



Semester report from International Students' Union – Stavanger Branch

April 21-23, 2006

National Assembly in Oslo University College

Overview

The International Students' Union (ISU) – Stavanger is located at the University of Stavanger (UiS). ISU-Stavanger is a young branch of ISU Norway and has been submitted to several changes since its establishment in 10th of February 2004.

Every semester ISU-Stavanger has considered in its vision and strategy an increase in the quality of services provided to students. This quality increase is a demand in order to give international students a high quality of life despite being abroad – away from home, family and friends. Integration is our motto and all our actions go towards reaching this goal.

The community of members in ISU - Stavanger grows every semester. In the fall semester ISU-Stavanger welcomes approximately 120 new students. In the spring semester, ISU welcomes around 40 new students. ISU-Stavanger does not have concise information about the precise number of international students on campus as it is considered confidential information, but has been informed that there are approximately 350 students. The international students that ISU/UiS welcome come for study programs in diverse areas, from Petroleum Engineering to Hotel Management. The duration / permanence in Norway of international students vary between three months and seven years. We have Erasmus students that come for just three months (the comparative education program); as well as for six months (the hotel management program). The students that come to study their entire program here learn Norwegian language and culture in the first year, followed by their three-year bachelor's and two-year master's. Some of these students even plan to complete their PhD in Stavanger.

One of the milestones achieved last semester, and reported to all branches, was a stronger sense of cooperation with the international department / international relations at UiS. This semester, this stronger cooperation increased its intensity. In January ISU accompanied and welcomed hand-in-hand with the international department, the 38 new ERASMUS students. In addition to participating in the welcoming week, ISU aided in the integration of these students, organizing a welcome party for them in one of the dormitories and keeping in close contact with the students during the transition period, having events going on every week.

ISU continues to be engaged actively in issues concerning students, striving every day for a more international UiS campus with the needed infra-structures, especially language based structures.

Rewind

Since October 2005, ISU has been striving for new office accommodation and also for more space in the website. ISU received a larger office (17m²), which is located in the main campus. It is near the Norwegian language and culture students, which is one of the largest groups of students (approximately 50). With the new office facilities, ISU hopes to be able to keep in closer contact with all the international students. As all the organisations from UiS campus will be placed in the same building, this will facilitate increased partnerships / co-operation and improved communication systems.

Harmonious power transfer

ISU held elections on February 14th, 2006. Our election process was coordinated by a third party, StOr. None of the candidates were involved in this process. The previous board officially transferred their positions to the new executives on the same day, February 14th.

All the officers received a job description and continued with the projects / activities already in progress. This was decided in order to promote continuity in ISU work and also to guarantee the welfare of the members (previous and new).

As the majority of the board is constituted by students that have been studying already for one semester at UiS / Stavanger, and had been a part of the union in the previous semester, the new board members integrated easily in their duties. Officers meet every Tuesday at 16.15 for a one hour brainstorming of ISU Stavanger's plan of action for the coming week.

Challenges accomplished

ISU got the opportunity to show that it is not only a party union, and that students can contact its services for every single matter that affects their integration in Stavanger. ISU is still considered the second biggest and second most important union on campus - after StOr - as we have the same objectives as StOr, but directed towards the international students.

This promotional image of ISU, as relevant union in UiS, led ISU to receive the biggest office facilities in the new location. The office includes all the amenities available in the previous office (printer, PC and free phone).

Last semester questions were raised about integration of International students in Norwegian society in Stavanger after an article was published in a Norwegian newspaper. Hugin, the local student newspaper wondered if Stavanger branch identified the same matters and issues that Oslo international students were experiencing. To be able to answer to this question, ISU developed a survey in which it is possible to evaluate both international students perspective towards the Norwegians and vice-versa. We are waiting for final permission to use University quest-back to open the survey to all UiS students.

