

Universitetspladsen

RUglobal

Information and debate from Roskilde University

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International 'team-building'

When insiders and outsiders go inside out!

By: *Ida Klitgård, Associate Professor, LICs, CUID*

As a teacher in Academic English at RUC I often speak to both Danish and international students about the challenges of group work in the international degree programs. The international students may feel marginalized – like outsiders - in groups with Danes, and the Danish students, in turn, sometimes fear for their grades when having to cooperate with international students whose level of English may not equal their own presumed level. The Danes may feel like the true 'insiders' who should set the rules of the game. It seems like an insurmountable problem as long as the very point of internationalisation has not been made crystal-clear to everyone. And the point of internationalisation, as I see it, is to work in an international environment, with an international scope and through international team-building, including learning to handle all the culture-bumps this may include. When you decide to opt for an international program, it should not mainly be because you want to boost your English skills, or because it might look good on your CV. Ideally it should be because you want to get a global worldview based on truly international experiences. Learning to cope with language and intercultural barriers is part of the deal. You have to learn to go inside out, i.e. letting your inside face outward so that you become an 'outsider' and thereby learn to see more perspectives than when normally facing inward.

Language and culture barriers

The language and culture barriers typically originate in the Danes' perception of themselves as better at English than the international students. The Danes may be correct, but it is not the only truth. Danish students

may have had more years of intensive English classes in primary and secondary school than e.g. Southern European exchange students, but the Danes mostly excel in oral English as they have become highly accustomed to the lively, critical debate culture in the Danish school system. Southern European students, on the other hand, may not feel confident to speak on an academic level at all, since their foreign language learning background may have consisted of the so-called audio-lingual approach with much root-learning and formal written grammar exercises, and certainly no English-only classes. So what surprises me again and again is that the Danes' English writing often does not live up to the standards of formal English writing conventions, but their discussion skills are excellent; and the international students do not say much in class, and when they do, it may be difficult to understand what they say due to various thick accents and wrong stress patterns, but their essays prove different, as they are much more carefully crafted and formulated, and I can see they have worked hard in living up to the rules of their grammar books. This paradox was sadly hammered home to me last semester when a Spanish student in one of my Academic English Speaking classes, almost with tears in her eyes, told me and the rest of the class that she was so frustrated and angry because Danish students thought she was totally unintelligent because of her bad spoken English, but she had no way she could prove to them that she is a perfectly intelligent student in her native language. Food for thought, I must say.

Solutions?

So what do we do about this? One possible solution might be the one presented above

about learning to accept the essence of going international. This would include better integration of international students in the Danish student environment and vice versa. Exchange students must try to break out of the comfort zone of being only with native friends, and Danes must break free from letting themselves be controlled by the 'grade race'. Less hostile group work with marginalisation and perhaps even exclusion of international students will, in the long run, I am sure, build better platforms for higher grades as group work based on tolerance, mutual respect and a truly international outlook will pull in the right direction.

Students also need to understand that working in English as a foreign language at university level is working with English as a *lingua franca*, i.e. a common language of communication which allows for certain errors which do not distort the meaning expressed and which allows for accents of all kinds. Here I take the opportunity to strongly encourage all students attending international programs to sign up for my courses in academic English (writing, reading or speaking) which provide students with skills in working with English as a *lingua franca*. The courses are not traditional grammar courses, but provide a solid practical foundation for understanding the conventions of good and clear academic writing practice, both in terms of content and form as they are inseparable in all successfully persuasive academic products. Here 'insiders' and 'outsiders' meet and work with texts and approaches to language and intercultural aspects to underscore the need to 'go inside out'.

Website: http://magenta.ruc.dk/lics_en/english_academic/

Editor's Desk



Dear reader,

I'll get straight to it. This issue of RUGlobal is a very significant issue. At least as far as the content goes.

Most students feel, or at least have felt, the burning questions surface, linger and hover above us like a dark cloud:

"What do I want to do? What can I do?"

Of course, I'm referring to post-graduation employment. Where can students find employment once studying is no more? We're in a global recession and competition is fierce. It's completely natural to worry. For that very reason, RUGlobal has taken a closer look at this issue.

So how do you get ahead of the pack? Making great grades? No, not necessarily. Learn how to use your academic combination to its utmost advantage, says career counselor. Read more inside.

