Institutional self-assessment: Education

BA-, MA and PhD programmes in economics

Department of Economics
University of Oslo
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1. Organisation and resources

The Department of Economics is the largest and highest ranked institute for economic research in Norway. The Department offers a Bachelor's programme, an integrated five year master programme, a two year master programme, as well as a doctoral programme with approximately 40 students. We are also in the process of establishing a one-year program in economics, the estimate is that this programme will be ready for student admission in the autumn semester of 2018. The department hosts a Centre of Excellence funded by the Research Council of Norway; Centre of Equality, Social Organization and Performance (ESOP). We have an administration that focuses especially on the education at the department, and a separate administration in charge of the research. In total we have 61 employees in the academic staff, and 10 permanent employees in the administrative staff. We have currently about 500 active students in our study programs.

We are located in Oslo, at the main campus of the University. This is favorable in terms of recruitment of both students and staff. This also makes it easier to draw on external expertise as guest lectures, co-supervisors and external examiners.

The Department also benefits from being a part of a strong university and the Faculty of Social Sciences. We have a well-developed administrative support system. The scientific staff is offered high quality pedagogical training from the Faculty of Educational Sciences. Our students have access to extensive welfare services, and also to career guidance services both at University and Faculty level.

Our courses are also part of an optional specialization amongst the Faculty of Social Sciences’ three interdisciplinary bachelor programmes in Internasjonale studier (international studies), Offentlig administrasjon og ledelse (Public administration and management), and Utviklingsstudier (Development Studies). If students on these programmes follow the specialization in economics, they qualify to apply to our two year master’s programme in economics. The size of the university in combination with student’s opportunities to either specialize in economics, or choose economics as a 40-group or free courses allows us to maintain a broader repertoire of thematic courses. It also means that there may be large differences in prior qualifications in economics of the students in some courses. Such large differences clearly make teaching more challenging. One measure to limit the differences that we use on many of our courses is to have prerequisite knowledge in terms of required or suggested courses. The diverse background of the students, combined with the fact that Oslo is a fairly large city and students may live everywhere in the city and the surroundings, is that it can be challenging to create unity among the students. We devote considerable resources to counteract this, as we will elaborate further in the report.

The department’s economy has been strong in the recent years. This makes it possible to spend resources on introducing new courses, increase seminar teaching and use external guest lectures. However, it is worth noting that the economic surplus reflects a high success rate in attracting externally funded research projects, from the Research council, ERC grants, etc.
2. Initial competence

The event “Open day” is once a year (in March) held at different universities and university colleges in the Oslo region. The University of Oslo is no exemption, and the faculties organizes the event in cooperation with the different departments. Open day is a very important event for recruiting new students to the bachelor- and five-year master programs. However, we also undertake school visits regularly throughout the year to recruit potential students. The visits may be organized by The faculty or the departments.

The bachelor programme has had a reasonably high GPA\(^1\) admission requirement of 56.3, while the GPA admission requirement in the five-year masters programme is somewhat lower at 53.7\(^1\). For both programs, we require “generell studiekompetanse”, and for the five-year master’s programme we also require Mathematics at high school level (R1 or S1+S2). This math requirement might be one reason why the regular GPA requirement is higher at the bachelor’s programme.

A considerable fraction of our students have chosen economics in high school, which may have contributed to their interest in economics. At the student evaluation conducted last fall, 25% of the first year students (which also includes some students from other subjects who follow one or a few economics courses) answered that they had taken economics at the high school level. Among students in the third year, 40% answered that they had taken economics at the high school level. The increase may reflect that students who have some prior knowledge of the subject are less likely to quit in the first year. The Faculty is currently conducting a study on the reasons that many students quit during their study.

By introducing the one year programme in economics, we hope to recruit students who are unsure on whether to embark on a full bachelor’s degree in economics. They will be given the opportunity to try out economics, and then they can either transfer to the bachelor’s programme, or leave for other education or work. For many students, a one year programme in economics may also be very useful in combination with other types of education.

