Institutional Strategies for Addressing Three-Year Degrees: Bologna and Beyond

Student Perception of Preparation

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Enrollment (2008):
- Undergrad: 7092
- Grad w/MBA: 5330
- Medicine: 813
- Law: 2083

Degrees (2008):
- Baccalaureate: 1730
- Grad w/MBA: 1987
- Medicine: 181
- Law: 1051

Carnegie:
- Basic: RU/VH
- Size/Setting: L4/HR
- Undergrad Profile: FT4/MS/LTI
- Enrollment: MU
- Graduate Instr: CompDoc/Med Vet
- Undergrad Instr: A&S+Prof/HGC

104-acre main campus in Georgetown
Law Center located near U.S. Capitol

Faculty (2008):
- Main Campus: full-time 750, part-time 399
- Medical Center: full-time 370, part-time 84
- Law Center: full-time 139, part-time 202
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

40 master’s, 22 Ph.D., and 42 dual degree programs

Largest master’s programs:
- foreign service
- security studies
- communication, culture and technology
- MBA
- public policy

Largest doctoral programs:
- government
- economics
- history
- linguistics
- chemistry
Evolvement of Policy around the Three-Year Degree

- Requirement: “bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university in the U.S. or the equivalent from an international college or university.”

- Prior to 1999, 4-year “equivalence”, literally = 3-year degree + [1-year of graduate work, or master’s]

- After 1999, case-by-case on recommendation of individual programs, guided by judgment and experience
Student Views of Preparation

Questions:
• Undergraduate Institution and Country
• Undergraduate Major
• Graduate Program at Georgetown
• Was 3-yr program created in response to “Bologna Process”
• Rate your general preparation for graduate study (1=low to 5=high)
• Are there areas in which you feel your background has given you:
  – An advantage in studying at the graduate level
  – A disadvantage relative to others for graduate work
• Other comments
Student Views of Preparation

Three broad categories of students and undergraduate institutions:

- **UK**: traditional 3-yr post IB
  - Warwick (2), Cambridge, Sussex, LSE
- **EU, but not UK**: Bologna 3-yr
  - Tübingen, Jagiellonian (Poland), Florence
- **India**
  - Madras
Student Views of Preparation

Undergraduate to Graduate:

- Sociology to MA in Communication, Culture and Technology
- Biotechnology to PhD in Physiology
- Political Science to MA in Security Studies
- International Relations to MS in Foreign Service
- History to PhD in Economics
- Politics with International Studies to MS in Foreign Service
- International Relations to MA in German and European Studies
- International Relations to MA in Security Studies
- Philosophy, Politics and Economics to Master of Public Policy
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Preparation: 4-5, but one 3*

*“However, the limitations in my preparedness were because my BA is in a different field of study to my program at Georgetown, and do not reflect the rigor of my undergraduate education.”

from History B.A. now studying for Ph.D. in Economics
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Advantages:

“very good preparation in writing, and better preparation in particular knowledge of the field (more in depth than U.S. bachelors) but less breadth.”

“I was surprised to find my writing and reasoning skills far above the average in my current graduate program.”
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Advantages:

“I have found myself at an advantage in respect to students with a U.S. undergraduate [degree] in projects of an academic nature (more theoretical and longer). This is probably due to the training I have received in writing more frequent in-depth papers.”
UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Advantages:

“My undergraduate course encouraged independent study and research, and required writing long papers on a regular basis, so I feel this gave me an advantage concerning reading, writing, and (to some extent) research skills.”
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

- Disadvantages:

  “Quantitative skills, specific subject expertise”
  from student with B.A. in History studying for Ph.D. in Economics

  “Political subjects in the U.S. require some quantitative knowledge in line with viewing politics as a ‘science’. This is not the case in the UK, where the approach is more theoretical.”
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Disadvantages:

“team projects and presentations were underutilized, too narrow in focus”

“The pressure of speaking in class was less prevalent (considering that class participation did not form part of the grade).”
UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Other Comments:

“I think that 3 year degrees are great for students who are certain in their field of study when applying for the B.A. However, for students who are unsure of future aims when still in high school, the U.S. system can be advantageous because it allows a broader field of study. If I had done undergrad in the U.S., I would probably have ended up as an econ major…”
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Other Comments:

“In order to ‘condense’ the education in 3 years, there is less flexibility in changes in courses/orientation. This would not be useful for someone unsure of their aims…it is great for someone with a clear idea about the course they wish to pursue. The 3-year degree can be extremely beneficial, though it depends upon the ambitions of the student.”
Student Views of Preparation

UK: traditional 3-yr honors from IB

• Other Comments:

“I would have very much enjoyed the freedom of being undeclared when first entering university and think that 3 year Bachelors are too short to offer this opportunity.”

