



BSc Political Science
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The bachelor's programme Politicologie (henceforth Political Science) offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) at VU University is characterized by a foundation in the breadth of political science as a scientific discipline, with a substantive emphasis on the entwined nature of national and global politics. The panel appreciates the broad setup of the BSc. It considers the programme to have a solid foundation in the traditional disciplines of political science (comparative politics, international relations, and political theory). At the same time, the programme pays attention to other disciplines, such as public administration or sociology, and is open to incorporating current developments. The intended learning outcomes reflect this profile well and capture the critical and open attitude aimed for. The panel concludes that they are well-suited for a bachelor's programme in political science. The BSc ensures that its profile, aims, and learning outcomes match the needs of and developments in the professional field through its External Advisory Board, whose composition has recently changed to include a more diverse group of alumni and external stakeholders. The panel applauds this shift.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

According to the panel, the BSc in Political Science offers students a well-balanced, logical and well-structured curriculum that addresses all substantive subjects that may be expected in a BSc in Political Science. Students are offered sufficient freedom to shape their own learning trajectories in the thesis and the elective semester. The panel is particularly positive about the attention paid to research skills in the BSc. Students receive solid training in methods, especially in quantitative methods, and the programme is working on expanding attention paid to qualitative methods as well. The panel highly appreciates this attention paid to research methods. It recommends introducing all students to human research ethics in an accessible manner to match this development.

The panel considers the programme to be challenging, yet feasible. It applauds the didactic vision of a personal, open and responsible approach, which is reflected in the varied teaching methods and many elective and extracurricular options used in the programme. The BSc succeeds in creating an active and open learning community where students feel welcome and challenged. The programme works hard at enhancing feasibility, for instance through the mentorship programme and the thesis trajectory. The panel considers the choice for an English track to be logical and fitting, not only because English is the language used in the academic as well as the professional field of Political Science, but also given the track's substantive focus on Global Politics.

The panel concludes that staff quality is sufficient for offering the BSc. Staff quantity is a point of attention in the programme, but is dealt with thanks to extra funds available now and the fact that the management keeps the topic on the agenda and proactively supports its staff in addressing it. The panel concludes that staff quantity is sufficient, but should remain a priority. It supports the programme's wish to increase the percentage of permanent and more senior staff in the BSc. In its hiring policy, the BSc should aim for staff diversity, particularly since an increase of non-Western perspectives would be beneficial to the programme content.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel finds that student assessment in the BSc Political Science is well-designed and well-executed. It appreciates the varied assessment forms, both summative and formative, and the various procedures in place. The Examination Board is in control of assessment quality through its regular checks on courses, theses and internship reports, and internship and thesis assessment are done in an insightful manner. The

panel learnt from alumni that they usually receive the assessment forms of the thesis by way of final feedback. A more extensive explanation is given orally when the supervisor deems this useful or necessary. The panel suggests giving this feedback moment a more structural character by introducing it for all students as useful input for their future studies and careers.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The panel finds that the final theses of the BSc Political Science demonstrate that they achieve or even exceed the level aimed at and that they reflect the students' solid training in (quantitative) research methods throughout the programme. Alumni feel well-prepared for master's degrees due to this training, paired with the strong substantive training in political science they received during the BSc. The panel therefore concludes that the learning outcomes are achieved.

Score table

The panel assesses the programmes as follows:

BSc Politicologie

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes	meets the standard
Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment	meets the standard
Standard 3: Student assessment	meets the standard
Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes	meets the standard

General conclusion positive

Prof. dr. Petra Meier
Chair

Dr. Fiona Schouten
Secretary

Date: 19 June 2023

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 21 March 2023, the Political Science programmes of Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam were assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Political Science. The assessment cluster consisted of 9 programmes, offered by Radboud University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam and Leiden University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Political Science. Fiona Schouten acted both as coordinator and secretary in the cluster assessment. She has been certified and registered by the NVAO.

Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 2 April 2022, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on her role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The programmes composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3) and selected representative partners for the various interviews. They also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programmes provided the coordinator with a list of graduates over the September 2020-August 2022. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses per programme. She took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the various tracks. Prior to the site visit, the programmes provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. They also provided the panel with the self-evaluation reports and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation reports and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to a colleague in Academion for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After

processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the programmes in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalised the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Faculty of Social Sciences at VU Amsterdam.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment:

- Prof. dr. Petra Meier, Professor in Politics at the University of Antwerp, Belgium (chair);
- Dr. Chris van der Borgh, Associate Professor at the Centre for Conflict Studies Utrecht University;
- Prof. dr. Stefan Rummens, Professor in Philosophy at KU Leuven, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Marijke Breuning, Professor of Political Science at the University of North Texas, USA;
- Prof. dr. Peter Bursens, Professor in Political Science at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Maarten Vink, Professor in Citizenship Studies and chair of the Global Citizenship research programme of the Robert Schuman Centre at the European University Institute, Italy;
- Prof. dr. Sofie Marien, Associate Professor in Comparative and Historical Political Science at the University of Leuven, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Amy Verdun, Professor of Political Science and founding Director of the European Studies Program at the University of Victoria, Canada;
- Dr. Laura Horn, Associate Professor in Political Economy at Roskilde University, Denmark;
- Fee A'mema MSc, Political Science graduate at Leiden University (student member);
- Elsbeth de Vries, MSc student in Political Theory at Radboud University;
- Mark Dzoljic BSc, MSc student in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam.

