

Chapter 7

Quality Assurance for a Developmental “Global Studies” (GS) Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on quality assurance (QA) for cutting-edge transdisciplinary university curricula. As a case study, it analyzes the developmental, internationally- and peace-oriented “Global Studies” (GS) curriculum at Graz University, Austria. Based on an extensive literature review on concepts of quality for curricula, key concepts for transdisciplinarity and approaches for quality monitoring are provided. This analysis finds and emphasizes that QA criteria are highly dependent on the stakeholders’ perspective; notably on the perspectives of lecturers, students, university administration, and external auditors. Based on several practical sets of such stakeholder-dependent QA criteria, quality in the Graz-based GS curriculum is assessed thoroughly. Detailed recommendations for quality enhancement are provided by students, lecturers and external auditors with a focus on: transdisciplinarity; relevance to practice; maintaining existing levels of academic requirements; and especially sound, sufficient and sustained funding by the university administration.

INTRODUCTION

“Climate change and shortage of resources, hunger and mass poverty, terror and violence represent manifold unresolved global problems and challenges” (GS, 2010, 2012). “As a sound answer to these challenges on an educational and cultural level, many universities have increased their efforts by studying such problems as globalization and structural peace” (Bader et al., 2013a). De-

velopmental curricula are hence a first priority for cutting-edge universities.

For such and similar endeavors in tertiary education, *quality management* and value management are sensible and useful approaches in evaluating curricula, especially given the unpredictable evolution of a workplace throughout the learners’ professional lives. Today, higher education providers face a world-wide environment full of competitors all explaining, interpreting and

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managing global change in the cultural, political, economic, technical and environmental fields (Nuninger & Chatelet, 2016).

Curricula developers are therefore urged to satisfy *Quality Assurance* (QA) criteria to maintain and further improve the profile of delivered results. The main criteria include the following (Nuninger & Chatelet, 2016):

1. Adequacy of training offer and its design to *societal* needs,
2. *Accessibility* of training at all ages and for everyone at any time with *adapted pedagogy* devices that are convenient to the public,
3. *Efficiency* of the training realization,
4. A high level of *trainer skill* throughout the training process, but also operational performance triangle
 - a. Objectives,
 - b. Results, and
 - c. Resources.
5. Welfare at work and security,
6. Efficiency of the organization and
7. Added value with respect to shareholders and stakeholders (including partners with companies, financial organizations and the skilled workforce; teachers, trainers, tutors and researchers).

To the author’s understanding, these criteria provide opportunities to perceive assets in a new, international, transdisciplinary and professional light; most specifically in quality management (QM) in modern, transdisciplinary, development-oriented, peace-oriented, cooperative *curricula of Global Studies* (Ahamer, 2014d, p. 250). Some sub-criteria of the above general criteria by which GS could suitably be assessed include:

1. Excellence
2. Student satisfaction,
3. Training and learning,
4. Skills and assessment,
5. Curriculum appropriateness,

6. Leading talents and
7. Sustainability in a global world (Nuninger & Chatelet, 2016).

In order to make such quality criteria operational, appropriate stakeholders with a role in assessing such quality for a GS curriculum are suggested in Figure 1: lecturers, students, university administration and external auditors.

In a symbolic manner, Figure 1 chooses to situate the four groups of stakeholders in the renowned landscape of the Dachstein massif (AEIOU, 2015), the highest elevation in Styria, Austria, where Graz University is located. The graphic setting suggests the act of reflection and underlines the necessity to (mentally) travel from one standpoint to the other in order to achieve the full picture.

With this in mind, training to assume different standpoints has been achieved with the support of dialogic processes based on web platforms during the everyday implementation of GS Graz (Ahamer, 2010, 2013c, 2014d).

The main body of this chapter will include voices from such different stakeholders (see especially sub-chapter “Assessments of the Graz-based GS curriculum”).

Suggestions for Quality Criteria from the Perspectives of Various Stakeholders

In accordance with the evaluation standards (see DeGEval, 2008), the task of auditors is to seek to identify the interests and viewpoints of all those involved and include them in the evaluation.

As Figure 1 suggests, the very diverse location of the stakeholders within society does not merely result in a *different view on the factual situation* (i.e. the physical landscape in Figure 1), but also in a very diverse perception of which set of quality criteria is valid in order to best assess “quality” as such in a curriculum. *We may therefore speak of stakeholder-dependent quality criteria.*

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