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HELLENIC REPUBLIC
H.Q.A.
HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND ETHNOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF THRACE (KOMOTINI)



European Union
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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
MANAGING AUTHORITY

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of History and Ethnology of the University of Thrace at Komotini consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Prof. Michele Bacci (Coordinator)

University of Fribourg/Freiburg, Switzerland

2. Prof. Jean-Paul Demoule

University of Paris I-La Sorbonne, France

3. Mr Dimitrios Gondicas

Center for Hellenic Studies, Princeton University, USA

4. Prof. Emeritus S. Victor Papacosmas

Kent State University, USA

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 members of the Committee arrived in Athens on Sunday, 26 January 2014. They first met on Monday morning, 27 January, for an initial exchange of ideas, and to travel together to Komotini.

The visit to the structures of the Department and the first meetings with the staff began on the same day with a brief visit to the Vice-Rector, Prof. G. Kostas. There followed a meeting in the Department, which opened with a welcome by the former chair and now dean of the School of Classics and Humanities, Prof. Konstantinos Hatzopoulos, and then an introduction by a powerpoint presentation to the self-assessment report, presented by members of the faculty. Following this presentation, the Committee had a first open-ended discussion with the entire Department, touching on various issues raised by the self-assessment report. In the afternoon, the Committee met separately to plan the activities of the next two days.

On the morning of 28 January, the Committee was given a tour of the departmental facilities in the downtown campus (classrooms, computer room, library, faculty offices, common spaces, dining room). The Committee was given a substantial introduction to the library’s facilities and services and had the opportunity to speak at length with the two librarians. The Committee was informed that the library owns approximately 25,000 books and ca. 1500 rare books, has an online catalogue, participates actively in the national interlibrary loan services, and follows the Library of Congress cataloguing system.

Each of the Committee members met individually with members of the faculty, selected by areas of interest and specialization, for informal, one-on-one discussion, focusing on specific aspects of the assessment review (teaching, research, public services, departmental culture). In several cases we had in-depth exchange with certain individuals. Of the 24 faculty members of the Department, the Committee interacted in person with 21. The Committee noted the fact that some of the staff on sabbatical did show up for the assessment process, whereas others, not on sabbatical (including senior professors), did not participate in the process.

The Committee had the opportunity to observe the administration of written exams. According to the schedule, the Committee expected to visit the *ergasterion* of Paleography and was very disappointed to find it locked and inaccessible. By contrast, the Committee received a warm welcome during the visit to the other *ergasterion*, the one in physical anthropology. The equipment in the laboratory is new and up-to-date for

serious scientific research.

In the afternoon, the Committee had a follow-up meeting with the faculty, where questions were raised about the functioning, administration and development strategies of the Department.

At the beginning of the third day, 29 January, several faculty members led the Committee on a tour of the historical centre of the town, including major monuments, such as the Ecclesiastical Museum and the Yeni Mosque. Subsequently, the Committee went to the Archaeological Museum, where the Director and his colleagues delivered a presentation focusing on the collaborative programs (internships, excavations, training) that have been initiated recently between the Department and the local Archaeological Service.

The Committee next met with students and was delighted by their significant numbers and high level of engagement. Conversation was open, frank, and substantive. The diversity of the students that participated enabled the Committee to have a multifaceted view of the student body, their academic interests, their professional aspirations, and social profiles. The Committee noted the active participation of students coming from the minorities, as well as their evident social integration in the student body.

The Committee then saw the administrative staff of the Department. We were impressed by their professionalism and their commitment to the Department beyond the call of duty. Of the three members of the technical staff, the Committee spoke only with two: the Italian lecturer and a person who does not have any ongoing duties in the Department. The Committee did not meet with the third member of the technical staff, the assistant at the Paleography laboratory, who had called in sick that day.

In the afternoon, to conclude its visit, the Committee had a general meeting with the entire Department, going over the broader themes explored during the three days. The Committee received the following documents:

- Self-assessment report (narrative and statistical tables)
- Course catalogue in Greek and English
- Website in Greek and English
- Department profile in statistical format
- Description of facilities
- List of faculty, technical and administrative staff
- Program of exams for February 2014

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The sources and documentation made available to the Committee were extensive and in-depth regarding issues of curriculum, teaching and community outreach, but were lacking emphasis and detail on the research profile of the Department as a whole. Careful review of the Department website (English version), as well as separate discussions with individual members of the faculty made possible by the site visit, enabled the Committee to form a clearer picture of the research activity of individual faculty members. This level of research activity is not adequately reflected in the self-assessment report.

