

The Study Board at Sociology



MINUTES

12.04 MARTS 2024

Forum Study Board of Sociology

Meeting held 13.05.2024

ØSTER FARIMAGSGADE 2A
KØBENHAVN K

Location Room 16.1.62

Minutes taker Andrea Ella Andersen Hald

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Present

Board members: Lasse Suonperä Liebst, Mengni Chen (online), Pia Cecilie Enevoldsen, Mira Chatterji Rosen Sørensen.

Guests

Merlin Schaeffer, Nina Stenvang Holmsgaard.

Absent

Jonas Toubøl, Anemone Frederikke de M Dalsgaard.

Agenda – open meeting

1) Approval of agenda /Lasse

The agenda was approved.

2) Key study data /Merlin

Merlin presented the key study data.

Dropout rates

Merlin explained that the cohort intake was reduced from 100 to 80% but that the institute accepts roughly 100 students because of the 20% dropout rates.

The Board discussed the reason behind the drop-out rates.

Merlin mentioned that the institute had tried to increase the quota 2 intake, but that it resulted in an even worse dropout rate.

The mentioned confusion about the content of Sociology and how it differs from Psychology and Political Science.

Merlin also mentioned that currently 20% go abroad and that the institute should make sure this stays a possibility on the BA since it won't be possible on the one-year master.

VIP coverage

The institute is close to 100% and the highest in the faculty. Merlin thinks it is too high because if you want good research based education the VIP needs to get grants as well and that they have good experience with hiring D-VIP.

Teaching hours

Merlin said Sociology must do better. We are working on it by adding TAs to the first semesters.

Unemployment statistics

Merlin said that the numbers are better than ever. He emphasized that 2021 is the first year Sociology has been below the Social Sciences average.

The Board agreed that the numbers are good but that a second year would be ideal to credibly say that it is a stable development.

Lasse argued that this should be used to argument against more cutbacks.

Mengni asked whether the institute can increase the intake in the future then and Merlin answered no because the government wants to decrease the intake of university students in general.

Dropout rates

The Board then revisited the discussion about dropout rates.

Lasse asked how the institute can target the selection effect. He asked whether it is because they transfer to Psychology and Political science?

Merlin answered that Psychology and Political Science has more status and that Sociology has more methods training, which the students find hard.

Nina mentioned that the Student Services try to prepare the students for what to apply to. Students who are unsure and contact the Student Services are thinking about which careers, job opportunities and profession awaits them. But she can't say for sure that these are the students that drop out.

Stud.rep. mentioned that Sociology's key competencies aren't clear to all students; SIDE 3 AF 10 or that they aren't aware of the competencies they acquire.

Merlin emphasized a change in the intake as the solution and said that all their other initiatives haven't helped, for instance labour market guest lecturers.

Nina asked whether there could be a relationship between the lack of study hours (reference to the Study Survey) and the relation to the education?

Lasse suggested that students leave because they actually want to study something else, that they don't have the grades for, and Sociology becomes a stepping stone. Lasse also said that the institute has a narrative that the initiatives have been working, but they haven't, so there shouldn't be such a narrative.

Stud.rep. suggested an email asking students that dropped out why and what could be better at Sociology. Merlin answered that analyses have shown transferring to another education and too many methods as the dropout reasons.

3) The Study Survey /Merlin

Merlin presented the Study Survey

Feedback

Merlin emphasized the "unacceptable" responses concerning feedback said it needs to improve. 70% responded that they don't get enough feedback.

Merlin informed the Board that he had a discussion with the staff, where it became clear that there had been a wrong impression among the staff that they should not offer feedback during their office hours and that students have been told there is no feedback option. Merlin said that this impression is wrong. If students request feedback, the teachers should always give it. Merlin encouraged the student representatives to share this information with the rest of the student body.

