

Expert Review

Bachelor Program

„Balcanistics“

Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Prishtina

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After a first evaluation round in 2011 the Faculty of Philology at the University of Prishtina has applied again for the accreditation of the Bachelor program *Balkanistics*. The program was recommended by the experts then for accreditation, but due to lack of students the program did not start in 2011. The Faculty of Philology applies now again for the accreditation of the program to be started as soon as possible.

Basis of this draft-report is:

1. Self-evaluation report of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina, titled *Self-Evaluation Report (2015)*
2. Personal evidence acquired during the on-site visit on 6th of July, 2015, 9.00 -13.30.

During the on-site visit at the University of Prishtina a first meeting was held on Monday, 6th of July, 9.00-9.30. The BA program Balkanistics was discussed with the management of the institution represented by Dean Prof. Sedat Kuci, Vice Dean Prof. Avid Visoka, Prof. Milote Sadiku (Development) and Mr. Krasniqi.

On the second meeting with the projected teaching staff of the BA program (same day, 9.30-11.00) the following professors participated: Dr. Bardh Rugova, Head of Department of Albanian Language, and Prof. Rrahman Pacarizi.

During the site visit the following topics were discussed:

- 1) Comparison of reports of 2011 and 2015
- 2) Causes why the program did not start
- 3) Lack of reorganisation of the program
- 4) Staff issues

1. Academic Programs and Student Management

Does the academic program correspond to the institution's mission statement and principles of operation?

The program of Balkanistics fits into the mission statement of the institution in as far as it aims to foster an interdisciplinary area studies approach. The program aims at conveying knowledge of Balkan languages, history and cultures. The program thus attempts to recover a whole branch of

knowledge that has been lost as a consequence of war and ethnic conflict. However, between the objectives of the program and the content as formulated in the curriculum some discrepancies exist. Most obvious is the discrepancy between the intended Balkanological approach and the program's inherent emphasis on Albanian studies. This stress on Albanology is understandable given the fact that the majority of teachers come from this Department; a too pronounced Albano-centric approach would however not do justice to the claim of an area study approach and would simply lead to a replication of already existing structures. In the discussion the responsible persons convincingly confirmed their conviction to strive for greater balance.

A second discrepancy concerns the use of international literature in the fields of Balkan history and culture. Important standard works of Balkan studies in history, sociology and cultural studies should be included into the bibliography. In order to gain access to international standards the acquisition and use of basic international literature is desirable.

Is the program based on an overarching didactic concept that has been adequately communicated to and adopted by the teaching staff?

In contrast to the other programs run at the faculty, Balcanistics implies a pronounced interdisciplinary component. Interdisciplinary instruction entails the use and integration of methods and analytical frameworks from more than one academic discipline to examine a given theme, issue, question or topic. The most challenging part of interdisciplinary instruction is moving from the examination of an issue from the lens of single disciplines to the synthesis and integration of insights, thus attaining a more inclusive framework of analysis. To be up to this challenge, it would require the students to get acquainted with interdisciplinary approaches. From the discussions during the on-site visit it became apparent that major issues do need a better coordination between the representatives of different disciplines and subject matters. The experts recommend fostering co-operation and exchange between professors and departments both on the administrative and the scientific level. The experts suggest devoting at least one course to interdisciplinary theory and methodology.

Does the academic degree correspond to international standards?

Yes.

Does the structure of the program give sufficient opportunity for independent study, reflection and analysis?

In principle, as formulated in the curriculum, yes. Since the program has not started the experts could not gain first hand experiences from the side of the students to evaluate this question.

Is the allocation of ECTS appropriate and justified?

Yes.

Is the workload required for the academic program manageable for students?

The review of the study program made clear that the requirements for a BA degree are rather ambitious. Our interlocutors made clear that the scope of the program will immediately be adapted to the capabilities of students once the program has started and first experiences have been gained. A realistic estimation of requirements is expedient if the faculty wants to attract a sufficient number of students to enrol.

Are the teaching methods and the content of teaching units sufficient for the successful achievement of the program's goals and outcomes (competences and qualifications, knowledge and skills)?

Teaching methods and contents of teaching are in line with the program's goals. In a medium time perspective the experts recommend to broaden the scope of Balkan history and culture and to put more weight on political sciences and applied language teaching (by reducing philological issues).

Is the overlap of academic content between the various parts of the curriculum comprehensible and transparent?

Basically yes, but, as has been stressed above, a more integrative approach that binds together the different disciplines would strengthen the profile.

Is the ratio of academic/artistic staff to students appropriate?

Yes

2. Staff

Does the institution have an adequate proportion of permanent staff and appropriate proportions of permanent and external staff?

- (a) Concerning the establishing of permanent staff (at least at the level of assistant professors) the teaching staff has been named. The permanent staff for this program has been discussed and first contacts with future colleagues have been organised, yet there are no permanent positions which would guarantee the success of the program. The coordinator of the program has been named as well – even though there were discrepancies between the information given at the first meeting with Dean Prof. Kuci and the information given by Prof. Rugova and Prof. Pacarizi. According to final discussion Prof. Kuci would be responsible for the realisation of the program, a fact that would be supported by the experts. As regards teaching Balkan languages other than Albanian (Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Greek, Romanian, Romani or Turkish) contacts to qualified staff have been established as well. With regard to the financing of additional staff for the respective second language the experts learned that additional staff will be hired from partner universities (Institute of Slavic Philology in Torun, University of Sofia and Salonica were named). Information about the provision of accommodation and payment were plausible, it remained however unclear how such arrangements will be implemented on a permanent and reliable level.

