

ERASMUS MUNDUS – NORWEGIANS DOWN UNDER

Ragnfrid Lie and Mari Elken from Oslo are the first intakes to the Centre for Higher Education Management & Policy (CHEMP) at the University of New England as part of the Erasmus Mundus program. Ragnfrid and Mari are working towards an international Masters Degree in Higher Education, coordinated by the University of Oslo. CHEMP has been selected by the European Commission to be the Australian partner to this degree program.



Mari and Frida in the UNE student forecourt

Our Erasmus Mundus experience started without us even knowing it. We began the Masters Programme in Higher Education at the University of Oslo in August 2004, and a few weeks later we were thrilled to find out that our course had been accepted as an Erasmus Mundus programme. This meant scholarships for our non-European students, and for all of us it meant highly skilled professors from all over the world visiting us and giving lectures and seminars. It also gave us the opportunity to study at three different universities in Europe and thereby get a joint degree from Tampere (Finland), Aveiro (Portugal) and Oslo (Norway).

Erasmus Mundus is a European high profile, high-quality co-operation and mobility programme supporting the best Masters courses to enhance mobility of students and scholars. In addition to our Norwegian lecturers, we have also had professors come to Oslo from Australia, South Africa, France, the Netherlands, USA and Finland. The lectures and seminars have been of outstanding quality and highly inspiring. Another positive aspect is the fact that we have students from all over the world: China, USA, Canada, Somalia, Indonesia, Belarus as well as several other European countries. This multicultural environment has made our classroom discussions very interesting, and it has given us a wonderful opportunity to understand more of national and regional differences as well as international relations regarding higher education.

Our interest in higher education developed from quite different starting points. Frida has a language bachelor's degree. She works at the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and

wanted to develop her knowledge in order to better understand the Norwegian higher education sector and how it relates to the international arena. Mari started from a very different angle, as she has a bachelors in art and teaching and from there developed an interest in teaching art in higher education as well as higher education in general. Higher Education systems all over the world have gone through or are in the middle of profound changes. Since the world is getting more global, no higher education system works in an isolated national context. This makes international programmes and co-operations so much more valuable. What an interesting time to be studying higher education!

After one year of study at the University of Oslo we found out about the Action 3 partnerships within Erasmus Mundus. This gave us a wonderful opportunity to visit institutions outside Europe and take part of our course there and get a personal experience of how higher education systems and institutions work in other parts of the world. In addition to our four weeks here at the University of New England, Armidale we will visit Obirin University in Tokyo in April 2006. These visits add an extremely important level in understanding the differences between national practices.

Coming to Australia seemed a bit scary in the beginning, as this is about as far as you can get from Norway. On the other hand, Australia has some of the world's leading universities that attract students from all over the world. We were therefore extremely excited to be able to study here for four weeks.

Late October, we left a cold, dark and partly snowy Oslo behind us, and after an exhausting journey of approximately 30 hours, we were delighted to breathe some warm spring air and finally have some steady ground under our feet.



Frida and Mari with lecturing staff from CHEMP, Dr Fiona Wood and A/Professor Leo Goedegebuure

The welcome we received at the University of New England in Armidale, particularly from the Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy (<http://fehps.une.edu.au/CHEMP>) was wonderful. The facilities are very good, even though getting used to a Mac proved to be a bit of a challenge. Having the professors available for discussion at our own initiative in a non-classroom environment is a very good setting for learning, and we feel very fortunate! We know this is not the way all students experience their master courses, which is one of the things that makes our Erasmus Mundus programme so special.

We both hope that our experiences here at the University of New England and other parts of Australia will prove useful in our future careers. We certainly feel that the entire programme has become an experience of a lifetime!