

**Master's program in Politics and Governance of Global Challenges (MASV-GLGOV),
University of Bergen**

Program assessment report 2022

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Background information

The last Program assessment report, on the Master's Program in Public Administration (MPA), is dated May 22, 2019. This program is still running, but will be replaced by a reformed Master's program in Politics and Governance of Global Challenges (MASV-GLGOV) starting in the Autumn 2023. The study program will thereby be substantially changed, putting global challenges in the forefront.

The current MPA-program is identical to the GOV-program, assessed in a separate report for 2022. In agreement with the department, the present program assessment report will comment only upon the planned GLGOV-program.

Whilst the task to develop and change the existing MPA-programme was initiated by the department leadership, a working group consisting of relevant staff members were appointed to redesign and develop the programme. This assessment report is built on the reform proposal for the revised English MA program, dated April 26, 2022 and the following case presentation, dated September 22, 2022, for final decision by the Department of Government. Furthermore, (group) meetings (via Zoom) were held with Deputy Head of Department, some of the involved employees, on January the 25 and February the 14 and 15.

The need to reform the method courses in both master's programs is commented upon in the Program assessment report 2022 for the Master's program in Politics- and governance – and will not be commented upon in the present report.

Evaluation of the study program

1. Reform background

For many reasons the two former master's programs – in Public Administration and in «Administrasjon og organisasjonsvitenskap» – have merged into one common program. Up until now the students have, respectively, been recruited from the Global South and Norway. Whilst the courses offered are practically the same (in A and B versions) and most of the teaching common for the two programs, seminars are customized to meet different needs among the two groups of students. Although efficient, the department wants to avoid offering two similar programs.

In addition, since the MPA was established in 1994, the competencies among the teaching staff have changed. Key teaching staff engaged in the program have retired, and the professional environment is reduced. At the same time, a considerable growth in new teaching staff now make it possible to separate the programs as well as to reform the thematic focus of the English master program. The revised program makes use of resources held by staff within the department with competences on global challenges and staff that (for the time being) can teach only in English.

The decision to focus on global challenges resulted from discussions among members of the staff. Offering this kind of broader political science approach, the aim is to position the new master program among similar programs offered internationally. There has not been any further examination of the demand for this particular kind of master program.

2. Recruitment of students

The knowledge level of the applicants to the existing MPA-program have been varied. For the reformed master`s program, the intention is to recruit a diverse cohort of students – one third of students each from the global South; from OECD/EU countries; and from Norway. The idea to recruit Norwegian students is new to the program, the aim being to offer an alternative English language choice to the existing Norwegian GOV-master and help internationalize the departments “home-grown” student cohort.

Whilst the number of students from the global South applying for the limited number of 10 study places historically have been very large (500-600), this is reduced to approx. 200 for the revised master-program. The deadline for OECD/EU and Norwegian applicants is March 1st and April 15th respectively, and the final number of applicants is unknown at the moment of writing this report.

There may be several reasons for the considerable reduction in applicants from the global South. The program offered is significantly changed in content, from a generic MPA program to a more specialized political science education that might not be found to be as work relevant. The fact that the applicants were asked to write a motivation letter might have hindered some from applying. And, lastly, when advertised it was warned that a student fee could be introduced.

The reduced number of applicants is not perceived as a problem per se, as the changes in procedure for applying were meant to sort out the unqualified and unmotivated students. The worry is, however, that the program will no longer attract students from the global South. Already in the 2019 assessment report there were worries about the recruitment of students. The NORAD fellowship program ended in 2008 and the Quota program was discontinued by the Norwegian government in 2016. So far university education has been almost free in Norway, but from the coming study year a substantial yearly fee of NOK 187 000 per semester is introduced for non-EU and EEA students. In addition, Norway’s high living cost is a barrier for self-financed students to move here.

If much less than one third of the accepted students in the reformed master’s program is recruited from the global South, the aim of recruiting a diverse cohort of students will not succeed. Consequences for the running of the master-program may be limited, however, as qualified students from the OECD/EU countries and from Norway may fill the available study places.

3. Economic sustainability

The new GLGOV-master have 10 fixed study places but will accept 20 students. The aim is to expand the current 10 study places to 30. The process of gaining more fixed study places is started by the department but is cumbersome – it will certainly take time and there is a risk that it will not succeed.

