

GUG - Gozitans' Voice at University

JOELENE ATTARD & ANTHONY BRIFFA

Introduction

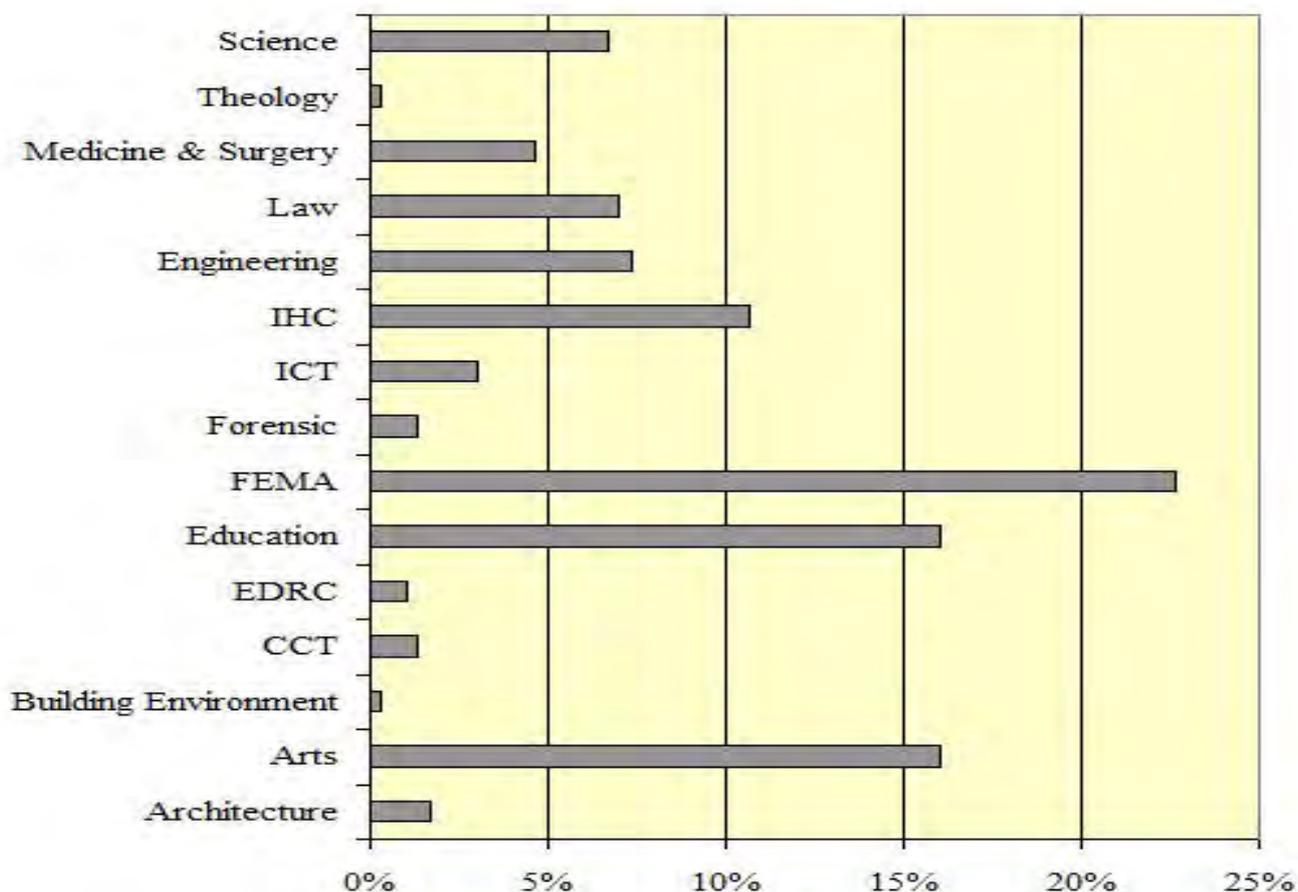
The Gozo University Group (GUG) was established in the 1980s and later, in 1987, it was formally recognized as a student organization. Since its inception GUG has evolved into a more organized, stronger organization and continuously strives to make its voice heard by undertaking a number of ambitious projects. Its main aim is to represent Gozitan students at University and to promote their interest in their transition to university life. GUG commits itself to cater for the students' particular requirements and to help them in whatever situations they might find ambiguous. The organization is affiliated with various committees and organizations, some of which are the Regional Projects Committee-Ministry for Gozo, KPS (Commission for Social Policy) and KNZ (National Council for Youths).

The Survey

In March 2009 a survey was undertaken to gather direct and useful information about Gozitan students and their experience as students living or studying in Malta. The survey involved asking questions regarding various aspects that in some way or another affected the quality of life of these students including important factors of their university year such as the course undertaken by individual students, transport, accommodation, grants and other activities. The survey was anonymous and the information gathered was treated with high confidentiality.