For admission to the two-year master’s program, we have more detailed requirements\(^iii\). In 2016, we applied to implement the GRE test as an admission condition to applicants with education from institutions outside the Nordic region. The department got support from the UiO leadership to introduce this requirement. This year’s admission process is the first where this requirement is included. In autumn of 2017, after this year's admission process, we shall be evaluating the GRE/GMAT requirement together with the central admission office at UiO (SOT).

The reason for introducing the GRE/GMAT test as a requirement for admission is that we have had some non-satisfactory experiences with some of the students with education from institutions outside the EU area. Some of these students have excellent GPA from their bachelor degree, yet they receive very weak grades here and their academic progress is often poor. We hope that the GRE/GMAT test will help us to distinguish the good applicants from the weaker ones with misleading grades from the bachelor studies, enabling us to find the best-prepared candidates.

The recruitment to our PhD is very internationally oriented, and we have attracted well qualified students from good universities abroad, as well as from our own programme and other Norwegian institutions. However, for admission to the PhD program, there is a requirement of at least a 2-year master program (120 credits). In our experience, there may also be good candidates with a one-year master’s degree from foreign Universities, and we
now encourage these candidates to apply for our two-year master programme. When admitted, they can have their previous education recognized and complete the two-year master’s degree in one year.

For new students at both master and bachelor level, the programme begins in week 33 (August). This is usually the week before the first lectures starts. Together with the Faculty administration, the department coordinates the “buddy system” for the first-year students at bachelor and the five-year master programs. Volunteer students arrange social activities, guide them around on campus, and give the new students insight in what it is like to study economics at UiO. The department funds some of these events and get-togethers. We also organize information meetings, two mini lectures, and pizza lunch for all new students where the student organizations, amongst others the Student Council, present themselves. The department also finances the annual weekend cabin trip in the forest north of the city (Nordmarka) in August/September for all new students at our study programme. The department is also in the progress of making a “buddy system” for the two-year master students.

Since mathematics is a key tool in economics, the department arranges calculus and Stata courses for students at bachelor level. These courses are voluntary, and meant to supplement the lectures for students who need extra help.

3. Programme design
Before the Quality reform in 2003, we had only the five year integrated master in economics and the PhD programme. When we established the three year bachelor programme and two year master’s programme, we also decided to keep the five year integrated master in economics partly because it is well known amongst employers and former students. Even if the five year programme to a large extent could have been replaced by a bachelor + master combination, we still believe that the five year program makes us able to attract some good students that we otherwise would not have recruited.

The programme committee is responsible for running and developing the study programmes in Economics. The Head of Department appoints members of the Programme Committee. The committee consists of seven members, of which two are student representatives. In addition we have appointed course group leaders for each of the larger topics in economics: Macro, Micro, Public economics, statistics and empirical methods, mathematics and demography. The course portfolio also reflects the research interests of the scientific staff of the Department. Thus, inclusion of new trends and methods are largely driven by the research orientation of lecturers. The compulsory courses focus on theory and methods, with less weight on applied and real world problems. However, in elective courses, applied and real world problems are also included. The main area for in-depth analysis of real world problems is the 30 credit master thesis.

To help in the assessment of the quality of our programmes, including ensuring that the courses are well connected, we have the Quality Assurance system. We have midway evaluation on every course, every semester. We have more extensive evaluations of the courses the first and second time they are taught, and then every sixth year. Our study programmes are also regularly externally evaluated. The next external evaluation is set to begin in 2017. We have also been involved in a pilot project carried out by NOKUT in 2016.
and 2017. The project EUROMA aims to compare Norwegian master degree programmes in economics with other European countries.

4. Teaching and assessment methods

The teaching in most of our courses are organised as a combination of lectures and seminar groups. Usually the lectures are more traditional in its form, and the seminar groups are used for solving puzzles, working in groups, mandatory assignments, discussing problem sets, and the like. There are variations between the lecturers on what kind of teaching methods they use. Some use more digital gadgets than others, like Kahoot for example. iv

The main assessment method at the department is school exams. In addition, the majority of bachelor courses has qualifying mandatory assignments that the student have to pass to be qualified to take the exam. In autumn 2016/spring 2017 the department re-established mandatory assignments at the mandatory master courses. This was partly inspired by feedback from student representatives in the Program council. The representatives mentioned that these assignments are popular at bachelor level, and wanted the master students to have the same requirement. These assignments are often used as preparations for exams.

