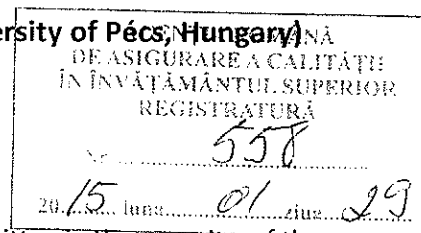


Evaluation Report : The Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica -Ilfov

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I would first like to thank ARACIS for inviting me to the accreditation committee in the capacity of the foreign expert. I feel it is an honour to be given this opportunity. I would like to express my special thanks to all members of the committee and the academic and managerial staff of the Institute for their support through the whole evaluation process. I really appreciate the friendly hospitality and helpfulness I was fortunate enough to enjoy. I am especially grateful to the student representatives of the committee who assisted me in evaluating their survey results. I was serviced very well in issues of translation.

The efficiency of the institutional procedures of programme quality assurance

Mission, Values

The Adventist Theological Institute has a relatively distinctive character as being a denominational private higher education institution that aims to fulfill its religious credo and at the same time keep the institution in agreement with high academic standards of instruction according to Romanian Education Law.

The Institute has been purposefully preparing itself for the first state accreditation process since it had been authorized by the Romanian government in 1992 and got Commission approval on accreditation from the General Conference International Board of Education and the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools in 1995.

There has been cooperation with the World Adventist Accrediting Association since the 90 s. 2004, 2007, and 2011 are the dates when institutional accreditation was given by the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA), General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists located in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

2015 is a year when both the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and AAA accreditation are to be achieved simultaneously.

The *Mission Statement* can be found and read publicly on the campus. It reveals commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist identity and transmission of its beliefs, emphasizes the task of spiritual and professional development of students, guiding them in their moral character development.

Holistic Education is a core value much referred to in the meetings. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person - spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. It is reflected in the study programs and in the daily routine of the students. (learning, devotional activities, community and social work, lactovegetarian food, sports and musical activities). The students are expected to

demonstrate a commitment to the Christian mission and engage in acts of social and community service. Approaches for Integrating faith into teaching are promoted vigorously.

The spiritual life on campus is under the guidance of the chaplain. My interview with him reveals that there is a richness of activities on campus representing strong educative values. (Two prayer weeks a year, mandatory and optional group sessions, devotional activities, evangelistic campaigns in home and foreign countries, small group discussions, adventist youth programs, health week projects, choral and instrumental concerts, and chosen social projects. His telephone number is known to all students, he makes himself available 24 hours a day, offers a very committed service. He does career and pastoral counselling alongside premarital and marital counselling.

Faculty and staff also participate in community outreach programs on Sabbaths as well as on other occasions.

The OBJECTIVES of the Institute are to prepare well qualified and dedicated pastoral staff to serve the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Romania and foreign countries and to engage in forming highly qualified practitioners for the needs of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and beyond.

The efficiency of the institutional procedures of ensuring graduation standards.

ARACIS and the Educational Act together prescribe and stipulate a large number of procedures and structures which have been undertaken in the last years by the Institute. A huge set of regulatory standards and structures have been developed, but the small size of the Institute keeps the relationships much more informal than formalized.

Study programmes

At present there are four BA degree programs offered by The Adventist Theological Institute: Adventist Pastoral Theology ; Romanian-English Language and Literature ; Social Assistance; Education and Pedagogy ;

In 2014 the student numbers totalled 157, as follows: 70 students on the Pastoral Adventist Theology study program, 23 students on the Romanian Language and Literature - English Language and Literature study program, 6 students on the Social Assistance studies and 58 students on Primary and Pre-school Pedagogy . There have been better years before, everyone in the leadership would like to triple the number of students, so recruitment efforts have to be intensified, especially in the Social Work –field. (This occupational field isn't attractive and resourced enough in Romania).

