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ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

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EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF PATRAS



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 Philosophy of the University of Patras consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Prof. Haralambos Symeonidis _____ (Coordinator)
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
 University of Kentucky, USA _____
 (Institution of origin)

2. Prof. Nikos Psarros _____
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
 University of Leipzig, Germany _____
 (Institution of origin)

3. Prof. Christos Clairis _____
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
 Université René Descartes-Paris V, France _____
 (Institution of origin)

4. Prof. Christos Evangeliou _____
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
 Towson University, USA _____
 (Institution of origin)

5. Prof. Theodore Scaltsas _____
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
 University of Edinburg, UK _____
 (Institution of origin)

Introduction

The External Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation committee met with the members of the HQA at the headquarters of the agency. During the one-hour briefing we were introduced into the aims of the evaluation procedure. Afterwards we were transferred to the University of Patras (UP) where we were introduced to the President of the University, Prof. Dr. Panagiotakis, the members of the rectorate and the members of the internal evaluation committee (MODIP) of the university.

During this session the President, the Dean, and the representatives of MODIP gave us a general briefing on the UP and the procedure and the goals of the internal evaluation of the UP. The committee received a detailed documentation of the university structure and of the position of the Department of Philosophy in it.

We were provided with an extensive and very complete documentation both of the general structure of the UP as well as of the structure, staff, curricula and research activities of the Department.

We had extensive discussions with all the members of the faculty, except one who was absent due to personal obligations, with three non-faculty members and the librarian, and with representative samples of under- and postgraduate students and of PhD students.

Finally, we had the opportunity to inspect a lecture hall, the library of the Department and the facilities hosting the offices of the faculty.

The Internal Evaluation Procedure

Materials, methods and presentation of the internal evaluation give an exact and critical picture of the current situation both of UP and DoP, underlining not only the strengths, but also the existing problems and challenges that the institutions are confronted with. The material provided by the University and the Department was of high quality and complete in every aspect.

The internal evaluation is reflective, self-critical and able to delineate both the strengths and the problems of the unit due to external factors.

A. Curriculum

Goals and objectives in general

The Department offers three curricula that cover all three levels of academic education: undergraduate (4 years), pre-doctoral postgraduate (2 years, equivalent to MA) and doctoral (min. 3 years). The curricula do not correspond exactly to the requirements of the so-called Bologna Agreement (3-5-8), since it has not yet been implemented in the Greek system of higher education.

Reflecting the homogeneous philosophical nature of the Department all curricula are dedicated to the systematical teaching of Philosophy.

Undergraduate program (4 years)

APPROACH

The main objective is to offer an integrated program of undergraduate studies preparing the students for any philosophical engagement in society, including careers in the market, civic service, academia and especially secondary education.

The program was conceived independently of the structure of related study programs at other Greek universities and reflects the autonomy of the department.

The implementation of the curriculum is characterized by the fact that the number of seminar-type classes is disproportionate to the number of lectures, due to great number of incoming students, which is beyond the control of the Department. This issue is already recognized by the Department, which notices that its efforts to ameliorate the situation have been so far thwarted by the government's policies.

However, the program, even in its current form, is able to meet the requirements of higher education and the expectations of the society providing the students with the reflective capacities and the philosophical knowledge necessary for coping with the modern global problems and challenges such as environmentalism, multiculturalism, economic crisis and globalization.

Furthermore, the curriculum reflects the balance of courses and specialities that are internationally recognized as the essential constituents of any undergraduate program in philosophy. It is constantly under scrutiny and has been recently revised in order to better meet the needs of students and teaching staff.

IMPLEMENTATION and RESULTS

The curriculum reflects the goals of the Department very well. In the rare cases of deviation the Department implements revisions and changes that bring the curriculum in line with its goals – as this happened in the last review (2013).

Its structure is very clear and transparent addressing the essential topics of philosophical discourse as well as a significant part of specialized topics in connection with the research areas of the faculty. Additionally, the curriculum includes a number of auxiliary subjects like introduction to pedagogy, philology or linguistics that entitle the graduates to apply for a position in the Greek secondary education system.

