

Universitetspladsen

RUglobal

Information and debate from Roskilde University

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▶ **Debate meeting: Government to help young people enter the labour market**

▶ **Rectors' meeting at RU**

▶ **Learn *learning* the RU way**

“We need to attract more students”

New Head of Department Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt wants more applicants to the Basic Studies in the Natural Sciences program

Text and Photo: Philip Michael Shange, RUGlobal

The Department of Environmental, Social and Spatial Change (ENSPAC) has a new man in charge and he's ready to make a change.

Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt is a professor, a well-known presence around campus and an RU-veteran of almost 25 years. Bærenholdt is MA in History and Geography, obtained his PhD in 1991 and added a postdoc in 2006.

He's expected to use his experience and expertise in developing the department.

The challenge is pretty clear— ENSPAC needs to attract more students.

“The biggest problem we have is that at the basic studies in natural sciences program is too small. We simply don't have enough students who apply,” said Bærenholdt, who has worked at RU since 1986 and served briefly as pro-rector in 2009.

Accommodating the students

Students within the natural sciences make up their minds about specializations very early, he said. The goal is to tailor the basic studies to the students' needs.

“We need sharper, specialized profiles in the natural sciences. The basic studies program

needs to be set apart from the social science and humanities programs,” he said, adding that dedicated students have had difficulties seeing sufficient specializations within the basic studies.

Specialization steps have already been taken. Once the Study Reform sets in next year, students will have another year of their specialization of choice. RU bachelor programs will consist of just one year of basic studies.

Continue efficient research

On top of the increased recruitment of natural science students, Bærenholdt said he plans to continue the latest trend of efficient research.

“Research within the social sciences at RU has an excellent performance rate,” Bærenholdt said of the research team. “It's well-known fact that RU publishes most natural science-articles per krone.”



Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt

The Editor's Desk

Welcome back!

Back to a new year. Back to a new semester (well, except for those with January exams.)

Welcome to classmates old and new. Welcome home to the students who have been abroad. And welcome to the new students who join us from a far.

Speaking of a far, we have an enlightening piece about RU's collaboration agreement with China. "China? They're communist. What can they do for us?" some may ask. Quite a lot, seemingly.

In this issue, discover how a communist rule out-think a Western democracy. And if you've just arrived in Denmark, you might just want to hang on to this issue. Why? Well, we're bringing two articles about learning the Danish language, and learning the Danish way.

So if you're worried about health care, banks and money, transportation and bureaucracy, you'll see why the two-week Foundation Course is for you. Hint – it's got a positive rate of 96 %.

On a different note, have you ever wondered about Danish classes at RU? Perhaps taken them yourself? Find out inside why international students choose to learn Danish – even when they're leaving again a few months later.

Professor Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt is the new Head of Department at ENSPAC, which we wrote in our Christmas issue. But in this issue, you can read what he plans to do with the natural sciences as we head into a new RU world in 2012.

As we all know, recessions and global economic meltdowns have hit everyone, rich to poor. And students are hit, too. RU economics professor, Jesper Jespersen reveals how the government can make a difference.

Enough with the previews, there's more stuff inside but you'll have to look for yourself. Naturally, all must be rejuvenated after a lengthy break of alcohol deprived relaxation. Surely, you will be ready to partake in another semester of riveting lectures and tantalizing studies!

So without further ado, enjoy this issue of RUGlobal!



Contents

- 31 "We need to attract more students"
- 29 Rectors' meeting at RU
- 27 Debate meeting: Government to help young people enter the labour market
- 26 Learn learning the RU way
- 25 RU Alumnus
- 24 International students want to learn Danish

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Rectors' meeting at RU

Quality assurance, evaluation models and research-based teaching were items on the agenda when Universities Denmark hosted a debate meeting at RU. The list of speeches boasted many and high-profiled speakers, and much useful experience was shared across universities, but the actual debate failed to happen, however

By: Thomas Humle, RUGlobal

Photo: Poul Erik Nikander Frandsen

The heavy artillery was brought up when Universities Denmark hosted a debate meeting at RU on 7 December. No fewer than six rectors representing Danish universities were listed as speakers and debaters for the afternoon programme. In addition to these were a pro-rector, a lecturer, a deputy director, a dean, a professor, a deputy chairman, a senior consultant and a student.

Thus, the scene was set for an important debate on the quality of Danish universities, and the institutions of highest authority were there to speak and listen.