Does the academic staff demonstrate proven ability at a high academic and didactic level and are their qualifications appropriate to the positions they hold within the institution according to the basic criteria?

Since the program will be carried through by the staff who already have their permanent positions at the University of Prishtina and who already have lots of experience in their fields, the experts trust in their qualifications and didactic experience.

3. Research and International Cooperation

Is the teaching staff involved in research activities inside or outside the institution, and do these research activities feed back into teaching/course contents?

The self-evaluation report provides general information on working places of the staff who will be involved in the program (p. 75-77). The electronic version of the CVs show that the qualifications of the staff satisfy European standards. From the on-site visit the experts learned that there is an active cooperation with other universities in the area. The self-evaluation report emphasizes scientific exchange with Albania, Macedonia and number of European Countries (p. 90). Unfortunately, there is no evidence of cooperation with universities in other countries such as Serbia or Croatia. The on-site visit showed though, that older colleagues, still cultivate scientific connections with Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian colleagues.

Is the extent and the quality of international cooperation in research and teaching adequate?

Does not apply yet.

Are students involved in research and cooperation projects?

Since the program did not start yet, the expert team cannot give complete information on previous two topics. According to the program and its main goal to educate students in a couple of languages spoken in the Balkan area and to learn as much as possible about the history and present of the Balkans as well, the international cooperation is the key part of the program. The on-site visit proved that as well.

4. Finances and Infrastructure/Space and Equipment

Does the institution have an adequate budget plan?

The self-evaluation report gives general information on the budget plan of the Faculty of Philology. It also shows that most of the program will be taught by teachers who have permanent positions in the department of Albanology as well as in other departments.

The experts see a problem in offering more than 5 languages (BKMS, Bulgarian/Macedonian, Romani, Rumanian, Modern Greek and Turkish) as a full program on the level of ‘second language’. This concept would require immense costs and logistic organization which at the beginning of the program seems to be a huge financial obstacle.

Does the institution have adequate building and specialized infrastructure for requirements of the program?

According to self-evaluation plan (p. 88) the future department for Balcanistics disposes of 1-2 classrooms, 1 common cabinet and 5 further cabinets. The Department is well equipped with computers.

The on-site visit proved as well that there is enough space and specialized infrastructure. The experts were pleased to see that there is even an old library with books in BKMS languages which might be a good base for future development of the specialized library.

Conclusion

Given the general political and societal situation in Kosova and its national structure and the fact that BCMS has not been taught for 20 years at the University of Prishtina, the BA program Balkanistics has to be seen as an extremely valuable effort in overcoming the gap in teaching and research on Slavic languages. It is obvious that such a study program might contribute to the attenuation of the conflict between the majority of Albanians and the minority of Serbian inhabitants in Kosova. The possibility of studying Bulgarian and Macedonian will of course contribute to those efforts as well. An additional possibility of studying Greek, Romani, Romanian and Turkish (for beginners) will give the possibility of widening the scope and at the same time enable the studying of common characteristics of these languages (e.g., “Balkansprachbund”).

In view of this, and despite some conceptual and administrative shortcomings, the experts express their support of the idea to establish a BA program for Balcanistics at the Faculty of Philology. However, the experts recommend that the accreditations should be given under the condition of two clarifications:

1. Clarification of the ‘second language’: Will it be only B/C/M/S or will students be able to choose from additional languages as well? In this case the minimum number of students enrolled in the respective language course has to be defined.
2. Clarification of the leadership: Who is going to be in charge of the program?

Final recommendation

In order to accredit the program based on the argumentation given above, the experts would recommend the conditional accreditation.

In order to insure the success of the program it must be ensured that:

1. It is of great importance to define what the term “second language” means in the context of the BA program.

Concerning the second language that is to be taught besides Albanian it turned out that basic organisational inconsistencies still prevail. While the Dean and Director of the program, Prof Kuçi, said that in the initial phase only B/C/M/S will be offered as second language, the head of the Albanian language Department, Prof. Rugova, pointed at the possibility to enrol in any of the available languages (B/C/M/S, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Greek). The question of enrolment choice points to the issue of capability in terms of human and financial resources. This aspect still appears to be unsolved and needs further clarification. The same applies to the minimum number of students to be enrolled in a given language course. Also in this regard only little clarity and coordination was to be seen between the head of the program and the head of the Department of Albanian language. In any case, Prof. Kuçi stressed the necessity to reduce the second language options due to lack of capacity in terms of expertise and money. It is therefore of urgent need to clarify this important issue in order to send a clear message to the prospective students.

2. The experts also discovered a lack of coordination between the responsible persons and institutions.

It is therefore strongly recommended to establish a platform of responsible persons who are in charge of scientific and administrative coordination. This is all the more important since the program has an interdisciplinary profile. With regard to the management of the program the experts fully trust in the scientific and administrative capabilities of Prof Kuçi who may take the role of the chief of the department and take the responsibility of further coordination and secure finally the success of the program.

These two conditions have to be fulfilled before the program starts, e.g. within the next 4 weeks.

Recommendations for future development

The experts want to take the opportunity to stress that the program's appeal might considerably increase if it were to teach prospective students the capabilities of working in the fields of diplomacy, international relations and international organisations. The experts understand that such a curriculum will need most substantial modifications, giving more weight to other contents, methods and approaches such as political sciences and applied language teaching (reducing philological issues to a minimum).

In order to bring the Balkanology to international standards the experts additionally recommend

- to sharpen the profile towards a more inclusive Balkanology
- to expand the library with standard works of Balkanology and international journals
- to put a more pronounced emphasis on inter- and transdisciplinarity