Two postgraduate programs are organized through the Institute: Master of Arts in Religion [US Andrews University extension programme] has been hosted since 2002. Nobody can practice as a pastor without this MA degree. University of Montemorelos (Mexico) is another partner which had offered MA in Education for years. (but not now). The MA programme consists of two-week modules

taught intensively. Those with employment can take four or fewer modules of their choice per year, thus prolonging their MA studies for more than one year.

Since 2004, in every year, a group of students holds an evangelistic campaign in different parts of the world, as part of the Share Him , Quiet Hour and Canada Youth Challenge programmes. The Institute supports the students to get involved in the Christian mission and be engaged in humanitarian activities.

The Practicum-part is done mostly in institutions of the Adventist Church (there are more than 50 kindergartens, 10 primary schools, 5 grammar schools in Romania), or in pastoral communities (consisting of roughly 60 thousand believers), Adventist media channels, publishing organizations and nonprofit caring associations. In the case of schools the approval of the state supervisory body has to be gained to function as a field practice institution. In order to enhance the practicing teachers' understanding of mentoring, they are requested to participate in a mentor's course.

Having met graduates I've heard their appreciation of the skills and knowledge they had gained at the Institute. A lot of them completed MA programmes in state universities after their studies here and they claimed they always enjoyed the fruits of the good reputation enjoyed by the Institute. A meeting with employers reinforced this view.

Study program directors are key personnel to monitor the efficiency of the modules. Introducing new courses is possible following discussions with the students, colleagues and the practitioners in the field.

In the 2014-2015 academic year the teacher/ student ratio is 1 / 4.83 guaranteeing very good teacher-student communications and relationships. Graduates frequently mentioned the kindness of their teachers, their friendliness and readiness in engaging with them. They agreed that teachers act like role models in their life. The high level of professional development and the non-competitive atmosphere were sincerely appreciated by the graduates.

Institutional recruitment happens in all the Adventist conferences of the Romanian Union. Faculty members together with groups of students visit church communities, Adventist schools with the purpose of presenting the educational programs. Grammar school students each year are welcome for a whole weekend to obtain reliable information on future studies at the Institute. The website of ATI (www.institutadventist.ro) has been upgraded to reflect the programs and activities of the institution. Information about the methods for candidate selection is public, at least 6 months prior to admission time.

The efficiency of the institutional procedures of supporting the educational process.

Teaching staff:

All the members of the academic department finalized their doctoral process and obtained the PhD degree. Faculty members are appointed by the Senate and confirmed by the Board of Trustees. 70 % hold tenure positions. The teaching staff numbers 32-33 this year. Faculty members who teach theological disciplines must be members of the Adventist Church and represent its spiritual and

academic standards. However, for a specific field of expertise, a non-Adventist Church member can also be hired. At present the latter group is more proportionate.

The leadership is satisfied with the academic achievements and holds that one of the strengths of the faculty is the age group of the teachers. (Median age: Middle-aged).

Teachers are required to assess the students' problem solving skills through case studies, projects / research papers, complex essays, practical works, laboratory activities, participation in debates, arguments vs. counter-arguments, student portfolios etc. during the semester. This represents between 30-50% of the final grade. The final, summative assessment is carried out based on written / oral examination representing 50- 70% of the final grade.

The graduation exam consists of two stages: a written test assessing basic and specialized knowledge and an oral examination of the dissertation presentation. Undergraduate diplomas have been issued so far by accredited partner universities (University of Bucharest, "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, University of Craiova, "Dunarea de Jos" Galați) for a fee.

The periodic assessment of teaching staff quality happens through self-evaluation, peer evaluation and student evaluation.

The teachers with whom I had a chance to talk weren't very satisfied with the peer-evaluation practice, mainly because they teach different subjects, so content-wise there is not much to reflect on. Surprisingly observation of the colleague's teaching is not a requirement. Only the accomplishments and publications are evaluated by them.

Incentives for the teaching staff:

Outstanding teachers are rewarded with verbal appreciation in Teachers' Counsel meetings, written appreciation, funds for publishing their research/course materials recommendations for studying abroad, recommendations for study trips abroad. The Institute finances each Faculty member's attendance at a Romanian conference each year, and tries to cover the cost for an international professional event every 2-3 years.