The panel assessing the Political Science programmes at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. Petra Meier, Professor in Politics at the University of Antwerp, Belgium (chair);
- Prof. dr. Peter Bursens, Professor in Political Science at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Prof. dr. Amy Verdun, Professor of Political Science and founding Director of the European Studies Program at the University of Victoria, Canada;
- Dr. Laura Horn, Associate Professor in Political Economy at Roskilde University, Denmark;
- Elsbeth de Vries, MSc student in Political Theory at Radboud University.

Information on the programmes

Name of the institution:	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive

Programme name:	Politicologie
CROHO number:	56606
Level:	Bachelor
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	180 EC

Specialisations or tracks:	Politologie (specializations Mondiale Politiek and Nationale Politiek en Bestuur) Political Science (specialization Global Politics)
Location:	Amsterdam
Educational minor:	Applicable
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	Dutch, English
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2023

Description of the assessment

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

The bachelor's programme Politicologie (henceforth Political Science) offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) at the VU prepares students to practise political science independently and to apply the scientific knowledge and skills acquired during the programme in a professional capacity. Graduates are able to analyse (the causes and effects of) contemporary social developments, such as globalization and regionalization, the nationalist and populist reactions to these developments, the rise of the information society and the role of diversity. The central aims of the BSc Political Science are (1) to provide students with a solid base in political science as a scientific discipline; (2) to equip them with the necessary academic and professional skills to recognise and analyse versatile social issues, to contribute to possible solutions for these issues, and to formulate and communicate their findings and insights in a societally relevant manner; (3) to educate students to become responsible, critical, open-minded and engaged citizens and professionals.

The programme is characterized by a foundation in the breadth of political science as a scientific discipline, with a substantive emphasis on the entwined nature of national and global politics. In accordance with the Domain Specific Reference Framework as formulated by the four political science departments of the Netherlands, the core object of study is 'conflicts and collective decision-making processes of groups and organisations, the tangible and intangible interests, institutions, and power processes that underpin these conflicts and decision-making processes, and their societal effects'. Within this core object of study, political science at the VU Amsterdam is characterised by the study of the entire political process within the (sub)national, European, and global public domains. This process ranges from the social struggle about the regulation of the public domain (politics), to the nature and design of the institutional framework in which that struggle and regulation take place (polity), to the political dimensions of the policy and its social impact (policy). These elements differ strongly per national political system, as a result of which (inter)national comparison can provide insight into the political process.

In addition, the bachelor's in Political Science features a strong interlinking of two core substantive areas of the discipline, Comparative Politics and International Relations, complemented by (normative) Political Theory. As a distinguishing feature the programme also integrates knowledge and insights from Public Administration and policy processes, or governance, at interacting levels and in the context of a changing political field due to globalization. Students specialize in Mondiale Politiek (MP) / Global Politics (GP) or Nationale Politiek en Beleid (NPB). Within the specializations students have the opportunity to broaden their knowledge into either international issues and cross-border transnational processes, institutions, actors and conflicts (MP and GP) or the domestic processes, problems and solutions (NPB).

The programme translated its aims into 16 intended learning outcomes (ILOs, see appendix 1). The outcomes match the Domain Specific Reference Framework for Political Science and reflect the Dublin descriptors for bachelor's programmes. Upon advice of the previous panel, the ILOs have been reformulated to reflect more accurately the VU core values (responsible, open and personally engaged), in particular those referring to Attitudes (C).

The panel appreciates the BSc programme's broad setup, aimed at educating well-rounded political science bachelors. It considers the programme to have a solid foundation in the traditional disciplines of political science (comparative politics, international relations, and political theory). At the same time, the programme pays attention to other disciplines, such as public administration or sociology, and is open to incorporating current developments into its curriculum. According to the panel, the adapted ILOs reflect this profile well and capture the critical and open attitude aimed for. Since they are formulated in accordance with the Domain Specific Reference Framework and the Dublin descriptors, the panel concludes that they are well-suited for a bachelor's programme in political science.

The BSc ensures that its profile, aims, and learning outcomes match the needs of and developments in the professional field through its External Advisory Board (EAB). The EAB consists of Political Science alumni and other professionals working in local or national governments, Europe, or semi-public and private companies. Recently, the composition of this Board has changed to include a more diverse group of alumni and external stakeholders. The Board is now composed of both senior and more junior Political Scientists with more varying backgrounds both culturally and in terms of positions in the working field. The panel applauds this shift and appreciates the importance that the programme attaches to the EAB's input.

