



NOTAT FRA PROGRAMSTYRE KNYTTET TIL PROGRAMSENSORRAPPORT I **ARABISK** FOR VÅREN 2017

Dato for håndtering i programstyret:

01.november 2018

Kommentarer fra programstyret:

Programstyret har diskutert programsensorrapporten for året 2017. Styret har flere merknader til rapporten:

- Rapporten er generelt lite konstruktiv, noe som gjør det vanskelig for fagmiljøet å bruke den som utgangspunkt for forbedringer av undervisningsopplegget på programmet.
- Forslagene som gjelder økt individuell veiledning og mer faglig fordypning, stiller programstyret seg bak. Med dagens ressursituasjon er det i praksis ikke mulig å gjennomføre noen av de foreslåtte tiltakene uten økt bemanning.
- Styret lurer på om programsensor har manglet informasjon om gradens oppbygging og læringsutbytte, samt det generelle fagtilbudet ved UiB: Det er for eksempel påpekt at studentene mangler tilbud innen midtøstenhistorie og litteratur, mens flere av de anbefalte emnene er tilgjengelige ved AHKR. Dette står også eksplisitt i dagens studieplan, og studentene får anbefalt disse emnene som frie studiepoeng.
- Rapporten oppgir dårlig studentmiljø, mens emneevalueringer viser at dette ikke lenger er tilfelle for 100-nivået i arabisk.
- Til slutt vil programstyret påpeke at rapporten ikke har tatt hensyn til ny struktur som er innført på bachelorprogram i arabisk, der vi har byttet fra flette til blokkundervisning. Programstyret mener at den nye strukturen vil føre til en vesentlig forbedring av undervisningstilbudet på bachelorprogram i arabisk for kullene høsten 2018 og utover.

Fagkoordinator: Ludmila Torlakova

Dato: 01.11.2018

BAHF-ARAB Bachelor Program in Arabic
University of Bergen

Program Evaluation

Report for the year 2017

Elie Wardini
Prof. in Arabic
Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies
Stockholm University

External Sensor for the period of: 01.01.2015–31.12.2018.
Programsensor for Bachelorprogram i arabisk, University of Bergen

Appointment

As of letter, dated 13.03.2015, I have been appointed as *programsensør* for ARABISK, for a period of four years, starting from 01.01.2015, ending 31.12.2018.

I have submitted two reports for 2015 in February 2016 and for 2016 in March 2017. This present report will be my last.

The report is structured as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Programs: Goals and Structure
3. Students
4. Teachers
5. Tutoring
6. Courses
7. Exams
8. Conclusion

The present report is based on:

- *Information available on the program website* (also provided by the department):
 - <http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB>

- *Previous reports for the same program:*
 - report by Prof. Wardini 2015
 - report by Prof. Wardini 2016

- Exam questions for:
 - ARA100 H17
 - ARA112 H17
 - ARA211 H17
 - ARA301 H17

- *Interviews with teaching staff* Feb. 8h 2018:
 - Ludmila Ivanova Torlakova, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Esmira Nahhri, Førsteamanuensis.
 - Mikkel Ekeland Paulsen (did not materialize)

- Interviews on Feb. 8th 2018 with student representatives for (anonymous in this report):
 - ARA100/111
 - ARA112/113
 - ARA115/211
 - ARA301

1. Introduction

The present report takes my reports for 2015 and 2016 as a point of departure (both appended to this document). In addition I have read the material available about the program on the department's website (for 2017/2018). I have received exam questions for 4 courses, all for the Fall of 2017. On Feb. 8th 2018, I have interviewed two teachers. A planned interview with the Tutor Mikkel Ekeland Paulsen, (studieveileder) of the department did not materialize. I have also interviewed 5 students. The three reports complement each other. With the exception of personnel change, no changes have been implemented since the first report for 2015.

This report will do two things:

1. Mark any changes (or lack thereof) compared to my reports from 2016 and 2017;
2. Discuss the state of student tutoring (studieveiledning) that the students of Arabic receive at the department.

During my interviews, I have been informed that changes are going to be implemented in the Arabic program, for example that courses on the Master level will be cancelled and that the teaching of Arabic will be more closely integrated with Middle Eastern Studies at the university. I will not in this report anticipate the changes or comment on the information, waiting for the actual implementation of the changes, though one welcomes the closer integration of Arabic with Middle Eastern Studies.

2. The Programs: Goals and Structure

For the year 2017/2018 no changes were introduced into the program compared to the two previous years. My comments for 2015, and thus also for 2016, stand in anticipation of the changes to come.

