



## Minutes from Programme Committee meeting in Master of Science in Economics (M-ECON)

Date: 26.02.2021  
Location: Zoom session

Attendees: Roberto J. Garcia, Mette Wik, Stein Holden, Ståle Navrud, Torun Fretheim, Nour Nabil Karim, Jenny Krogstad, Kateryna Krutskykh

Note Taker: Kateryna Krutskykh

### Agenda for the meeting:

1. Results from Studiebarometer survey
2. Strategic plan for 2021 – general
3. Strategic plan for 2021 – synergies in M-ECON and MØA courses/specializations
4. Thesis advising evaluation
5. Miscellaneous info or announcements, future issues to discuss

### Items to be approved

Resolution: [Minutes from 09.11.20 meeting](#) were approved.

### Action Items:

Item 1/21:	<b>Results from Studiebarometer survey</b>																									
<i>Item information:</i>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><b>Economics</b> Masters, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås Website: <a href="https://www.nmbu.no/">https://www.nmbu.no/</a>  Number of respondents: 8 (53,3%) Data is from 2020 NB: few respondents ?</p> </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><b>Master's Programme in Economics</b> Masters, University of Bergen, Bergen Website: <a href="https://www.uib.no/">https://www.uib.no/</a>  Number of respondents: 10 (41,7%) Data is from 2020 NB: few respondents ?</p> </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><b>Economics</b> Masters, NTNU, Trondheim Website: <a href="https://www.ntnu.no/">https://www.ntnu.no/</a>  Number of respondents: 7 (63,6%) Data is from 2020 NB: few respondents ?</p> </div> </div> <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Teaching &gt; Teaching and dissemination of knowledge</th> <th>Feedback &gt; Feedback from academic staff</th> <th>Expectations &gt; The academic staff's expectations of the students</th> <th>Study environment &gt; Social and academic environment, facilities and equipment</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>Economics</b> Masters, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås</td> <td> 3,4</td> <td> 3,0</td> <td> 3,2</td> <td> 2,3</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Master's Programme in Economics</b> Masters, University of Bergen, Bergen</td> <td> 4,0</td> <td> 3,5</td> <td> 3,3</td> <td> 3,8</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Economics</b> Masters, NTNU, Trondheim</td> <td> 3,8</td> <td> 3,2</td> <td> 3,2</td> <td> 4,1</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Average</b> Of all Economics</td> <td> 3,5</td> <td> 3,1</td> <td> 3,0</td> <td> 3,4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Teaching > Teaching and dissemination of knowledge	Feedback > Feedback from academic staff	Expectations > The academic staff's expectations of the students	Study environment > Social and academic environment, facilities and equipment	<b>Economics</b> Masters, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås	3,4	3,0	3,2	2,3	<b>Master's Programme in Economics</b> Masters, University of Bergen, Bergen	4,0	3,5	3,3	3,8	<b>Economics</b> Masters, NTNU, Trondheim	3,8	3,2	3,2	4,1	<b>Average</b> Of all Economics	3,5	3,1	3,0	3,4
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	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Organisation &gt;</b> Information, administration, academic coherence</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Working life &gt;</b> Information about and contact with working life</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Inspiration &gt;</b> Whether the study programme engages and challenges students</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Overall assessment &gt;</b> Students' overall satisfaction with the study programme</p> </div> </div> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"><b>Economics</b> Masters, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås</td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Master's Programme in Economics</b> Masters, University of Bergen, Bergen</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Economics</b> Masters, NTNU, Trondheim</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Average</b> Of all Economics</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p style="color: blue; text-decoration: underline;"><a href="#">Results from Studiebarometer survey 2020</a></p>	<b>Economics</b> Masters, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås					<b>Master's Programme in Economics</b> Masters, University of Bergen, Bergen					<b>Economics</b> Masters, NTNU, Trondheim					<b>Average</b> Of all Economics				
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<b>Resolution:</b>	This discussion was taken up with the follow-up on the periodic meeting.																				

<b>Item 2/21:</b>	<b>Strategic plan for 2021 – general</b>
<b>Item information:</b>	<p>The strategic plan does not specify any concrete actions to be taken for the M-ECON program.</p> <p>2.1. Does the change in the name of the program to Applied Economics and Sustainability require a re-alignment of course descriptions and learning outcomes to the new name where it is relevant and appropriate?</p> <p>2.2. <a href="#">Periodic meeting 2021: discussions/observations</a></p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">2.2.1 Issues related to groups, group work and social cohesion</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">2.2.2 Continued use of short videos (15-30 minutes) after corona</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">2.2.3 Flipping the classroom, problem sets, exercises, presenting &amp; feedback</p> <p>2.3. Covid-19 and spring 2021: Grade in courses in M-ECON, spring 2021: pass/fail or letter grade; exams during scheduled time</p>
<b>Discussion:</b>	<p>2.1 New name for M-ECON program: Applied Economics and Sustainability The name change has no real implication for the courses, specializations or learning outcomes or activities.</p> <p>2.2 Study barometer survey results and minutes of the periodic meeting</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">2.2.1 Study barometer results: All indicators were low and lower than last year. The scores were lower across the board relative to UB and NTNU, except for “students’ expectations”. The score for the overall assessment was higher than the score for any individual component. This is the reverse of the usual result, where the overall score is lower than for individual categories. The big take-aways are to further engage students in groupwork, specific tasks</p>

