



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' UNION

**International Student Union (ISU)
Universitetet for Miljø-og Biovitenskap (UMB)
(Norwegian University of Life Sciences)
Ås, Norway – April 18, 2006**

ÅS BRANCH – UMB

Records from the ISU branch in Ås go back to as early as 1994. We are not sure when the branch here was initiated as the records have not been well kept throughout the years. UMB has a large international student body composed of approximately 10% of the entire student population. This adds up to close to 300 students of which the main nationalities are Ethiopian, Ugandan, and Nepalese. However, this year there are over 60 countries represented at UMB and ISU-Ås is well known for its diverse constituency.

The students at UMB study a variety of subjects, but since the university specializes mainly in life sciences and agriculture then the majority of the students are studying some aspect of this. The most popular programs are: Management of Natural Resources and Sustainable Agriculture, Development Studies, Development and Resource Economics, and Tropical Ecology and Natural Resource Management. These are all Master's level courses so it is safe to say that most of the international students at UMB are Master's students, but there are some PhD students as well.

BOARD MEMBERS

The first set of board members was elected on September 9th, 2005, but some more members were added later on November 14th because we realized that we required more support. Here are the current board members, their positions, and their countries of origin for ISU-Ås:

<u>Position:</u>	<u>Name:</u>	<u>Country:</u>
President	Andrea Lawseth	(Canada)
Vice-President	Shimelse Mekonnen Ali	(Ethiopia)
Treasurer	Joseph Kawuki Kiggundu	(Uganda)
Secretary	Tawina Kopa	(Malawi)
Social Secretary	Miriam Venturi	(Italy)
Sports Representative	Baerbel Prevost	(Austria)
Social Committee Rep.	Eyilachew Yitayew Abate	(Ethiopia)
Webmaster	Eduardo Aguilar	(Costa Rica)

STUDENT WELFARE ISSUES:

Throughout this year ISU-Ås has worked very hard to maintain a high level of student welfare at our university. We have organized numerous events and activities so far in order to make sure that students have the opportunity to meet new people and socialize apart from class time. As mentioned above, the vast majority of students at UMB are Master's students so they tend to be very focused on schoolwork, but we want to make sure that their time spent in Norway is also socially fulfilling. Some of the events that we have organized are explained below.

Norwegian Course

We were successful in our struggle to set up a Norwegian language course for the autumn semester. Originally there was a plan to have this course in the spring, but we felt that this was unfair to most of the guest students who would be leaving in December. So with a little bit of pressure on the student board we managed to make it happen. The course ran twice per week for two hours each session. There was also an advanced course for those students who felt confident enough to undertake it. A Norwegian course was offered again in the spring semester and, as previously decided, was initiated by the university.

Party of the World

We successfully collaborated with the student society at Samfunnet to put on a Party of the World on Friday, October 14th, 2005. We found that we were having difficulties obtaining space to have our own party and decided that by collaborating we could set up a larger and more interactive event. We were able to offer some financial support to supply one free drink for all international students before ten o'clock as well as some support for decorations and snacks. We were in turn able to use the resources available at Samfunnet to put on a great event with performances by the international students, international films, and international music in the disco. This event was very well attended and some of the performances were very entertaining.

TVs in Pentagon and Samfunnet

We found that none of the TVs in any of the buildings at Pentagon (our residence complex) were working at the beginning of the year. We had many complaints from international students that they did not have a location to watch any international news in order to keep up with current events. Through the determination of ISU, especially the vice-president Shim, the TV is now functioning in Hemsén and Grotten and displays about 200 channels in numerous languages.

Follow up seminar

It was agreed amongst the members of ISU and the International Office that a follow-up seminar to the international introduction week was important to maintain contact with students and to ensure that quality of life remains relatively high at UMB. The follow-up seminar occurred on the 9th of November and was attended by about 30 students in total. The issues that were covered included winter clothing, health issues (lack of vitamin D), as well as depression during the winter season. A summary was compiled by the ISU president and vice-president and posted on the ISU website to supply this information to students that were unable to attend the seminar.

Guest Student Going Away Party

On the 9th of December we held a going away party in Samfunnet for all students, both international and Norwegian. We felt that it was important that ISU hold a party for these students to say goodbye and leave them with a positive impression of UMB. We once again cooperated with the student society to hold this event in Samfunnet. More Norwegian students came to this party than the last one and we felt that it was quite successful despite the fact that it was held during the exam period. The attendance was surprisingly high and the cooperation with Samfunnet was very good.

Winter Party

Over the winter break ISU held a party to bring the international students who stayed at Pentagon together to have some fun and spend some time together even though they were not able to be with their families. It was very well attended and everyone seemed to have a good time. This will need to be a long-standing tradition at UMB as more than 100 students often remain here throughout the holidays and incidences of depression can be quite high.

