

Experts' Report on the Accreditation of Study Programmes

at

St. Petersburg State University

- School of International Relations -

File Nr. 1627-xx-1



7th Meeting of the ZEvA Commission, May 31, 2019

4.0X

Study Programme	Degree	Credit Points	Programme Duration	Type of Programme	maximum annual intake
BRICS Studies	Master	120 ECTS	2 years	Full-time	

Hanover, May 24, 2019

Expert Panel

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Table of Contents

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	I-3
I. Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission.....	I-4
1. Decision of the ZEvA Commission	I-4
2. Summary of the Experts' Findings	I-5
2.1 Recommendations.....	I-5
2.2 Final Vote of the Expert Panel.....	I-5
II. Evaluation Report of the Experts	II-1
Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure	II-1
1. General Aspects	II-3
1.1 Mission and Profile of the University and the School	II-3
1.2 Internationalization and Student Mobility.....	II-3
1.3 Learning Environment and Student Support System	II-3
1.4 Quality Assurance	II-3
1.5 Transparency and Public Information.....	II-3
2. Assessment of the Masters Programme "BRICS Studies"	II-4
2.1 Basic Structure and Intended Learning Outcomes of the Study Programme	II-4
2.2 Contents and Curriculum.....	II-5
2.3 Teaching Faculty	II-6
2.4 Methods of Teaching and Student Assessment.....	II-6
III. Appendix.....	III-1
1. University's Response to the Expert Report	III-1

I Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission

1 Decision of the ZEvA Commission

I. Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission

1. Decision of the ZEvA Commission

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1 Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the ZEvA Commission

2 Summary of the Experts' Findings

2. Summary of the Experts' Findings

The reviewers note the uniqueness of the specialization the Master's programme "BRICS Studies" is offering, the wide range of courses provided by it, and the high qualification of teaching staff involved in the programme.

The reviewers would like to emphasize that the below-mentioned recommendations constitute suggestions for future development, rather than criticism of the programme's present state, and do not affect the generally good evaluation of the programme.

2.1 Recommendations

In order to ensure the future competitiveness of the programme, the reviewers *recommend*

- to consider further developing the country-specific part of curriculum;
- to continue in strengthening the international character and the academic exchanges with foreign universities. This should include, in equal part, collaborations with the top-ranked universities in Europe, Asia and North America pursuing study programmes with an emphasis on the BRICS countries as it should obviously include exchanges with the BRICS countries themselves, which are the focus of the new Master's Programme and which are currently also accorded priority by Russian state authorities;
- to further widen contacts with potential employers in the form of internship agreements, participation of employers' representatives in developing the program, etc.

2.2 Final Vote of the Expert Panel

The experts recommend the accreditation of the following Master's programme as offered by the *School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University*:

- BRICS Studies (Master)

The accreditation of the study programmes is recommended for a period of **six** years.

II Evaluation Report of the Experts

0 Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

II. Evaluation Report of the Experts

Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

It is the purpose of this accreditation procedure to assess the quality of one of the study programmes offered by the **School of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University** against international, particularly European standards. At present, the School offers a Bachelor programme and a relatively large variety of Master's programmes which focus on different aspects of International Relations and Area Studies, including the **BRICS Studies programme** assessed in this report

In 2017 an extensive review of all other programmes at the School of International Relations had taken place by a group of eight experts, including six academic experts, one representative of the labour market and one students' representative. The assessment included a site visit at Saint Petersburg State University's School of IR on September 26-28, 2017 and a resulted in an extensive evaluation report by the experts (December 17, 2017). The ZEvA Commission has then accredited all 15 programmes on February 27, 2018, for the duration of five years.

The present evaluation report of the Master's programme "BRICS Studies" is based on this former report. It takes into account the general evaluations and recommendations regarding Mission, Profile and Internationality of Saint Petersburg State University and its School of International Relations, the learning environment and student support system, the quality assurance on School and programme level and standards of transparency and public information. Overall, the previous evaluation results remain still applicable.

