EVALUATION REPORT
OF POLITICAL SCIENCES (612L20001) STUDY PROGRAMME
at Vilnius University

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Išvados parengtos anglų kalba
Report language - English

Vilnius
2013
**DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ**

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<td>612L20001</td>
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<td>Studijų sritis</td>
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<td>Studijų programos įregistravimo data</td>
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**INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME**

<table>
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<th>Title of the study programme</th>
<th>Political Sciences</th>
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<td>State code</td>
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I. INTRODUCTION

Bachelor programme of political science offered by the University of Vilnius has enjoyed long a reputation of excellent programme with excellent staff and students, also giving the graduates wonderful opportunities to make a career in the service of many well-established institutions. This was also reflected by the previous accreditation of the programme in 2007, as it rose up several points of strengths and only some minor weaknesses of the programme (Final Assessment Report 2007, 8-9). Many strengths pointed out by the previous accreditation team are the same as the present team has found relevant: successes in recruiting well-motivated students, structuring curriculum that develops students’ knowledge and understanding of the key areas of political science, providing analytical skills highly appreciated by employers, sustaining constant will to use quality assurance to further development of the programme, and creating opportunities to use the research base of the academic staff in teaching the programme. These and some other well-qualified aspects continue to be part of the programme.

The previous team addressed as areas of improvement student counselling related to personal and motivational issues and the challenges of the part-time programme. The programme has tackled both issues. It has terminated the part-time programme as the legal framework has made part-time studies more challenging and less popular among potential students. The issue of student counselling has proved to be a larger issue related to university wide services. In any case, the programme has taken seriously the feedback given by the previous assessment group. For example, the bachelor thesis process and been structured in a new way leaving students more time to prepare the thesis and also giving more space for the motivation of the student to grow and find its direction.

The programme continues to be a flagship programme in many ways, but changes in the operative environment may challenge the standard operating procedures’ and their relevance. This underlines the need to be ready for modifications that ensure the sustainability of this very successful programme.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

On the level of the programme and course modules the aims and leaning outcomes are generally very well defined, clear, and concise. Definitions differentiate between knowledge, understanding, and skill. Module descriptions are very informative, including assessment strategy with weight of each assignment and assessment criteria for each assignment. One can consider these structures and formulations exemplary for many other programmes.

Attitudes and values are mostly absent in the definitions, but for the aim to create critical attitude towards knowledge and societal issues in general. For example, the ethics of politics, administrative ethics, democratic values, and corruption constitute an area that might be considered also in the definition of intended learning outcomes related to values and ethics. Plagiarism and other aspects of research ethics are addressed, but the software for revealing plagiarism is not still in efficient use for Lithuanian texts because of the narrow basis of available texts.

In the SER, there is a detailed comparison of the programme to other bachelor programmes of political science in the country, but the identity or profile of the programme could be clearer.
claimed emphasis on issues of the European Union may not be sufficient for a profile. Based on the interviews during the site visit, the identity or profile of the programme is rather vague. The principle of interdisciplinarity is sometimes referred to, but it is not necessarily widely shared among the staff and students. It seems that the programme has not specified its nature of interdisciplinarity in any transparent way. This may affect the quality of learning. It appears that the discussion on the identity or profile of the programme is influenced by complacency. Some interviewees almost had to be drawn out to talk about any possibility of improvement. The vagueness and complacency may indicate a need to discuss more intensively on the creation of a distinctive mission statement and vision for the programme to guide its development in the future.

The aims and learning outcomes are based on the academic and professional requirements. This is supported by the academic competences and research culture among the teachers of the programme. The Institution has the general policy that social partners of the programme are involved in all committees and study programmes as well as in final thesis defences. The achievability of learning outcomes is reported to Institution’s Board of Trustees which represents major stakeholders. This gives an opportunity to analyse the adequacy of the learning objectives of the programme together with actors knowledgeable about public needs and the needs of the labour market. The aims and learning outcomes are clearly consistent with the type and level of the qualifications offered, as well as with the content and the name of the programme.

