

Translation and Interpreting Studies at the University of Vienna – Today and Tomorrow

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1. The Old Curriculum

The present (2002) training program for translators and interpreters at the Department of Translation and Interpretation of the University of Vienna is based on the General University Studies Act¹ of July 15, 1966, including the subsequent amendments and on the Ministerial Study Regulation of October 1972.²

It provides for a 4-year study program in three languages including mother tongue, a first foreign language and a second foreign language. Students with a mother tongue other than German have to take German as their first foreign language.

The languages are:

German, Czech, English, French, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portugese, Rumanian, Russian, Serbocroatian, Spanish.

The program is divided into two cycles of studies. The first 2 years of the program are the same for all the students and are terminated by what we call the first diploma examination. The first diploma examination consists of 5 written and four oral examinations.

After the students have successfully passed the first diploma examination they can start on the second part of the program which consist of another 2 years of

¹ *Allgemeines Hochschulstudengesetz - AHStG, BGBl. 1966, Nr. 177.*

² *Verordnung des Bundesministeriums für Wissenschaft und Forschung vom 3. Oktober 1972 über die Studienordnung für die Studienrichtung Übersetzer- und Dolmetscherausbildung.*

studies. Here the students have to choose between a specialization in translation or in interpretation.

The second cycle of studies is terminated by the so-called second diploma examination which consists of 6 written and 5 oral examinations for translators and of 7 written and 8 oral examinations for interpreters.

In addition to the above diploma examinations the students have to write a diploma thesis and have to pass an oral examination where they have to defend their thesis and are also examined on a topic from translation and interpretation sciences.

After the successful completion of all of these examinations the academic degree „Mag.phil.“ is awarded.

Students then usually start a professional career in business, in the local, provincial or federal administration or they work for international organisations or on a free lance basis.

Those who want to pursue a career in the academic field can enrol in a Ph.D. program in the science of translation or interpretation.

At present the Department of Translation and Interpretation of the University of Vienna has a teaching staff of approximately 130 part-time and full-time teachers and a student population of about 2500 students.

On October 1, 1997 a new University Studies Act³ entered into force, extending our study program from a 4-year program to a 5-year program.

2. The New Curriculum

In March 2001 the Department of Translation and Interpretation of the University of Vienna adopted a new curriculum providing for a B.A./M.A. program (final version of April 22, 2002⁴) for the training of translators and interpreters.

³ *Bundesgesetz über die Studien an den Universitäten (Universitäts-Studiengesetz UniStG), BGBl. 1997, Nr. 48.*

⁴ *Studienplan für die Studienrichtung Übersetzen und Dolmetschen an der Universität Wien - Bakkalaureats-/Magisterstudien, 22. April 2002.*

The decision was based on the Bolona Declaration of the European Union and the realization that our modern age of communication has fundamentally changed the professional profiles for future translators and interpreters.

The Bolgna Declaration of 1999 provides among others for:

The adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require the successful completion of the first cycle of studies lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree.

This prompted us at the University of Vienna to devise a curriculum for a 3-year B.A. training program concentrating on language perfection in the three obligatory languages and in intercultural communication.

After the B.A. program we offer a 2-year M.A. program where the students can choose between four different fields of specialization:

1. Written and oral translation
2. Translation-oriented terminology (specialized translation)
3. Conference interpreting
4. Media and literary translation.

3. General Entrance Requirements

The secondary school leaving examination gives access to university studies. We do not have any other entrance requirements, we do not have a *numerus clausus*.

All students who want to study at our Department have to choose two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue (the legal provisions are more or less the same as under the old curriculum). All students have to have an adequate level of language competence both in the first and the second foreign language and should, of course, also have an excellent command of their mother tongue before embarking on our B.A. program.

We do not offer any courses for beginners or language courses on an intermediate or advanced level. We are not a language school where you can learn the language. We train translators and interpreters.

4. The B.A. Curriculum

Professional Profile

The graduates of the B.A. program are experts in the field of international communication. They receive a general introduction into scientific working methods and acquire a high level of language competence and a profound knowledge of the culture and civilization of the countries where their first and second languages are spoken. In addition they acquire a basic competence in written and oral translation.

The first year of the B.A. program offers a series of introductory courses into law, economics, translation oriented linguistics, intercultural communication, culture and civilization of the countries where the first and the second foreign languages are spoken and courses concentrating on the perfection of language competence (advanced grammar courses, idiomatics, stylistics etc.) All the courses are obligatory.

In order to complete the first year, students have to successfully pass semester examinations (written and oral examinations) in courses amounting to a total of 36 hours. Most of our courses are 2-hour units per week per semester. In other words, they have to „collect“ 18 certificates before they can continue with the courses in the main section of the B.A. studies.

