

Presentatie Hovo Rotterdam

My name is Carolien van Bergen, I'm the head of the department of Hovo Rotterdam at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Let me explain a bit about our institution and our background.

Hovo Rotterdam originated in 1988, when the Dean of Rotterdam University visited France and discovered the Université du Troisième Âge. He wanted to do something similar in the Netherlands, but at an academic level. The first years were difficult – not everyone understood the purpose of education for seniors. But seniors understood the meaning of it, and through the years Hovo grew, both in the number of offered courses and in the number of students.

Nowadays we have, a bit depending on how counting is done, about 2000 students each year, and more than 4000 inscriptions – people inscribe on average for 2 courses yearly. At this moment we have more than 1600 inscriptions for the first semester. We have two semesters and a Summer Academy.

Courses vary from short programs of 5-6 lectures, to longer courses of eleven weeks. We offer courses in the city of Rotterdam, at the Erasmus University, but we also have connections with two university colleges in the province of Zeeland, close to Rotterdam.

On a yearly basis we offer about a hundred different courses, on subjects that vary from sociology to art, philosophy, mathematics, science, psychology et cetera. These courses are not meant for practical purposes or career opportunities, but are all in the realm of what the Germans call 'Bildung': general development.

The teachers are professors of the Erasmus University or other universities, or qualified freelance teachers with an academic degree.

To give you an impression of our program I show you our brochure – it's all in Dutch, but the pictures are universal. I also brought some material to show you.

And perhaps it's nice, after all the talking that has been done, to show a little **movie** that is made to encourage new students to participate. Don't mind the language, which sounds ghr ggh, I'll translate some of it, but it gives a nice impression of the Erasmus University, our students and some of our teachers.

www.hovorotterdam.nl

Some facts:

The average age is 68, but Hovo is meant for everyone over 50. In our marketing we try to reach this younger group actively, because once they find us, they will come back for many years. We have quite a few students who followed over 100 courses, and some of them joined Hovo from the beginning! Fortunately however, we also reach new students each year.

Happiness

In Rotterdam, a very recent research amongst a huge group of people over 50 showed that people who study on a regular basis, gain day to day happiness. This is a result that made me happy, although it shows what I have always known: education and studying contributes to general happiness. And research has shown since a long time that people who are happy, are less ill. With this message I hope to interest Insurance companies or large employers for our type of education. One of the problems that the Netherlands face, like more European countries, is that people have to work longer. The age of retirement is 65, but will raise to 67. This means that many people have to work longer, and cannot 'just wait' until they are retired. It also means that it is not a good idea to aim only at retired people; I want to interest them before the age of retirement – there are 15 or even 17 years to win! You see that Hovo aims not only at retired people, but is also interested in people who are still working.

ICT

I'd like to zoom in on some details on the use of internet and ICT. In the Netherlands the use of internet is widespread, also amongst seniors. In just a couple of years we saw a huge transition in our groups: from one or two people having an e-mail adres, to just one or two people who don't. More than 70% of the inscriptions are through the internet. At the opening of our academic Hovo-year last month, I asked how many people used Facebook – over 100 fingers of 800 participants rose their fingers; approximately 50 people used Twitter.

More specifically we have a new e-learning environment that is quite basic at this moment. We call it the Hovo Weblokaal – Hovo web-classroom. At this moment we do two things in this digital classroom:

- Teachers can put extra information on it, like presentations, interesting links, You Tube movies, etc.
- Students can place information on it, like tips, questions etc.

There are more possibilities with it, but we start slowly, and we always have to take into consideration that some people have no access to internet. In the next years this group will become even smaller, since we can safely assume that younger seniors all have access to the internet.

Grundtvig project – Seniors in the Knowledge Society

The Grundtvig project is coming at the right time for us. I myself have little knowledge of the possibilities of e-learning, but I'm eager to know more. The field of applications that Hovo Rotterdam at this moment sees for e-learning are:

1. To incorporate e-learning in more classes, to keep up with the time. I know that a lot of people like to attend classes because of social reasons, and

because they like to interact with real teachers, so I'm not very eager to develop e-learning as a substitute for face to face courses.

2. Reach students who live far away (Zeeland) or who for health reasons are not able to attend classes. We can also offer courses on a national or even European scale.
3. Give small free courses to make people enthusiastic to follow face to face courses.

I want to conclude with some general remarks on this project. Seniors are a large group of people in number and in influence: babyboomers (60 years and older) . I think it is good to offer them opportunities to stay in touch with technical innovations in our time – although people might think that they are over 60 and don't need to know all these things, they might live another 20 years and our society will continue in doing things with internet. I also believe in the ideal of permanent education, as a tool to happiness, and – as a consequence – healthy aging.

I want to conclude my presentation, I like to give some time for questions.