International Coffee Hour

On February 1st from 7 to 9pm we had our first International Coffee Hour in Café Klubben. Close to 60 students attended the coffee hour and we felt that it was so successful that it should be made a biweekly event. It was really well received and hopefully encouraged international students to visit Samfunnet more often. We also held it on a Wednesday evening so that afterwards people could have the opportunity to join in the festivities going on elsewhere in the building. We managed to hold two more coffee hours before the attendance dwindled to the point that it was no longer sustainable. We have decided to postpone these events until the weather improves and we can convince more people to come out and join us.

Welcome Party for New Students

On Friday, February 3rd we held a welcome party in Casino for the new international and Norwegian students on campus. This party was also very well attended by Norwegian students and by many new faces. We had a DJ play for us throughout the night and he received many good reviews. We also served homemade pizza and roasted potatoes care of our Italian social secretary and some other volunteers.

Sports Activities

Our sports committee member, Baerbel Prevost, has been working very hard to get international and Norwegian students out of their rooms and into GG Hall (our local sports gym) or the outdoors for some exercise. On Saturday, the 25th of March, ISU held a sports event for all students on campus from 15.00 to 17.00. Unfortunately, only about 20 people came, but I am happy to announce that approximately half of those present were Norwegian students. We played soccer and volleyball and the students that were there said that they enjoyed themselves a lot.

Spring Party

During the Easter holiday many international students remained in Pentagon. Therefore, we felt that it was beneficial to hold a Spring Party in order to bring students together and allow people to have some fun even though they couldn't be with their families. We served chicken, potatoes, cheese and fruit for free and many people danced until well into the night. It was well attended considering that it was the Easter holiday and we got some good responses from the people there.

POLITICAL ISSUES:

Second Election

On November 14th, ISU held an election for five new positions within the board. These positions were as follows: one webmaster, two social committee representatives, and two sports representatives. The attendance for this election was quite poor, but four positions of the five eventually were filled. The new ISU members are:

Baerbel Prevost	Sports Representative (Austria)
Miriam Venturi	Social Committee Representative (Italy) (Later promoted to Social Secretary due to unforeseen circumstances)
Eyilachew Yitayew Abate	Social Committee Representative (Ethiopia)
Eduardo Aguilar	Webmaster (Costa Rica)

ISU Website

We have successfully managed to get our website in order with the fantastic work of our webmaster Eduardo Aguilar. We have a link from the main Athene page (university information page) to our site so that it is easy to find for both Norwegian and international students. Work has been progressing nicely and some of the topics that are available are: health issues, information about the board, information about ISU central, important dates, study abroad material, activities and contact information. All of this is in English so that the international students feel that they have a place to look for information that pertains directly to them. This has been an ongoing process and we are happy to finally see results. The address for the site is www.umb.no/isu.

Constitution Revision

It became apparent that a clear constitution was needed to ensure the efficient functioning of our board. Some issues came up that we felt needed to be addressed in a general assembly. The Vice-President and myself are in the process of creating a working draft of the constitution that we hope to bring to a general assembly before the end of the year. We realize that our time is quickly disappearing, so this may not occur, but we think that it is an important issue to address before the next board takes control.

Classes in English

We had an issue at our university this year where one student from Austria was unable to take a class that was supposed to be offered in English. The professor for the class was changed at the last minute and even though the class was listed as 'English if requested' the professor refused to teach it in English. This issue has been taken to a higher political level and we have been guaranteed that this will not happen again.

Housing Payments

It has come to our attention that there are outstanding housing payments with SiÅs that total close to 135 000NOK of which 115 000NOK is due to past international students. We have not been able to have a meeting about it, as the director of SiÅs has been preoccupied with other things. We hope to have the meeting soon so that we can come to some sort of resolution that will not be detrimental to current and future international students.

Student Parliament Meetings

As is the case with all ISU branch presidents, I have attended monthly student parliament meetings where I have given reports and presentations to the rest of the student body. I have always been very well received, but the entire event is in Norwegian so I am unable to participate too much without a good translator. I would urge the next branch to fight hard to have the student parliament meetings in English.

Collaboration with UKA and SAIH

I was approached early on in the semester to collaborate with UKA to include international students in their activities next October (2006). I have had various meetings with UKA representatives and have let them know of the importance of holding events in English and keeping costs low. Also, ISU-Ås is working closely with SAIH to have a bar during UKA. It will not serve alcohol, but will have various international foods available and drinks from other countries. We are still working out the details and will pass the information on to the future ISU board.

Buddy Committee Meetings

Every year UMB has a week to introduce new students to the campus and aid in the registration process. New UMB students are paired up with Norwegian and international student buddies from previous years who work to make the transition to UMB easier. I have attended meetings with the buddy committee to ensure that international students are well represented in this event. We hope to attract more international students to volunteer as buddies than in previous years.

Meetings with Sit and International Office

I have also attended monthly meetings with the Student Information Center (Sit) and the International Office to address any concerns that the international students may have at a higher university level. The International Office at UMB has been shut down due to budget constraints and now the Student Information Center deals with the majority of their tasks. We have accomplished many issues that have already been explained above.

