



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

Vilniaus universiteto  
**STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS GEOGRAFIJA** (*valstybinis kodas -  
6121CX009, 612F80001*)  
**VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

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**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**OF GEOGRAPHY** (*state code - 6121CX009, 612F80001*)  
**STUDY PROGRAMME**  
at Vilnius University

**Experts' team:**

1. **Prof. Maris Klavins (team leader)** *academic,*
2. **Prof. Andrew Cooper,** *academic,*
3. **Prof. Dr. Adam Weintrit,** *academic,*
4. **Dr. Christiane Weber,** *academic,*
5. **Mr. Sakalas Gorodeckis,** *social partner,*
6. **Mr. Dionyzas Šlimas,** *students' representative.*

**Evaluation coordinator -**

*Miss Lina Malaiškaitė*

Išvados parengtos anglų kalba  
Report language – English

## DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	<i>Geografija</i>
Valstybinis kodas	6121CX009, 612F80001
Studijų sritis	Fiziniai mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Gamtinė geografija
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Pirmoji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolatinė (4)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	240
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Fizinių mokslų bakalauras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	1997-05-19 Nr. 565 Human geography minor studies were approved in 2012-11-08 by VU Senate

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## INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>Geography</i>
State code	6121CX009, 612F80001
Study area	Physical sciences
Study field	Physical Geography
Type of the study programme	University Studies
Study cycle	First
Study mode (length in years)	Full-time (4)
Volume of the study programme in credits	240
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor in Physical sciences
Date of registration of the study programme	1997-05-19 Nr. 565 Human geography minor studies were approved in 2012-11-08 by VU Senate

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the evaluation process

The evaluation of on-going study programmes is based on the **Methodology for evaluation of Higher Education study programmes**, approved by Order No 1-01-162 of 20 December 2010 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study programmes and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *visit of the review team at the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the evaluation report by the review team and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study programme SKVC takes a decision to accredit study programme either for 6 years or for 3 years. If the programme evaluation is negative such a programme is not accredited.

The programme is **accredited for 6 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as “very good” (4 points) or “good” (3 points).

The programme is **accredited for 3 years** if none of the areas was evaluated as “unsatisfactory” (1 point) and at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “satisfactory” (2 points).

The programme is **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as "unsatisfactory" (1 point).

### 1.2. General

The Application documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by the SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site-visit:

No.	Name of the document
1	Organisational structure of the Vilnius University
2	Performance indicators of the program staff ( <i>h-index</i> )

### 1.3. Background of the HEI/Faculty/Study field/ Additional information

Vilnius University (hereinafter also University or VU), founded in 1579, is the oldest and largest institution of higher education in Lithuania. As of 1st of January 2017, the University had 3627 employees (including 1377 teaching staff and 450 research staff) and had 20236 students The

University comprises 23 core academic units: twelve faculties, seven institutes (with two of them of faculty status), four research and study centres and seven core non-academic units.

The FCHG (hereinafter also Faculty) was founded in November 14, 2016 after joining two former faculties: Faculty of Chemistry and Faculty of Geosciences. The Faculty operates in accordance with the Statute of Vilnius University. The Faculty comprises 2 institutes: Chemistry and Geosciences.

The Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences consists of 11 departments. In the Institute of Geosciences: Department of Geography and Land management; Department of Hydrology and Climatology, Department of Cartography and Geoinformatics; Department of Hydrogeology and Engineer geology; Department of Geology and Mineralogy. In the Institute of Chemistry: Department of Analytical and Environmental Chemistry, Department of Physical Chemistry, Department of Inorganic Chemistry, Department of Organic Chemistry, Department of Polymer Chemistry, Department of Applied Chemistry.

Study programme of Geography is implemented at Department of Geography and Land Management of the Institute of Geosciences. This program has been implemented since 1997.

#### ***1.4. The Review Team***

The review team was completed according *Description of experts' recruitment*, approved by order No. V-41 of Acting Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The Review Visit to HEI was conducted by the team on *25 October, 2017*.