Considerations

The panel appreciates the broad setup of the BSc Political Science at VU University. It considers the programme to have a solid foundation in the traditional disciplines of political science (comparative politics, international relations, and political theory). At the same time, the programme pays attention to other disciplines, such as public administration or sociology, and is open to incorporating current developments. The intended learning outcomes reflect this profile well and capture the critical and open attitude aimed for. The panel concludes that they are well-suited for a bachelor's programme in political science. The BSc ensures that its profile, aims, and learning outcomes match the needs of and developments in the professional field through its External Advisory Board, whose composition has recently changed to include a more diverse group of alumni and external stakeholders. The panel applauds this shift.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

Curriculum

The bachelor's in Political Science is a three-year programme, consisting of 180 EC in 6-EC course units. The academic calendar is divided into six periods of eight weeks (periods 1, 2, 4, 5) or four weeks (periods 3, 6). From the start, the BSc has a Dutch and an English track. The Dutch track diverges after one year into two thematic specialisations: Mondiale Politiek and Nationale Politiek en Bestuur. The English-language track - Global Politics - consists of the same courses as the specialisation Mondiale Politiek. The two tracks are partly offered in separate courses where the language of instruction and assessment is either Dutch or English, and partly as joint courses where the language of instruction is English, but where students in the

Dutch track may opt to hand in their exams and/or assignments in Dutch. See appendix 2 for a curriculum overview, including the different Dutch- and English-language courses offered.

The first year entails a common programme for all students (albeit partly in separate courses for the two language tracks). The courses offer an introduction into the main subfields of political science and a general introduction to public administration, along with basic academic and research skills. Four courses (24 EC) belong to the Academic Core, which all bachelor's programmes at the faculty are required to incorporate. These are common courses for all FSS students, aimed at methodological training and history of social sciences. In the final period, students participate in the Workshop Model United Nations.

In the second year, students in the track Global Politics and the specialization Mondiale Politiek take three courses (18 EC) that aim to broaden and deepen the knowledge of core areas of comparative international politics and international relations. For students in the specialization Nationale Politiek en Bestuur, the programme offers three courses (18 EC) that focus on national politics in a globalized context and interlink this with the analysis of public administration and policy. Students also follow a final Academic Core course in Philosophy of Science (6 EC) and, like in all bachelor's programmes at the FSS, participate in the joint curriculum Social Sciences for Society (SS4S) (12 EC; two restricted-choice courses).

The first semester of the third year (30 EC) is reserved for the elective space (30 EC). This space can be used for an internship, studying abroad, a minor or electives. All students then reunite in two English-language common courses in period 4, and subsequently write their bachelor's thesis (18 EC) within their specialization.

The curriculum pays attention to academic as well as professional skills. Students are trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods from the start (in the Academic Skills workshops) and throughout the programme. Aside from their bachelor's thesis, students complete two research projects in which they complete the full empirical cycle: Research Project Political Science and Governing Global Challenges (both in year 2). Professional skills are incorporated into the curriculum from the start, and include presenting, judgement-forming, cooperating and communicating. Increasingly, courses incorporate professionally oriented assignments, such as policy proposals, memos, debating and public speaking. In year 1, the Workshop Model UN works towards a two-day simulation of an international diplomatic conference, requiring students to write a policy-oriented memo, and to practice debating and collaboration skills. In year 2, the course Governing Global Challenges has students work with external partners, write their own policy analysis, engage in group work, and write a consultancy or policy report.

The panel studied the curriculum setup and discussed it with programme staff and students. It concludes that the curriculum is complex, yet well-balanced, logical and structured. The panel ascertained that all substantive subjects that may be expected in a BSc in Political Science are present within the various courses, either explicitly or, in the case of related disciplines such as sociology and economics, woven into the course content. The panel appreciates the placement of the Model UN at the end of year 1 and the Research Project in year 2. The timing of these courses allows students to relate the knowledge and skills studied in the courses to the academic and working fields early on. It is also positive about the elective space in year 3, allowing students to place their own accents and /or opt for an internship or period abroad.

The panel is particularly positive about the attention paid to research skills in the BSc. Students receive solid methods training, especially in quantitative methods, which includes doing a research project in year 2. As a result they are well-prepared to write their bachelor's thesis. The panel noticed that research ethics are dealt with informally in the programme, highlighted by the thesis supervisor when necessary. Since many BSc

students work on research with human participants, or might do so in subsequent research, the panel recommends introducing all students to human ethics principles in an accessible, yet structured manner.

The programme has invested in strengthening its quantitative research components over the past few years and is now considering also boosting attention paid to qualitative methods. Currently, these are dealt with chiefly in the course Dutch Politics and Qualitative Methods. The programme intends to separate Dutch political analysis from qualitative methods and to introduce a course specifically designed for instruction in qualitative methods in year 2 as of 2024-2025, followed by a separate research project in qualitative methods. In order to make room in the curriculum, the course Political Analysis, which prepares for the subsequent Bachelor's Thesis Project, will be incorporated into the thesis trajectory. The panel agrees with the planned changes, as long as the course content necessary for achieving the programme's exit qualifications remains in place. It appreciates strengthening the qualitative methods learning line.