What's another way to get the proverbial foot in the door? Quick tip: moonlight as consultants and do your project reports in a real business. Easier said than done? Not really. Find out how you can leapfrog the competition in the MatchMaking-story.

Plus, gain valuable insight on how to find a relevant job during your studies. Hint: They matter more than you might think, shows new study. Even if studies are delayed.

So if you're considering working after RU, you might want to keep reading. Plenty of valuable information inside.

That's all for now!

Enjoy

Philip Michael Shange

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Editorial staff:

Hanne Preisler (Responsible)
Camilla Buchardt (Editor)
Jakob Bang Schmidt (Editor)
Philip Michael Shange (Editor)
Tyson William Lyall (Editor)
Andreas Wraae (Editor)

Cover photo:

Poul Erik Nikander Frandsen

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Address: RUCnyt, Postboks 260, DK - 4000 Roskilde, Telephone 4674 2013 eller 4674 2612, e-mail: RUCnyt@ruc.dk, www.ruc.dk/ruc/RUCnyt
Notifications: rucnyt-meddelelser@ruc.dk

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Young people hardest hit by rising unemployment

You have to go back 17 years to find unemployment among young people at a higher level than today. Men are particularly hard hit. These are the findings of a new report from ECLM – the Economic Council of the Labour Market



You have to go back to 1993 to find youth unemployment at today's level

By: Jakob Bang Schmidt, RUGlobal

Young people in the 25–29 age bracket are hardest hit by the rising unemployment, recording an unemployment rate of 8.7% in December 2010. Those in the 30–39 age bracket are just behind with an unemployment rate of 6.8%. In fact, you need to go back 17 years to 1993 to find higher youth unemployment rates, concludes the new report published by the ECLM. The trend is the same if you consider

academics alone. According to the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations, young academics top the statistics with an unemployment rate of 5.3%.

Young people lack work experience

Frederik L. Pedersen, chief analyst with ECLM, points out that the rising unemployment among young people is due to lack of experience in the labour market. “A decline in the number of job vacancies intensifies competi-

Unemployment, %		
Age	June '08	Dec. '10
16-24	1,7 %	4,9 %
25-29	3,5 %	8,7 %
30-39	3,0 %	6,8 %
40-49	2,2 %	5,8 %
50-59	2,5 %	6,2 %
60 +	1,4 %	3,6 %
Average	2,5 %	6,1 %
Men	2,2 %	6,7 %
Women	2,8 %	5,7 %

Source: ECLM based on Statistics Denmark

tion, and employers choose the candidates with the best qualifications. Older candidates with more job experience will be chosen first,” he says.

RU’s Student and Careers Guidance Office therefore also advises students to take jobs relevant to their studies and to perform voluntary work.

Men are hardest hit

The proportion of unemployed men has tripled since 2008 whereas for women it has only doubled. In December 2010, a total of 6.7% of men was unemployed, while the rate was 5.4% for women. According to Pedersen, the difference is explained by the fact that the traditional male professions were most severely affected by the economic crisis. “Industry and the building and construction sector in particular were hit by the crisis – and those professions are dominated by men. Conversely, the public sector, which is dominated by women, has grown,” he says.

Extending your study period pays off

It is an advantage to be able to include study-relevant work in your CV when competing for a job after study completion, even if it means that you spend so much time away from your studies that you have to extend your study period

Text and photo: Andreas Wraae, RUGlobal

It is no secret anymore that in addition to supplementing your study grants, a student job of academic relevance can help you gain a

Percentage of students having a relevant student job according to the survey conducted by Rambøll Management and AC:

Librarians: 80%
 Political science/public administration: 80%
 Psychology: 76%
 Architects: 70%
 MSc (economics and business administration): 69%
 Film and media science: 67%
 Danish: 61%
 History: 60%
 Biology: 57%
 MSc (engineering): 54%
 Philosophy/history of ideas: 48%

foothold in the labour market. It is even worthwhile extending your study period by up to two years in order to boost your CV while you study. As concluded by a survey conducted last year by Rambøll Management and the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC): "If you are in a situation where you have to choose between study-relevant work and completing your studies within the prescribed

period, the best labour market strategy is to focus on the study-relevant job." The survey indicates that an extended study period is only a problem if you exceed the prescribed study period by more than three years.