UPCOMING PLANS:

In addition to what we have accomplished so far this year, we are also planning a few activities for the remainder of this spring semester as well. These activities are as follows:

Ferry Trip to Denmark – for all international students. ISU will pay for food on the trip and the students will pay for their ferry tickets and whatever they spend in Copenhagen.

Continuation of the Coffee Hour – as mentioned above we hope to continue this every two weeks and attract more Norwegians to join us once the weather improves.

Sports Competitions and Fun Days – we are thinking we will have some skiing or cycling races as well as some fun sports days once the weather gets a bit warmer

Parties – we are planning to have at least one more party this semester to say goodbye to all the current international students.

Involvement with UKA – as mentioned above ISU is working with SAIH and UKA to make sure that they take international students into consideration in their planning.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

As everyone attending the National Assembly knows, ISU is not always the easiest job in the world. Throughout this year ISU-Ås has had its share of ups and downs. The majority of our issues stem from the fact that we have been without a specific local constitution. We had adopted the central ISU constitution from the inception of our local branch and have gradually grown past this. We are now in need of a refined constitution that deals with our specific needs. Some issues with board members have come up in terms of lack of attendance at meetings and inappropriate emailing that we

had no proper recourse to uphold. Instead we had to deal with such issues on a trial basis, which was not always the most efficient.

If I could offer advice to upcoming branches and future ISU board members I would say that your constitution and definition of roles and responsibilities within your branch will be the most beneficial thing you can undertake. It will make the flow of the board much more smooth.

There are other concerns that we have encountered, but those are minor in comparison to the above issues so I will not go on any longer than I already have.

NEXT ELECTION

The next elections for the ISU-Ås board members will take place in September of 2006. It is the responsibility of the local NSU International Officer to arrange the elections and this position is elected in the August of each year. Therefore the person who will be taking over the current international officer duties is unknown. However, I do plan to keep in contact with this person in case any issues come up that require my assistance.

To smoothly bring in the new board I plan to write an extensive report (not unlike this one ☺) outlining our activities and offering some potential areas to work on. I hope to have my other board members submit reports to me as well that can be passed on too. When I took over the position of president I was at a loss as to where to start and I had no information to go on. I needed to learn all the connections at the university from scratch and I refuse to put the next ISU president in the same position. If necessary I may make the trip back from Wales (where I will be studying) to ensure that the turnover is smooth and successful.

I would like to thank everyone for getting all the way through this and I hope that it is helpful for some of you who are just starting new branches. Feel free to contact me anytime if you have any questions or concerns andrea.lawsseth@student.umb.no.

Sincerely,

Andrea Lawsseth
ISU President – Ås Branch
ISU Norway Alternate Vice-President
MSc in Agroecology Program, UMB

ISU BUDGET

Activity/Issue	Date of activity/ allocation	When received / paid	Income (NOK)	Expenditure (NOK)
1) Opening Balance	*****	30-09-2005	14842,59	
2) Bank Charge	*****	31-10-2005		10,00
3) Welfare Fund Allocation	25-10-2005	04-11-2005	1000,00	
4) Old Debt from ISU Board of 2004	*****	05-11-2005		4587,00
5) Kick-Off Party	14-10-2005			5273,00
6) Transportation to Oslo for President	29-10-2005	29-10-2005		118,00
7) Election of New Board Members	29-10-2005	29-10-2005		125,50
8) Integration Fund Allocation	24-11-2005		30000,00	
9) Fare-Well Party for Guest Students	09-12-2005	21-12-2005		7276,90
10) Drinks Sold at the Guest Student Fare-Well Party	09-12-2005	09-12-2005	3248,00	
11) Winter Party	24-12-2005	22-12-2005		3341,50
12) Phone card	21-12-2005	21-12-2005		150,00
13) Office Supplies	13-01-2006	13-01-2006		25,00
14) 1st Coffee Hour	01-02-2006	01-02-2006		175,00
15) New Year's Party	03-02-2006	03-02-2006		7305,00
16) Drinks Sold at the New Year's Party	03-02-2k6	03-02-2k6	2853,00	
17) Sale of Bottles from Party	*****	09-02-2006	520,00	
18) 2 nd Coffee Hour	15-02-2006	15-02-2006		135,50
19) 3 rd coffee hour	01-03-2006	01-03-2006		119,50
20) National Assembly Participant's Fee	13-03-2006			2000,00
21) Board dinner	17-03-2006	17-03-2006		2231,00
22) 1 st Sports Event	25-03-2006	25-03-2006		139,50
23) Welfare Fund Allocation			2000,00	
24) Spring Party	15-04-2006			2944,50
25) Drinks Sold at the Spring Party	15-04-2006		1270,00	
Total:			55733,59	35956,90

Balance of Account Apr.19/06 = 19776,69NOK