Didactic approach and teaching methods

The educational vision of the BSc Political Science is linked to the educational vision of the VU, in which the core values of *personal*, *open* and *responsible* serve as guidelines for staff and students. The core value *personal* is understood as a learning environment in which students and staff members know each other and learn from each other, where each student is recognized as an individual, and where students feel free and stimulated to bring in their personal experiences. This goal is achieved by offering sufficiently small-scale tutorial- or seminar-based teaching and interactive teaching methods, involving students as assistants in research, and supporting students to create and maintain an active and lively student community. Being *open* means that the programmes welcome students from all national, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds, and provides a learning environment that is open to a wide variety of worldviews, political convictions and lifestyles, creating a safe space on the one hand and stimulating (self-)critical and reflexive thinking on the other. The value *responsible* requires students to take responsibility for their own learning process and engage with the programme as a whole, inside and outside of the classroom, and to become responsible future citizens and professionals who reflect upon their role as trained political scientists in the wider society.

In the BSc, this approach is reflected in an activating approach with interactive elements and many options for students to tailor the programme to their personal needs and insights. The curriculum offers lecture-based courses as well as smaller seminar-based courses, or tutor groups alongside lectures. Examples of activating teaching methods are the Workshop Model UN simulation, case-based learning and Community Service Learning (in Governing Global Challenges). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in online and blended learning methods. The programme also activates students through extracurricular options, organized with the help of student coordinators. These include social events, current affairs events, career events and a student-led online magazine, *Politeia*. In this way, the programme invests in creating a close-knit and active community and learning environment.

The panel highly appreciates the didactic vision and approach, as well as the varied teaching methods and the many elective and extracurricular options used in the programme. During the site visit, the panel learnt from students and alumni as well as from staff members that the programme succeeds in creating an active and open learning community in which students feel welcome and challenged. The extracurricular activities contribute to this sense of community, as does the teaching staff, whom the students consider accessible and involved. Another important aspect of creating a sense of community is the open and proactive attitude of the members of the programme management. They offer students a weekly online consultation hour, and host an annual 'speak your mind session' where management and students exchange feedback and ideas.

This personal approach works very well in creating the desired activating and open community. The panel applauds the programme for achieving such a community.

Feasibility and guidance

In order to make the BSc feasible for all students, the programme has entry requirements in place that include proof of proficiency in English and mathematics for non-Dutch applicants (35% of students enrolling in the English-language track). Students are offered the option of taking a mathematics entrance exam if they cannot provide such proof.

Once the students embark on their studies, the programme has various measures in place to support them. At the start of the programme, students follow a brief onboarding programme by senior students. In addition, there is a mentor programme. This was expanded upon advice of the previous assessment panel to span the full three years of the BSc. In this trajectory, students have two individual meetings per year during which they reflect on their academic, personal, and professional development under the guidance of a lecturer. During the first year, this is the Academic Skills lecturer; in the last two years, another lecturer from the team is assigned. In addition, the BSc has an internship coordinator who supports students who choose this option, and ensures they embark on it well-prepared with an internship plan and clear information and guidelines. Students are well-informed about the options offered in the elective semester, for instance through a 'welcome back' session where students who just completed an internship talk about their experience. Finally, the faculty offers support from academic advisors, a psychologist, and a student well-being programme.

Over the past years, the programme has worked on increasing its feasibility by strengthening research methods components in the curriculum in preparation of the thesis and by using a more formalized procedure with clear deadlines in the thesis trajectory. In this trajectory, students are supervised in groups of around 10 students with one supervisor, yet with sufficient room for individual feedback and consultation. These groups are formed around themes chosen by the teachers and the coordinator. Student guidance is enhanced by extracurricular options that include the stats café, thesis retake class, thesis-writing marathons and a thesis market.

The panel applauds the BSc's efforts in enhancing feasibility. It appreciates the extended mentorship, the extracurricular activities, the 'welcome back' session and the increased attention paid to research skills and timely completion of the thesis. The panel points out that the open and welcoming community also contributes to student wellbeing and therefore feasibility of the programme. All in all, the panel finds the programme to be feasible, if sufficiently challenging for the students.

The programme pointed out in the self-evaluation report that there is still room for improvement in view of the current success rate of 65% of students graduating after 4 years of study. The BSc also sees a relatively high dropout rate in the first year (between 27-34%). The panel discussed these numbers with programme staff, students and alumni. It learnt that students often take longer to graduate due to extra-curricular activities or an extra internship, or due to combining the BSc with another programme. Regarding the dropout rate in the first year, students and alumni mentioned that this is usually a consequence of students having other expectations of the programme. The panel recommends looking into ways to find out why students drop out in year 1. It also advises adapting the information presented on the website for prospective students to present a complete picture of the programme content, for instance by having alumni reflect on the programme.

Language

The BSc has a Dutch-language and an English-language track. The Dutch-language track has two thematic specializations: Mondiale Politiek and Nationale Politiek en Bestuur. The English-language track, Global Politics, consists of the same courses as Mondiale Politiek. The two are partly offered in separate courses wherein the language of instruction and assessment is either Dutch or English, and partly as joint courses where the language of instruction is English, but where students in the Dutch track may opt to hand in their exams and/or assignments in Dutch.

