

## What Constitutes a Good Curriculum?

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### Foreword

In its presentation in June 2009, the Teaching Evaluation Work Group emphasized that teaching evaluation, both in scope and content, involves more than the evaluation of individual courses. Four thematic areas of equal importance for teaching evaluation were identified and presented:

- **Courses**
- **Curricula**
- **Infrastructure and organization**
- **Qualification and further training of teachers**

In the first phase, which focused on the first of these thematic areas, the working group elaborated the concept TEACHING – QUALITY – EVALUATION. As a second step, the work group dealt with the thematic area “curricula” and asked itself the question: **“What constitutes a good curriculum?”** As a result of this investigation, a position of the University of Applied Arts can now be presented.

## Introduction: What constitutes a good curriculum?

**The quality of a good curriculum is determined by three components:**

- The crafting of the curriculum
- The curriculum itself
- Practical implementation

These three components are the subject under consideration here. The study will make it possible to identify aspects that are significant in describing the quality of curricula. These key aspects serve as a basis and as orientation in the indispensable process of establishing quality criteria suited to the specific requirements of each study program. These quality criteria can be assessed qualitatively and/or quantitatively and serve as a basis for continuous, periodically redefined, further elaboration. The aspects that are relevant in determining the quality of curricula are outlined in the present position paper and organized under seven thematic headings:

1. **Basic premises**
2. **The crafting of a curriculum**
3. **Goals, content and structure of a curriculum**
4. **Quantifying students' workloads**
5. **Permeability**
6. **Implementation of the curriculum**
7. **Quality assurance and periodical revision**

## 1. Basic premises

### 1.1 What is a curriculum?

A curriculum structures study programs and establishes commitment on the part of teachers and students. Curricula encompass study goals and study content as well as aspects of the learning process and organization of study. From the legal point of view, the curriculum is a decree<sup>1)</sup> and is adopted by the academic senate.

If one wanted a metaphor for the curriculum, a map might be a good one. Maps provide orientation and a general picture, they make it possible to ascertain positions and to set destinations. Paths, roads and means of transportation offer various ways of reaching a given goal – either for the single traveler or for the traveler in the company of others.

1) "Curriculum" means the decree which sets out the qualification profile, contents and structure of a programme, and the examination regulations. (§ 51 para. 2 subpara. 24 Universities Act 2002)

# 1. Basic premises contd.

## 1.2 What do curricula mean for the university?

For the university, the significance of curricula is multilayered, with both internal and external aspects.

Curriculum signifies a continuous evolution of the respective study programs, a process that can be divided into three phases:

- **The crafting of the curriculum**
- **Implementation**
- **Quality assurance and periodical revision**

The successful organization of all three phases requires general coordination, adequate decision-making structures and specific responsibilities.

There is an increasing public interest in curricula. As a result, they have become a very visible indication of the quality of the course range offered by a university and of the university's general profile.

## 1.3 Gender and diversity mainstreaming

"Gender mainstreaming" refers to the awareness of the category of gender on the part of all persons involved in the decision-making and implementation process, as well as its inclusion in the process as a fundamental factor at all levels, in all parts of the organization and in all programs and activities, with the goal of achieving gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is a cross-section notion and should not be viewed as an additive but rather as an integral component of all processes involved in the development and implementation of curricula.

Universities are important places of socialization. For that reason, gender mainstreaming acquires particular significance in the university context.

Curricula must also be seen from the point of view of diversity. Social diversity is an asset, and curricula should do their part in making this diversity fruitful.

# 2. The crafting of a curriculum

## 2.1 Starting point

At the University of Applied Arts Vienna, there are three ways in which curriculum proposals are drawn up and submitted to the academic senate for approval:

### a) By curriculum committees<sup>2)</sup>

Existing study programs are further elaborated by curriculum committees.

### b) Without curriculum committees

When new study programs are established (bachelor program in Creative Writing, master program in Art & Science, bachelor and master program in TransArts), curricula are first approved by the academic senate which then establishes curriculum committees for further elaboration.

### c) By the heads of postgraduate programs

In the case of postgraduate programs (Art & Economy, ecm – educating/curating/managing, Urban Strategies), the curricula are drawn up by the heads of the respective programs.

