



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

24 January 2019

To: The University of Bergen, Faculty of Social Sciences
From: Linda Berg, University of Gothenburg

Programme evaluation report, Bachelor programme in European Studies (BASV-EUR) 2019

This evaluation report is based on the instructions described in the *Programsensormappe for der samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet*. The report will be in English, as agreed upon with the Department of Comparative Politics. The overall assignment is to evaluate the programme structure as a whole, and the specific courses in European studies given within the programme, and offer suggestions of improvement. This report will also pay extra attention to some of the changes made since the last report (by Elisabeth Bakke, 2018) as well as reflections regarding fallout, how to strengthen the sense of programme attachment, and the interaction with the SAMPOL courses.

This report is based on extensive documentation provided by the Department of Comparative Politics, and a site visit in Bergen 18-19 October 2018. The site visit included meetings with Director of Studies Leiv Marsteintredet, Director of the BA programme in European Studies Michaël Tatham and Study advisor Stine Soltvedt Jakobsen, as well as meetings with professor at AHKR (Department of Archeology, history, culture and science of religion Christhard Hoffmann, previous Director of BA-programme in European Studies, and Kjetil Evjen, who teaches in the introductory course EUR101. In addition to staff meetings, I also had the opportunity to meet some students, one currently in the second year and two who had finished the programme.

The documentation provided includes programme and course guides, statistics about application rates, fallout rates, completed courses and students' grades (autumn 2017 and spring 2018), statistics about how many students who chose the comparative politics or history specialisations respectively (2012-2017) and a report about the programme being one of three programme pilots to test a new form of Opt-out Exchange process. In addition, examples of exam questions and grading guides for exams have been provided.

The disposition of the report follows the suggested template from the instruction regarding evaluation reports, with one main exemption; I have opted to discuss forms of examination under the heading of each course. It makes more sense to me to discuss it together, as the way the examinations (and other forms of assignments) are set up is an intrinsic part of how a course functions pedagogically.

About the programme

The Bachelor programme in European Studies is administrated by the Department of Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen since 2012. It was previously, before 2012, organised by the Department of Archaeology, History, Culture and Religion. The program is based on cooperation between these two departments, focusing on the academic disciplines comparative politics and history.

Applications, admittance and fallout

There are 30 places available at the programme, which has been the same number since 2012. The admitted number of students varies somewhat over the years. Most years it has been around 30, with the exception of 2016 when there were unusually low numbers of admitted students (see Table 1). According to numbers provided in the previous evaluation report, this seems to more or less also correspond to the number of students applying to the programme as their first choice (Programsensorrapport 2018, p 2).

Table 1 Number of admitted students, choice of specialisation in year 2, and fallout

Start year	Students admitted	Specialisation y2		Active y2	% active y2	Active final yr/current sem.	% active final yr/current sem.
		SAMPOL	History				
2012		17	2	19			
2013	23	16	1	17	74%	7	30 %
2014	34	17	1	18	53%	17	50 %
2015	35	21	4	25	71%	19	54 %
2016	15	9	1	10	67%	8*	53 % *
2017	27	20	4	24	88%		

Source: Figures provided by the Department of Comparative Politics. *Spring 2018

In addition to the issue of limited number of students who apply and are admitted into the programme, there is also the issue of fallout. After the first year of joint courses, the students in the European studies programme chose to specialise in either Comparative politics or History. At this point there is a noticeable drop in the number of students. I have been informed by Leiv Marsteintredet that among those who drop out, a large share simply transfer to the regulat SAMPOL programme. By the third and final year the numbers indicate that slightly over half of the originally admitted students remain active in the programme. Fallout obviously happens in all programmes and courses to some extent. A typical strategy is to overbook the number of admitted students in the beginning to compensate for the predicted fallout later. In this case, the lower number of applicants to the programme (especially as the first choice) makes such a strategy more difficult. It should however be noted that the numbers for 2017 looks much more positive, both in terms of the number of students starting the programme, but especially also the lower levels of fallout. It seems as if the measures taken to improve the situation after 2016 have been fruitful, although the future development should of course be monitored carefully.

Table 1 also indicates that most of the programme students chose the specialisation in comparative politics. I have not been able to find out if this has changed and become more pronounced since the shift of the programme responsibility to the department of Comparative

politics, or whether this has been the tendency also before. On average over the later years, only one in ten students chose history. This situation did not seem to be of any particular concern to neither the teachers from the varying disciplines, nor to the students. It can however potentially affect the perception of the degree of cross-disciplinary of the programme. More importantly, the choice of speciality in the second year is a feature of the programme structure that does raise some concern regarding the programme identity of the students.