(European Theological Teachers' Convention, Society of Biblical Literature, TTC European Conference, National Conference for Adventist teachers were events regularly mentioned in the interviews).

Publishing activities are encouraged and supported as well.

Full-time staff members are provided teachers' family apartments at the campus site with subsidized costs and transport services for their children to go to school.

Learning environment and facilities

The Campus was finished in 1999, inaugurated in 2000. It is a safe and pleasant learning environment offering favourable working conditions with its 11 lecture halls, a big Amphitheatre (200 seats, area – 189 m²) and a Chapel (600 seats, 665 m²), a Library (259 m², 7 computers) and a Computer lab (72 m², 15 computers).

There are sport facilities, a fitness room (184 m²) and open air sport fields can be used by the campus residents. (Football, tennis and volleyball courts are available.) The restaurant/cafeteria seats can host 130 students at a time and an attached small room 20 places.

All the students are offered a dormitory accommodation at the site. Male students have been housed 2 to a room, and female students 3 to a room. Each floor (in the boys' dormitory) has a special room for social and devotional activities. The Institute offers rooms for married students too. There are altogether 280 places in the dormitories.

All the teaching rooms are well equipped with modern technology, a free WIFI is ensured for the students.

Library

The head of the library is very committed to the development of the library. The library catalogue is accessible from all computers on campus or any computer that is connected to the campus network. The library is on the top level of the Campus Central Building and contains a fairly small number of (est. 32 000) books. The Library of Congress Classification system is used. EBSCO access is guaranteed through the partnership with Andrews University. Kindle e- book reader software is installed to the computers in the library. Digitization of copyright-free books has started with the help of volunteer students. There is a wish to join the network of academic libraries (Library Consortia) to acquire discount prices and easier access to international databases.

Students

Students are coming from all parts of Romania, mostly from middle class adventist families.

They do have a weekly workload of 28-29 hours, they seem to consider learning activities very seriously. 12 hours of sporting activity a week is obligatory.

They seem to identify with the Institute and its specific mission. At the students' meeting some of them expressed the view that teachers spend a lot of time with them doing joint extracurricular activities.

The Institute offers annually merit and social scholarships for the students according to the *Regulation on awarding scholarships for students*. Every year 3 Social Work, 3 Pedagogy and 4 Theology Students can get distinction scholarships (200 EUR/year) that requires full attendance and very good grades from the applicants to win. 52 % of students are satisfied with the present system, others would favour more scholarships with less money.

At the meeting of the students, questionnaires were given to them asking about their satisfaction level by the student members of the accrediting committee.

The results were very favourable for the Institute.

91 % were satisfied with the methods of teaching, the appropriateness of the learning materials and conditions, only 4 % rejected them. 52 % is very satisfied, 48 % is satisfied with teachers appointed to act as a responsible teacher for each study group.

78 % were knowledgeable about the process and the results of teacher evaluation, 13 % didn't know about the results. 4 % were ignorant of both.

87 % were satisfied with the Campus facilities, 9 % expressed certain disappointments. 87 % were appreciative of the practicum-models. 83 % were satisfied with the consultation hours teachers offered. 60 % value the opportunities for interaction with external institutions, 35 % think there are not really enough external interactions.

61 % feel their opinions are requested and heard in decision making processes, 17 % are negative about it.

43 % regularly use Counselling and Guidance services offered at the Campus, 9 % have never used it so far, 4 % have never heard about it.

87 % are satisfied with the youth organisation, 4 % don't know the activity, 4 % are not satisfied at all. 78 % participated in the voting.

Student Services

Student services staff slogan is, *"More than an institution, a family!"*

Together with student representatives (one per class), student services staff constitute the Campus Services Committee (CSC). As it is a relatively small institution, with a small number of personnel members, the leadership of this committee is given to the chaplain. And a number of students participate directly in the preparation and serving of food, as well as in cleaning the kitchen and the dining hall. For the maintenance of dormitories and the campus volunteering is promoted. Each student offers an hour a day to work for the benefit of the community.