The self-assessment report was incomplete in an important aspect, in that it lacked information about the Paleography *ergasterion*.

In the months preceding the visit of the Committee, the process of self-assessment had obviously motivated the Department to reflect on and evaluate its mission, its structural capabilities, and possible future improvements.

A. Curriculum

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

APPROACH

The Department's goal is to provide a curriculum that has flexibility in terms of student choice between the two tracks, History and Ethnology, respectively. One of the primary aims of this curriculum is to integrate into a coherent program of studies the fields of historical sciences, humanities, social anthropology, physical anthropology, and archaeology. The combination of these disciplinary areas is unique among Greek institutions; it creates special challenges, while concurrently presenting opportunities for the training of students in non-traditional ways and towards a broader range of academic and professional careers.

It allows students to have a common core curriculum at the beginning and then at a later stage to choose one of the tracks (History/Ethnology). The general objective is to offer a curriculum that is theoretically informed, regional in focus (Balkan, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean), and comparative in approach, in both a diachronic and a horizontal, geographic-cultural sense.

The objectives were decided on the basis of the changes that happened both in society and the cultural milieu of the university and in the context of broader educational reforms. The primary focus on Greece and especially on its classical tradition has been enriched by a parallel focus on the larger European scenario in response to Greece's increasingly crossroads positioning in the Balkan, Mediterranean and European network of interactions. The curriculum addresses the needs of teaching, by taking into account local specificity and international academic standards and practices.

In the short time of implementation, the new curriculum has largely lived up to the objectives it was designed to serve, within the constraints imposed by the limited resources available. The curriculum was developed and approved after many months of consultation, not only among faculty members but also with students, who played an active role in the process.

The Committee was not made aware of regular procedures for reviewing, assessing, and revising the curriculum, which is still quite new and coexists with the previous one, as it is being phased out with the older students. There seems to be a broad base of consensus within the academic unit, which makes us hopeful that in due course they will develop regular procedures for the revising of the curriculum.

The department aspires to establish a new program of graduate studies, which would enable students to pursue training at an advanced level.

IMPLEMENTATION

The undergraduate curriculum is effective in both tracks and provides students with basic undergraduate training. On the whole, the department's academic goals are served quite effectively by the new curriculum. There are, however, areas that could be strengthened with regular teaching staff and/or adjunct faculty and/or faculty from other departments.

Despite the constraints of limited resources but basically because of the recent curricular reforms, the curriculum is moving closer to international standards and practices. The Committee does believe, though, that there are some underrepresented fields and methodological approaches for enriching the curriculum.

The curriculum's structure is presented very clearly and in a user-friendly way in the printed catalogue and in the attractive website of the department, in both the Greek and English versions. The Committee finds the curriculum coherent and functional, acknowledging that it is at its early stage of implementation. Despite the systemic constraints of the one-book bibliography and thanks to the additional materials posted online by the faculty, the material for most courses is appropriate for the basic undergraduate level.

On the whole, the academic staff has expertise that largely corresponds to the range of offerings in the curriculum. In the last couple of years, during the crisis and the cutbacks in adjunct faculty positions, the Department has not been able to invite outside scholars to fill certain gaps in the curriculum.

The languages offered in the Department are only two (English and Italian), which is an improvement over past practice of offering only one language (Italian).

RESULTS

At this stage, the implementation cannot be fully assessed, because of the curriculum's newness but the committee does feel that it will largely prove successful.

IMPROVEMENT

There is a broad consensus in the Department for continuously assessing and improving the curriculum. The Department recognizes the need to fill certain gaps (e.g., Roman history, pre-Modern Western History, Classical Archaeology, Ottoman studies) and to reduce barriers for cross-departmental, cross-school, and cross-disciplinary registration for courses that would fill gaps in the curriculum and would address the needs of students, as well as the broader academic goals set by the Department.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

The main pedagogic method is the lecture format. Introductory and required courses have very large class sizes, implying ex cathedra teaching. Through the use of e-class technologies and informal out-of-classroom contact with the students, the faculty makes it possible for motivated students to enrich their educational experience beyond passive acquisition of knowledge. Specialized, upper-level courses and laboratories are smaller in size and more interactive, encouraging the active participation of students in class. There is also the option of supervised research papers, which are not required, but strongly encouraged for motivated students. Non-credit internship opportunities are made available and encouraged as a complement to classroom-based teaching.