The present report is conceived as an extension of the previous evaluation and accreditation. ZEvA and AKKORK decided that a document-based assessment by selected experts from the former panel is sufficient, as the programme on "BRICS Studies" is part of the School of IR's portfolio of programmes.

The assessment is based on ZEvA's "Assessment Framework for the Evaluation of Study Programmes" as laid out in the agency's "Manual for Evaluation and Certification of Study Programmes". This framework is fundamentally based on the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG; 2015)", the "Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area" (2005) and the "ECTS User's Guide" (2015).¹

For the purpose of assessing the 'BRICS Studies' programme, the School of International Relations was asked to submit a self-report in English. Apart from detailed descriptions of the study programme, the self-report included a number of additional documents, as e.g. course syllabi and data on students and teaching staff. All documents were translated into English before submission.

This report is based on the experts' assessment and will serve as a basis for ZEvA's accredi-

¹ All three documents are accessible here: <http://www.ehea.info/index.php>



II Evaluation Report of the Experts

0 Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

tation commission to decide on the accreditation of the study programme. In the case of a positive decision by the commission, ZEvA will award its quality seal for a limited time period, after which the university can apply for re-accreditation.

II Evaluation Report of the Experts

1 General Aspects

1. General Aspects

1.1 Mission and Profile of the University and the School

See full accreditation report December 17, 2017

1.2 Internationalization and Student Mobility

See full accreditation report December 17, 2017

1.3 Learning Environment and Student Support System

See full accreditation report December 17, 2017

1.4 Quality Assurance

See full accreditation report December 17, 2017

1.5 Transparency and Public Information

See full accreditation report December 17, 2017

2. Assessment of the Masters Programme “BRICS Studies”

2.1 Basic Structure and Intended Learning Outcomes of the Study Programme

For a general assessment see full accreditation report December 17, 2017

The BRICS Studies program established in 2016 has a specific focus, concentrating on problems related to BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries and their role in the modern world, both individually and as an international grouping.

The international character covered by the programme implies the goal of achieving high levels of academic mobility and internationalization of the programme with particular importance. The self-evaluation report does mention several notable achievements in this field, such as teaching a part of the curriculum in English (at present, unfortunately, limited to only one course according to the documents provided), internships done by the programme’s students in various universities in China in 2016-17, as well as ongoing negotiations with the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) to implement joint courses. In the future, this might result in offering joint degrees with cooperating universities.

The objectives of the programme, as stated in the self-evaluation report, cover a wide range of international issues related to the BRICS countries and beyond. Alongside a differentiated list of general and professional competencies to be achieved by graduated, indications of post-graduation professional activities are given. The competencies named are targeted towards educating

“highly professional specialists with fundamental knowledge in the field of international, political, economic and social processes, topical issues of international relations development, work of international and regional interstate structures and networks formats of interstate interaction, as well as analytical skills of an international political and international economic profile with calculation on the needs of both government agencies of the Russian Federation and representatives of the international governmental and non-governmental structures, transnational business and non-governmental organizations” (cf. self-report).

The experts acknowledge both the academic uniqueness of the programme and the practical applicability of the skills and knowledge that its students can acquire. The reason for this is the significant role that relations with BRICS member states play in Russian foreign policy, as well as the increasingly important place that these nations occupy in world politics.

The international character of the issues covered give particular importance to high levels of academic mobility and internationalization of the programme. Given that achieving high levels of internationalization is always an ongoing process, efforts in this direction must not cease.

The objectives stated would indeed give the students the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in a wide range of careers both in the public and the private sectors. One should also note that, while the focus of the programme gives the students an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge which are unique, the other side of such a narrow specialization might be that the graduates run the risk of not finding sufficient demand for these unique skills and

II Evaluation Report of the Experts

2 Assessment of the Masters Programme “BRICS Studies”

knowledge in the labour market. To mitigate this risk, the management and faculty of the programme must thread a delicate balance. They need to give the students competencies specific enough, so that the graduates would stand out as specialists in the field of BRICS studies, but also general enough, so that they could successfully work in other related fields while still using the skills they acquired in the programme. As will be further elaborated in part 2.2, both reviewers are under the impression that the programme has generally succeeded in this.