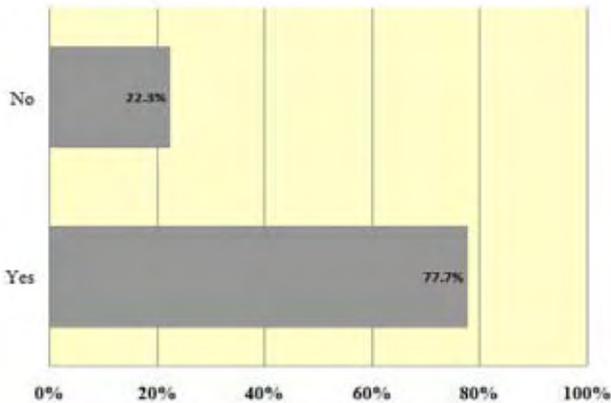
As can be seen below, the majority of the students are inclined towards business studies followed by education and arts. The majority of Gozitan students fall under Faculty of Economics,

Demography of Students According to their Faculty



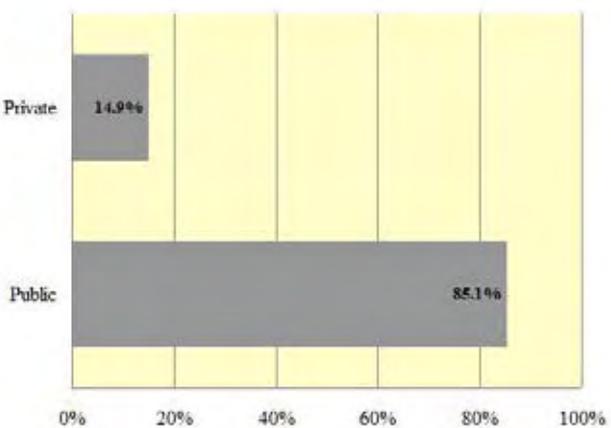
Management and Accountancy whilst there is a poor concurrence in Theology, ICT and architecture.

Would you prefer the exams be held in Gozo?



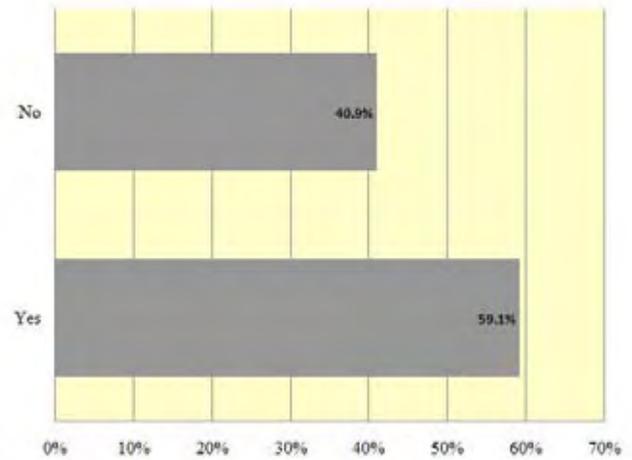
As the result clearly shows the majority of Gozitan students prefer to have their exams held in Gozo and they feel at a disadvantage against fellow Maltese students in this particular case. This could be because of the fact that they have to cross between Malta and Gozo everyday and there were cases where students missed their exams because of bad weather conditions. This issue was confirmed by 63.1% of the Gozitan students when they were asked if they felt at a disadvantage when it came to exams.

When travelling in Malta, what type of transport do you use?



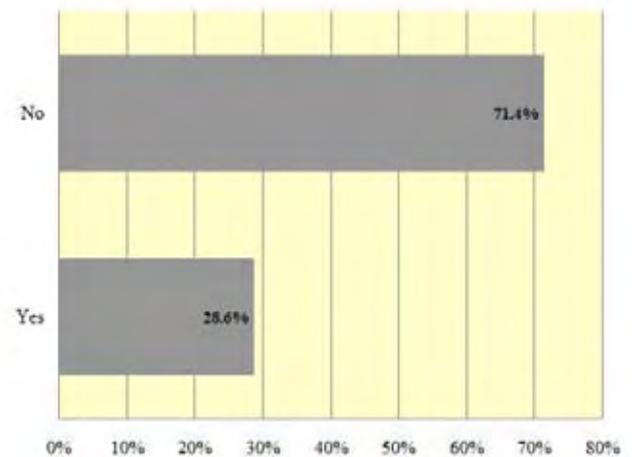
When travelling in Malta the majority (85.1%) of the students use public transport while the rest prefer to travel by private car. When asked about the quality of service of public transport, 63.1% stated that it was of medium quality. It was only 17.2% who said that the service was bad and the remaining 19.7% said it was good.

