



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto

***POLITIKOS MOKSLŲ* STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS
(612L20005) VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF *POLITICAL SCIENCES* (612L20005) STUDY
PROGRAMME**

at Vytautas Magnus University

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader:

Prof. dr. Turo Virtanen

Grupės nariai:
Team members:

Prof. dr. Žaneta Ozolina

Prof. dr. Geoffrey Pridham

Dr. Hans Winkler

Augustė Meškytė

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DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	<i>Politikos mokslai</i>
Valstybinis kodas	612L20005
Studijų sritis	Socialinių mokslų
Studijų kryptis	Politikos mokslų
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Pirmoji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	4 (nuolatinės studijos)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	240
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Politikos mokslų bakalauras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	1997 05 19 Nr. 565 įregistruota kaip „Politologija“, 2001 08 01 Nr. 1187 pavadinimas pakeistas į „Politikos mokslų“

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>Political Sciences</i>
State code	612L20005
Study area	Social sciences
Study field	Political sciences
Kind of the study programme	University studies
Study cycle	First
Study mode (length in years)	4 (full-time)
Volume of the study programme in credits	240
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor of Political Science
Date of registration of the study programme	Registered by programme title “Politology” 1997 05 19 No. 565; The title has been changed into „Political Sciences” 2001 08 01 No. 1187.

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
I. INTRODUCTION.....	4
II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS	4
1. Programme aims and learning outcomes.....	4
2. Curriculum design	5
3. Staff	7
4. Facilities and learning resources	8
5. Study process and student assessment.....	9
6. Programme management	10
III. RECOMMENDATIONS	11
IV. SUMMARY	12
V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT	13

I. INTRODUCTION

The BA programme in Political Science implemented by the Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter VMU) is well placed in the philosophical framework of the University policy serving the aims and goals of local, sub-regional, national and European labour market. Despite that fact the VMU is relatively new institution of higher education it has proved the achieved progress, as well as ambitions in the future attracting students from the country and abroad. The initiative to open its regional office in Ukraine is one of those examples. The adopted strategy for the next 7 years allow to combine education of students based on the current needs of the labour market with the comprehensive tendencies taking place in economic and social life of Europe.

The staff implementing the study programme is committed, enthusiastic and sense of community is well spread among teachers and students. The students supported the above mentioned argument by stating that personal, friendly and professional relations among them, staff and administration make the study programme attractive. Well established relations with local community, local partners, stakeholders and alumni serve to the quality of the study programme and academic environment at large. The observed consensus on the identity of the study programme, namely, Liberal Arts – allows the BA programme executed in the VMU to be compatible in Lithuanian higher education system.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

The objectives, the aims and the learning outcomes of the study programme are clear and well defined. There have been sufficient efforts invested in defining learning outcomes and their connectivity to the education process. The programme has clear identity – Liberal Arts, which is accepted and promoted by all relevant groups – teachers, students, administration and stakeholders. There are three keywords explaining the aims of the programme – analyze, explain and predict. Although, there are no doubts that two research methods courses (Quantitative Research Methods and Qualitative Research Methods) and proposed *curricula* prove that students after graduation will be able to analyze and explain, nevertheless, prediction is more is left too open. The courses that are offered during 4 years of studies do not provide a specific knowledge and skills of prediction. Probably it is a matter of framing the issue, as explanation of

the past is sometimes understood to improve the prediction of the future. The word “projection” might be more appropriate.

It should be noted that the aims of the programme and the intended learning outcomes are based on the advice of the Lithuanian Political Science Association, ECPR and IPSA. From the perspective of the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, the programme needs a constant adaptation which is based on analysis of students’ evaluations and labour market needs. Permanent consultations with more than 60 stakeholders in combination with regular students’ public opinion surveys ensure that learning outcomes are based on academic and professional requirements, public needs and labour market. It is worth mentioning that majority of students are satisfied with the study programme (59,9%), but at the same time these are only 20,7% who acknowledge that the programme provides good career opportunity. The study programme aims at preparing specialists for the sub-regional (local), regional (the Baltic Sea Region) and European labour market needs. However, within the section of “Programme aims and learning outcomes” more emphasize should be put on the connectivity of the learning outcomes to professional qualifications and adaptability to the widely defined labour market.

