

Panel Report: External Evaluation of IPED Master Program

The Panel has been asked to conduct an evaluation of the Master Program at IPED focusing on 4 different areas:

- 1) Evaluation of the “wholeness and connectedness” of the Program
- 2) The Master Thesis and The Method Subject
- 3) Worklife Relevance
- 4) Internationalization

Panel members	Nominated by
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Thomas Hillman, professor at Gøteborgs Universitet	KDL
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Is it really One Program?

After reviewing the self-evaluation, one apparent question from the panel has been: Is it really one program? The panel discussed in depth that there seems to be a very limited connection between the four different streams. We would question if there is indeed a clear “wholeness” in the Master program.

Currently, the four different streams can perhaps be best understood as four separate programs that share administrative resources but have few academic commonalities. The one place there is an obvious academic connection between the streams is in the shared methods course, but this course is not delivered in the same semester in each stream and does not appear to constitute a shared ground for the meeting of students or faculty across streams. This lack of alignment also shows itself in the sequencing of course areas in the different streams where some such as KULA begin with overviews of their field whereas others such as KDL choose not to provide a clear introductory course. In this sense, there is a visible lack of agreement between the streams about how a master’s program should be generally constructed that can be seen to hinder synergies. With the lack of commonalities between streams, the Panel wonders if the idea of one program is a vision from IPED that

has yet to be achieved? If this is the case, it begs the question, do the streams have to be organized as a single program and if so, what is the added value? Based on the evidence presented, the four streams can be seen to “live their own lives” quite well, though each has a relatively low number of students.

Given the relatively low level of alignment in the shared methods course, it seems that a renewed focus on the wholeness and connection would require substantial change management from IPED to bridge the four directions. However, such efforts may be justified as the panel sees many possibilities for a further integration of the four streams that have potential to add value. We will be returning to this topic throughout the report and we have suggestion for a more integrated program in the final chapter.

The Master’s Thesis and the Method Subject

Method subject

As currently organized, all streams share a methods course (PED4011) which consists of a general introduction to a selection of both qualitative and quantitative methods. At 15 credits, the course is relatively large while, at the same time, it has received criticism from both students and stream leaders for not meeting the needs of the program.

Furthermore, students who completed their undergraduate degrees at the faculty express a concern that PED4011 has too much overlap with methods courses at the bachelor level, stream leaders identify the concern that students with other undergraduate backgrounds need more basic and general methods instruction than is provided. These concerns can also be understood to underlie the rationale for most of the streams providing additional methods courses on top of the 15 credits shared course.

Added to the relatively large number of credits dedicated to thesis preparation, the effect is that around one whole term of the four terms of the master’s program can be seen to be dedicated to methods or preparation for the thesis.

The panel discussed extensively the current situation of the method course(s), the critique from the students and from the different programs and tried to find possible solutions.

We suggest a smaller unit for the general method course that provide a stronger foundation on the relation between ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches. The question what knowledge is and how it is produced should be clearly linked to ontological ideas about what learning, a human being and ideas about (the current and future) society are. This proposal does not mean a one-sidedness on philosophical questions. Rather, these questions “only” serve as the overarching perspective, while the course focuses on different research methods. Both qualitative and quantitative methods that are prominent in the different programs should be presented, learned, analyzed and questioned.

While a relatively large number of credits are dedicated to methods across the streams, there is concern expressed that students may lack a solid grounding in the broader issues of

methodology and theory of science. A possible solution to this issue would be to scale PED4011 down to 10 credits and refocus it on basic methodological issues, but at the level necessary for a master's program over and above what is already addressed at the undergraduate level. This course would have as its goal providing students with a basis to understand and critique existing studies rather than focusing on expressly providing skills for conducting the thesis. In this sense, the course would focus on issues of theory of science and set the stage for more informed understanding of the methodological choices presented in later courses.

The panel recognizes the dilemma: Between the need to provide a generalized and deep understanding of research methods, particularly for those who will go on to Ph.D. studies, and the application of research methods, in addition to the inherent friction between the streams, as they typically have different needs from a methods perspective. Which is clearly seen in the vast array of extra methods courses offered within the streams.

On the basis of this friction, the panel suggest that IPED uses a 10 ECTS standard methodology course, focusing on philosophy of science, delivered during the 2nd semester. Half of the time should focus on Theory of Science, and utilizing examples, preferably from ongoing studies, and half of the time on quantitative and qualitative methods. Then, in the 3rd semester, there will be a Methods course, of at least 10 ECTS, possibly 15ECTS, organized as a "Methods Buffet", where the students choose half of the ECTS on Quantitative methods courses and half on Qualitative methods courses, based upon the needs of the stream and the student, linked to the upcoming master thesis work.