- 1. Prof. Maris Klavins (team leader)**, *Professor of Department of Environmental Science, University of Latvia, Latvia;*
- 2. Prof. Andrew Cooper**, *Professor of Coastal studies, School of Environmental Sciences, University of Ulster, Ireland;*
- 3. Prof. Dr. Adam Weintrit**, *Professor of the Faculty of Navigation, Gdynia Maritime University, Poland;*
- 4. Dr. Christiane Weber**, *Senior researcher at CNRS DRCE, France;*
- 5. Mr. Sakalas Gorodeckis**, *board member of Geography and the Geographical Society, Lithuania.*
- 6. Mr. Dionyzas Šlimas**, *student of Kaunas University of Technology of Chemical engineering study programme.*

**Evaluation coordinator – Miss Lina Malaiškaitė**

## **II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS**

### ***2.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes***

The main aims of the study programme are “to provide interdisciplinary education in the area of physical and human geography and land management, to form a complex-regional and eco-environmental thinking effectively applying it to the professional, social and personal activities, to develop a critical attitude and sense of civic responsibility for the Earth and own country“. The program aims to train young professionals with a broad competence in field of geography. The aims of the programme are unique in Lithuania and the competences obtained fit well into the structure of university education system in Lithuania and Vilnius university. Also, the research direction fits well into its self-identified niche and is appreciated at both a national level and internationally. The aims and objectives are rational, clearly formulated and well related to national development, the demands of the labour market and the interests of employers and students.

The system to develop study programme and study plan for each student is logical and well-elaborated and ensures an efficient functioning of the study process. The study programme fulfils an evident need in Lithuanian society and is popular amongst applicants considering large number of applicants and competition for a study place, largely due to innovative programme development and to an approach which supports the involvement of students with differing interests. This approach includes the development of a truly interdisciplinary study programme which involves (as stated in the SER and study plan) physical geography mains, social science background and methodology, environmental science perspective and social science (management) approaches. The balance between these directions is very important to maintain in order to preserve the compliance between study content and the qualification awarded. This aspect is especially important when considering the content of student qualifications and their compliance with the qualification obtained. It should not be skewed too much in the direction of social science studies.

The learning outcomes (as described in the SER) of the programme include skills to assess human impacts on the environment, basic knowledge of physical processes policy, knowledge of environmental systems and the principles of use of geographical information systems etc. It is clear that the learning outcomes have been carefully considered in terms of their appropriateness to the demands of the labour market and other professional and societal needs in which the acquisition of practical and transferable skills has gained greater prominence. There has been some interaction with external stakeholders and alumni in the programme renewal process as it

was found during meeting with corresponding groups, but there is a space for further intensification of this process, as existing input is not regular and based rather on personal contacts.

Care should be taken to achieve program renewal and the expert team suggest to continue analysing: a) impact on the student recruitment process, b) the competitiveness of graduates in the labour market and c) the consequences of the proposed programme management and institutional reorganisation.

## ***2.2. Curriculum design***

In principle, the programme structure is in line with the Lithuanian legislative requirements, however, it seems that experience of similar study programs in EU has not been much analysed. Subjects of study (modules) are taught in a consistent manner, subjects and topics are not repeated, but there are some fields in the Curriculum which require review to become more logical in construction (course units sequence). The content of subjects (modules) corresponds to the type and cycle of studies. Expected learning outcomes are transparent and clearly reflect the programme content and ensure the distinctiveness of the Bachelor and Master programmes in Physical Sciences at Vilnius University. With regard to both aims and outcomes and the curriculum, the programme covers the practical work, which are associated with introducing qualitative research methodologies in social geography and strengthens the group of optional subjects. But it should be clear that the structure of the programme should be kept in line with the principle of maintaining a balance between theory and practice. The content of subjects (modules) and study methods enable the intended learning outcomes to be achieved. The scope of the programme is sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes. The curriculum adopts the research-based and/or evidence-based teaching methods that are found in parts of the programme and help to ensure that the programme reflects the latest scientific achievements. The content of the programme corresponds to the latest academic and technological achievements. The curriculum takes into account the trends in the labour market in the wider sense and covers a wide range of transferable skills that will increase the employability of the graduates. The logic of the programme, the relationship between the learning outcomes of the programme, the learning outcomes of subjects have been clearly described. It should be emphasized that the programme has been developed properly, but a few things could be changed to make it even perfect.

