

I. Introduction

I hereby present an internal overview and evaluation of the BA and MA educational programs in UiB's Department of Comparative Politics (Sampol). The report will begin with a presentation of relevant statistics and descriptions of the variety of programs offered by Sampol, followed by a discussion of the Sampol MA program, finally entering into a more detailed overview of the BA program. A larger amount of attention will be devoted to the BA program given that very significant evaluations and reforms were completed during 2012, which merit careful and detailed description.

II. Descriptive Overview: Applicants/Places; Completion/Withdrawal

- The Department of Comparative Politics presently has administrative responsibility for the following programs of study:
 - One-Year Study Program in Comparative Politics
 - Bachelor Program in Comparative Politics
 - Bachelor Program in European Studies
 - Master's Program in Comparative Politics

The following two tables display numbers describing application/acceptance as well as completion/withdrawal of students from the various Sampol-related programs.

Program	Number of Available Positions	Number Of Primary Applicants	Change in Applicants 2011-2012	Qualified Applicants Per Available Position	Number of Accepted Offers (Including Internal Movement)	Number Entering Program (Including Internal Movement)
One-Year Study	20	35	-1	1,8	22	20
SAMPOL BA Program	87	131	8	1,5	100 (112)	90 (102)
BA Program, European Studies	30	25	-8	0,8	29 (31)	25 (27)
Total Available BA Positions	137	191				
MA Program	48	100	6		30	30

- The BA figures presented in Table 1 have been relatively stable across recent years, albeit with a small drop in Sampol applicants. The number of MA applicants, by contrast, has grown sizeable from 67 in 2010 to 94 in 2011.

- Sampol. 2010: 146 applicants for 90 places; 2011: 123 applicants for 87 places
- European Studies: 2011: 37 applicants for 30 places;
- Master Program: 2010: 67 applicants; 2011: 94 applicants

Program	New Students Fall 2012*	Number Registered in SAMPOL Courses, Fall 2012 (Registered in Non-SAMPOL Courses)	Number Registered Spring 2013	Number Registered in SAMPOL Courses, Spring 2013 (Registered in Non-SAMPOL Courses)**	Number On Leave, Academic Year 2012-2013	Transfer	Number of Withdrawals
One-Year Study	20	15(5)	16	16(0)	0/0	0	4
BA SAMPOL	91	89(2)	79	77 (2)	1/6	0	3
BA EUR	27	27(0)	20	20(0)	0/1	2	6
MA SAMPOL	30	30(0)	29	28 (0)	0/0	0	1

* New students are operationalized as those new students (both accepted under normal procedures as well as those who have transferred internally) who have paid their semester fees and have registered for the fall 2012.

** Students who have applied for transfer to another program of study are included in the 2012 figures and counted as those who have registered for non-SAMPOL courses.

- The figures presented in Table 2 have also been relatively stable across the past two years, although 2012 has witnessed a slight drop in numbers:
 - The 2011 Årsstudium figure was 24, compared to this year's 20;
 - The 2011 BA Sampol figure was 102, compared to this year's 91;
 - The 2011 BA EUR figure was 29, compared to this year's 27;
 - The 2011 MA figure was 33, compared to this year's 30;

Finally, Tables 4 and 5 below show figures for the number of credits produced per student as well as the number of students who have completed their respective degrees.

Level	Credits per student 2011	Credits per student 2012
One-Year Study	40,3	34,8
Bachelor SAMPOL	45,6	44,5
Bachelor EUR	47,7	41,9
Master SAMPOL	52,5	44,4

Table 3 shows that although the number of credits per student in SAMPOL BA has remained stable from 2011-2012, there has been a moderate decline in both the EUR as well as SAMPOL MA programs.

Level	Candidates 2011	Stipulated time	Candidates 2012	Stipulated time
BA, 3-year	57		50	
MA, 2-year	25	20	21	16
Total	82		71	

Table 4 shows a small decline in both the number of BA and MA candidates who have completed their respective degrees. In addition, the number of MA candidates who have completed their respective degrees within the normally-stipulated 2-year period has declined.

Recruitment of new students to the variety of Sampol programs has become a high priority in the course of the 2012-2013 academic year. An employee of the department has been assigned the specific task of updating and improving the department's websites relating the programs of study, study abroad, research group activities, departmental publications, faculty profiles and a variety of other relevant information. This same individual is also engaged in utilizing social media in an innovative manner to further spread information concerning SAMPOL.