The panel considers the choice for an English track to be logical and fitting. English is the language used in the academic as well as the professional field of Political Science. Given the English track's substantive focus on Global Politics, its alumni move on to English-language master's programmes in political science or related fields with an international orientation, and end up in organizations and companies with a focus on diversity, Europeanisation and globalization. The panel learnt that this track is chosen both by international students and by Dutch students interested in a career in an international environment. For those who prefer the use of Dutch, the Dutch-language track's Mondiale Politiek-specialization is a good alternative.

In the current setup, Global Politics/Mondiale Politiek students (between 125-150) outnumber those of Nationale Politiek en Bestuur, a specialization that draws a small but highly motivated group of around 10 students. At the moment, this works fine, but if the international specialization were to grow, a larger imbalance might occur. The panel suggests taking action on time to ensure the Dutch-language specialization stays large enough to maintain the current balance.

Teaching staff

The BSc is taught by a core staff of 30 political science lecturers within the department of Political Science and Public Administration, except for the faculty-wide courses, which are jointly taught with colleagues from other departments (e.g. Sociology, Anthropology, Organisation Science). The expertise of the staff members in the Political Science part of the programme covers all the core areas identified in the domain-specific framework of reference: comparative politics, international relations and (normative) political theory, areas in which several staff members are internationally prominent. The majority of the teaching staff has a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ, 83%).

In order to ensure the scientific orientation and the link between education and research, a substantial part of the teaching is conducted by (senior) lecturer-researchers (51%). Much of the teaching in the BSc is also done by (junior) lecturers on a temporary contract of usually at least three years, supervised by senior lecturers. The (junior) lecturers provide a lot of the intensive seminar and tutorial teaching, in particular in the first year, and are also involved in the BSc thesis supervision. When they have sufficient teaching experience and have received a UTQ certificate or equivalent, they are also appointed as examiners. In total, 63% of teaching staff have a PhD (63%). The panel concludes that staff quality is sufficient in the BSc.

The programme is aware of the precarious position of the junior lecturers on temporary contracts and without a PhD, and offers them the necessary structure and support to fulfil their tasks under supervision of senior lecturers. Nonetheless, the panel encourages the programme to increase the percentage of permanent and more senior staff in the BSc to reduce the number of lecturers in this position. This should be possible now that extra financial injections allow the programme and Faculty more leeway here. In its hiring policy, the BSc should aim for staff diversity, particularly since an increase of non-Western perspectives would be beneficial to the programme content.

Staff quantity is a point of attention in the programme, as the experienced workload among staff members is high – particularly because they also teach in other programmes, such as the inter-faculty PPE programme (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) and the joint master’s programme with the Law faculty: Law and Politics of International Security (LPIS). This issue has been addressed through recent increase in funds, which has allowed the programme to hire more staff members and provide support (secretarial or student assistance) to those already at work in the programme. On the other hand, the programme addresses it continuously by raising the subject in the annual individual meeting between the programme director and each lecturer; through regular (bilateral) consultations and mentoring among lecturers/colleagues; through organizing the teaching allocation according to the lecturers’ preferences; through ensuring that all staff has a yearly teaching-free period; through introducing a ‘reading and reflection week’ for students as the first week in some of the periods, which means there are no lectures that week and students have time to prepare; through facilitating the ambitions and development of the lecturers who are in the most precarious positions; and through providing budget and hence time to innovate courses and for staff development.

The panel discussed the quantity of the staff and the relatively high number of junior lecturers with management, staff, students and lecturers of the programme. It considers the extensive efforts of the programme management to reduce the workload in constant conversation with the lecturers to be positive and even crucial to address such issues. The management consistently places workload at the top of the agenda, and asks staff members what concrete help they need to deal with it. Staff members with a teaching load peak are proactively provided with teaching support. The panel praises the positive role of the management here. It found that the management’s role in workload mitigation is highly appreciated by staff members. The panel concludes that staff quantity is sufficient, but should remain a priority.

Considerations

The BSc in Political Science offers students a well-balanced, logical and well-structured curriculum that addresses all substantive subjects that may be expected in a BSc in Political Science. Students are offered sufficient freedom to shape their own learning trajectories in the thesis and the elective semester. The panel is particularly positive about the attention paid to research skills in the BSc. Students receive solid training in methods, especially in quantitative methods, and the programme is working on expanding attention paid to qualitative methods as well. The panel highly appreciates this attention paid to research methods. It recommends introducing all students to human research ethics in an accessible manner to match this development.

The panel considers the programme to be challenging, yet feasible. It applauds the didactic vision of a personal, open and responsible approach, which is reflected in the varied teaching methods and many elective and extracurricular options used in the programme. The BSc succeeds in creating an active and open learning community where students feel welcome and challenged. The programme works hard at enhancing feasibility, for instance through the mentorship programme and the thesis trajectory. The panel considers the choice for an English track to be logical and fitting, not only because English is the language used in the academic as well as the professional field of Political Science, but also given the track’s substantive focus on Global Politics.

