



Recommendations

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Recommendations

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NISPAcee is an international association focused on public administration. Its mission is to promote and strengthen the effective and democratic governance and modernisation of public administration and policy throughout the NISPAcee region.

Background

Assessing the present situation

NISPAcee experts made significant efforts to collect all relevant information in Caucasus region in order to understand the present situation regarding Public Administration (and in some cases Public Policy) programmes, both at bachelor and masters levels.

First, our local counterparts investigated the Public Administration (PA) education landscape and a comprehensive inventory of PA programmes was compiled. As a next step, we determined what kind of information was necessary and we also provided standardized forms to collect information on the relevant aspects of programmes for the Universities that were interested and also ready to make serious efforts in the project.

Based on the available information we evaluated the programmes of universities that made sufficient information available to us.

Finally, we met representatives of each of the three countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and from several universities at an on-the-spot visit (including a two-day workshop with about a dozen participants and a one-day conference with over sixty interested participants). This visit was used to obtain additional information, to check if our understanding of the situation was appropriate by obtaining feed-back and also background knowledge.

Evaluation criteria

We followed the general standards of Public Administration education in the modern World and specifically the standards and evaluation criteria set up by the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA), whenever it was possible. More realistically, we analyzed the following aspects:

- Mission statement: How the goal of the education is defined; how realistic is it and especially, how well does it fit to the content and style of education?
- Curriculum: How well does it reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the subject; how well proportioned are the various courses/disciplines; how much does it assist students to obtain the relevant competencies and how well does it reflect international educational standards and local circumstances (a balance difficult to find)?
- Individual courses, syllabi: Do they provide the expected information: learning outcomes, course outline, requirements, especially reading material, etc.?
- The instructors: Do they have the necessary level of education (Ph.D.); appropriate research, publication and references record; international experience and potentially practical experience in the national administration?
- Other issues, in particular:
 - Cooperation with other universities.
 - Internship, its role in the program, etc.

Recommendations

In the section below we briefly formulate our recommendations. We address each major issue listed above separately (and if necessary we refer to crosscutting issues in this structure). First, we briefly summarise the situation referring to the potential problems. Second, we review our suggestions and, third, if necessary we openly refer to the trade-offs and difficulties that may occur in the practice of implementing these recommendations.

Mission statements

Summary of the present situation

Mission statements are typically formulated in a very general way. Our impression was that they had been considered more as an exogenously expected formal exercise rather than a summary of the “philosophy” or the ultimate goal of the program.

Suggestions

We suggest, that

1. Mission statements are reformulated.
2. Mission statements should be based on a careful examination of needs. Most importantly:
 - needs of the students; as tertiary education is run almost solely by market forces in this region; this is identical to market research¹
 - needs of the government, more specifically, public administration²
 - taking into account the above, universities may also consider their strength, weaknesses, threats and opportunities in a given environment.
3. The mission statement should also reflect the question of what image of the PA program would the program follow. For the sake of simplicity, at least the choice between the following images should be made and reflected in the mission statement: (a) public administration, with more emphasis on law and constitutional arrangements (polity); (b) public management, with the emphasis on management skills³; or (c) public policy with more emphasis on research and analytic skills, handling complex and non-structured policy problems, etc.

¹ In fact most universities react to market needs. Starting relatively popular PA programmes and forming their curricula similar to a business management program reflects this fact.

² We learned that curricula hardly reflect the needs of public administration. They also may not reflect the content of the civil service entry exam. While PA programs usually teach specific courses, the civil service examination tests the general knowledge, such as native language skills, IQ, information technologies and laws, both general and particular to specific public services. Thus it may happen that a person who successfully obtains a BA and/or MA degree might not pass the civil service entry exam. Also, government agencies may prefer law students rather than PA students in generalist positions.

³ Presently, this is the most typical approach. However, economics is overwhelming for a typical management degree, whereas management skills (not theoretical knowledge) are insufficient in most of the programs we

The mission statement, by briefly answering the above questions also provides a – preferably attractive – image of the program.

A well elaborated mission statement, i.e. a clear view of what we want to do and what we offer must be the key to all other segments of the program: curriculum, staff composition, etc.