Lasse said that there has been confusion in the staff. Some thought they only had to offer feedback in certain situations, for instance low grades. Lasse said there are no such regulations. All students should have this opportunity and he believes the teachers provide too little feedback overall and that it is important that there is a change in culture.

Mengni mentioned that they promote peer feedback a lot and that it might have to do with this culture. That the peer feedback is reducing the teacher feedback.

Stud.rep. agreed and said peer feedback works, when the teacher follows up on it and that it doesn't work when the students must organize it themselves. Then the students don't perceive it as feedback. When students get at grade but no comment it doesn't feel like feedback.

Merlin agreed that it is important that the students get the right to go to the office hours and get comments on their grade. Merlin mentioned that he always write a comment himself, but students should also be allowed a quarter of an hour for feedback and currently the most essential feedback is not provided. SIDE 4 AF 10

Stud.rep. asked if they could bring more focus on the fact that the students are allowed to do that.

Merlin said yes and said that they should tell Fagrådet as well.

The student representatives mentioned that it should come directly from the teachers as well.

Lasse encouraged the students to embrace and use it, because currently it is only a minority who do so.

Stud.rep. answered that they don't think the students know they have a right to get feedback if they get good grades and that they can be afraid to take the time from students with lower grades.

Lasse said that office hours go through the whole semester and that there should be a more ongoing feedback culture.

Stud.rep. said that the core task is to frame it in a way that the students feel and know they are allowed to use the office hours. They mentioned that it has had a positive effect, that the teachers informed them about when and where the office hours take place. But maybe more could be done?

Nina said that the Student Services tell students they have to complain to get feedback.

Merlin said this is wrong and that they have the right to receive feedback during office hours.

Lasse agreed and said that it has to do with the norm agreement.

Nina said that the general rule across SAMF educations is that you are not obliged to give feedback.

Lasse said that it is a local rule at the Sociological Institute.

Merlin said that he could tell all the teachers to inform the students about this during their respective courses.

Stud.rep. said that they would bring it up at the next Fagrådsmøde.

Nina asked what the students should do if their request for feedback is not met.

Merlin answered that they should try a few times, but if a teacher repeatedly neglects to answer or give feedback the students should contact Merlin.

Lasse mentioned that Rusturen could also be a good place to communicate it from the beginning and install a new culture.

The student representatives agreed.

Lasse said there is still confusion as to when feedback must be given. Only if they ask, during office hours, or also when grading?

Merlin answered that he thinks his mail to the staff was clear. It said that teachers should always allow students to get feedback during office hours and that teachers are encouraged to provide some feedback when they get the grade. Merlin also said that these things can be emphasized but that there needs to be a change in culture and that it will only come about if the students begin to request it more.

Merlin closed the discussion and summarized: it is unacceptable, but we are on it.

Doubt and negative thoughts

Merlin said the numbers of stress and well-being doesn't stand out as particularly bad but there are some issues. 60% of the students responded they hold back in discussion and asking questions. Merlin said his perception is that it is not easy to get the students to talk. He asked whether the stud.rep. had suggestions.

Stud.rep. said they think the increase in TA sessions on 1. And 2. Semester influences this and helps students learn to speak in front of people.

The stud.rep. asked whether Nina had insights about this from Student Services.

Nina said the students don't use Student Services in that context. But Student Services form groups in the first year of the BA and this year they emphasize how to use groups and how to make it a safe space for the students.

Lasse said more feedback could help; that students express relief when they get face to face feedback.

Merlin said that the main issue is compulsory classes with a big lecture hall and many students. It takes a lot to raise your hand here. Merlin summarized that we have it on our mind but that the conclusion is not clear.

4) The Graduate Survey /Merlin

Merlin presented the results of the graduate survey. He clarified differences between responses from current students and graduates.

Oral presentation

He emphasized the ability to present orally and said that this should be included more in the teaching.

Stud.rep. mentioned that Merlin had said at an earlier meeting that there was a tendency that students avoid the elective with oral presentation.

