

UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT

2013

AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR REGISTRATURĂ
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Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the University of Oradea as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 16 October and Friday 18 October 2013. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of the University of Oradea focusing on the main points of continuous improvement of quality and future development aspects with outlining the main dimensions of present and future challenges of the university. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of the university and the guidelines of external institutional evaluation from ARACIS. During my stay in Oradea with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to insight all the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and to collect information about the operation of the university. My report is roughly following the structure of the self-evaluation report of the institution.

Background

The University of Oradea is located in the city of Oradea near the western border of Romania and having a crucial role in the socio-economic and cultural development of this special geographical area of the country. The city of Oradea is the capital of Bihor County and an important center of economic, social and cultural activities of the region. This part of the country is among the most developed parts of Romania: the GDP per capita is above the national average and this region has a very low level of unemployment rate. Although higher education has old traditions in Oradea from the 18th century, 'modern' history of the higher education institution only starts from 1963, when a new Pedagogical Institute was founded in Oradea: this institution has become the core of the present university as in the next years other educational programs and institutions began to operate in the city. In 1990, the Technical University was established in Oradea, and later this institution had been renamed to the University of Oradea in 1991. From this time as a result of a permanent evolution of the university there is a significant increase in the number of

students and teaching staff, there is an increase of material assets, financial resources (in absolute numbers) and research and development activities.

Mission, Objectives

Currently in the region and in the city of Oradea there are several higher education institutions offering different kinds of educational programs but the traditions, the experience, the prestige and the competences of University of Oradea as a public higher education institution show the importance of the institution in the internal and international environment and also support and develop scientific research activities both national and international level. According to the self-evaluation report, the main objective of the University of Oradea is the permanent and continuous improvement of the educational process in order to form specialists in various fields of science and culture.

Between the present strategic objectives of the University of Oradea we could also find the focus of the further development of research and management activity, the socio-economic development of the regional community with contributing to the knowledge-based society, the further improvement of national and international visibility, the intensification of academic collaboration and permanent development of educational programs that could satisfy the demands and requirements of the market; and the maintenance of an effective management system with the continuous improvement of quality of educational services, together with efficiency and quality management.

To overview the strategic steps of the last few years, it is visible clearly that the institution has permanently had strong efforts to reach these aims with promoting complex systems and mechanisms for quality assurance in education, improving institutional quality and management, ensuring a high quality level in compliance with European requirements, promoting European and international cooperation in multiple directions and developing and improving professional competences in different fields. On the whole the institution meets the cultural, social and economic needs of the community. As a leader university in the region this institution is attractive for those who want to get knowledge, skills and competencies on the offered fields at a high standards.

Leadership, Managerial Structures, Quality Management

According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of the University of Oradea have appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the 15 faculties of the university, the departments, centers, the functional structures

for scientific research and the other organizational units of the institution have clear, transparent structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution rely on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of the different types of programs, the teaching staff and the other personnel of the university.

The Administrative Council of the University of Oradea is the structure that assures the operational management of the university and enforces the strategic decisions of the University Senate, in accordance with the National Education Law (LEN 1/2011). In order to fulfill its duties, the Administrative Council has permanent and temporary operating councils of work.

The student participation is strictly observed in the university, the level of participation is minimum 25% in the faculties' structures and 25% in the University Senate. It is very important to point out that because of efficiency reasons; recently the number of the members of the Senate of the University of Oradea was reduced from 100 to 76.

The managing teams of the University of Oradea and other entities operating in its structure are aware of the fact that continuously ensuring and optimizing quality is a strong necessity to implement its mission and also an important tool to increase process efficiency. Currently a decentralized management operates to ensure quality at the level of departments, faculties, university and administrative entities, and integrated within a Total Quality Management (TQM) system. The efficient quality management in the university is based on legislation (regulations, procedures, methodologies), their implementation and monitoring of their compliance. The culture for implementing quality management in all educational and administrative structures can be obtained by involving all the staff of the institution.

According to the self-evaluation report, in 2007 the university participated in a process of External Quality Evaluation, conducted by ARACIS within a pilot program. The evaluation result was "limited confidence". In May 2011, the University of Oradea had another institutional evaluation in order to change the qualification obtained in 2007. As a result, the rating was changed from "limited confidence" to "confidence". In 2012 the university participated in the evaluation process for the classification and hierarchy of study programs according to MO no. 4072/21.04.2011. After completing this process, the University of Oradea was ranked to the category of universities providing education and scientific research. Also in 2012, the university participated in an international evaluation process of the Institutional Evaluation Program of

the European University Association (EUA), in the project "Performance in research, performance in teaching. Quality, diversity and innovation in the universities of Romania". These efforts show clearly that the university has a permanent intention to improve its performance and to get better evaluation.

Infrastructure

The University of Oradea has 41 buildings which basically meet the highest standards and most of them are able to ensure high-quality educational process. According to different governmental, county and local council decisions, the University of Oradea has the ownership or right to manage most of its property, except only two rented facilities: a hostel in the city center of Oradea and a teaching facility located in Beiuș.

