

REPORT FROM THE GLODE PROGRAMME REVIEWER 2022

By Axel Borchgrevink, OsloMet

This is the second year for me as a programme reviewer. The tasks for this year comprised the following:

- Assess and advise on opportunities for practice within the programme
 - GLODE 307 Development Practice (10 ECTs) being expanded into 15 ECTs course GLODE 311
 - GLODE 310 Internship (30 ECTs) Has been given 3-year review by staff with minor changes to course description
- Control assessment of
 - 2 or 3 reports in each of GLODE 307 and GLODE 310

I visited Bergen and GLODE on May 23rd. (See the programme for the visit, attached at the end of this report.) In advance I had received and read relevant documents for the two courses (course plans, evaluations, student reports, etc.). Thanks to Marguerite for organizing the visit, and to all of the GLODE staff for receiving me in such a nice way.

The two programmes to be assessed are related in that both are concerned with the practice element of the GLODE (Global Development Theory and Practice) MA programme. In GLODE 307 (which is being expanded into 311) students organized in groups carry out a commissioned study for an organization, company or institution, while simultaneously learning about planning tools and approaches within the applied development sector. GLODE 310 is an internship where students work in an NGO, research institution or public institution for three months. Both courses thus aim to give the students hands-on experience, knowledge and skills of and for development work. As such, I see the courses as valuable and well conceived. They give the students relevant knowledge and skills, and thereby contribute to what makes GLODE a strong programme.

The report is based on the visit and material mentioned above. Apologies for coming with conclusions and recommendations based on such short interaction with the programmes. Hopefully, the following comments can still be of use in generating debates, ideas and, ultimately, improvements, however small they may be.

As this is a report to the staff of GLODE, who know the programme and the courses so much better than me, I will skip any attempt at sketching out the programme set-up and go directly to the issues observed.

GLODE307 (being developed into 311)

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Group dynamics

- *Dividing into groups.* Both in the 2020 and 2021 evaluations, some students were unhappy about the composition of groups, feeling they were unbalanced and unfair. There seems to

be feelings that there are free riders that have to be “carried” by the other group members. The fact that the same grade is given to all members deepens the feeling of injustice of being with somebody who does not pull their own weight. There were wishes that students should have a say in who they ended up in groups together with, and which organization and task they would work with. As I have understood it, groups are organized by the GLODE staff, seeking to strike a balance in terms of gender and specializations, and to distribute the Norwegian students equally among the groups.

- The dilemma is familiar from the group-based work and grading we have in our BA programme in Development Studies at OsloMet. Previously, we used the opposite principle: students were allowed to choose which thematic fieldwork group they would join. Even if this process required considerable guidance from teachers, it often had the unhappy ending where some students - who nobody wanted to have in their groups – ended up being stuck together. It was both a very unfortunate highlighting of who was unpopular in the class, and meant very unbalanced groups, where often some of the brightest students had chosen each other.
- We ended up with a mixture of the two principles. A range of group themes (somewhat parallel to the tasks of 307) were delineated, and students were asked to select three in ranked order. That allowed them to talk among themselves and make wishing lists that corresponded with those they hoped to work together with. And then we divided into groups, trying to ensure that everybody got their first or second wish. This way of doing it has at least produced happier students, who feel they have had a say over which group they end up in.
- Possibly something similar is possible with GLODE307/311? As groups are put together by teaching staff, one could even to some extent maintain the attempts at balancing gender, specializations and national backgrounds.
- *Handling conflicts in groups*. It is inevitable that in some groups, conflicts arise. But could one measure to limit and handle such conflicts be to use the rotating roles from PBL, and the structured forms of feedback in that process? After all, the students already have experience with this, no?

How to strengthen coherence between lectures/course readings and practical tasks for organizations?

- In both the 2020 and 2021 student evaluations of the course, it was commented that lectures and readings were not particularly relevant for the students’ work for the organizations and the reports they were writing. As the name of the course is Development Practice, and as the students are assessed and given grades on the basis of the report they write and present, it is natural that they give priority to this part of the course. I was told by one of the teachers that the students probably do not read very many of the readings.
- In my view, it is very valuable that the students get practical experience of “development work” through this course. It would be even more valuable to the extent that the practical experience is linked to analytical perspectives on this same practice – as is the intention with the theoretical part of this course. What could be done to realize this potential for linking learning by doing with more theoretical perspectives?
- Is it possible to combine the assessment based on the report and presentation, with another exam or essay on the course readings? Of course, another exam requires more teaching resources, which are scarce at GLODE at the moment. But expanding the course to 15 credits might imply some more resources? Or one could find ways where the additional workload was kept to a minimum. Perhaps, in addition to the group report been given a fail/pass,

students could also write a short, individual essay about their experience of doing a task for the organizations, using theories, concepts and perspectives from the literature?

- The reading list for the course seems both good and relevant, offering both practical how-to-do-texts as well as more critical perspectives. (I am basing this on the 307 reading list. I was told that a revised reading list will be made for the 311 course in the spring of 2023.) It seems to be a great resource collection. However, it is also a very long and comprehensive reading list, in particular for a course with such a large practical component. Maybe it is over-ambitious? Would it be useful to reduce the number of texts and lectures, and instead put more resources into follow-up/support for the groups and for an extra exam/assessment form?
- There is also something about sequencing that it might be useful to reflect upon. One could imagine that literature of the how-to type is useful before or when you are doing the practical task, while more critical perspectives on development praxis may be better suited to coming after practical experience, to allow reflections on what one has done. Not sure what the practical implications of this would be for the organization of the course, but maybe worth thinking about?
- Finally, if students feel that the literature and lectures are not relevant for the practical tasks, they might also have a point. Is it possible to find organizations and tasks that more fully correspond to the practices of the reading list? Or could the reading lists be adjusted to better fit the tasks they get in the organizations?'