Newly appointed Pro-rector at RU, Hanne Leth Andersen, introduced the debate meeting saying:

“How wonderful it is that we have a forum to discuss dialogue across the universities. In my experience, competition between us has been fierce for a number of years, and it is fantastic that we can meet to discuss our common ground, which we can benefit from developing together,” she said.

Based on this encouraging statement, the debate meeting on the universities' quality work was launched.

Control and development

Practical usage of evaluations at the universities was put up for debate. To what extent are evaluations equal to control of the quality of the teaching and to what extent do evaluations constitute a development tool? And another thing – is it possible to combine these two aspects in the evaluations?

The answer to this was a clear “no” from the first speaker of the afternoon, Jakob Ravn from CBS. He had conducted research into the universities' use of evaluations.

“If you try to combine the control and development elements in the evaluation, the control element will always prevail. Bridging this gap is simply not possible in practice,” he said.

As a different aspect of his presentation, Jakob Ravn encouraged the universities to exploit the enormous amount of data from previous evaluations, often remaining unused. He stressed that these data represent large-scale knowledge resources that by investigation and comparison could disclose a lot of information on a specific teaching process over time. In other words: Has teaching deteriorated or improved over recent years and what are the opinions of teaching across different subjects or programmes?

Lack of competence

The next speaker to take the floor was Lene Tortzen Bager who has everyday experience in qualifying university teaching at the Centre for Development of Teaching.

“Universities have accepted the requirements for evaluations without acquiring the necessary competences”, was one of the heavy-hitting points in her presentation.

“Unfortunately, this has a negative impact on teachers”, she continued while giving a number of examples of how teachers have called in sick or handed in their resignations due to critical evaluations from their students.

“We ask students to do evaluations at a time in their career when they are not capable of telling us what they need. It is no coincidence that in my examples the students having provided teachers with face-to-face negative evaluations have been bachelor students. We do nothing to build on students' evaluation competences, and that is a big problem,” she stated with seriousness.



Evaluation models in the design phase

In the subsequent panel debate, Rector at the IT University of Copenhagen (ITU), Mads Tofte, followed up on Lene Tortzen Bager's presentation:

"Evaluation systems are always based on design specifications, and through these one's management values are strongly communicated. If as a university you have evaluation methods of such a nature that they lead to teachers handing in their resignations due to negative experiences, then that is management failure," he commenced.

He then went through a number of design contemplations forming the basis of ITU's somewhat different and more public evaluation system. According to its rector, to some degree evaluation at ITU is a control tool, but more importantly a communication tool, which, among other things, is expressed in the timing of the evaluation:

"Before a course is completed, students have had time to not only provide their evaluations, but also discuss them with their teacher." Results of the evaluations are then made available to the public, which Mads Tofte finds important since it constitutes a joint basis of data for a debate on quality and satisfaction.

"It is made public that most teachers are doing a very good job. For those not doing so well, management is not responsible for confronting them with negative criticism. As a principle, we do not disclose evaluation results just before weekends because the teacher receiving negative criticism should have the option of quickly discussing it with his or her immediate superior who will be able to provide support and discuss whether the criticism is justified. Anyone criticised in public through an evaluation should respond to the criticism. And the response should be at least as visible as the criticism."

After each semester, ITU issues a report setting out the study-related changes that have been made on the basis of the evaluations. That way, students experience a direct consequence of the evaluation and thus are more committed to the evaluation process," Mads Tofte explained. He is also well aware of the fact that students extensively use publicised evaluations to select future courses.

Research-based teaching

The other part of the debate meeting dealt with research-based teaching. What is it and how can it be done?

Rector at Aarhus University, Lauritz B. Holm-Nielsen, talked about the possible universities of the future under the headline: "The modern university". In this context, he highlighted international models accommodating "talent



Lene Tortzen Bager

development" and "fast runners". This means that particularly clever students are given the opportunity to "jump" from receiving lectures to doing research at an earlier stage of their study period. To be specific, they could be given the opportunity to initiate a five-year PhD study programme already after completion of their bachelor degree.

This caused the audience to discuss whether the universities' primary responsibility is to educate new researchers or people who wish to stay in the university universe.

"What about those who do not wish to stay in the isolated university universe all their life," asked Mikkel who is a student at the University of Copenhagen. He continued: "Are we not at risk of creating A and B universities if some universities educate "talents" and others "fast runners"?"

