



HÁSKÓLINN Á BIFRÖST  
BIFRÖST UNIVERSITY

**PRiME** Principles for Responsible  
Management Education



PRiME progress report 2013-2014

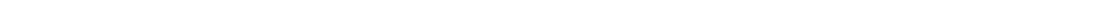
**From the rector,  
Dr. Vilhjálmur Egilsson**

Bifröst University has been going through an important transformation in the last two years. The university had been in a defensive position for a number of years for various reasons but the tide has been turned and better times are now ahead. Bifröst University is a small institution but in the fall semester of 2014 more than 600 students were enrolled, up by 20% from last year.

Bifröst University has three basic values; initiative, co-operation and responsibility. These basic values are a defining factor in the academic and professional work of the university. Being located on a rural campus the university draws pride and support from the local community that is also extending to a larger area. Bifröst University aims at graduating global citizens with roots in the country side. We emphasise tolerance and open mindedness along with such rural values as mutual trust and respect for other individuals. Furthermore Bifröst University graduates are expected to know the difference between ambition and greed.

Bifröst University has defined several growth areas reflecting our basic values and ambition. We want to advance in Business Administration by offering a new line of studies in Services Management, in Law by offering a distance learning programme and a part time programme for working students and by offering three new lines in our Social Sciences programme. We are also investing in our Continuing Education programme and upgrading our preparatory programme for students that have not completed a secondary level degree.

Bifröst University places high value on participation in PRiME. We look at this as an opportunity and a challenge. By adhering to the principles of PRiME we hope to make the learning experience for our students more valuable and help us to graduate future leaders in business and society in general.



## Introduction to Bifröst University

Bifröst University is a private, non-profit institution, set on a rural campus outside Iceland's capital city of Reykjavík. Founded in 1918, Bifröst has a long history of training individuals for careers in business and politics and at the same time shaping future leaders. Bifröst offers undergraduate and graduate programmes in three academic departments: Business, law, and social sciences. In addition to degree programmes, there is a one-year foundation programme for students lacking full university entrance qualifications, as well as various life-long learning programmes.

A new modular system was developed at Bifröst University in 2013. The aim was to streamline the curriculums within all departments of the university and to increase both quality and efficiency in teaching and learning. As off autumn 2014, teaching is based on seven weeks long modules, with two modules every semester. This entails that over such a period students have the opportunity to focus and work more intensely on each subject. However, each semester a few courses span 14 weeks in order to distribute evenly the 30 ECTS taken every semester. Figure 1 illustrates how this new system is structured over a period of one year.

Haustönn (30)							Vorönn (30)							Sumarönn (20)								
Lota 1			Lota 2				Lota 1			Lota 2				Sumarlota								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Uppl.tækni							Reikningshald I							Forysta & stjórnun								
Félagaréttur I							Almenn lögfræði II							Stjórnskipunarréttur								
Almenn lögfræði							Kröfuréttur I							Misserisverkefni								
							Aðferðafræði							Stjórnsýsluréttur I								
							Samnigaréttur							Vinnuréttur								

Figure 1: An overview of the now modular system at Bifröst University. Every course is 6 ECTS except the group project which is 8 ECTS.

Concurrently, Bifröst University introduced flipped teaching, meaning that all lectures are now recorded and available online, giving the students access to the lectures anytime they want wherever they are located.

The advantages of the new modular system with flipped teaching are:

- Increased focus on the subjects taught at each time.
- Students' workload will be more manageable as co-ordination between subjects and instructors becomes easier.
- Increased time for students to master complicated parts of their studies as they will have access to all course material online.
- By delivering the lectures online, more time can be spent doing "hands on" work in class, under the teacher's guidance. This also increases the opportunity of dynamic discussions and interaction with the instructors in class.

## Principle I: Purpose

*Principle 1: Purpose: We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.*

Our mission is to educate socially responsible leaders, people who emphasise initiative and cooperation. With this mission and appropriate actions we manage to graduate individuals who are entrepreneurial in spirit and who are capable of leading groups, organizations and societies with the aim of stimulating sustainable improvements.

We devote an effort to involve our mission and values into our curriculum in order to motivate our students to be innovative and focus on social responsibility. We emphasise creativity among our students and inspire them to consider the greater goods for societies rather than a narrow minded benefit for a few. We apply the ideology of servant leadership within the school and want our students to be strong leaders who can serve their communities well.

At Bifröst we have started off a new local project for student entrepreneurs, where they can gather, brainstorm and form their ideas and if appropriate take them further. This is done with the aim to increase the student's creativity and initiative and for student's to work on real life projects formed by themselves.

While studying at Bifröst University all students have to work on two major group projects that account for 8 ECTS each. Bifröst University places great emphasis on these research projects, where students are allocated a professional facilitator as well as concurrently attending a course in project management. Students are trained to approach their group research project, using a novel method, Learning by Developing, that was developed by Laurea University in Finland. Learning by Developing has proved to stimulate creativity and cooperation by students.