	<p>related to the courses, and opportunities for students to give each other feedback on their work. More feedback is required from course responsible on the specific tasks that are assigned. More worklife related relevance in the courses/program is also desirable.</p> <p>2.2.2 Summary of the periodic meeting – There were four issues that came up: (1) group formation, groupwork, and social cohesion; (2) continued use of short videos; (3) flipping the classroom, problem solving exercises, discussion questions, presentations and feedback; and (4) BUS350 Introduction to Data Analytics to become a requirement in M-ECON.</p> <p>One central issue for this discussion is that students noted that instructors did not have strong ambitions for them in the classes. Students lack motivation and admitted to spending little time on their schoolwork. The discussions centered around assigning more groupwork (and attention to how groups are formed) and to assigned tasks, both inside class time and outside class time. There was general agreement of how important was having more organized activities of this sort. The short videos have often been noted as being very helpful. Having short videos can be a substitute for lectures, freeing up time during scheduled lectures to use for supervision and group work. The short video can raise discussion questions to which students must prepare answers to discussion during the next lecture session. Short videos might help increase the likelihood of participation (or lower the bar of resistance to participating in discussions) in assigned tasks.</p> <p>There were important insights and observations shared. During this semester, many students have not shown up for class discussion, defeating the purpose of some exercises. Instead, it seems that the short videos have been used as a substitute for attending lectures when discussions are held. Second, while the videos free up time during lectures, there needs to be more resources for mentoring, advising, and giving groups the desired structure for discussions and feedback on their tasks. If the push is for more group activities and feedback, then more resources must be dedicated to that end. Finally, variation is important across courses. The activities must be tailored to what is appropriate in each course, avoiding assessing the same learning outcomes. here cannot be a semester project, for example, required in each course as this will likely defeat the purpose of achieving a learning outcome.</p>
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Item 3/21:	<b>Strategic plan for 2021 – synergies in M-ECON and MØA courses/specializations</b>
<i>Item information:</i>	<p>3.1. <a href="#">BUS350 Introduction to Data Analytics (5 ECTS, Dag Einar Sommervoll)</a></p> <p>This is a new course being introduced for the M-ØA program beginning in autumn 2021. The contents of the course are relevant for ECN301 Econometrics and Olvar has expressed strong interests in having this required for M-ECON students. Dag Einar is open to having M-ECON</p>

	<p>students and agreed to teach the course in English. It is proposed that the course be required for M-ECON students, autumn semester of year 1. This would imply an increase to 55 ECTS in required coursework but would contribute to strengthening the methods toolbox and data analysis in the program.</p> <p><a href="#">Updated M-ECON if BUS350 is included</a></p> <p>3.2. Environment, Climate and Energy specialization with M-ØA students</p> <p>3.3. Joint specialization in Agribusiness and Food Economics: ECN263 Food Industry Economics (5 ETCS) introduced in Jun 2020; ECN330 Economic Integration and Trade Liberalization (10 ECTS) in autumn 2021. Probably too early for any feedback on how this is progressing.</p>
<p><i>Discussion:</i></p>	<p>3.1 BUS350 Introduction to Data Analytics:</p> <p>The issue of making this course a requirement for M-ECON students was raised, increasing the number of required credits to 55 from 50. The program leader went through the requirements in all specializations and confirms that having it required in the autumn of the first year is possible and does not pose any hardship for students completing the program in the given time. Second, the subject matter is very relevant for ECN301 Econometrics and was something that Olvar was very keen on having as a pre-requisite. The applied nature of the program also means this course would add to the toolbox of quantitative and analytical skills. There were no objections to having this added as either a requirement or strongly suggested course. Given Olvar's preference, it is suggested to make it a requirement. It was approved as a motion. However, there were some issues to consider.</p> <p>First, it was noted that the name and context was a bit odd for a 300-level course. Is there are reason why is the course set at the 300-level? Why should the word "Introduction" be included in the title if the course is at the 300-level? Second, and more important is how does BUS350 differ from INF230 Data Processing and Analysis? This is a course that also can be taught in English if requested. The problem is that INF230 is 10 ECTS and this will no longer be possible to add as a required course.</p> <p>3.2 Environment, Climate and Energy specialization with M-ØA students</p> <p>Discussions were held with the relevant economics teaching staff and M-ØA to ensure the needs are met across both programs. The conclusion was that there needs to be work life related activities for the students. This could involve guest lectures, field trips, mentoring programs (from government and business), and summer internships. The mentoring and internship programs are being discussed above the program council level and resources need to be committee to it so that someone is directly responsible for seeking applications and partners from government and business. It was noted that there are already ministries and directorates that have summer internship programs. Too often there are not enough applicants from economics students (e.g., energy, transport, and health). The involvement of post-docs could be an important resource to this end.</p>

