

Programme Auditor Report:

MPhil GLODE, University of Bergen

29/11/17

Overall comment:

This is an excellent MPhil programme in which students are given the opportunity to gain a strong academic background in Global Development Theory and Practice (with a specialisation in either Health Promotion or Gender and global Development) and additional practical experience in the form of engaged Development practice in their first year, and, for those who opt for it, an internship in their second year. Five permanent members of staff, and additional staff, run the programme. The time and dedication that staff put into the programme is most impressive and comes through clearly in the study plans, time tables, reading lists, student evaluations and sample of assessed work.

Visit to Bergen May 2017:

I had a very productive series of meetings with the programme convenor, staff and students. I initially met with the head of Department and head of administration. They provided a thorough overview of the Department. I met with GLODE staff who presented and discussed the MPhil programme, focusing on the development courses, and the gender and health promotion specialisations. I met with staff from the Global Challenges group for discussions about quality development of the study programme. The latter consist of a group of colleagues from various departments /faculties at the university who are working together to develop a new interdisciplinary master's constructed around the model of the GLODE programme but expanded to also cover other fields. I shared knowledge about the organization of teaching from my institution (The School of Global Studies, University of Sussex) and the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex).

I had the opportunity to get feedback from the students. Overall, the students were very satisfied with the programme. They felt the academic staff were excellent and very supportive.

### Research:

They felt they were encouraged to participate in wider academic life (e.g. attending PhD defences). They wanted to hear more about staff research and projects, as well as be included in research meetings.

### Curriculum:

The main feedback was that they wanted more time spent on their area of specialisation (at the moment they spend approximately 6 weeks) and for the courses to run for a longer period. They proposed the following to consolidate course content.

- Fieldwork in Development Practice (term 2) could be moved to term 1
- Tighten up the timing of Problem Based Learning.
- Reduce time spent on the history and philosophy of methods.

My response would be to keep the programme in its current format, particularly because this does not seem to have been an issue in the feedback from the student evaluations that were sent to me. However, if future students would also like to have more time spent on their area of specialisation, staff may want to think about how this can be done practically (e.g. in the form of additional specialisation workshops).

Students also wanted to do a mixed methods course that covers both qualitative and quantitative methods, rather than having to choose between the two. In the Qualitative Methods course, they wanted to devote more time to focus groups and interviews, and less time to ethnography. They are also keen to ensure that the methods they will use for carrying out fieldwork for their dissertations are covered in the qualitative methods course. Again, my response would be to keep the programme in its current format, because this does not seem to have been an issue in the feedback from the student evaluations that were sent to me.

In terms of reading, although they recognise that staff have included a range of literature from the Global South, with some staff doing this more than others, they would like to ensure that this is done consistently across their courses.

### Assessment:

They really appreciate the writing workshops presented in the first part of term and the option to do the 30/60 dissertation, with the internship for those doing 30 credits. They felt that it was excellent that they have the choice and that this is so well and clearly structured into the MPhil. However, they would like to have more information on the differences in expectations of a 60/30 credit thesis, in terms of how the assessment criteria varies for either one.

They would like to receive feedback with their mark for submitted work, rather than having to request feedback and are unclear as to the rationale for having to request feedback.

### Teaching Methods:

Students felt that it was excellent that they have outside speakers and that they are encouraged to attend presentations from outside speakers. They felt that staff were very supportive in helping the students to develop their research ideas and the content of their work. Although they enjoy the group work some felt that there was bit too much of it. Finally, they wanted more individual written work and feedback in the first year to help and support them in the second year. Staff are addressing this issue: two course papers will be introduced in GLODE 301 (see comments under Student evaluation).

### **Assessment of overall structure of the MPhil Programme in Global Development Theory and Practice**

The overall structure of the MPhil Programme is coherent and sound. Objectives and content, required learning outcomes, admission requirements, compulsory units, specialization units, and teaching and assessment methods are clearly mapped out in the study plan. Students are introduced to Development theory and methods in the first semester, providing a context for the areas that they choose to specialize in in the second semester.

## **Assessment of course content of Critical Perspectives on Global Development (301)**

### Syllabus, lecture themes, structure of teaching

The reading list is comprehensive and includes a range of resources, from classic texts to more recently published material. The objectives and overall content, learning outcomes and forms of assessment are clearly mapped out in the syllabus and teaching schedule. As well as covering an array of contemporary Development issues, the students are introduced to Gender and Health promotion, through a focus on resource-based approaches to development. This provides them with the opportunity to make an informed choice about their areas of specialisation. The change to the learning objectives from 2016 / 2017 to 2017/ 2018 (i.e. including a focus on the “colonial roots of inequality” and “critical perspectives on education and schooling” and removing the objective on ‘welfare approaches to development’ reflect a stronger critical engagement with the historical context of Development as well as the inclusion of education and schooling, a significant issue in Development.

