

The challenges of internationalization

International faculty in the teaching and learning environment at the Department of Political Science

Internationalization is a key focus in the 2012-2016 strategy of the Department of Political Science and is being actively promoted these years. Results have started to show. There are more international faculty as well as more international students coming into the department.

From the strategy: "If the department is to be among the leading political science departments in the world, it requires that the department is continuously developed as a pluralistic one with a great deal of diversity when it comes to theoretical and methodological positions, national, educational and disciplinary backgrounds..." "[internationalization] contributes to higher quality – in research, teaching and education".

Main focus: It has been openly acknowledge by the leadership of the department that the internationalization process is not easy or unproblematic and it therefore requires reflection and solid discussion. One of the question that the leadership has put forward is "how can we as a department and colleagues make sure that our international faculty is integrated societally as well as professionally?" It is this question that guides this THLE project focusing especially on how to integrate international faculty at the teaching and learning environment at the department.

The international faculty at the department comes from different countries and cultures and often also from very different teaching and learning environments – not only different teaching and learning cultures with different expectations to, and perceptions of, the roles and tasks that the teachers and the students have, but also with different requirements for planning and conducting courses and not least for the assessments of students.

Main question: How can the guidance and help given to international faculty be improved also strengthening the teaching and learning environment including the student learning at the department?

Argument: Need to become more aware and explicit about our own, i.e. the Danish, teaching and learning culture – that is, the system of beliefs, expectations and practices – in order to better guide and help the international faculty about how to teach, supervise and assess in this culture.

Methods and data: Interviews with several - new and old - international faculty at the department in the autumn 2014/spring 2015 using a semi-structured interviewguide.

The department as of spring 2015 has 5 international permanent staff members equal to 9 percent of the permanent staff. The stated goal is that within the next 5-10 years the international permanent staff should make up 20-25 percent.

International faculty brings in different networks and different sources of funding as well as different work ethics.

"Learning – effect-full teaching – is culturally conditioned"

What do we actually mean when we say "encourage independent and critical thinking"? How to teach that? And how to promote 'reflective learning'?



What are the best strategies for becoming more explicit?

How to make teaching and learning assumptions visible?

Example of questions: "Do you find the teaching and learning environment at the department different from what you have been use to?" "In what way/how?" "Are the Danish students different?" (different learning practices and processes?)

"Why do I need a external examiner at the oral exams? Does the department not trust me?"

"Students really take their exams in groups!!" ... "Why do they do that?"

"I never knew if my Danish students showed up for class"

"The students have no motivation to be active in class and I had no enforcement mechanism"

Main findings:

- The Danish higher education system is very special and somewhat complicated and difficult to engage in and with.
- In particular the role of the teacher and the character of as well as the tone in the relationship between the teacher and the students are surprising and difficult for many.
- It is difficult to understand why and to get use to how grading and testing are not part of the daily teaching and learning environment and of power relations in a Danish higher education classroom – that means how there is no or little control of student attendance and student performance during the semester.

"It took me months to get use to the students calling me by my first name"

"The student-teacher relationship in Denmark is almost blasphemously egalitarian compered to Germany"

"The Danish students are very, and often too, independent"

"The grading scale in Denmark is very different and difficult to use"

Suggestions and recommendations:

- Start a kind of mentor system for international faculty. Get it institutionalized and included as part of the workload scheme at the department.
- Give an introduction to the structure and the development of the higher education system in Denmark as well as to the development of the philosophy and pedagogical thinking behind.
- Prepare a welcome package including information about the rules and regulations as well as the important deadlines and administrative staff when teaching courses at the department.
- Give an introduction to the different assessment options, e.g. what is a synopsis exam, and to the grading system in Denmark and the thinking behind it, e.g. how to see and use it compared with the A/B/C (+/-) system.

Readings:

- Blasco, Maribel & Charles Tackney (2013). "If it ain't broken, don't fix it: internationalization and the erosion of the positive hidden curriculum in Danish higher education", *International Journal of Management in Education*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 341-359
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