

## Master in Communication Sciences: Journalism and Public Relations (MA)

Evaluation by em. O. Univ. Prof. Dr. Thomas A. Bauer, University of Vienna

### *Introduction*

The Department of Journalism / Faculty of Philology had already undergone an evaluation process in 2016 requiring an accreditation for a MA degree program in Journalism and Public Relation. Due to lack of enough qualified teachers the program was stopped after one year. Now the Department is asking again for an evaluation to gain a re-accreditation, even if it is in fact again an accreditation since there is not any substance to evaluate und to build on.

### *The visit – report: Journalism and Public Relation*

#### 1. The faculty -level

As an expert I had the possibility to hear the arguments of the Faculty /dean Prof. assoc. Dr. Lindita Rugova, together with Secretary MA Besfort Krasniqi, being keen to develop the departments faculty within the structures of the Faculty of Philology and the University of Prishtina to a meaningful academic institution in all three academic missions: science research, teaching and supportive engagement in societal development (third mission). It came out clear, that not only the market in Kosovo would need such an educational program but also the society, especially facing that also (just as others) the society of Kosovo is turning to a media society, which means: the society works and functions increasingly in (not only technical or structural but also in social and cultural) modus of media (digitalisation in administration, political, educational, economic communication and management). In detail the information of the dean was stressing following points:

Some programs have been dis-functionalized two years ago

3+2 system has been changed to 4 + 1

Journalism and Public Relation MA program counts as a re-accreditation since the master study program had to be stopped, what means the accreditation, given 2016 has been withdrawn. Now the faculty is able to fill the gaps- especially related to teaching staff. The students number is not yet as big as it could and should be. But with a re-accredited program also this gap will be filled. But, of course, the umber cannot go over the limits for accreditation as standardized. The faculty needs more support in developing the infrastructure. Looking for sponsors, the American embassy has granted for a studio equipment for journalism. The faculty also has established a blind peer review journal , where the publishing mode is in articles, later on the faculty will try to push monographies.

Related to that observation it got clear – in distinction to the arguments given in 2016 for the requirement of accreditation) – that an MA program of Journalism and Public Relation meanwhile has to face a huge (media) change in technical as well as in professional structures. A teaching program (meant for MA which demands adequate and appropriate theoretical and methodological claim of quality has to be aware of the situation that students have to be taught getting prepared for an hybrid media landscape (in structurally, technically and professionally journalism and public relation models), where the society gets used to forms of individualized and de-professionalized sharing of information and opinion.

## 2. The department-level

Referring to the discussion that I had the pleasure as an expert with some of the faculty staff (3 others next to Prof. ass. Dr. Arben Fetoshi and Prof. Ass. Dr. Remzie Shahini-Hoxhaj, Prof. Ass. Dr. Muhamet Jahiri) especially commenting content and quality measures to be reached of teaching, research and third mission perspective I could deepen my insight and found a general acceptance of the academic engagement and motivation of the respective staff at the department teaching a much more wider framed program than the categories journalism and public relation usually mean: the demand is more to media and communication studies as this reaches to a wider framed horizon of analysing public communication systems and of the theoretical perspective ( in technical terms of social and cultural studies), overcoming partly the partialization of the integrated process in producers and consumers role-models, but facing a new ontology of social and societal (public) interaction and communication. The fact of including media literacy studies and research in that program displays that cognitive development.

Points mentioned and discussed in detail: (explained by Prof. Ass. Dr. Arben Fetoshi And Prof. Ass. Dr. Remzie Shahinio-Hoxhaj):

- Masters level, for two years suspended, referring the teacher's perspective.
- Following the recommendation given 2016: more theoretical courses at master level - according to 1: the technological and societal development, 2: the scientific analysis trends in Europe, 3: the increasing development of hybrid media landscape in Kosovo as anywhere else: cultural theories, media law, media literacy (related to ML the department has initiated a pilot project in mode of train-the-trainers: 35 teachers from primary and secondary school),
- RadioUp: A cooperation with DW has been started, diverse national and international conferences have been organized, coordinated and executed, a whistleblowers training has been offered, many activities have been done in order to fulfil the goal that 100 percent of the master students have got jobs in the market – facing the changes of digitalization (journalism in digital age), and last but not least there has been realized an infrastructure development: RadioUP founded - 12 students now participating in a three month period within a media lab.

## 3. *The staff-level - MA program Journalism and Public Relation*

In consequence of the fact of having stopped the Master Program Journalism and Public Relation after the first accreditation in 2016 because of the difficulties to engage qualified lecturers and researchers the focus of the 2019 on-site-visit was on academic staff going to be engaged for that program. The program demands 120 ECTS (6 mandatory - , 3 elected courses in 1<sup>st</sup> year, methodology focus in second year (1 semester quantitative, 1 semester qualitative methods of research).