Most of the staff make a special effort to go beyond the narrow systemic parameters of the one textbook base for learning, by suggesting alternative textbook and by complementing them with lecture notes that are posted on the departmental website.

The actual number of attending, “full-time” students, as far as the Committee was able to determine, tends to be rather variable and a small fraction of the total number enrolled. Students are strongly encouraged to interact. Motivated students receive academic advice and mentorship beyond the classroom setting. This positive appraisal came out of the Committee’s informal discussion with the students about their educational experience.

Physical facilities are inadequate in size. Large introductory classes are not allowed to use the nearby auditorium (which is controlled by another department) and must be offered on the other campus located several kilometers away. Some facilities, namely the Paleography laboratory, were inaccessible for the Committee to inspect, and it is unclear whether students and faculty, beyond the supervising professor, have any interaction with and access to it.

Due to the efforts of the Department the new computer room (run by volunteers), although smaller in scale, is attractive and provides opportunities for interactive learning. Increasingly, this room is being used for classes and didactic activities. Students unable to attend classes regularly are provided access to teaching materials through information technologies and online resources developed by the faculty.

The combination of a large student body with limited classroom space and new technologies facilitates widespread cheating during examinations. It is a major problem that the Department is trying to address but not very successfully. Oral exams are an option, but they are very time-consuming and at the expense of the teaching faculties.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Committee visited the Department during the examination period and therefore had

no opportunity for first-hand observation of teaching practices.

The Committee did not examine course materials in detail, but it was encouraged to see detailed course-descriptions with bibliography, as well as close collaboration between the faculty and the library, which has an adequate collection to support undergraduate teaching and offers a welcome setting for students.

At the undergraduate level there are limited opportunities for linking the personal research of instructors with their teaching activities.

Teaching in the Department extends outside the classroom and includes study tours to sites in Greece and Turkey and also student-led conferences. In addition, student participation in the “Balkan Border Crossings” network conferences adds an extra-dimension in keeping with the intercultural and regional focus of the Department.

In theory, it is possible for students to register in elective courses and for faculty to teach in other departments, but in practice there are logistical obstacles that prevent this from happening to the extent that the Committee would like to see.

The Department has strongly encouraged its students to participate in the Erasmus Program and succeeded with the sending of students abroad; it has been less successful in bringing foreign students to Komotini. The Committee especially appreciates the initiative of the Department to establish a network of European institutions under the Erasmus program, and in particular with universities in neighboring countries, which further enhances the mission of the Department as a regional center for scholarship on South Eastern Europe.

The Committee had no opportunity to review student course evaluations.

RESULTS

The Committee regrets, but is in no way surprised, that many students take a very long time to graduate or actually drop out altogether. The Department understands this pattern is endemic to the Greek system, a condition further exacerbated by the current crisis.

IMPROVEMENT

The new curriculum and its implementation in the classrooms has been the Department’s response to the need for improvement in teaching. The Department recognizes the necessity of continued enhancements and revisions as, for example, example, in the form of team teaching and in further development of the internships program, which could be designed in a way so that credit may be awarded..

C. Research

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

APPROACH

To date, the Department's approach to research has been to organize research clusters (*ergasteria*). Two such *ergasteria* are in operation: the Physical Anthropology *ergasterion* has a clear and successful research agenda, as evidenced by the recent awarding of a competitive, national grant. The Paleography *ergasterion* was not accessible to the Committee, so that we cannot assess it. The two projected *ergasteria* ("Modern and Contemporary History", "Social Anthropology") represent the direction in which the Department wants to move in the future and are envisioned in connection with the graduate program the Department is hoping to establish.

Building on the strength of some senior faculty with distinguished records of publications, the Department is to be commended for having recently made new appointments of early-career scholars, who are active in research, pursuing their individual projects, but the Department has not yet constructed a coherent picture of its own research profile.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department aims to create a supportive intellectual environment for excellence in research. Physical Anthropology has adequate and well-equipped facilities to support the research of the faculty, as well as a post-doctoral fellow slated for appointment. The Committee was told that Physical Anthropology section of the library is the best in Greece. The Committee was also told that the Paleography laboratory has extensive equipment, which, as mentioned, was inaccessible to the Committee and is apparently inaccessible to the rest of the Department. Faculty members in the social sciences and the humanities do not have library facilities that can support adequately their research, nor do they have reliable electronic access to journals and databases, and therefore they are forced to travel on their own to do research in Greece and abroad. This unfortunate situation is due to budgetary limitations.