- The Goals

There have been no changes in 2017/2018 in the stated goals of the Bachelor and Master Arabic programs at UiB compared to the two previous years.

- The Structure

For the school year 2017/2018 no changes have been implemented to the structure of the program. I was informed that changes will be brought to the program in the coming years. I will not here anticipate these changes.

3. Students

The inter-personnel conflicts between the teachers, as mentioned in my previous reports, seem to have subsided in 2017. This is good and the students have taken notice. There is some tension between students and teachers. This, it seems to me, to be within the normal relations between teachers and students.

4. Teachers

The present report in no way claims to evaluate the teachers. Neither does the method nor the documentation used in the report allow for such an evaluation. The focus is rather on the interaction between the teachers and the students and the studying/ teaching environment.

From my interviews with the students and the teachers, as well as the student evaluations three matters are clear:

- 1) The teachers are highly motivated, highly regarded, and appreciated as individuals.
- 2) Inter-personnel conflicts have subsided.
- 3) There is nevertheless some uncertainty among the teachers about the future plans for the form Arabic teaching will take at UiB. At the time of the interviews, it seemed to me that it was unclear who should take the initiative to make the necessary preparations for the changes to come.

5. Tutoring

Students of Arabic at UiB have access to three types of tutoring:

1. Department wide information
2. Information specific to the students of Arabic
3. Individual appointments with teachers.

All three forms of tutoring are important. Not only given the often complicated rules and regulations that govern university studies as well as the opportunities and choices the university offers, but especially when employability is one of the goals of a university education.

Department wide information is necessary to inform the students of general rules and choices. Information specific to students of Arabic is also very important. This is when schedules, course requirements, and anticipated content of the courses would be presented to the students in preparation for the coming term. In my opinion, though, it is the individual tutoring of students that is the most important of all three. University is a daunting place to be for a student at all levels. Challenges need to be met and choices need to be made. Long term planning and a review of the possibilities in the world of research or on the labor market.

1. The students in general expressed content with the tutoring at the department. The department wide information was useful.
2. The teachers informed me that the Arabic specific information sessions (orienteringsmøter) were intermittent. No reasons were provided. The students did not complain.
3. The teachers also informed me that they have regular meeting hours on their schedules and that the students were always welcome. The students were well aware of this possibility and appreciated it.

When pressed, though, neither the teachers nor the students actively made use of the individual tutoring possibilities. One of the questions I asked students in the interviews was: “*What do you want to use your knowledge of Arabic for?*” They all replied they intended to use Arabic in work opportunities. This is really good. But the students were not sure how, and which choices are available to them on a more individual level. Even on an academic level, it seemed that the students saw themselves as just learning Arabic. This is where individual tutoring plays an important role. Students are individually shown support and guided on an academic level. There is no doubt that more active individual tutoring will help motivate students more, raise the academic level and raise the success rate of students taking exams.

6. Courses

No changes have been implemented in the courses. The course literature is more or less the same as for 2016.

7. Exams

I have received the questions to the following exams:

- ARA100 H17
- ARA112 H17
- ARA211 H17
- ARA301 H17

No noteworthy changes have been implemented in the form or content of exams. My criticism from my last report is still applicable.

8. Conclusion

There are plans to introduce changes to the Arabic program at UiB. In this report, I will not comment on the information I have received on the proposed changes. I will wait till they are implemented. Nevertheless, a meaningful closer coordination between Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies is welcome.

The present report compares the year 2015 with 2016. The report for 2015 is appended to the present one. Very little has changed. This is regrettable. The present report has gone a bit deeper into tutoring. While the structure for tutoring is in place, very little effort is made to actively take advantage of individual tutoring. This is a tool that is worth exploiting.

As a last note in my reports, I will emphasize that UiB has enough students of Arabic. They are motivated and want to make use of this language as a tool in their future employment. UiB has competent teachers of Arabic and a recognized milieu for Middle Eastern Studies. The potential is there. The closer coordination and cooperation between Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies is welcome. Yet, I repeat that in order to achieve a higher standard of teaching/ learning Arabic at UiB, the staff need to discuss and resolve two central and related questions:

- Why should UiB offer Arabic?
- Why should students study Arabic at UiB?

Stockholm, March 3rd, 2018

Elie Wardini

BAHF-ARAB Bachelor Program in Arabic
University of Bergen

Program Evaluation

Report for the year 2016

Elie Wardini
Prof. in Arabic
Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies
Stockholm University

External Sensor for the period of: 01.01.2015–31.12.2018.
Programsensor for Bachelorprogram i arabisk, University of Bergen

Appointment

As of letter, dated 13.03.2015, I have been appointed as *programsensør* for ARABISK, for a period of four years, starting from 01.01.2015, ending 31.12.2018.