In order to fulfil the quality goals, the staff of lecturers/teachers has been extend due to the fact that doctoral students had completed their study programs.

Following competent personnel is planned to teach within the MA program:

- Prof. Asoc. Dr. Milazim Krasniqi: Associate professor of journalism, head and founder of the department, teaching since 2005 – research focus: media culture, discourse and media history, has published 42 books, 4 of them student books of journalism. He ws career journalist and has been board member of many printed media outlets in Kosovo.

- Prof. Ass. Dr. Arben Fetoshi. He is one of the coordinators of the MA study program, experted by his PHD thesis: The role of media in European integration process Kosovo case. His research and teaching is focusing on International Relations, political communication, interaction between media and public. He has been in the position of RTK radio director holding now the position of the program director.
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Muhamet Jahiri, as well coordinator and initiator of the MA program. His expertise based by his PHD thesis (“Critical analysis of Albanian press during Mach riots 2004”)is on media editorial judgement, crises communication, public opinion and media literacy. His publications include papers and books in the field of news reporting during the crisis, print media, media ethics, etc. He also has worked for several printed media in Kosovo.
- Prof. Ass. Dr. Remzie Shahihi-Hoxhaj, expert focus given by the doctoral thesis on: “Media culture in societies in transition” (2005). Next to her PHD degree she holds a Double Master Degree in media and intercultural communication. Her research focus is on television, communication culture, societies in transition, gender and media, media literacy, as well as the impact of visual new media. She published on communication culture and television.
- Alban Zenelli, experienced by his PHD thesis” The report between new and traditional media in Kosovo. He has been teaching staff member since 2009, his research interests focus on differences between traditional and new media, news portals, professional reporting of news and video journalism. His publication focus on media freedom, social media, news reportig, legal framework of media. He has been working as a journalist and editor for several years in local TV and Radio Station in Mitrovica, in daily newspaper “Epoka e re and “Lajm”.
- Faton Ismajli. He is PHD candidate at University of Prishtina with the thesis: “Transformation of genre in online media”. He is member of teaching staff since 2010. He has finished his master studies in the field of Media and Public Relation, has done his Bachelor in Sociology as well as in Journalism. Publishing in the field of online media and transformation of genres and formats. He is a career journalist holding the position of an editor in one of most well-known online newspapers in Kosovo “Gazetta Express”, combining as many others the expertise in practice and science.
- Mr. Gezim Qerim MA, as well PHD candidate, having done his Masters degree in der field fog media and Public Relations, holding a Bachelors degree in political science, currently working on “Organizational Communication Analysis of Kosov Railways.”. He is also member of the teaching staff of the department. His publications are affiliated to organizational communication, political public relations and mass communication in general. Net to the academic activity he is member of the Regulatory Board of Kosovo Railways.

- Mr. Dren Gergury MA, belongs to the teaching staff since 2015, having been working as a sports journalist for 10 years on KTV, now working currently on his thesis “Political communication in social media in 2017 general elections in Kosovo.. His research interests focus on media-politics relations and political communication, specialized for “fake news” and media ethics. His publications include papers and book chapters on political communication, media freedom, social media.
- Next to those academics affiliated to the department/faculty there is the intention to hire academic experts from cooperation international universities for special topics as planned in the curricula. Management and budget is reserved for that.

#### 4. *Managerial environment*

- In general, the managerial structures at UP still give reason to claim: in many cases they could work better organized or structured than they do - in the perspective of the faculty level personnel. Though there is a strict order of rules, the reality for a long time has not fulfilled the requirements of the faculty’s interest in quality on many relevant levels: management, programs, services, facilities, staff development, and internationalization. The faculty in many sectors depends upon guidelines and specifications done at the rectorate level, especially regarding financing and the management of funding.
- The structural precondition that causes most of the difficulties is the strict *centralization*. This structural circumstance does not give enough air to breathe and space to be used for changes, developments, or initiatives at the faculty level. For every small amount a request has to be made, after which the requesting individual must wait for too long time for a decision – knowing already that the most of the percentage of the budget goes to the Rectorate itself.
- The other obstacle, which has been the reason for a long-lasting *management crisis* because of *vacancy of the rector’s position now seems to be resolved*. The rectorate’s (UP in general) support is still quite modest. In many cases the faculty or the department has to struggle for support or for donations from outside (mostly given due to personal contacts to other institutions) in order to execute all activities planned for the program. The expectation now is that 25 students could start with the MA program

#### 5. *Future aspects and plans*

- Topics to be researched within the MA program are somehow already depicted in research work and/or publications of the academic staff to be engaged for: in the context of Kosovo’s society and development would/should be: empirical studies in New Media, Media Literacy, and Organizational Communication. The communication about it has shown that the staff of the Journalism Department already has published scientific papers in international

journals as well as having published science-based comments stating the opinion in various local media in order to promote media education, organizational communication and literate use of social media.

