



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

**VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO
PROGRAMOS ŠIUOLAIKINĖS AZIJOS STUDIJOS
(621U71001)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF MODERN ASIAN STUDIES (621U71001)
STUDY PROGRAMME
AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY**

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DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	Šiuolaikinės Azijos studijos
Valstybinis kodas	621U71001
Studijų sritis	Humanitariniai mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Regiono kultūros studijos
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Antroji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolatinė (2)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	120
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Azijos studijų magistras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	2006-03-06, Nr. ISAK-410

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	Modern Asian Studies
State code	621U71001
Study area	Humanities
Study field	Area Studies
Kind of the study programme	University studies
Study Cycle	Second
Study mode (length in years)	Full time (2)
Volume of the study programme in credits	120
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Master of Asian Studies
Date of registration of the study programme	2006-03-06, Nr. ISAK-410

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I. INTRODUCTION

Vilnius University (VU) Centre of Oriental Studies (COS) was established in 1993 and acts as an academic core unit of Vilnius University. The programme in Modern Asian Studies at Vilnius University is active since 2006. This is the first external evaluation of the programme.

The aim of the study programme is to educate professionals of contemporary Asian cultures, giving them high intercultural competence and the ability to work efficiently in the global multicultural society, and to resolve problems related to the global environment. The programme is based on interdisciplinary research, and it fosters values of diversity in thinking and acting.

The programme is a basic second-cycle (MA-level) entity comprising 120 ects and corresponding to two years of full-time study. There is a close relation to the corresponding BA programme in Asian Studies, also at Vilnius University. Both programmes are located at the Centre of Oriental Studies of Vilnius University, and they share a large part of their teaching staff and other resources. They nevertheless remain independent entities, and the students enrolled in the MA programme come also from other backgrounds.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

Apart from the generic skills required of all university students, the programme in Modern Asian Studies has the aim of giving students a profound knowledge and broad understanding of Asian (and other non-European) cultures. The aims of the programme and the expected learning outcomes are for the most part clearly formulated, though some formulations could be more specified as it is difficult to measure how and when one achieves learning outcomes such as knowledge of „the multifaceted nature of area studies, its complex relationship to other disciplines and interdisciplinary formations,“ or „the dynamics of social change in the academic field of area studies.“

Information about the programme's aims and learning outcomes is publicly available both in printed form and on the university's website.

By international standards, the objectives of the programme are well-defined. The programme produces specialists that can well serve the needs of the labour market and the society, especially

the public sector. On the basis of interviews with the students and alumni it may be stated that the programme meets their expectations. The evaluators confirm that the title of the programme corresponds to its content and qualifications.

Modern Asian Studies is a field whose global importance is rapidly growing together with the growing relevance of Asian countries, especially China and India. Programmes under the general heading of „Asian Studies“ are offered by many universities in Europe, and it is important that the main national university in Lithuania also has a programme of this type at the MA level. The name of the programme corresponds well to the stated objectives and achieved learning outcomes, as well as to the international professional requirements and expectations of the field. Judging by the observations made during the site visit, a degree in Modern Asian Studies from Vilnius University is a good guarantee of professional competence in the field.

2. Curriculum design

As far as can be judged from the self-evaluation report and from the information received during the site visit, the programme meets all the relevant legal requirements concerning curriculum design. It seems that the programme has adapted well its contents to the European system of credits (ects), as adopted in 2011, and to the other adjustments made in connection with the parallel introduction of the modular system. According to the self-evaluation report the programme currently offers 13 different courses/modules. The spread of the workload and courses is rational and corresponds to the objectives of the programme.

The curriculum in general is arranged in two clusters of study subjects, i.e. (East and South) Asia-related subjects on the one hand, and subjects dealing with the methodology of a particular interdisciplinary formation on the other hand. Interdisciplinarity may be considered one of the strongest aspects of this programme.

As an additional positive observation, it must particularly be noted that the Center of Oriental Studies has made significant changes in the MA programme due to the students' feedback to the courses. The courses Reflections on Orientalism in Lithuania, Cross-Cultural Management and Marketing, Contemporary Political Processes in Asia, Legal and Social Aspects of Migration have been skipped mostly due to unfavorable feedback received from the students. These changes demonstrate the flexibility and responsibility of the teaching staff.

The content of the subjects taught corresponds to the type and level of studies. Of course, the

teachers, especially those with research degrees, must to some extent adjust the contents of the curriculum, and of the individual courses, to their own research interests. This only increases the relevance of the teachers' contribution and allows the latest achievements in the field to be included in the programme.

Interviews with the students and an examination of the MA theses also confirm, that the learning outcomes correspond to the aims of the programme. The course materials are research-based and allow the intended learning outcomes to be achieved. All students have a very good command of English, and can easily engage current issues found in international research.