Finally, and related to the above-mentioned points, the particularistic focus of the programme makes it a priority for the programme management to establish direct relations with potential employers. Here, it seems, the programme succeeds as well. The program maintains ties with one of the key potential employer of its graduates, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, as exemplified by the fact that the Educational Program Council is headed by Deputy Foreign Minister S.A. Riabkov. However, more could and should be done in this respect as well, particularly in the form of internships for students.

2.2 Contents and Curriculum

For a general assessment see full accreditation report December 17, 2017

The curriculum of the programme covers a wide range of topics related to international issues the BRICS countries are facing. Moreover, several courses (particularly those taught in the first year) go beyond that and focus on teaching concepts and methods of international studies in general. These are, for example, the courses “Current Issues in Theory of International Relations”, “History and Research Methods of International and Regional Studies”, “Political Economy of Information and Communication Technologies”.

In the experts’ opinion, this wide range is particularly valuable, given the relatively narrow scope of BRICS studies *per se* and the high likelihood that, in their future professional lives, the graduates of the programme would likely need to focus on issues not limited to Russia’s relations with the BRICS group. However, the reviewers want to note that the readings of the courses need to be updated in order to better reflect the international state of the art. This is especially pertinent as far as the general mandatory readings of the course “History and Research Methods” and its session-specific readings for “Topics” 1 to 11 are concerned. The course “Russia and European Integration”, to name another example, would also benefit if additional non-Russian readings would be added since it should be an overarching goal of the programme to provide students with a variety of perspectives on different issues in order to enable them to form independent judgments.

On the other hand, the vast majority of courses seem to be dedicated to general international, rather than country-specific issues. Given the fact that the programme’s self-evaluation report claims that it “prepares highly qualified international specialists in the field of problems of BRICS Countries both as a whole and *by individual member states* [italics added]”, one is left to wonder whether, in the future, the country- and region-specific part of the curriculum should possibly be strengthened.

II Evaluation Report of the Experts

2 Assessment of the Masters Programme "BRICS Studies"

In particular, out of 27 specialized courses (not counting analytical practice, literature colloquia, research seminars, etc.) listed in the course curriculum, only four focus on region-specific issues:

- BRICS in International Relations of the Western Hemisphere
- China in the World and Regional Politics
- Indian Ocean and World Politics in the 21st Century
- Environmental Security in Western Hemisphere

No specific course focuses on Africa (in the curriculum, Africa is mentioned once, but only in the title of the course "Issues in Social and Environmental Development in Asia, Africa and Latin America"). Moreover, the latter three courses are 'electives' for the 3rd semester, which makes one to assume that most students would not pick all of them simultaneously.²

2.3 Teaching Faculty

For a general assessment see full accreditation report December 17, 2017

The School of International Relations has provided the experts with information on its teaching faculty for the "BRICS Studies" programme.

The experts conclude that according to the data provided in the self-evaluation report and the "Statistics on Teaching Staff" file, the teaching faculty are sufficiently qualified and have a wide enough scope of academic interests to cover all the key topics the programme is focusing on.

2.4 Methods of Teaching and Student Assessment

For a general assessment see full accreditation report December 17, 2017

The methods of teaching and student assessment, including final state examination, have been described in the self-report.

The experts regard the methods of teaching and student assessment to be largely identical with those in the other programmes evaluated before. No specific additional comments related to this programme seem necessary.

² Some of the course syllabi provided with the self-report seemingly do not bear direct connection to the issues the BRICS Studies program is focusing on and are not listed in its curriculum ("Energy policy of the European Union", "Lobbying public private interests institutions of EU", "Regional organizations of Europe", "Russia and European integration"). One might assume that these are examples of courses that students of the BRICS Studies programme may take or, at least, attend, but it is not quite clear whether such an extension of the field of study would indeed be efficient (time- and academic load-wise), given the aims and goals of the present programme.

III Appendix

1 University's Response to the Expert Report

III. Appendix

1. University's Response to the Expert Report

[...]