The SER informs that the BA programme in Political Science is the leading one in Lithuania which is measured by number of students. But numbers are not very different from the University of Vilnius. Therefore, more clarification is needed what makes BA in PS in the VMU different from other programmes in Lithuania. A comparison with similar programmes implemented in other European universities would be of value as well.

The name of the programme and its learning outcomes, content and the offered qualifications are compatible with each other.

2. Curriculum design

The study programme in Political Science is based on legal national documents relevant for the institutions of higher education in Lithuania and the normative acts of the VMU. The SER argues that the study programme is following the logic of Liberal Arts education, embracing general and broad spectrum of courses. On the one hand, the above mentioned logic is understandable and the composition of the *curriculum* follows this path. The argument that general education and diversity of courses expand general knowledge of students is relevant. But, on the other hand, competitive pressure of tendencies dominating on the global/European educational market requires combination of general/specific, theoretical/practical knowledge and skills which allow to enter in the labour market in a short span of time. In terms of number of

courses and diversity the balance is kept, but in the realm of theoretical and applied courses, the first ones are dominating. Incorporation of the introductory week in the curricula has strengthened the study programme. The existence of two internships/practices is helping to improve the situation and they have been highly appreciated by students and social partners. In some cases students pointed out that the courses are repetitive, such as political philosophy and political ideology. During interviews students also expressed need to consider whether more emphasis on political economy and law as compulsory or elective studies should be put. Some students also questioned the length of seminars (45 min) which they felt could be longer to give more space for discussions.

Course descriptions are detailed but sometimes there are inconsistencies – some are very detailed, some too general, some are listing only Lithuanian authors (even if the course is focusing on Lithuanian politics, there should be authors from other countries that have studied and analyzed Lithuanian politics), some incorporate only basic textbooks. In course description there are very limited number of e-resources mentioned, as well as current articles in specialized journals are missing. For instance, the compulsory course “Political system and political tradition in Lithuania” offers only three basic reading materials and two supplementary materials; “Political philosophy” – only one basic, 13 supplementary; “Introduction to Public administration” – the list of basic literature consists of only Lithuanian authors. The comment is not based on the prejudice that Lithuanian colleagues are not able to deliver high quality textbooks but on the necessity to introduce diversity of opinions and approaches.

With regard to teaching methods – there are more traditional rather than creative and innovative methods mentioned in the course descriptions. The SER several times emphasizes a necessity to promote creative thinking, but listed methods do not support this ambition. Teaching methods are described in the SER but they are not reflected in the course descriptions. For instance, such courses as “Political sociology”, “Public relations”, “International and national security”, “Election campaign technologies”, which can be taught applying diversity of methods with the emphasis on developing practical skills needed during professional career, still are based on lectures, seminars, team work, and consultations.

Since the last evaluation detailed guidelines on how to write the final thesis are developed as well as assessment criteria are defined, which support the quality improvement of theses and the consistency of assessment.

One of the essential components of the study programme is an opportunity for the students to select and compose modules according to their interests and needs. Proposed freedom of choice with regard to optional courses (44 electives) and designing individual study plan is one of the strongest sections of the programme. There are few issues that should be addressed: to what extent students are capable enough to select courses that will assist them in drafting their BA thesis and arm them with necessary knowledge and skills needed for graduate studies and professional careers. The Study Committee might consider developing a guiding tool for the best composition of individual study plans.

The internship is integrated in the curriculum and enhances the quality of the programme. However, the practices of the internship system should be reconsidered to make sure that the intended learning outcomes are shared and effective feedback is given by all key actors. The programme may consider making the internship longer than one month.

Despite the above mentioned problematic issues, the study programme reflects the latest achievements in the field of political science. The composition of the programme ensures that the learning outcomes are achieved.