- The Department assured that there is the requirement of training the professors to improve the supervision of the MA research work of the students. This should also promote more interdisciplinarity, and enhance the media knowledge competence. According to the statement of the Department those requirements can be matched by the training programs offered by the Centre of Teaching Excellence, which is given by UP regulations, by which academic staff is obliged to complete different levels of training from the Centre during the reelection procedures. Anyway the MA program must not just follow the market needs, but should also challenge the market to develop according to the complex interests of the society as well as the complex media system's change.

#### 6. *Academic Research*

The Media Institute that has been established already years ago is still in need of resources in order to become an environment used by and for students research projects. The structure of the Media Institute is dedicated to research (media analysis, media discourse analysis, opinion research, political communication, journalism, public relations, media market, media change, etc.) The efforts of this institute should serve the Kosovar society in self-analysis and self-reflection. The Media Institute is established at the university/faculty level and shall share its income in a 60 to 40 distribution system: 60 per cent of its income shall go to University of Prishtina, and the remaining 40 per cent to the Department of Journalism to be re-invested in research programs.

The Department also stated that there are congresses at which the Department shows publicly its research and publication work, so for example in June 2019 at CEECOM Sofia, where some of the academic staff will participate in order to present two scientific papers dealing with organizational communication. The Department also assured that it will continue to participate at international conferences in order to get known, but also in order to use the opportunity to stay in touch with the current streams in theory development and research activities.

#### 7. *Facilities*

The faculty management now is quite happy owning a radio station, even if it still lacks a lot of environmental structures. Regarding the library: there is still the lack of money (and as well of some staff that takes care for the inventory) is obvious. The book-program is yet at a poor level, not really enough (especially current analysis and theory concepts) for an internationally qualified Masters program; there is almost nothing that is relevant to the discipline (Journalism in change, Public Relation), no international book program, no international journals, not even few meters of books that could cover the theoretical and methodological basics of communication and journalism studies.

## 8. *General Observations and Conclusions*

Considering the given situation (new start of the MA program after stopping it two years ago) filling the gaps now with the young scientists having done their doctoral studies partly at UP, partly abroad, the recommendation is to start again since on the one hand the market is able to absorb alumni, on the other hand, the field of public communication and the Kosovo media landscape needs a higher qualified academic analysis and guidance:

- A stable established group of scientists covering media- and communication studies on the qualified level of an MA school program, established and working according to international procedures (quality filters, supporting courses in research methodologies, external guest lecturers, international reviewer system etc.);
- A research program (participating the master students with their theses) at the Media Institute, established and working (relevant topics such as political communication, media landscape, media change, media literacy, Balkan studies, etc.), research plans, staff and staff development,
- A program of internationalization (staff, foreign experts, academic cooperation, meaningful participation in European projects and exchange programs etc.);
- A student service program (international relations, exchange, not only Erasmus).
- A facility-development program compensating for the huge lack of infrastructure: budget, structural plans, etc. for library, lab and online access, scholarship programs in cooperation with other institutions or organizations.

Observing and assessing the structural components of the MA course program (staff, content, teaching, research, publication, lab, library, administrative and quality management) and facing the orientation in mission, academic practice, development plans, internationalization, European dimension, and local affiliation) as the evaluating external expert I could get the impression, that the MA program for Journalism, Public Relation /resp. Organizational Communication means a big and to some extent necessary step in the development (enlargement) of the Department of Journalism, as well as an enrichment of the Faculty of Philology at UP, being aware that it also means a big challenge for teachers, lecturers, researchers, and management – and that the leadership and the academic team is ready to face that challenge in the interest of the regional development, of their own career interests and of the internationalization of Kosovo based social sciences - assessing all that I recommend an accreditation granted for a two-year period, after which a follow-up visit should check progress against targets established in this report, in order then to adjust, if necessary to given conditions and changes. A condition that has to be demanded just in accordance to the accreditation is that the number of students to be enrolled, should not go over 45 students. This limit gives attention to the students being waiting for a continuation of their studies, but also cares for a limit of a group to be taught in an appropriate way.

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