Norwegian and international students

- In the 2021 evaluation report, it is mentioned that during interviews, it is the Norwegian students in the groups who must interview and take notes, as the interviews are done in Norwegian. This would seem to mean that the international students are totally marginalized in this part of their tasks. For an international programme, this is highly unfortunate. I would strongly recommend that GLODE do its utmost to find tasks for students that can be carried out in English.

GLODE 310

It is interesting to see that the course seems to function well on the principle that the students themselves find organizations and placements. (This could be an inspiration for developing similar internship arrangements in our own programmes in development studies at OsloMet.)

The following remarks are made largely on the basis of the material I was given from three internships in 2021. It is a very small sample on which to draw conclusions.

Yet it is clear that the procedure results in extremely different placements. Differences between host institutions, between tasks assigned to the intern, and in the way they are specified at the outset. In one of the three cases (maybe even in two), the internship agreement was very open and unclear about what tasks were assigned and what was expected of the intern. In many cases, this will undoubtedly be agreed over the course of the placement period, and it may even be an advantage in terms of being able to respond flexibly to organizational needs that may arise and to the capacity and ability of the intern. However, it may also result in an internship with unfocused responsibilities, which may not yield the expected learning outcomes. As discussed with current (?) course coordinator Marguerite while I was in Bergen, specifying objectives – for the student and for the organization – could be useful.

When it comes to the reports the students submit, the samples I have seen all include reflections on how the internship relates to the GLODE programme. This is good. Yet perhaps the connection between programme and internship could be made even stronger. Students could for instance be asked to select and use literature from the 307/311 course to reflect upon and analyze their own placement. Perhaps – in line with the more specific objectives recommended above - the whole internship could be treated as a project, with an initial logframe developed at the outset, and going through the project cycle, ending with the report that describes all the steps?

Attachment: Programme for the visit by the programme reviewer on 23 May 2022:

Morning

09.00 – 10.30 GLODE 307 Practice module.

- Meet with Siri & Ann Cathrin to discuss course in 2021 and 2022;
- review two student reports from 2021 selected by Siri
- review recent course evaluation for 2020, 2021;
- review changes in course description from GLODE 307 to GLODE 311

10.30-12.00 GLODE 310 Internships.

- Meet Marguerite to discuss course in 2021 and 2022
- review current course description
- review course evaluations
- review internship reports (1 Gender (NGO) and 2 HP – one research organisation and one action NGO)

Lunch

12.00 to 13.00

Afternoon

13.00 to 14.00 Time for reading, evaluating, etc.

14.00 to 15.00 GLODE Staff meeting

- Any questions or issues arising
- Any initial comments

GLODE response to report by Axel Borchgrevink

The report by Axel Borchgrevink (AB) on the practice module (GLODE 307/311) and the Internship module (GLODE 310) was discussed by GLODE staff in a meeting on Monday 24 October 2022.

We are delighted that AB sees these two courses as “valuable and well conceived” and that they contribute to students’ knowledge, skills and competence. We are also grateful for the many suggestions made either to address a challenging issue or to improve the coherence of the courses. Here we comment on four of AB’s suggestions.

GLODE 307/311 Practice module

Group dynamics and handling conflicts in groups

In determining group membership, both staff-determined groups and self-selected groups may lead to problems. AB suggests a mix of the two, where students are given a list of topics to be covered and they rank their top two or three choices. Staff can then balance gender, nationality, disciplinary background, specialisation and ability while attempting to give students their first or second choice. We actually already do this in the introduction module (GLODE 301) for both the PBL and student-led lecture groups, but have not yet used this method in the practice module. This is something we will bear in mind in the future once we know the organisations and the tasks for each cohort.

Likewise, we will encourage good evaluation processes during group work as practiced in PBL – to reduce the likelihood of conflict within groups.

Better coherence between lectures, readings and practical tasks

Student and staff evaluations note that students read very little in this module. AB suggests reducing the number of readings and noting – and strategically using – that there are both ‘how to’ and critical-perspectives-on-praxis type articles. We aim to follow both these suggestions, first by shortening the literature list for the course and secondly by identifying a single ‘how to’ type article for the students to focus on before each lecture/workshop.

In addition, we plan to manage student expectations better by informing students that although they may not use all literature listed during the course, they may use it in their internships or in their work-life after their master’s course. This applies to the content of the lectures as well – while each lecture may not be directly relevant to the practical task at hand, it is contributing to knowledge that will benefit them as a development practitioner in general.

We have decided to focus on the practice nature of the course and will NOT add individual written reflections or an exam on the literature.

Norwegian and international students

AB noted that it is extremely important that we do our best to find organisations that can commission tasks in English to include our international students on an equal footing. We agree wholeheartedly.

GLODE 310 Internship module

Goals and tasks as specified in the Internship Agreement (between intern, host organisation and UiB)

AB pointed out the wide range in the quality and appropriateness of the tasks and goals for the internship set by students and host organisations. A very positive suggestion is to integrate this course better with other modules in GLODE, for example getting students to view their internship as a project, draw up a logframe at the outset and to use the literature from GLODE 307/311 to frame their reflections in their internship report.

We have embraced this suggestion entirely and intend to introduce the idea of constructing a logframe (or Theory of change) during the training workshops in the semester before the internship. Likewise, we will add to the instructions for the internship report, the idea of using the literature from the practice (and other) module(s).

We are grateful for AB's thorough and considered report and appreciate that he has taken time to give us positive advice and suggestions.