I have submitted my first report for 2015 in February 2016.

The report is structured as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Programs: Goals and Structure
3. Students
4. Teachers
5. Tutoring
6. Courses
7. Exams
8. Conclusion

The present report is based on:

- *Information available on the program website* (also provided by the department):
 - <http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB>
- *Previous reports for the same program:*
 - reports by Prof. Wardini 2015
- Exam questions for:
 - ARA100 H16
 - ARA112 H16
 - ARA211 H16
 - ARA301 H16
- *Exam results* (exam protokoll):
 - ARA100 V16
 - ARA100 H16
 - ARA111 V16
 - ARA112 V16
 - ARA112 H16
 - ARA113 V16
 - ARA211 H16
 - ARA252 V16
 - ARA301 H16
 - ARA302 H16
 - ARA303 H16
 - Master's Thesis H16
- *Interviews with teaching staff* Feb. 9h 2017 (NB: Professorship is vacant):
 - Ludmila Ivanova Torlakova, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Esmira Nahhri, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Frank Weigelt, Førsteamanuensis (temporary)
- Interviews on Feb. 9th 2017 with student representatives for (anonymous in this report):
 - ARA100/111
 - ARA113
 - ARA211/252

1. Introduction

The present report takes my report for 2015 as a point of departure (appended to this document). In addition I have read the material available about the program on the department's website (for 2016/2017). I have received exam questions for 4 courses, and the results (protokoll) for more, all for 2016. On Feb. 9th 2017, I have interviewed three teachers as well as had a short, impromptu interview with the head of the department. I have also interviewed 4 students.

This report will do two things:

1. Mark any changes (or lack thereof) compared to my report from 2016;
2. Discuss the exam questions of the tests that I have been provided with.

During my interviews, I have been informed that changes are going to be implemented in the Arabic program, for example that courses on the Master level are cancelled and that the teaching of Arabic will be more closely integrated with Middle Eastern Studies at the university. I will not in this report anticipate the changes or comment on the information, waiting for the actual implementation of the changes, though one welcomes the closer integration of Arabic with Middle Eastern Studies.

2. The Programs: Goals and Structure

For the year 2016/2017 no changes were introduced into the program. My comments for 2015 stand in anticipation of the changes to come. I will nevertheless reiterate the following:

There are many reasons for learning languages. Not all require courses at university. If someone were to study Arabic, for example, for primarily communicative purposes, then it would be much more efficient, and probably cheaper, to spend longer periods of time in Arabic speaking countries and taking language courses there. University courses would be an overkill and achieve fewer results. Though important, communication is not and cannot be the only purpose for studying language, especially at university.

Studying language at university implies much more than communicative skills. A student at university acquires more than just linguistics. University studies in a certain language involve acquiring three types of skills:

- 1) linguistic;
- 2) specialist knowledge of a region (area studies); and
- 3) analytical skills.

Thus a university education in Arabic is not only important to train students and researchers to be skilled linguists, more importantly for society at large, the university is the ideal place to train students in the combination of deeper knowledge of language, regional expertise and analytical skills.

- The Goals

There have been no changes in 2016/2017 in the stated goals of the Bachelor and Master Arabic programs at UiB.

- The Structure

For the school year 2016/2017 no changes have been implemented to the structure of the program. I was informed that changes will be brought to the program in the coming years. I will not here anticipate these changes.

3. Students

For this section I refer the reader to my report for 2015. My comments for that report are still applicable to 2016.

What is disturbing from my interviews with the students is that inter-personnel conflicts are spilling into the classrooms and among the students. One cannot emphasize enough the detrimental effects of this issue.

4. Teachers

In this section, I repeat what I have said in my previous report:

The present report in no way claims to evaluate the teachers. Neither does the method nor the documentation used in the report allow for such an evaluation. The focus is rather on the interaction between the teachers and the students and the studying/ teaching environment.

From my interviews with the students and the teachers, as well as the student evaluations two matters are clear:

- 1) The teachers are highly motivated, highly regarded, and appreciated as individuals.
- 2) As a team, there seems to be a break down in communication, coordination and planning.

[...]

This contrasts with the frustration students have expressed, in the interviews as well as in the student evaluations, towards the lack of coordination, cooperation and planning among the teachers. This is a serious problem.

5. Tutoring

I have not been informed of any changes with regards to tutoring compared to my report of 2016. This will be a matter of focus for the report in 2017.