Merlin answered that he doesn't think this is just about oral exams but more about how to acquire presentations skills and learn how to present to an audience.

Stud.rep. said that presentations throughout their own bachelor haven't worked well and expressed a need for more teaching focused on training presentation skills. SIDE 6 AF 10

Mengni agreed with this and added that the BA students on her course are nervous to present in English.

Lasse asked the student representatives where presentations are currently working well.

Stud.rep. said when they present their own assignments. Ghita had arranged a day with pitch training where they took it seriously. Students would like it earlier in the education.

The Board agreed there should be a clear format and clear expectations for the presentations to work well. It was briefly discussed how to facilitate it, for instance that the students should give a representation to qualify for the exam.

Specialization

The Board discussed whether the students should be able to specialize more during the BA.

Lasse argued that the BA covers basis content, and the MA is for specialization.

Merlin argued for more choices on the BA as well but specified that it doesn't mean introducing fagpakkefag and specialization titles.

Stud.rep. said they get a good base knowledge on the BA but that Critical re-reading could instead be where the students could get more choice.

Lasse said the spot could also be used for basics.

The Board agreed to discuss this at another time.

Responses from the employed graduates

Responses are more optimistic, no reason for concern. Merlin said they are aware that some theory doesn't have direct implementation in the labor market, but we also do have to teach Sociology as a discipline, it is a university.

Sociologisk Innovation was mentioned as a course that brings connections to the labor market.

Graduates responded that student jobs are important for employment. Merlin said that we must keep that in mind when creating the new one-year master.

It was discussed that the institute hire many teaching assistants; almost 30% of the cohort. The Board discussed whether this is an issue – keeping the students away from the labor market.

Stud.rep. replied that teaching assistants have secondary jobs as well.

Lasse also argued that having been a teaching assistant is considered a hard skill in the labor market.

It was mentioned that it is annoying in the survey setup that they combine theory and methods; makes it difficult to know what they mean.

5) Status on the MA reform draft /Merlin

Merlin gave a status on the MA reform process. Sociology will become a one-year MA. All programs will have a one-year MA and those with more than 100 students will also have a two-year master.

Merlin also informed the Board that the BA intake at KU must be reduced with 12%. It doesn't mean that every education is reduced with 12% but we don't know the share yet.

There is a master reform group working on creating the one-year MA and they expect to have a rough draft by the end of the semester. Merlin mentioned he would be happy to present it at a Fagrådsmøde in the fall.

He also mentioned that he had gotten an email from the students saying they are organizing workshops about the reform. Merlin said to the student representatives that they represent the student cohort and that the other students should give their conclusions to the student representatives to bring further.

Stud.rep. agreed.

6) Teaching in programming (Rstudio) /Student representatives

The student representatives explained that there were mistakes with the quizzes and that the necessary help isn't available. They are long and time consuming and don't have a good learning outcome.

Merlin asked Mengni if a teaching assistant try out the quizzes before it gets released every week.

Mengni answered that this semester they had gotten the quizzes from Epinion later than usual. It was released just before the class started.

Merlin suggested to demand they send the quizzes earlier and Mengni agreed.

Stud.rep. said this reflected the issues they experienced, but that it is not the main concern.

The main concern is that students miss the premise in the introduction to coding; why are we coding and what is the use for us? They don't get educated in what coding is and how to use R. It is not introduced sufficiently.

We need to address how to give the students on Sociology the core competencies to work with coding on the rest of the education.

Mengni agreed and recognized this knowledge gap. The students feel unsure of what they are doing and how it connects with the other content they are being taught.

Merlin suggested that he, Mengni and Jasper should talk about it. It shouldn't be left to the teaching assistants to go through.

Stud.rep. said that students feel thrown into Stats, into coding and R without knowing what it is, and that there should be a class teaching the basics before.

Merlin recognized the issue but said that there is already a lot of method courses. SIDE 8 AF 10
He suggested that changes made in ESM combined with if they taught R in Basic Statistics, might solve the problem.