2. Curriculum design

On the whole, the curriculum design fulfils the general expectations of a bachelor programme of political science. The curriculum design meets the legal requirements. The study modules are spread evenly and their themes are not repetitive. The content of the modules is consistent with the type and level of the studies. The number of elective modules is sufficient. The scope of the curriculum covers different branches of political science and adjacent social science disciplines. The content and methods of modules are, in general, appropriate for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The content of the programme reflects the latest results of the research in political science, as teachers are able to use the expertise of their own research in teaching. The literature is adequate in terms of learning objectives of the modules. The SER describes in detail the major changes of the programme, as they are related to recent changes in the field of political science.

Research skills are taught in the modules of basics of research, philosophy of social science and quantitative methods. There is no module on qualitative methods. They are taught to some extent on demand basis during the bachelor thesis process. However, this may not support adequately the development of deeper understanding of qualitative methods and their strength in creating original research problems. There is a need for better coordination of teaching or a separate module to make it sure that the teaching qualitative methods is sufficient and timely. More coordinated cooperation with other disciplines of social science may be beneficial in the provision of courses of single techniques of qualitative methodology. Also the thesis process needs slightly more attention in teaching scientific writing, based on implications of reading bachelor theses.

Issues of gender and politics are, according to interviews, addressed, although there is no module of this topic. It seems that teaching in this area, currently part of mainstream political science curriculum, is not provided in a sufficiently coordinated way. The programme might consider new solutions to make gender studies more transparently an integrated part of the curriculum.

The four months long internship is long enough to develop understanding of the professional practice of the organisation providing the internship. The process of internship is organised...
exceptionally well ensuring sufficient communication of shared goals of internship between key actors.

The assessment criteria of bachelor theses are defined in the module description. This is a good practice. However, the review statements that were available during the site visit exemplified great variety in their use. To ensure sufficient communication, transparency and justification of the grading to students, the programme could consider possibilities for more structured feedback to students, for example with the help of a well-designed form, without losing the possibility of explaining adequately the factors behind a single grade.

Curriculum is based on the Institution’s Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (TLA) that has been implemented for several years. According the interviews, it is a living practice not specified in a strategy document. Although it may have turned to successful professional culture, it may be easier to explain and justify the TLA strategy to new teachers with concise descriptions where appropriate.

3. Staff

The study programme is taught by the staff meeting legal requirements. The number of scientists in proportion to practitioners and research fellows (PhD candidates) complies general requirements. The sustainability of the human resources is clearly addressed emphasising internal recruitment, but recruiting academic staff from the outside and from abroad is not an obvious part of strategic human resources management. Teacher exchange and joint research projects are instruments that may make the attractiveness of the Institution more transparent to interested postdocs from abroad, given there is a possibility to increase the share of courses taught in English. As the youngest age groups of the staff (25-30 and 30-40 years) comprise around 35 per cent of the staff, it is obvious that the general sustainability of the staff has been ensured by human resources management practices.

Teaching staff turnover does not endanger an adequate provision of the programme. The conditions for the professional development of teachers are adequate. Pedagogical courses are offered at the level of the university and many teachers of the programme have attended the courses. Teaching and research are related at individual level and the research activities of teachers are followed systematically along with annual performance measurement practices. However, all teachers do not seem to know, how performance information is used on the institutional level. The System of Motivation Promotion, pointed out in the SER, also did not seem to be widely known, although there were no doubts of the high motivation of the academic staff. The programme follows the allocation of academic workloads on the level of contact hours and has systematic information about these workloads of all groups of the staff. Non-contact hours are difficult to measure, but some information might be available about the individual variation of the numbers of students and different types of assignments with ensuing variation of the teacher’s time needed for assessment of assignments. Sometimes these factors may create substantial differences between the actual individual workloads, although the contact hours are the same. The ratio of workloads between full-time and part-time teaching staff needs to be monitored constantly in order to keep a motivated staff oriented to academic career and having sufficient time for research.

International teacher exchange is stable (2-3 outgoing, 5 incoming) but it could be stronger. Recently graduated PhDs attend often to international summer schools. There is a relatively strong research culture, but international research co-operation could be stronger. Many research projects are funded externally. Academic staff takes part in international conferences (abroad), but not all on annual basis. However, research output is dominantly published in Lithuanian language. There is a need for publishing more in international peer reviewed journals, although it is by all means appropriate to publish in Lithuanian language to make research societally

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effective and contribute to the development of Lithuanian language as a language of social science – especially when political science research is relatively young in Lithuania. A sabbatical system would surely underpin the research effort and give more opportunities also for international research cooperation, but the staff seemed to be rather sceptical about the ‘realism’ of any sabbatical system.

