A Conversation with Nannette Ripmeester

Nannette Ripmeester is founder of Expertise in Labour Mobility. She holds an MA in European Studies from the University of Amsterdam and has worked for seven years at the European Commission in Brussels. Expertise in Labour Mobility works for both the corporate and the higher education sector in the area of international job mobility. With their double-sided knowledge on what makes people internationally employable, ELM regularly advises governments – from Canada to Sweden – on how to further increase the connection between recent graduates and their future job opportunities.

Moreover, Nannette heads the European Office for i-graduate – responsible for the International Student Barometer (ISB) in continental Europe. More recently, she has become involved in the educational gaming app CareerProfessor.works, bridging education to the world of work. Together with her team Nannette works under the motto of Making Mobility Work and with over 20 years of advising employers, universities and governments on graduate mobility, Nannette is one of Europe’s leading experts on mobility for study and work.

Mandy: What's on your calendar for today?

NR: I am working on submitting proposals for the EAIE conference in Seville. I’m not only working on my own proposals but I’m also guiding my team in submitting proposals to maximize their exposure. Today I also had review meetings with my team, where we discussed where they want to head with their career. It is a small team with eight staff including me. We have also been looking at a few advanced IT solutions. We have a tool called CareerProfessor.works that we’ve made a few steps towards improving on the backend but we are looking at improving it further. I am also getting a few more universities to launch their International Students Barometer (ISB) surveys. We are responsible for continental Europe and we have 60 institutions doing the ISB this wave.

Mandy: Describe a “pivotal career moment” when you knew you were ready to move from managing education abroad programs to leading a broader internationalization strategy.

NR: My role is slightly different than working for an institution. My work is to provide services to institutions. When I started my career, I first worked for a research institution...
and following that I worked for the European Commission in Brussels for seven years. That was interesting but at some point I decided I wanted something different. There was a "pivotal career moment" that spurred this. At the European Commission my boss asked me to bring in employers to our labor mobility project. His boss became angry with me for doing this. It was at that point that I realized I wanted more control over what I was doing and that I wanted to do things differently. This was pivotal because it led me to decide to create my own company. I have now been leading my own company for 24 years.

**Mandy:** What are a few skills you find are necessary to your role as an SIO/Senior EA Professional?

**NR:** Communication is huge, both with your team and even more so with clients. You will need to be able to communicate with different people at different organizations from different cultural backgrounds. The ability to deal with people from different cultural backgrounds is particularly important. For example, if we launch a survey with a German university it is different than working with a Canadian university. Another skill is the ability to not worry too much and let go and trust the ability of the people you work with. Also, the ability to delegate tasks is important. This is sometimes easier said than done. I would also recommend having some resilience to constantly keep on going and see the bright side of things.

**Mandy:** What are some of the major challenges you face in your role as an SIO/Senior EA Professional and how do you face them?

**NR:** If you plan your work ahead you are sometimes confronted with things that are outside your scope of influence. The situation may change and be out of your control but may have a huge impact on your work. You still have to find a way to deal with it.

**Mandy:** What are a few pieces of advice you would give new and mid-career EA professionals who are looking to continue on towards eventually becoming a SIO/Senior EA Professional?

**NR:** The most important advice I have is to choose a career that you really like and that you find pride in doing. Also, don’t shy away from challenges and thinking outside of the box. The biggest challenges are usually the biggest growth opportunities too. Take the leap forward.

**Mandy:** How has NAFSA assisted you in your role as SIO/Senior EA Professional (either with resources, events, etc.)?

**NR:** One thing that has been great for me is that I became a NAFSA Trainer and I wasn’t expecting to learn a lot about training but I have and I am truly enjoying the experience. It has helped me progress in my career as well. It is different from anything I experienced in Europe.

**Mandy:** Have you worked in the US previously?
No, I have never worked full time in the US. My husband worked for two years in the US and I did a few projects there when he was there but I have worked in several countries in Europe.

Mandy: Where do you see yourself in 5 years or 10 years from now?

NR: I hope that our new tool – CareerProfessor.works - is running smoothly across the globe. I hope that my role evolves so that it is mainly traveling to talk to the teams that are in charge of this and to see that they are happy doing their work. This might not all happen in five years but hopefully in ten years’ time.

Mandy: What do you see as current trends within education abroad?

NR: I feel that there are now more obvious generational divides than even five or ten years ago. The current generation is more demanding than past generations but this is because we ask more of them. For example, in Europe, we now charge high tuition fees. In return current students are asking more of the services we provide. They also want to engage more. They have a deeper connection to their alma mater instead of just funds in return.

Mandy: What is the one thing you don’t think the field is giving enough attention to?

NR: We are not fully grasping the whole employability perspective. It is more than just about finding a job upon graduation, it is about maximizing the talents of every graduate. The labor market is truly global. I think to prepare students and to maximize their skills is to fill them in on the global scale of the labor market. We should be doing much more than we do now to prepare students for the global marketplace.

Mandy: How is it different to be located abroad and work in EA?

NR: It helps to understand the issues that students are confronted with.

Mandy: What’s the one thing you never travel without?

NR: I never travel without my phone. I think that it would freak me out to not have it and nowadays you can’t live without it.

Mandy Reinig

*Virginia Wesleyan College*

Mandy Reinig is the Director of Study Away at Virginia Wesleyan College. She has a Master’s degree in Teaching English as a Second Language from the Pennsylvania State University and a Master’s degree in Latin American Studies from Ohio University. Prior to working at Virginia Wesleyan she was the Director of International Education at St. Mary’s College of Maryland. Mandy has been active in
NAFSA serving on Trainer Corps on the Region VIII team and the EA KC National Team. Additionally, she presents regionally, nationally, and internationally on a variety of topics.
Provosts Summit
Ron Moffatt
Seminar on Peace
Symposium on Leadership