## 2.2 What kinds of competence or whose points of view are necessary?

In putting together a work group or curriculum committee, one has to ask what qualifications, knowledge and experience are required in order for the group to operate professionally.

The kinds of competence required for selection are, accordingly:

- **Competence in the field**
- **Didactic competence**
- **Well-grounded knowledge of the organizational and legal framework<sup>3)</sup>**
- **Knowing how to form a team, team leadership and moderation**
- **Gender competence**
- **The ability to put a curriculum into written form suitable for dissemination**

The capability for organizational interfacing is also a requisite. In addition, an overall view of the courses offered by the university is needed so that the individual curriculum can be coherently embedded in the general context of studies.

In addition to the points of view of teachers and students represented in the curriculum committee, other points of view should be solicited as well, those of graduates and external experts, for example. The findings of research on curricula should also be taken into account.

Curriculum committees should regard their work as a process of organizational development.

Aside from the "technical requirements", a personal commitment on the part of all team members, a sense of joy in cooperating as partners in a productive process, the readiness to work in a team and a great measure of willingness to interact with people are also essential.

<sup>2)</sup> Curriculum committees are established according to the Statutes of the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Part I: Organisationsrecht, § 7.

<sup>3)</sup> These are set out in the Universities Act 2002 and in the Statutes of the University of Applied Arts.

## 3. The goals, content and structure of a curriculum

### 3.1 Goals and qualifications profile<sup>4)</sup>

**First**, the study goals and the qualifications students seek to acquire must be defined. As a second step, the course of study must be structured.

Goals and qualifications must be formulated in **explicit, concrete** terms. In the case of multiple goals, these should be prioritized.

Commonly accepted notions and what **appears to be obvious** should be questioned. For example:

- How much basic knowledge can one expect students to possess, or what artistic abilities? How can these be measured or conveyed, if necessary?
- What are the implications of the requirement that the curriculum should be interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary?
- What exactly is the goal of the “main artistic subject”?
- Within what framework are skills and knowledge such as fundamentals of economics, presentation techniques, notions of marketing, etc., to be transmitted?
- What are the **non-goals** of the curriculum?

**Students** must also have the possibility of **setting goals and priorities themselves**.

Professional qualifications and relevant core competencies must be specifically set out in each study program. This requires consideration to be given in each case to the breadth of the respective spectrum of professional fields<sup>5)</sup> as well as to the rapid pace of change.

Orientation in determining the professional qualifications and core competencies required in each field is provided by studies carried out in the relevant professional fields, by external experts who share their practical professional experience, by representatives of professional organizations and by graduates from the university. In some cases there are also legal provisions (in the case of teacher training, for example) or guidelines issued by national or international professional organizations (as for the study program “Conservation and Restoration”<sup>6)</sup>).

Furthermore, goals must be examined in order to ascertain whether they affect women and men differently and whether they reproduce gender-specific inequalities.

### 3.2 Content and structure of the study program

The meaningfulness of the program structure must be evident and the structure itself must follow the inner logic necessary for the achievement of the goals and qualifications that have been specified. The structure of study must offer **options** to the students.

In training in the arts (in the “main artistic subject”, for example), students should be able to choose between differing artistic points of view represented by different instructors. In bachelor and master programs, the curricula can foresee the possibility of “internships and traineeships in art-relevant institutions, such as artists’ studios, art galleries, museums and other cultural institutions, as an integral part of study and for which academic credit can be obtained.”<sup>7)</sup> In order to ensure that advantage is taken of this possibility of acquiring **learning experience outside the university**, such a possibility should be made explicit in the curricula of the study programs.

The structure of study must make room for **debate on topical issues** in each respective artistic field. If the profile of an artistic course of study includes the premise that the practice of the art is also rooted in and supported by the sciences and humanities, then this profile should require – for its implementation at the teaching level – **systematization in the transmission of knowledge in the sciences and humanities**.

