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ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
H.Q.A.A.
HELLENIC QUALITY
ASSURANCE AGENCY
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Faculty of Economics and Political Science
School of Political Sciences
Thessaloniki, Greece

February 2014

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the School of Political Sciences of the Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Professor Constantine Danopoulos_____ (President)
(Title) (Name and Surname)

San Jose State University, USA _____
(Institution of origin)
2. Professor Dimitris Tsarouhas, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey _____
(Institution of origin)
3. Professor Christos Ioannides, Associate Professor, Department of Urban Studies _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

Queens College, CUNY, New York , USA _____
(Institution of origin)
4. Professor Petros Vamvakas, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Studies _____
(Title) (Name and Surname)

Emmanuel College, Boston MA, USA _____
(Institution of origin)

N.B. The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department.

The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The four-person External Evaluation Committee (EEC) was invited to review the School of Political Sciences of the Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. The site visit took place between 24th and 26th February, 2014. The Committee followed the arrangements made by the HQAA. All meetings took place on campus. Almost all full-time faculty members were present in the plenary meetings. The Committee met with undergraduate and graduate students, recent alumni, academic and administrative staff members (the University Deputy Rector, the Faculty Dean, the Head of the Department, and the Secretariat). The Committee visited facilities in two distinct buildings, on and off campus, which included classroom and seminar spaces, faculty lounge, faculty offices, the offices of the Secretariat, as well as the student union lounge. We also visited the IT lab of the Department and the Department Library, which is currently functioning on an irregular basis due to funding constrains.

The Committee was not able to observe any teaching due to the fact that the site visit took place at the beginning of the Spring semester. Administration, Faculty and Staff at the University and the Department level were extremely accommodating, open and willing to assist the Committee and provide whatever information was requested of them. However, a few of the faculty members took no part in the process. Student representatives met with the committee and had a constructive dialogue, while a number of students on the graduate and undergraduate level objected to the legitimacy of the process by disrupting proceedings on two occasions.

The Committee reviewed the Internal Evaluation Report of 2013-14, which was an updated version of the 2010-11 internal report, primarily reflecting concerns of the recent staffing lay-offs. The Committee also received CVs and

publication lists of faculty members, course syllabi, exam samples, electronic versions of powerpoint presentations, which were later presented in person, as well as various appendices to the Report and other statistical data.

All the documentation the Committee received and inspected was thoroughly prepared, comprehensive and easy to follow. The documentation contained ample information, highly appropriate and useful for the evaluation. The data sources appeared legitimate and the information was properly obtained and recorded. In the Committee's view, the Department has met the objectives of the internal evaluation process. The data was consistent with the Department's academic goals and objectives, in both its qualitative and quantitative form.

A. Curriculum

To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.

APPROACH

The Department has an undergraduate as well as an MA and PhD programs of studies.

Undergraduate program

The undergraduate program includes both required and elective courses. A student is currently required to pass satisfactorily 50 courses or 240 ECTS credits in order to graduate from the Department. About 38 of these courses are required and are outlined in the program, while 12 are electives. Class attendance is not required, although the nature of some courses forces students to attend more regularly. The undergraduate curriculum at this point appears to be focused on the strengths and particular interests of the faculty, which certainly has many benefits, but also poses a number of challenges. The main challenge is the ability to comprehensively cover the field of Political Science, especially at the undergraduate level. Faculty and the overwhelming majority of students present, find the curriculum appropriate. However, faculty and some students expressed a concern regarding the inadequate skills students possess upon entry. It appears that this can be traced back to the very nature of pre-university education.

Currently, entering students are advised by two faculty. However, the faculty recognizes problems with the current structure, since a limited number of students make use of it. The committee offered different options to ameliorate the problem based on individual experiences and international practices.

All Department courses have syllabi; nonetheless, many of the syllabi appear to be too terse and do not provide adequate and clear means for student assessment. In addition, syllabi tend to be deficient in outlining course aims and objectives. Moreover it appears that a number of syllabi do not include non-Greek bibliography.

MA program

The MA program consists of two tracks: Political Theory and Political Philosophy and Political Analysis. Within each of these two directions there are different pathways though students are expected to develop their own individual program of studies in consultation with an academic advisor. In fact, the process of acceptance into the specific graduate program is rigorous

and selective while it requires a three-tier selection process. Even though an overwhelming majority of students come from Greek universities, there are a few non-Greek candidates as well.

PhD Program

As in the MA, the PhD program attracts a substantial number of applicants from the Department as well as outside the department. Currently, there is only one non-Greek candidate. PhD candidates develop their research proposal upon consultation with their supervisor and a three-member committee.

IMPLEMENTATION

According to the Internal Evaluation Report, the Political Theory and Political Philosophy and Political Analysis tracks are equally represented in the Department. The committee feels that other subfields of Political Science, such as Comparative Politics and International Relations are severely underrepresented, which is also reflected in the curriculum.