The panel concludes that staff quality is sufficient for offering the BSc. Staff quantity is a point of attention in the programme, but is dealt with thanks to extra funds available now and the fact that the management keeps the topic on the agenda and proactively supports its staff in addressing it. The panel concludes that staff quantity is sufficient, but should remain a priority. It supports the programme’s wish to increase the percentage of permanent and more senior staff in the BSc. In its hiring policy, the BSc should aim for staff

diversity, particularly since an increase of non-Western perspectives would be beneficial to the programme content.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

Assessment policy and practice

Student assessment of the BSc Political Science follows the VU Assessment Framework and the Assessment Policy of the VU Faculty of Social Sciences, and is laid down in an assessment plan. This plan shows the alignment of the BSc's exit qualifications with the learning objectives of the courses and the distribution and structure of the assessment methods in the curriculum. It also describes the policy on monitoring the quality of assessment.

Assessment in the BSc is designed to allow students to take responsibility for their own learning process. In order to stimulate this ownership, the programme strives to create a balance between intensive and extensive forms of assessment. Written exams (44%), which can be multiple choice exams, open exams, or a combination of both (one final exam or several interim exams) are combined with individual written assignments (35%) such as essays, research papers, or policy-oriented papers. Other assessment types are group presentations and reports (13%), portfolio assessment, presentation and participation. In line with the aim to allow students control of their learning process, the programme also opts for formative assessment. Many courses incorporate a variety of such formative and interim assessments, including quizzes, written assignments, debates, presentations, clips, speeches, and simulations. Students also give peer feedback among themselves.

The programme makes use of peer review and calibration among teaching staff in the composition of its assessments. It also uses grading forms, model answers, and rubrics to achieve transparency and reliability of assessment. Students are informed of the assessment types in advance.

In the case of the internship, the student is assessed based on an internship report that reflects on the attainment of the learning goals and on the relevance for political science. The daily internship supervisor submits an evaluation that is added as an appendix. Based on the report and the evaluation, the VU Political Science internship coordinator determines the final assessment, which is 'pass' or 'fail'. The coordinator fills out an assessment form that is discussed with the student and the daily supervisor in a final interview. Thesis assessment is done by two examiners, each of whom fills out a thesis assessment form independently. The first examiner is usually the thesis supervisor. The final grade is the average of both assessments, rounded to half a point.

The programme's assessment quality is safeguarded by a faculty-wide Examination Board (EB), which has appointed a subcommittee for Political Science. Once every two years, the programme-specific subcommittee of the EB randomly assesses a selection of three course examinations (one from each year), four theses, and two internship reports. The subcommittee prepares a report on this sample with

conclusions and recommendations to be discussed with programme management. It meets with the management twice a year to discuss assessment in the programme.

The panel studied assessment policy and procedures in the BSc programme and discussed them with staff, students, management, and Examination Board. It concluded that student assessment is well-designed and well-executed. The Examination Board is in control of assessment quality through its regular checks on courses, theses and internship reports.

The panel also looked at the assessment forms of 15 theses. It found these and the rubric to be extensive, detailed and insightful. The panel agreed with the grades given. It noticed that usually, the examiners provide clear feedback on the forms and substantiate well why a grade is given. It learnt from alumni that they usually receive the feedback forms, and a more extensive explanation is given orally when the supervisor deems this useful or necessary. The panel appreciates this moment of informal feedback and wonders whether it could be given a more structural character in the programme, allowing all students to receive such extra oral feedback at the end of their BSc which they can use when entering an MSc or the job market.

Considerations

The panel finds that student assessment in the BSc Political Science is well-designed and well-executed. It appreciates the varied assessment forms, both summative and formative, and the various procedures in place. The Examination Board is in control of assessment quality through its regular checks on courses, theses and internship reports, and internship and thesis assessment are done in an insightful manner. The panel learnt from alumni that they usually receive the assessment forms of the thesis by way of final feedback. A more extensive explanation is given orally when the supervisor deems this useful or necessary. The panel suggests giving this feedback moment a more structural character by introducing it for all students as useful input for their future studies and careers.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

Prior to the site visit, the panel read 15 bachelor's theses and their assessment forms. It found that they all reflected the level that might be expected of bachelor's theses in political science, and often even exceeded this level. According to the panel, the strong foundation in especially quantitative methods that students receive is visible in the theses.

Recent alumni from the BSc all ended up in related or relevant master's programmes, or chose to embark on a second bachelor's degree. The panel interviewed a number of alumni and learnt that they are very satisfied with the way that the programme prepared them for their master's studies. According to the alumni, the solid education in research skills paired with a strong foundation in the main substantive strands of political science provided them with the necessary knowledge and skills to do well in their master's degree.

Considerations

The panel finds that the final theses of the BSc Political Science demonstrate that they achieve or even exceed the level aimed at and that they reflect the students' solid training in (quantitative) research methods throughout the programme. Alumni feel well-prepared for master's degrees due to this training, paired with the strong substantive training in political science they received during the BSc. The panel therefore concludes that the learning outcomes are achieved.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the bachelor's programme Politicologie / Political Science is positive.