6. Courses

No changes have been implemented in the courses. The course literature is more or less the same, with slight changes in ARA100.

This gives rise to concern, given the evaluation of 2016. In this report, I will concentrate on the exams, as part of the courses. This is done in the next section.

7. Exams

I have received the questions to the following exams:

- ARA100 H16
- ARA112 H16
- ARA211 H16
- ARA301 H16

All the exams have more or less the exact same structure:

- Translate to Norwegian known Arabic text(s):
ARA100, ARA112, ARA211, ARA301
- Translate to Norwegian unknown Arabic text(s):
ARA211, ARA301
- Comprehensions questions concerning a text: (answer questions about understanding the text(s):
ARA211
- Add vowels to an unvowelled Arabic text:
ARA112, ARA301
- Provide the correct morphological form adding the vowels of a word in a certain conjugation:
ARA100, ARA112
- Exercise in Syntax (verbal nouns and passive, negation, definiteness, nominal sentences, prepositions, numerals):
ARA100, ARA112
- Translate to Arabic
ARA100, ARA301
- Insert the correct Arabic word and form in the blanks of an Arabic text:
ARA100, ARA211, ARA301
- Questions on the Arabic language and History:
ARA100
- Provide 4 Arabic greeting expressions:
ARA100

One can argue that exams at university are a necessary evil. There is no general consensus on what constitute the best methods and strategies to test the skills of students. One could question the very notion that exams indeed do test skills, at least the required skills in students. And yet, no one, or very few, would argue that exams at university need to be eliminated.

Rather, exams should be seen as part and parcel of the whole pedagogical process. A course starts with defining its intent and ends with propelling the students to higher levels. Every part of a course, including the testing process and the exam questions, is part of the learning/ teaching experience as a whole. All aspects of a course should be coordinated and reflect the intention of the course. One could argue in this respect, and at least from a student perspective, that the exam gives indications of what the teachers consider to be the most essential information/ skills to be achieved by taking a certain course. In most universities, including UiB, this is reflected in the course plans which include variants of: *expected outcomes*. These are not measured in points or grades, but in skills/ knowledge acquired as a result of taking a certain course. This is essential.

Therefore, both for the evaluator as for students, previous exam questions give strong indications of the intention of the course. “What will I be tested on”, “what will we get on the exam” are very familiar questions to any teacher. The response to these questions is crucial. Previous exams then are a strong tool in this respect.

In my evaluation of the exam questions provided to me for Arabic in H2016, I would conclude that the intent of the courses on all levels is rather very limited. The scope of the questions could be restricted to:

- a. Understanding of words and combination of words in Arabic texts,
- b. Ability to produce some well written Arabic texts,
- c. Have a basic knowledge of Arabic grammar.

Note that I did not use the term “understand” Arabic texts. Texts are more complicated than the combination of words into morphologically correct forms and grammatically correct sentences. Texts are worlds in their own rights, non-literary texts just as much as literary ones. One would expect that studying a language at the university level would enable a student to explore the world(s) of texts. This is not reflected in the exam questions that are under review. To my understanding, this is not reflected in the teaching either. It is definitely not reflected in the course literature that is bare minimum and lacking essential and central works.

1. Even if one were to concentrate on grammar, the questions are always on a basic level, not getting to the point where students would acquire skills in linguistics.
2. The literary and socio-political content and context of the texts are not covered, with the exception of ARA100 with very basic questions on language and history, let alone in a critical manner.
3. The exams do not approach the subject of Arabic at university from an analytical angle.

The argument of limited time and difficulty of teaching Arabic are not to be ignored. While one could argue for the method and structure of the exam questions as described above for the first two terms in the program, there is no reason why these should continue all the way to the later stages of the Bachelor degree and even up to the Master level. Fill in the blanks does not belong at the Master level.

8. Conclusion

There are plans to introduce changes to the Arabic program at UiB. In this report, I will not comment on the information I have received on the proposed changes. I will wait till they are implemented. Nevertheless, a meaningful closer coordination between Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies is welcome.

The present report compares the year 2015 with 2016. The report for 2015 is appended to the present one. Very little has changed. This is regrettable. The present report has gone a bit deeper into the exam questions for 4 courses from H16. These are the exam questions that were presented to me. It is our conclusion that the exam methods, structure and intent should be looked at more carefully and revised.

We believe that in order to achieve a higher standard of teaching/ learning Arabic at UiB, the staff need to discuss and resolve two central and related questions:

- Why should UiB offer Arabic?
- Why should students study Arabic at UiB?