“I believe that they [3-yr degrees] give a huge amount of preparedness for the much more specialized degrees of very high quality that GU and other U.S. institutions give at master’s level.”
Student Views of Preparation

3-yr Bologna Degrees in the EU

- Preparation: 3-5 (broader range than UK)
- Advantages:

“I must admit I felt well-equipped in the basic knowledge from all areas of my current expertise to undertake studies here. The biotechnology studies I sent through were a combination of molecular biology, biochemistry, biophysics, physics, and medicine, so when I started my classes here, nothing was intimidating.”

from Biotechnology B.S. to Ph.D. in physiology
3-yr Bologna Degrees in the EU

• Advantages:

“great emphasis on theory and research training in contrast to the popular perception that in Germany the BA programs are primarily practically oriented degrees”

“In Italy, universities tend toward a very theoretical rather than career-oriented approach to teaching. That gave me a clear advantage in introductory and mandatory classes.”
Student Views of Preparation

3-yr Bologna Degrees in the EU

• Disadvantages:

“having a four year B.A. would have provided a broader background of knowledge”

“When I started in the MSFS, I had only ever written two academic papers - in Germany when I was an exchange student there.”

from Italian student at Florence
Student Views of Preparation

3-yr Bologna Degrees in the EU

• Other Comments:

“Though a good 3-yr B.A. will equip graduates with a **solid theoretical understanding** of the major issues in their discipline, they usually are **clueless when it comes to writing papers** or memos and have only **rudimentary research skills**. Italian universities also do little to encourage students to get acquainted with the professional environment they will have to work in after graduation.”
Student Views of Preparation

3-yr Bologna Degrees in the EU

• Other Comments:

“Currently, the discussion in Germany is to move away from strictly 3-yr programs toward 4-yr programs whenever necessary (such as engineering).....long overdue, since the idea was from the start of the Bologna Process that undergraduate programs should be in the 3-4 year time frame, but the vast majority were for some reason always limited to 3 years.”
“Also, the old argument made when comparing German and U.S. universities that Germans have an additional year of high school, and therefore should only have 3 years of undergraduate education, is not valid anymore, since high school now also ends after the 12th grade and not after the 13th. This point was often heard as a justification for shorter B.A. programs.”
India (one student)

• Preparation: 2
• Advantages:

“The only real advantage that I’ve seen in completing my education in India is my command of the English language, especially the formal written form.”
India

• Disadvantages:

“The areas my previous education are lacking in would be critical thinking and reasoning skills as well as a lack of exposure to specific knowledge in my undergraduate degree. From my research of institutions in the U.S., I’ve found that they would have provided me a broader knowledge base in terms of classes I could have taken and majors I could have pursued.”
Student Views of Preparation

Take-Away Message on 3-Year Degrees

- Depth, not breadth - highly focused, theoretical
  
  - If student is studying in the same area as bachelors and is clearly focused (personal statement, recommendation letters), then likely a low risk for admission
  
  - If student seems less sure of career aims, the letters are broadly worded, and/or the student is changing disciplines, then admission is of higher risk
Take-Away Message on 3-Year Degrees

• Clear differences remain between UK and rest of EU
  – Although both highly focused on theoretical content, UK degrees seem to develop writing and research skills to higher degree; increased risk with EU degrees for graduate programs relying on these skills
  – Questions remain in EU on rationale for 3-year degrees, possibly affecting continued implementation
Student Views of Preparation

Take-Away Message on 3-Year Degrees

• Beyond Bologna remains high risk
  – Although limited information, the one student who responded painted a rather negative picture of preparation
  – Although all admission decisions are effectively case-by-case, there needs to be high level of scrutiny outside Bologna