Learning by Developing:

- Improves students' skills to handle complex problems.
- Improves project management skills and the ability to work in groups.
- Enhances critical thinking and problem solving.
- Has an additional focus on social responsibility

In these group projects students commonly select topics that are related to social issues. As an example of this a group of students studied the potential social impact if the monopoly of alcohol, which currently lies with the government, would be abolished and common stores allowed to sell alcohol.

They wrote a comprehensive report on the subject, presented the results to their peers, teachers and staff at Bifröst University. Their results were discussed in the social media and taken up by multiple newspapers. As a consequence members of the Icelandic parliament, with a seat in a congressional committee with the task to review the matter, requested the students to come and meet them and present their results to the committee. The students were praised by the



parliamentarian members who took their results into consideration in their decision making process. This is just one example of how our students work and the impact they can have in our community.



## PRINCIPLE 2 and 3 – Value and Method

*Values: “We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact”*

*Method: “We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.”*

### **Values**

Several projects have recently been completed or are still ongoing at Bifröst that aim to develop and strengthen our community and promote the values of social responsibility. Some of these are best described as applied research projects while others entail broad based cooperation between businesses, regional governments and other institutions.

A so called “Growth clusters in Borgarbyggð” is a project that aims to promote growth and business development by offering consultancy services, networking and linking entrepreneurs and investors. Borgarbyggð is a largely rural municipality of around 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a fairly diverse mix of production and service organizations and two universities, including Bifröst University. The first step of the project was to undertake a survey among all businesses and entrepreneurs in Borgarbyggð. Interviews were conducted and other data analysed to summarize the current situation and to highlight viable opportunities. The project is promising and is expected to increase the productivity and competitiveness of the region.

Another ongoing project is a study on the negotiations and subsequent establishment of collective wage agreements in Iceland. The approach taken by both unions and employers and the input given by the government are regularly criticized for being ineffective and for causing overly long and frequent labour strikes that involve high costs for the economy. Differences in procedures between Iceland, Sweden and Denmark are analysed to suggest policy advice that may improve the efficiency of the Icelandic labour market.

### **Methods**

As previously mentioned Bifröst offers degrees along three broad lines of study; business administration, social sciences and law. We are actively working to include elements of the PRiME initiative into our courses and curricula. The courses offered do all, to a varying extent, incorporate elements of leadership and responsibility. Key courses in this respect, such as Servant Leadership and Management, are part of the curricula for all our bachelor level degrees while others are specific to one degree but offered as an elective course to students following other curriculums. The courses that touch upon the important values embedded within PRiME are for instance:

- Servant Leadership and Management
  - Sustainability and Social Responsibility
  - Arctic Politics
  - Ethics
  - Climate Change and International Politics
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- Political Philosophy
- HRM and the role of Leaders
- Environmental- and resource Economics
- Development Economics

Servant Leadership and Management is a project-driven course that teaches leadership theory in part by using traditional lectures but also by having students work in groups on a practical project chosen and designed by themselves. Projects should aim to somehow improve the environment or the community of Bifröst University in the wider sense. An example of a project that has had a permanent impact on the community is a container from the Red Cross for receiving donated clothes and linens. Another project was an initiative that used peer support to help people give up the habit of smoking, thereby improving the health and wellness of individuals.

Sustainability and Social Responsibility is a course on CSR that among other things places an emphasis on environmental issues and sustainable development. Students are trained to use the tools that critical thinking offers, to tackle the ethical dilemmas that today's managers will face. Through work on class projects, students analyse the often conflicting objectives of social and environmental responsibility of managers on one hand and on the other, pure profit maximization. This analysis is then followed by a discussion on how to form corporate strategy and on the role of the private sector in promoting sustainable development.

### ***On campus***

The great environment that Bifröst University is located in has its influence on the campus life. Our students and staff members have great opportunities to enjoy the outdoors with walking, hiking, running, cycling, golfing etc. In the past we've had multiple choices of fitness training which varies between seasons and how innovative students and staff members are each time. As we have basic services such as a kindergarten, a store and a café located on campus a car is not necessary and can be parked for days and even weeks at times. The campus life supports students in dedicating themselves to their studies and working towards their goals in a healthy lifestyle.

Bifröst University has now implemented a new printing system that's both environmentally friendly and cost efficient. The estimated reduction in paper use is 30%. The students and staff are also encouraged to recycle and recycling bins are to be found throughout the campus.



## PRINCIPLE 4 - Research

*Research: “We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances to our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.*

Bifröst University operates a research centre to manage research activities and research centres focused on specific fields of study, including retail, European studies and cultural management.

