

Europe May Be Hurting, but E.U. Studies Is Going Strong

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Headquarters of the European Commission, in Brussels

Fabrizio Capogrosso's choice to pursue the European-studies M.A. at the European University Viadrina in 2008 took him far afield from his home in the Mezzogiorno. Viadrina is on the German side of the picturesque Oder River, which marks the German-Polish border. The university prides itself on its European orientation and strong links to the E.U.'s newest members in Central Europe.

Capogrosso, now 31 and a staff member in the European Parliament, says that Viadrina's broad-based, cultural approach to European studies is why he opted for the program, and that this has served him well in Brussels. "In the Parliament in particular," with colleagues from 27 countries, he says, "you have to understand where they're coming from when you're working together on legislation." The Viadrina degree helped, he says, first in landing him an internship in the prestigious

European Commission, the E.U.'s executive branch, and then in getting the Parliament job.

Viadrina is one of 43 German universities that offers a European-studies degree, and among roughly 300 that do so across Europe. These programs specialize in study of the European Union, a young but booming field here in Europe and beyond, including in the United States. The courses examine developments in the E.U. community and span disciplines, including political science, law, sociology, and cultural studies. In Europe the field has gradually gained acceptance as a discipline in its own right, with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The programs are enormously popular among students.

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At Viadrina, for example, the number of students in the M.A. program shot up from 50 in 2003 to more than 400 today. In the one-year program at Maastricht University, in the Netherlands, applications grew from 95 in 2005 to 346 in 2011. Maastricht offers several European master's degrees in politics, public administration, and Europe from a global perspective. Maastricht's undergraduate European-studies program enrolls nearly 400 new students a year.

Yet questions about E.U. studies' purpose, academic rigor, and critical assumptions remain. The European Union itself provides substantial support, grants, and scholarships for these programs. The rapid growth of these departments has made evaluation of their quality complicated. Are they essentially incubators of Eurocentric technocrats, or do they produce graduates with skills valuable beyond the corridors of Brussels?

Viadrina's European-studies M.A., which began in 2000, now has more students than any of the university's other programs. It is international, and polyglot. The program boasts the highest proportion of foreign students in Germany, most from Poland and Eastern Europe. Both traditional professors and experienced practitioners, like a former E.U. commissioner, teach courses in governance, European economic policy and law, and E.U. integration theory, in five languages: Polish, German, English, French, and Spanish. An internship is required during the two-year course of study.

Viadrina's president, Gunter Pleuger, a retired senior German diplomat, understands the university's role as promoting the E.U.'s vision of an integrated continent above the fray of competing nationalisms. He sees Viadrina as a training ground for European and national public service, an orientation that he has stressed since he became president in October 2008.

"The master's degree in European studies serves to teach the students all the things that are necessary for service in the institutions of the European Union," says Pleuger. Whether it be in E.U. capitals of Brussels or Strasbourg, in other international bodies like the United Nations or NATO, or in national capitals from Moscow to Paris, a thorough understanding of European integration is indispensable, he emphasizes.

The possibility of an E.U.-studies degree leading to a plum job is one distinct allure for students. "Brussels functions a lot like Washington as a kind of place that is all about politics, and there is a big market for people who have knowledge of the E.U. system," explains Alex Warleigh-Lack, an E.U.-politics professor at southeastern England's University of Surrey.

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Asked whether the prospect of a job affected her peers' choice to study for the European-studies M.A. at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Milena Oschmann, a 27-year-old working in the German Parliament, exclaimed with a big grin, "Oh, yeah!" Among her classmates, it was rumored that the European Commission took 15 or so graduates from the LSE program every year, and roughly the same number from the other top-flight E.U. programs, like [the College of Europe, in Bruges, Belgium, and Natolin, Poland](#), as well as Maastricht. The commission denies there is a structured preference. But these institutions have impressive track records in placing their graduates in the hubs of power.

The reputations of these heavyweights for opening doors is one reason for their popularity. The [College of Europe](#), founded in 1949, is the oldest E.U. course, and receives annual financing from the commission, as does its newer sister campus, in Poland. Its graduates often get choice positions (or, for students, choice internships) in E.U. institutions. The college was created to train recruits for the European public service, and even though many of its graduates find jobs elsewhere, it is considered one of the most professionally oriented of the E.U.-studies programs.

Like the Bruges program, Maastricht and the University of Strasbourg benefit immensely from their geography. The city of Maastricht, at the junction of Europe's Dutch, German, and French language zones, is closer to Luxembourg and Brussels than it is to the Netherlands' capital, The Hague. Maastricht University even has a branch campus in Brussels. Strasbourg, in Alsace-Lorraine, is home, along with Brussels, to the European Parliament, as well as the Council of Europe and some 20 other European institutions or organizations of international cooperation.