Recommendations

1. Introduce all students to human research ethics principles in an accessible, yet structural manner.
2. Monitor the balance between the Dutch-language specialization and Mondiale Politiek/Global Politics in terms of student numbers, and be proactive in ensuring that the differences in numbers does not become too great.
3. Investigate the substantial drop-out of students in year 1. Adapt the information presented on the website for prospective students to present a realistic picture of the programme content, for instance by having alumni reflect on the programme. In this way, the expectations of incoming students are managed better.
4. Increase the percentage of permanent and more senior staff in the BSc to reduce the number of junior lecturers and to strengthen further the BSc's research orientation. Aim for staff diversity, particularly since an increase of non-Western perspectives would be beneficial to the programme content.
5. Keep staff workload on the agenda as a priority.
6. Provide oral feedback after thesis completion in a structural manner, as useful input for students' future studies and careers.

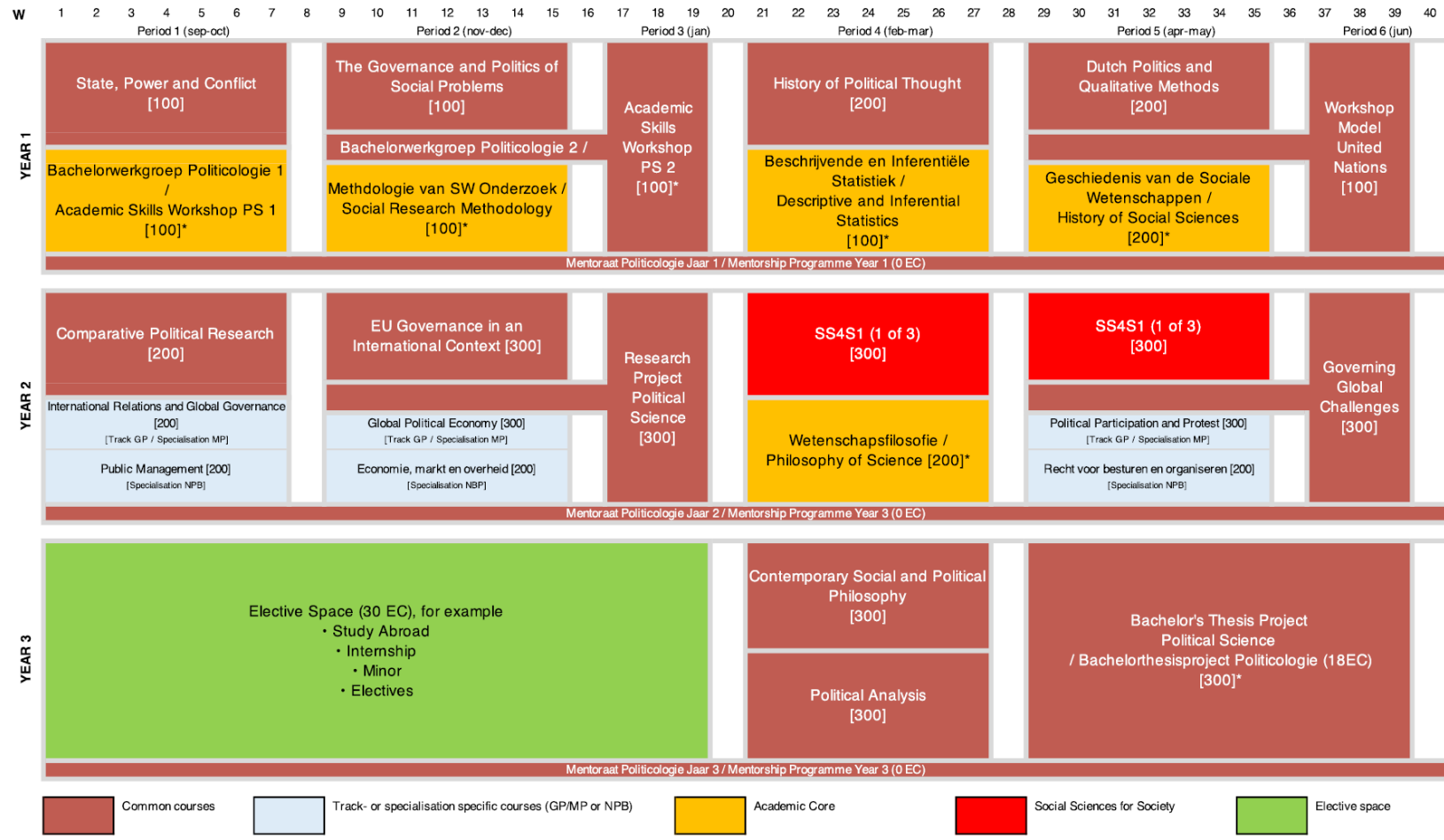
Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

TABLE 1. EXIT QUALIFICATIONS BACHELOR POLITICAL SCIENCE IN RELATION TO DUBLIN DESCRIPTORS (DD) AND DOMAIN SPECIFIC REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (DSRF)