In November of 2013 Bifröst adopted a new research policy. This policy outlines the importance of research within the university, the need to cooperate with other stakeholders as well as emphasizing research that touches upon social responsibility. Researchers are encouraged to maintain good relations with the public and private sector and to be active participants in the university’s community.

Several research projects, ongoing at Bifröst University, contain strong elements related to social responsibility. Below is a brief description of selected projects and how they align with the goals of PRiME.

- Bifröst leads a project aiming to raise the level of education in the Northwest region in Iceland and to increase the human capital in the region. The project is managed in cooperation with several partners active in vocational education in the north western region. These partners include the municipal government, unions and other relevant parties in the district and is funded by ministry of education and parties of the labour market. The main target group are people with little formal education who can gain a stronger position on the job market mainly through vocational degrees. Other stakeholders in the project include immigrants or other groups whose first language is not Icelandic, since these individuals can be empowered by courses in Icelandic.
  - Female; Supporting Fempreneurs, aims to support women as entrepreneurs across Europe. The project is run by a consortium of organizations across five European countries that are working together to support and develop female entrepreneurship. The goal of the project is to bridge the skills and competencies gap that women entrepreneurs in Iceland, Italy, Spain, Lithuania and the United Kingdom, face.
  - A recent study in the field of fisheries policy reviews management systems for renewable resources. The focus is on fisheries systems based on transferable quotas where the Icelandic system is used as a case. Since 1990, Iceland’s fishing industry has been governed by a quota system where the total allowable catch is set each year with the aim to manage the stocks in a sustainable manner. The quotas, that give rights to fish a given share of the total allowable catch, are then freely tradable between the fishing companies. The analytical tool used in the study is the sustainability triangle. The findings suggest that overall the transferable quota systems can help to impose more sustainable fisheries. Other industries that are built on renewable resources can possibly learn from the experience of the fisheries management systems worldwide, both from the positive and negative factors.
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## PRINCIPLE 5 & 6 – Partnership and dialogue

*Partnership: “We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.”*

*Dialogue: “We will facilitate and support dialog and debate among educators, students, business, government consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.”*

In our last report we discussed our aspirations to connect and work further with the closest society in the north western region of Iceland. Bifröst University has already made efforts to realize this goal with success as can be witnessed by previously mentioned research projects.

### ***In partnership with the local community***

At Bifröst we run a student project programme, with the aim to strengthen the ties between the university and local businesses. Businesses from all sectors are invited to propose projects, and students working individually or in groups can then adopt the idea and use it in their final thesis or as a part of some of their courses. The ideas mainly come from small businesses or entrepreneurs. The projects touch on various topics, many are related to tourism or other services. Often these businesses want help with creating a business plan or doing a market analysis, and this offers great value to the students who get to do hands on work in real business settings. One recent example is a business model for Luxury sail boating in Iceland's Westfjords and the coast of Greenland.

Bifröst University has also started a project related to smaller companies in the local area in cooperation with the municipal government. The aim of the project is to encourage individuals with business ideas to start their own companies, encourage individuals already in business and to analyse investment opportunities. The root of this project lies in the need for job creation in the region as well as the need for increased income in the society. This project is a great opportunity for the University to participate in promoting companies in the area and giving support to the society.

Hugheimar (e. the venue for open minds) is a place in Borgarnes (the closest town of Bifröst University) where entrepreneurs in Borgarbyggð are allocated space and given time and support to work on their ideas. Bifröst University is participating in Hugheimar and a new course, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which will be started in 2015 will be connected to this initiative.

### ***Women's Power to Tanzania***

For more than a decade, Bifröst University has run the program Women's Power in Iceland. It is a program to empower women, who often lack confidence, to use their creativity to form new business ideas, to plan and execute them. This program has made many Icelandic women stronger either in their current job or helped them to start new businesses.

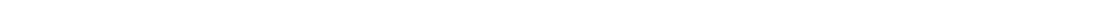
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Bifröst University emphasises global social responsibility – not only in the curriculum taught within the university – but also in their own operations. The program Women’s Power will in 2015 be adjusted and transferred to Tanzania in Africa and offered to women in a village in northern Tanzania where more than half of the population lives below the poverty line. The women will be trained in entrepreneurship, simple business plan writing and how to get to the start-up phase.

### ***Other projects***

The Bifröst University started a special project in the fall semester on making operations’ budgets for small and medium sized companies. Between 20 and 30 companies have participated and opened access to their accounts and real time data to a course where students apply the data to make actual budgets for these companies. This course has been run two times is still in the development phase and the companies contributing more than they are receiving. After the third run the course will hopefully be ready for expansion to more companies and have greater value for students.

Bifröst University has in addition to this worked alongside firms in the labour market to set up an exhibition on contemporary Icelandic economy. After kicking off at Bifröst University in July, the supervisors of this exhibition introduced the posters both in schools in the closer community as well as in a wider spectrum.





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