

Merknader till rapporten "Restrukturering av Institutt for reiseliv og nordlige studier"

The comments below refer to how this report depicts the work and function at IRN of the Bachelor of Northern Studies program (BNS) and the Northern Studies Research Group of UiT AUN (NSRG).

1. It was not in the instruction to this work group that it should assess and suggest the closure of the NSRG. The NSRG is a network and professional asset that should be kept because it facilitates the careers and productivity of its members irrespective of any reorganization.
2. The NSRG website provides ample information on its members' work, including how it supports, and benefits from the BNS. https://en.uit.no/forskning/forskningsgrupper/gruppe?p_document_id=442068
3. At an IRN staff meeting the report's main author has stated as the basis for the report's proposal to close BNS and NSRG suggestions made by BNS teachers themselves at an IRN staff idea seminar held at Gargia lodge August 10, 2022. My recollection is that BNS staff, on being asked to respond "very creatively" to the general discussion there, stated that BNS and NSRG could be discontinued at IRN in Alta and moved to suitable departments in Tromsø and Kirkenes.
4. The report states that the Northern Studies study program enlisted 14 students in autumn 2022, but on its Canvas platform the on-line & on-site course BNS1001 had a total of 28 students enrolled that autumn, and for the spring 2023 the course BNS1004 e.g. has 30 students.
5. The image of NSRG & BNS as old stranded Russian CBC projects is at odds with reality. Since long no Russian students are enlisted in BNS. The on-line BNS program recruits well internationally and in Europe, and increasingly well in Norway. Of course conditions are changed by the new demand on students' fees for non-EØS students, but to give in on BSN by closing it before trying to re-launch it as e.g. an international on-line program for a complete BA degree, is a mistake with regard to the strategy of UiT and given the promising partnerships now underway for NSRG and BNS at top-ranked Trent University, Canada and University of Alaska at Anchorage, see the NSRG web pages, "Western Turn".
6. When Urban Wråkberg joined the BNS program in 2013, he replaced Bjørn Sagdahl at Nord University, who then retired. The following BNS teachers at IRN have retired or passed away in recent years: Sigurd Westergaard, Per Magne Møller, Peter Fischer, Pål Markusson, Kjell Hines and Tor Arne Gjertsen. Thus a lot of teaching capacity at the IRN in Alta was made useful in the BNS program after its incorporation in IRN by the North Norwegian university fusion. Substantial earnings by study points produced by the BNS have accrued to IRN. Only two teachers and researchers have been hired to replace those six departed in recent years: David Alenga and Gunnar Rekvig. The BNS study points and the release of four positions not replaced, represent an economic benefit for IRN, and not the opposite which the report seems to imply. It also fails to make clear that BNS emanated in Kirkenes before the North Norwegian university fusion and that two of its course developers and teachers, Urban Wråkberg (NSRG leader) and Peter Haugseth (BNS program leader), never had Alta as their workplace.
7. Critical student's statements on the BNS program are presented in the report. These are from campus students who regrettably have developed a grumpy social culture all their own which they impose on new students arriving in Alta. The BNS campus Alta group has remained too small to be sustainable. On-line BNS students are offered to fill out evaluation inquiries after every course they take. They are in general positive; some are very positive about the feedback and the interaction they had with teachers and applaud the flexibility and societal relevance of the BNS.
8. The BNS should be re-launched as an on-line international University of the Arctic initiative or a trilateral Trent University, UiT AUN and University of Alaska Bachelor Program in Northern Studies. Also keeping the on-line one-year program could be sustainable and work well in a combination of teaching and research elsewhere in UiT AUN.

Urban Wråkberg, Professor, Head of the NSRG, BNS course-developer and teacher