Difficulties, trade-offs

It is clear that there is a certain trade-off between two types of needs, i.e. the present market need indicated by students' applications and real needs of the government. Forming a curriculum that fits well to the ideal of a civil servant may not at all make a program attractive for potential students, as most of them cannot and/or do not want to find a position in public administration. Furthermore the "ideal of the civil servant" is quite vague in these countries.

We believe that international accreditation – in the long run – can serve both purposes, as the fact that a program is accredited by an official European organization provides prestige in the market and the fact that it reflects the appropriate composition of courses for PA may be convincing for government agencies to employ students of these organizations.

Meanwhile it may be useful to consider including a course that prepares students to pass the civil service exam. This arrangement may also increase the value of the program on the market and also for the government. For example in Georgia, civil service entry exams usually cover legislation and general aptitude skills. BA and MA programs may (and often) have law courses focusing on constitutional and administrative law, including local governance, and students have the opportunity to learn the specific courses that will be useful for the entry exam. Preparation courses may also be offered as part of the support services (as with the case of Georgia, there are several centers on the market which provide tailored trainings for would-be civil servants).

Curriculum

Summary of the present situation

Apparently there is no relatively stable and clear idea of what exactly should be included in a PA curriculum. In certain programmes, surprising courses (such as two pedagogy courses in a 16-course curriculum) are included. Quite typically, a large part of the curriculum, sometimes roughly half of all courses, includes economics-related topics and management also plays a major role. These indicate a strong Anglo-American influence. At the same time, public-specific, and especially PA-specific courses are rare (typically only about 10-30% of all courses). In several cases, it is not clear – after reading the curriculum and course syllabus –

assessed. Furthermore, the specificity of the public sphere, or non-profit sector, is hardly addressed. (See below).

how students would learn about the most basic polity issues, such as structure of government, major division of responsibilities, procedural rules, etc.

In Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as in Russia, there is a government defined, obligatory national standard for PA programmes, which has similar features to those mentioned above. These curricula greatly limit the opportunity of universities to set up their own, specific program.

The role/use of internship is not clarified in most cases.

Suggestions

It would be necessary to gradually formulate and agree on a kind of “identity” of PA (and possibly Public Management / Policy) programmes. This is, however, beyond the scope of individual universities and this project, although we also hope to contribute to the wider goal. An impact on the national standards, which would reflect international standards of PA programmes, would be a major breakthrough in this regard.

We suggest – in most cases – to:

- Significantly increase public sector – government and PA related courses.
- There has to be a course or courses on the basic constitutional-legal arrangements.
- Economic courses may be significantly reduced and/or transformed into courses that are relevant for the public sector (public sector economics, economic aspects of budgeting, public finance theory, economics of regulation, several fields of institutional economics, etc.).
- Management is important but it should reflect on the specificity of the public sector (e.g. HRM – and civil service; finance – public finance, budgeting, etc.; IT – privacy and transparency vs. secrecy rules specific to government data).
- Legal aspects should be strengthened in most cases (with one clear exception where it is absolutely sufficient).

Studying the curriculum of PA programmes of other, leading universities that are widely available via internet could be useful for transforming the course structure. We believe that while universities of the United States are highly ranked, it may be more useful to check out curriculum of leading West-European, Continental Universities, or even accredited universities from the CEE region.

Discussions among universities with a PA program within a country or amongst countries could also be useful to identify specific needs of the region (whilst creating endogenous capacities as well).

The role of internship has to be clarified. Internships, if well-designed and not only a formal exercise, are especially useful for students to get into contact with reality, to assess the usefulness of competencies and probably to encourage obtaining other relevant such competencies. Many students in international practice use internships as an opportunity to

assure later employment; others may collect information for their thesis on a given field – also increasing employment opportunities at a given agency. In brief, internship should be a well-designed, functional part of the curriculum.

Difficulties, trade-offs

The present government defined a standard curriculum which may greatly hinder the suggested changes.

As the curriculum is, to a great extent, supply-driven (that is: we teach what we can, instead of what is needed), change may happen only gradually.

Internships only work well if students find employment in relevant positions. They work well only if the government is ready to accept interns and give them real tasks (ideally the internship should last at least 3 months) and this may require some serious efforts on the side of the university and/or individual instructors, especially if they are employed by the government.