Programme structure

After the first year of European studies courses, the students can choose to specialize in either discipline. In the third year they have an exchange semester in the autumn, followed by the spring semester with courses in the chosen discipline, including the bachelor thesis.

Table 2 Structure of the European Studies Bachelor programme (BASV-EUR), 3 years

	Autumn		Spring	
Yr 1	EXPHIL-SVEKS Examen philosophicum- skuleeksamen, 10 p <i>eller</i> EXPHIL-SVSEM Examen philosophicum – seminarmodell, 10 p SAMPOL103 Faglege tilnæringsmåtar og ideologiar i studiet av politikk, 10 p EUR101 Examen facultatum - Innføring i europeisk historie og politikk, 10 p		EUR103 Europa etter 1945: Ressursar, demografi, økonomi, 15 p EUR105 European Union Institutions, Politics, and Policies (Jean Monnet Academic Module), 15 p	
Yr 2	<u>Samanlikn pol</u> MET102 Samfunnsvitenskapleg metode, 15 p SAMPOL115 Democracy and Democratization, 15 p	<u>Historia</u> HIS101 Oversyn over eldre historie til 1750, 15 p HIS113/114 Fordjuping i eldre historie, 15 p	<u>Samanlikn pol</u> SAMPOL105 Stats- og nasjonsbygging, 10 p SAMPOL106 Politiske institusjonar i etablerte demokrati, 10 p SAMPOL107 Politisk mobilisering, 10 p	<u>Historia</u> HIS102 Oversyn over nyare historie frå 1750, 15 p HIS115/116 Fordjuping i nyare historie, 15 p
Yr 3	Utveksling (exchange semester)		<u>Samanlikn pol</u> SAMPOL260 Bacheloroppgåve i samanliknande politikk, 10 p 2 valfrie emne på 200-nivå (å 10 p)	<u>Historia</u> HIS250 Bacheloroppgåve i historie, 15 p HIS203 Teoriar, metodar og historiske kjelder, 15 p

Comment: The light grey areas indicate the semesters focusing on European studies, i.e. the first year and the exchange semester in the autumn of the third year. In the second year the students chose specialisation, dark grey indicating SAMPOL courses and white indicating History. This specialisation also remains for the spring courses of the third year when the students also write their bachelor essays.

As illustrated in the overview of the programme structure in Table 2, the students only study together during the first year. In the second year they follow the (much larger) courses within each chosen specialization. According to the students I talked to during my site visit, this is a challenge for the programme identity. There is a risk that students start to think of themselves more as e.g. “SAMPOL” students than European studies students. This is amplified by the fact that the only remaining joint semester of the programme is the exchange semester, when the student group is anyway fragmented, as they are expected to go abroad and study at another university. The variation over the years thus becomes quite large, depending on the interest and activities among the programme students to keep up social activities, field trips,

study groups etc. which helps to preserve a sense of European studies identity in any given cohort.

The students also pointed to another aspect of the change into the specialisation discipline in the second year, especially for those students who chose Comparative politics. They found the qualitative step very large, from the courses in the spring of year one, to the autumn of year two. Both the method's course (MET102) and the democracy course (SAMPOL115) were considered to be good, but rather challenging, especially in comparison to the three courses (SAMPOL105, 106 and 107) that are taught the following spring. The students expressed the view that they get to study these courses in the reversed order, and that the teachers of SAMPOL115 assume all the students to have already taken the 105-107 courses. For the students choosing history, this seems to be much less problematic, with a more logical order of the courses.

A third remark about the overall programme structure and its consequences are the lack of advanced courses in European Studies, which was also brought up by the students. The students mentioned both the 200-level and the potential of a later stage 100-level course. In addition to the value of the advanced course in itself, having the possibility to study again together as a programme in European studies at a later stage would also increase the sense of a programme with its own identity. To this point should also be added the fact that the students write their bachelor theses in the specialisation discipline and not in European studies. Some of the students indicated that it would have been nice to have "their own" sub group of theses examination focusing on European issues, and preferably if possible, together with the students choosing History as their specialisation.

In sum, there are issues concerning the risk of lack of programme identity, the lack of advanced courses in European Studies, and potential of a more European studies focused bachelor thesis course. The first aspect could, in addition to the great work done by the students themselves) be considered in the form of perhaps one joint seminar/workshop per semester about some important European topic, for students of both specialisations. Ideally in a way that it could inform the coursework of some of the specialisation courses, but otherwise as a "0 credit" assignment, which could potentially give some bonus points to later course work.

