

EVALUATION REPORT - The Institute for Business Administration in Bucharest (ASEBUSS)

Written by the short –term foreign expert: Teréz Kleisz PhD

2013 October



Overall review - Quality Culture

As we all know the process of accreditation is about evaluating quality assurance and quality development of educational programs and institutions providing learning contexts and program delivery. It is about reviewing structures, procedures, systemic steps and perceptions of those involved in or affected by the teaching-learning process, all the ingredients that can ensure the expected results through maintaining and developing standards.

As a result, trust is established between the education institution and its students and even with the wider public it serves. It clearly brands and articulates the value for each of the stakeholders, mostly for the current and prospective students. An alumni survey ordered by the Institute for Business Administration established that 75 % of students who applied for admission had chosen the EMBA program following the recommendations of earlier students.

The Institute for Business Administration fulfills all the criteria that are needed to guarantee quality standards of education, the whole institution can be described as one having a quality culture.

Having been the member of the Executive MBA Council since 1996 (EMBAC: is the association of choice for more than 200 schools in the world representing more than 300 Executive MBA Programs with a mission to educate, network, and inform) enables the Institute to profit from the international experiences of the members and be conscious of the role of monitoring and measuring the educational processes in advancing performance. Suggested tools like *Entry and Exit Surveys* by EMBAC are done by the Percept Research Company each year. Based on the overall alumni feedback the Institute scored very high on *the reputation of the business school, the quality of students* and the *overall quality of the faculty*.

Since 2005 the Institute have been purposefully preparing itself for the accreditation by AACSB International (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and therefore acts on identified and required standards, systematically reviews feedbacks on how the objectives set in the process of continuous quality improvement have been reached. According to the accreditation procedure the Institute works with an appointed mentor from AACSB and submits each year an annual report. The accreditation process is rigorous and requires a significant amount of work to achieve it. It is a costly project, and it is for financial reasons that in recent years the Institute requested a break but still operates according to the criteria approved.

This institution has a relatively unique and distinctive character in the Romanian university system. It is a private postgraduate institution of higher education that emerged after the political changes with a clear strategy to promote transformation of business culture through building strong cooperation and knowledge transfer with US universities and to create the Romanian - American Executive Master of Business Administration program. (taught in English.) Apart from EMBA

currently there is a new MBA program for entrepreneurs starting this autumn. So the Business School is a relatively small-scale operation that uses well the powers of intensive communication and human relations in building cohesion among students and staff.

Strategic management

Mission, Values and Competitiveness

The mission statement explicitly expresses the aim of reaching the standards of the leading business schools. Cooperation with the American Kennesaw State University is a core part of the overall institutional strategy.

The Institute fosters creating a class of competitive business leaders with the mindset and competencies required to compete in the increasingly global business environment. Leadership qualities, proactivity, ethical decision-making based on valid theoretical and practical knowledge, ability to work across cultural barriers, competitiveness through continuous improvement are the values highlighted to work for.

Having talked to the staff members it is obvious that they see the Institute as exhibiting a good blend of a business school and an academic institution. Applicability and applied research-orientation stands at the centre of activities. Employing innovative and effective teaching methodology is also one of the aims, all that facilitates team work and collaboration among the students who are pooled from ambitious and experienced management position-holders.

The Romanian-American EMBA-programs has created an alumni community of more than 1100 young managers. The Business School sees them as a valuable asset in its strategy. This network gives a constant source of innovation and information to revise the EMBA program in order to reflect the ever-changing needs of business and its students. The alumni community acts as linking with the Romanian business community, their experience is an add-on whenever they are invited to be guest speakers not only at Alumni Evenings but on several of the courses as well.

Developing the quality of teaching offers to the Romanian business community is also helped by the *Advisory Board* where members of top companies are consulted and via *framework agreements* with companies, partner institutions and the Ministry of Finance.

Alongside the embeddedness to the Romanian business community, the 10-year-old strategic partnership with Kennesaw State University Business School, Atlanta was renewed in January 2013 and it has been working both as a very valuable asset in improving quality standards and as providing a competitive edge for recruiting students for the EMBA.

Being - an institution demanding high tuition fees it is always a challenge to recruit sufficient numbers of eligible students. In spite of the recent financial and economic crisis and its legacy the Institute's leadership thinks the road to financial stability is secure.