All students and employees at the Institute can purchase meal tickets and eat three meals per day at the Institute's cafeteria.

Musical Activity: The students' choir, bell choir and occasional vocal and instrumental groups are available for students interested to learn how to sing.

The credibility of the information disseminated by the institution with regard to the study programmes.

The Institute undertakes proactive marketing and recruitment strategies. The main website gives detailed information on the mission of the university, the study programs, degrees offered. The

information regarding the admissions methodology and the educational offer are available on the official site (<http://www.institutadventist.ro/admitere>), in the periodic publications of the Adventist Church (Curierul Adventist and Studiile Biblice), on the radio and TV stations of the church and in advertising materials such as posters and flyers. All this allows future students to access information at least 6 months prior to the admissions process.

GOOD PRACTICE ASPECTS:

Being relatively small the institution is well positioned to personalize its education offer, successfully shaping personalities in diverse aspects through mentoring and support activities resulting in strong character-building. This educational outcome (producing people with moral principles who always give more than asked for) was explicitly singled out in the meeting with the employers alongside the good reputation of the graduates.

Open Doors –Weekend for the purpose of recruitment through inviting grammar school students

AAA's internal accreditation system every 5 years serves as a constant stimulus to develop and improve.

A principle “no student shall give up studies for lack of funds” and the supporting practice as a consequence

Offering work opportunities for the students in exchange for tuition fees during school time, as well as during holidays.

International embeddedness as an asset. International partnerships offer a lot of varied cooperation activities in the field of education, missionary work, and research. Even financial back-up. The World Adventist Church does have corresponding structures across the regions and countries (Youth Ministries, Education, Family Ministries, Communication, Health Ministries, Sabbath Schools, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty , Women's Ministries etc.) that helps to get access to good practice and to expert knowledge.

Embeddedness into the Romanian Adventist world can generate extra resources through the appeal to potential fundraisers supporting good initiatives (for example: a fundraising Bucharest Classical Concert resulted in buying a very modern computer with scanning capacities for the Library.)

Collaborative leadership culture, consensus-seeking informal culture shaping the organizational culture

Statement related to the confidence granted to the institution

I propose a “ confidence” grade.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Increase the number of students and teaching staff to reach a more sizeable, optimal entity.
2. Establishing clearer procedures in more formalized ways, more efforts to document actions and proceedings in order to objectify more the tacit knowledge held by the Institute and increasing transparency. External evaluators will always be keen on seeing documentation and audits.
3. Structured ways of integrating employer feedback into the teaching process should be developed.
4. Having achieved the status of being accredited by ARACIS, a new development phase can start: the scope of BA degree programmes may be expanded and the MA program development work should be strengthened, new (even foreign) students could be targeted alongside the Romanian diaspora.
5. With the arrival of MA students it must be a priority to improve and sharpen the research focus within the activities. The possibility of identifying a few joint research projects within the Institute is worth exploring together with stimulating interdisciplinary approaches. In this aspect the fact that Romania managed to get the Eastern Spirituality Research Centre (ESRC) located at the Institute certainly is an asset and the research network building activities and the pursued themes offer great potential.
6. Involving talented students in research projects should be promoted as well.

7. Increase their publishing activity, make achievements more visible among interested parties nationally and internationally.
8. Students expressed their wish to learn more about comparative religions and to be involved in inter-religious projects and communities.
9. Potential sponsors and donors are ready to be invited to support the institution's activities. (common agreement at the employers' meeting). I'd recommend events like project-fairs, project auctions when good ideas, projects are shown to the potential financiers who can pick their favourites.
10. The needs of the disabled shouldn't be overlooked, at present there are no lifts at all and there are no barrier-free rest-rooms for wheelchair users.
11. A better equipped Media Library instead of the present Media Corner would offer more individual study and recreational space for the students.
12. An in-service continuous professional training (workshops with guest experts) on innovative teaching methods and evaluation tools would be beneficial for quality development.
13. The institutional website should be in English as well.
14. I'd recommend providing reading lamps in the dormitory rooms.

Pécs, January 26.


Teréz Kleisz