Courses initiating students to scholarly treatment of topics are indispensable.<sup>8)</sup> The curriculum must set out in specific terms provisions concerning the **preparation of students for the written part of their theses and for faculty supervision throughout this process**.<sup>9)</sup>

In the case of students who have opted for a written scholarly thesis, the curriculum must lay out the provisions relating to the preparation of students and to faculty supervision throughout the process.<sup>10)</sup> The curriculum is to provide specifications relating to the topics chosen for the diploma thesis, the master’s thesis<sup>11)</sup> and the doctoral dissertation.<sup>12)</sup> The course range in the sciences and humanities must be designed in such a way that they prepare students sufficiently for a program of doctoral studies, should they choose that option.

### 3.3 Examination regulations<sup>13)</sup>

Examination regulations are amply defined in the Statutes of the University of Applied Arts Vienna. These regulations vary according to whether they apply to diploma programs or to bachelor and master programs<sup>14)</sup> A listing of the various types of examinations is also found in the Statutes<sup>15)</sup>. Modalities for examinations before an examination committee are also set out in the Statutes<sup>16)</sup>, although it must be added that the applicability of these regulations is limited in the case of admission examinations. The examination regulations must also include detailed provisions concerning the prerequisites for and the conduct of admission examinations.<sup>17)</sup>

### Admission examination and gender:

“Gender inequality is a problem that concerns everyone in society. Candidates for admission to university, in deciding what they want to study, subconsciously allow themselves to be influenced by socially determined, gender-specific notions about what their interests and roles should be. The University of Applied Arts has no sway over such behavior. It can, however, prevent gender from becoming a discriminating factor in the application and admissions process.”<sup>18)</sup>

4) “A qualification profile is that part of the curriculum that describes which scientific and professional qualifications the students acquire in the course of the degree programme.” (§ 51 para. 2 subpara 24 Universities Act 2002).

5) For example: Harald Schomburg, et al., *Arbeitsituation von Universitäts- und FachhochschulabsolventInnen*, a study commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, 2010  
[http://www.bmwf.gv.at/nc/startseite/mini\\_menu/service/publikationen/wissenschaft/universitaetswesen/arbeitsituation\\_von\\_universitaets\\_und\\_fachhochschulabsolventinnen/?sword\\_list\[0\]=arbeitsituation](http://www.bmwf.gv.at/nc/startseite/mini_menu/service/publikationen/wissenschaft/universitaetswesen/arbeitsituation_von_universitaets_und_fachhochschulabsolventinnen/?sword_list[0]=arbeitsituation)

6) ECCO (European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education): Basic Requirements for Education in Conservation-Restoration  
<http://www.en-core-edu.org/ecco3.html?tabindex=1&tabid=172>

7) See Statutes, Part II: Studienrecht, § 12 para. 8.

8) In this respect, see § 51 para. 2 subpara. 9 Universities Act 2002: “Artistic diploma and master degree submissions” mean works of art which serve

to demonstrate students’ ability to work independently towards the goal of their study, and to perform artistic work on a sound academic basis.”

9) “Artistic diploma or master’s submissions shall include a written component as well as the artistic component that represents the main focus of the work. This shall comment on the artistic component. Detailed regulations for the supervision and assessment of artistic diploma and master’s submissions shall be established by the statute, and those governing the themes by the respective curricula.” (§ 83 para. 2 Universities Act 2002).

10) “Artistic diploma or master’s submissions shall be completed as part of art study programmes. Students shall be entitled to prepare a diploma or master’s thesis on an academic subject specified by the curriculum instead of submitting works of art.” (§ 83 para. 1 Universities Act 2002).

11) See footnote 9.

12) “The preparation of a doctoral thesis shall form part of doctoral degree programmes. Detailed regulations for the supervision and assessment of doctoral

theses shall be established by the statute, and those governing the topics by the respective curricula.” (§ 82 para. 1 Universities Act 2002).

13) “Examination regulations” mean that part of the curriculum which sets out the nature and method of the examinations, and detailed provisions governing examination procedures.” (§ 51 para. 2 subpara. 25 Universities Act 2002)

14) Statutes, Part I: Studienrecht, § 8 and § 12 para. 9 and 10.

15) Statutes, Part II: Studienrecht, § 8.

16) Statutes, Part II: Studienrecht, § 9.