III. MA Program

The MA program has now completed almost two years of implementation of the reforms which began in the autumn 2011. The reforms included: (1) the creation of a new first-semester MA "Seminar in Comparative Politics" (Sampol 306); (2) The creation of a new course on qualitative research methods and MA thesis project description writing (Sampol 307); (3) the creation of a broader array of substantive courses based upon faculty research. These latter courses are directly linked to the three faculty research groups, which create and teach these courses to second-semester MA students. Most indications from student evaluations and staff experience are that the reforms have worked very effectively indeed. Following student and staff input following the experience of the academic year 2011-2012, some minor reforms were implemented for the current 2012-2013 academic year. For one, Sampol 307 was adjusted to

increase the weight placed on qualitative methods and less weight on project description, while a broader array of skilled staff were incorporated into the lecture/seminar meetings, with one focusing on academic writing, one focusing on field research, and two focusing on the comparative method and related theory. The thematic focus of the substantive courses continues to vary from year to year, but the courses have been more formally and explicitly connected to the research groups, thereby enhancing the degree of linkage between education, research, and the training of MA students in conducting their own research. With respect to the latter, student research has been qualitatively improved in recent years, both by integrating MA students directly into the research groups wherein they can present ongoing thesis work and comment on others' work, and by linking the research groups to substantive MA courses. Student research related to the MA thesis has also been enhanced by an additional program reform: second-semester students in Sampol 307 are assigned temporary thesis supervisors from the outset of the semester. This assignment allows students to begin careful, supervised work on their MA thesis project descriptions, which improves the quality of the document for submission as a required course assignment and which also prepares the students to enter their second-year fully ready to begin intensive, decisive research on their MA theses. Despite these innovations, there has been a disappointing fall in the on-time thesis completion rate amongst MA students during the past two years: while 72% of the students submitted their theses on time in the spring 2011, only about 63% did so in the spring 2012. This matter raised the concern of the Sampol faculty and therefore a meeting was held in which a group of MA student supervisors were invited. The discussion reached an agreement that no structural, organizational features of the Sampol program could be identified that explain this fall in on-time completion rates. It may be simply that the rate of 63% has returned to trend: the 72% rate for 2011 was unusually high, and in fact, rates prior to 2011 were closer to the 2012 figure of 63%.

IV. BA Program

The most significant development in the Department of Comparative Politics during the year 2012 (and one of the most significant across recent years) has involved the restructuring of the BA program. The broad goal of this reform is to improve the quality of education afforded to Sampol BA students via a course program that is diverse and rigorous substantively and which uses lectures, seminars, and writing assignments to contribute to a rich learning environment. This process involved an intensive process of review: not only through the visit and eventual report of the program reviewer (Svend-Erik Skaaning, Aarhus University), but through a variety of informal and formal staff committees (with student representation) which deliberated and formulated the overall program reform and individual course reform. Hence 2012 was a uniquely intensive, broadly cooperative period of internal evaluation and reform. These reforms are presently in process of implementation. During the spring semester 2013, course directors are meeting in groups or individually with Alvarez to design course syllabi and plan the new courses. The new structure will be implemented beginning in the autumn semester 2013, and will continue to be implemented during the spring semester 2014. At the completion of each of these respective semesters, the committees and individuals that designed the respective

components will meet in follow-up evaluation committees. These committees will consider the degree to which minor adjustments to the new courses are to be implemented or not.

A. 2012 Program Evaluation and Reform

The BA reform process began committee with work which involved studying the Sampol BA program evaluation report of Svend-Erik Skaaning and proposing program reforms consistent with his recommendations. The committee completed its work in June 2012. The Sampol BA revision report was circulated to the faculty of Sampol and discussed collectively at a departmental meeting in June 2012. The start of the new academic year in August 2012 marked the beginning of a process of specifying the more broadly defined proposals presented in the June report. This process involved a variety of committees and staff who modified existing courses or created new courses in line with the general goals. The result of this extensive process is the following list of program reforms, which have since been approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences. One key goal in this program reform has been to enhance the clarity and relevance of the *Læringsutbytter* of the respective courses. The redesign of the courses allowed fresh attention to be paid to this element, which was highlighted in the documents which were submitted to and approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The key elements of the Sampol BA program reform are outlined below.

- (1) The existing *Sampol 110, State and Nation-Building* course (30sp) is broken up into three distinct new 10sp courses (Sampol 105-107). This restructuring is instrumental for pursuing the following objectives:
 - a. A diversification of participating lecturers. The three 10pt required courses, which run simultaneously in semester two, are designated as follows, with respective course directors:
 - i. Sampol 105, *Stat- og Nasjonsbygging* (Aarebrot);
 - ii. Sampol 106, *Politiske institusjoner* (Strømsnes and Engene);
 - iii. Sampol 107, *Politisk mobilisering* (Selle).
 - b. An explicit incorporation of a broader range of essential themes into the 100-level *required* courses, as well as a fine-tuning and revision of the course content.
 - c. The new structure allows for three independent four-hour final desk exams which can thereby be more thematically focused and varied in structure;
 - d. The new structure incorporates more required essay writing, wherein one 2000-word essay, written and approved under the seminar program will be required for *each* of the three ten point courses.

- (2) The incorporation throughout the BA program *generally* of more essay-based examination components. Examples include Sampol 105-107 (as explained above), Sampol 115, and the 200-level courses.