The majority of the departments at the Faculty of Social Sciences has begun using Inspera in the exam digitalization. The Economics department has its first digital exam this spring semester. In the past, we have had some challenges with the Inspera system, which could not support an easy way for students to use math equations, graphs and the like. The faculty has now found a better solution by using a Scantron scanner for the exams. This is improving our opportunity to have an increasing number of digital exams, and we expect to have more digital exams at both master and bachelor level in the future.

At a structural level there are some incentives in place to encourage a more varied pedagogical practice. The faculty offers incentives to lecturers who want to implement new teaching and assessment methods. While our teachers in general strive to provide high quality teaching, time constraints probably also work to limit ambitions and attempts towards developing new and more varied pedagogical methods. Institutionally supported initiatives at the department and faculty level are thus important to stimulate the development of more varied methods in teaching and assessment.

5. Learning environment in study programmes

Our department organizes several extracurricular events during the course of the year, and we also provide financial support for student- and alumni driven activities.

Every year we arrange a lecture for our new students called Scweigaardforelesningen, where we invite a former economic student from our department to hold an inspiring lecture about their job. Former invitees include former prime ministers, central bank governors, leading bureaucrats and business leaders, like Kåre Willoch, Jens Stoltenberg, Svein Gjedrem, Marianne Andreassen and Øystein Olsen. We also invite our students to guest lectures when well-known economics are visiting our department. In 2015 -2016 Jeffrey Sachs, Michael Greenstone, Helen Campbell held guest lectures for our students.
We support the students’ own organizations with funding and infrastructure. Our experience is that the student driven activities are often very popular among the students. Each year the student council organizes “Aktualitets uka” in collaboration with Oslo Economics and Dagens Næringsliv with focus on current topics in economics. In 2017 Steve Keen, Jonas Gahr Store and Jens Ulltveit-Moe were among the invitees. Another annual event organized by the Student council is Samfunnsøkonomisk Helaften with guest lectures, announcement of lecturer of the year and master thesis awards to the three best master thesis’ of the previous year.

Another student organization, focusing more on social events, organizes a field trip once a year for our students and occasionally it also organizes Professor lunches, where students and staff meet over coffee and cakes. There are also two student driven magazines, Equilibrium and Observator, which both receive funding from the department.

In the PhD programme the candidates arrange a lunch every week where they presents a text/a draft or a paper to receive comments from the other candidates. No senior member of the staff is present at these lunches. The PhD candidates also attend the regular seminars at the department, i.e. the Department seminar, ESOP-seminar, OFS seminar, CREE seminar and Staff lunch seminar. The Department has also made an effort to create a good environment for candidates by admitting candidates only once per year, ensuring that there is a group of PhD students starting at the same time. All new candidates start in August each year.

6. Educational competence
Our academic staff is engaged in our study programmes. They want to provide high quality teaching and they devote considerable time to this task. That said, our academic staff also struggle to find a good balance between teaching and research activities. To qualify for permanent positions and professorships, considerable time must be invested in research and publication activities.

The department support staff members in undertaking pedagogical training. All new employees are required to complete 100 hours of training in university pedagogics within two years of employment, and these hours are deducted from the work duty account. Pedagogical training and teaching experience is also considered a requirement for promotion from associate to full professor. Internal PhD-fellows are also offered pedagogical training and they get this deducted from their work duty account. We also normally fund a fourth year for our PhD-students for teaching, to provide them with useful teaching experience and because the PhD-students are in general popular teachers.. At the bachelor level, we also use master students as seminar teachers. These students are carefully selected and have a high academic level. Some of them apply and become PhD candidates when they finish their master’s degree.

The main incentive for pedagogic development comes from the lecturers’ own interest in creating a good course and teach students useful and interesting subjects. To support these incentives, we regularly undertake teaching and course evaluations, to obtain feedback from students. We have staff meetings where we discuss and exchange experiences to inspire the lecturers, and the Head of Department discusses teaching with the staff in appraisal meetings. There are also additional incentives in place for lecturers to continue to improve their teaching skills and teaching methods. In addition to the 100 hour course in university pedagogics
mentioned above, the Faculty offers an optional course in educational leadership. The Faculty also offers incentives (2017: 200 000 NOK) to staff who want to try out varied and appropriate teaching and assessment methods. And, as noted above, our students award one of our lecturers with the prize “lecturer of the year”.

