

Resolution Experts: Behind the Scenes with Your Study Secretaries

Anne Mette Laursen, Frida Katarina Kings, Lise Suhr Mogensen, and Viktor Rasmussen



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The following article is the transcript of an interview with two study secretaries and a study board secretary at the Department of Mathematical Sciences.

Anne Mette Laursen [AML] assumed her position in May 2024 as a study secretary and is primarily engaged with 5th through 10th semesters;

Frida Katarina Kings [FKK] assumed her position in February 2024 as a study secretary and is mainly engaged with 1st through 4th semesters and staffing; and

Lise Suhr Mogensen [LSM] began her career at AAU in 1987, but has worked as the Department's study board secretary since 2019, where she is engaged with the quality control of the programs and, furthermore, charged with tasks across the entire faculty.

This interview offers students a closer look at the everyday responsibilities, challenges, and backgrounds of their study secretaries at AAU. By shedding light on their roles and motivations, it aims to deepen students' understanding of the essential support study secretaries provide throughout their academic journey.

Viktor Rasmussen [VR]: I would like to start by understanding the background for your positions at AAU, including the education that qualifies you for your work.

FKK: There is no official or specific educational path to becoming a study secretary as such; the required background depends heavily on the tasks central to each position. Originally, I graduated as an office assistant from Roskilde Uni-

versity, where I also worked for two years during my education and three years afterward. Later, I earned a professional bachelor's degree in public administration before assuming my position at AAU. My profile is inherently practical but includes theoretical aspects related to management, among other areas.

AML: My background consists of an academic professional degree program in service, but I have since held various positions involving administrative and coordinating tasks.

VR: So, would you consider yourself more of an autodidact?

AML: Absolutely. My experience working with planning and coordinating has enabled me to succeed in my current position at AAU.

LSM: I began my career as a project coordinator, with a background that includes a diploma, now equivalent to a bachelor's degree, in business communication in English and German. My current role at AAU largely stems from a series of career developments, where I held positions such as study board secretary for the program in surveying, planning, and land management before eventually joining AAU.

VR: Throughout my years at AAU, I've always been somewhat unclear about the specific responsibilities of study secretaries and study board secretaries—other than their seemingly extraterrestrial ability to solve whatever issue I happen to have.

FKK: Ultimately, we handle all operational aspects of our programs. This includes planning semesters, booking rooms—relatively prac-

tical tasks—and coordinating with professors on how many sessions they wish to be allocated for their courses, the type of exams they prefer, and how these should be scheduled. Additionally, Danish law imposes numerous requirements that we must follow regarding exam registration, among other things. Lise, you handle more of the student-related challenges in this area, correct?

LSM: Yes. The study board essentially defines the curricula for the programs at AAU, which students must follow. When students are unable to meet these requirements, we must administer dispensations within the legal frameworks set by Danish law. Each dispensation for individual students is a key responsibility of the study board, alongside maintaining the curricula and ensuring quality control of the programs. We're consistently evaluated on whether our programs and individual courses meet the quality standards outlined in the curriculum. Once the curriculum is established, implementing it practically becomes the study secretaries' responsibility.

AML: As Frida mentioned, this implementation involves a lot of exam planning, which requires managing a surprisingly large number of details.

FKK: We also print students' diplomas and register them in various IT systems to ensure the exams are legally compliant and fully documented. Additionally, I currently coordinate courses that the department offers to students in other departments, which means my work has an interdepartmental component as well.

VR: It sounds like there are peak workload periods, especially around scheduling and exam times.

Everyone: Yes!

AML: At the moment, in October, we're particularly busy planning the January exam period, focusing on room assignments, finding external examiners, and so on. Managing Moodle pages for professors and assisting new students with navigating Moodle are also time-intensive tasks at the start of each semester.

VR: How do you handle the variability in workload?

FKK: Prioritizing these overlapping tasks is definitely challenging, especially since some have very strict deadlines. For exam planning, we typically start with the larger exams—those with the most students—and schedule smaller exams

around these. This approach has proven to be the most effective.

