



ARACIS

Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

External Institutional Evaluation

“Tibiscus” University

Timisoara, Romania

Foreign Expert Report

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of Denmark and chairman of the  
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## **1. Introduction and conclusion.**

Early this year (2013) I was invited to participate in the External Institutional Evaluation of the Tibiscus University of Timisoara, Romania, and I accepted the invitation with pleasure. I have been involved in other evaluations in Romania for the National University Research Council and have furthermore performed a series of different university evaluations in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Lithuania, Slovak Republic, Cyprus and Turkey.

I have earlier received from ARACIS a guide on “External Evaluation of Academic Quality in Accredited Higher Education Institutions (External Institutional Evaluation) dated December 2006. This guide follows the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, and I find the procedure well defined and illustrates that a competent agency is running this type of evaluations. This is indeed also the impression I have got from former ARACIS evaluations I have participated in at Dimitri Cantamir University and University Carol Davila.

In late April I received the Internal Evaluation Report from Tibiscus University a document of 54 pages and 116 appendices in the form of links to documents from the university and various external authorities. Unfortunately for this external expert none of the appendices were available in English, and thus my judgements in this document is based on the Internal Evaluation Report and the conversations I have been involved in during the site visit at Tibiscus University.

The site visit to Tibiscus University was well organised and well taken care of all the way from transportation internationally as well as nationally and between meetings, to installation in a local and very comfortable hotel. The meetings at the university went on in a very pleasant atmosphere and everything being asked for in the form of documents and meetings was taken care of promptly and correct.

The meetings in and with the ARACIS team of evaluation were generally performed in the Romanian language, and for this matter I was during the whole process attended by competent interpreters who gave me a first hand feeling for the various presentations and discussions going on around the table and in the various conference rooms which we were visiting.



2.

Tibiscus University is a private and small institution. It strive to give research based education and to develop and maintain an internationally oriented flavour in its teaching activities. My judgement in this relation is that there are still some major challenges to overcome. There is international relations, cooperation and Erasmus activities to build on. However, I consider the general lack of professional commandment of the English language in the university to be an mayor barrier for true internationalisation, and this subject has to become a focal issue in the further development of Tibiscus University.

I also find the working conditions for the academic staff in relation to their research work very poor both in relation to office space, means of communication and access to relevant and recent literature in electronic form, and also these challenges have to be confronted by the university management in the further development of the university.

I feel that I during the 2½ days of visiting Tibiscus University and through my preparation done in the available documents have got a fair notion of the standards and performances of the management, the academic staff and the students at the university. On basis of the below described experiences I find this university as being off

Limited Confidence

but with potential for developing into a respected national university provided the right amount of resources are coming to the university in the years ahead and provided the management of the university follows a well defined strategy of development within normal university standards in both teaching and research.

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## 2. Language

In small countries with a specific language of its own like *e.g.* Denmark and Romania it is of utmost importance that knowledge of and competences in foreign languages is a wide spread phenomenon. In the case of universities proficiency in the English language is very important as this language today is the lingua franca of science in general. If you cannot communicate, write, speak and publish in English you have a major problem in advancing in your subject and to be competitive on the international scene.

I do not know which policy the Romanian government and parliament has on foreign languages and intercultural competences for the Romanian population – and especially for children and youth under education - but I noticed that Tibiscus University has English teachers of very high quality and two of these were my interpreters during sessions in the evaluation committee.

A number of the students with which I was confronted on various occasions and situations were also very good in expressing themselves in English and there were very few communication problems during the meetings. I thus think that the students are ready for the challenges connected with globalisation and possible free movements in the European Union under various educational programs such as Erasmus and for that sake in the rest of the World. However, in relation to the management and the academic staff at this university I must confess a certain frustration in relation to the competences in English. Out of the 15 – 20 academic staff members I met during my 2½ days at Tibiscus University less than half of them were capable of performing conversations and discussions in English.

Thus the common dialog during meetings, in the evaluation committee and during lunches and dinners went on in Romanian and everything was interpreted for me if I did not had the luck of sitting next to a person who could speak English.

I judge this situation as being severe for the university in its ambitions of becoming international recognised and a trusted partner in various research programmes financed by international agencies *e.g.* the European Union.

Thus I recommend:

- a. That Tibiscus University continues to urge and support its students in developing proficiency in the English language.
- b. That Tibiscus University defines a policy and sets up a program with the aim of improving considerably the language capabilities in English for the academic staff at the university in general.



4.

**3. Exchange and credit transfer.**

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is in use at Tibiscus University and this procedure is of course essential in relation to exchange of students which for the major part is arranged through the Erasmus Mobility Program of the European Union.

In the material given to us in connection with this external institutional evaluation no statistics on student exchanges and exchange programs with other universities were to be found. I was, however, informed that the funds available for exchange under the Erasmus Program has increased considerably over the last couple of years and that Tibiscus University has the ambition of increasing the number of outgoing students, of learning experiences and professional training. Further it is stated that the university is collaborating with 17 institutions of higher education and research centre from 9 European countries: England, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain and Portugal.

It is of course a realistic ambition to start up the internationalisation process by focusing on out-going exchange. However, the university will as mentioned above have to focus on the improvement of language capabilities in general in order for the exchange to become bilateral.

Thus I recommend:

- a. That key figures in relationship to student and staff exchanges are collected , published and used as platform for formulating policies on internationalisation of the study programmes in Tibiscus University
- b. That instruments such as the following are being activated: Students' international days, international advisors, publishing on the university website, newspaper and radio features on exchange students' experiences and reflections on the outcome of staying a semester or more abroad, etc.
- c. That the university in order to increase the number of foreign students create packages of study programmes given in English and being at the same time transferable with respect to credit points in partner universities abroad.



#### 4. Premises and facilities

Tibiscus University is a small institution and the various study lines do not require much equipment except for computer systems, access to internet and interactive media facilities in the class rooms. In some class rooms there was Smart Boards and TV monitors. However, in the Faculty of Law I only saw blackboards and chalk!

There are a number of reasonable equipped computer laboratories and internet is accessible for staff and students. However, I did not see many students working on laptops.

There is a well organised library, however, access to electronic journals etc. is not available from the premises of Tibiscus University but may be obtained from the close by West University of Timisoara.

Even though the number of students in Tibiscus University has been shrinking over the last couple of years it seems as if there is a lack of space. Part of this constraint is going to be solve through a building near by which for the present is being renovated. There are two advantages in this initiative, firstly Tibiscus University is embarking in a process where it is creating the start of a campus facility and secondly the new building offers more spacious rooms than the present building.

For the time being the rooms in the new building is empty and raw, but the indication was that it would be equipped with modern teaching facilities.

For bigger gatherings ore lectures for classes of over 50 persons it has been arranged with a commercial centre in the town of Timisoara to rent conference rooms of the appropriate size.

I thus recommend:

- a. To continue the process of modernising the old building with up-to-date teaching facilities.
- b. To continue and develop the cooperation with other universities in Timisoara.
- c. To further develop the ambition of creating a university campus and an environment around the present site of the university.
- d. To use the facilities provided in the commercial centre in town to organise lectures and gathering for many students and to use it in the process of creating a Tibiscus University spirit through graduation ceremonies, annual celebrations etc.



6.

5. **Benchmarking.**

In the Internal Evaluation Report, which we received as preparation for our site visit and evaluation of Tibiscus University there is of course a number of tables and figures indicating the development of the university since the start in 2002.

In order to evaluate the function and quality of a university it is necessary to compile a number of key parameter. This is: Student intake, number of graduates, drop-out rates, employability of graduates, number of teaching staff, number of academic staff doing research, number of administrative staff and technical staff etc. Further one needs numbers of publications and type of publications, books, patents, national and international contracts, number of international exchanges for both students and staff, invitations to lecturing at national and international conferences, number of visiting scholars etc.

Other parameters may also be valid, however, the point is that any institution should build up a consequent documentation system. Such a system is valuable in the management of the individual university, however, also important in accounting towards agencies and ministries. Finally and most importantly it may be used in benchmarking with other higher education institutions to document a certain ranking and to learn about both strong and weak sides of the individual institution.

Thus I recommend:

- a. That Tibiscus University develops a set of key indicators to be used in the future as platform for quality development in the performance of the institution and for benchmarking.
- b. That Tibiscus University also use the developed key indicator system in judging how available resources are to be spend most efficiently.

6. **Course Evaluations and the general attitude of the students towards Tibiscus University.**

During our visit in Tibiscus University we had the opportunity to talk with relatively many students. It was a pleasure to listen to their reports from classes and to feel their enthusiasm for the institution. Several of the testimonials talked about dedicated teachers, who is able to explain difficult subject and to put theory into an applied context. The teachers also involves the students in choosing subjects for their classes which is very helpful in relation to keeping the attention of the class. I want to comment here, that a fair fraction of the students are mature people with family and jobs, so the above cited testimonials are coming from a critical audience with not too much time to waste.



With respect to course evaluations the students we spoke with knew about the existence of these and the process. However the indication was that participation in the evaluations, which are performed electronically, was not highly prioritised by the students. This is a shame as course evaluations are a potential source for proposals in relation to better learning outcomes and for teachers to improve their performance as teachers.

With respect to course evaluations this can be done in many ways and with many purposes and the literature about this subject is quite extended. My personal angle towards course evaluations and whether students think they are worth the effort is related to whether the students experience an effect of the performed evaluations or not.

A final remark in relation to the students is the present lack of a student union at Tibiscus University. Again this may be related to the fact that about half of the students are mature persons with a family and a job and thus they probably think they that will not find time for engagement in union work. This may be true, but is still a shame as many qualities in a higher education institution may be considerably improved by student participation in relevant discussions in the union and in various university committees, where important issues in relation to the university management and performance are discussed and regulated.

Thus I recommend:

- a. That the university recognize, treasure and preserve the student oriented attitude show by the teachers in Tibiscus University.
- b. That the university consider in dialog with the students how participation in the course evaluations can be improved?
- c. One method of improving participation may be to execute midterm evaluations in stead of at the end of a semester. In that way problems identified at midterm may be corrected already while a course is still running to the benefit for the students who answered the evaluation scheme.
- d. That the university engage itself in setting up a student union by providing the proper help and support for the process.

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## 7. Research

Tibiscus University aim to be an institution delivering research within the subject areas being taught at the institution. We have been informed that this university since its establishment in 2002 have had 52 publications in ISI-journals and 90 abstracts in ISI-conference proceedings. This is a production of 142 publication over 10 years from an academic staff of approximately 100 persons in all the years. This is a publication average of 1.4 publication from each academic staff over a 10 year period. Not an impressive result.

Obviously there are many reasons for this disappointing result. First there must obviously have been a construction period where all efforts went into the creation of an organisation and the formation of teaching programmes in a number of faculties. Further with the economy being tight, time for research must have been very limited. One should have expected that the situation now – 10 years after the establishment of Tibiscus University – might have been at the point in time when the research activity would have been increasing, but that does not seem to be the case, on the contrary. This situation is really serious and has to be tackled very soon, very directly and seriously.

The university must determine in which direction to go, i.e. keeping the master programs based on a necessary research activity or focus on bachelor programs which are not so demanding for research but can survive on the basis of consulting and practical development programmes.

Thus I recommend:

- a. That Tibiscus University formulates its strategy with respect to the future considering the consequences of its potential (or lack of potential) in the fields of research associated to its various faculties.
- b. That Tibiscus University according to the recommendations given above under benchmarking formulates procedures for keeping trustworthy lists of its published research results.



8. **Final Remarks.**

It was interesting to participate in the External Institutional Evaluation of Tibiscus University and I learned through this engagement more than I knew before coming to Timisoara about the situation for universities in Romania, which for the time being is not so profitable.

For further evaluations along the line defined by ARACIS I will suggest as before to focus on a procedure of performing a major part of the discussions in English if foreign experts are going to be an effective part of the evaluations. Doing as proposed will help the foreign expert a lot and also show clearly which universities are competent on an European level and who are not. Even though I was serviced well by a professional interpreter I am sure that I missed a lot of important details in the discussions around the table and thus my in-depth knowledge of what is really going on in Tibiscus University may be too weak for making such recommendations as I have done it above.

Signed  .2013

Hans Peter Jensen