Hiring decisions follow general university and faculty guidelines where both scientific and pedagogical competence are required. The emphasis is clearly on scientific competence. However, relevant job candidates are now asked to give a job talk where they present their own scientific work to the staff, and this allows us to also consider the applicants’ pedagogical skills. Rather than posing strict requirements to pedagogical training, the Department has chosen to support new staff in acquiring pedagogical competence. A reason for this is that we have well qualified applicants from the research sector and from abroad, where teaching may not be a part of the ordinary work.

7. Internationalisation
The 2-year master’s programme and PhD-programme at the department are taught in English. We aim to attract well qualified students from abroad, in sufficient numbers to represent a genuine international master programme. We have currently 17 active international students in our 2 – year master’s programme, where 4 are quota students. In the PhD we have currently 9 international candidates.

The Department of Economics has in total 12 exchange agreements with several European universities and their Departments of Economics in Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, The Netherlands, Italy, and with Fudan University in China. The students can also apply to go on exchange on several agreements on both Faculty and University level.

We recommend that students in our bachelor programme have their mobility semester during their 4th semester. Students in the five-year integrated master in their 8th semester, and students in the two-year master’s programme at their 2nd semester. It is common that our PhD-fellows have a residential visit to a foreign University during their admission period. However, this is dependent on receiving financial support – either from the Department, or from external sources. Unlike the bachelor- and master’s programmes, there are no exchange agreements for the PhD candidates. They rely on their own (as well as their supervisor’s) network to make arrangements.

A member of the administration has particular responsibility for mobility on all level at the Department. In 2016 15 master level students went on exchange (including two-year and five-year master students), and two bachelor level students.

As we offer all of our master level courses in English, we receive many exchange students. In 2016 we had 20 incoming students exchanging through the departments own agreements. As exchange students incoming from other UiO-agreements also can choose courses from our department, the actual number of exchange students taking our courses are much higher.

Internationalization is important, but it is also a challenge. Especially in our five-year programme, we have several mandatory courses in the study plan, and it is sometimes difficult to incorporate complete courses taken abroad as mandatory courses in our programme. However, it is less problematic if the students go abroad in their intended
semester as it consists of optional courses. Mobility in the bachelor programme and two-year master’s degree is more flexible.

8. Relevance
We aim to make our candidates highly attractive in the job market, both in the private and the public sector. The majority of our master students report that the studies provide them with good job opportunities. However, student surveys indicate that some students report the program contains too much mathematics, and requests a stronger connection to “real life” economics.

We regularly have meetings with relevant employers of economists to get feedback on the candidates we examine. Last meeting was in May 2015, and the general feedback was that they remain happy with our candidates. However, compared to the impression from similar meetings some years back, there was now more expression of concerns about the candidates’ writing and presentation skills, also compared with “todays” young economists from other programmes. Recently, we have included a course, ECON3010 – Anvendt økonomisk analyse (applied economic analysis), in our programmes where the focus is on organisation and presentation of economic analysis. We view this as a step in the right direction, but we may have to combine it with other measures to get the wanted effect. We also notice that some students get very good grades in all the courses, except ECON3010. This might be a matter for concern, as the application and communication of the theory and analysis is an important skill.

It was important for the employers to be able to distinguish the job seekers between those who have a “heavy” economics background, and those who have a “lighter” background. Some used the distinction between the two-year and the five-year programme for this.

To allow some students to obtain more practical job experience in our bachelor programme, we have included an intern programme in one of the mandatory courses in the bachelor programme. The students can choose to apply to the course “ECON3010B – Anvendt økonomisk analyse med praksis” (applied economic analysis with internship) with the intern programme. The applicants are carefully selected by the internship firms. The internships are currently held at a large bank (DNB) and the Labour Organisation (LO), with one student at each organization. This first semester the internship arrangement is a try-out, but we hope to further develop, improve and continue with this arrangement. An evaluation will follow at the end of this spring semester.

