

# Towards relevant jobs through research-based learning and professional collaboration with external stakeholders

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*Pedagogical strategy*

*Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, University of Southern Denmark*

*The Faculty of Business and Social Sciences offers education programmes which academically and pedagogically engage the students to interact with the surrounding community to develop knowledge, skills and competences at the highest academic level. With these programmes, the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences creates value regionally, nationally and internationally.*

## Background

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Towards 2020, the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences focuses on three strategic goals: societal relevance, education programmes and research. The goal of the programmes is that *"We must have attractive and viable education programmes that lift dedicated students towards relevant jobs through high-quality education at all campuses."*

The strategic goals provide the framework for four key initiatives, one of which concerns a prioritised and attractive portfolio of education programmes. The purpose of this initiative is specifically to develop a clear pedagogical profile with student involvement, practice orientation and business relevance.

## About the Faculty's pedagogical strategy

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The Faculty's pedagogical strategy sets up a coherent pedagogical direction for the entire Faculty and functions within the context of the [qualifications frameworks for higher education](#) and develops and promotes [the principles of active teaching and active learning at the University of Southern Denmark](#).

The strategy is aimed at education programmes as a whole including the interplay between programmes and *CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES*. The strategy addresses themes and challenges that must be addressed both at the level of the individual programmes and in relation to activities involving several programmes. The strategy provides *the framework* for the pedagogical development in the programmes as a whole, and the concrete implementation must take place in the academic environments, taking into consideration the aim of each subject in relation to the overall education programme.

The quality and relevance of the programmes is deeply rooted in the principles of *RESEARCH-BASED TEACHING* through its basis in strong research environments and a productive interaction with the surrounding community. It is a priority for the Faculty, through professional collaboration with external stakeholders, to connect research-based learning to competences that create the basis for relevant future employment.

The strategy is rolled out in three stages:

1. Key strategic ambitions that we want to achieve through our education programmes
2. Derivative priorities in the design of educational and learning activities as a result of the ambitions
3. Translation into concrete actions in order to implement the strategy

### CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

*Activities which complement and support the learning activities established in the curriculum – e.g. writing an assignment in collaboration with a company. Contrary to extra-curricular activities, which typically are not directly related to the programme's subjects.*

### RESEARCH-BASED LEARNING

*The part of the students' learning which happens as a result of research-like activities, e.g.*

- *Work with a subject's primary objects and sources*
- *Active participation in an academic community*
- *Research-related writing*
- *Participation in authentic research projects*

## Strategic ambitions

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The strategic ambitions have two levels. A *general* level which defines our identity as a faculty, and a *specific* level which links our activities to the surroundings that make up our foundation as a regional university on all campuses.

### *General ambition*

- ❖ Through our programmes, we create value for our students by developing their academic and personal competences as well as their abilities to cooperate on specific issues.

Development of academic and personal competences as well as the ability to collaborate on specific issues in interaction with each other. The development of academic and personal competences provides the foundation for professional participation in the solution of issues relating to businesses and society, and active participation in the solution of professionally related issues provides the basis to further develop academic and personal competences.

Our education programmes support and challenge our students to develop generic competences in three areas: *cognitive competences* in terms of academic knowledge of disciplines, creativity in problem identification, analytical skills and knowledge-generating problem solving; *personal competences* in terms of intellectual openness, accountability, integrity, as well as academic self-confidence and confidence to act and take initiative; and *collaborative competences* in terms of the ability to cooperate and the ability to demonstrate leadership.

### *Specific ambition*

On the Faculty, the development of these competences is supported by a specific ambition, which relates to the surroundings that make up our foundation as a regional university on all campuses:

- ❖ We create value for our students and the wider community through our educational activities and through the diversity of our students.

The Faculty's existence is very much based on our special regional presence, and on this basis, all programmes contribute to the regional, national and international development.

As a regionally based university, we attract students with highly varied backgrounds. These backgrounds cut across socio-economic and national factors. In the planning of the learning activities, we recognise these differences and take advantage of the differences in backgrounds and perspectives to create value in the learning.

## Priorities in the design of programmes and learning activities

Our strategic ambitions lead to priorities in three areas in our programmes:

1. Research-based learning
2. Collaboration with the surrounding community
3. Interaction and IT

### Research-based learning

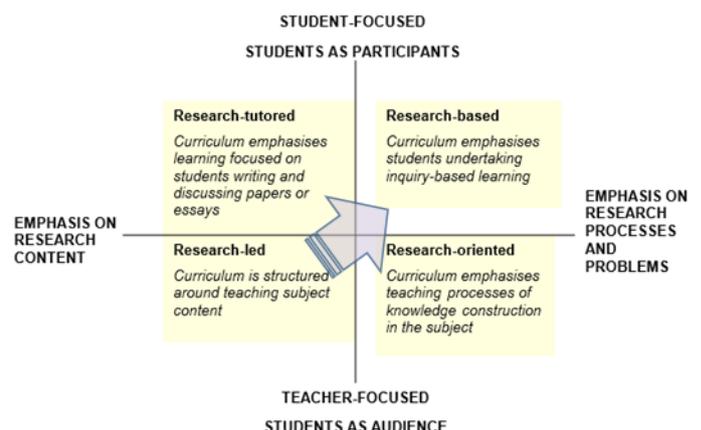
- ❖ We organise research-based learning programmes with a focus on academic knowledge and competences for knowledge production in order to support the development of academic competences.