Due to the particularities of the Greek higher education admission system, the students do not form a homogeneous group regarding both their interest in philosophical thinking and their preferences to study this subject. Thus, the curriculum faces the admittedly very difficult task of transforming the very non-homogeneous group of beginners to potential teachers of and researchers in philosophy. In this context a general introductory and survey course in philosophy providing a general historical overview on the development of philosophical ideas in relation to the persons who conceived those ideas appears to be a good means to achieve this aim. Such a course is missing from the current revised curriculum. This doesn't mean, however, that the problem has been ignored or neglected or underestimated by the faculty of the Department. The current strategy is to address it in a system of interconnected introductory courses focused on various aspects and particular philosophical disciplines like "Epistemology" or "Modern Moral Theory". The External Evaluation Committee is aware of the intricacies of this problem and highly appreciates the efforts of the Department and the implemented strategies. Nevertheless the Committee feels that a general historic-methodical survey course would provide the necessary insight into the inner coherence of philosophy as a discipline despite its fragmented appearance in public opinion that is obviously shared by the majority of the freshmen.

Besides this immanent problem there are also several external obstacles in the Department's efforts to fulfil completely its curricular objectives. These are the insufficient teaching infrastructure (especially seminar and lecture halls), the very large number of the enrolled students and the insufficient number of the teaching staff, with the ratio between teachers and students reaching the unacceptable magnitude of 1:55 in 2013. These obstacles have cumulatively two main negative consequences: First, the majority of the courses in the last six years had the form of lectures, with seminars being reserved for special occasions; and second that only about

15% of the students finish their studies with a degree thesis. The vast majority prefers to earn the necessary scores and credit points by taking examinations. Thus only a minority of the graduating students has the experience of the interaction between learning and research that is pivotal for the formation of the scientific character. Here again this situation clearly does not reflect the objectives and desires of the Department. In the contrary, the Department feels that degree theses should be compulsory and the Committee supports this aim and strongly recommends that the necessary measures should be taken at every level of the organisation of the higher education in order to enable the Department to achieve its goals.

Other important features missing from the curriculum are:

- 1) The opportunity to provide those students who aspire at becoming secondary education teachers with internships or other kinds of practical training at schools. This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, there is no legal and administrative framework regulating such matters, and, on the other hand, there is a lack of faculty specializing on the problematic of teaching philosophy at secondary education level. Here again the responsibility does not lie with the Department.
- 2) Adapted curricula for students with special needs, especially for students with dyslexia.

IMPROVEMENT

For the better implementation of the undergraduate program the Committee considers as a first measure enabling the Department to determine autonomously the number of the student intake accompanied by the right to define the requirements for the admission of students.

If the Department shall continue to provide education to the current number of students the reduction of the vacancies in the faculty is mandatory. However, the right to define the admission requirements remains indispensable

Pre-doctoral postgraduate program (MΔE)

APPROACH

Main objective of this program is to offer the possibility to graduates both from philosophy and other cognate disciplines to obtain a degree in philosophy. This program can, thus, be considered as a conversion course.

The program has been conceived in close relation to the research spectrum pursued by the faculty. It is, thus, very concise and coherent providing at the same time an exhaustive insight into the particular subjects, namely: Ethics and Political Philosophy, and Metaphysics and Epistemology. Due to the fact that the postgraduate programs are not subject to the regulations and the restrictions of the undergraduate programs, the Department is at liberty to determine both the number and the qualification of the admitted students. This in turn enables the implementation of intensive forms of teaching in small groups.

The studies are completed with a compulsory diploma thesis that lasts for six months and is examined and graded by a committee consisting of three members of the faculty. During the studies a personal mentor is appointed to each student, who provides the necessary guidance and expertise. An important feature of the program is that it includes the active participation in national and international conferences.

IMPLEMENTATION and RESULTS

The Committee regards the program as very well conceived and implemented, reflecting exactly the goals of the Department. The only missing aspect, here too, seems to be a kind of a historical survey course, which will take into consideration the conversion character of the program.

Doctoral program

APPROACH

The doctoral program of the Department follows the line of the traditional continental European doctorate that consists in individual research of the candidate in close collaboration and exchange with her supervisor. In order to fulfil their role, the supervisors have established doctoral seminars, in which the candidates have the opportunity to present their work in progress and to discuss it with their fellow students and supervisors.