In general, it may be said that the curriculum is as good as can be achieved in the conditions of a relatively small country with a short history of modern independence, with still somewhat limited resources, and with a rather short tradition of Oriental Studies. Courses in business might be considered by the Committee of the Study Programme (CSP). This could be useful in linking present knowledge of Asia with practical skills to improve students' ability to be engaged in private sector after graduation.

3. Staff

According to the self-evaluation report, the programme in Modern Asian Studies has had in the years 2008-2012 a staff of 2 professors, 5 associate professors (docents), 4 lecturers with a doctoral degree and 6 other lecturers. The student/teacher ratio is given as 3:1. This information is, however, somewhat misleading, as many of the teachers are not permanently or full-time employed, and most of them are also involved in other programmes, especially in the BA programme of Asian Studies. Many of the teachers listed have also been present in the programme only during some years. When properly calculated, the number of teachers is much smaller, and the teacher/student ratio much less favourable, but still good. Students are apparently very pleased with the teachers.

Even so, the programme obviously has all the resources it can get under the current circumstances, and the programme can be well maintained in its present state. The legal requirements concerning the number and type of teachers and supervisors are met, and the learning outcomes can be obtained. Interviews with the teachers confirm that the current staff is professionally competent and can secure the sustainability of the programme also in the coming years.

The staff is regularly producing research results with international relevance. Since this is an MA

programme, it can be expected that all of the teachers are research-oriented. The intensity and international visibility of the research produced by the staff could, however, be even higher than it is today. As it is, many of the research results of the staff members are published in Lithuanian or in Russian, and not necessarily in internationally well-known series. This may be a matter of time, as a younger generation of Asianists and Orientalists is only emerging in Lithuania. It would also be important to attract more international visiting researchers to the programme. Only Koma Kyoko and Deborah Summer are named as visiting scholars during last 5 years.

The average age of the staff is promising. Half of the staff is less than 45 years old. The teachers' age structure is diversified and shows a good balance. Although age as such is neither a merit nor a disadvantage, it is important that the programme has staff members of all ages, which guarantees both the presence of accumulated knowledge and the future continuity of the work. The staff in general has a good teaching experience, and the programme is in all respects sustainable. Conditions for the professional development of the staff are to a sufficient extent guaranteed by the university.

4. Facilities and learning resources

The main facilities of the programme are located in the main campus of Vilnius University, with only the Confucius Institute having a separate location.

There are rooms with altogether c. 300 seats. COS facilities have received generous financial support from the governments of Japan, India and P.R. China. Most rooms have modern technological equipment (audiovisual teaching, internet connection). Equipment in some language cabinets needs to be modernised, but this is mainly an issue for the BA programme because practical language teaching is not an issue of MA programme. Also, the obsolete technology has already to a large extent been replaced by modern computers and other technological solutions.

Students of the programme make use of the Vilnius University library and its Oriental Reading Room. The Reading Room has over 11,000 books and almost 1,000 journal items. Thanks to the age of Vilnius University, the university library also contains some older sources, including both book collections and manuscripts. Since 2008, the Centre of Oriental Studies has temporarily housed an important oriental collection belonging to the National Library. In recent years, the

resources of books and journals on Asia have grown in a positive way, and the staff and the students have access to a considerable number of relevant electronic databases. In view of the sustainability of the programme, it would be much better to rely on the university's library collections than on the professors' private libraries.

Although the library resources may be judged to be adequate, it is clear that an even larger collection of especially modern literature on Asia would be desirable in a country's only Centre of Oriental studies. This is obviously a question of financial investments, and it is clear that the available limited financial resources should be concentrated on acquiring books and journals on those areas and fields that attract the largest numbers of students. More significant use of Moodle could ease the study process and would help to spread the materials needed by the students.

While the students apparently have the practical facilities that can be afforded by the university, an obvious problem raised in the self-evaluation report is the lack of individual working places for the staff. This may also affect the students, who would benefit of a possibility of consulting the teachers in properly equipped staff working rooms. There are on-going plans to amend this problem, but more should be done.

5. Study process and student assessment

Admission to the Modern Asian Studies programme is organised every second year and is highly competitive, and is based on the grade of the BA final thesis and on average grade of the assessment marks listed in the BA diploma supplement. Additional points are given for proficiency in Asian languages or for Asia related courses. There may be minor problems in this system, as it does not guarantee that all new students have a command of an Asian language, while it also does not fully open the door to graduates with a BA degree in subjects other than Asian Studies. Proficiency in Asian languages should be required for all applicants, or not at all, because the present situation creates inequality that complicates the study process.