As a weakness of the program curriculum is the absence of several topical study courses. Surprisingly some cutting edge scientific domains like urban studies or rural studies are

considered as elective lectures. Regarding Global change urban dynamics are one of the main elements in the understanding of the issues. Considering nutrition issue and food safety, rural studies are also an important topic to be addressed. It could be suggested to elaborate e-learning materials for the study program study courses, using available platforms, for example Moodle. Some overlapping between the content of the study courses can be observed, for example, between study courses: Geomorphology, Physical geology, General geography and others.

### ***2.3. Teaching staff***

This programme is taught by a large number of staff (35) who are suitably qualified and meet the legal requirements. There is a good mix of experience among the Professors, Associate Professors and Lecturers. About 20% of the teaching staff are from institutions other than Vilnius University and this brings an additional range of experience to the course, particularly from those with direct practical experience in the various fields of study. This adds considerable value to the teaching provision. Staff are suitably qualified to deliver the learning outcomes, although there is slight imbalance in numbers toward human geography. Several staff have taken courses in didactics offered by Vilnius University, thus supporting implementation of innovative teaching methods.

Research activity among the teaching staff is quite variable and results in a variety of outputs. (several have no scientific outputs while one attended 23 conferences in five years). Overall, however, research productivity and recognition is quite low as indicated by *h* index. Publications by staff include quite high numbers of journal articles, but most are local journals and in the Lithuanian language. There is a reasonable level of involvement in research projects. Many staff have, however, made presentations at conferences nationally and internationally. Some have undertaken study visits abroad but the numbers are quite small (on average 4 visits per year). Small numbers of international visitors contribute to the study programme annually.

Several factors appear to contribute to the relatively low research productivity. They are as follows:

- International publications are not required to become a professor in this field;
- Teaching workloads (student contact hours) are quite high
- No doctoral programme exists in human geography.



To address this, student contact hours are to be reduced, staff are to be encouraged to engage in interdisciplinary work and the University has incentive schemes in place to encourage research publications. Staff are aware of the challenges.

#### ***2.4. Facilities and learning resources***

The BSc program is managed by the Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences, which consists of two Institutes that were reorganised a year ago. One of them, the Institute of Geosciences, occupies a part of one 3 storey historic building in the Vilnius University campus at the Čiurlionio street area. This Institute located at this building has five departments. The owner of the BSc programme is the Department of Geography and Land Management, which recently has physical resources for the studies. The auditoriums and classrooms for this programme are renovated and equipped by modern multimedia.

At the Faculty few computers are available for students, and they often use their own laptops. The up-to-date licensing of computer software, including GIS programs, is available for use in the study process. Most lectures and practical classes are held in the Faculty building except chemistry lab works. The laboratory equipment is adequate for studies at the bachelor level. In general, the premises for studies are adequate in both size and quality. However it could be suggested to elaborate e-learning materials for the study program study courses, using available platforms, for example Moodle. Regular updating of study course descriptions is suggested in order to exclude outdated study materials.

The department has renovated its internship centre in the countryside, where every year a few weeks field training is held for students. Human geography-related practices mostly are studied at other premises in cooperation with social partners. So the arrangements for students' practice are adequate.