Study less and work more

It is a fact that if given alternatives, employers are not keen on recruiting labour market newcomers. They prefer persons with "double qualifications" as they are called in the survey, that is, students who have had study-relevant work while studying. In actual fact, there is no difference in pay between persons with double qualifications and those holding only a diploma so it's a simple equation for employers: Better value for your money.

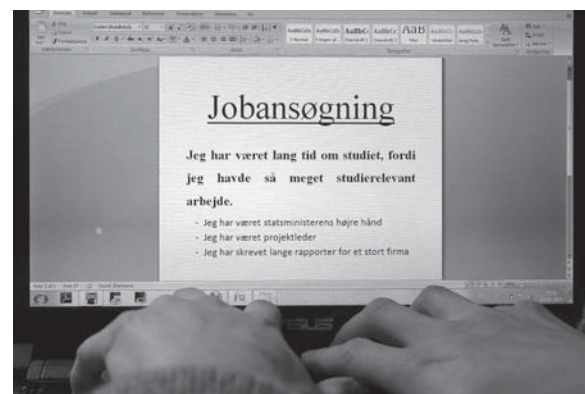
The survey also indicates that "the practical element of double qualifications – the study job – offsets the influence of lower grades."

This means it is possible to get into the labour market without having sky-high grades, but only if you really *have* had a relevant study-job to put forward. Good grades may still compensate for the absence of a student job of academic relevance.

We network while working

Besides the academic qualifications, one of the most important reasons for getting a study-relevant job is that it enables students to create a network. This may be useful when you are looking for a job. According to the survey, more than 50% of the respondents got their first job through a network after completing their studies, either from a student job or a work placement. However, it can be difficult to create an adequate network if you are totally focused on completing your studies in the shortest possible time.

An extensive CV indicating several relevant student jobs at a high academic level is the way to go when competing for work after study completion.



New chair of the Danish Council for Independent Research: Research must rid itself of narrow utilitarian thinking

Anette Warring, professor of history at the Department of Culture and Identity at RU, is the new chair of the Danish Council for Independent Research/Humanities. She believes research should break free from the idea of going directly from ‘thought to invoice’. Research driven by researchers’ own ideas is important, she says

By: Jakob Bang Schmidt, RUGlobal

What are the greatest challenges you face as the new chair of the Danish Council for Independent Research?

- We currently experience an imbalance between strategy-driven research and independent research. So for me, defending independent humanities research will be a special focus area.

Humanities research is under greater pressure to explain its usefulness, politically as well as to the population in general, who immediately seems to grasp that science, technology and health research can be of more use to growing society. However, research should break free from the narrow utilitarianism of going directly from thought to invoice. I believe it is an important task for the research council to increase awareness in society of the importance of independent humanities research

to growth, welfare and cultural wealth. We must demonstrate that humanities research is more than just the icing on the cake in society. It is not just a communication problem. I also believe that within the humanities we need to further develop our understanding of what humanities knowledge is and why it is important.

- I am not opposed to strategic research; I just think it is vital that we have a balance between independently generated research and strategic research. I believe it is important to ensure that we have many paths to good qualitative research, including that we allow researchers’ independent ideas to unfold, regardless of political and short-term goals.

Why is it important to have an independent research council for the humanities?

The Danish Council for Independent Research

The Danish Council for Independent Research funds research activities that are based on the researchers' own initiatives. The council also provides scientific advice.

The council is comprised of a Board and five scientific research councils.

Read more at: fi.dk



Anette Warring, new chair of the Danish Council for Independent Research, believes the council should make it clear that "humanities research is not just 'the icing on the cake' in society."

- Sometimes independent research reveals something we did not know that we needed to know. History shows that. Several Nobel Prize winners have said that they would never have reached their research findings, had they been subjected to strategic research terms to a greater extent dictated by the present.

Do you intend to promote historical research in particular given that your own background is in that research discipline?

- The research council always awards grants on the basis of the merits of the research projects submitted. Quality is the decisive factor; not the subject area, nor which institution submits the project.

Funds allocated to independent research have been cut while at the same time the number of qualified applications increases. How do you intend to handle this?