The entrance competition for state-funded places is relatively high with c. 2 to 3.3 applicants per place. The drop-out rate is c. 37%, which is quite high. There are a number of reasons. Students consider the programme very demanding and they are not able keep pace with other students if they study abroad and are not able to transfer the credit points. There have been also mentioned personal reasons as a cause of drop-out. Some students graduate later.

The organization of the study process seems to correspond to the objectives of the programme, and the students are processed in annual contingents, which facilitates their graduation. The

students are also encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities although their activity does seem to be particularly high. The amount of social support provided by the institution seems to be adequate.

A general problem for Asian Studies programmes in many countries is the insufficient availability of student mobility opportunities. It should be taken for granted that a student majoring in Modern Asian Studies should have the possibility of staying and studying a sufficiently long period – as a minimum of one semester – in the target country of his/her studies. This can only be organized by establishing a sufficient number of bilateral exchange agreements and scholarships both at the level of universities and the state level. The number of outgoing students (2 out of ten in 2008 and 3 out of eleven in 2010) has been insufficient.

The course / module descriptions are clear and state the goals and methods of each entity in an easily accessible form. The amount of contact teaching and the estimated number of independent work hours is well balanced. The assessment of the students' performance also follows the normal rules of adequacy and transparency. The relatively high competition for admission into the programme guarantees a sufficient number of motivated and talented students, which is also reflected by the fact that the final theses get a very high average grade (8 out of 10). The topics of the final theses are diverse and intellectually challenging.

Information on the post-graduation professional activities of the graduates has been gathered with the help of a questionnaire in 2013. The survey includes also the BA graduates from the programme of Asian Studies and shows that a majority of the graduates use their acquired professional knowledge and skills in their work.

6. Programme management

Supervision of the quality of the programme is performed by the Committee of the Study Programme (CSP), which consists of prominent scholars, an external stakeholder and a student. Implementation of the Programme lies with the administration of the COS. The Deputy Director of Studies is the person who offers all the bureaucratic information needed by CSP. The system looks coherent and stable.

The quality improvement of the programme is supported by regular collection of students feedback from 2009 at the end of each semester. The Centre for Study Quality management of

VU gives survey results to the teachers and administration. COS looks at the results at regularly scheduled meetings. There exist surveys of the teaching staff, alumni and external stakeholders. A number of very good suggestions have been received, for example, to provide more possibilities to spend some time in Asian universities during the study period. Some changes in the curriculum have been discussed and enacted after receiving such input.

External stakeholders are clearly involved in the quality assurance system, they are involved in CSP and have given feedback in the form of a survey in 2013 first time. The feedback gives clear suggestions for improving the programme.

There exist a number of documents defining the responsibilities of the Programme providers. Internal quality management is based on 4 principles what are internationally and widely respected as core values in the quality improvement system at a HEI. Internal quality assurance functions well, though the time period has been too short to see all the outcomes.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase resources that are required to keep the library collection on Asia up to date.
2. Consider possibilities of increasing access to student mobility to the Asian countries.
3. As far as possible, increase academic exchange with other centres of Asian Studies.
4. Investigate possibilities of “marketing” graduates to the private commercial sector.
5. Introduce a programme of support for students to decrease dropout rates.

IV. SUMMARY

Interdisciplinary can be considered one of the strongest aspects of this programme. Interviews with the students and alumni confirmed that the programme met their expectations. Students are very pleased with the teachers.

The Center of Oriental Studies has made significant changes in the MA programme due to the students` feedback to the courses. These changes show flexibility and responsibility of the teaching staff. The teaching staff in general has good teaching experience and is sustainable. The number of oriental items in the Vilnius University Library is rising quickly, but some gaps still exist and more items are needed to cover a topic as large as Modern Asian studies. Admission to the Modern Asian Studies programme is organised every second year and is highly competitive. The number of students travelling abroad (2 out of ten in 2008 and 3 out of eleven in 2010) has been insufficient. The relatively high competition for admission to the programme guarantees a sufficient number of motivated and talented students, which is reflected by the fact that the final theses get a very high average grade (8 points out of 10).

Some learning outcomes should be revised. Teachers should increase the number of publications in high impact international journals. MA students should spend more time in some Asian universities during their study period. CSP should consider how to decrease the dropout rate. Courses in business and a more extensive use of Moodle should also be considered by the CSP.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Modern Asian studies* (state code – 621U71001) at Vilnius University is given positive evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation Area in Points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	3
2.	Curriculum design	4
3.	Staff	4
4.	Material resources	4
5.	Study process and assessment (student admission, study process student support, achievement assessment)	3
6.	Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)	4
	Total:	22

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.

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