- (3) The expansion of the exposure of Sampol students to a *wider variety of themes in the upper-level courses* via the reduction of credit points from 15 to 10, thereby increasing students' exposure to two substantive courses from the existing one. In addition, the 200-level courses are to become more theme-driven rather than area-driven, as for example in Sampol 206, *Constitution-Making, Democracy and Development: Africa, Middle East and Comparative Perspectives*; Sampol 204, *Varieties of Political Regimes: Latin America in Comparative Perspective*; Sampol 205, *Regions, Federalism and EU Integration*.
- (4) The reform of Sampol 260, *Bacheloroppgåve i samanliknande politikk*. First, the credit points are reduced from 15 to 10, in order to make space for additional 10point substantive courses. Second, we have introduced a seminar component at the outset of the course, wherein students will formulate clear research questions in preparation for more effective thesis supervision.

The new structure of the BA program at the department also has consequences for the European studies program. The former SAMPOL 215 has been altered in order to work into the EUR program as a second-semester course. This, together with the new 200 level elective course (Sampol 205, *Regions, Federalism and EU, Integration*), will strengthen the program. In order to familiarize currently enrolled students with these changes, there will be scheduled an information meeting wherein students will be given information on choosing a EUR specialization in either comparative politics or history.

The student environment in the EUR program has been productive and active, even organizing a field trip abroad. Students have been invited to guest lectures such as the lecture given by János Herman and the EU's ambassador to Norway. Although the EUR program has experienced a small decrease in applicants, it is belied that the new changes in the course structure and further development of the student environment will strengthen this program in the future-

B. Evaluation, *Kvalitetsbasen*, and *Alumnusportalen*

Sampol courses are evaluated regularly, specifically at least once every three times that the course is offered. Because the majority of our courses are offered once per year, this amounts to an evaluation of each course conducted at minimum once every three years. The course evaluations are assembled in a departmental database. The department is presently working on new procedures for effectively organizing these documents and increasing their availability. First, these documents, along with other evaluation-related documents will be publicly available in an easily accessible *kvalitetsbasen*. This source will also include other evaluation-related documents such as the report submitted by our external departmental reviewer, Svend-Erik Skaaning. Secondly, the department is working on procedures that will assemble recent course evaluations and distribute them to the members of our Education Committee, which can thereby remain updated on the relative strengths and weaknesses of our course performances and thereby call any matters of concern to the attention of the departmental chair and

Department Board. Third, the department has a well-functioning *Alumnusportal*, which in addition to matters of interest to departmental alumni will also distribute related updates concerning the ongoing pedagogical evolution and performance of our department.

The Sampol MA program reviewer will visit our department during the current spring semester. This will provide an excellent opportunity for us to consider the MA program revisions in the light of two full years' experience.

V. Study Abroad

Table 5

SAMPOL Students Studying Abroad

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number	24	24	29	37	41

EUR Students Studying Abroad

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number	21	7	10	10	9

The Department of Comparative Politics continues to show growth in the number of students studying abroad. The department has placed particular attention on encouraging and facilitating continued growth in this area, for example by strengthening its relationships with universities abroad and offering our students a wider variety of study abroad opportunities that work well within the Sampol program. Furthermore, the department has established a number of new cooperative ventures with universities abroad. These developments have also been more effectively communicated to students via the construction of new web pages available to students on the Sampol internet website.

Sampol students have traveled to all continents during the year 2012. The country to which most traveled is the USA (17), particularly to popular institutions such as Berkeley and The American University. The next most popular destination was the continent of Europe (14), particularly to countries such as German and the UK. The ten other students that studied abroad traveled to Amongst the ten remaining destinations, Makarere, Fudan and Cape Town were popular. In the course of 2013, the department will continue to seek new contacts in new destinations and to further advance our capacity for the effective transmission of relevant information to the students. Particular current attention is directed towards Belgium and the Netherlands. Sampol is also sending a delegation to the Nordic Center at Fudan University in order to become better acquainted with its research environment. We will also pursue the advancement of the semester program "Chinese Politics in a Globalized World."

VI. Overview and Conclusions

Under the leadership of departmental chair Lise Rakner, the Department of Comparative Politics has undergone an unusually dynamic and productive process of internal evaluation and reform of both its MA and BA programs. These efforts have borne fruit with respect to the diversity, rigor, and pedagogical value of the spectrum of courses and related educational services offered by Sampol. The Department of Comparative Politics has consistently stood out in the UiB Faculty of Social Sciences as highly successful: we recruit many students (and our program is particularly attractive to students visiting from abroad), and we train them well. This is in part due to the unusually large share of departmental resources which are allocated to education. Sampol takes teaching seriously, and our efforts and resources have borne fruit. At the same time, we are not complacent: our continuing efforts to evaluate and improve our program attest to our continuing efforts at improvement.