

Letter to Rector Curt Rice

Dear Rector Rice,

In this serious corona pandemic situation, we urge OsloMet to pay attention to the international students at our institution, and in Norway generally, and the particular challenges that they are facing. Most international students on Erasmus+ exchange programs have probably returned to their home countries, but students at the master programmes seem to stay. The overwhelming majority of international master's students are self-financed. Norwegian authorities require students from outside the EU/EEA to have and to demonstrate an amount equal to one year's student loan in their bank account at the start of the academic year, as a condition for renewing their student visa.

To make ends meet, they are usually, like their Norwegian colleagues, dependent on a regular income from part-time work. Many have lost this paid work as this type of employment – typically in bars and restaurants – has been closed down because of the public policy measures against the pandemic. Many students now doing the first year of their master's degree are, as a result, at real risk of having to leave at the start of next semester, without completing their degree. In addition to the stress and disruption this would cause, it may also lead some to abandon their studies entirely. To take an example, the master programme in International Education and Development has 25 students in the first year, of whom 14 are international (13 from sub-Saharan Africa and one from Asia).

Earlier this week, the Parliament announced a new crisis package which included students. However, international students, in a more difficult position, seem to have been left without any security net. We therefore ask you to raise the issue, perhaps in conjunction with other rectors in the Norwegian higher education sector, by contacting the ministers of higher education and of international co-operation to advocate for direct support and accompanying policy responses so that our international students can remain and complete their studies.

It is important to keep up the positive aspects of internationalization also in this time of crisis, and academic institutions should reconfirm their humanist traditions of international solidarity.

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Axel Borchgrevink, IST

Tom Griffiths, IST

Einar Braathen, NIBR

Hanne Svarstad, IST

Yuri Kasahara, NIBR

Gagan Chhabra, Institutt for sosialfag

Berit Aasen, NIBR

Anne Waldrop, IST

Kristen Nordhaug, IST

Sissel Egden, IST
Thorgeir Kolshus, IST
Anne Birgitta Nilsen, IST
Jo Helle-Valle, IST
Elise Margrethe Vike Johannessen, IST
Rebecca Skretteberg, IST
Berit Helene Vandsemb, IST
Åse Røthing, IST
Randi Havnen, IST
Per Inge Båtnes, IST
Odmund Toft, IST
Halla Bjørk Holmarsdottir, LUI
Cato Christensen, IST
Johan Hjulstad, IST
Hilde Haualand, IST
Benedikte Victoria Lindskog, IST
Tatjana Radanovic Felberg, IST
Lars Gule, IST
Mikhail Kharakoz, IST
Tone Horntvedt, IST
Vibeke Bø, IST
Claudia Steidl Talgo, IST
Hanne Skaaden, IST
Eva Abildgaard, IST
Arnfinn Muruvik Vonen, IST
Anders Breidlid, IST
Simon Pahle, IST