Infrastructures Created:

ISU received the opportunity to be involved in several activities which help to facilitate the students' presence in Stavanger. By developing a campaign to collect kitchen / room materials from students that were returning home, ISU can now provide this material to a number of new students free of charge, dependent upon the amount of materials donated. We are trying to encourage this practice so that it may become a tradition helping to create a cheaper student life in Norway.

ISU Stavanger also bought a coffee machine and an electric kettle so we can provide tea or coffee to our students during their class breaks. Officers are stationed in the office on a rotating schedule. The purpose of this time is to develop ISU's work / plan of activities and to have an open door to students whenever they want or need to reach us.

The strategy of uniting efforts with all the organisations/unions on campus begun last semester has revealed very positive. The Engasjert campaign will continue, but will work in cooperation with the fadder program during the opening of the semester, manifesting itself as a unified program lasting two weeks. We will join hands with all the unions on campus and we will provide two unforgettable weeks for the UiS students. This project will take place in august 2006.

This semester all the 17 positions in the board were filled. ISU Stavanger felt the lack of webmasters during the last semester and its website was not updated during that period. Now we are working to develop a website that is informative to the students studying in Stavanger and for those who will come to Stavanger.

We are still working to develop a communication system that captures the attention of both Norwegian and international students. SiS continues to give ISU Stavanger all the necessary

support to publish announcements and a few short articles placed on announcements page in the student newspaper Hugin.

International day, developed in co-operation with the UiS international department, turned out to be a success. The objective for the international day was to promote other cultures and traditions, but mainly to capture attention from Norwegian students for the Erasmus programs offered through UiS. There were stands representing the various countries available for study exchanges, providing information about the universities and programs. Around 36 international students and ISU contributed by preparing food and organizing the entertainment. The idea of having international students present was also to allow the students to share experiences. The event was a success both for international department and ISU-Stavanger, as ISU received more visibility.

Budget

Last year ISU Stavanger received a fund of 17.500,-kr. This year ISU applied for a 53.250,- kr budget and got 22.000,- kr. ISU was assured by SiS – Welfare system that even though we did not receive the whole amount, this should not be an hindrance to performing our activities. ISU always has the possibility of applying for special funding; again SiS never closed doors to ISU. The new treasurer is also trying to obtain new sources of sponsorship in order to provide a wider number of activities to international students.

Mistakes from the past:

We alert every ISU representative to be careful in the information given to journalists and to ask every time for quotation check. In past ISU-Stavanger was misunderstood and didn't have the chance to correct it.

Plans for next board elections:

Elections will be held in September and ISU-Stavanger is willing to promote its' image and engagement in its' activities with students throughout the end of July/beginning of August while the new students are arriving. Being a part of the fadder week, ISU will have two weeks to engage students in its activities.

ISU-Stavanger believes that first time contact with international students is very important. It is during this first time, the pick up service, that a welcome pack will be given to the students

containing information on how they can get involved and the advantages they will have in doing so. ISU used this strategy at the beginning of the current semester and three of the students that arrived in the Spring semester got involved within the first week; ISU thinks that this is extremely positive and important. Being a part of the welcoming week also helped us to show our support to the students, let them know about our duties, and how significant we are to their international experience.

To have a “voice” in the welcoming pack provided by the international department is extremely relevant. Last year we intended to send, together with the information from the international department, a brief description of ISU, its’ activities from the past and a calendar of the coming activities. By providing this information to the students we are gaining opportunities to see the democratic values grow in Stavanger.

Our elections are conducted through a third party, StOr. In General Assembly; we vote for which people will collect the votes. The people involved cannot be candidates to any of the positions. They must also be a neutral party. There will be three polling stations. One located at the main building cantina entrance, the second at the Institute of Music and Dance. The third polling station will be a mobile station. This will go to the teaching rooms of the main programs such as: Norwegian Language and Culture (around 50), Petroleum Master 1st and 2nd year (40) and Hotel Management (Erasmus program). Through the mobile station, ISU gets higher participation from the international students. It gives them freedom to decide if they want to vote or not. Students are not obliged to vote, this just makes it easier for them to do so.