Stockholm, March 24th, 2017

Elie Wardini

BAHF-ARAB Bachelor Program in Arabic
University of Bergen

Program Evaluation

Report for the year 2015
(Addendum: Exams, Feb. 23rd 2016)

Elie Wardini
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Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies
Stockholm University

External Sensor for the period of: 01.01.2015–31.12.2018.
Programsensor for [BAHF-ARAB Bachelor Program in Arabic](#), University of Bergen

Appointment

As of letter, dated 13.03.2015, I have been appointed as *programsensør* for ARABISK, for a period of four years, starting from 01.01.2015, ending 31.12.2018.

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7. Conclusion

The present report is based on:

- *Information available on the program website* (also provided by the department):
 - <http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB>
- *Previous reports for the same program:*
 - reports by Prof. Lutz 2014 and 2015
- *Previous report for French (for comparison):*
 - report by Gundersen and Helland 2013
- *Teaching material:*
 - Textbooks
 - Material provided by the teachers
- *Student evaluations:*
 - ARA100 H15 (4 respondents)
 - ARA112 H15 (2 respondents)
- *Exam results:*
 - ARA100 H15
 - ARA112 H15
 - ARA115 H15
 - ARA210 H15
 - ARA301 H15
 - ARA302 H15
- *Interviews with teaching staff* 24-25th Nov. 2015 (NB: Professorship is vacant):
 - Ludmila Ivanova Torlakova, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Pernille Myrvold , Universitetslektor
 - Esmira Nahhri, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Frank Weigelt, PhD student
- *Interviews with student representatives* for 24-25th Nov. 2015 (anonymous in this report):
 - ARA100
 - ARA112
 - ARA115
 - ARA211
 - ARA301
 - ARA350

1. Introduction

The present report being my first for Arabic at UiB, I will concentrate on issues that, in my opinion, are a priority and the most in need of attention.

I have read two previous reports and all the available documentation. I have also had interviews with students and teachers. One miss, which ones hope to remedy in 2016, is that I have not talked to the leadership at the department.

I have looked at the exam results. These in themselves do not say much. I have not seen the actual exam questions nor sample student responses. I have nonetheless enquired about them in my interviews with the teachers and students. Exams and exam results are important. Nevertheless, I have deemed that there are other matters that are more in need of attention at this point.

Thus the report for 2015 will concentrate on the “*vision*” of the program, i.e. profile and structure of the program, and the “*implementation*” of the program, i.e. the teaching and the content and syllabi of the courses. As can be seen, special mention of tutoring is included, since it is deemed a priority.

2. The Programs: Goals and Structure

There is no doubt that Arabic is an important language, not only due to the sad situation in the Middle East and its implications for the world and Europe more generally, but also for Norway specifically. Arabic is one of the major languages represented by over 300 million speakers. There are great financial and cultural benefits from interaction with the Arabic speaking world. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that many Norwegian students get a chance to learn Arabic.

There are many reasons for learning languages. Not all require courses at university. If someone were to study Arabic, for example, for primarily communicative purposes, then it would be much more efficient, and probably cheaper, to spend longer periods of time in Arabic speaking countries and taking language courses there. University courses would be an overkill and achieve fewer results. Though important, communication is not and cannot be the only purpose for studying language, especially at university.

Studying language at university implies much more than communicative skills. A student at university acquires more than just linguistics. University studies in a certain language involve acquiring three types of skills:

- 1) linguistic;
- 2) specialist knowledge of a region (area studies); and
- 3) analytical skills.

Thus a university education in Arabic is not only important to train students and researchers to be skilled linguists, more importantly for society at large, the university is the ideal place to train students in the combination of deeper knowledge of language, regional expertise and analytical skills.

My evaluation of the program rests on this premise. I have therefore posed the following question: *Do the programs have clear goals and a structure that are aimed at achieving the skills presented above?*

- The Goals

The Bachelor and Master Arabic programs at UiB state the following as their goals:

Bachelor Program

Læringsutbytte

Kandidaten skal ved avslutta program ha følgjande læringsutbytte definert i kunnskapar, dugleikar/ferdigheiter og generell kompetanse:

Kunnskapar:

Kandidaten

- Har god dugleik i lesing og skriftleg omsetjing
- Er kjend med eit breitt utval av fagprosa og skjønlitteraturtekstar
- Har grunnleggjande dugleik i lesing og forståing av arabisk pressespråk, til dømes i nettaviser
- Har grunnleggjande dugleik i bruk av nokre arabiske ordbøker
- Har god kompetanse i moderne arabisk grammatikk

