

# Being a ‘Waldorf’ master student in Norway

Competence in academic research – international networks – opportunities for personal development

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This autumn, the Rudolf Steiner University College in Norway welcomed its seventh class in the master’s studies programme. In mid-September, thirteen new students and the college faculty met for the first time to commence the academic year. The atmosphere was one of anticipation, given that the students came from literally all corners of the world and were about to embark on and share an exciting journey of studies together. Both faculty members and students arrived in a spirit of excitement with



one overriding question: What will this journey bring? For now, it will bring three weeks of intense interaction consisting of lectures, practical exercises, colloquial groups and individual study. And, as in the past, something remarkable happened. After only a few hours, the students bonded and a tight-knit student community began to evolve. The seeds of new friendships were sown, enhanced by good coffee and good food, exciting conversation, new knowledge and hard work. Laughter was juxtaposed with seriousness already from day one.

## **An international student environment**

Eight countries and three continents are represented in this year’s class of students. This provides a broad international background for the academic discussions taking place during lectures and group assignments. After a three-year course of studies, they will, if all goes as planned, submit their master’s thesis. During this time, they will have been together for twelve weeks, divided into six sessions or modules, as we call them.

Various artistic talents soon become evident, enriching both study sessions and informal evening and weekend activities. From this particular group came flavours of African drums, Irish folk music, English ballads and Harding fiddle, an enjoyable musical potpourri of sound.



The Rudolf Steiner University College master's programme campus is located at Vidaråsen, a Camphill community just south of Tønsberg, two hours from Oslo. The location's beautiful natural setting and cultural community, into which the students are invited, provide a backdrop for the programme. Here we get to know the village's residents as well as the international staff members. Students have attended concerts, seasonal festivals and celebrations, while at the same time moving deeply into various areas of educational theory and research.



For many students, it is important to be able to spend the module weeks away from daily obligations, allowing for in-depth study, as well as practice in the challenging task of reading and writing academic texts. Because the study corresponds to two-thirds of a full-time study programme, most of the students work, in addition to their studies.





## Daily schedule and study contents

The daily program begins after breakfast, when students meet for a half-hour session in small groups to reflect on the theme of the upcoming two-hour lecture. This half-hour session helps stimulate awareness of the theme in preparation for the lecture. The lecture itself is focused on various themes in educational theory and research methods, held by lecturers from Norway and abroad<sup>1</sup>.



The morning lecture is followed by a session of artistic expression, often music or movement. This in turn, is followed by individual or group exercises related to the theme of the module.

These exercises allow the student to work through, digest, and put into context the theoretical material. We have in the past, for example, worked on a project on 'learning' in which the students wrote about an especially meaningful learning experience they had had. Through discussion and a written reflection, the exercise helped the students understand their learning experience



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<sup>1</sup> One of our close collaborations is with the Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences in Germany, which offers its own version of a Steiner master's programme, the so-called 'Oslo Master's programme'. We also collaborate, among others, with Crossfields Institute, Ruskin Mill Educational Trust, Snellmann College in Finland, WLH in Sweden. For the Oslo-Masters at Alanus, see: <http://www.alanus.edu/studium-paedagogik-master-education-praxisforschung.html>



through group reflections and application of a relevant educational theory derived from the module's assigned reading. As is the case with almost all educational research, the challenge was to combine experience with theory in order to gain new insights. Later in the day articles and book chapters from the reading list are studied and discussed.

The six taught modules provide the foundation for the students to complete an independent research project, which is the basis of their master's thesis. The first module gives a general introduction to important themes such as knowledge (epistemology), learning, and teaching. The subsequent modules provide students with, and allow them systematically



to work through the necessary knowledge and skills needed to be able to conduct a research project, culminating in their master's thesis. A full spectrum of research methods is introduced, ranging from interviews and observations to analyzing texts, and including phenomenological as well as 'post-modern' methods, just to name a few. The goal is that the students become acquainted with a wide range of current educational scholarly theories and research practices. In the intervals between the modules, the students complete individual written assignments to deepen their understanding of the topics presented during the module. These written assignments are evaluated by the faculty members, both in writing and orally, helping the students gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their work.

All instruction and discussions are in English, but the written assignments can be completed in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German or English. The study programme uses an electronic learning platform<sup>2</sup>, where information and most of the literature on the reading lists is made available, and where all written assignments are to be submitted.

## Research in your field of experience

Students are invited to formulate their own individual research questions in line with their interests and experience. These research questions are often a direct result of relevant themes within the students' professional work. After many years in one's respective field, for example as teachers, pre-school teachers, curative or social educators, eurythmists or principals, to

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<sup>2</sup> [www.rsuclearn.com](http://www.rsuclearn.com)

name a few, the master's programme provides a unique opportunity to expand one's knowledge and skills in collaboration with others.

Writing a master's thesis involves developing a wide range of competencies. An important aspect of the master's study consists of learning to master an academic language. It is a question of making one's experiences, reflections and research efforts accessible to others. Being able to express oneself both orally and in writing in a relevant and confident way is an important prerequisite for contributing to educational development and research. Several of our students have gone on to take a doctorate after completing their master's degree.

### **Lifelong learning - personal development**

Another, and perhaps the most important form of competence achieved in a master's programme, is in the area of deep personal development. Several of our former students have told us how the master's programme provided them with considerable new knowledge. Yet, and equally important, it



unleashed vital life forces and inspiration reaching beyond their professional lives, contributing to a renewed sense of self-knowledge. Master's students have often experienced finding themselves in totally unexplored landscapes, a new and in some cases challenging experience. One student commented that it is 'like being a child again'. Participants are confronted with the dual roles of being an uncertain student, and at the same time master in one's own profession.

An educator's interest in development extends beyond a personal wish for widening one's horizons. Responsibility for guiding others' development is intimately related to responsibility for daring to explore one's own personal development. The ability to guide and inspire children, young people or adults on their road to development is often, for the teacher, closely tied to being on that same road oneself. To aid others, it is essential to personally experience what it means to aim to widen one's own horizons, to face impasses, and to know what a breakthrough to achieving new skills and insights really means.

Working in the field of education is both challenging and exciting. Each day involves new meetings, new challenges and a unique opportunity to support the learning and development





of children, youth or adults. As a teacher, you come in contact with the vulnerability and difficulties associated with the evolution of new knowledge and skills, as well as experiencing the deep satisfaction in seeing people grow through educational activities.



It means that you can be an aide to and witness the subtle transformations that take place when a human being blossoms and unfolds within the activity of learning. Many chose educational professions because of this 'humanness', because every day contains unforeseen moments of growth, and because they can use - alongside a professional, specialized competence - personal empathy and intuition.

Today learning and development are understood as lifelong processes. Not long ago these themes were restricted to children and youth. The realization that development continues throughout an entire life occurred relatively late in the 20th century. In 1974, *Gail Sheehy* published *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life*, which sold millions and placed the drama of adult development on the agenda. Previously, the concepts of mid-life crises and lifelong learning were just footnotes among researchers. Now this awareness has become general knowledge. Adulthood has proven to be a potentially exciting and rich arena for personal development.

One way of entering this stage and experiencing challenging and rewarding dramas, is by working toward a master's degree in Waldorf education. In our programme, you will be able to develop research based knowledge within your own particular area of interest, obtain academic competence as a 'master', and widen your international network, while at the same time experiencing new and possibly unimagined areas of personal growth.