Do you think that the Gozo Channel Schedules are well apportioned?



The majority of those who said yes agreed that the ferry schedule was adequate but the rest 40.9% did not agree. This amount has to be taken into consideration especially when we bear in mind that there are a large number of students who travel to Malta and do not find that the service caters to their needs. This argument must be looked into and if sufficient arguments exist, amendments made.

Do you think that one bus trip every hour is enough?

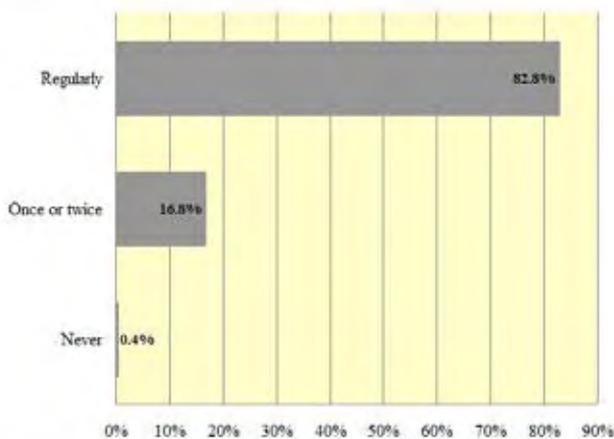


After students cross over to Malta by ferry, if they are to use public transport they must find the right bus to get to their destination. According to the survey 71.4% of the students who use public transport do not agree that a bus every hour is adequate. If students are late by five minutes because of ferry delays, they have to wait another hour to catch the next bus. This clearly shows that there is the need for some type of a reform or an agreement to increase the number of bus trips.



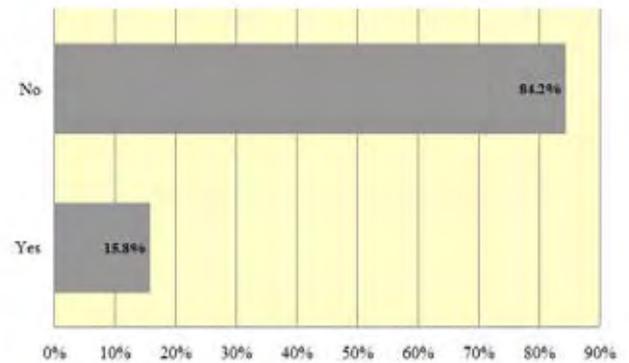
Current GUG members.

Have you ever missed the ferry, even by just a couple of minutes?



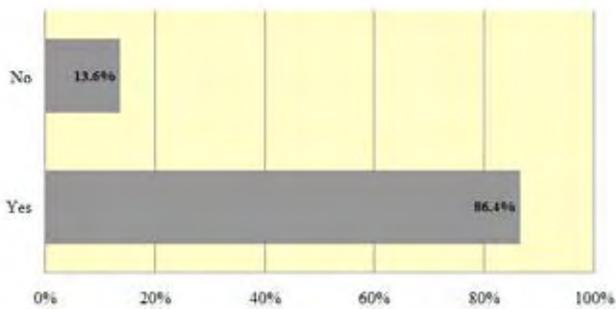
When asked if they ever missed a ferry, 82.8% of students confirmed that this happened to them regularly while 16.8% said it happened to them a few times. There was a small percentage of 0.4% who said that they never missed a ferry that they were meaning to catch which is a relatively small amount compared to the 82.8% who miss ferries regularly.

Do you think that the transport system is scheduled to complement the ferry timetable and vice versa?



From the results one can see the enormous lack of coordination between the Gozo Channel timetable and that of public transport. It is often the case that upon arrival at Ċirkewwa by bus, a ferry has just left meaning that a 45 minute wait for the next ferry is required; or else upon berthing at Ċirkewwa, the required bus has just left meaning a wait for the next one. This is confirmed by 84.2% of students questioned.

Should there be a “Students’ Card” so that students can be entitled to a discount when using public transport?



When this question was presented to the students, 86.4% agreed that they should have this card to entitle them to a reduced rate when using public transport. After all, this system of a “Students’ Card” would help students to minimize the day to day costs they incur during their University years.