Exit qualifications Bachelor Political Science		DD	DSRF
<i>A. Knowledge and understanding - have good knowledge and understanding of:</i>			
1	the core political phenomenon of social-conflict regulation by the state or by private or semi- private institutions, including the underlying power processes;	1	1
2	the increasing internationalization of the public domain and how this influences governance and policy at different, often interacting levels;	1	1
3	the most important theories in modern Political Science, especially those in respect of general and comparative politics, the doctrine of international relations and normative political theory;	1	1
4	methods and techniques in social scientific research, in particular those important for Political Science studies; and,	1	1
5	the specific position of Political Science by comparison with other social sciences.	1	1
<i>B. Skills - be able:</i>			
6	to analyse and interpret political data, including in the national and international context;	2,3	2
7	to assess Political Science research results for their reliability, validity and usability;	2,3	6
8	to apply Political Science knowledge and insights to current social issues;	2,3	2,3
9	to process knowledge drawn from other relevant disciplines and to apply this in the analysis of social and political problems;	2,3	3
10	to recognize, based on their knowledge of normative theories, the value ladenness of both scientific theories and policy intentions;	2,3	7
11	to function within a group and to contribute to joint research and suchlike products;	2,3	4
12	to provide clear oral and written reports of their Political Science knowledge and understanding; and,	2,4	8
13	to complete the entire empirical cycle by carrying out basic scientific research under supervision;	2,3	5
<i>C. Attitude - displays:</i>			
14	a demonstrable interest in the causes of and background to political phenomena;	3	
15	a critical attitude towards academic Political Science literature and towards prevailing views on politics;	3	7
16	intellectual integrity and a willingness to self-criticise.	5	

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum

FIGURE 1. BACHELOR POLITICAL SCIENCE: GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM



Common courses
 Track- or specialisation specific courses (GP/MP or NPB)
 Academic Core
 Social Sciences for Society
 Elective space

* Courses indicated in Dutch and English are offered and taught separately for the Dutch and English track

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

20 March 2023

16.00	18.00	Preliminary panel meeting / office hour
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21 March 2023

08.30	08.40	Welcome	
08.40	09.20	Interview programme management	40 min
09.20	09.40	Internal meeting panel	20 min
09.40	10.10	Interview MSc students and recent alumni	30 min
10.10	10.15	Break	5 min
10.15	10.55	Interview MSc teaching staff	40 min
10.55	11.25	Break	30 min
11.25	11.55	Interview BSc students	30 min
11.55	12.00	Break	5 min
12.00	12.40	Interview BSc teaching staff	40 min
12.40	13.30	Lunch (panel) and lunch programme with students	50 min
13.30	14.00	Interview Examination Board	30 min
14.00	14.05	Break	5 min
14.05	14.45	Interview professional field and alumni	40 min
14.45	15.15	Internal meeting panel	30 min
15.15	16.00	Final interview management	45 min
16.00	17.30	Preparing preliminary findings and oral report	90 min
17.30	18.00	Oral report	

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses per programme. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Self-evaluation report BSc
- Dublin Descriptors
- Domain Specific Reference Frame
- Enrolment and student success rates
- Programme Management and coordination (2022-2023)
- Teaching Staff
- Composition of the External Advisory Board
- Overview of Internships in 2021-2022 (finalized) and 2022-2023 (in progress)
- Teaching in times of COVID-19
- Selection of courses for the Committee
- Programme changes as of 23-24, 24-25 and 25-26
- Study guide and course descriptions Bachelor Political Science
- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Rules and Regulations of the FSS Examination Board
- Assessment Policy FSS
- Bachelor's Thesis Regulations FSS
- Internship regulation FSS
- Internship Manual Bachelor Political Science
- Annual report BSc Political Science 2021-2022 (in Dutch)
- Assessment plan BSc Political Science, 2022-2023 (in Dutch)
- Annual report Examination Board FSS, 2021-2022
- Annual report Programme Committee Bachelor Political Science, 2021-2022
- Factsheet BSc Political Science, 2021-2022
- Student and Alumni Events Booklet, 2020-2022
- Course manual Mentoring Programme, 2021-2022
- Course manual Bachelor's Thesis, 2021-2022
- Previous report and NVAO decision (BSc)

- Self-evaluation report MSc
- Dublin Descriptors
- Domain Specific Reference Frame
- Enrolment and nominal student success rates
- Programme Management and coordination (2022-2023)
 - Programme management
 - Programme Committee
 - Examination Board
 - Various coordinating tasks
- Teaching Staff
- Composition of the External Advisory Board
- Teaching in times of COVID-19
- Selection of courses for the Committee
- Study guide and course descriptions Bachelor Political Science

- Teaching and Examination Regulations
- Rules and Regulations of the FSS Examination Board
- Assessment Policy FSS
- Master's Thesis Regulations FSS
- Annual report MSc Political Science 2021-2022 (in Dutch)
- Assessment plan MSc Political Science, 2022-2023 (in Dutch)
- Annual report Examination Board FSS, 2021-2022
- Annual report Programme Committee Master Political Science, 2021-2022
- Factsheet MSc Political Science, 2021-2022
- Student and Alumni Events Booklet, 2020-2022
- Course manual Master's Thesis, 2021-2022
- Previous report and NVAO decision (MSc)