Syllabi

Summary of the present situation

The content and structure of the syllabi is not unified and sometimes even differs in the one university; there is no standard format. In several cases, basic issues are not addressed.

Suggestions

A uniform content and structure should be adopted. This has been done at universities which provide students with syllabi for all courses when they begin their study program, typically making syllabi available on the internet. Transparency is a general requirement in this field; universities should make detailed syllabi open. Internet then requires a standard format.

We believe that a syllabus should contain the following information:

- expected learning outcomes (what the student will have learned by the end of the course),
- a relatively detailed description of topics/issues, discussed, “processed”, probably on a weekly basis,
- requested major assignments (“homework”), including,
- readings (obligatory and optional), indicating major citation data (and possibly made available for students in the library or by other methods),
- the way students are evaluated,
- eventually the course prerequisites (if the passing of other courses is required before students can enroll in the course), or recommended catch-up courses (that can help

students be prepared for MA courses if they did not pass the introductory courses at BA level).

Detailed suggestions are summarized in the table below:

Element	Suggestions
expected learning outcomes	In most cases this is missing. Identifying outcomes is the core information on: “what is the course good for?”
topics/issues, discussed	The level of detail varies greatly. An agreement should be reached and followed. The description should be detailed enough to provide basic information.
major assignments readings	<p>Students need to know what the type is, amount and timing of their home-work-load.</p> <p>There are no well-written, or in most cases any potential course books in the native language in any of the countries. Some universities use US-origin books to solve this problem. However, these books may simply be difficult to obtain and to read for students (in general and especially at BA level). Furthermore, in our experience, their validity in post-socialist countries is highly questionable; they could even be seriously misleading. We suggest that an endogenous set of major course books are established. This could be done most easily via the cooperation of leading universities in each country.⁴ Some books published by NISPAcee may also serve as course books for some courses. We suggest checking the available books and potentially select the appropriate ones.⁵</p>
students’ evaluation	<p>Students must be informed on how they are evaluated. We believe that the almost uniform reliance on written, typically multiple choice tests, at the end of the semester is strongly questionable. Other ways of evaluation should be used, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More importance could be given to during-the-semester activities. (For example, 30-70% of evaluation may be based on this, including group work, individual assignments, presentations, class activities.) • Other forms could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ final essay, or research paper submitted (and checked for plagiarism); ○ solution of certain problems (case) ○ oral exam (its various types).

⁴ We are under the impression that some sort of cooperation is gradually forming among some universities in this regard. The project hopefully gave these efforts a push.

⁵ As we know, NISPAcee provided access to its available books, so that universities may choose from them, if they wish.

Difficulties, trade-offs

Reconstructing, widening and unifying syllabi may require additional efforts and instructors must be motivated to do their part.

There are pros and cons in using American course books: students meet a different view from the one to which they are accustomed, and this view is from a successful country. Furthermore, for studying abroad it may be useful to study from the same book that is used in the given foreign university. Meanwhile it is very difficult to write or edit “own course books” from scratch in a given field, which reflects the international literature but also local circumstances, institutional and informal arrangements, and the specific culture, etc. Still, we are convinced that this is a major prerequisite in these countries for an effective PA education.

As we understand it the method of evaluation is limited by the law/government and the defined PA curriculum, we believe, should be changed.

Instructors

Summary of the present situation

In several cases we have received no information on the professors, lecturers, and in general instructors of the courses. When we did receive this information we were faced with severe deficiencies, as discussed in detail in our report, in particular:

- Level of degree: In several cases the level of degree cannot be identified.⁶ In most cases at most universities, instructors responsible for a given course do not hold a Ph.D.
- Research activity is rarely indicated at all. Publications and other indicators of academic achievements are rarely included in CVs. We could not identify anyone with an acceptable record of publications in a foreign language and references.
- Some universities are quite strong regarding the practical experience of their instructors (as we learned, typically only part-time lecturers at the university) and a few universities have instructors with intensive foreign experience (both practical and academic).

⁶ It is our understanding that this is because it is difficult to translate previous “soviet” degrees into English. We believe that the previous College (or Technicum) type degrees, with a 3-4 year learning period are identical to a BA. University degrees, requiring typically 5 or even 6 years to obtain an MA, and Kandidate Nauk goes to Ph.D. degree.