## **Assessment of course content of Development Practice (307)**

### Syllabus, lecture themes, structure of teaching

The reading list is comprehensive and includes a range of resources. As is the case with GLODE 301, the objectives and overall content, learning outcomes and forms of assessment are clearly mapped out in the syllabus and teaching schedule. The content, broken down in the timetable, covers many key areas in Development Practice. However, the reading list consists of an overall summary of a few key books and journal articles. I think this needs to be organized along the lines of GLODE 301, where – either in the format of a table or a more detailed reading list – readings are organized thematically. It would also help to indicate whether readings are essential or optional / recommended. This would provide a more focused reading list and greater clarity for the students.

Assessment system in the courses, including control assessment of 2-3 selected exams from 301 and 2 reports from 307.

The course papers for GLODE 301 (with a sample covering grades A, C, and D) were fairly marked and fulfilled the criteria for papers marked in this range. The overall results for 301 are reasonable and encompass the full grade range, with most students achieving a C (good). This is an ideal variation in terms of results. It would be helpful to know whether students are penalised for going well above or below the word count since there is a substantial variation in length between the papers that were graded an A and a C.

The two reports (assessment for GLODE 307 based on oral presentations of group reports for staff and stakeholders) were detailed, creative and highly engaging. It is clear that the students had put in a great deal of work and reflects on the staff teaching. This form of assessment effectively fulfills the course learning outcomes and skills by capturing the students' ability to engage in action research and development practice.

#### Student evaluations

The feedback for both courses was very positive. Staff have addressed student concerns by doing the following:

#### GLODE (301):

1. Students wanted feedback more frequently, including changing the weighting of assessments. Staff have proposed to change the assessment form of GLODE 301 from a single course paper (3500 words) to a portfolio containing two products – a paper on development theory, and a course paper on a topic related to selected learning objectives of the course. The grade would then be dependent on two rather than one piece of written work, with a reduced course paper of 2,500 words (weighted 75%) and a 1200 word paper on the 'self-study' topic (weighted 25%). This is a good solution. We have done something similar in the 'Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Development' course (part of the MA Gender and Development at the Institute of Development, Sussex) in response to students wanting more feedback on their written work. We have introduced a short 1000 word essay due mid-term and a 4000 word essay due at the beginning of the next term. Students can then implement feedback from the mid-term essay in writing their longer essay.

2. The writing of the course paper and the academic writing workshops will be more clearly linked.
3. Students are struggling to do all the readings. The initial short term solution for Autumn 2017 of having the students select some development issues for a self-study section in which they read in detail in the area and work with a member of staff was not implemented because of the danger that students would not do the reading for the topics that they would not focusing on. I agree that this course of action is best avoided for this reason. Staff can ensure that each of the sessions is equally weighted and direct students to two or three key readings for each of the sessions. Each student can be asked to come up with a few questions or discussion points on each of the texts to ensure that they are doing the reading. The long term proposed solution to reduce the weighting of the course to 15 ECTs and introduce a new course of 5 ECTs in which students are supported with key academic communication skills is a good proposal. Staff could ensure that students do the readings for 301 by linking them to the work in the 5 ECT course.
4. In order to address the issue of a lack of a cohesive structure and integration between the sessions, staff have had the course director teach more of the lectures throughout the course so that she is more in control of the learning process of the students. The staff have also introduced an introductory book (Haslam, P., et al., Eds. *Introduction to International Development: Approaches, Actors, and Issues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press) covering the topics so that students have an overview of the field. Both of these initiatives are very good and will ensure greater consistency and coherence within the course. Another suggestion is that different staff, teaching from one week to the next, ensure that they make an explicit connection with the issue that is covered in the following week. It helps to ensure that there is an over all logic where one session builds on the knowledge of the previous session and is actively referred to and used by the staff member teaching a particular session. This will require additional work in terms of staff familiarizing themselves with the general content of the previous session. Staff can also encourage students to make the connections from one week to the next for themselves. The final session could be student led, with students being given the opportunity to reflect on what they have covered and the

different ways in which the sessions relate to each other.

GLODE 307:

The staff have changed the order of the courses in the spring term so that Development Practice is the last course in the term and comes after students have completed their methodology courses. This will certainly help students to feel more confident in carrying out project group work with organisations and is an effective way of addressing their concern about the timing of courses in the Spring term. The course director has also proposed to rename sessions and change the teaching schedule to ensure that students do not miss group work sessions and and that they take the contact time seriously.

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