The second part, advanced courses, is more difficult without changing the existing programme structure. If that is to be considered, one potential idea could be to start the specialisation already during the second semester, which would allow for the students choosing SAMPOL to take those courses in the more logical order. Coming back to joint European studies courses the fourth semester could then also allow for EUR103 and 105 to be transformed into 113 and 115, with a more advanced theoretical approach. Especially for EUR105, this seems as something that could potentially be done fairly easy. Otherwise the fifth exchange semester should focus on cooperation with universities where the option exists to take at least one European studies course at the advanced level (and emphasise that to the students). It could of course also be considered if there is any potential for developing a 200-course focusing on European issues as an elective course, maybe even a shorter, 5 credit, course.

The third aspect, concerning the potential of a joint European studies bachelor thesis course, is in theory a very good suggestion. It would address all three aspects brought up here. In reality it is naturally more complicated as the SAMPOL260 is only 10 credits, whereas the HIS250 is 15 credits. This was also highlighted by the students, who perceived it to be in

practice the same demands and amounts of work, despite being worth 5 credits less for the SAMPOL students. In addition, the students also study different methods courses in history and comparative politics respectively. The placement of the methods courses also differs (third semester for SAMPOL and sixth semester for HIS). This placement of the methods course earlier in the programme for the SAMPOL students was not considered to be of any problem in relation to their thesis work. In fact, some students highlighted the benefits of a better methods understanding for the other later courses, and also useful for those students who choose to do an internship during the exchange semester. Moreover, there is in general almost always a need to specialise even further regarding methods once you have started your thesis work. Despite the practical issues and challenges, it is however worth considering the possibility of a joint thesis course for the future. It would underscore that it is in fact one programme and not just a common first year. The value of discussing the theses at the seminars with the students from the other discipline would also strengthen the cross-disciplinary approach. As a suggestion, if there were a 5 credit elective EUR-course at 200-level, the European studies students could then choose that course (instead of one of the SAMPOL200-courses), thus being able to have their own 15 credit thesis course together with their fellow students specialising in history.

Courses in European studies

In correspondence with the programme responsible teachers, I have chosen to focus in more detail on the European Studies courses (EUR101, EUR103 and EUR105), and the exchange semester. However, since the students start with both EUR101 and SAMPOL103 during their first semester, I can briefly communicate an overall impression from the students I met. They mentioned that they appreciate this course, and had the impression that this was also the case for students specialising in history. In addition to good literature and lectures, they especially liked the training in academic writing. They did however also feel slightly “swallowed” in the large group of SAMPOL students. I would also like to point out that this issue, as well as all other references to students’ perceptions regarding each of the courses below, is only based on impressions from the few students I met during my visit to UiB. The student views are thus in no way representative of the whole European studies student group, although the students I met have been active in the student group and thus heard and discussed course quality issues with their peers. There have not been any recent course evaluations of either of these courses, something I would strongly recommend to do in the coming years.

EUR 101 Innføring i europeisk historie og politikk (Introduction to European History and Politics)

Main course instructors 2018: Christhard Hoffman, prof history and Kjetil Evjen, senior lecturer comparative politics. This course is a partnership between comparative politics and history, and it consists of two main parts: 1) ideas about Europe from the Ancient time to the Second World War, and 2) European political history and the European integration project after 1945.

Lectures and seminars: From the teachers perspective the course works well, but there has been an issue with securing a more stable staff situation for this course over the years. From the history side it seems to be more stable now, whereas it is more uncertain from the comparative politics side. The students I met said they appreciated the lectures and found them very interesting. The voluntary seminars with master students once a week is a very good idea, but from students starting different years I got the impression that it is really important to find the right master student for this task. It seems to have worked less well some

years, leading to several students stopped attending the seminars that year. They were however happy with the more recent seminar leaders. As several master students wants to do this, the students would like the course management to be careful in the selection of the right person.

Literature: Three books: Claes & Førland (2010) *EU. Mellomstatlig samarbeid og politisk system*; Olsen, Espen Daniel Hagen, Trondal, Jarle (2017) *Hvordan virker EU?*; and Pasture, Patrick (2015) *Imagining European Unity since 1000 AD*. The students who took the course some years back were very happy to hear that the older book by Wilson & van der Duissen has now been replaced. The current selection seems to work better.

There is also an electronic compendium of 7 articles/chapters, and another 4 electronic resources. Compared to last year there has been a reduction in the number of texts, which seems to correspond to recommendations made in the previous evaluation. However, it does still seem to be a rather intense reading list for a first semester course of 10 credits.