This discussion developed in the subsequent panel debate. Chief Adviser Birgit Bangskjær from the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations said:

"Universities focus heavily on research – and with good reason. Sometimes, however, one gets the impression that universities are research institutions whose sideline activity is to produce graduates. I dare say that universities are first and foremost educational institutions conducting research primarily to support the academic level of the programmes."

According to Birgit Bangskjær, research-based teaching should be understood as teaching conducted by researchers who teach subjects closely related to their research area. Based on this understanding she finds that the emphasis on research can be too distinct, if not enough students subsequently choose to become researchers.

Research-based teaching not equal to research-directed teaching

Lena Skotte, deputy chairman of the National Union of Students in Denmark (DSF), took the floor and stated that research-based education is important:

"Research-based education is not the same as research-directed education." By far the majority of today's university students have no wish to become researchers." She explained that many researchers are not necessarily good teachers. "Sometimes it doesn't work if an ancient professor is focusing on his shoes while teaching 200 students in an auditorium," she said.

This comment was followed up by Rector at University of Southern Denmark Jens Oddershede, who found that in Denmark we have a very rigid attitude to research-based teaching: "Looking at the good universities around the world, there is a lot of teaching conducted by skilled teachers who are not researchers. It is easy to imagine research-based teaching conducted in various shapes and forms."

Debate meeting: Government to help young people enter the labour market

The financial crisis has hit young people hard. All over Europe, unemployment among young people has risen; however, by conducting the right financial policy, the Danish government could make a difference, states Jesper Jespersen, Professor of Economics at Roskilde University

*By: Sofie Dam, volunteer campaign worker for Yildiz Akdogan, MP (S)
Photo: Michael Danielsen*

On the frosty evening of 7 December, the Social Democrats invited three clever people to the culture centre "Huset i Magstræde" to discuss what economic policy can prevent the Danish government from losing a whole generation of young people to endless unemployment: Jesper Jespersen, Professor of Economics at RU, Yildiz Akdogan, Member of Parliament for the Danish Social Democrats, and Poul Hansen, Labour Market Consultant from the labour union 3F.

More unemployed young people

In the EU, there are now 5.2 million young people aged 15 to 24 who are at risk of never becoming part of the labour market. In Denmark, unemployment among young people has risen from 7.2% in 2008 to 12.3% in 2010. Consequently, according to Akdogan, the Danish society is facing one of the most serious problems.

"Like in the 1980's, we are right now at risk of losing a whole generation of young people. It is a problem for the young people being mar-

ginalised – and for society as a whole because young people constitute our raw material, and we cannot afford to lose them. That is why education is important," said Akdogan.

Education means the future for young people

Uneducated young people are facing the most severe problems. Even if it seems absurd now that many new RU graduates are looking for jobs in vain, the number of educated young people will be inadequate in the future.

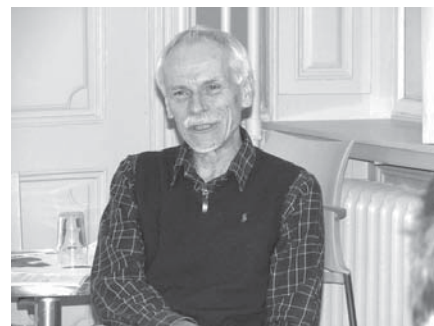
According to Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd (The Economic Council of the Labour Movement), over the next ten years there will be a shortage of 45,000 vocationally trained people, 40,000 with short-term further education and 65,000 with medium-term and long-term further education. At the same time, 120,000 uneducated people will constitute an excess labour force.

We can't save our way out of the crisis

Jespersen believes that youth unemployment should be combated by retaining young people in education and creating jobs for them by kick-starting the economy.

"Government cannot hide behind the old idea of the invisible hand in the market sorting everything out by itself. It needs to play an active role," he said and suggested ways of how the government could intervene.

"We can't save our way out of the crisis, and there are lots of social tasks remaining unsolved. For this reason, the government ought to fix an earlier date for projects that will require completion at any rate. For the young



Professor of Economics Jesper Jespersen reports how youth unemployment in Europe has risen dramatically during the financial crisis. He sees two elements as absolutely crucial in combating youth unemployment: job creation and education.

people it is a big problem that there are not enough work placements. In this context, the government could impose requirements on the workplaces,” explained Jespersen.

Akdogan believes that the government’s failure to invest in education during times of financial stability is now backfiring.

“The government has starved education of resources, and the 2011 national budget is not any better. When making cut-backs at the business schools that are struggling with a drop-out-rate of 50% among young people, they are shooting themselves in the foot,” she added.