IMPLEMENTATION and RESULTS

A severe problem that hinders the undisturbed completion of many doctoral projects is the lack of financing in form of fellowships or research appointments. The candidates are, thus, forced to take up external jobs or to pursue their doctoral research parallel to their main occupation.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

Teaching methods used

It has been already mentioned that due to the large number of the students and the desolate situation of the teaching facilities (especially the missing seminar rooms) the teaching during the undergraduate phase takes place almost exclusively in form of lectures addressing large audiences. A certain degree of assistance is provided by the only member of the “laboratory teaching staff” (ΕΔΙΠ), who prepares interactive courses in philosophy using multimedia resources. This shows that the Department is both aware of the flaws of its teaching methods and of the possibilities and chances to ameliorate this by using new technologies.

At the postgraduate level, however, teaching takes place in more appropriate forms in small classes. The problem there is mainly the lack of appropriate classrooms.

Teacher/student collaboration

In spite of the mentioned difficulties, the collaboration between students and teachers is almost excellent. The students feel that their situation and their problems are taken seriously; they also feel that they are well advised, and that the teachers do their best in order to provide guidance.

Adequacy of means and resources

With the exception of the classrooms, the resources provided by the Department (library, computers, internet accessibility) are adequate. This does not mean, however, that the overall situation cannot be further improved, especially by a reorganisation of the library system.

Use of information technologies

Information technologies are intensively used.

Examination system

As already mentioned, the majority of the exams is administered in the form of written exams, following the traditional Greek system. Some teachers apply also other forms, as for example, essays or oral examinations. As it has also been mentioned, there is the possibility to obtain the first degree by writing a diploma thesis. This option is not obligatory (as it is at the postgraduate level), and is used only by a minority of the students (about 15%).

IMPLEMENTATION & RESULTS

Teaching methods and materials are of high quality, constantly monitored and updated by internal evaluations. The faculty is trying to include and implement the results of its research in the particular courses in so far as it complies with the level of the courses.

The Department provides an extensive mobility network by maintaining a

great number of ERASMUS (at least 15) and other academic cooperations with institutions in almost every European country and with many countries around the world. This has a positive impact to both the graduate and the postgraduate levels, exposing the students to international standards. Additionally, the faculty has international teaching experience because of its academic origin from non-Greek universities and from extensive sojourns abroad within the framework of the Department's international co-operations (Warwick, Grenoble, Freiburg, Karlsruhe, UNC at Chapel Hill).

Due to the Greek university admission system, the incoming students belong to the upper middle level of the overall student performance. This results in a corresponding performance at the first two years of the studies that improves significantly in the second phase of the undergraduate program. There is an on-going awareness of the need to improve and ensure the better performance of the students.

The Committee has ascertained that there is no precaution or care for students with special needs, especially for blind students or for students with cognitive impairments like dyslexia.

IMPROVEMENT

The undergraduate program has been recently revised (2013) both with respect to the structure and the content of the courses as well as with respect to the applied teaching methods, within the confines of the present suboptimal situation.

C. Research

APPROACH & IMPLEMENTATION

General remarks

The Department has three research areas: ancient Greek, continental, and analytic philosophy. The unique character of the Department, compared to other Greek philosophy departments, consists in the fact that both the researchers and the topics of their research aim at reconciling the two main streams of contemporary philosophy: the analytic and the continental traditions.

Regarding the assessment of the Department's research, the main indicator is the number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals, as well as in the frequency and the number of international co-operations (Freiburg, Munich, Edinburgh, Birkbeck, Goldsmiths College, Louvain, Grenoble, UNC Chapel Hill, Pittsburgh).

Special remarks

The actual research takes place in the form of particular research units consisting mainly of individual researchers and their postgraduate students. The research areas extend from Analytical Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Science, to Phenomenology, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Law and Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist Philosophy. A significant part of their research has been and is still funded by national and international research programs.

The individual researchers have earned several national and international distinctions by publishing in internationally renowned journals and participating in international conferences. An important indication of the quality of the research conducted at the Department is the fact that leading figures in contemporary philosophy like John McDowell participate regularly in workshops and conferences organised by the Department.