The unpredictable nature of the admissions process and the corresponding infrastructural inadequacies pose great challenges. These are associated with reported issues of proper guidance and effective monitoring of student progress.

Further development of cooperation with other universities through the Erasmus program offers opportunities to students to study abroad, which the committee encourages.

RESULTS

The Committee opines that the Department has been able to generally implement its defined goals and objectives, despite the limitations in resources and staffing. Shortcomings in specific areas are largely the result of insufficient budget allocation and the excessive number of students the Department is obliged to serve in its incoming cohort. Faculty are cognizant of these problems, and the committee applauds their commitment to meet these challenges often beyond their formal obligation.

IMPROVEMENT

The program of studies was last internally reviewed in 2011, and updated as in January 2014. The Department appears to recognize through student

feedback that there is space for curricular improvement. Although the curriculum is one of the strengths of the Department, some students expressed the view that there is a need for a clearer specialization focus, reflected in their diplomas.

The Department plans to partially restructure the curriculum by making a clear delineation between required and elective courses. Moreover, the Committee suggested reducing the number of required courses, and the Department seemed amenable to the idea.

The Department has offered successfully the option of practical training, and is considering expanding it into a curricular requirement.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

The Department's primary teaching method is based on the lecture format. The actual faculty to student ratio of is unclear, since class attendance and participation is not mandatory. One reason behind this is the difficulty in determining the exact number of students in the program, as well as the legal framework relating to the monitoring of class attendance.

Teacher/student collaboration seems to be a Departmental strength, with high levels of satisfaction among students.

The means and resources at the Department's disposal are inadequate, as reflected in the hiring freeze currently in place as well as the severely limited and inconsistent library access.

The Department has been proactive in using information technology. For example the Department's faculty are using online platforms, such as facebook and Moodle for the purposes of interactive communication between faculty and students.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department has attempted to overcome the lack of resources by developing and implementing use of electronic means as stated above.

The quality of teaching seems quite strong and the course material up to date. However, according to the Internal Report, students are reluctant to fill out teaching evaluation and feedback forms. The Committee understands the difficulty of receiving accurate feedback through electronic means, since a number of students are either reluctant to participate or will not participate at all. The Committee appreciates that student evaluations are a recently introduced phenomenon, and it would take a while for students to get used to the process.

As far as the Committee was able to ascertain, faculty members utilize their research and publications to enrich their course materials. This is a good means of keeping up with the latest in research and to familiarize students with contemporary research practices. The alumni praised the utility of their

education and considered it quite relevant and useful in their jobs. Some of the Department's students are attending courses in European universities as exchange students and/or are pursuing graduate degrees.

The Committee's general impression of the students' evaluation of the teaching and the course content was extremely positive. Students remarked that they value highly the assistance and guidance offered by the faculty.

RESULTS

The Committee's appraisal of the efficacy of teaching is positive. However, the number of students participating in the exams and the success rate is average, (59% for required courses and 43% for elective courses), according to the figures supplied by the Internal Evaluation Report. The average degree grade is 7,1, which is similar to the University average. Data shows that 85% of the student population completes the degree within five years. Others require more time to complete their studies. There is no available data regarding the association between final degree grade and years of matriculation.

IMPROVEMENT

The Committee considers that, given the current circumstances, the Department performs satisfactorily. The Department plans to further utilize information technology as it becomes available.

The Committee recommends that alternative pedagogical methods be explored in order to enrich the teaching experience of students. This would enable the Department to become more student-oriented.

Multiple and alternative examination methods should be considered in order to diversify the teaching system and allow a far more accurate and fair assessment of students' performance.

The Department is currently contemplating strategies that would allow it to maintain its current level of instruction in light of impending faculty retirements and budget cuts. That is, in the Committee's view, quite commendable.

C. Research

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

APPROACH

The Departmental environment appears amenable to the promotion of research. The Committee was not able to determine whether the Department has set internal standards for assessing research. However, the faculty maintains an ambitious research agenda, which compares favorably with those of their counterparts in major American and European universities.

IMPLEMENTATION

Despite inadequate resources, the faculty manages to publish rather extensively. It appears that a good number of faculty is research active, with many publications in foreign language refereed journals, mainly English and French. Many faculty are leading and/or participating in national and international research projects and research collaborations. Faculty attend and present in professional association conferences, such as those of IPSA, APSA and ECPR.

The Committee encourages the Department to build on a good track record and continue to organize national and international conferences in Greek as well as in English.

RESULTS

Many of the research programs initiated by faculty members, as outlined above, have led to high-level publications as well as grant awards. (eg. Rothschild Foundation, Aristeia.) The Committee deems that in general the research objectives of individual faculty members have been implemented as evidenced by the high number of publications and conference presentations. A few faculty excel in research performance and have wide international reputation.

IMPROVEMENT

The Department budget allocation for research is severely limited and there is no research administrative infrastructure per se. Faculty seem to be knowledgeable of the grant request process, but could also benefit enormously from professional guidance on preparing applications for

international research funding. The Committee recommends that more active liaison between the Research Committee of the University and the Department is established, and along with the development of relevant initiatives at the level of the Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences.