- The latter is very positive; we receive many qualified applications, but it is also distressing when we award grants. We were only able to award grants to 9% of the applications we received last year. This is a huge challenge, but also a matter of concern for research in Denmark. We will, of course, award grants to the best projects while also seeking to make it clear why independent humanities research is important. We can only hope to be allocated more funds that way.

In your opinion, what are the most important criteria for selecting the research projects you award grants to?

- It is important to us that the project will provide new and essential knowledge – in terms of theory, empiricism and methodology alike. It is also important that the project should develop the research field it deals with. And, as every RU student will know, it is vital to

present a clear and well-delimited problem formulation. The project should have a clear connection between the theory, concepts and empiricism chosen, and it should have a good research plan.

- Recent years have set the scene for increased competition between research institutions. I believe it is important that the research council supports inter-institutional research collaborations. It is not always true that a certain institution has all the best brains. Sometimes, it can be useful to bring together researchers across universities, and maybe also from international institutions.

Communicating your qualifications is important when you apply for a job

What are my talents and what do I want? Two key questions when you are applying for a job. However, the way you communicate your qualifications is equally important, says career counsellor Louise Jørgensen

By: Jakob Bang Schmidt, RUGlobal

You should highlight the exact aspects of yourself that are required for the job. According to Louise Jørgensen, career counsellor with RU's Student and Careers Guidance Office, this is one of the most important points when you apply for a job. However, how you communi-

Useful tips from the Student and Careers Guidance Office

- Visit RU's job forum at ruc.so.dk
- Participate in KompetenceCafé. Nearly every other Thursday from 12:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at SHEIK. See dates at ruc.dk/vejledning > Arrangementer for studerende
- Visit RU careers fair from 6 to 7 April at RUC. Details are available at ruc.dk/karrieremesse
- Read much more at ruc.dk/vejledning

cate your qualifications is just as important as high grades and an extensive CV. In recent years, she has therefore focused strongly on *communication* when counselling students. "It's about communicating your qualifications in a real job context, depending on the job you apply for," she says.

RU students' broad profile is a challenge

RU's interdisciplinarity gives students a broad profile, enabling them to perform many different jobs. However, according to Louise the broad profile may be a challenge when you need to highlight the exact qualifications that are required for the job vacancy. "RU students may find it difficult to integrate the two aspects of their studies and express their qualifications in a way that is useful to employers."

Louise therefore stresses that you should consider what you communicate and how you communicate it. A useful tip is to use the programme regulations of the individual courses for inspiration when formulating your qualifications.

What are your talents?

It is hardly a surprise that communicating what you can do is one of the most important things when you apply for a job. "In this context, it is important to provide specific examples, perhaps from the programme, such as RU projects," says Louise. "You must find out what you have been through, in your studies as well as your work, but also what you like to do in your spare time."

What do you want?

When you apply for a job, it is important to identify what motivates you to apply for that job, explains Louise. You should also ask yourself what kind of a working life you want. "It



doesn't necessarily have to be a specific job, but more about what kind of work you like."

Social media

It is important that you are visible and use your networks when you look for a job. According to Louise, social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn can be extremely useful in this context. However, do not forget that many companies seek all the information they can get via the social media. "If you are the type who posts all your party pictures on the internet, you should consider how accessible you want your profile to be."

Louise explains that it may also be useful to participate in academic debates and write blogs to increase your visibility on the web.

Study-relevant work

The Student and Careers Guidance Office recommends that students take jobs relevant to their studies or perform voluntary work. However, Louise stresses that students must strike the right balance between studying and working for the two activities to support each other. She declines to give a general indication of the number of hours students should spend working. "Students are very different and it is very different what comes easy to them." She also explains that there are differences between what you study. "Some programmes contain a lot of theory and require much studying and preparation, while others require a higher degree of active participation."

Despite the fact that many workplaces attach great importance to work experience when recruiting employees, Louise believes that, ultimately, achieving a degree is the first step into the academic labour market.

Louise advises students who are not able to find study-relevant work to prepare their project work in the closest possible collaboration with businesses. RU regularly organises events where students can meet company representatives.



◀ *When applying for a job you should consider carefully what you communicate and why you communicate it.*
Photo: Mette Nielsen