RESULTS

The Department's excellence in research is visible in a large number of publications in journals, collaborative volumes, and monographs as well as in research collaborations with institutions outside Greece. This promotes not only the Department's but also the University's visibility in the international arena.

The Department's success in research is internationally acknowledged in form of distinctions and foreign fellowships awarded from institutions like Humboldt-Foundation, Onassis Foundation USA, Institut Jean Nicod, CNRS, DFG, and Andrew F. Mellon Foundation.

Regarding Ancient Greek Philosophy, the Department has achieved a

status similar to a Centre of Research, focusing on Platonic and Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian Philosophy, and their ramifications in the Byzantine period.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH & IMPLEMENTATION

Regarding the organisation of the non-academic infrastructure, the services provided are of sufficient quality. However, there is still space for improvement that can be achieved by rationalizing the structures of the administrative organisation. The Committee is aware of the fact that such reforms do not depend solely on the will and the capabilities of the Department, but are heavily interconnected with the administrative organisation of the University.

This general problem is aggravated by the fact that there is, for the time being, no sufficient degree of electronic data processing. However, even if this deficit is remedied, the fact would remain that the organisational structure of the administration of the Department is problematic due to the general nature of the structure of the administration of the Greek universities. Every staff member has a variety of non-interconnected responsibilities that cannot be met with the same degree of efficacy at a given time (for example student management *and* financial tasks). The effect is that some staff members have a disproportionate workload that cannot be justified by their position.

The same holds for the organisation of the library. On the one hand, having a departmental library that is freely accessible to the faculty and the students is of a certain advantage. On the other hand, a partial library isolated from the main university library demands an intensive management and is financially more demanding. In times of economical crisis, like the one Greece is currently experiencing, those aspects cannot be served appropriately.

Other important infrastructure includes a PC room accessible to the students at certain hours as well as the possibility to access the University internet domain from the outside using a Virtual Private Network (VPN).

RESULTS

See Implementation

IMPROVEMENTS

Under the premise that the current organization cannot be changed significantly, the Department tried in the past to ameliorate the library situation, especially the extension of the opening hours, by employing graduate students. However, these efforts have been curtailed by the recent cuts in the Department's budget.

A further improvement in the administration efficacy is expected from the completion of the electronic data processing system which, as we have mentioned above may simplify some tasks, but will not unfold its full capabilities, if it is not accompanied by a thorough reform of the administration structure of the School.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Apart from its teaching and research efforts, the Department is involved in a series of important activities with strong impact at the local and the national community. These activities include a nation-wide competition in philosophy organised and carried out by the Department, an exchange program with regional schools enabling faculty to participate in school teaching and school teachers to teach university students, the organisation of public lectures and book presentations, the organisation of common events with other social institutions, and the invitation of distinguished personalities from arts and politics. There is also an extensive presence in the media as well as research collaborations with non-academic institutions.

All these activities help to shape the public image of the Department as a source of scientific knowledge of great social relevance. Especially in times of social and value crisis, the Department of Philosophy of the University of Patras takes an active role in providing answers to the pressing ethical and cultural questions arising in our society.

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

Short-, medium- and long-term goals:

The Department has very good and comprehensive short-, medium- and long-term goals in the following areas:

1. Their curriculum design at undergraduate and postgraduate levels
2. Their international student and teacher exchanges
3. Their international research activities and publications
4. Their student-staff interactions and departmental organization

The Committee recommends the following as an improvement strategy for the Department:

International standing of the Department in Philosophy

The Department is already promoting among their faculty the highest level of publication and research activities. We expect that they will continue placing high priority in this, both in their practice and the appointments to be made.

However, this is not sufficient for attaining the recognition the Department deserves internationally.

- a. Their research achievements and activities need to be **publicised** appropriately. This can be achieved through appropriate additions to and redesign of their departmental website, as well as through the establishment of a series of **named lectures** sponsored by the local economy.
- b. For the identification of the Department with particular areas of research strength, it is advisable to create **Research Clusters**.
- c. Research Clusters should be well **defined** under research goals; **dynamically run** with seminars, conferences, prestigious academic **visits** – in both directions –, **dynamically advertised** internationally.