4. Facilities and learning resources

On the whole, facilities and learning resources are adequate in terms of their size and quality. However, part of the seminars are taught in auditorium-like rooms that are not best for creating interactive situation, if the chairs and tables are not movable. The lecture rooms are equipped with appropriate devices supporting effective teaching and learning and there are computer halls with altogether 50 computers for students’ use. The Institute has its own library which conducts customer surveys and is knowledgeable, for example, about the wishes of students (e.g., somewhat more copies of textbooks). Students use also other libraries of the university and they have sufficient access to international databases of scientific journals. Interviewed students and staff did not point to any problems with facilities and learning resources.

5. Study process and student assessment

The attraction of the programme is enduring and stable, which gives excellent opportunities for the programme to receive well-motivated and talented students. The admission process is designed carefully. Teachers do not see any major differences between the learning outcomes of state-paid and self-paid students, although the latters’ admission grades are lower, especially in 2011-2012. The SER includes thorough analysis of admission and dropouts. The programme knows on individual level the basic reasons for dropout (e.g., lack of interest in political science, acceptance letters from the UK universities). The study process is well planned and there is adequate provision of teaching for all semesters. The programme is aware of students’ wishes to reduce the workload of the second semester to create better balance between the semesters. There was also a remark about fragmentation in studies in the third and fourth year. Interviewed students felt that they are not left alone, the consultation of teachers is frequent and easy also outside teachers’ designated office hours. Many students considered staff amenable and also the junior staff were valued as professionals in the field.

The size of seminar groups (20-25 students) is relatively big. Smaller groups would support more interactive teaching practices as the time for talking and presenting would be bigger for each student. This is naturally related to available teaching resources, but the staff has accustomed to lead seminars and ensure learning outcomes also in these circumstances. Students are encouraged to participate in research activities; this was confirmed both by interviewed students and academic staff. Research work can be taken as an elective course, but might be more popular if moved to later semesters. The annual competition (since 1999) of the best Bachelor and Master thesis makes students’ best performance public and supports the culture of excellence. For natural reasons, the quality of bachelor theses varies. There is space for improvement in the structure of the theses and knowledge of scientific writing. Many topics are challenging and original, but some theses might benefit from more practical focus.

International student mobility is relatively strong. An increasing number of students have chosen to do their internship abroad. The methods of teaching have a certain basic variation, covering also group work and other non-traditional ways of teaching. Problem-based learning is applied in
some courses, indicating willingness to adopt new approaches in teaching and learning. Based on interviews, the student community seems to be very committed and motivated. Command of English appears to be good to excellent.

The assessment system of students’ performance, mostly based on so-called cumulative assessment, is very systematic and publicly available through detailed module descriptions and other documents. The programme might consider more systematic practices in the structure of the review statements of grading the bachelor theses (see curriculum design, above). The programme has flexible arrangements to give students a second chance to submit their bachelor thesis next semester in case of failure to submit it in time. There is also a possibility for students to appeal about their grade to the Exam Appeal Commission. The programme has good contacts to alumni and organisations providing internship and also the Board of Trustees, which support the development of the programme to meet the expectations of the employing organisations. Students are supported also in issues related to prospective careers. Those who do not choose to continue their studies tend to be employed easily. The career opportunities of the graduates seem to excellent. The programme monitors the employment processes of their graduate with appropriate measures.

6. Programme management

The responsibilities for decisions and monitoring of the implementation of the programme are clearly allocated. The Committee of Studies has the primary responsibility of the quality assurance of the programme. The most developed mechanism for collecting feedback is that of students’ feedback from teaching, which is regular and effective part of the development of the programme. The SER says that feedback is collected, in addition, from lecturers, social partners, employers and graduates. According to interviews, there is no systematic procedure for the collection of feedback from these actors, but the information is gathered in different informal ways. As there is no transparent system of this feedback, the quality assurance system of the Institution, linked to these issues, and its relation to the programme needs perhaps more attention. As a recent exception, a feedback from students’ supervisors of internship has been established to bring in information about potential employers’ view about students doing their internship.