Master's thesis

At 45 ECTS, the master's thesis is considerably longer than the practice at many comparable universities. The panel sees this as both a strength and a potential problem. The strength lies in the deeper emphasis on independent scientific work, whereas one potential issue is the reduced options to offer specialization in the coursework. As we have pointed out earlier, there are, as the panel sees it, substantial gaps in the topics addressed for most of the streams, which could be at least partially, mitigated by using some of the 45 ECTS dedicated to the thesis. In concert with this, the panel finds it important emphasize the need for all streams and courses to work systematically to clarify what competencies are needed to successfully write a master's thesis, to further prepare the students. This could be a common theme throughout the program. In this sense, thesis preparation can be thought of as an ongoing part of the program rather than as a set of standalone courses. The panel believes that all courses should have components that are designed to prepare students for identifying relevant topics and for thesis writing. The panel recognizes that this is yet another dilemma but suggest that the thesis be reduced from its current size to 30 ECTS while keeping 5 ECTS of thesis preparation during the 3rd semester. Both the preparatory and thesis courses could be run as a collaboration across streams.

Worklife Relevance

General comments

Throughout the evaluation-process, the panel discussed repeatedly the question what purpose university education has and should have, which reflects back on the purpose what the panel's task and mandate could be.

While we acknowledge the "work-life relevance" as a relevant criterion for our evaluation, we still want to comment, that this specific criterion for evaluation may push the panel into a certain frame of normative assumptions about what the aim and purpose of a university education is. Universities are neither in the Continental nor the Anglo-Saxon tradition of educational thought institutions that are meant to provide applicable bodies of knowledge to students. Given that we never live in societies that are perfect, e.g. given that we are always struggling with difficulties and challenges of inequality, justice, peace and sustainability etc., we want to highlight that it is not enough to ask for an assessment in what way the provided education will be of relevance for a future working life.

Overall, IPED seems to be on the path towards a closer integration between the study programs and the demands of the professional life. The panel wants to point at the dilemma inherent in this ongoing integration. Is it really the role of education to provide businesses and public sector with candidates who knows as much as possible about the work they are going to do? Or is the role of education more to provide society with candidates that can think critically and learn fast?

Interestingly, the panel is somewhat divided in this discussion: Some of the academic representatives problematize choices to increase worklife relevance at the expense of opportunities for critical thinking and theoretical exploration, whereas the student and worklife representatives suggest that education should strive to become more relevant in terms of post study applications. Furthermore, the internship periods should potentially enrich the curriculum.

Specific comments

All four specializations have practice elements as part of their curriculum. They are, however, of very different length and relevance. Some of the streams are more clearly addressing a specific profession. This makes it difficult to evaluate across the streams in a consistent manner. Those found as part of PPR, for example, are very closely related to a specific profession in demand whereas those associated with KULA appear to be aimed at more loosely defined professions within the field of working with knowledge and learning in both public and private sectors, hence the work with internships are highly prioritized. In the case of UDO, there is no opportunity for internships as such, a feature that deviates substantially from the other streams.

According to the self-evaluation and student input, students are divided in their opinions about the internship periods and their connection to the literature reading they do in classes. Some students express that there is a clear connection and relevance for future work life, while others disagree and perceive the gap between "theory and practice" to be large. These differences suggest particular situations for each stream that the panel wishes to highlight.

In the case of PPR, practice periods can be seen to be well connected to the specific roles that the stream educates candidates for. However, the panel notes that there are some concerns about a need for more theory on laws and regulations before internship periods.

For KDL, the focus seems to be primarily educating candidates for the Instructional Design profession and the internship period is reported to have high relevance for the students, though there seems to be little focus on Instructional Design itself in the program. Instead, there is a significant focus on Design-Based Research. The panel would like to highlight the need to address design approaches and processes beyond those used in the context of research projects, particularly those learning design approaches that are commonly found in professional Instructional Design contexts. In concert with this, there is also a need to expand the range of theory covered in the stream beyond those that can be largely grouped under the umbrella of socio-cultural and material perspectives. For example, cognitivist perspectives that have led to theories such as cognitive-load are of significant relevance to practicing Instructional Designers as are neuro-scientific approaches to understanding learning that currently receive little attention in the program.

KULA aims at a match between themes, which relates to an educational (learning) perspective on HR, leadership, knowledge management and organizational learning to prepare for work in HR departments and within consultancy. Internships (practicum) for which there is a long tradition signaling high importance to the KULA program. In many cases the students get employed later on in their internships. The practicum has been upgraded with a dedicated coordinator. In the interviews, a specific 'working life' pedagogy is called for.

Unlike the other streams, UDO does not have an internship period. As a theoretical and philosophical program, the question of working-life relevance, practice and methodological knowledge and skills have to be interpreted differently than in the cases of the other streams. The relevance of UDO lies not in a direct applicability for certain needs in the (educational) labor market. Rather, UDO's relevance, strength and importance lies in providing critical analysis and thinking educators in order to uphold the ability to enhance our societies as far as this is possible.