The literature for the courses is mainly in the Lithuanian language, the programme's principal language. Access to major research databases is available. Due the reorganisation the faculty library located in the same building is splitted, focusing recently for the Institute of Geosciences purpose only. Recently the library holds scope of the subject literature and most of the general science literature used in the programme. The students have possibility to use other modern organised University libraries as well. In generaly, the available teaching materials are covering programme needs.

### ***2.5. Study process and students' performance assessment***

The admission procedures comply with all statutory requirements. Entry is by competitive examination with scores augmented by high performances in national and international geography competitions. The programme attracts highly motivated students with good competitive scores, considering the good number of applicants and the stable student number enrolled in the study program.

The programme has been described as involving a large number of staff from several faculties and other Vilnius University institutions, with classes held in a variety of locations. The organising task, performed by the Department, is considerable; it is a notable feat to be able to ensure an adequate provision of the programme and the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Students are provided with all necessary information about classes, aims and outcomes, subject requirements and the scheduling of assessments, learning practices and study papers, including the final thesis. The information is provided in a variety of ways and in a timely fashion. The students who met with the expert group acknowledged they are kept well informed.

Students are encouraged to participate both in scientific and social activities. Opportunities include an annual scientific conference of geography students where presentations and papers are in competition for awards and prizes. The Faculty organises a wide range of events for students to be able to meet and interact with teachers and social partners; some of the events also involve staff from other universities, in Lithuania and abroad, and graduates from the programme. Of particular note are the specialised learning trips in spring and autumn that take students to various parts of Lithuania and widen students' knowledge of the natural and cultural heritage (the trips are additional to the annual summer practices, which are an important part of the study process). All these activities heighten students' motivation and help to promote the excellent relations between staff and students that greatly impressed the expert group. The learning environment is good.

The University provides financial support in a number of ways. Scholarships reward certain academic successes or are directed to the social support of students with disabilities or other handicaps to study, such as serious illness or pregnancy. Counselling and advisory services are available to help and guide students experiencing study difficulties, but the expert team got the feeling that this information is not communicated properly. A lot of students said they did not know about this possibility.

Students have opportunities to participate in the ERASMUS exchange (student mobility) programme. Relatively many students use (ref. SER) these opportunities to go study and to do ERASMUS internships.

The assessment of knowledge and achievement is by a variety of continuous, intermediate and final examination methods. They take mostly traditional forms. Eligibility to take a subject examination is dependent on satisfactory attendance at the various practical and seminar sessions. Students expressed a wish for expert group, that they would like if a part of studies would be in English. Especially noted was the confidence of students; the enthusiasm of a well-qualified staff; and appreciation by graduates of the skills they had acquired in the programme.

The professional activities of the majority of graduates meet the programme provider's expectations. Many of the substantial remainder go directly into employment, mostly in geography-related positions. From discussions with graduates and employers, it would appear that students are now better prepared for employment than they were some years ago. But given the likelihood that in the longer term the job opportunities will change, it would be sensible for the Department to begin intensive labour-market analysis with the intention of modifying the programme in readiness for the changes that are thus identified. The progression of a majority of graduates into further studies or subject-related employment.

## ***2.6. Programme management***

The responsibilities for decisions and monitoring of the implementation of the programme are clearly allocated through scientific and administrative functions. The opportunity to be gathered with chemistry faculty might be an opportunity to restructure the organisation of the faculty.

Student's feedback is collected through an electronic database after each semester or by teacher individually. It has to be noticed that the assessment quality by student reaches a rather low rate. The questionnaires focus on specific course units (modules) attended during the semester and on general satisfaction with the studies (6.4 SER).

To cope with the necessity for numerous students to work, some flexibility of the lectures has been introduced. It has to be noticed that a lack of information exist considering the students representative in department, faculty and SP committee. More information on department management and students roles inside university management committee has to be disseminated.