Dugleikar/ferdigheiter:

Kandidaten

- Har moderate skrive- og taleferdigheiter i lesing og forståing av arabisk pressespråk
- Har lesedugleik i klassisk arabisk
- Har moderat skrive- og taledugleik i moderne standardarabisk

Generell kompetanse:

Kandidaten

- Kan bruke sine kunnskapar om språket på ein kritisk og sjølvstendig måte
- Kan nytta sin kombinasjon av fag i spesialiseringen og frie studiepoeng i vidare utdanning eller yrkesplanar

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB#uib-tabs-laringsutbyte>

Jan 25th 2016

Master Program

Presentasjon

Mål og innhald

Mastergraden i arabisk skal gi studentane djupare fagleg og metodisk innsyn, dels gjennom eit utvida studium av språket og dels gjennom eit djupare studium av eit avgrensa område, der studentane får rettleiing. Det problemet som masteroppgåva konsentrerer seg om, kan til dømes vere språkvitskapleg, litteraturvitskapleg, historisk, religionshistorisk, resepsjonshistorisk, osv. Det kan òg liggja innanfor andre disiplinar som til dømes økonomi, politikk, jus, utviklingsstudiar, sosionomi, med meir, når studenten kan presentera gode grunnar for det. I slike høve vil studenten kunna få ein siderettleiar frå eit relevant institutt eller senter. I oppgåva skal en vise at en har førstehandskjennskap til kjeldematerialet, kritisk overblikk over tidlegare forskning og evne til å bruke vitskapleg synsmåte og metode.

Opplegget skal både kontrollera og utdjupa dei allmenne språkkunnskapane og teoretiske kunnskapane som studentane vil trenga for å bruka arabisk som forskingsreiskap. Oppgåva skal vise at studentane har førstehandskjennskap til kjeldematerialet, kritisk overblikk over tidlegare forskning og evne til å bruke vitskapleg synsmåte og metode.

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/MAHF-ARAB>

Jan 25th 2016

It is clear that the programs focus essentially on language learning, grammar and to a lesser extent literature. Only exceptionally does the Master program accept themes in other disciplines.

From my interview with students, there is no doubt that their main goal for studying Arabic is to use it at the workplace. A key for job opportunities. Knowledge of Arabic grammar and literature alone, do not prepare students for the needs of society. More on this in section 6. Courses.

- The Structure

I have evaluated the structure of the program based in the available documents, the web-pages mentioned below, as well as my interviews with students and teachers.

Bachelorprogram i arabisk (krav 180 SP)

Studieplan:

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB/plan>

Studiesløp:

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB> (Nov. 10th 2015)

Masterprogram i arabisk (krav 120 SP)

Studieplan:

<http://www.uib.no/nb/studieprogram/MAHF-ARAB/plan>

Studiesløp:

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/MAHF-ARAB#uib-tabs-construction> (Nov. 22nd 2015)

The main feature of the Bachelor programs is that Arabic takes up roughly 15 credits of a total of 30 per term. Half of a student's courses per term over a period of three years. The whole Master program is dedicated to Arabic. The last year of the Master program is dedicated fully to the Master Thesis (60 credits).

On the Bachelor level, only ARA100 (10 credits, thus 1/3 of a term) lays claim to train the students in "cultural", non-linguistic/ literary skills. Otherwise it is up to the student to get this type of knowledge at other departments.

On the Master level, it seems that ARA302, 303 and 304 can offer an opening for cross departmental training. This though, seems to be more the exception than the rule.

Experience and my interviews with the students show that such a structure is rather a hindrance than a help. One could argue that the present structure presents the student with choice and freedom. Yet this freedom and the choices are not always easy to deal with as a student. Nor are they always clear. More on this theme under 3. Students and 5. Tutoring.

The combination of subjects and disciplines in an education is an essential element for broadening the scope and strengthening one's knowledge and analytical skills. So the question is rather of structure and organization as well as course content.

3. Students

Universities have several functions: education, research and outreach to state the more classical ones. The present report is concerned with the education part. In this context, it is necessary to put the students first.

As mentioned above one of the main goals for students to learn Arabic is to gain a special tool in their arsenal when applying for and conducting their work in society.

They want to be able to speak Arabic, use Arabic, understand Arabic, etc. But they also want to apply this knowledge to their concrete work situations.

Thus the frustration is high among the students. The argument is that they study grammar for three years and are still not able to use Arabic in any meaningful way. This is clearly seen in the high degree of dropouts in Arabic. A high degree of dropout is expected when offering courses in Arabic. Many underestimate the amount of effort needed to learn a language as Arabic. Clearly, some of these students would benefit much more from taking evening classes, or traveling to an Arabic speaking country.