AML: There are only so many rooms at AAU, so securing the larger rooms for large, written exams is also essential, as is arranging for adequate supervision.

FKK: Each September is busy with new students, from organizing the orientation, hereunder RUS period, to answering questions about their programs' practical details. October is often hectic with staffing and our requisition system, where we must document the alignment between planned and actual staffing and begin scheduling for the next semester. This transitions into planning exams for the current semester, which makes October a particularly busy month.

LSM: October is also when we have the hard deadline for curriculum revisions. In 2022, for instance, we introduced a new specialization in statistics within the master's degree program in mathematics, which must comply with Danish legal requirements. Both the study board and study secretaries commonly agree that the fall semester is typically busier than the spring.

FKK: Yes, this is a natural outcome of the fall semester being shorter at five months compared to six in the spring, along with potential overlaps between re-exams and the start of the new semester's activities.

VR: I would love for our readers to gain insight into your thoughts on supporting students throughout their education and the central role you play in this.

LSM: That is the reason why I'm here—and it's the best part of my job: the relationship with the students. I may not be the same age as most of you, but it's truly what drives me. I recently read a scientific article that found increased social contact with younger people strongly correlates with better cognitive flexibility in aging brains. Although this isn't the only reason I enjoy my work, which is also underlined by the recency of the article, it certainly adds to my sense of purpose.

AML: This is one of the main reasons I chose this position, too. Building relationships with students and supporting them throughout their education, and even beyond, is incredibly rewarding. We're always ready to help students with whatever they need—which often goes far beyond a request for chalk or markers!

LSM: Of course, we work within the uni-

versity's structure and must recognize that our role is fundamentally administrative; much of our time goes into problem-solving and interdepartmental coordination. Still, at the last graduation, a few students achieved more than I expected when I first met them, and seeing their happiness from a sense of achievement was incredibly motivating. Knowing I may have played a small role in their success, despite any challenges along the way, is simply the best!

FKK: To me, our educational system—and by extension, our support of research and learning—is vital to the future of our society. We need motivated, intelligent students with a drive to improve lives. Supporting these students and aiding professors in their research brings a real sense of purpose to my work. In my view, a strong administration doesn't see assisting students as an inconvenience but rather as essential to helping them focus on their education and become valuable contributors to society. This is what success looks like for us.

VR: Despite your different backgrounds, it seems your motivation and sense of purpose stem from a shared commitment to facilitation and support. What would you say are the core skills needed to handle these tasks?

Everyone: Structure!

AML: The ability to juggle multiple priorities, especially during the peak workload times we discussed earlier.

LSM: Also, we're practitioners by nature. We consistently get from A to B as efficiently as possible. If a problem comes up in a team meeting, I guarantee it'll be solved within minutes. We're resolution experts!

FKK: Additionally, effective communication with a diverse range of people in different contexts is key. We read a lot of material on Danish law, but reciting it verbatim wouldn't be helpful for students. Instead, we need to translate these legal frameworks into clear, accessible information that students can navigate easily.

VR: Lastly, do you have any advice for students who want to make the most of their study secretaries?

LSM: Reach out to us as soon as you face any challenges! It's much easier for us to help you sooner rather than later.

FKK: And read your emails! Joke aside, a lot can be affected if students miss key information. We don't always have the legal right to act on behalf of students, so it's important they stay informed. That said, we see ourselves as guides, here to support students through every stage of their education.

VR: So the term 'supervisors' might describe your role better than 'mom and dad,' wouldn't you say?

LSM: Absolutely. Our students are adults. While we very occasionally might have to remind a few of them of that, we also know that starting university often coincides with moving out of their parent's home and standing on their own feet for the first time.

FKK: We acknowledge this transition by setting up, for instance, pop-up events during lunch breaks at the start of each semester so students can get to know us. We aim to create a welcoming atmosphere: there are no stupid questions, and our doors are always open. We genuinely want to assist and support you.