Suggestions

As the current composition of instructors is the major barrier to accreditation, it has to be changed.

Research activity should be part of the professional activity of instructors, or at least, full-time, associates or full professors. Understanding the highly limited expressed need and especially resources for research we suggest several potential solutions:

- attempting to be involved in international, typically comparative research activities (such as being responsible for your own country's case study),
- involve the most capable and ambitious students in data collection and preliminary analysis,
- despite all the difficulties, try to obtain some funding from ministries and government agencies⁷. This may be worth a trial, either through personal connections or with the assistance of the top leaders of the university.

Publications in the English language, a potential peer-reviewed journal, possibly with the impact factor in the long-run are also a must. For this purpose, we suggest:

- cooperation with foreign schools, research community, participating in international projects, comparative research that normally ends up in publications, thus offering an opportunity for local scholars, even if their English is not perfect,
- select young, capable new staff (who have probably studied abroad), who in a few years' time may be able to publish in the relevant journals,
- encourage and support participation in relevant international conferences, such as those organized by NISPAcee, EGPA and others,
- establish (or at some universities: reinforce) an incentive system which rewards extensively those who publish in prestigious journals,
- it is also possible, though perhaps less preferable, to "buy" scholars with an extensive publication record on the job market, as has been done by some universities in the post-Soviet region.

Whilst understanding that an MA in a foreign university may provide more relevant competencies than a Ph.D. it is an international standard and also a basic requirement of accreditation that instructors hold a Ph.D. This has to be achieved in a mid-run. It may be done by hiring people who already have such a degree, or encouraging (both with positive and in the longer run, negative incentives) your staff to obtain such a degree. Maintain a

⁷ The budget of public institutions is usually limited and, in fact, they may not be very interested in research. However, the same organizations like to refer to academia whose research/advice was taken in making a certain decision and generally looks good to work together with academic people. Some may even consider a position in the future at the university. These may be driving forces to receive funding.

mixed strategy to employ young, capable people who are ready to start or have already begun their Ph.D. studies.

Difficulties, trade-offs

The difficulties are self-evident in this case. There is such a large gap between the ideal or even international standards on the one hand, and the reality, on the other, which means immense efforts, resources and time to bridge, or at least significantly narrow this gap.

Other, overarching issues

Cooperation

Universities should network and cooperate! Presently, even the simplest flow of information is missing, partly because of sharp competition but mostly, perhaps, for cultural reasons (secrecy, lack of trust, etc.). These impediments should be overcome and effective cooperation should be started.

Meanwhile, we believe that wide-range cooperation between all universities involved in the project would be useful⁸. We also believe that an incremental approach may be more feasible. First a few, perhaps leading universities of a country ought to cooperate on specific, relatively small-scale, well defined objectives. Such objectives could be, for instance, the production of basic course books in the national language, reflecting the specific circumstances.⁹ If this works well, other universities may be eager to join. International cooperation between the universities of Caucasus is more difficult. At least some information flow should be assured. However, this may not be created without exogenous factors (e.g. resources).

Universities should attempt a closer cooperation with government institutions such as ministries, agencies, local agency units and local governments. As we indicated, this may be crucial for research opportunities, effective internship arrangements and for other reasons (such as increasing the graduated students' opportunities to find public employment). Whilst being aware of the impediments of such cooperation, we also provided some clues in that regard. However, better understanding of local circumstances is crucial, so that management of universities may best determine how to handle this necessity.

⁸ As we (experts and participants) all learned in this project, despite the undoubtedly existing differences and even tension and hostility between the countries of the region, all three countries face very similar, sometimes identical, problems and difficulties generally in tertiary education and specifically regarding PA programs. Consequently, joint understanding of these common difficulties could be useful and could be a good basis for supporting one another in fighting these problems, especially by spreading and learning good solutions ("best practices") which have already been successfully applied somewhere else in the region.

⁹ Our understanding is, that perhaps as an impact of the project – such networks are about to be set up in Georgia by a few universities that were especially active in the project.

Cooperation with the Civil Service Commission (where it exists) may also be beneficial. Assessing the potential viability of such cooperation is beyond our competence.