It is also about quality

According to Poul Hansen, retaining young people is not only about finances.

“We need to look at the good examples across schools and programmes to find out what works if we are to retain the young people,” said Hansen.

In Jespersen’s experience young people do not take an interest in education until they realise what they can use it for.

“Therefore, at RU, we combine learning with social skills and practical usage through group work. We spend a lot of resources on supporting the young people,” he reported.

“We could use that for inspiration at the business schools and post-secondary education programmes,” stated Akdogan.

“Everybody needs an education of at least 13 years, but it could very well be a combination of work experience and trainee service. We also need to be better at helping the young people find out what they are good at,” she added.

Preserve the state education funding system

Even though the problem with youth unemployment is bad in Denmark, it is even worse in other European countries. Our neighbouring country Sweden is up against a youth unemployment rate of 29.7%.

According to Jespersen, this could be because Sweden has a state education funding system of lesser quality.

“It is important that the financial incentives exist. If young people are not capable of coping financially during their study period, then there is a risk that they opt out of the education system,” she explained.

For that reason, we have to be careful not to reduce the student grants for children living with their parents and other students”, said Akdogan.

“I have talked to young people out in the western region of Copenhagen, and there, young people in youth education, living at home and receiving student grants, spend their so-called “café funding” not on café lattes, but on getting through their financially squeezed everyday lives,” she stated.

European solutions

The new initiative launched by the European Commission “Youth on the move” sets out a joint European goal for combating youth unemployment and offers a suggestion for how the problem could be solved through collaboration between the countries. Based on national as well as European measures, we might be able to deal effectively with youth unemployment.

UNiverse

Learn *learning* the RU way

If you’re new to RU you can attend LICS’ Foundation Course and pick up everything you need to get the perfect study start at RU

By: Philip Michael Shange, RUGlobal

Are you worried about the transition to a new country and a new way of studying? Well, no need to worry.

Since august of last year, Language and Intercultural Communication Services (LICS) has offered a two week Foundation Course to newly arrived international students at RU. Here, students are introduced to everything RU.

“We make sure they get a head start in Denmark,” LICS coordinator Karen-Margrete Frederiksen said.

The main purpose of the course is to prepare students for the RU experience. The course involves everything from how to do RU projects to how to use the library.

Frederiksen said that another goal is to connect the RU students that usually don’t interact.

“We’re in the process of making a seminar for all – Danish and non-Danish. We want to focus on stereotypes and the expectations people have of one another,” Frederiksen said.

“But it’s still a work in progress.”

Each year, about 120 out of 350 new students from abroad elect to participate in the Foundation Course. While the course helps students learn how to be a RUC’er, practical issues such as health care and banks are also brought up.

“We take the students to Roskilde, tell them about Borgerservice and help them with all the practical things so they don’t have to spend all their money on information and bureaucratic stuff they could get right away,” Frederiksen said.

According to a report from LICS, 96 % have rated the course from “good” to “excellent” while some have stated that “they wouldn’t know what to do without it.”

RU Alumnus

By: Mette Reebirk, Director of International Department & Kristel Pent, Alumnus coordinator

RU Alumnus' ambition is to involve 10,000 persons, both new graduates and older national and international graduates, in the alumnus-network before the end of 2011.

The job for RU Alumnus is to create a very strong interrelation between alumni and between RU students, thus bringing even more of the university's knowledge about social development into play and boosting societal and personal growth. The collaboration between alumni, students and people responsible for the study programmes is crucial for RU to be able to continue to develop study programmes and research reflecting the requirements of the business community.

Alumni from RU will *build a bridge* between RU and society through a strong connection with the students and the educational and research environments at RU. The connection will be intensified over the next three years, both in respect of the quality of the relations and in respect of the number of alumni wanting to commit themselves to a collaboration with RU.

Vision:

To retain RU's place in the alumni's minds as a platform for knowledge and career opportunities.

Mission:

To offer former Danish and international students a continuing education portfolio and a network that can promote and support their academic and personal development. Furthermore, linking alumni and students together to create a learning opportunity between the two groups will be the main priority.

RU Alumnus is implemented as part of RU's strategy, where the International Office has picked up the thread, and the rectorship has chosen to invest in Kristel Pent, who by working 15 hours a week in close collaboration with Mette Reebirk, Director of International Department, is to ensure that RU Alumnus can be formed.

The Alumnus concept will be implemented from commencement of the studies in order to enter into the students' mind at an early stage.