From 2012 a very excellent innovation and an organizational strategy objective was introduced through establishing the *Center for training and continuing professional development* within the Institute where offers are provided for business people ranging from short intensive modules to

complex 4-to-9-months management and leadership courses and accredited professional further training.

A recent strategical decision is to build stronger connections with the business community through a nationwide daily financial newspaper. According to the recent cooperation agreement the teaching staff is supposed to comment on current business issues, write analyses – thus contributing to enhancing further visibility of the Business school.

In Romania at present there are 12 Business Schools, only the Institute for Business Administration offers an accredited (by ARACIS) EMBA. The Daily Financial Newspaper many times published ranking lists among these institutions and the Institute has always ended up in first position in all categories.

The efficiency of the institutional procedures of programme quality assurance.

Continuous improvement cycles of the curriculum follow from the design of teaching-learning process offering up-to-date knowledge sharing and peer consultation and review between the American and the Romanian staff during two periods (Residence weeks) within the academic year; The latest cutting-edge theories and practices are familiar to the teaching staff through these contacts, peer reviews.

Joint international conferences are organized annually in partnership with Kennesaw State University, always with the aim of creating space for the latest most advanced findings in the global and Romanian business field.

The teachers are exposed to experienced and demanding managers as a student group which in itself makes them alert to developing their courses and their capacities all the time. Links with the business community, the frequent invitation of top managers as guest-speakers on Alumni Evenings motivates the teachers to create relevant and multifaceted case studies for efficient teaching.

The Institute created a collection of international and European case studies to facilitate praxis-oriented teaching. The curricula consists of integrated teaching modules (14 courses in all). At a certain period 2 modules are taught simultaneously.

Periodic assessment and adjusting the process of the curricula takes place following an internal analysis by the Faculty Council and the Committee of Quality.

Students are asked to give feedback anonymously on the courses taught two times during the semester (mid-term and final evaluations) and the teachers always discuss the results with the students and are compelled to try and improve the items questioned, thus enhancing course-content relevance. Queried on the evaluation sheet are whether *the subjects are useful for managerial/ professional development, adaptable to the Romanian business environment, contributing to leading and managing the students' business or present a well-chosen combination of these elements*. It is also asked which topics have been found useless and which ones arose interest.

Having attended the meetings with student groups and employers , it is obvious that applicable content is the main expectation.

The rules for monitoring and periodic approval of the educational program has been in action since 2005, codified in the *Manual Of Quality*. The Institute prioritized sending some of its staff members to conferences and training sessions to acquire the skills and the evaluation techniques of the teaching - learning process.

The efficiency of the institutional procedures for ensuring graduation standards.

The admissions policy of the Institute is transparent and announced on the website at least 6 months prior to application. The applicants are required to have management experience between 3-5 years, BA degree from an accredited university, take part in an interview in English, accomplish a written examination in English (General Management Admission Test). The latter is designed to highlight literacy skills, analytic and presentation competences. Within a scale of 0-100 points applicants have to pass above 60. A sample of possible question-types is demonstrated on the website. All the selection procedures ensure that a high quality and highly motivated student group is recruited which is willing to invest time and energy throughout the 2 year-period.

60 % of the students are male and they belong to the 27-45 year-old age groups. 70 % of their first degree is Business Studies.

In the meeting with graduates there were favourable comparisons made with those universities at they had acquired their BA degrees. At the Business school, they said, it is not information dissemination and individual tasks that are the main components of teaching but group discussions, case studies, practice-oriented approaches that build on the soft skills of the participants. Learning goals like enhancing collaboration, effective communication and presentation skills are intensively fostered by the teaching program.

Designing team-learning for study groups of 5-7 for task-solving, and putting the 8 month-long American- Romanian joint study group method in the focus (through face-to-face occasions and via videoconferencing using the SharePoint learning platform by Microsoft) ensure a collaborative environment. These methods seem very appropriate in influencing learners to listen to others' arguments and perspectives, encounter with different thinking styles and to learn from each other. The group members decide the research project theme themselves and are supposed to create the framework for collaboration setting out the rules for the whole process. Either a Romanian or an American professor supports them as a mentor.