The London School of Economics' European Institute has worldwide prestige in the social sciences and boasts some of the biggest names in the field. Moreover, the LSE alumni network is formidable, something graduates know they can tap into. The LSE also has a top-notch lecture series that brings foreign statesmen and E.U. movers and shakers to London. The gigs offer students an opportunity to schmooze with potential employers, and they put the LSE squarely in these officials' sights.

The relatively new European University Viadrina is not yet on this level, but its president, Pleuger, has every intention to boost its profile, not least by placing its best and brightest in E.U. agencies. For example, he has organized a tutorial in the German Foreign Office to help graduates score well on the *concours*, the E.U.'s notoriously tough entrance exam.

The tension between E.U. studies as basic training for civil servants, on the one hand, and a solidly academic, liberal-arts discipline, on the other, or the attempt to balance the two, is a prickly topic within these universities.

At Viadrina, the head of the European-studies master's program, a mild-mannered German political scientist named Timm Beichelt, doesn't see the program through the same prism as the university's president. "I would insist that it's an academic program," says Beichelt. "It's the task of faculty and students to increase knowledge about European integration, not to get them jobs." Many of the M.A. graduates, Beichelt notes, elect to work for NGO's, think tanks, foundations, consulting firms, the private sector, or to go further in academe.

"Those students who come to us thinking we're going to train them to be technocrats or lobbyists," explains Spyros Economides, an economist at the London School of Economics, "are disabused of this pretty quickly by the nature of the courses they're taking."

There are few in the field of European studies who can afford to say no to E.U. funding.

He points out that the European Commission's hiring policies are highly politicized, and that its national quota system strictly limits its annual job openings for graduates. "We give them the right kind of intellectual tools to choose the path they wish to follow," he says. European studies "should be a combination of getting an education in the broader sense, being challenged intellectually, and also getting a diploma, a piece of paper that can open doors for you."

Nor is a suit-and-tie job the only reason students are drawn to European studies. The European Union, Economides says, is "a living laboratory" where a whole new model of supranational governance is taking shape.

The roots of E.U. studies are diverse and reach back to the founding of the College of Europe, when the European Community's original treaties were signed, in the 1950s. In 1976 the European Commission-financed European University Institute, in Florence, Italy, was created, and five years later the European Institute of Public Administration, in Maastricht. The field began to grow as the E.U. itself grew—from the six founding members to 12 in 1986 and then to 25 in 2004. New treaties expanded the role and importance of the Union into nearly every field of public policy. The E.U. today has 27 members and a free-trade zone that encompasses 500 million people, the biggest single market in the world. The common currency, the euro, and the continuing financial crisis are striking evidence of the union's salience for all of its members and the rest of the world.

Initially, courses that included a module or some readings on the E.U. were most likely to be found in political-science or international-relations classes. Yet traditional comparative politics emphasized the nation-state as the primary political actor. Moreover, many of the facets of the E.U. integration processes extended beyond political science and international relations, into fields like economics, law, history, area studies, and sociology. The first European-studies courses were simply a bundling of existing courses that dealt in some way with contemporary Europe.

From country to country, E.U. studies emerged differently. The strengths of the programs today often reflect their origins. In France, most of the programs have their roots in legal studies, a response in the 1990s to the growing body of E.U. law. In Denmark, Aarhus University's E.U.-studies master's program is in the department of culture and society, where students explore European interaction through a wide-angle lens that includes classes in arts, customs, and history. The University of Copenhagen is known for its competence in politics and economics, where its European-studies program emerged.

In Germany at the end of the 1980s, the lack of qualified public servants to represent the country in Brussels, as well as in other multilateral institutions, was undermining German clout. "The French and the Brits had 50 to 60 percent of the positions in Brussels," says Pleuger, who was in the German foreign service at the time. The German Foreign Office, then in the cold-war capital of Bonn, took it upon itself to finance the first E.U.-studies courses in Bonn and the North Sea port city of Bremen.

Moreover, the E.U.-led Bologna Process of reorganizing European academe along lines more similar to the American system required that German universities and degrees become more interdisciplinary. "It was a solution made in heaven," says the German political scientist Beichelt. "More civil servants, more interdisciplinary research, more students. So why not call it European studies?"

E.U. studies became a lifesaver for flagging fields that had trouble finding jobs for their graduates. At Aarhus, European studies helped save the arts and foreign-

languages departments. "We had to be inventive and come up with new degrees to increase enrollment," explains Knud Erik Jorgensen, an international-relations professor there. "Students liked it, and it grew and grew."

There is often a regional wrinkle to these programs, particularly those situated in borderlands. Viadrina boasts an affinity to Central Europe; its Collegium Polonicum is a research institute on the Polish side of the Oder River. Students can even earn a "double master," from the Viadrina and the Adam Mickiewicz University, in Poznan, Poland, or the Bilgi University, in Istanbul. Likewise, Germany's University of Flensburg and the University of Southern Denmark, which lie across the Danish-German border from each other, are developing a joint European-studies program that will feature border-region issues.