The identity and profile of the programme, especially the nature of its interdisciplinarity, need attention in the future (see aims and learning outcomes, above). The further development of interdisciplinarity may need reconsideration of the compulsory and elective modules or new type of collaboration between the internal and external experts (for example, in teaching qualitative methods and issues of gender and politics). In principle, the architecture of modules may be thematic, providing input from many disciplines – or disciplinary, based on one discipline at a time. The programme might consider how these options could be applied in the future specification of the interdisciplinary profile of the studies.

The programme management takes efficient use of social partners by organising their output in the form of the Board of Trustees. Social partners are also included in the practices of the Committee of Studies and the Commission of Final Thesis. Social partners have been active in presenting initiatives for the development of the programme. The programme obviously benefits from its location in Vilnius and can make strong use of social partners like Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministry which serve to place graduates with employment. The reputation of the programme is clearly very good in the eyes of social partners. On the whole, it is clear that the outcomes of internal and external evaluations (like the comments from the 2007 accreditation) are used for the improvement of the programme.

The general picture of the quality assurance system is favourable. However, the SER does not include a balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. This may be an
indication of organisation culture that does not fully support the development of the programme, if the operative environment changes in unpredictable ways. The organisational culture may also be influenced by strands of complacency that are based on successful history of the programme along with the achievements of the Institution during its existence. The programme management carries the responsibility of creating organisational practices of strategic management and quality management that help to question ‘standard operating procedures’ and taken-for-granted views of operating environment in order to avoid the trap of success. It was noted with regret that the Director could not attend the interview sessions. It was unfortunate given the high priority normally given to such an assessment exercise by universities at home and abroad.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The programme is very strong in many respects, but even the best programmes may consider ways to improve their performance. The team suggests the following:

1. Creating a clear mission statement for the programme as well as a vision that shows where the programme wants to be in the future and – to this end – create a more distinctive profile for the programme to identify it as compared to other bachelor programmes of political science in Lithuania, for example, in its application of principles of interdisciplinarity.
2. Considering a more systematic internationalisation strategy that would include recruitment of academic staff from abroad, more active international teacher exchange, international research co-operation and publishing in international peer reviewed journals.
3. Reflecting how values and attitudes can be included in the definition of learning outcomes in appropriate ways.
4. Even though the assessment criteria of bachelor theses are defined in the module description, the programme management might consider possibilities for more structured feedback to students, for example with the help of a well-designed form, without losing the possibility of explaining adequately the factors behind a single grade. More attention should be paid on achieving the learning outcomes of scientific writing.
5. Qualitative research methods and issues of gender and politics are addressed to some extent in the programme, but the programme may consider a more coordinated way to integrate these studies to the curriculum in a more transparent way, if not as independent modules.

IV. SUMMARY

The programme continues to be one of the flagship programmes of the university. It has a strong quality assurance culture and it pays special attention to continuous development. It takes seriously both internal and external evaluations. The aims and learning outcomes are generally very well defined, clear and concise. Research culture supports the quality of teaching. Social partners are very positive about the programme and also involved in the development of the programme. On the whole, the curriculum design fulfils the general expectations. The scope of the curriculum covers many branches of political science, and the number of electives is sufficient. The programme has improved the teaching of research skills and the process leading to bachelor thesis. The transparency of assessment strategy is generally exemplary. The staff is very committed and competent in teaching and active in research, showing also willingness to
develop their professional competences and internationalisation. The attraction of the programme among prospective student is very strong. International student exchange is active. Consultation of teachers is frequent and easy for students. Programme management is well organised, involving all major stakeholders.

The programme is very strong in many respects, but even the best programmes may consider ways to improve their performance. Some suggestions are quite specific; some reflect also the national challenges of higher education. The identity and profile of the programme could be more transparent. Qualitative research methods and issues of gender and politics need more attention. The application of the designated assessment criteria of bachelor theses could be more systematic. Recruitment of academic staff from outside and from abroad might need reconsideration. International teacher exchange could be more active. International research cooperation and publishing in peer reviewed journals could be stronger. Smaller size of seminar groups would intensify learning based on interaction. The programme may consider how it can further develop itself as a learning organisation which makes transparent both its strengths and its needs and ambitions of improvement, both internally and externally.