Peer assessment at the end of the 8 months-long international project provides an opportunity to gather relevant data regarding the achievement of *Collaboration* learning objectives. Each student has to assess the individual performance of the other members in the group with respect to answering 12 questions. Five response options have to be filled in electronically. 80-81-84 % of students met or exceeded expectations of the different criteria according to the assessment.

Students also undertake a self-evaluation.

After the completion of the Residence week the professors also evaluate the students' performances.

The Institute specified seven *learning goals*, output-achieved learning outcomes (collaboration, ethical decision-making, communication, global environment, leadership, business acumen, strategic agility) consistent with their mission and specified objectives, and one or two of the learning goals each year (from 2007 on) are subjected to a formal review, an assessment that is followed-up by decisions to improve performance. Assessment of Learning (AOIL Progress Reports) is a recurrent agenda item at the The Faculty Council meetings.

The *final dissertation* requires the students to demonstrate that they can approach a management problem from multi- and interdisciplinary theoretical approaches. An individual field project has to be conducted that builds up a case study of the student's company. It has to be presented in front of the Dissertation Committee, professors, peers and some members of the business community. Each professor assesses independently, five performance criteria have to be met, at least 3,5 points have to be achieved at each.

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

The Institute operates clear channels of communication with the students, fair, quick, substantial information is given in real social contexts (classes, group meetings, residential sessions, Alumni Evenings, conferences, etc.) and in online communication. Teacher-student relationships are assessed as being very good according to the evaluation documents. The size of the groups is not big, interactive communication is easier to promote and implement.

Students elect a representative for each year cohort who is invited to the Senate meetings to voice the students' needs and opinions. The representative is authorized to vote.

Transparent expectations are given on grading. Each course ends with a written exam. (Percentage shares of grading are known in advance. (written tests, homeworks, group works, classroom participation), however it would be wrong to depict the student population as grades-hunting. They are interested in the applicability of the knowledge and the skills they are developing.

The weekend-classroom session (each week a Friday or a Saturday is on the schedule for a student) is considered to be commensurate with the students' job workload.

The Residence sessions are very well-managed according to the students. However it is unfortunate that in Romania the total number of paid holidays is only 21 days. Because the teaching program is time consuming, getting the packages of all the teaching resources is considered to be a very effective tool.

Each year the Senate approves the Regulation for the presentation of the dissertations with specific dates. Special sessions are given over to preparing the students for the presentation requirements.

Teaching staff:

The Institute has got 11 professors, all of them are mature, very experienced. Nearly half of them women. Attracting new professors with academic merits, Phd-levels, managerial experience and a very good level of English is a challenge. The Institute applies the *Teaching Positions Competition Methodology* approved by the Ministry of Education. Within the agreement with Kennesaw University, Atlanta, American professors are involved in the teaching.

Keeping talented staff members is also a challenge for the Institute. The international component, the motivated students, the quality culture attracts them, however the financial rewards are limited and the business sphere is always an option for young high-fliers. The Institute wants to strengthen the cooperation with the business field and encourages consultancy work.

The staff/student ratio is: 6,81

The teacher evaluation framework is composed of the following elements:

1. Teacher self-evaluation (giving data on teaching, on scientific research activities, contributions to the academic community and national and international recognition). Highlighting the progress compared with the previous year is required.
2. Peer-evaluation (reports from visits)
3. Student evaluation of courses and professors.

Each year there is a face-to face talk between the management and the staff members to formulate new development goals for themselves and for the teaching program.

The Students' Manual is given to each of the students containing the latest textbooks, exercises, case-studies, films, i.e. a complex set of teaching resources to use.

The internal evaluation results of the study programmes' quality.

Students are asked to evaluate each integrated course taught in a semester twice, a mid-term evaluation sheet and a final one. There is a teacher evaluation sheet as well.

Based on the alumni satisfaction survey the strongest aspects of the program were: case study methods of teaching , the international component; networking and courses like accounting, finance, HR, strategy, operations.

The Exit Survey of 2011-12 asked graduates to rate the following blocks based on their entire EMBA experience: *Program evaluation; Faculty; Teaching methods; Curriculum; Course Areas; Operations, administration; Learning outcomes; Career outcomes; Overall Program Assessment*

The rating is on an eleven point scale, where 10 means „performed extremely well“, 0 means „performed not well at all“.

Program evaluation block: the average value of all responses was: 6,6 - 8,9

Faculty-block : 7,8 - 9

They rated *teaching effectiveness* and *responsiveness to student needs* 8,3-8,2 respectively.

Teaching methods:	8,3 - 8,8
Curriculum-block:	8,1 - 8,6
Course Areas:	6,8 - 9,6
Operation, administration:	7,2 – 8,6
Learning outcomes-block:	7,5 - 8,6
Overall program assessment:	7,4 - 8

Students' evaluations are very favourable.

The Exit survey of 2012 ranked the top 5 learning outcomes as follows: decision-making skills; global sensitivity; integration of business disciplines; communication skills; critical thinking. Developing leadership competences were very much rated by the students, they felt methods like simulation games made them decide upon careful evaluation and assess probable outcomes.

The students' use of the academic infrastructure, facility .

The Institute rents facilities in an 8- floor office building.

The learning environment is consisting of 1 lecture room with a studio (amphitheater style, 150 m2), 1 teaching room (130 m2) , a computer lab with 12 working spaces, and a library: judged as satisfactory for the purposes. The room furniture is giving opportunities for flexible layouts, creating friendly spaces for small group discussions, Technical facilities are provided as well as tea, coffee and water in the rooms for the students. Technical support for IT technology is provided by Bit Solutions, a partner company.

The Library (17m2) acts as a professional service that handles ordering for the required textbooks, teaching materials, professional literature and journals, provides accessibility to online sources and prepares all the compulsory course materials into packages for each of the students at the start of the school year. The library doesn't offer many possibilities for reading there, the opinion is that students don't require that service. The compulsory teaching materials are made easily accessible to students and there is a considerable effort to provide the latest ones. Each professor has got an open account to publications and case studies from Harvard Business School.

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

Admissions policy and procedures and teaching program information are transparent, open to the interested public through the website, not only Romanian but in English. (www.asebuss.ro). Open days are organized, demo-courses can be visited and personal interview options are offered. I think the marketing department does a very thoughtful, analytical work, efficiently contributing to the quality assurance and development.

The Institution runs an evidence-based management, internal audits and rules for the procedures are codified. The Institute's internal documents are posted on the SharePoint platform.

Good practice aspects

Residence Weeks, weekend sessions held outside Bucharest in pleasant surroundings ideal for team building between students and the teachers, between the Americans and Romanians.

Alumni Evenings are valued by the students and faculty as well. Business experts, CEO's are invited giving excellent opportunity for dialogue and knowledge exchange apart from the much valued social networking.

Demo courses , open house: a very excellent form of marketing used since 2007

The marketing is served well with the Entry and Exit surveys, make a good use of the numerous surveys and evidence-based analyses of the teaching-learning process - and the fact that the marketing specialist works in the Quality Committee prompts direct actions for improvement.

Personalized marketing: „Entry Interviews are scheduled at your convenience. We encourage you to visit us and learn more about the Executive MBA program .”

Members of the administration staff can take part in the courses that the Center for Training organizes without paying fees if there is a relevance to the tasks they are performing.

Statement related to the confidence granted to the institution

I propose a “high degree of confidence” grade.

Recommendations for the institution's activity

Raising disability awareness. A person who uses a wheelchair is not able to enter the building because there is no ramp. Accessibility standards are worth considering and promoting in the everyday life of the Institute.

Enhancing European contacts with business schools (Barcelona was mentioned) to profit more from the European experience-building case studies. Even a Romanian-American-European study groups could be contemplated.

The collaborative doctoral education (knowledge alliance-type composed of university – companies-public organizations) seems fitting to the Institute's research profile. (EUA DOC-CAREERS Reports)

For better time-management: Audiobooks were mentioned by the students as a good idea for learning , as their work involves them in driving a lot.

Time-management as module to be taught was proposed by the employers.

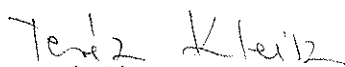
Recommendation to ARACIS

Translator-issue:

I have been fortunate enough to be involved in accreditation as a short-term expert several times. I always had somebody translating me for the whole time, making notes at committee sessions, etc.