Given that the information provided in the internal assessment report is incomplete (it is clearly stated that new departmental members are not included) and considering that the data is purely quantitative and not qualitative, the Committee can not develop a substantive evaluation of the level and quality of publications of the Department. Through the website of the Department (English version) it was possible to conclude that a good number of the faculty have an active publication record with increasing international visibility.

Other than the Physical Anthropology laboratory and some faculty in archaeology, who are involved in international scholarly collaborations, the Committee was not made aware of other collaborations in international projects in the humanities or the social sciences.

Only one faculty member has participated in the Erasmus program by going to the University of Erfurt.

RESULTS

The Physical Anthropology laboratory has been impressively successful in securing a competitive EU grant for funding a two-year project, which will also enable the appointment of a post-doctoral researcher. Though the Committee felt that its location on the main campus outside Komotini provides an impediment to closer interaction of that section of the Department with their colleagues and despite the fact that the facility is housed in “temporary”, sub-standard quarters, the Committee was impressed by the professionalism and intellectual energy of the group working there.

IMPROVEMENT

Emerging in discussions during its visit, the Committee was pleased that the Department seems to welcome the idea of establishing an ongoing faculty research seminar to promote intellectual exchanges among departmental members, thereby providing the basis for the formation of new research clusters in the future. The Department also welcomes the idea of encouraging its members to take advantage of the opportunities offered through the Erasmus program.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

Though the facilities and services (office spaces, classroom spaces, library facilities, administrative support, research funding) available to the faculty are sub-standard and limited (with faculty members sharing offices), the majority of the faculty members demonstrate that they care deeply about their students over and beyond the call of duty. The services provided by the University to the students (e.g., housing and food services) are of marginal quality, but the faculty, as well as the administrative and secretarial staff, generously provides mentorship, individual one-on-one tutorials, and guidance.

The Committee was impressed by the spirit of academic community and shared sense of purpose on the part of the vast majority of faculty, staff, and students. The Department has developed an admirable tradition of volunteerism on the part of recent graduates and members of the broader community, who contribute their services to the library and computer center, to make up for what the institution cannot provide.

To the extent that the University and Ministry bureaucracy permits, the Department makes efforts to simplify administrative procedures and to develop electronic tools for more efficient service to faculty and students.

While the Department will not require of its students full-time presence on campus and regular attendance of classes, and given that the economic situation prevents many students from moving to Komotini from more distant locations, the Department tries to engage students intellectually as members of the academic community, not only by enhancing the quality of teaching, but also through a number of innovative activities (e.g., student conferences, community outreach initiatives, excursions, seminars). The comments of students in conversations with the Committee reinforced this impression.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department is fortunate to have the services of two dedicated and highly competent secretaries (one and a half equivalent), who however do not have continuing appointments.

Two highly competent and dedicated librarians with a very limited budget have been able to organize a library that is welcoming and provides support for undergraduate teaching and student research projects. Acknowledging the importance of electronic tools in teaching and learning today and despite its limited budget, the Department invested in a computer room, which is attractive, well maintained and staffed by competent volunteers.

All facilities are equipped with wireless access, which allows inclusion in the wider

European eduroam network.

The Committee was shocked to hear that budgetary restrictions permit only six hours of heating per day in classrooms and for departmental facilities, in general, during the winter season.

Student counseling in the Department starts with an orientation program before the beginning of the students' first semester of studies and continues throughout the students' course of studies, both in person and with email. A commendable component of career counseling is the offering of courses on CV-writing in English for those seeking professional or academic advancement.

RESULTS

Within the limited resources and cramped physical space, services are at an acceptable level thanks to the personal engagement and generosity of key faculty and administrators. The Department would be the first to acknowledge the need for improvement, however the constraints are overwhelming.

IMPROVEMENTS

The continuous enhancements of the website and e-class are an ongoing priority of the Department.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Taking advantage of the proximity of the Archaeological Museum of Komotini and the shared academic interest of the Museum staff with the faculty in ancient and Byzantine studies, the Department has created an impressive number of internship opportunities for its students, who work at museum and excavation sites in Northern Greece.