Experience shows that, on the other hand, clearer and relevant goals, a balanced structure and well thought through and planned courses, could help the students maintain focus and sustain them through the hardships of learning Arabic, not only on the Bachelor level, but also aiming for a Master degree. Clearly, a strict focus on grammar and literature is not enough to sustain the students through their education. More on this in section 6. Courses.

4. Teachers

The present report in no way claims to evaluate the teachers. Neither does the method nor the documentation used in the report allow for such an evaluation. The focus is rather on the interaction between the teachers and the students and the studying/ teaching environment.

From my interviews with the students and the teachers, as well as the student evaluations two matters are clear:

- 1) The teachers are highly motivated, highly regarded, and appreciated as individuals.
- 2) As a team, there seems to be a break down in communication, coordination and planing.

The students have given each teacher individually high marks for their efforts, care and helpfulness as well as their expertise in their field. The teaching profession is very often unforgiving. In our case, the teachers are highly valued by the students.

This contrasts with the frustration students have expressed, in the interviews as well as in the student evaluations, towards the lack of coordination, cooperation and planing among the teachers. This is a serious problem.

5. Tutoring

As mentioned above the structure of the programs, especially the Bachelor program, leave 50% room for students to choose from other relevant disciplines and subjects. While this surely has its benefits, it also has its drawbacks.

Students, even if adults, are not always knowledgeable or do not have the necessary resources to make good, long term choices for their education. From my interviews with the students, it

was clear that they were not sure which combinations were optimal, and in which sequence. It seemed also that there was very little coordination between the relevant departments.

There is clearly a need for focused tutoring (*veiledning*). The students stated that they are generally advised to take courses on the Middle East. Experience shows that this is not enough. Coordination and cooperation can be achieved in different ways. These should be explored. Moreover, tutoring should also be rather concrete and conducted by persons with close knowledge of Arabic and the Middle East as well as the system at UiB.

6. Courses

The discussion here will concentrate on the courses on the Bachelor level. I will discuss the Master level shortly towards the end of this section, since there is at present only one student enrolled.

Among the courses on the Bachelor level ARA100 (10 credits) and ARA115 and ARA252 (15 credits each) stand out.

ARA111, ARA112, ARA113 are all *Grunnkurs i moderne standardarabisk (I-III)*; 15 credits each
ARA211 *Tekststudier i klassisk og moderne standardarabisk* (15 credits).

As stated above, I have not seen the exam questions, nor the student responses. I have nevertheless enquired in my interviews with the students and the teachers about the content of the courses. I have also consulted the syllabi (*pensumlister*).

- The Textbook

The Textbook used is: Schulz, E. *Standard Arabic: An Elementary-Intermediate Course*; current edition as well as E-Book.

The question of textbooks in education is always an issue. No book in itself is perfect.

While many have gone the communicative path, using relevant books, to my knowledge nearly all universities that keep to teaching Arabic at university level, in the spirit mentioned above, use Schulz. The Schulz textbook has its strengths and weaknesses. The alternatives, on the other hand, are few and far between. They too have strengths and weaknesses. At issue here is the way the book is used in the teaching. Following Schulz chapter by chapter, with no complimentary material is hardly optimal. Every textbook needs to be used with deliberate planning and adapted, taking into consideration the circumstances of each teaching milieu. Some parts of Schulz are better than others, so some complementary material is needed. Moreover, the texts of Schulz as well as the exercises are not always good or relevant to students. These may be adjusted, complemented or replaced.

- The Content of the Courses

The syllabi for ARA111-113 contain only one reference: Schulz. A dictionary (Wehr) is only introduced in ARA113.

It is only in ARA211, 5th term, that students read genuine texts. A total of some 30-35 pages distributed as follows: 4 Classical, 18-25? Modern Standard, 11 modern poetry and 5 media, of which only 2 are current.

The content of the courses needs to be reviewed in light of the principles stated above. The syllabus should be complemented with books/ articles on the history and analysis Arabic literary and media prose, as well as relevant theoretical approaches to different types of texts.

The texts should also be more central and relevant in context of the Arabic literary scene as well as the media, the socio-religious-political-etc. landscape.

- The Examination

I have not seen any exam questions nor student responses. I have nevertheless enquired about them from students and the teachers.