The students must then join RU Alumnus as soon as possible after having commenced their studies and not later than at the end of their studies. The alumni will join the business sector and the organisations where many of them will become decision-makers or managers of Danish and international companies/organisations; they will be the "food canal" to new continuing education clients, business partners, student mentors and potential members of the advisory boards of the programmes.

It is our intention to build a strong Alumnus platform which, seen in isolation, will attract new members and at the same time develop the concept, thus creating an even stronger psychological sense of loyalty to RU. That way, it will be possible to follow students' careers "from the cradle to the grave".

RU Alumnus will be the platform for knowledge sharing and career opportunities that the alumni will use as a natural step in connection with their continuing education and career development. Thus, they will experience a relevant flow of useful knowledge, inspiring cases about and with other alumni. RU Alumnus will email newsletters each year and hold academic workshops every month. An electronic facebook group has already been set up where alumni can find and communicate with each other.

From a community perspective, the initiatives contribute to strengthen Danish companies positioning among business partners, clients and competitors. The primary objective is to offer former students – salary earners in permanent jobs or job seekers – a continuing education portfolio and a network that can promote and support their academic and personal development and create an opportunity for RU students to learn something new and enter into new networks with alumni.

RU Alumnus is not alone in understanding the importance of a solid Alumnus platform. Currently, the Danish media describe the effect of a network among graduates. If Denmark is to secure a strong position among international competitors, it is important that the alumni representing the business community, have a network aiming to help companies in the intensified global competition.

The Danish society will benefit from RU Alumnus. The students' network with alumni could lead to students experiencing that the time between being a graduate to being an employee is shortened. RU Alumnus therefore also intends to help the network establish an interrelation between study programmes and the business community. RU Alumnus will also bring new students to RU, nationally as well as internationally.

In order to develop this concept, RU Alumnus has an internationalisation strategy, in which RU Alumnus will include international students in the network. This initiative can prove to be of special interest to the Danish society because it helps international students to maintain relations with RU and Denmark in general. The vision of such a strategy is in part to strengthen the multicultural society and business sector, enabling both full-degree and exchange students to boost and influence the development of RU Alumnus. As mentioned above, international alumni will be an important food canal for new international students coming to RU.

It is not only RU Alumnus' ambition to create a framework for graduates' physical network formation. It is just as much about building virtual fora that can create interactive debate, which results express innovative thinking to the individual whether you are a researcher, graduate or student.

- RU Alumnus has potential – all students, including the international students, new as well as old, have been given a lifelong e-mail address. In addition, in terms of technical performance, RU has the tools it takes to initiate communication with RU alumni.

The action plan for RU Alumnus can be compared with the key marker determined for RU in the development contract, 2008-2009 between RU and the Danish Ministry of Science. According to the contract, "to bring university and society together" and "to educate the leaders, teachers and experts of tomorrow who will give useful and sustainable answers to how the global and local challenges of the 21st century should be handled" are tasks that serve as guidelines for activities and scientific fields at RU; something a well-functioning and academic Alumnus platform can support.

International students want to learn Danish

According to a report from Language and Intercultural Communication Services, more international students try to pick up the Danish language

By: Philip Michael Shange, RUGlobal

More and more international students are taking on the challenge of learning the Danish language.

Between 2008 and august 2010, 398 students have passed at least one Danish course. Learners of Danish usually consist of full degree students. However more exchange students are electing to participate as well.

“The students who are here for just one semester and choose to follow a Danish course often do it out of respect for the host country,” Language and Intercultural Services (LICS) coordinator Karen-Margrete Frederiksen said. “They think that they should at least acquire competence in a basic range of language.”

Others simply think it adds a little extra to the resume.

“Some think Danish is a different, exotic language and therefore a language our students find it interesting to get to learn,” Frederiksen said, while also pointing out the practical benefits of Danish lingual skill.

“They can use it to communicate in their everyday life, with their neighbors, stores and things of that nature.”

Growing number of full degree students

According to LICS, another reason for the added number of learners of Danish is the growing number of international full degree students at RU. Fifteen years ago, most international students were short term exchange students, Frederiksen said.

“We don’t have official statistics on this, but I definitely think [the growing number of international students] has something to do with it.”

While learning Danish can be an extremely tough task for someone new to the country, most handle their Danish duties well.

“It can be hard to find the time to prepare and attend class,” Frederiksen said. “But most of them are very diligent and persistent.”