Events:

Pyjama party;

Trip to Denmark - Hanstholm;

Football tournament;

Dinner at Turkish restaurant;

Farewell party December;

Welcome party January;

2nd Birthday party for ISU Stavanger;

Farewell party April;

International day;

Trip to Denmark - Hirtshals.

Upcoming Events:

Table tennis, chess, cards, backgammon competitions;

Spring party (spring-roll party);

Dinner at Chinese restaurant;

Barbeques;

International dinners;

Movie night;

Bowling;

New amigos meeting;

International film & culture festival;

Achievements from the last NA

ISU Stavanger brought two topics to the last NA which had the following (re)solutions:

■ ISU in Student Parliament

The importance of having a voice in the highest institution of student politics has been shown to be necessary and compulsory. ISU should have a voice in the parliament.

ISU Stavanger obtained an elected voice in Parliament.

Still there is no rule or regulation that obliges Stavanger student parliament to have a permanent / non elective seat for ISU. ISU will continue fighting for a secured position in Parliament.

■ Equality of opportunities in studies with a crystal clear program

In order to provide greater equality in the studies to the foreign students, more care should be taken in providing reading material in Bokmål, avoiding the added difficulties presented by the Danish, Swedish or Nynorsk languages.

Lectures are still held in Nynorsk and Swedish. Students still complain about their difficulties and unequal opportunities of studying in Norway.

Larger aims / proposals for discussion – possible resolutions for 2006

■ Quota-program students

ISU- Stavanger gives support to ISU-NHH and to other ISU branches that presented this problem last NA. ISU-Stavanger students under the quota program also have to wait approximately two months to receive their identification number. When arriving in Stavanger students bring information from their home countries that the scholarship will be deposited in approximately two weeks. None of the students were given money before **two months** (as they received their personal number two months after arrival).

ISU requires the support from ISU Norway, NSU and from StL to reach this goal – that these international students under these specific conditions have priority to get their ID number.

International students can only receive equal opportunities to study if they have the needed support to do it.

■ Obligatory exam/project regulations course

Last semester ISU Stavanger faced an increasing number of international students or students with international background, who used non-permitted material during exams or used quotes in projects without respecting intellectual property rights, (which implies quotation of author when using ideas from those authors).

Some of the students come from countries with completely different educational policies and so they are unaware of what is or is not allowed in the exams. Some of the study programs with higher representation of international students are having a course informing students about the exam regulations at UiS. It is compulsory for some programs, but for others the course is not a part of the program. ISU would like to propose that all Norwegian universities have a compulsory course on the Norwegian educational system, which can be included in the welcoming week where all the rules for examinations and compulsory course work are clearly stated.

■ Essential information in English at the universities

ISU Stavanger strives locally to ensure that the essential information is provided in English throughout the campus. New signs in both Norwegian and English were promised to ISU Stavanger. New signs are being put up, but just in Norwegian. ISU requests support from national level institutions to explain to the Norwegian minister of education and rectors from the universities that a high quality standard at a university is only achieved when all students are included in the system. At a minimum, ISU Stavanger wishes the menus in cafeterias to be listed in both Norwegian and English, important news in newspapers that concerns international students be written in English, all information from faculties to be available in both English and Norwegian, in addition to exam registrations, re-sit exam application, etc.

It is not the duty of the university employees to be able to explain to us how to fill in a form. We should be able to understand / read it on our own. Without national support, ISU Stavanger will have a silent campaign with wall full of information in other languages. ISU will ask for support from all students, international and Norwegians, to show their support so local authorities can “wake up” to this important issue. Lack of information in English throughout the campus makes international students’ life harder and doesn’t allow them to integrate easily into the university community.

Thank you for your attention,

Best Regards from ISU-Stavanger branch and see you all soon!

Note: You can find our contacts and constitution in attachment.

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Note: All officers will seat from February until September except Verena and Christiane due to their study programs – replacements will be announced when justified.