The impression I have gotten was that for all the courses (except ARA115 and ARA252), the focus is on grammar, transcription and translation. This including ARA211 and the Master level. While grammar and translation are essential parts of learning any language, unless one wishes to become a linguist they are not an end in themselves. They are essential means to understand the texts. But the aim is to be able to apply analytical principles so the texts get their meaning in their social, religious, political, etc. context. These elements are not only essential for understanding the text, but also to train the students to apply the same analytical principles later in their work.

- ARA100

ARA100 *Innføring i arabisk språk og kultur* (10 credits) seems to be a mixed basket. On the one hand it is the first introduction to Arabic, script and language, and on the other it is the only course in the program dedicated to "Arabic culture". While the language part follows the same pattern as ARA111-113, the culture part does not seem to be thought through well. The syllabus is larger and heavier than nearly any other course in the program. As an example, one could argue that it is somewhat premature to read about Arabic-Norwegian contrastive grammar already the first term, while they are learning the alphabet.

ARA100 could well be reviewed, and here is a clear case where cooperation and coordination with other departments could yield better results.

- ARA115 and ARA252

ARA115 *Innføring i arabisk språkvitenskap og dialektologi* and ARA252 *Arabisk språk og samfunn* (15 credits each) are the only courses where relevant theory is applied to Arabic studies in the program on the Bachelor level.

- Master Level

Having one student on the Master level, makes it difficult to evaluate. The structure of the program seems to allow for both theory and analysis. It also, in principle, also allows for a wider scope of themes than just linguistic and literary.

7. Conclusion

Language is an essential part of society. Ignoring language would be a great loss. But then, language does not exist in a world by itself, disconnected from the people who speak and use it. The relationship between language and society is complex. The study of language and the world that uses it, should then be placed in the relevant theoretical and methodological frameworks. Language can indeed be studied as an end in itself. But the majority of students today study the Arabic language as a tool. Students should be trained to think and write analytically.

Concluding, one would first like to stress the necessity of filling the vacant professor position. Then, one would draw attention to the goals of the programs in Arabic as well as their structure. Students need help to navigate the complicated freedom and choices they have to make in their education. Teachers should work as a team as well as cooperate and coordinate

more with other departments. The content of the courses needs to be more relevant. The Arabic milieu at UiB could do well to consult with other comparable universities to exchange ideas on how to solve many of the issues touched upon.

Bergen seems to have enough students wanting to study Arabic. Norwegian society has a clear need for people who not only master Arabic, but who also have a solid expertise on the Middle East. The motivation is there. UiB has the resources, both in Arabic and Middle Eastern studies to fulfill a good portion of this need.

Stockholm, February 5th 2016

Elie Wardini

8. Exams (addendum)

On the 15th of February 2016 I received copies of 6 exam questions for 6 courses.

These are:

ARA100 - 3rd December 2015

ARA111 - 27th May 2015

ARA112 - 18th February 2015

ARA113 - 27th May 2015

ARA 211 - 3rd December 2015

ARA 301 - 3rd December 2015

In the report I came to the conclusion, based on my interviews with the students and teachers that “[t]he impression I have gotten was that for all the courses (except ARA115 and ARA252), the focus is on grammar, transcription and translation. This including ARA211 and the Master level.”

Now that I have seen the exam questions, my impression was confirmed. The exams mentioned above, for ARA100 and ARA301 see below, focus on translation from and to Arabic and grammar: parsing, vocalization, conjugation, etc., words in their right context.

Concerning ARA100, I wrote in the report:

ARA100 *Innføring i arabisk språk og kultur* (10 credits) seems to be a mixed basket.

On the one hand it is the first introduction to Arabic, script and language, and on the other it is the only course in the program dedicated to “Arabic culture”.

While the language part follows the same pattern as ARA111-113, the culture part does not seem to be thought through well. The syllabus is larger and heavier than nearly any other course in the program.

ARA100 is the only course that includes “*Realia - kultur og samfunn*” questions. These are:

1. Give the names of five most important regional Arabic dialects (5/100p);
2. Give the correct name of the country or the capital of 8 countries (4/100p);
3. Give the Norwegian title and date of publication, the name and country of origin of the author, as well as the name of the translator to Norwegian of the chosen novel (3/100p).

My conclusions concerning ARA100 still hold:

ARA100 could well be reviewed [...]

ARA301, on the Master level follows exactly the same pattern.

My comments concerning the courses and their content still hold. These are clearly reflected in the exam questions. While one could argue for such an approach for ARA100-113, all exams even those on higher levels lack any questions involving critical and analytical discussions of the content of the texts read.

Stockholm, February 23rd 2016

Elie Wardini