17) “The curricula for programs of study in the arts must specify the modalities of admission examinations ascertaining artistic ability.” (§ 76 para. 4 Universities Act 2002).

18) University of Applied Arts Vienna (Veronika Schwediauer): *Jahresbericht 2010 laut Frauenförderungsplan*, Vienna, 2011.

## 4. Quantifying students' workloads

### 4.1 ECTS-credits

The standard for measuring students' workloads is the ECTS credit point: 1 ECTS credit point corresponds to 25 hours of study. For one semester, 30 ECTS credit points are awarded, corresponding to 750 hours of study.<sup>19)</sup> This workload can be regarded as equaling full-time employment. For bachelor and master studies, an ECTS credit minimum is established by law.<sup>20)</sup>

ECTS-credit requirements for bachelor and master programs and for diploma degree programs are to be specified in the curriculum.<sup>21)</sup> ECTS points awarded are also to be indicated in grade reports,<sup>22)</sup> which must be shown for accreditation of exams.<sup>23)</sup>

When compared with the provisions of the Universities Act 2002, those set out in the Statutes of the University of Applied Arts Vienna seem questionable. In the Statutes, one reads: "Course workload is to be indicated **either** in semester hours **or** in ECTS credit points."<sup>24)</sup> "Semester hours" is a quantifying notion applicable to teachers' workloads, which are not the same as those of students.

The Statutes, in their provisions relating to course credit, differentiate between diploma degree studies and bachelor and master studies. In the special curriculum model, one reads: "Indication of workload: The workloads corresponding to the courses listed in this curriculum model are to be indicated **only** in ECTS credit points, which specify the workload for the completed course of study in each case."<sup>25)</sup>

### 4.2 Estimating Students' Workloads

In the curriculum, a specific ECTS credit-point workload is assigned to each of the subjects of each study program, or, inversely formulated: the total amount of study time – 30 ECTS points per semester – is divided up among the various subjects. Careful, concerted thought should be given to how this can be done so that the students' effective workload is determined as coherently as possible. This is, of course, a matter of estimation, but the estimations should be kept realistic.

There must be a realistic relation between goals and desired qualifications on the one hand, and the duration of study on the other.

In accordance with the Statutes, a workload corresponding to the last semester of studies is to be foreseen for the diploma degree thesis and the master thesis.<sup>26)</sup>

Students should have the possibility of structuring 30 ECTS of their workload themselves with study offers from outside the university, national and international.

Students must be able to organize their time in such a way that they can devote as much of it as reasonably possible to work on projects.

Students must have time enough to test themselves and to discover and explore their own interests and strengths.

The needs of students who work must be taken into account.<sup>27)</sup> Time has to be allowed for weaknesses and dramas!

## 5. Permeability

### 5.1 National, international and intramural

The need for national mobility must be kept in view.

Every curriculum should encourage international mobility. In the case of bachelor and master studies, ensuring this mobility is a formal obligation.<sup>28)</sup> Administrative mechanisms for awarding credit must be kept in mind so that study abroad does not lead to prolonged study.

Students should be free to structure a total of 30 ECTS themselves – that is, the workload of one semester – and thus be able to complete a semester of extramural study, nationally or internationally, without prejudice to their regular program of study.

There must also be internal mobility, particularly in the case of study programs where there are a number of persons to choose from for artistic guidance in study.

### 5.2 Permeability for interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary projects

The precondition for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary projects is a correspondent permeability of the curricula. Time flexibility and flexibility in determining subject content are essential factors of permeability.

19) The extent of degree programmes, with the exception of doctoral degree programmes, shall be defined in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS, Decision No. 253/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Official Journal No. L 28, February 3, 2000) and shall be expressed in ECTS credits. With these credits the share of the workload of the students related to the individual studies shall be determined in relation to the entire degree programme, with an amount of 1,500 hours for one year of studies and 60 credits being assigned to this workload. (§ 51 para. 2 subpara. 26 Universities Act 2002).

20) "The workload associated with bachelor degree programmes shall amount to 180 ECTS credits, and that associated with master degree programmes to at least 120 ECTS credits. The workload associated with a bachelor's degree programme

may, in exceptional cases, amount to up to 240 ECTS credits, if this is vital for guaranteeing employability and if the duration of the studies is comparable to that in other countries. [...] § 54 para. 3 Universities Act 2002.