In an effort to open itself to the local community, the Department offers a wide range of initiatives on current topics of general interest, which are meant for a public audience. All such initiatives create a relationship of trust between the Department and the local community, which, in turn, can help the Department recruit students, including minority students, from Komitini and its broader area.

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.

In reinventing itself, starting in 2010, the Department made the strategic decision to focus on curricular change, teaching initiatives and community outreach. In the medium- and long-term, the Department seems to be keen on upgrading its research profile and its activity at the post-graduate level.

The Committee realizes that this report is meant to focus on structural and institutional matters and not on financial aspects, yet we need to note that the departmental budget is absurdly low.

The institutional inhibiting factors identified by the Committee are the following:

- 1) The fragmentation of the University of Thrace in four different towns, as well as the fragmentation of the Department of History and Ethnology itself in two locations (downtown and main campus).
- 2) The apparent lack of a coherent and ongoing mechanism to promote collaborative activity (teaching and research) among the three departments of the School of Classics and Humanities (Black Sea Studies, History and Ethnology, Philology).
- 3) Inadequate and sub-standard physical facilities.

Though the Department has achieved broad consensus in its efforts to reinvent itself, there is a small number of faculty members that are not active participants in departmental affairs and seem to resist change.

The University's location away from the major metropolitan centers of Athens and Thessaloniki and in a relatively undeveloped border area has traditionally been considered to be an inhibiting factor for the institution. Conversely, Thrace with its multicultural character and its location at a geographic crossroads for South Eastern Europe provides a special opportunity for this institution. From this perspective, the area and its peoples constitute an ideal "living laboratory" for a Department of History and Ethnology.

An unforeseen opportunity provided by the current economic situation is that an increasing number of faculty and students at the University now work and live in Komotini and the broader area, thereby strengthening academic life and ties to the local community.

The recent establishment of the School of Classical Studies and Humanities provides a special opportunity for substantive interdepartmental, cross-disciplinary collaborations.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

Despite the limited resources, the Department has demonstrated an impressive dynamism and desire for necessary, long overdue change, and has already made substantial steps in the direction of academic excellence.

The Committee proposes the following recommendations:

- 1) In the short term: the development of a regular and rigorous internal review process of research activity by individual faculty members; the establishment of a regular faculty seminar to enhance scholarly interaction within the Department; the establishment of an international summer school for undergraduate students with a focus on Thrace and intercultural exchange; the establishment of a tuition income-generated international undergraduate summer program, focusing on Thrace's intercultural relations in the broader context of South Eastern Europe; the enhancement of student career counseling services, and curricular adjustments to offer students skills that may be useful for careers in new professions, beyond the traditional secondary education track (e.g., cultural management, tourism professions, applied history, social work, etc.); the development of a strategy ofr encouraging full-time attendance in classes and other didactic activities.
- 2) In the medium term: the establishment of interdepartmental collaborations (team-teaching of courses, research programs, and co-sponsored events) within the School of Classics and Humanities; with the prospect of impending faculty retirements, the development of a coherent plan for faculty growth in new areas of expertise (e.g., Roman history, Ottoman studies, Sociology of multicultural societies, Classical Archaeology and Archaeometry, Islamic Art History, Environmental Archeology, Comparative Religions, etc.), as well as teaching of languages that are relevant to the long-term goals of the Department (e.g. Turkish, Bulgarian, Arabic, etc.).
- 3) In the long term: establishment of two small, but distinctive and internationally competitive graduate programs, one in Archaeology/Physical Anthropology (American model) and one in South East European area studies with a focus on intercultural interactions across space and time. In this scheme, social anthropologists would play the role of "intellectual bridge" between the two main tracks of the Department. In this way, the Department would become a center for intellectual activity, research and teaching, a hub of an international network of institutions in the broader South-East European area, attracting scholars and students from a range of countries. Outcomes of this vision would be twofold: to promote mutual understanding of peoples across nations in the area, and to attract international funding to promote its scientific and community outreach missions.

Based on our experience through this assessment process, the Committee has strong reasons to believe that the Department is ready and capable to move strategically in the directions proposed, aspiring for academic excellence, in spite of the current lack of resources.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname

Signature

1. Prof. Michele Bacci

2. Prof. Jean-Paul Demoule

3. Prof. Emeritus S. Victor Papacosmas

4. Mr Dimitrios Gondicas