Furthermore, the Committee recommends that faculty make every effort to publish their research in foreign language peer-reviewed outlets, especially in English. The Department should continue to update the data-base of faculty publications and citations, which should also be available in the School website.

The Committee commends the faculty members for their strong research and publication records and encourages them to continue their excellent work.

D. All Other Services

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

APPROACH

The Department has recently experienced a 60% reduction in administrative support staff. Despite the cuts, the Department copes reasonably well due to the transition to electronic record keeping, including registration, and grading, thus meeting the basic needs of students. The administrative staff is highly conscientious and fully integrated into the Department's fabric.

The student body has an active presence on campus, which is reflected by their hosting a number of activities and events.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department appears to be in good hands and is led by an engaged, active and purposeful Chair. There appears to be a synergy between the Department Chair and the Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences.

The Department maintains an IT Lab with free internet access to students so as to enhance their research.

RESULTS

It is clear that administrative and other services are inadequate. To the extent they are functioning this can be attributed to the personal sacrifices of the people involved. This sort of behavior is typical of the community-based sentiment that permeates the University.

IMPROVEMENT

The Department is aware of most of the above problems. It does not appear, nevertheless, it lacks the necessary resources to meet its mission and goals.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The Department has a long standing history of involvement in local, regional and national matters. A large number of faculty are regular contributors to print and electronic media outlets, roundtable discussions, festivals, and cultural activities in general. Faculty teach within the Open Courses Program, thereby offering significant community service. Department members are socially active and some have served in various positions outside the University.

E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

Ongoing economic austerity and the recent staffing cuts has taken a high toll on the University's as well as the Department's ability to fulfill its mission. Although obliged, the University does not as yet have a strategic plan in place reflecting its short-, medium-, and long-term goals. The Department recognizes the need for strategic planning, which will include curriculum review, staffing concerns (faculty,) and collection and processing of feedback data. This will allow the Department to enhance its standards and maintain its reputation. The Committee views this as a worthwhile undertaking and strongly recommends that the Department moves forward with it as quickly as possible. Furthermore, the Committee would like to encourage and support the Department's declared intention to initiate interdisciplinary, interdepartmental, and interinstitutional cooperation. In fact some faculty engage in such activities, as indicated in the latest internal departmental report.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

Although this is a relatively new Department, it enjoys a strong reputation in the country and could be considered a leader in the fields of political theory/ political philosophy and political analysis. Faculty members appear to get along and the Departmental environment is amicable and student-friendly. Students feel well served and have a close rapport with the faculty. The research record of the faculty is strong, and well established, faculty are well-engrained and active in civil discourse and public life. These attributes significantly contribute to the enhancement of the Department's standing and student fulfillment. The Committee believes that the Department can improve its standing and enhance its reputation by implementing the following recommendations:

- Restructuring of the curriculum. This should include consolidation of courses and development of new ones that would deal with hitherto neglected subjects/themes, geographic regions, and world politics.
- Offering more courses in English, including an extensive summer school program. This will allow the Department to attract students from other parts of the world and thus enhance its connectedness as well as provide new sources of funding. Greece's geographic location, natural beauty, cultural richness and historical legacy is conducive to such undertakings.
- Consider the introduction of an interdisciplinary and inter-departmental MA in English, which could involve other universities and research institutions in Greece and beyond.
- Introduce team-taught and interdisciplinary courses.
- Identify mechanisms of encouraging students to further participate in the evaluation of teaching and feedback process in a quantitative and qualitative manner.
- Encourage students to use a range of bibliographic references in their essays and other assignments, beyond Greek bibliography.
- Reconsider the 38 to 12 ratio between required and elective courses students need to pass in order to obtain their undergraduate degree.
- Introduce a weekly or fortnightly departmental research seminar where faculty members and graduate students present their research and receive constructive comments and feedback.
- Encourage faculty and research students to seek international research funding opportunities.

- Encourage faculty and research students to present papers at international conferences.
- Establish a faculty-student committee, which will meet at least once per semester to resolve student problems and consider their suggestions.
- Create the mechanisms and processes through which faculty and graduate students could seek alternative sources of funding including NGOs and the domestic and international private sector.
- Establish and update regularly a database reflecting faculty research accomplishments in Greek and English. This will allow the Department to be easily accessible, user-friendly and ultimately enhance the Department's reputation.
- Given the severe budget constrains, it is more imperative than ever to formulate a short and long-term strategic plan for sustained funding.

The Committee is pleased to have had the opportunity to undertake to evaluate such a collegiate and well-functioning Department. Despite the adverse overall environment, faculty morale seems high, teaching and research activities continue smoothly, and students appear content with their studies.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. Constantine Danopoulos	_____
2. Dimitris Tsarouhas	_____
3. Christos Ioannidis	_____
4. Petros Vamvakas	_____