21) See § 51 para. 26 Universities Act 2002

22) See § 75 para. 1 and 6 Universities Act 2002

23) See § 78 para. 1 Universities Act 2002.

24) Statutes, Part II: Studienrecht, § 5 para. 11, emphasis Mann/Reiffberger

25) Statutes, Part II: Studienrecht, § 12 para. 16.

26) Statutes, Part II: Studienrecht, § 6 para. 4.

27) In this respect, see § 13, para. 2 subpara. 1 lit f Universities Act 2002: "Offerings for working students: This includes the creation of part-time study programmes, which should also include blended learning."

28) "[...] In addition, the curricula of bachelor's degree programmes shall be designed in way that studies abroad are possible for students without losing time in their studies." (§ 54 para. 3a Universities Act 2002). "The curricula of bachelor's and master's degree programmes shall be designed in a way that studies abroad are possible." (§ 54 para. 11 Universities Act 2002).

## 6. Implementation of the curriculum

### 6.1 From the curriculum to a concrete study program

Ideally, once the curriculum has been approved,<sup>29)</sup> the following decision-making bodies should work together to draw up the concrete program of study/course catalog:

- Rectorate
- Academic senate
- Study Committee
- University institutes

Prerequisites for successful and goal-oriented cooperation are:

- Clear responsibility for overall coordination
- Clear definition of interfaces
- Project-oriented management
- A clear distribution of tasks
- Binding time schedules
- Structured communication

All the work should be planned, transparent and coordinated.

Ideally, all the university's study programs should be **concertedly** coordinated and harmonized.

### 6.2 Communicating the curriculum

Certain conditions are required in order for the curriculum to be communicated to the students comprehensibly and effectively:

- It must be formulated with targeted groups in mind
- Graphic visualization
- Bilingualism (according to the groups targeted)
- Gender-sensitive language
- The wording used in the curriculum must be congruent with that used in the course catalog. This means that the titles of courses offered must be so worded that the students can locate the corresponding subjects in the curriculum.

## 7. Quality assurance and periodical revision

The notion "curriculum as a process" is to be understood as meaning that the university reviews the curricula systematically and at regular intervals in order to ascertain whether they (continue to) satisfy quality criteria or whether changes have to be made.

This process of review concerns not only the curricula themselves, but also the procedures and framework conditions required for their creation and implementation.

### 7.1 Quality assurance and periodical revision of the curriculum itself

In establishing quality criteria for the individual programs of study, it is necessary to establish indicators. In doing this, it is helpful to ask questions such as:

- How can one tell whether... ?
- What allows one to judge whether... ?
- How can one ascertain that... ?

For example:

- How can one tell whether there is international permeability?
- What allows one to judge whether the courses in academic subjects prepare students sufficiently for a program of doctoral studies?
- How can one ascertain what conditions are helpful to working students?

With the aid of such indicators it is possible to verify whether the criteria are being satisfied.

Points of view of students and graduates should be solicited in the evaluation process; focused, qualitative interviews are a recommended method. The comprehensibility and clarity of study programs should also be subject to verification by means of student feedback. It is useful to welcome feedback from external persons and to compare the curricula with those of other universities.

## 7. Quality assurance and periodical revision contd.

### 7.2 Quality assurance and periodical revision of procedures and framework conditions

The provisions of the Statutes should be periodically reviewed in order to ascertain whether they are (still) relevant, comprehensible and consistent, and the findings should be communicated to the academic senate.

A system for providing information and advice in concise form to the studies committees should be put in place as a support to the committees' work and as a contribution to their professionalization.

Efforts must be made to cultivate gender competence on the part of all persons involved in the process.

In order to sustain an effective implementation process, peer-review procedures are recommended.

The category of gender is to be taken into account during all phases of the work; clear rules and transparency are a central requirement for all institutional bodies involved in the process. "It has been proven that clear rules and transparency reduce the probability of (unconscious) discrimination."<sup>30)</sup>

Sharing experience with other universities should be systematically encouraged at all levels of the decision-making process.

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