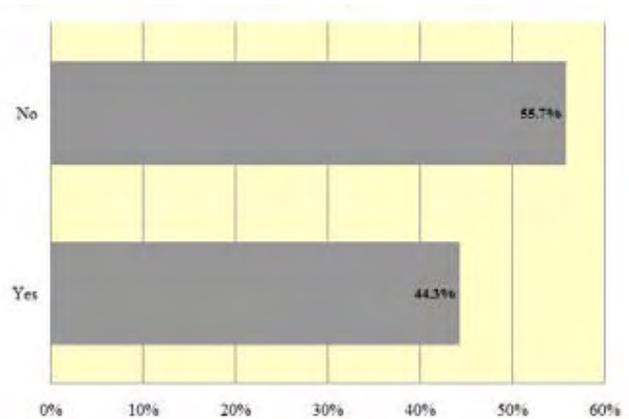
Accommodation

Every Gozitan student has a choice either to travel four hours every day of the week to and from University or otherwise find a flat near University to minimize the hassle and time wasted in travelling back to Gozo. With the latter option there are added difficulties and expenses such as payment of accommodation and having to live as independently as possible. This study shows that 86.6% of the Gozitan students prefer to live in Malta during their years at University, 72.9% of which rent an apartment to live in. The majority of these flats are in Msida, Gzira while there are small numbers who live in Birkirkara, Santa Venera and also in Valletta and Hal Luqa. This means that the percentage of students who live in their own or their family’s apartments are a meager percentage of 27.1%. When asked if the apartment they rent is to their particular tastes, 72.3% answered that it is, which is a clear indication that the majority of students are happy while living in Malta.

Renting your own flat can bring about added expenses to the cost of living of students and GUG asked about these particular issues as well. Students were asked how much they must pay every month as rental expenses. The majority of 69.9% pay between €80 and €100 a month whilst

20.5% are paying more than €100. This is a burden on the student especially since students have no fixed wage and it takes a substantial part or all of the monthly stipend allowance. Gozitan students nowadays have the facility to apply for another type of allowance of €349.43 every 3 months (equivalent to €116.47 monthly) to compensate for their monthly rental charges.

Do you think that a Stipend Allowance of €116.47 per month is enough?



55.7% answered that this amount is not enough to recuperate all their expenses, most of these being rent and transport expenses. It is because of this that 71.2% of students think that this amount should be increased.

The information gathered from this survey served multiple purposes and GUG has worked and will continuously strive to improve the various difficulties arising from these situations.

GUG Managed To...

Sub-Committee

On the 6th April, KSU (University Students’ Council) held its annual AGM during which GUG was present and asked for a permanent KSU sub-committee directly involving issues concerning Gozitan students. GUG, representing more than a 1000 (Gozitan) students at University, believes that there should be more direct communication between the two, and hopefully tackle issues faster. One of the issues mentioned as an example was for the examinations to be held in Gozo, an option that the majority of Gozitan students would like to have available. Carl Grech, President of

the KSU said that his organisation agrees with the suggestion and a KSU sub-committee will be created. He proposed a sub-committee made up of four Gozitans, namely ex officio GUG President and any three GUG members and three ex-officio members of KSU, namely the KSU President, the KE and the KPS. GUG was pleased to agree to the proposal as this should strengthen the much needed direct and close collaboration structure with KSU.

Transport Reform

GUG, together with KSU did its best to ensure a smooth implementation of the public transport reform directly involving the University bus routes for Gozitan Students. This is due to positive meetings GUG had with KSU and MITC, the two major stakeholders in this assignment.

The Bus Service from Ċirkewwa

A direct service between Ċirkewwa and the University will be catered for so that there will be no need for Gozitan students travelling to and from University to exchange buses. This service was to start at 5.30am and was to end at 11.00pm, operating on an hourly service.

Any student travelling in Malta will benefit from reduced fare prices when purchasing 30 and 90 day tickets. The ticket price for a 30 day student pass ticket is €21 instead of €45, whilst that of a 90 day ticket is €60 instead of €120. These rates apply to persons between the ages of eleven and sixteen and to those persons that can provide evidence that they are enrolled in a full time course with a minimum duration of three months. The institute that they are enrolled with must be registered with the Ministry of Education.

Buses operating between Ċirkewwa and University, besides being high capacity buses need also to have the space to accommodate luggage. This will help in facilitating mobility.

The proposed bus routes will be run by the new service provider Arriva. The GUG has, on many occasions, imparted information on this matter

mainly during meetings with Gozitan students and during Freshers' Week, an annual event organized by KSU.

Acknowledgements

GUG would like to thank KSU and Emanuel Delia, Amanda Ciappara and Pierre Carabott from MITC for their alliance in this assignment. More information can be acquired by contacting GUG or KSU Secretary General Karl Agius on secgen@ksu.org.mt or 99309841.

Joelene Attard is a 20-year old University student reading a Bachelor of Commerce degree, her major line of studies being Accountancy and Management. Currently she is the GUG Assistant Financial Officer with the aim of replacing the current one in the next scholastic year.

Anthony Briffa is a 23-year old University student reading a Master in Maltese Language by research. He has graduated with B.A. (Hons) in Maltese and Communications and PGD in Translation Studies. Currently he is a member in the GUG executive and has been a member for over four years lately occupying the role of Secretary General.