Merlin thanked the students for bringing it up.

Mengni asked which students are facing the problem?

Stud.rep. answered specifically students in the first year.

Stud.rep. also mentioned that students are reluctant to choose quantitative projects because they don't feel they have sufficient knowledge of R and coding.

Lasse said that perhaps it is a good example of the need for alignment between courses. We need a basic introduction and then a "brush up".

Stud.rep. said that teachers had done brush up lectures but that they need to focus specifically on how programming works and which elements will be used in the course.

Merlin said he will do it on his course.

Lasse said that this issue had been raised before and thanked the student representatives for flagging it.

Mengni added that she believes some students like the course and programming and that it attracts a lot of students that come directly for R. It needs communication between courses to work better.

7) Winter start at the master's degree /Student representatives

At the beginning of this agenda point several sociology students joined the meeting to show their support for winter start at the MA.

Stud.rep. explained that they have discussed this in Fagrådet and that it has become even more relevant after new SU-reforms. The stud.rep. explained that the students who joined the meeting had made the appendix that was sent out late and that they have collected a bunch of signatures to show support.

The students presented the proposal to have winter start at the master. They argued it could create more flexibility which is especially important for SPS students who are at a disadvantage with the current model. They also said that a consequence is that students don't choose the Sociology MA because of the delay.

They asked why Sociology doesn't have the opportunity when other educations do.

Merlin said that he will bring it up with the dean at the Studieledermøde next Tuesday. But he also said it is unlikely to be successful and that Political Science and Economy for instance has winter start because they have more students. Merlin explained that winter start means double administrative burden for at small number of students and that the institute will have to offer courses on more semesters.

The students asked if they couldn't just fill up the empty spots.

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Nina answered that you cannot fill up spots in an education you are not enrolled in. Or else you must go the BAKA way. Nina also gave an example of a student starting in the winter at Political Science. She said that it works because they have many electives. Nina also mentioned that for Sociology it is more than 50% of the students who go into a 7th semester or more.

The students mentioned that smaller educations than Sociology at KUA have winter start. They also encouraged the Board to include winter start in the new one-year master.

Lasse said their arguments are fair but that it needs to work on an administrative and economic level as well. He mentioned that Merlin would take it to the dean for assessment but also said that he was a bit pessimistic about it. If they say okay, we can try to look at it, but it also needs to work locally in the department. We are a substantially smaller department, and it becomes more complicated then. So to introduce this can also have potential negative spill effects on other tasks. It is hard just to staff the current programs; there needs to be a balance.

The students said that it could also attract new students to the program.

Lasse said that he is not against it, but that we should be aware that it introduces more complexity and makes us vulnerable.

Nina asked if the students knew about the BAKA arrangement.

The students answered that they did, but that they don't find it very flexible.

Nina said it is possible for students to plan ahead, but it requires a different study plan and can have certain effects as well.

Stud.rep. encouraged Merlin, when he brings it to the dean, to compare Sociology to the educations at HUM. Their situation might be more similar to ours than Political Science for instance.

Lasse thanked the students and student representatives for bringing it up. He said, that it is the only way the institute and the Study Board can become aware of it. But he also said that Sociology is a small machine and that many constraints need to be balanced.

The student representatives thanked the students for contacting the Student Services and for preparing the document.

The students mentioned that a lot of people are signing the document.

8) News from head of studies? /Merlin

SIDE 10 AF 10

Nothing.

9) News from Chair of the Study Board? /Lasse

Lasse informed the board about a debate between the researchers concerning the use of AI for transcription. He mentioned that students are currently using a system from Zetland, but it is not approved because KU doesn't have an agreement with the. They have made detailed instructions for another system that will be available for the students.

10) News from the Student Services /Nina

Nothing.

11) News from the student representatives?

Nothing.

12) Any other business?

Andrea sends out a revised doodle for the June meeting.