Students are included in the research environments in the meeting with active researchers so that they can:

- 1) *Develop solid academic knowledge:* Solid academic knowledge is a prerequisite for the development of the student's academic and professional identities and forms the foundation for being able to create value in different types of contexts.
- 2) *Develop competences in knowledge production:* Development of competences to produce knowledge in different types of contexts is a core area in the research-based learning at the Faculty. By engaging in knowledge production, students develop academic competences such as (i) the ability to identify, analyse and evaluate complex challenges, (ii) the ability to acquire new knowledge, (iii) the ability to develop professional, academically solid and creative solutions, (iv) the ability to communicate and present ideas and knowledge in a variety of formats, (v) the ability to cooperate, give and receive criticism and (vi) academic accountability and integrity. Knowledge production is a key element at all levels of our education programmes, and it is supported by progression across semesters.

Each programme must have a deliberate and appropriate distribution of learning activities, which takes into account both elements of research-based learning: Academic knowledge and knowledge production. In order to ensure this, the work with research-based learning and the prioritisation in the organisation of the programmes is based on Mick Healey's frame of reference <sup>1</sup>.

In one dimension, the frame of reference draws a distinction between whether a programme is focused on *the research content*, or if the focus is on *the research process and problems*. In the other dimension, the frame of reference distinguishes between whether the students are involved as *listeners* or as *participants*. In



<sup>1</sup> Source: Barnett, R (ed) (2005) *Reshaping the University: New Relationships between Research, Scholarship and Teaching*. McGraw Hill / Open University Press, pp.67-78

the organisation of the programmes, the aim is progression towards learning activities in the upper-right corner.

### *Collaboration with the surrounding community*

- ❖ We offer learning programmes where students take part in professional collaborations with the surrounding community. Thereby, we create value for the surrounding community and develop the students' commitment to concrete issues in society.

Challenges with the transition from university life to a life on the labour market are widely recognised. The ability to act and interact on the basis of academic knowledge and competences in contexts outside the university takes practice and experience. This is even more the case for students training for professional contexts which lie far from their socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, it is our aim that our students not only develop academic knowledge about disciplines, but that they do so in open learning programmes in collaboration with the surrounding community about concrete issues. In this way, the students will develop their abilities to act and interact professionally with different types of stakeholders based on academic knowledge and competences.

The education programmes' and the students' interaction with the surrounding community must be organised in such a way as to ensure deliberate priorities and variations in the interplay between academic professionalism and the surroundings. This is done by applying the model on the right, which, on the one axis, distinguishes between who is responsible for the academic content that forms the basis of a learning activity, and on the other axis, between who is responsible for the collaboration with external stakeholders. On both axes, the responsibility can be shifted between teacher and students.

		Responsible for the academic content	
		Teacher	Students
Responsible for collaboration with stakeholders	Students	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Live cases</i></li> <li>• <i>Academic issues requiring data from external stakeholders</i></li> </ul>	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Study visits</i></li> <li>• <i>Projects with issues developed in collaboration with external stakeholders</i></li> </ul>
	Teacher	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Guest teachers/ presentations</i></li> <li>• <i>Case-based teaching</i></li> </ul>	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Problem-based teaching with or without structured collaboration</i></li> </ul>

All the Faculty's programmes must have a deliberate and appropriate distribution of different forms of collaboration so that the students gradually become more responsible for both the academic content as well as the collaboration with external stakeholders.

### *Interaction and IT*

- ❖ We design learning activities focused on academic interaction and feedback in order to create value on the basis of diversity among our students and support the development of personal and interpersonal competences.

Through feedback, peer feedback and group-based projects which include cooperation, the students develop their interpersonal skills and professional competences.

The involvement of new technologies is key to the Faculty's educational development. In the development of learning activities, technologies are used actively as a means to support interaction. The starting point for the use of new technologies is that they are used to create new spaces for interaction – inside and outside the class-

room and synchronously as well as asynchronously. The choice of technology is therefore always based on the value for student learning and academic interaction.

Simultaneously, we develop and use the facilities we have for physical attendance on our campuses so that they support new forms of activity that actively utilise the specific learning benefits of being physically present.

Technology must be used in the planning in a way that ensures deliberate priorities and variations in the interplay between the learning goals and the forms of interaction in the individual learning programmes. This is done by applying the model on the right, which on the one axis distinguishes between the nature of learning outcomes, particularly if they emphasise *academic content* or *knowledge production*, and on the other axis whether the interaction is *synchronous* or *asynchronous*. It is important to note that the model does not differentiate between *delivery* methods, because courses can be both digitally mediated or require physical attendance.

		Learning goals	
		Academic knowledge	Knowledge production
Form of interaction	Synchronous	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lectures:</li> <li>• Live streams</li> </ul>	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussions and seminars with physical attendance or online</li> </ul>
	Asynchronous	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> <li>• Digital content</li> </ul>	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Grade</li> <li>• Giving and receiving written feedback</li> <li>• Project work:</li> </ul>

## Implementation

The implementation of the strategy requires a holistic focus on the balancing of:

- learning outcomes,
- financial, technical and human resources,
- academic and scientific elements,
- structural and administrative conditions, as well as
- external and internal collaboration.

The responsibility for the implementation of the strategy lies with the departments – and involving the relevant stakeholders, while follow-up, knowledge exchange and qualification take place in the Education Committee. Follow-up on the pedagogical development work in relation to the individual programmes takes place via the programme report.

The implementation stage can, with advantage, apply an online resource for sharing of knowledge and good examples.

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