Minutes from the meeting in the Study Board for International Affairs Thursday February 12th 2015

Participants: Li Xing, Søren Dosenrode, Steen Fryba Christensen, Anders Thriga Nielsen, Avishek Banskota, Sissel Mai Ødegaard, Stina Bentsson (deputy member), Danny Raymond, Macarena Espinar López, Martine Wilhelmina Breivik (deputy member) Malene Gram, Anne Vestergaard Larsen, Jytte Kongstad (min.).

Ikke deltaget: Peer Møller Christensen, Morten Penthin Svendsen.

1. Approval of the agenda
2. Approval of the minute from the last meeting (enclosure)
3. Welcome to the new student members
4. Election of vice chairman (student)
5. Approval of semester descriptions (enclosure)
6. Dimensioning and application criterions
7. Semester and project evaluations – 7th semester E 2014 (enclosure)
8. Status of semester start Spring 2015
9. Dispensation to write thesis in other languages than English
10. Follow-up on reports from the external examiners
11. Miscellaneous
12. Meeting plan for Spring 2015

The meeting started with a presentation of new and old members of the Study Board.

1. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without any comments.

2. Approval of the minute from the last meeting

The minute from the last meeting was approved without comments.

3. Welcome to the new student members

Li asked the new students members of the Board welcome
4. Election of vice chairman

Anders Thrige Nielsen was elected vice-chairman of the Study Board. Anders has previous experience within the same field of work from his bachelor studies in History.

5. Approval of semester descriptions

Semester descriptions are part of AAU’s overall quality control. The descriptions for 8th semester will be posted on Moodle right after the meeting in order to give the students an overview in one place covering all modules, courses, literature, guest lecture, exams, etc. This is meant as an extra service to the students and is a supplement to the Regulation of Curriculum.

Malene and Susanne will cooperate with GRS to make sure all semester descriptions are in place.

6. Dimensioning and application criterions

”Response on the question on the dimensioning for SNIF:

The suggestion on the specific numbers of students in the ‘Dimensioning’s proposal from the Faculty of Social Sciences has been received and discussed by the Study board of International Affairs.

The members of the study board do not agree on this issue – as both the Aalborg part of the study board and the Copenhagen part of the study board find that their programmes are reduced too much. For this reason we have agreed to present the arguments for smaller reduction – in both Aalborg and Copenhagen - below.

It is underlined that it would have been preferable with more time to discuss this important decision at more length.

DIR and ES
A teachers’ meeting has been held to discuss this. Most teachers agree that a reduction in the number of enrollment is a good idea. It is recognized that DIR has a slow reduction not taking full effect the first years, but the number will end at 75 students when the reduction is fully implemented. DIR prefers to have more students when the reduction is fully
implemented, and suggests 85 as a good number. The teachers feel that 85 is a minimum taking into account that all specializations need to thrive (LAS, CAS, GGS).

Regarding ES: ES is quite unhappy with only 25 new students a year. A certain critical mass is necessary, and 30-35 students would be preferred.

GRS
GRS’s teachers have also discussed the issue.

GRS finds that they are in a transition period, and there has been pressure because of maternity leaves and very high number of students, so all agree that some reduction would be good. In future GRS would like to become an independent master programme.

GRS finds that a reduction to 60 would be a too small number of students – they prefer 70 students. GRS has had 96 students till recently, and going down to 60 students would be a too big reduction. 70 would give a good academic environment which would assure a certain quality. The GRS teachers find that it is important with a critical mass, not least in the Copenhagen area where GRS is competing with similar programmes e.g. the Saxo Institute at Copenhagen University. 70 is the preferred number.

DIR, ES as well as GRS find that their reductions are too harsh and all plead for a slightly higher number of students. The Study Board is not in a position to make any decision on this issue, but simply to collects the different arguments and presents them to the Faculty for the final decision”.

Søren pointed out that it is typical for Aalborg University to start out a process like this earlier than requested and Li asked Malene to contact the faculty and ask for a reduction at a lower speed than planned.

The number of students accepted at the different programmes and specializations have to be published on the SNIF homepage as information for the future applicants.

Steen pointed out that the amount of students and the number of teaching hours are connected. The more student and examinations passed the more hours are allocated by the Faculty. Li added that also the overall economy of the Study Board is dependent on the number of students who finish they study in time (STÅ). The better the performance the more teaching hours and economic resources. The dimensioning might result in better students and thus also a higher amount of STÅ.

Danny mentioned he would like to be more selective in the screening process of the students but it might be difficult as it is not possible to interview the applicants in person because of the travelling distance.
7. **Semester and project evaluations - 7. semester E 2014**

The summaries of the course, project and semester evaluations at DIR/ES and GRS were discussed. There were no specific problems and in general the evaluations were positive within all areas both at DIR, ES and GRS. The students pointed out that foreign students who come from different university cultures may fear to evaluate because they have doubts about the survey not being anonymous. The Danish students will try to encourage them to evaluate and tell them that the evaluations are anonymous.

Every semester Li writes a summary of the evaluation results from the courses as well as the project writing and the summary is uploaded to the homepage. At GRS Danny is responsible for the follow up on the semester evaluations as well as to submit a summary to be posted online.