Monitoring and evaluation

Universities should set up a system of basic quality assessment. The most basic elements of these systems reflect on the two major activities carried out by universities: teaching-training and research. The latter may be measured by the following indicators:

- Number of publications measured by the prestige of the journal/publisher where it was published; prestige is measured by:
 - impact factor (for those at the highest level)
 - being – indeed – a “double blind peer reviewed” journal
 - a ranking of professionals in the field (set up and laid down on paper, i.e.: not decided case by case; this system may also be used for book publishers)
 - journals where you need to pay for publication are excluded.
- Teaching quality is measured:
 - on the most basic level of control: are the classes held at all, do they start roughly on time, etc?
 - through students’ feed-back, typically on standardized forms filled in anonymously, containing quantitative elements on certain aspects (such as: usefulness, how well the instructor is prepared, etc) and non-formal, written feed-back on what should be done differently, etc. (The latter is more to assist the instructor on how to improve the course.)

Above the formal, internal evaluation, an external evaluation could be carried out by EAPAA or another accreditation organization.¹⁰

Some kind of informal evaluation may be carried out in an open network of universities. In the countries where the experts came from it is widely known which university is “strong” in which aspect of PA education and a rough list of ranking may also be put together by experts, mirrored in some data, such as student admissions or the employment ratio three months after graduation.

Style of education

In all socialist countries, university education was based on the ideal of classical universities. This may be summarized as follows:

- concentration on theory (the university is far from everyday practice)
- concentration on knowledge, as opposed to:

¹⁰ These organizations, their list of requirements as well as the process applied were described in depth to the participants during the project.

- skills that may be immediately applied in practice,
- individual collection and processing of information (i.e. learning skills to obtain relevant knowledge in the future), instead of memorizing present information (that may not be valid in the future).
- the teaching method based on the “wise professor talks, students silently sit”, also known as “talk and chalk” method.

Universities should change their approach, as some of them have already done and most of them are gradually doing. Most important:

- Competencies - to a great extent, the skills relevant to the practice should be provided both at BA and MA level.
- The style of education should be changed to more interactive methods, such as case studies, group discussions, individual assignments, individual research, and presentations may be utilized.

Relationship between MA and BA level

Apparently the function of and relationship between the BA and MA level is unclear for most universities. In brief, the international standard to be followed may be summarized in this way:

- BA provides competencies on a relatively wide field (such as basics of economics). BA thus, can be described as “wide but not deep”.
- MA provides more in-depth competencies on a narrower field (such as Economics of Regulation, Public Economics, etc.), surely not more general, more theoretical compared to BA.
- None of these programs are to create scholars i.e. they do not need high level, abstract theories (or simply those that can be utilized in practice), but rather practical competencies.

Everywhere where the so-called Bologna system was later introduced (in most European countries) handling the relationship between BA and MA is difficult. There are two potential problems: (a) overlaps as the same topics are taught at both levels, so those students who continue PA at MA level after a BA may hardly learn anything new.; or (b) basic competencies are missing as the MA student has not learned them in the BA (where the BA is from, for example, political science, history, or even economics).

There are various techniques to handle this problem. If:

- a) both BA and MA are in PA
 - there should really be different courses,
 - there is a large set of non-core (elective courses) in the curriculum,

- several courses at MA level are accepted from the BA level and a waiver is provided, so that the MA may be finished in one year, instead of two,
 - we accept that BPA students have reason to continue onto MPA, as is the case in some universities in the project,
- b) BA is from a different field to PA: missing core competencies must be identified and:
- students are requested to take the missing, most relevant courses from BA level, whilst doing their MA, which may make the MA longer (say 3 years) for those without a BPA,
 - there are special, so called catch-up courses for major fields of knowledge that students must accomplish,¹¹
 - The MA is designed to include all relevant courses, but those having studied some of these courses may have a waiver on them – in a way equivalent to the first choice as this means: an MA is designed for to last approximately three years but may be completed within two or even less. (Students can calculate this on internet.)
 - we accept that our MPA students may not be aware of the most basic facts about government and their future employers will be faced with this, thereby forming an opinion on our program.

¹¹ For example at Corvinus University (Budapest, Hungary) there are “soft” and “hard” catch-up courses. Soft: polity, law. Hard: economics, statistics. Students are individually assigned to take one or sometimes both of these courses.