

Good practice of curriculum development at the University of Prishtina (UP), Kosovo

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Abstract

The article describes the development of the study program, Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Health Management, at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Prishtina (UP). It gives an overview of: definition of the study program's aim; definition of learning outcomes at program level; study program structure; comparability and internationalization of the program; cooperation with the labor market partners; gender fairness; accreditation and other modalities before the start of the program. In the end of the article, conclusions and recommendations have been made on successful introduction of teaching and learning process at the University of Prishtina, based on learning outcomes.

1. Introduction

This article describes the development the Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Health Management, in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Prishtina by giving an overview of: the definition of the study program's aim; the definition of the study program's learning objectives; the study program structure; the comparability and internationalization; the cooperation with the labor market partners; the gender fairness; the accreditation and other modalities before the start of the program. In the end of the article some conclusions and recommendations have been made that contributed to the successful introduction of the competence based teaching at the UP.

2. Background Information

In the academic year 2001/2002 UP voluntarily participated in the Bologna process, by conducting a huge reform of the institution and curricula, as well. Its study programs are organized based on the three cycle system: Bachelor, Master and PhD.

By trying to respond to the needs of the health sector in Kosovo, the University of Prishtina, respectively the Faculty of Medicine decided to design an MBA in Health Management. Traditionally, the University of Prishtina throughout its existence for 40 years has been awarding just scientific degrees. This program was the first one, which is a professional one, based on the needs of the Kosovar health sector. Furthermore, by taking into consideration that the program has a professional orientation it was developed and taught entirely in English by the local Kosovar professors and guest lecturers from the EU partner institutions. Through this way it represents, not only the first professional degree awarded by the UP but also the first one taught in English by local professors.

3. Processes of Study Program Development**A) Labor market relevance of the study program development**

The current situation in the health system of Kosovo is quite difficult as the health system faces constant obstacles caused by a lack of educated and skilled managers. Information systems in health are in very early stage of development. In addition, the yearly statistic medical newsletter of 2006 provides statistics regarding the overall health situation and general number of employers in the health system of Kosovo. Thus, official government documents (Health strategy 2005 – 2015) and studies of relevant international organizations such as the World Bank: Kosovo Poverty assessment, 2007, Vol. I and II; and the Kosovo Health Financing Reform Study, 2008, indicate that there is an ultimate need for expertise in health management through which it would be able for the whole field of business to deal with challenges rising from the new economic and political situation.

Beside the reports mentioned before, there was a labor market research conducted with the main stakeholders of the health sector in Kosovo which were the following: University Clinical Center Prishtina, Regional Hospitals, Main Family Medicine Centres, Ministry of Health of Kosovo, Private Hospitals and Clinics and the University Clinic of Dentistry of Kosovo. The main aim of this study was to measure the needs of such a profile which an expert within the health sector should have. The processed results of the survey verified the conclusions of different official reports. Thus, it reinforced the fact that there is an emerge need within these institutions for the candidates of such a profile.

B) Definition of the study program's aim

Relying on the survey results the general study program objective has been designed as:

*"The **MBA in Health Management** prepares students for the contemporary challenges faced by social welfare and national health systems and in doing so further develops health care at the local and national level. Furthermore, it equips students with all the administrative and management-related skills needed for a career in various private and public organizations, NGOs, companies, and institutions of health care, taking into consideration classic economic and organizational theory. In addition, it teaches students the analytical skills needed to solve problems of high social complexity as well as to increase students' competencies in effective communication and team work to achieve specific goals".*

Furthermore, the program aims to prepare the graduates not just for the local market, but also for the international one.

C) *Definition of the study program's learning outcomes*

After designing the study program's objectives, the learning objectives of the program level have been developed consisting of general and specific outcomes. After the completion of the study program MBA in Health Management, students will:

- Be able to demonstrate critical understanding of key concepts and theories related to health management.

- Develop practical skills in leading, managing, building capacities, in relation to emerging situations and limited capacities.

- Have a practical knowledge of a range of applications and environments for monitoring and control specific problems faced in medical institutions.

- Be able to develop their own innovative and creative solutions according to the emerging needs.

- Become skilled managers in normal and extraordinary situations.

D) *Study program structure*

University of Prishtina uses European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to structure its programs, according to the Bologna process. Considering that the program is professional oriented, it is consisted of 90 ECTS with a duration of two years (four semesters).

E) *Comparability and internationalization*

The modules have been designed in cooperation with the twinning higher education institution from an EU country, as well with the Kosovar labor market partners (who were part of the survey). The modules were designed based on the model to respond to the demands and challenges of the Kosovar health system by being very practical oriented, as well as based on the curriculum of the EU higher education twinning partner. One of the main criteria introduced by the UP is that a new program designed should have around 85% similarities with a program in a European university. Further developing a study program that has similarities with a program in an EU university enables an easier cooperation with the EU universities and raises the program's comparability. Thus, easier cooperation increases chances of internationalization of a specific faculty in terms of staff and student mobility and this contributes to the overall UP's internationalization.

The EU twinning higher education institution contributed expertise to the program development and supported the program in the teaching process by sending guest lectures at the University of Prishtina.

F) *Cooperation with the labor market partners*

There was an intense cooperation developed with the most relevant key players of the Kosovar health sector in terms of providing experts to take over guest lecturers for the specific courses within modules, providing internships, providing concrete topics for the final theses etc.

G) *Gender fairness*

Within the project different aspects of gender fairness has been taken into consideration:

- Gender balance during student selection
- Integration of gender aspects within modules/courses i.e. introduction of specific chapters on gender related issues
- Use of a language during lectures/teaching materials that promotes gender balance

H) *Accreditation and other modalities before the start of the program*

Each of the newly introduced/modified study programs at the University of Prishtina should pass through the Senate approval. Once it is approved, the program as such has to be submitted to the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. This agency with its developed procedures decides to either accredit or not to accredit the study

program. If the program is not accredited it may not enroll new students.

The program MBA in Health has been successfully accredited by the Kosovar Accreditation Agency. As a result, in the academic year 2009/2010 36 students have been enrolled in the study program.

By considering all of the aforementioned steps, the program as such represents a good model of curriculum development not just for the University of Prishtina but also for the entire Kosovar Higher Education System.

- Development of study programs (especially new ones) based on generic and specific competences;
- Close cooperation with Kosovar labor market to understand its needs through different tools and methods;
- Design of curriculum with the inputs of labor market partners for the specific fields;
- Provision of continuous support to the students on their professional development through career counseling and different services

4. Conclusion

The University of Prishtina by being comprised of 16 faculties is being faced with many problems and challenges. In this way it is very difficult that each of its study programs follow all the steps as were introduced during the development of MBA in Health Management (and some other Master programs).

A common point for all the existing documents on higher education at the European level is the appeal on **“the employability aspects of the graduates”** i.e. that in the future the study programs that do have the largest employment rate will survive within HE institutions. By considering that the public universities have been recognized traditionally as more theoretical oriented, there is a huge challenge ahead for the institutions all over Europe not just in Kosovo to do a huge transformation on providing study programs that guarantee a fast employment process of its graduates.

According to the Bologna process the envisaged European Higher Education Area will:

- Facilitate mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff;
- Prepare students for their future careers and for life as active citizens in democratic societies, and support their personal development;
- Offer broad access to high-quality higher education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom.

UP by implementing voluntarily Bologna process has to put many efforts on further realizing these three objectives, as it intends to become as soon as possible part of the European Higher Education Area.

5. Recommendations

Even though there UP has many challenges ahead on development of competence based teaching, some necessary recommendations would consist of: