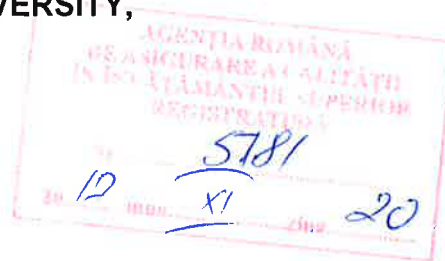


**EXTERNAL EVALUATOR'S REPORT
FOR ARACIS OF AGORA UNIVERSITY,
ORADEA, 2017**



Introduction

I was appointed as a Foreign External Evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was consequently invited to join the evaluation team for the institutional accreditation process of AGORA University in Oradea. The audit took place between Wednesday 18 October and Friday 20 October 2017. I have participated in quite a number of accreditation procedures but it was the first time that I evaluated a university which I had visited also in 2010. So I had the chance to follow some changes at AUO.

The evaluation team consisted of the following members, in addition to myself:

Prof. univ. dr. Ianos Ioan – Mission Director (University of Bucharest)

Prof. univ. dr. Apahidean Alexandru-Silviu – Coordinator of the Experts Evaluator Team (University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca)

Prof. univ. dr. Dinu Airinei – Advisory Commission Expert (“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi)

Prof. univ. dr. Dumitru Miron – Institutional Commission Expert (Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies)

Prof. univ. dr. dr. Roman Teodora – Program Expert (“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi) Management

Mihai Marcu – Technical Secretary

Madalina Petruta Florea – Student Evaluator (“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi) ANOSR

Dorin Alexandru Branescu – Student Evaluator (West University of Timisoara) UNSR

The evaluation process began on Wednesday the 18th of October at 9 a.m. in Rector’s office. The Rector of AGORA University welcomed the evaluation team and introduced the leadership of AUO. Prof. univ. dr. Ianos Ioan presented the introductory statements of the mission and the main principles of the evaluation.

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From 9.30 a.m. the evaluation team discussed the most important aspects that should be considered during the audit. This was followed by a tour at the university to see the infrastructure of the institution.

Between 10.30 a.m. and 5 p.m. the group of experts was working on different aspects of the evaluation. In my role as Foreign Expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of the whole university and was allowed to move freely, talking to members of staff and students of the university. At 5 p.m. we had an appointment with a huge group of students (circa 80-100) in the Blue Auditorium. At 6 p.m. we had another meeting with a group of about 25 graduates' employers and at 7 p.m. there was a one hour appointment with 22 alumni of AUO. The first day ended with a meeting of the evaluators.

The team continued the evaluation process on Thursday the 19th of October starting at 9 a.m. and lasted until 8 p.m.

The evaluation process was finished on Friday the 20th of October at 1 p.m. when the team of experts finalized the documents and met the management of AUO. The evaluation process was conducted in open and collegial manner. The colleagues of AUO let us have all the materials we needed for the evaluation. Some similarities can be recognized between the present (2017) and the former self-evolution report (2010).

General Statements

AUO became a university in 2012 (accredited in April 2012 under Law 59/2012), after a successful assessment by the ARACIS in 2010. AUO operates and respects all the laws that govern the higher education system in Romania.

The very simple didactic structure of AUO was changed since my latest visit according to the recommendations of ARACIS. It means that the Faculty of Law and Economics was divided into two faculties: the Faculty of Economic Sciences (FES) and the Faculty of Juridical and Administrative Sciences (FJAS).

AUO has four accredited undergraduate (Information Management, Law, Local Police, Management and Accounting) and three accredited master (Applied Researches on Forensics, Criminal Sciences and Forensics, Human Resource Management) programmes.

The University has about 734 enrolled students in the academic year of 2017/2018. The quality of human resources at AGORA University seems to be at a good level but scientific potential and research has been confirmed since 2010.

Managerial Structure

The management of the university is organised in accordance with its legal obligations. AUO management is ensured by the following management bodies: the Board of Governors, the Senate, the Faculty councils. The Administration Council is the supreme administrative, financial and economic governing body, and the Senate is the governing body for all didactical and scientific activities. The Rector's duties include the strategic leadership of the university and representing the university at judicial and public bodies.

Although the scientific potential is strong in the field of information sciences, the management system (and also the educational administration) is still not based on the integrated information system that provides automated data records, functional departments of the University by communicating through the intranet system. Most of data are recorded manually.

Comment: AUO has a coherent, integrated, transparent leadership system but the organizational structure of the university is quite large for its size compared it to the number of students and teachers.

Teaching Staff

The number of academic staff at the AGORA University at the beginning of academic year 2016/2017 was 47. There was 33 employees in the academic staff who were employed full-time by the university and 16 (48,48%) of them were professors and

associate professors. Every member of the teaching staff had PhD at AUO in the last academic year.

The non-permanent teachers of AUO are leading practitioners in their field or well qualified professors, that may be very beneficial for the students.

Comment: The University management pays a great attention to recruit competitive teachers. The academic staff quality is at good level. The ratio of students to teaching staff is very close to the European average level.

Facilities

AGORA University is housed in a building which used to be a factory in Oradea. Considering that the building was not designed for its current purpose, the university makes extraordinarily good use of its facilities.