In spite of the fact that this Institute was English speaking, still the accreditation committee meetings and discussions with the students/employers were conducted in Romanian making it difficult for me to follow. Only one of them was translated by a student. I had to gather information later which indubitably was always helpfully given .

Pécs, 30 October


Teréz Kleisz

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Program evaluation block: the average value of all responses was: 6,6 - 8,9

Faculty-block : 7,8 - 9

They rated *teaching effectiveness* and *responsiveness to student needs* 8,3-8,2 respectively.

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Course Areas:	6,8 - 9,6
Operation, administration:	7,2 – 8,6
Learning outcomes-block:	7,5 - 8,6
Overall program assessment:	7,4 - 8

Students' evaluations are very favourable.

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The students' use of the academic infrastructure, facility .

The Institute rents facilities in an 8- floor office building.

The learning environment is consisting of 1 lecture room with a studio (amphitheater style, 150 m2), 1 teaching room (130 m2) , a computer lab with 12 working spaces, and a library: judged as satisfactory for the purposes. The room furniture is giving opportunities for flexible layouts, creating friendly spaces for small group discussions, Technical facilities are provided as well as tea, coffee and water in the rooms for the students. Technical support for IT technology is provided by Bit Solutions, a partner company.

The Library (17m2) acts as a professional service that handles ordering for the required textbooks, teaching materials, professional literature and journals, provides accessibility to online sources and prepares all the compulsory course materials into packages for each of the students at the start of the school year. The library doesn't offer many possibilities for reading there, the opinion is that students don't require that service. The compulsory teaching materials are made easily accessible to students and there is a considerable effort to provide the latest ones. Each professor has got an open account to publications and case studies from Harvard Business School.

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

Admissions policy and procedures and teaching program information are transparent, open to the interested public through the website, not only Romanian but in English. (www.asebuss.ro). Open days are organized, demo-courses can be visited and personal interview options are offered. I think the marketing department does a very thoughtful, analytical work, efficiently contributing to the quality assurance and development.

The Institution runs an evidence-based management, internal audits and rules for the procedures are codified. The Institute's internal documents are posted on the SharePoint platform.

Good practice aspects

Residence Weeks, weekend sessions held outside Bucharest in pleasant surroundings ideal for team building between students and the teachers, between the Americans and Romanians.

Alumni Evenings are valued by the students and faculty as well. Business experts, CEO's are invited giving excellent opportunity for dialogue and knowledge exchange apart from the much valued social networking.

Demo courses , open house: a very excellent form of marketing used since 2007

The marketing is served well with the Entry and Exit surveys, make a good use of the numerous surveys and evidence-based analyses of the teaching-learning process - and the fact that the marketing specialist works in the Quality Committee prompts direct actions for improvement.

Personalized marketing: „Entry Interviews are scheduled at your convenience. We encourage you to visit us and learn more about the Executive MBA program .”

Members of the administration staff can take part in the courses that the Center for Training organizes without paying fees if there is a relevance to the tasks they are performing.

Statement related to the confidence granted to the institution

I propose a “high degree of confidence” grade.

Recommendations for the institution's activity

Raising disability awareness. A person who uses a wheelchair is not able to enter the building because there is no ramp. Accessibility standards are worth considering and promoting in the everyday life of the Institute.

Enhancing European contacts with business schools (Barcelona was mentioned) to profit more from the European experience-building case studies. Even a Romanian-American-European study groups could be contemplated.

The collaborative doctoral education (knowledge alliance-type composed of university – companies-public organizations) seems fitting to the Institute's research profile. (EUA DOC-CAREERS Reports)

For better time-management: Audiobooks were mentioned by the students as a good idea for learning , as their work involves them in driving a lot.

Time-management as module to be taught was proposed by the employers.

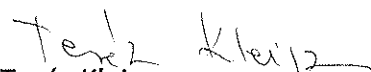
Recommendation to ARACIS

Translator-issue:

I have been fortunate enough to be involved in accreditation as a short-term expert several times. I always had somebody translating me for the whole time, making notes at committee sessions, etc.

In spite of the fact that this Institute was English speaking, still the accreditation committee meetings and discussions with the students/employers were conducted in Romanian making it difficult for me to follow. Only one of them was translated by a student. I had to gather information later which indubitably was always helpfully given .

Pécs, 30 October


Teréz Kleisz