Examination: The exam allows the students to choose to write about one of two questions, each covering one of the two parts of the course. The students I met commented that this meant that they tended to focus mostly on the literature belonging to one of the two parts, and only skimming the literature of the other. If there is a wish to integrate these two perspectives more in the future, the examination could be changed. Questions could for example be asked in a more thematic manner, asking students to compare a phenomenon, e.g. migration, European integration or nation-state formation, over a longer period of time, thereby forcing the students to study both parts of the course more equally. But in that case the reading list should probably be reduced, or at least divided into mandatory and optional readings.

EUR 103 Europa after 1945: Resources, Demography, Economy

Main course instructor 2018: Harm Schröter, prof emeritus history. This course combines historical aspects of Europe with geographical. There are three main themes covered: resources, people and economy. The course is in English and it is open to Erasmus students, although the exam can always be written in Norwegian if the students want to. There are also many history students taking this course as an elective.

Lectures: there is in general one two-hour lecture each week during the course. The students perceived this to be too little. They would have liked to have one more lecture per week and/or the opportunity to combine the lectures with some form of seminars. Otherwise they found the course and the lectures interesting, although the geography part appeared to be somewhat loosely connected (or not enough integrated) compared to the others. There are also a number of different teachers involved, and the quality of their lectures, as well as their level of spoken English, varied according to the students I met.

Literature: Three books: Livi-Bacci (2000) *The population of Europe*, Berend (2006) *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe*, Eichengreen (2006) *The European Economy since 1945*. In addition to the books, there is a selection of 10 articles or chapters. The students found this to be a bit too much literature in total, as well as some of the texts being fairly dated. My own assessment would be that at least for some of the topics, e.g. migration and economic developments the last decades, there seem to be a more updated selection of texts available that could fit into this course. I was also slightly surprised to see that the issue of welfare states (and especially Nordic type of welfare states and equality issues) and their challenges today, was not given an even more pronounced coverage in this course. It is not only highly relevant, but also something that usually interests the Erasmus students too.

Examination: The exam allows the students to choose to write about one of two questions, where the intention is to compare and contrast different aspects covered in the course. The exam itself seemed to be ok from the student perspective, but the lack of seminars as well as more detailed feedback on the exam, left them feeling more uncertain about what they had done well and/or what they could improve, compared to the other courses.

EUR105 European Union Institutions and Politics

Main course instructors 2018: Michael Tatham and Georg Picot, Comparative politics. This course focuses on institutions, political processes, and policy areas of the European Union, and it also covers the most important theories of European integration. These two aspects also constitute two parts of the course. Moreover, the course also comprises a Jean Monnet module, allowing the introduction of a practitioners' perspective by inviting EU Commission officials and other practitioners.

Lectures and seminars: This course combines lectures and seminars, as well as group work assignments leading up to the construction of a digital "deliverable" and thus also instructions regarding research communication and the production of podcasts and video for online publication (the latter in cooperation with DigUib). There has obviously been a great deal of investment into creating this course, and it seems to have been successful as the students I talked to highlighted this as their favourite course of the programme. They talked about the high quality of the teachers and lectures, as well as very helpful (and well structured) seminars. The students also appreciated the possibility for them to combine the production of the podcast/video with the field trip that they make each year in spring. This seems to be a very good and ambitious course, only raising the question if the placement as a 100-course is the most appropriate.

Literature: Two books: Hix, Simon and Bjørn Høyland (2011) *The Political System of the European Union*, and Nugent, Neill (2017) *The Government and Politics of the European Union*. These are two classic books, typically used in courses about the European Union across universities. They are good, although the Hix/ Høyland is becoming a bit dated. This is complemented with 7 chapters and list of 15 scholarly articles, which does seem quite ambitious for a 100-level course. The students admitted that it was intense, especially with the theories of European integration, but they also found the texts good, and the lectures and seminars helpful in indicating the most important aspects of the texts.

Exam: There is a take home exam, allowing the students four days to write a 4000 word essay. They also get to choose one of two questions. Given this form of exam, and the choice of exam question, the extensive literature is more justified as the students will focus more on certain aspects than other in their essay. In addition to the exam, there is also the mandatory production of a digital outcome, in the form of group work. Although time consuming, the students seemed to appreciate this very much, not least as it also allowed them to learn additional skills of potential use for their future work.

All in all this is a very ambitious course with highly engaged teachers and high demands of the students. As I only met high achieving students, it would be good to find out if there is any other potential views/issues the student group as a whole. I would therefore strongly recommend a course evaluation to be conducted. On the other hand, most students have been able to pass the course.