Interestingly, in Denmark, as elsewhere, the fate of E.U. studies has been closely tied to the fortunes of the European Union itself. The number of applicants to the country's five E.U. programs peaked in the early 2000s with the creation of the euro zone and the entrance of the Central Europeans.

E.U.-studies programs have been established beyond Europe, too, from the University of Miami to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in Beijing. There are 10 European Union-sponsored "centers of excellence" in the United States: on campuses in Seattle; Chapel Hill, N.C.; Boulder, Colo.; and elsewhere. Their purpose, according to E.U. officials, is to "promote the study of the E.U., its institutions and policies, and E.U.-U.S. relations."

Some of the earliest research on European integration was conducted by American scholars at Stanford and Harvard. One of the first E.U.-studies initiatives was the Chicago-based Institute of European Studies program in Freiburg, Germany, which, since 1981, has been teaching American undergraduates taking their junior year abroad about the E.U.

According to John T.S. Keeler, dean of the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and its leading specialist on the E.U., the reasons that American and other non-European students participate in European-studies programs—whether in the United States, Europe, or elsewhere—are somewhat different than those of their European counterparts. There is no chance, for example, of a non-E.U. national's landing a commission post. But, says Keeler, there are jobs in the State Department and elsewhere that require a sound knowledge of the E.U. "An American student is less likely to engage in a fine-grained study of, say, E.U. regulations or law," he says.

Although E.U. studies has matured and taken shape as a discipline, particularly over the past 10 years, questions linger. One is whether the field is sufficiently independent from, and critical of, the object of its investigation. The academics and practitioners on the faculties of these departments are almost always convinced Europeanists. They believe in the E.U.'s mission to bind together a democratic Europe through ever-closer integration. Most students, too, are committed to that mission.

Of course, some members of E.U.-studies faculties are critical of certain policies, say the E.U.'s harsh border regime or its somewhat centralized decision making. but they stop short of questioning the E.U.'s basic reasons for being.

"In West Germany, during the 1950s and 60s," explains Viadrina's Beichelt, "the purpose of political science was to teach the postwar Germans democracy. This was necessary at the time, in a country with very undemocratic traditions." Only in the late 1960s and early 1970s did German political science become critical of the state and the kind of democracy that had emerged, Beichelt explains. "It's a lot like the early phase in Germany now in the E.U. with European studies."

The Romanian sociologist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi refers to the "European identity industry." Less sanguine observers compare the imposition of E.U. ideology to the role that Marxism-Leninism played in Eastern Europe during the cold war.

The European Union provides support for a variety of E.U.-studies programs. The flagship vehicle for that support is the Jean Monnet Program, named after the chief architect of European unity. According to its mandate, the program aims to "stimulate teaching, research, and reflection on European integration in higher-education institutions worldwide." There is no attempt to conceal that the program is guided by the E.U.'s strategic priorities. Recently, for example, the program's main focus has been on Central Europe, where identification with the E.U. is weak.

In addition to the institutions that the commission finances directly, like the College of Europe, it bankrolls Jean Monnet chairs, centers of excellence, information and research activities, academic associations, and European integration-related research. Begun in 1989, such projects are now present in 72 countries across five continents. From 1990 to 2011, the Monnet Program set up 162 Jean Monnet centers of excellence and 875 Jean Monnet chairs. According to program organizers, these projects bring together 1,500 professors and reach approximately 500,000 students every year.

In addition, the Monnet Program sponsors conferences and "thematic groups" that "promote the interaction between the academic community, policy makers, and civil society." The European-studies programs act as a kind of "think tank" to inform E.U. policy. The Monnet Program is considered so successful that the commission wants

to increase its support by 50 percent, which would mean a budget of 45 million euros a year from 2014 to 2020.

Does this fountain of cash blunt scholars' critical edge? John Keeler, the political scientist at Pitt, argues that "American scholars aren't going to be muzzled by the dangling of grant money." The LSE's Spyros Economides says the same about Europeans but acknowledges that "there are a lot of people out there chasing E.U. research money. This has resulted in an interest in certain aspects of the E.U., those the grants target, which otherwise might not have created such a big interest."

"There are few institutions that can afford to say no to E.U. funding in the field of European studies," says Viadrina's Beichelt. He believes there's a genuine question about the independence of E.U.-supported European-studies scholarship. The E.U. money "makes scholars reflect on things that the commission is currently doing or wants," like the fostering of multiple identities, the transcendence of borders, and fighting nationalism. This reinforces a kind of "European political correctness," he says.

This tension, however, doesn't seem to bother the bulk of E.U.-studies scholars or their students. As the LSE grad Milena Oschmann put it, "You wouldn't study it if you didn't believe in it. I'm a European citizen. I believe in E.U. integration, and it's not finished yet."

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