The team recommends the creation of a clear mission statement for the programme as well as a vision that would show where the programme wants to be in the future. This would strengthen the distinctiveness of the programme’s profile. A more systematic internationalisation strategy related to staff recruitment, research cooperation and publishing might make already existing practices more effective. The reflection of the inclusion of how values and attitudes can further improve the definition of learning outcomes could be helpful. Even though the assessment criteria of bachelor theses are defined in the module description, more structured feedback for students might be achieved with the help of a well-designed form. More attention should be paid on achieving the learning outcomes of scientific writing. Qualitative research methods and issues of gender and politics are addressed to some extent in the programme, but there might be opportunities for more systematic solutions.
V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Political Sciences* (state code – 612L20001) at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

*Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.*

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Evaluation Area</th>
<th>Evaluation Area in Points*</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Programme aims and learning outcomes</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Curriculum design</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Material resources</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Study process and assessment (student admission, study process student support, achievement assessment)</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)</td>
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*Total: 22*

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated; 2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement; 3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features; 4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.*

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Prof.dr. Geoffrey Pridham  
Prof.dr. Algis Krupavičius  
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VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETETO PIRMOSIOS PAKOPOS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS
POLITIKOS MOKSLAI (VALSTYBINIS KODAS – 612L20001) 2013-12-09
EKSPERTINIO VERTINIMO IŠVADŲ NR. SV4-520 IŠRAŠAS

V. APIBENDRINAMASIS ĮVERTINIMAS

Vilniaus universiteto studijų programa Politikos mokslai (valstybinis kodas – 612L20001) vertinama teigiamai.

<table>
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<th>Eil. Nr.</th>
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<th>Srities įvertinimas, balais*</th>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Studijų eiga ir jos vertinimas</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Programos vadyba</td>
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<td><strong>Iš viso:</strong></td>
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* 1 - Nepatenkinamai (yra esminiių trūkumų, kuriuos būtina pašalinti)
  2 - Patenkinamai (tenkina minimalius reikalavimus, reikia tobulinti)
  3 - Gerai (sistemiskai pločiojamai sritys, turi savitų bruožų)
  4 - Labai gerai (sritis yra išskirtinė)

<...>

IV. SANTRAUKA


Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras


III. REKOMENDACIJOS

Daugeliu požiūrių programa labai stipri, tačiau galima pasvarstyti, kaip būtų galima patobulinti net ir pačias geriausias programas. Vertinimo grupė siūlo:

1. Sukurti aišką programos misijos aprašymą ir viziją, iš kurių būtų matyti, ko programa siekia ateityje, o tuo tikslu – ir išamesnį programos profilį, kurį identifikuotų ją, lyginant su kitomis Lietuvoje dėstomomis politikos mokslų bakalauro programomis, pavyzdžiui, Lietuvos politikos mokslų bakalauro programomis, pavyzdžiui, pavyzdžiui, nurodytų, kaip šioje programoje taikomi tarpdisciplininiai principai.

2. Apgalvoti sistemiškesnę tarptautiškumo strategiją, kuri apimtų akademinio personalo iš užsienio įdarbinimą, aktyvesnius tarptautinius dėstytojų, tarptautinį bendradarbiavimą mokslių tyrimų srityje ir straipsnių publikavimą tarptautiniuose recenzuojamose žurnaluose.

3. Apsvarstyti, kaip į studijų rezultatų aprašą būtų galima tinkamai įtraukti vertinimo aspektus.

4. Nors bakalauro darbo vertinimo kriterijai yra nurodyti modulio apraše, svarstytina, kaip programos vadovybė studentams galėtų pateikti aiškiai struktūrą viršutinių ryšių, pavyzdžiui, tam galėtų būti naudojama įsami forma, tuo pačiu neprašant tų galimybės tinkamai pateikti veiksnius, lėmusius vieną ar kitą pažymą. Galėtų būti skiriama daugiau dėmesio šiuo dalyvu rezultatų siekimui rašant moksliusius darbus.

5. Programoje skiriama dėmesio kokybiniam tyrimų metodams, lyčių ir politikos klausimams, tačiau reikėtų apsvarstyti, kaip šias temas labiau koordinuoti ir skaidriausiuose integravimu į studijų programos turinį, o galbūt apskritai vertėtų jas išskirti į atskirus modulius.
Paslaugos teikėja patvirtina, jog yra susipažinusi su Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso 1
235 straipsnio, numatančio atsakomybę už melagingą ar žinomai neteisingai atliktą vertimą,
reikalavimais.

Vertėjos rekvizitai (vardas, pavardė, parašas)

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