbonne, Edinburgh and Utrecht, mostly in the local language and for professionals. The big difference is that now classical universities start to offer online courses for credits as part of the residential student curriculum. This could be the start of unbundling and rebundling the traditional university degree programs.

### **5. What are the challenges?**

Firstly, as with physical exchange, virtual exchange requires a lot of administration and coordination. Secondly, students have to get used to studying online and much more autonomously. In their working career, it will prove a useful skill, but it requires a different discipline than going to a physical class. Currently, the percentage of no show and dropout in virtual exchange is still higher than for on campus courses. Participating universities are experimenting with different measures for expectation management, such as requiring a motivation letter before enrollment. And thirdly, especially when exchanging with partners in different continents, different systems and customs require ample attention. Think of credit conversion. Think of different time zones: it should not lead to students having to participate in group discussions or even exams at midnight. Or think of different policies regarding elective space, and minimum number of EC per course. Even within Europe, it is important to understand the differences that can make or break the exchange, and work out solutions.

### **6. Where is it going?**

Virtual exchange for credit allows universities to experiment with more flexible curricula in

medium, content and time. Not only students of the virtual exchange program benefit from the online offer; home students as well can, whenever they prefer, take online courses at their own university. Online learning will become as familiar as face-to-face learning; students and teachers will get to know well the specific advantages of each medium and make choices accordingly.

Exchange students online requires first of all trust between the partners. The several alliances are an excellent network to build up experience with virtual exchange. In the long run, we will see that virtual exchange will extend with bilateral agreements. International Offices will include virtual exchange in their agreements with partners all over the world. Imagine what virtual exchange can offer for collaboration with partner institutes in civil war zones. By offering online courses for credit, traditional universities can claim the online space in a growingly competitive and marketized higher education field.

### **7. What are the implications for teaching and learning?**

Doing online courses through Virtual Exchange will mean access to some of the best universities. To realize this, universities will create a more flexible offer for home and exchange students. We will have to support teachers as well as students to make teaching and studying online a success. We will look for hybrid forms where online exchange students can participate while those who prefer face2face can come together physically. We will have to adapt our learning spaces accordingly. Educational support departments will adapt to support as well on campus as face-to-face logistics.

*The “7 things you should know about..” concept is copied from the renown Educause series “7 things you should know about..”*

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## Contactdetails

For more information please have a look at our website:

[www.universiteitleiden.nl/virtual-exchange](http://www.universiteitleiden.nl/virtual-exchange)

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