	<p>The person responsible should be made aware of these existing possibilities.</p> <p>3.3 Agribusiness and Food Economics joint specialization</p> <p>It is too early to get formal feedback on how this program is progressing. The involvement of government and business in the ECE specialization will be used as a template for work life involvement under this specialization as well. It was noted that there could be important synergies between Agribusiness and Food Economics and Bioeconomy.</p>
<i>Post-meeting follow-up discussion</i>	<p>3.1 Requiring BUS350</p> <p>It was questioned why BUS350 should have a 300-level code. BUS350 is as much a master's course for economics students as ECN302 is. Perhaps ECN302 is a bachelor level course for engineering students, but it builds on the modest mathematics background that economists have in their bachelor's degree. program. Requiring BUS350 still will be a big equalizer for foreign students and students who have not taken a bachelor's degree from NMBU.</p> <p>Another issue raised was why INF230 could not be used instead of BUS350 given the overlapping material covered. INF230, a 10-ECTS course, is provided by Realtek and is based on two other Realtek courses. As a 5-ECTS course, it fills a gap in the existing program and fits within the current study program for all M-ECON specializations.</p> <p>Finally, whether the course title includes the work "introduction" will be left up to the course responsible to address.</p>

Item 4/21:	<b>Thesis evaluation and assessment in M-ECON</b>
<i>Item information:</i>	<p>4.1. Joint theses written in pairs either with ECON or M-ØA candidate</p> <p>4.2. Standardization of evaluation criteria for written work and oral defense</p> <p>4.3. Oral defenses must be done individually; the presentation of the work can be done as a team – then one candidate is dismissed while individual exams taken in turn</p> <p>4.4. For M-ECON candidate writing with a M-ØA candidate, an individual oral exam is still required, including a member of the M-ECON faculty</p> <p><a href="#">See NMBU Academic Regulations (p.41)</a></p>
<i>Discussion:</i>	<p>4.1 Jointly-written theses in M-ECON</p> <p>4.2 Standardization of evaluation criteria for written work</p> <p>4.3 Oral presentation and defense processes for joint theses</p> <p>4.4 Candidates jointly writing a thesis between M-ECON and M-ØA</p> <p>NMBU regulations allow for joint written theses and this is to be optional for M-ECON students. Guidelines were drafted for the criteria over which a written thesis should be evaluated and assessed. These were discussed and distributed among the M-ECON faculty in Nov 2020. However, a more substantive matter arose involving the final defense (presentation and oral</p>

defense). Because most M-ECON theses at present are individually written and defended, we need a system that ensures that all M-ECON students defend their work individually. Guidelines were drafted for the criteria over which a presentation and oral defense was to be evaluated and assessed. These criteria were discussed by the M-ECON faculty. However, the program council noted there are different methods in which this might be done. This should be left to the advisor and external sensor to arrange. The two methods proposed each last about one hour.

Methods for presentation and oral defense of a jointly written thesis	
Method 1.	Method 2.
Students jointly present the thesis (about 20 minutes)	Candidate 1 presents the thesis individually (10 minutes) followed by an oral defense (20 minutes) Candidate 2 presents the thesis individually (10 minutes) followed by an oral defense (20 minutes)
Candidate 1. Individually defends the thesis (20 minutes)	
Candidate 2. Individually defends the thesis (20 minutes)	

Regardless of the method, the advisor and external sensor would ask the same questions of the two candidates. Of course, the direction of the discussion will differ based on the answer to the questions, but the starting point should be the same. The presentation/oral defense will contribute to an overall grade on the thesis, but the grade received can differ between candidates. The presentation and oral defense will allow for marginal changes in the grade in the written work, either up or down (as per university regulations).

Administratively, we would have to inform the students of the method and process of the presentation and oral defense ahead of time, and the order in which they will defend. All this would be specified once the date and time is arranged for the defense.

Item 5/21:	<b>Miscellaneous info or announcements, future issues to discuss</b>
<i>Item information:</i>	<p>5.1. Internships or mentorships: competitive; especially for joint specializations – more information will be forthcoming when Head of Academic Affairs and the Dean take up the matter formally.</p> <p>5.2. Sabbatical leave:</p> <p>There are only minor implications for the courses normally taught by faculty who will be on sabbatical leave during 2021-22.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stein Holden (2021-22) – ECN350 Development and Global Change will not be offered in spring 2022; ECN304 Behavioral Economics will not be taught; and ECN303 Impact Assessment is a required course for M-ECON and will be taught by PhD students. The specialization in Development and Global Change will not be possible for those entering program in Aug 2021.</li> </ul>

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• K. Rickertsen (2021-22) – Aida Ardebili (PhD candidate) will take responsibility for both ECN302 and ECN311; served as a TA in 2020-21.</li></ul> |
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5.3. Cancellation of the social event: it was noted that the social event was twice cancelled and is postponed as an end-of-semester social gathering, Covid-19 restrictions permitting.