After the completion of the first year the B.A. program continues with a 2-year curriculum with courses amounting to a total of 56 hours. The program offers introductory courses into the science of translation, interpretation and terminology and specialized translation, courses enhancing the level of language competence such as text analysis and text production, translation oriented idiomatics and stylistics, culture and civilization, methodology of translation and courses providing for a basic competence in written and oral translation.

During the B.A. program students have to spend at least 4 months abroad, in a country where their first or second foreign language is spoken. We do

recommend, however, that students perfect their language competence in both languages by spending some time abroad.

In addition to the obligatory semester examinations in various courses, the students have to take some written and oral comprehensive examinations at the end of the third year. After they have successfully passed all the required examinations the students will be awarded a B.A. in International Communication.

5. The M.A. Program

As stated above we offer M.A. programs in four different fields of specialization.

1. Written and Oral Translation

This program offers a training for the vast spectrum of general as well as more specialized translation tasks in industry, business, and the local, provincial and federal administration such as courses in business negotiations, precis writing, community interpreting, court interpreting etc.

2. Translation-oriented Terminology and Specialized Translation

This training program provides for a high degree of specialization in various fields such as medicine, technology, law, economy etc. It includes courses in machine-assisted translation, the work with data banks, courses in new translation strategies using all means of modern communication.

3. Conference Interpreting

A classical training program concentrating on courses in simultaneous and consecutive interpretation although courses in written translation are of course also included in the training program.

4. Media and Literary Translation

This training program will offer courses specializing in the translation of literary texts as well as multi-media translation for example film synchronization, subtitling, translation of opera libretti etc.

All the M.A. programs are based on a modular structure and comprise a total of 42 hours each. Every module consists of three 2-hour courses per week per semester.

The 42 hours are subdivided as follows:

- ✓ One module on scientific and theoretical approaches and methodology of the particular M.A. program. (6 hours)
- ✓ Three obligatory modules that are a specific requirement for the particular M.A. program. (18 hours)
- ✓ Three optional modules that fit into the M.A. program and that the students can choose freely. (18 hours)

In the course of their study program the students also have to choose a field of specialization such as political science, law, economics, psychology etc. where they have to take examinations in courses amounting to a minimum of 16 hours. These courses should preferably be taken both at the B.A. and at the M.A. level, i.e. a minimum of 8 hours at the B.A. and a minimum of 8 hours at the M.A. level.

During their M.A. studies students have to take a number of semester examinations and at the end of the M.A. program they have to pass a number of final comprehensive written and oral examinations. The details of these examinations, however, have not been worked out so far. The M.A. degree furthermore requires an M.A. thesis which students have to defend in a final oral examination consisting of two parts:

1. a defensio of the M.A. thesis
2. an oral examination in their field of specialization e.g. in the science of translation or interpretation etc.

After the successful completion of all the above mentioned examinations the academic degree M.A. will be awarded.

I assume that the majority of the students will terminate their studies at this point and start their professional career.

If they want to embark on an academic career then they will have to continue their studies and acquire a Ph.D. in translation or interpretation or translation-oriented terminology.

At present this curriculum is being scrutinized by the legal experts of the Ministry which means that the Ministry may force us to make some changes. With or without changes, this curriculum will enter into force on October 1, 2003.

3 Summary: Problems and open questions

1. It is the aim of the Bologna Declaration to harmonize university training programs at the European level. This will not be easy, because different universities operate already with different B.A.-M.A. programs (e.g. 4-year B.A. and a 1-year M.A. program) This will cause problems concerning the mutual recognition of academic training programs and academic degrees.
2. What is the „value“ of the B.A.? How does it fit into our system of academic degrees? Will most students terminate their studies at that level? How many students will actually continue with an M.A. program?
3. The Department of Translation and Interpretation of the University of Vienna wants to avoid at all costs that the B.A. becomes an academic degree for a „translator light“ This is why we do not include the word „translation“ in our B.A. degree, and chose the title B.A. in International Communication. However, this will be difficult to implement at the European level, because there are already a few B.A. programs in operation that award a B.A. in translation. A very unfortunate development in our opinion.
4. Nobody knows how the business world or public institutions and international organisations will react to the B.A. or the M.A. What do they expect from a B.A. graduate/ an M.A. graduate? How will they integrate these graduates into their company, institution? At what level? How much is a B.A. or an M.A. worth in terms of prestige, money, position? We have asked these questions again and again, but we have not received any answers so far.
5. Who is going to pay for all these new curricula? Politicians at various levels are very eager to introduce B.A. and M.A. programs at the university level, but they are not as keen and eager to provide the necessary funds for such reforms. In some cases they outright refuse to

grant extra financial resources, the reforms should not cost anything at all. But these reforms **do** cost extra money if they are to be successful. Hopefully politicians will, sooner or later, also arrive at this conclusion.