In our two master programs, we offer three different tracks for our students to specialize in. The Economics programme option is well suited for students who wish to choose freely among all the optional master courses that the department offer. This option is most popular because it allows more flexibility when choosing courses at the Department. With this option, it is fairly easy for students to spend a semester abroad and/or have previous education included in their degree. Another option is the specialization Environmental-, Resource- and Development Economics. The third programme option is research. This option is designed for students who want to continue with a PhD after their master's degree, or for students who wants to extend their skills to the research frontier. The students learn more about current trends in research and deepen their skills in Macroeconomics, Microeconomics and/or Econometrics beyond the regular master’s level. The courses are compulsory in the PhD programme, providing the students a head start in the PhD study if they start there.
9. Educational leadership
The Programme committee is responsible for running and developing the study programmes in Economics. The Head of Department appoints Programme heads and members of the Programme committee. The committee consists of seven members, of which two are student representatives, and programme heads for the bachelor programme, master programmes and PhD programme. The Head of Department is the leader of the Programme Committee. The committee meets 5-6 times per year.

The Head of Department appoints different staff members to have responsibility for the various courses on offer in our study programmes. The course group leaders in macro, micro, public economics, statistics and empirical methods, mathematics and demography give advice on the content and structure of the courses within their area, with the aim of ensuring that the courses make a coherent whole. However, there is a balance between a fixed structure to ensure a coherent whole and the desire to allow the teacher/course responsible flexibility on his/her course.

The teachers/course responsible on each course have some influence on the organisation of the teaching in terms of asking for collaboration with colleagues in teaching, organisation of seminars and choice of seminar leaders, the use of guest lecturers, etc. Often, this is done in dialogue with the Head of the Department to ensure that resources are available. The work duty account is used in allocating personnel resources to various teaching and administrative tasks.

10. Academic staff research and development orientation in relation to education
All our regular teachers have a PhD or equivalent research qualifications. The exceptions are PhD fellows, who do some teaching during the PhD program, and master and bachelor students who are seminar leaders on lower grade courses.

All our academic staff have mandatory research time.

11. Research orientation in teaching methods and assessment
The Department has as ambition to provide study programmes at a high international quality level. One of our strengths is that all our teachers are well-qualified scholars and active researchers. Our master’s programme is taught in English, and we have attracted teaching staff from several other high ranked institutes around the world.

The economics specialization in the bachelor degree amount to 110 credits and almost all of this consist of mandatory courses where student learn the main parts of microeconomics, macroeconomics, statistics and econometrics. This gives the students the tools to understand the main concepts in economics, and enables them to use basic models and theories of how the economy works. The students should also be able to conduct basic statistical and empirical analyses in an appropriate statistical program, and develop the ability to form a research question and conduct logical reasoning and applying mathematics.
The course portfolio at the master level in our programmes reflects the research interests of the scientific staff of the Department. Thus, inclusion of new trends and methods are largely driven by the research orientation of teachers. The mandatory courses focus on theory and methods, while the elective courses are more applied, and also discuss real world problems. The main area for in-depth analysis is the 30 credits master thesis. During their work with the master thesis, the students engage in the analysis of a substantive economic question. They do this by independently producing an original written piece of research at an academic level. This involves formulating a research question, developing an approach that allows answering this question using economic methods, and implementing this approach in a scientific manner which leads to a structured analysis which is reported both in writing and orally. The topic of the thesis can be chosen freely, although it is recommended to coordinate plans with a (potential) supervisor at an early stage.

The balance between students’ independent work and the supervision varies considerably with different students and supervisors. Typically, student and supervisor may have 1-2 meetings in connection with the project proposal (in the second and the third semester) and 6-7 meetings in connection with the writing of the master’s thesis (in the third and the fourth semester). The student is entitled to no more than three semesters of supervision in total.

At the PhD level, all courses giving ECTS demand student activity in form of project presentations, assigned papers and active participation.
Grade point average from videregående skole
GPA from 2016

http://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/economics-master/admission/
http://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/economics-master/admission/beregningsgrunnlag.html
https://getkahoot.com/