8. **Status of semesterstart F 2015**

At European Studies 5 new students started February 1st and according to Søren everything went smoothly. Literature, slides and lectures were all published at Moodle. There was no official introduction apart from a session in Methodology for the newcomers. Only one of the new students missed a more thorough introduction. Søren will meet with the students in the middle of the semester for a follow up.

Bjørn mentioned a problem with the printing of the compendiums this semester at GRS where every second page was missing in the first issue and they had to reprint. Danny pointed out that from next semester they have decided to skip the compendiums and upload the texts on Moodle.

The student representatives complained that there were too many students for the lectures in order to have a dialogue between the teachers and the students and, furthermore, the seminar rooms were too small to gather all the students. There were not tables for everybody and on top of that there was a ventilation problem. The Study Board will contact the administration regarding these problems. Malene has contacted the administration about this.

The physical facilities for GRS in Copenhagen are satisfactory and fulfil the need but the students agreed with the Aalborg students regarding the possibility for discussions with
the large amount of people in the classes. This problem will to some extent be solved via
the dimensioning which will lead to a reduction in student numbers.

9 Dispensation for thesis writing in other languages than English

In the Thesis Guide there is an opening for thesis writing in Spanish, German or French.
The Board of Studies sometimes receives applications from students who want to write in Spanish. The last application was not accepted on the basis of difficulties in finding suitable censors for projects written in Spanish. Li suggested to stop dispensations altogether and delete the language passage in the Thesis Guide on the grounds that the teaching language for the programmes is English. Li’s proposal was accepted by the Board.

10 Follow-up on reports from external examiners

The Study Board is obliged to follow up on the remarks in the reports from the external examiners. This is done continuously by Li Xing by any critical remarks and the criticism is discussed at the board meetings. There were no problems raised to be handled on the present meeting. The examination reports are submitted to the council of external censors for their meetings taking place every second year. Danny and Morten will receive the reports for GRS and are kindly requested to communicate to the study board if any problems arise, so that these can be dealt with.

11 Miscellaneous

Steen mentioned that more and more students request feedback on their written examination but at the same time the Board of studies experiences a reduction in teaching hours. Li informed about the planned reduction in the use of internal censors for the written examination on order to safe hours for other purposes. Bjørn asked for a suggestion to solve the problem. Feedback is time consuming as the teachers have to re-read the assignments, which is not possible within the reduced number of hour that they get per student. Søren thinks that it is ideal with feedback and that the students learn a lot from discussing the assignment with the teacher after the examination. However, there is no way of complying with the wishes of the students within the reduced teaching norms and no more hours will be allocated from the Faculty. The students are welcome to ask the teachers individually and then it is up to each one to make the decision whether to
comply with the students requests or not. However, Søren advises his colleagues not to offer this kind of service. Avishek pointed out that if the students don’t know what they are doing wrong they can never approve. He suggested feed-back to be given in a group of student but again the size of the classes was mentioned as a problem. Sissel suggested that the students had the written assignments back together with the teacher’s notes as it is important with feed-back after the grading even with a high grade. Also a 7 or a 10 can be improved. This was not considered a good idea by the teachers as it will be very time-consuming to write comments in a way that they are understandable for the students.

Anders did not agree to the idea of publishing teacher’s notes to the student. Instead he suggested forming working groups where the students could compare grades and exchange experiences. Students are encouraged to move on with this idea. Malene suggested a compromise where the teachers make a routine of summing up major weaknesses in the assignments. Bjørn mentioned the internship reports as a place where the students could benefit from feedback on the assignments.

Written exams are only censored in cases where the students fail their examination and Li fears that it will make all students question their grade. Steen mentioned that the system with several different examination forms creates a fair system.

A comment from GRS was that in most cases the students already know what went wrong with the assignment and why they got the specific grade.

Stine mentioned that it is also a problem with feed-back in connection with project examination. Malene’s opinion was that most supervisors always give the students an oral feedback after project examination in connection with the grade giving. However, this is not the normal practice after the 48-hour written examinations.

Conclusion: feedback must always be given at each oral project exam. At written exams, students cannot expect feedback but may gather and read each other’s papers, compare and discuss the strengths and weaknesses and learn in that way. Students who feel that they do not get any feedback at their project exam, can hand in a written complaint to the study board. But it will be even better to ask for feedback when getting the grade just after the exam.

Søren mentioned the overall positive economic situation at the Faculty which unfortunately does not affect the economy of the Study Boards.

Søren gave a summary from the meeting of the Academic Council at the Faculty of the Social Sciences: Teachers must make teaching portfolios in the future in order to focus on
good teaching skills and encourage pedagogical quality. It is a new task for teachers, but is not expected to be very time consuming.

Malene asked for an updating of the self-evaluation meeting with the external member from Linköping as an item for the next board meeting. By then the strategy and action plan for the Study Board needs to be finished. Steen informed about the positive reactions from the external member on the meeting in December.

GRS was asked to formulate an action plan with suggestions for improvements to be implemented in the strategy and action plan. The strategy and action plan will be an item on the next agenda.

Malene informed about the meeting in Aalborg on February 26th with all coordinators at CGS. This meeting will be a workshop to improve teaching quality and student participation.

12 Meeting plan for Spring 2015

Li will make a doodle for meetings date in April and June.

The students asked for the time schedule to be taken into consideration when the next meeting is arranged.