3. Staff

According to the SER the study programme is executed by the staff that is meeting legal requirements. Hiring procedure which is based on an open competition ensures selection of candidates who are qualified and appropriate for the demands of the study programme. Criteria for the selection of the best candidates are clear. However it is not explained how the ambition of the internationalization of studies is reflected in the composition of staff members. There are no full or part time professors from abroad. The SER provides information on the number of visiting professors and the number of them is impressive, but still their engagement is based on the ad-hoc approach. It is obvious that the teaching is carried out by academic staff with different experience (teachers, researchers and practitioners), different levels of qualification (senior and junior, PhD candidates), visiting scholars invited via ERASMUS and other programmes. Using professors from the VMU staff pool can be considered as an advantage. Inter-departmental cooperation with regard to teaching staff is an asset and reduces costs of the study programme. It should be noted that the Department of Political Science attracted full time teaching staff from other universities (4 professors, 1 associated professor and 2 lecturers with PhD) and gradually is reducing a bad practice when the programme depends on the visiting and part time professors from outside.

The visiting professors from Poland, US, Lithuania, Turkey, France, Italy and other countries have contributed to the programme. However, it is not quite clear whether there are local professors ensuring sustainability of the subjects taught by visiting professors.

Majority of the teaching staff is actively involved in research projects, publish their findings in books and journals, and participate in national and international conferences and workshops. Research interests of the teaching staff are relevant to the study programme and thus contribute to the overall quality of the programme. Although number of research project looks convincing, majority of them are nationally based and financed. Internationalization of research should be expanded beyond Poland and Belarus. The administration should consider supporting staff to take advantage of sabbatical in order to increase their research and teaching performance.

There is a wide range of opportunities provided by the VMU and other sources for professional qualification (academic exchange, training, scientific and academic conferences). According to the SER 20 teachers underwent activities related to the Professional development from 2008 to 2012. High qualification of staff is also acknowledged by students what is reflected in the surveys. The professional development in the last 4 years was taking place within the ESF programme. Therefore, the question remains whether the VMU will introduce a permanent programme ensuring professional development of staff.

4. Facilities and learning resources

The facilities and learning resources are adequate. The VMU has all necessary facilities for the successful implementation of the study programme, including library, specialized reading rooms, auditoriums, computer classes and equipment. Teaching and learning materials are available. However, there is not enough space for student consultations in more private setting.

The library is well equipped and the collection of specialized literature is existent. However, the provision of books needed for the implementation of the BA study programme is not sufficient enough. The existing gap is bridged using electronic data basis. Therefore, more efficient application of the MOODLE could solve the situation.

The Faculty has adequate arrangements for students' practice. There are several agreements signed with potential institutions. At the same time the VMU applies flexible policy allowing students to selected potential places for internship. At the same time students' surveys indicate

that majority of attractive and for the future career relevant institutions are located mostly in Vilnius.

5. Study process and student assessment

The admission of the students takes place on the basis of the existing general procedures commonly applied in Lithuania. The places in the bachelor programme are divided in state financed and self-paid. The VMU faced challenges similar in all Baltic States – number of students is decreasing due to the demographic and migration reasons (136 in 2009 and 101 in 2012), but it looks that the level of students enrolling to the programme is not decreasing significantly (increase in the highest points and increase of lowest points among self-paid students). Numbers of applications are stabilizing around 1600 in last few years.

The organisation of the study process ensures an adequate provision of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes, but more dialogue is needed with social partners in defining the goals of internship and giving feedback between all key actors. The question was raised whether the time is sufficient for acquiring basic knowledge and skills for professional performance in the future. More active engagement of students' representatives in evaluating, improving, coordinating and designing the programme should be encouraged.

Students' research activities are not going more beyond course papers and BA thesis. However internship provides opportunities for individual research projects. Teachers engaged in the execution of the study programme should be more active in stimulating students to draft their own research projects in affiliation with the staff.

The study programme in Political Science offers variety of students' exchange programmes – ERASMUS and bilateral. The balance between out-going and in-coming students is achieved in 2012/2013 when 27 the VMU students left for studies abroad and 21 foreign students arrived. This tendency should be sustained, promoted and more students should be encouraged to take part in ERASMUS mobility programme. It means that more courses should be offered in English on the BA level. As students indicated – the staff is not always proficient in English enough to deliver high quality lectures. The study process only gains from students not only from the EU member states but also from Georgia, Kazakhstan, Japan, the Republic of Korea.

The assessment system is clear and is described in the VMU study regulations. There has been substantial progress monitored in drafting guidance/requirements for the BA thesis. Consultation system of students is functioning well. There were no complains expressed by students. This is a good achievement as such, since the interviewed staff indicated that there is no training provided for student consultation. Nevertheless, the programme might consider, whether it can further develop consultation by appropriate measures, as this is an essential part of Liberal Arts approach with lots of elective studies. The students' surveys on quality of teaching are carried out on regular basis. The issue of plagiarism is taken very seriously. It is important that the main role in dealing with plagiarism is played by the Students Council.