Institutional support of the Department's effort for national leadership, and international standing:

- a. University support for **upgrading** the Department's web presence.
- b. University support in implementing a **retention policy** to ensure that the department retains key research leaders.
- c. University support for **building a critical mass** of members of staff for each Research Cluster.
- d. University support for **funding research activities** of the Research

Clusters.

- e. University support for prospective **star graduate students**.
- f. **Rationalisation of the administrative structures on departmental and faculty level** aiming at the concentration and specialization of the tasks assigned to the non-faculty.

For an optimal implementation of the proposals in paragraphs 1 and 2 above, we recommend the creation of a research unit, recognised by the University, in the form of a **Research Laboratory or Centre**, with the appropriate internal organisation – on the basis of a constitution (president, secretariat, working space, etc.), as well as presence on the internet.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

Conclusion

The Department of Philosophy of the University of Patras is a **dynamic, dedicated, and expanding** academic educational research unit that meets the standards of an **internationally competitive** and **innovative** academic institution. The faculty provides **high quality teaching** at all three levels of studies despite the suboptimal infrastructure regarding teaching space, the very unfavourable ratio between students and teachers and the flawed organisation of student administration. The Committee stresses the point that the itemized shortcomings and deficits absolutely **do not** lie in the responsibility of the Department. Furthermore, the Department is involved in a variety of **extra-academic activities** both at the local and the national level that promote the idea of Philosophy, provide important intellectual support to the society, and help attract potential qualified students.

Regarding its research output the Department is **very well represented** in the international arena with a large number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals, book publications, research contacts and awarded distinctions.

The most profound sign of the high level of the research conducted at the Department is a **joint project** submitted together with the Munich School of Ancient Philosophy with the title “Griechische Philosophie im Kontext. Eine Deutsch-Griechische Kooperation zur Auslegung, Überlieferung und Anwendung der antiken griechischen Philosophie“ that is awaiting its final approval. This project includes the organisation of summer schools, workshops, conferences, and the exchange of academic teachers and students.

Further Recommendations

The external limitations of the Department's performance can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The **shortness of faculty members**, which is about half of what was envisioned (13 and not 21), for more effective implementation of the departmental goals.
- 2) The **insufficient number of classrooms** allocated to the Department and the **apparent negligence** of good maintenance of the existing ones.
- 3) The **lack of sufficient funding for the support of mobility of faculty and of postgraduate students** to attend conferences inside or outside of Greece.
- 4) The **limited access to the departmental library** due to the lack of sufficient staff.
- 5) The marked **insufficiency of organization** of the supporting services.
- 6) The **large number of students** to be admitted by the Department, which is determined by other authorities and not the faculty of the Department and is disproportionate to the teaching capacity of the Department.

To meet the aforementioned limitations and shortcomings, which are above the will and the responsibility of the Department, the faculty is constantly and relentlessly trying to improve the educational and research activities, so that its voice can be heard inside and outside the University. Thus, it implements a strategy that indicates its will to adjust to the requirements of the newer developments of the academic community. In addition, it attempts to make its creative presence felt in the extracurricular activities for the benefit of the narrow and larger geographic Greek community.

This effort tends to secure the connection of the Department with the community, which in the future may be useful for the projection of the university image and the growing communal support for the University with funds for the various activities of the Department. Beyond the organizing of public lectures and other educational events, the establishment of the Panhellenic Competition of Philosophical Essay, which has been a great success for two successive years, is a significant part of the sustained effort of the Philosophy Department to gain the recognition of the non-academic community and secure its present and future support.

A problem that seems to have missed the attention both of the HQA and as well as of the University authorities is the complete absence of any authority or person concerned with the providing of assistance in cases of

humiliation, harassment or discrimination towards students or staff members. The Committee strongly recommends the creation of an **Office of Academic Ombud Services** for such cases at least at the School level.

The Committee closes its evaluation report expressing its congratulations to the Department for its achievements and its best wishes for a further improvement and success.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. _____	
2. _____	
3. _____	
4. _____	
5. _____	