The exchange semester

As one of three programmes at the University of Bergen, the Bachelor programme in European studies is part of a pilot programme, in which the exchange semester becomes default rather than optional. After an administrative evaluation of what changes this would entail, there is now a new suggested process of how to handle the applications of the exchange semester as well as how to inform the students about this change. With the existing partner universities there are already a number of preselected options, allowing for the students to be able to apply via the student web portal. With clearly defined criteria for the admission to each exchange partner, the administrative process is assumed to be reduced compared to before. The intention is that the distribution of seats among the student group can be easily informed online, shortening the time before the nomination to the partner universities can be. With more clearly defined criteria and information to the students, the process should be easier also from the student perspective.

This looks like a reasonable reform, as long as this is clearly communicated to the students already from start. In discussion with the teachers it seems to still be some unsolved issues, e.g. how to handle those who chose to opt-out, how to make sure to have a good selection of partner universities offering European studies relevant courses (in English). Some students welcomed the idea of a mandatory exchange semester (opt-out instead of opt-in), although requested more specifically targeted information to the European studies students, instead of the more general SAMPOL exchange information provided today. Some of the students also expressed some concern regarding the option of doing an internship instead, especially the timing of when one has to apply for opt-out in relation to the timing of applying/decisions regarding internships. The time span does not appear synchronised in this respect, which clearly should be looked over.

The students I talked to who had done an exchange abroad were happy with the experience, but again, without any evaluations it is difficult to assess to what extent this represents the larger student group. It would be useful to carefully monitor the student evaluations of both the new process and the experience in itself. The latter may help to detect patterns if certain partner universities are less useful in terms of the courses they offer, or other aspects that make them less suitable within the framework of this programme. Especially for the European studies students it would seem logical if the exchange really should focus on/prioritise partners with advanced European studies courses. Moreover, if the exchange becomes a default, and history students also go abroad, it might be worthwhile considering at least one Nordic and/or Baltic option among the priority agreements.

Concluding discussion

In summary, this seems to be a well-functioning educational programme in general, which is clearly appreciated among its students and offer interesting courses about highly relevant topics. It is also a programme characterised by a smaller intake of students compared to e.g. comparative politics and history, and thus the programme offers a more personalised relationship among the students, and in relation to the faculty. There is a group of very engaged teachers working hard to make the courses as good as possible.

The student group seems to be very active, with a lot of student social activities, and the yearly European field trip is highlighted as a particularly liked feature. As far as I have been able to understand, the students seem to enjoy their studies in Bergen and at the European

Studies programme. The exchange semester is also mentioned as an appreciated feature of the programme. There are however, as noted above, some concerns and/or room for improvement. I will shortly list them here, with a comment and potential suggestions.

Applications and fallout: Given the overall quality of the programme and the courses, the fairly low number of (especially first choice) applicants is somewhat surprising. Increasing the number of applications would also increase the chance of over-booking, to compensate for the fallout later in the programme. Hence the recommendation is to follow up the marketing strategies of the programme to find out what seems to work – or not. A suggestion might be to make a simple questionnaire to new students when they start each year about how they found out about the programme and why they choose it – in order to get a better idea of what sort of marketing strategies might actually reach the interested students. Another suggestion concerns the content of the marketing, where the smaller student group potentially could be highlighted more, as a unique/exclusive feature of this programme.

Programme structure: as it is set up now, the programme only has the first year common for all the students. From year two they are split into either SAMPOL or history. This not only leads to challenges for the programme identity, but also for the degree of cross-disciplinary of the programme, as well as possibilities of advanced European studies courses. There are a number of potential ideas of how to address these issues; from the easier aspects of a common seminar each year/semester, to more fundamental and complicated ideas of changing the order of semester 2 and 3, or even to create a joint thesis course for the European studies students.

Individual courses: In short: most courses seem to function well. The exam forms vary between traditional exams and take-home exams, as well as a variety of other forms of assignments and group work. This is good and allows students to learn and to be assessed in different ways. It does however seem as if the EUR103 could increase the number of lectures and/or add some seminars. The students also asked for more feedback on all courses, and sometimes a clearer description about how different literatures related to the themes of a course. However, as a first step it would be sensible to do student evaluations in order to find out what aspects of each course that work well, and what parts might have room for improvement.

Opt-out exchange semester: This is an inspiring idea and it will be interesting to see how it works out. The value of studying abroad, especially for students of European studies, should not be underestimated. However, in terms of career possibilities, the internship possibilities (some of which also take place abroad) should not be forgotten. Coordinating the timing of the process to facilitate students who prefer this option is important.

Finally, it might be worthwhile to investigate what happens with the alumni, and potentially survey them regarding their perceptions of the programme. Ideas of improvement and/or new marketing suggestions might come out of it.

Göteborg 24 January 2019

Linda Berg