The equipment of the educational spaces has improved since 2010 but still not all of them fulfil every requirement of the European standards. Some of the laboratories still need some more new and modern equipment. The biggest development can be noticed at the field of IT devices (e.g. smart boards, new PCs etc.). There are huge differences among the furniture used by the students in the lecture rooms.

The Faculty of Law managed to construct a courtroom that is used for improvised trials, where students are offered opportunities for practical development to deal with juridical cases, which help them to strengthen the practical part of their profession.

The collection of the library has grown in quantity since 2010 (2402 → 5183 titles, 10463 → 24757 titles) but quite a lot of the publication is out of date. Also the reading rooms need to be refurbished.

Comment: It is very important for the university to continue investing in its physical infrastructure.

Students

It is remarkable that AUO could increase the number of students from academic year 2010/11 to 2015/16. There is a halt in the number of undergraduate students but the number of master students is still growing.

In the academic year of 2010/2011 there were about 550 students (only BA programmes) and at the beginning of this academic year 734 students (611 BA + 123 MA) perform their studies at AUO.

Comment: It is a great result that AUO has provided for their students also to take part in MA programmes since the academic year of 2013/14. Probably it is the reason that the number of students have not decreased. The next step would be to create a doctoral programme not only based on students' possible demands but confirming AUO's academic position.

Besides the organized appointments with the students I also had the possibility to meet the representative of the Students' Union.

Although the number of participants (there were only two students from the master programmes) was high at the appointment of the undergraduate students only a few were active but I found them very open minded. Most of them also have a job. They were pleased with the education and the circumstances. The operation of AUO is proper and they are involved in the decision making processes.

At the meeting of the students' representatives I was informed about all the activities organised by them e.g. volunteering, blood donations, sport competitions, excursions etc. Two of them had previous experience in state-run universities and they prefer AUO to the state universities. AUO is much more student friendly higher education institution.

Only minor changes can be experienced in the field of internationalization. AUO has bilateral international agreements with different Universities and also a few Erasmus agreements. The numbers of students participating in international programmes are still very few.

Comment: It is recommended to enter into more ERASMUS agreements and other European Higher Education Programmes (e.g. CEEPUS). AUO should encourage students to take part in mobility activities, especially doing traineeship abroad.

At the meeting with the representatives of the employers, they seemed pleased with those students who graduated from AUO. They also mentioned that they have good cooperation with AUO for the student's practice. It seems that the present legal regulation of internship is not satisfactory; it does not really motivate employers to establish internships.

During the discussion with the former students they seemed satisfied with the AUO. One of them mentioned that it were very useful if those who become managers would study psychology.

Research

AOU focuses on fundamental and applied scientific research in the fields of economic, legal and social sciences, carried out in collaboration with other universities and research institutes in the country and abroad. Research activity is performed and organized through research centres. One more research centre has been established (an International Centre for research in the field of human rights – CONEXIS - in collaboration with the "Luigi Vanvitelli "University in Naples, Italy) since my visit in 2010. AUO is doing research activity in accordance with the income obtained through research contracts.

AUO Publishing House publishes five scientific journals with ISSN, and the papers of several conferences. Newly founded journals (Agora International Journal of Administration Sciences; Agora International Journal of Masters Studies) are published in English. Research is promoted through the journals which is published at AUO.

I appreciate it very much that AUO involve students in scientific research much more than they did it in 2010.

Comment: The master programmes can be based on advanced standards of teaching, combination of lecturing with scientific research and students must acquire advanced skills in critical analysis and scientific research.

Quality Management

The ambition of AUO in quality assurance is quite clear: the continuous improvement. AUO has structures, strategies, policies and procedures for quality assurance of the teaching and research processes. Commission for evaluation and quality assurance has an important role in informing the decisions on policy and objectives relating to quality. Quality Assurance Department coordinate all quality assurance regulations and procedures. AUO regularly reviews its courses and gathers student feedback.

The management of AUO is open with regard to the utilization of previous evaluation results, and all these evaluations serve for improvement follow up procedures.

Comment: AUO should explain how to guarantee consequences of the questioning of students in the quality assurance process.

Conclusion

I propose the institutional reaccreditation of AOU (I recommend a “confidence rating”) based on what I have experienced; seen, read and heard. I hope that some of the comments which I made in my report will help the University Management in the process of continual improvement. I also would like to stress that all comments offered in this report are intended to contribute to further improvements of AUO as it strives towards the achievement of its mission.

I emphasize the following:

- I appreciate that AUO has confirmed its programmes, structure and did not make a speedy extension; AUO followed the tactic of slow growing.
- AUO has to continue to invest in the physical infrastructure and facilities, as and when funds allow.

- I strongly suggest developing international links and collaborations to support international research activities and encourage students and academic staff taking part in exchange and mobility programmes.
- AUO has to continue to strengthen the relations with trade and industry actors for getting more information and feedback from the job market.

Finally I would like to express my thanks to the Rector, the Deans and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Oradea. Also much gratitude to my colleagues from the evaluation team for the professional, open and gentle way in which the audit was conducted.

At least but not last special thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

Pécs, 10-11-2017



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