Stakeholders have good relationships with the faculty members and provide feedbacks. The specific position of part time teachers provides a direct link between some stakeholders and the staff of the SP. The interest of proposing a compulsory lecture on “ Basics of entrepreneurship“ is evident if the content provides some information on professional entrepreneurship requirements to be employed and not only some general economic basic concepts. This lecture could be associated with a professional internship in order to provide some keys about the actual labor market. In case of implementation of such internship the duration and the specific content could to be defined with social partners.

### **2.7. Examples of excellence**

The concept of the study program is based on the interdisciplinary education in the area of physical and social sciences (physical and social geography) to provide broad competence in field of geography. The offered interdisciplinarity by itself can be considered as good practice example. The program aims and the program structure is unique in Lithuania and the competences obtained fit well into the structure of university education system in Lithuania and Vilnius University.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS\***

1. With regard to both aims and outcomes and the curriculum, enhance the programme by increasing practical work, which could be associated with introducing qualitative research methodologies and strengthening the group of optional subjects.
2. Adopt more widely the research-based or evidence-based teaching methods that are found in parts of the programme and would help to ensure that the programme reflects the latest scientific achievements.
3. Given the likelihood that in the longer term employment opportunities will change, the Department should provide continuous intensive labour-market analysis with the intention of modifying the programme (and the master programme that many students progress to) in readiness for the changes that are thus identified.
4. Considering the recent trends of the development of the study materials and methods strongly can be suggested to elaborate e-learning materials for the study program study courses, using available platforms, for example Moodle
5. Regular updating of study course descriptions could be suggested to exclude outdated study materials
6. Major efforts should be taken to improve research performance of the study program staff, especially considering international publications

#### **IV. SUMMARY**

The concept of the study program is based on the interdisciplinary education in the area of physical and social sciences (physical and social geography) to provide broad competence in field of geography. The offered interdisciplinarity by itself can be considered as good practice example. The program aims and the program structure is unique in Lithuania and the competences obtained fit well into the structure of university education system in Lithuania and Vilnius university. The study program concept is attractive for students and ensures good enrolment figures during the period of the program assessment. The curricula of the study programs can be considered as good combination of differing approaches and provides high quality education. The management of the study program is functioning well however during ongoing institutional reorganisation process further clarification of allocation of functions could be suggested. In the study process facilities of other units of the Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences are used efficiently and this significantly contributes to overall results of the study process. Advanced research infrastructure and leading databases are available for students and staff, however, further efforts should be taken to renew the study course descriptions, to exclude use of old, outdated books, maps etc.

Organisation of the study program content and logics behind the consequence of the study courses should be re-evaluated and the program content adjusted. It is important to continue to work at the improvement of the communication between academic staff and students, to provide necessary advice to students' at all essential steps of the study process, probably through student mentoring, providing help at the identification of the thesis topic, basics of the scientific writing, work with databases etc. Some overlapping between the content of the study courses can be observed, for example, between study courses: Geomorphology, Physical geology, General geography and others. The steps that have been initiated by the university to improve research performance of the study program staff, especially considering international publications, should be implemented vigorously.

Considering the recent trends of the development of the study materials and methods strongly can be suggested to elaborate e-learning materials for the study program study courses, using available platforms, for example Moodle. To improve competitiveness of the students in the labour market, efficiency of their professional orientation, introduction of internships in the study program could be strongly suggested. An important aspect of the study program improvement could be related to internationalisation, including delivering of more lectures in English language as well as inviting international lecturers.

## V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Geography* (state code - 6121CX009, 612F80001) at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

*Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.*

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an area in points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	3
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Teaching staff	3
4.	Facilities and learning resources	3
5.	Study process and students' performance assessment	3
6.	Programme management	3
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>18</b>

\*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.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	<b>Prof. Maris Klavins</b>
Grupės nariai: Team members:	<b>Prof. Andrew Cooper</b>
	<b>Prof. Dr. Adam Weinrit</b>
	<b>Dr. Christiane Weber</b>
	<b>Mr. Sakalas Gorodeckis</b>
	<b>Mr. Dionyzas Šlimas</b>