



Faculty
Student Council

ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

Roetersstraat 11
1018 WB Amsterdam
(020) 525 4384
fsr.feb@studentenraad.nl
studentenraad.nl/feb

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File Examination Structure BSc Split
Submitter Nicolae Munteanu; Jelle Turkenburg
E-mail nicolae.fsr.feb@gmail.com ; jelle.fsr.feb@gmail.com

Dear Prof. Dr. P. J. van Baalen,

Through this letter we want to express the Faculty Student Council's (FSR FEB) opinion and suggestions for possible improvements towards the examination structure of the redesigned Bachelor programs, specifically focussing on the current implementation of the 8-8-4 academic system at our faculty and its effects on students and the quality of education.

According to the Evaluation Report Study Success 2.0, which analysed the recommendations given by the working group behind Study Success 2009, the system 8-8-4, subsequently the *sub-system 3-1-3-1*¹, puts a lot of pressure on students. The midterm exam is considered the main source for the constant pressure, because the workload from some subjects is high coupled with insufficient time for the material to sink in. This pressure resulted in consistent stress faced by students in the weeks before the exam. Overall, the pressure incentivised students to work hard and focus more on passing the exams, rather than working systematically and focusing on the entire knowledge and academic material they are supposed to acquire. Nevertheless, because FSR FEB values the uniformity of the system which works well among all the faculties at UvA, we believe that the 3-1-3-1 system should not be changed utterly, but the examination structure should be improved. Hence, this is the main goal of this letter.

In the memo sent on the 29th of September by Peter Van Baalen to FSR FEB, he acknowledges that the "caesura that was created by the introduction of the midterms should be avoided in the new bachelor programs, by organizing at least one midterm or assignment which would carry a total weight of 20-40 per cent of the final grade". Although FSR FEB

¹ *sub-system 3-1-3-1* – the teaching format for every quarter: 3 weeks of teaching, 1 week examination





shares the belief - that a midterm which counts less than 30 per cent would reduce the amount of pressure, FSR FEB objects to a reduction in the midterm weight at the expense of an increased weight for the final exam. Our analysis upon the courses in the first year of the new bachelor led us to the conclusion that the distribution of weights in the majority of cases shifted towards the final exam: *in the first year of the new Economics and Business Economics bachelor, it was found that in seven out of ten subjects the midterm counts for 20 per cent and the final exam for 80 per cent.* In the opinion of the FSR FEB, this is deemed unfavourable for students, since the benefit of students feeling less pressure for the midterm is offset by the additional pressure towards the final exam.

Furthermore, the reliability of the general grade for the course decreases tremendously when the weight for the final exam increases to 80 per cent. We believe that in this case the final grade for the course might not reflect students' actual knowledge, as FSR FEB shares the opinion with the evaluation on recommendation 4 by Study Success 2.0 – *“...it is recommended to test a lot but count little, with the final grade per subject being built from multiple tests, resulting in higher reliability”.*

We are worried that a decreased reliability for the course grade might lead to a dissimilarity between students' overall GPA and their actual knowledge. Ultimately, this dissimilarity could increase our students' struggle in the job application process.

Building upon numerous communication with the first-year students, FSR FEB believes that the newly proposed examination structure in the new bachelor programs does not reduce the burden of pressure for students, and decreases the reliability of the final grade for the course. Therefore, FSR FEB proposes the inclusion of more *summative tests*, which will result in less pressure experienced towards the midterm and final examinations, a more continuous and systematic studying experience of students, and an increase in the reliability of the course grades.

By definition *“Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period”.* The goal of summative tests is to determine whether students have learned what they were



expected to learn. The FSR FEB suggests that summative tests can come in many ways including *actual pen and paper assessments, quizzes, home assignments, presentations, case studies, etc.* Some examples of courses that already implemented similar ideas are Finance 2 or Advanced Corporate Finance. In the course *Finance* led by Dr. Tolga Caskurlu, the midterm was replaced by multiple weekly summative quizzes. These quizzes count for 20 per cent of the final grade, and indirectly it stimulates students to study continuously and more systematically. Also in *Advanced Corporate Finance*, students need to write three case studies in groups and present one of these. In total, they make up 40% of the final grade.

FSR FEB proposes that more summative tests should be put into place with a minimum total weight of 20% on the overall course grade. In the end, the final course grade composition will consist of: 60% final exam, 20% midterm and 20% summative tests.

If weekly quizzes were to be implemented in certain courses, the examination structure could look as follows: weighing 5 per cent each (*20 per cent in total*), the summative assessments tests could be done in the 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 7th week. These weeks have been specifically chosen because in the first week there is no material to be tested. However, tests will be provided in week 2 and 3 in order to summarize and assess the material from the previous weeks. In week 5 there is no need for an additional quiz because the students already have been assessed during the midterm from week 4. We would like to stress that this structure is only one example out of a variety of structures that could be implemented.

The most important outcome of including summative tests will be to shape a continuous educational environment, where students study systematically and focus on gathering knowledge, rather than passing the examinations. Hence, FSR FEB believes that summative assessments are a direct solution to the constant pressure faced by students. We believe that through systematic preparation and evaluation techniques, the students will feel more confident in their strengths when writing the midterm or final assessment.

Furthermore, FSR FEB believes that the inclusion of the summative tests will increase the reliability for the final course grade. By including these assessments, we will follow the



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vision of Study Success

2.0 of “*testing a lot but counting little*”. Higher reliability for the course grade means that the correlation between student’s actual knowledge and final grade for the course will increase. As such, if the course grades will be more reliable, the overall GPA will be more consistent relative to students’ aptitudes and actual knowledge. Therefore, this represents an advantage for our students, who will soon start the job application process.

Concluding, the baseline vision of this proposal was to generate a solution to a persistent issue aroused from the system 8-8-4 used by UvA– namely the constant pressure in the week before the exam. FSR FEB wholeheartedly believes that the inclusion of summative tests will result in a reduction of the *pressure on students towards the final and midterm exam*, a redesigned educational environment where students study continuously and systematically and a greater reliability of the final grade.

For further communication and questions please do not hesitate to contact or reach us,

Sincerely,

On Behalf of the FSR FEB,

Nicolae Munteanu

General Member FSR FEB

Jelle Turkenburg

General Member FSR FEB