There is a well advanced system of students' support programmes – social assistance system and student accommodation. Variety of activities related to developing of social and professional skills are available at the VMU in forms of discussion clubs, young politologists, and other. The system that supports students with special needs is put at place and functions very well.

Professional activities of the majority of graduates meets the programme providers' expectations what was proved by social partners who emphasized high quality of graduates and their ability to adapt to the labour market needs in short span of time.

6. Programme management

Management of the programme is solid and sound. There are several bodies engaged in the management, such as Study Programme Committee, Department of Political Science, the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, and the Faculty Council. Responsibilities and tasks are clearly defined and allocated. Cooperation with social partners is active and covers internship, lecturing, and even research to some extent. However, cooperation with alumni can be stronger.

There is a formal Council with participation of the student representative from the Department of Political Science. However, during the meetings with the students it became evident that they are not fully aware of the participatory potential of the Council. Engagement of students in drafting, implementing, coordinating and evaluating the study process should be ensured.

In 2011 the special body - The Centre for Quality and Innovation at the VMU is established in order to develop and introduce quality assurance system at the University. A set of indicators for quality assurance is drafted. It is difficult at the present moment to give a comprehensive

assessment of the performance of the Centre for Quality and Innovation due to its short period of existence but it is clear that the actions and initiatives are promising.

The main recommendations from the previous evaluation report are taken into account and implemented: the course on Public Administration is included in the study programme; additional course on research methods is introduced, namely, Qualitative Research Methods and Quantitative Research Methods; didactical guidelines for the writing bachelor thesis are elaborated; improvement in international exchange of staff is taking place.

Student surveys indicate high level of satisfaction with the management of the programme – 80% consider the Department administration supportive and encouraging.

Formalization of students' participation in the execution of the study programme should be improved. Students in general are satisfied with informal relations between administration and their representatives, but the formal students' representation body would enhance the dialogue between the both sides and ensure regular exchange of views, which in the end will improve management of the programme.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Internationalization of the study programme should take place at the larger scale. The SER puts emphasis on the increase of numbers of incoming students. However, the same should apply to staff, research, students, and foreign professors working on permanent or long-term basis. Participation of staff in international research projects, international conferences and publishing in peer reviewed (international) editions should increase substantially.
2. More attention should be paid to innovative teaching methods. Introduced e-learning methods are not utilized fully, as well as MOODLE system which can assist to diminish existing lack of text-books, books and current publications in the library. The seminars might be longer than 45 minutes. Students should be more involved in research activities performed by the staff members and the Faculty at large.
3. Formalization of students' participation in the execution of the study programme should be improved. Even if students are satisfied with informal relations between administration and their representatives, the constant presence of their interests the Faculty's Students Council can be established.

4. The practices of the internship system should be reconsidered to make sure that the intended learning outcomes are shared and effective feedback is given by all key actors. The programme may consider making the internship longer than one month.

IV. SUMMARY

The strength of the study programme in Political Science at the VMU is based on the well defined and respected identity of the programme – Liberal Arts. The possibility to acquire a wide range of electives which are based on number of general courses is the strength of the programme. The ability to compose individual programmes for the needs and interests of students is an effective tool arming students with knowledge and skills needed for their professional career, under condition if students receive guidance from the programme administration.

The existing sense of community and collaborative spirit allows to define long and mid-term goals compatible with regional labour market needs. Friendly, open and engaging relations between students and professors serve as additional motivation pursuing career in the field of political science,

Despite the fact that students are satisfied with the study programme their voice should be more formalized and represented on all levels – not only University's. At the moment there is a imbalance between the VMU ambition to become more internationalized, including the opening of the regional office in Ukraine, and still existing modest internationalization of staff and students mobility.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Political Sciences* (state code – 612L20005) at Vytautas Magnus University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation Area in Points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	4
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Staff	3
4.	Material resources	3
5.	Study process and assessment (student admission, study process student support, achievement assessment)	4
6.	Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)	3
	Total:	20

*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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