Currently the department have economical means to finance this relatively high-cost program, with several pedagogical innovations, where project-based learning plays a key role (see below). As pointed out in the proposition, project-based learning is facilitation-heavy. The MA reform is considered as a pilot, and the plan is to test and evaluate the innovations. If successful, these may later be implemented in the Norwegian MA program as well.

The economical sustainability of running such a resource intensive master program has not yet been calculated. The plan is to evaluate the program after two years. Issues like professional quality, students' satisfaction, number of enrolled students and program completion would obviously be of interest, but the evaluation should also include the degree to which the program is dependent on increasing the number of fixed study places and the cost of the innovative pedagogical teaching methods.

Evaluation of courses

4. Teaching and learning format

To attract well qualified students, the GLGOV master will offer project-based learning (PBL). Elements of student-led and teacher-facilitated activities as seminars, workshops, conferences etc. will be introduced throughout the program. Assessments will be closely linked to the learning outcomes. In addition, a supervisory/advisory relationship will be established at the end of the second semester, to guide the students from their third semester and onwards.

In the third semester, students are given a choice between three options: "i) an external internship at a research institute, government organization, NGO or similar; ii) an "internal internship" of self-organized study at UiB where students chose 30 ECTS of elected courses from other UiB programs and/or a 10 ECTS self-taught course supervised by the MA program; iii) mobility or study abroad, either at a suggested "matched program" or self-selected (ERASMUS etc.)".

Overall, the new GLGOV program leave the students with considerable choice and the pedagogical ambitions are impressive. Highly skilled teaching staff is available, and some of the teaching staff have special competencies in PBL. The involved staff seems highly motivated to innovative their teaching. Innovation is hard to foresee, however, and the plan to let the program run as a pilot, evaluate the experienced gains, and then make necessary adjustments is therefore sensible.

5. Elective courses/specialisation

To offer the GLGOV-students the planned freedom of choice between elective courses in the second and third semester, it is a prerequisite that the portfolio of elective courses offered by the department is expanded. While only three 10-credit courses are currently offered by the GOV-master in the second/spring semester, the portfolio is suggested to include five or six courses offered both in the autumn and spring semester.

The GLGOV-website inform that "Elective courses in second semester must be chosen across the department's two master programs. The portfolio of master level elective courses at the Department of Government is subject to change and will vary over time". Indeed, for the second/spring semester electives can easily be coordinated between the two MA programs. For the third/autumn semester, however, the department have presently no elective courses to offer. The website mentions the possibility to choose from the whole UiB portfolio of master courses, but without further specification.

To implement the plans for elective courses in the revised GLGOV-program, there seems to be a need for a thorough revision also of the GOV-program. This is further commented upon in the Program assessment report 2022 for the Master`s program in Politics- and governance. It is important that both the GLGOV- and the GOV-students benefit from these revisions. At the same time as there is an obvious need to coordinate teaching across the two study programs, their uniqueness should be underscored.

Furthermore, it is hard to see that one elective course in the Master`s program in Politics- and governance could count as a specialization, as announced on the website. To work as an actual specialization, the courses offered should thematically go in depth. This is not the case for (at least two of the) the three elective courses currently offered by the GOV-master. In addition, there is probably a need for more than 10 credits for it to be perceived as an actual specialization.

A thorough revision of elective courses in the two study programs gives an opportunity to define what a specialization implies and what kind of specializations to be offered by each program.

Summary

The reformed Master`s program in Politics and Governance of Global Challenges (MASV-GLGOV), starting in the Autumn 2023, offers an interesting approach to political science. It is well composed. Students are given considerable choice; internship is offered; specialisation is offered; and the program is well arranged for mobility or studying abroad. Great freedom of choice is balanced against two substantial program specific courses – which includes the understanding and conceptualising of global challenges. The pedagogical ambitions, building on project-based learning (PBL), is impressive.

To implement the well-planned program, however, there is a need to revise methods courses as well as selective courses in the GOV-master. In the short run there are economical means available to run courses in parallel and allowing for piloting the facilitation-heavy teaching planned. In the long run, however, there is a need to resolve the inherent challenges in integrating the two master programs, and to evaluate the economic sustainability of the GLGOV-master.