Still, this does not mean that there is nothing concrete that students of UDO could do in order to practice and train different (philosophical/theoretical) abilities that are fundamentally needed in both academia and society as a whole, and that can offer civic/democratic learning opportunities that could be in line with the aim of universities as relevant for society and humanity (and by that even relevant for working life).

The panel proposes UDO students could do internship in e.g. IPED's various research groups and get insights in research processes on different stages (from preparing applications to collecting data, transcription, analyzing or preparing seminars for different stakeholders).

In addition, the panel suggests that the differences that make UDO distinct from the other three streams might serve to achieve a richer form of synergy between streams. The various foci in UDO (social justice, sustainability, racism, democracy, young children and youth,

curriculum etc) might serve as frames for cooperation across streams that enrich the specializations in KULA, PPR and KDL. For example, if the methods course were moved from the 3rd semester to earlier in the UDO program, shared activities could be arranged. These activities could have 3rd semester UDO students guide and support 1st semester students from the four streams in their examination of different foci in relation to key issues for each area. This might highlight practical connections to the content in UDO and enrich the theoretical content of the other streams while promoting conversation across streams.

The panel conclusion on worklife relevance is that there are good reasons to review some improvement suggestions to bridge the gap between education and worklife, however IPED needs to be mindful of the role of education, and the dilemma inherent. The strive towards worklife relevance could go too far.

Internationalization

The panel believes it is worthwhile to discuss what internationalization means and why it is a goal unto itself. Presently, the level of internationalization effort at IPED seems relatively low, but this is not necessarily problematic. It might be that the program chooses to prioritize delivering a complete experience of courses over opening up for the variation in experiences that comes with students taking courses abroad.

The panel would also like to point out that there are no elective topics in the programs. This could help with the internationalization efforts.

The panel sees further internationalization as a potential strength since it is often attractive to students, can be seen to increase their competitiveness in the job market and is a way to bring new ideas into the conversations in the program. For example, the panel notes that the theoretical framework in some streams, like KDL and KULA, is very much centered around a Social-cultural approach. Internationalization efforts could bring students in contact with other learning theories, such as the cognitive and neuro-scientific traditions.

The panel would also like to challenge IPED on rethinking what internationalization could mean. It might not be necessary to physically go abroad, which always is difficult to organize during a tight schedule of 2 years. Rather, there should be international cooperation with other students and scholars on similar issues of online learning design/ teaching. EG KDL students who engage in educational questions of digital tools etc. could easily share and work together with other students digitally, develop tools, analyze and assess tools etc. With exercises like this they could get international networks and deepen their insights in the possibilities and challenges of digital learning design.

Based on the above, the panel sees at least five different ways to increase the international profile of IPED and the different master programs.

1. Enabling students to go abroad (international coordinator etc.)

2. Enabling and actively inviting students to come to Oslo (e.g., the whole 3rd semester could be taught in English by default)
3. Increasing international scholars to visit and teach
4. Joined digital student projects with befriended international institutions
5. Reorganize the program structure with the aim of obtaining a semester that is suitable for international exchange (3rd semester stands out)

Suggestions for a “One Program Approach” at IPED

Based on the analysis of how the panel sees the current situation at IPED, we present the following suggestion, that is designed to both meet the 4 different streams, a new approach to the Methods course and a more aligned and interlinked program:

	UDO	PPR	KULA	KDL
1 st Semester	10 ECTS General Introduction to Pedagogy as field of Research			
	20 ECTS Stream specific introductory topics	20 ECTS Stream specific introductory topics	20 ECTS Stream specific introductory topics	20 ECTS Stream specific introductory topics
2 nd semester	10 ECTS Methodology, Theory of Science			
	15 ECTS Stream specific specialization topics	15 ECTS Stream specific specialization topics	15 ECTS Stream specific specialization topics	15 ECTS Stream specific specialization topics
	5 ECTS internship in research groups	5 ECTS Internship	5 ECTS Internship	5 ECTS Internship
3 rd semester	10 ECTS Methods Organized as “Methods Buffet” (selected topics)			
	5 ECTS Thesis Preparation			
	10 ECTS Stream	5 ECTS Stream	10 ECTS Stream	10 ECTS Stream

	specific specialization topics	specific specialization topics	specific specialization topics	specific specialization topics
		10 ECTS Internship		
	5 ETCS practical experience		5 ECTS Internship	5 ECTS Internship
4 th semester	30 ECTS Master Thesis			

The 10 ECTS General Introduction to Pedagogy as field of Research could be:

- What is Learning? How is Learning discussed in the different streams, and within different theoretical traditions
- How do the different streams treat communication. Is communication everything we do with words, pictures or through other media. Is communication different from dialogue?
- The different scientific research traditions inherent in the 4 streams
- Orientation about the current research conducted at the Faculty of Education

As a closing remark the panel would like to thank Line Wittek and IPED for the interesting and rewarding opportunity to read, comment and learn from your program, self-evaluations and organization of the streams.