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ANNUAL REPORT 2016 – GOOD STUDENTS WILL BE A LARGE PART OF THE FUNDAMENT FOR AN EXCELLENT STUDY PROGRAMME

Programme evaluated: Master's Programme in Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Bergen (UiB)

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second year of evaluation for signed programme sensor. The representatives for the programme have asked for a focus on student recruitment. The evaluation is built upon one physical visit at the Dep of Biomedicine, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, the host for the programme, and a general scan of web pages connected to the programme. In addition, a discussion about international student recruitment in general with Dr Daniel Guhr, Managing Director at ICG (Illuminate Consulting Group) has served a background to several of the comments/observations in this report. The visit in Bergen included one workshop day, "Programutvalgsseminar for Det medisinsk-odontologiske fakultet. Senior Executive Officer Alsaug Saether and Prof Marit Bakke were hosting the visit at UiB. The visit at the Dep of Biomedicine, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry can be divided into three parts.

- 1) A general meeting and discussions with representatives from central university student office and local (faculty) representatives for student affairs and communication.
- 2) A meeting with student representatives and some of the representatives for student affairs and communication. At the end only a discussion with students.
- 3) A final discussion and sum up with teacher representatives from the programme, including Alsaug Saether and Marit Bakke.

STUDENT RECRUITMENTS

The programme has a strong focus on biomedical research with teaching within the research groups. It should be stressed that the placement of students in the research groups is a true strength of the programme, as judged by the student representatives.

1) At the first discussion about general student recruitment, representatives from the faculty student recruitment and communication offices participated and representatives from the UiB central student recruitment office. Alsaug Saether and Marit Bakke participated in addition.

There are several ideas how to improve the information for students and how to attract international students to study at UiB. The Master's programme in Biomedical Science is a fairly small programme with 20-25 student positions. Today the programme is occupied only to 50 -70% (1st year 14 (-16) students, 2nd year 13 students, according to students at the programme). Most Norwegian students are internally recruited from the Bachelor programme in Molecular Biology UiB, some others from the universities in Oslo, Trondheim and Tromsø. If the programme should be sustainable in the long run it's crucial to fill up the positions allotted.

For an international student who doesn't know local details it can be confusing with different names of the programme in English and in Norwegian. More confusing is a third name used at the portal "Study in Norway".

Masterprogram i biomedisin

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/MAMD-MEDBI> (no)

Master's Programme in Biomedical Sciences

<http://www.uib.no/en/studyprogramme/MAMD-MEDBI> (en)

Master's Programme in Medical Biology

<https://www.studyinnorway.no/Masters-and-Bachelor-course-search/Programme/Master-s-Programme-in-Medical-Biology>

It is strongly recommended that the name of the programme should be aligned at all sites.

A minor point is that the programme at the UiB portal in Norwegian is placed at "Naturvitenskaplege og teknologiske fag" and not at "Medisin, odontologi og helsefag"

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram>

International students, especially student from Asia, check ranking lists and are well updated how the universities they apply for are ranked. Every country, university and programme has to compete at a tough "market" where the programmes have to emphasize their strengths and opportunities. For UiB:

ARWU "Shanghai Ranking" - 201-300 (number 3 in Norway)

THE - 201-250 (number 2 in Norway)

Today, the Master's programme is not visible at international portals for advanced studies. However, the central student office at UiB will test the "Master's portals", in a first round for programmes at the Faculty of Science and Technology. If this will include the Master's programme in Biomedical Science was not clear (as the programme is announced at the Norwegian web pages under the Faculty of Science and Technology). Probably, there are more viral marketing sites for the programme. Face Book is known to reach the student group (young people) and here it's possible to market at local geographical areas. Google is an alternative. Experiences from other universities are that it's an advantage to focus on specific areas instead on everywhere. What are the geographical target regions for UiB? When a programme has been running for some years and hopefully has received a good

local reputation, students ambassadors is a strong vehicle (from the discussions with students, see below, there is no doubt that the students will be good ambassadors). They can blog (sponsored by the university), write at the university's Face Book page etc. Further, use them as contact person for mail questions. The challenge is to convince someone to study at UiB. How to brand UiB as the first choice? Ask the students. Usually their voices are much stronger and convincing as compared to the official voices from the university. In addition, researcher can be used when they are visiting collaborating universities.

2) The discussion with students during the visit at the Dep of Biomedicine gave a clear view of satisfied students who expressed that the courses gave them a sound knowledge within the field and a solid base for future research activities. From a sensor point of view, something has happened with the view from the students in a clear positive direction. Furthermore, they stressed that the strength of the programme, as compared to similar programmes at other Norwegian universities, was the strong focus on placements in research groups where they could practice real lab work. The programme is using this in presentations but could develop this further. From a recruitment point of view the students expressed that the web pages presenting the department and specifically the research could be improved. They saw the research at the department as a part of going for UiB. On the content of the programme there was only minor remarks. There was a request to include teaching in bioinformatics, improve teaching in ethics and avoid overlaps on cell signalling.

The programme is now at a level where the challenge is to develop the courses further and to keep and improve the very good reputation! This can be tough, but is crucial. The student expressed that the small group is both an advantage and a disadvantage. They know each other very well and they receive close to individual teaching. As a student expressed it, "you have to prepare before going to class because the teacher knows you". On the other hand, some disappointments were expressed over the lack of social activities because of the low number of students at the department. The students asked for a mentor week specific for students at the programme and later to receive specific career information.

Very often during discussions with international students, the question about scholarships will be raised. That was true here as well..

3) The sum up with teachers verified more or less what the student expressed. However, the programme has to fill up the number of places better. Probably, the programme has to set as a goal to start the second year with 20 students. The deadlines for application was discussed and Dec 1st is very early as compared to other competing universities. If possible this should be changed to mid Jan or Feb 1st, which probably will increase the competitiveness for UiB.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Experts within the field of student recruitment often stress that students going for a Master's programme would like to have information about the entire chain and at the same time the university must know how to market/inform about the different steps. In line with this it is crucial to assess every step. Recruitment can be seen as a sequence of events, where every step can/should be optimized

Application – Admission – Registration – Year 1 – Year 2 – Graduation – PhD/and or Employment

Why should a student from e.g. China or Greece apply to UiB and The Master's Programme in Biomedical Sciences? This is a general question to answer.

What universities are the main competitor worldwide and national?

A strategy is recommended strongly for the international marketing of international Master's programmes at UiB. Today UiB seems to start this work, but from a very low level. For an international student all the steps in the sequence above will be important.

FINAL REMARKS

Student recruitment is not a quick-fix.

The Master's programme in Biomedical Science as such is truly competitive at a global arena. To attract top students, which every university is going for, it is crucial to be visible at the global arena and to have a unit/department that is supporting these efforts.

Go for

- student ambassadors that are blogging about the programme
- experts at home (e.g. Bjorn Einar Aas, ICG advisory board, Bergen University).
- advertisement about the programme at FB
- advertisement about the programme at Google
- visibility at international Master's portals
- researchers that are visiting international universities
- visits at international student fairs
- visits at target countries and universities
- learning from other universities (<http://ki.se/en/education/global-masters-and-bachelors-studies>) and visit them

In summary, a university recruiting international students must be aware of how smart students are making their choices.

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