Apart from its headquarters the university owns other six locations used by the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Faculty of Architecture and Constructions, Faculty of Energy Engineering and Industrial Management, Faculty of Juridical Sciences and Faculty of Environmental Protection, Faculty of Environmental Protection.

The capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations. Recently a modern, five-story library has been built at the headquarters of the University of Oradea with the total area of 7,800 squaremeter. The university also has good sport facilities for the students. It is also important to add that in case of some educational programs the university has capacities to organize and manage a certain part of the field work and training of the students and research activities with the ownership of certain possessions like agricultural plots, or a dendrological park. I think these places and spaces are very useful to manage these field work and practical activities of the students at a high, professional level as an university competence. Parallel with these possibilities there are certain needed practical activities which are not covered by the own capacities of the university are implemented with other institutions, companies or organizations based on cooperation protocols and contracts (like contracts with the local clinical hospitals, etc.).

The university has many specialized teaching and research facilities like the National Geothermal Research Centre, where engineering students carry out their teaching and research activities or "Gaudeamus" Research and Sport Facility, located in Stâna de Vale resort, Bihor county, where students carry out practical activities, sports activities, as well as research activities and scientific events in the best possible conditions. Within the university a

Horticulture Research and Development Centre is operating, located in Oradea, where students from the Faculty of Environmental Protection and the Faculty of Sciences carry out their didactic, practical and research activities in proper spaces and there is an Agricultural Research and Development Centre, located in Oradea, which is used by students of the Faculty of Environmental Protection and the Faculty of Sciences.

Accommodation facilities include 4 hostels: 3 hostels are located in the main campus and the fourth in the city, which is owned by the City of Oradea and rented by the University of Oradea for a period of 10 years.

In the self-evaluation report of the university there is a certain difference between required and the used area – it seems that in almost every field (lecture rooms, seminar rooms, and laboratories) less facility is enough to satisfy the needs of the education. According to the received information the difference comes from the fact that there are certain buildings and spaces that the university has got earlier and right now some of these facilities are not used (some of them are in a very bad state of repair, or need to rebuild in the future). In the next years the university has to cope with this problem and has to try to manage these facilities correctly and more effectively.

Finally it is important to point out that the use of the thermal waters in central heating systems of the university is a nontypical, unique and very sustainable use of the local resources what could be a good precedent for those universities where this kind of resources exist.

Educational programs, research, teaching staff

According to the self-evaluation report of the University of Oradea the university has 15 faculties and 49 departments; 6 doctoral schools, and a large number of centers. The university has 12,685 BA students (out of which 502 overseas/foreign students) who are attending 106 study programs, and 3,004 MA students (out of which 17 overseas/foreign students) who are studying on 88 Master programs and 353 PhD students (out of which 5 overseas/foreign students) who attend 11 PhD programs.

According to the data of the university there is a relatively strong competition for the funded places in every year: right now the number of candidates exceeds the funded places, and in certain education programs the level of competition is really high (Medicine and Pharmacy, Economics, Social and Human Sciences, and Environment Protection). The graduation average rate (2008-2012) for the BA study programs was 86.40% in 2012, and the same rate for MA study programs was 89.20 %. The study completion rate for

Bachelor's programs was 88% and for the Master's programs was of 87.20 %. The average rate in the period between 2008 and 2012 of BA programs graduates enrolled in MA study programs was 38.94 %. This latter rate is relatively low despite of the fact that the diversity of the master study programs is high.

The analysis of the results regarding the graduates career path tracking (2008-2012) show that the average weight of the graduates that work in their field of expertise was relatively high, 56.6 % in case of Bachelor's programs and over 66.6 % in case of Master's programs.

One of the most important assets of the University of Oradea is its human resource: throughout its evolution, the structure of the teaching staff of the university has permanently met the normative and quality standards. The present number of teaching and research staff is 1,125 (120 professors, 197 readers, 438 lecturers, 268 teaching assistants, 93 teaching assistants-under-probation, and 9 researchers). In the last years there was a significant reduction in the number of teaching staff mainly as a result of rationalization processes of the institution.

With a view to ensuring educational quality, at the University of Oradea the average ratio between the number of students and teaching staff is 14,37. Teacher and student mobility is dynamically growing, parallel with the staff mobility: according to the self-evaluation report of the university, in the period from 2006 there are certain years when the teacher and staff mobility exceeded the student mobility.

International Relations, Research Activity

The University of Oradea has continuously developed international relations in the last few years. The university has a large number of bilateral cooperation, Erasmus agreements, and cooperation in projects. These agreements are concluded mainly with European universities (over 98%). Due to its good geographical position, the University of Oradea has an intensive participation in Romania-Hungary Cross-Border Cooperation Program.

An important part of the research activity is developed within the doctoral schools, coordinated by The Council for Doctoral University Studies. Within the university, there are 11 doctoral fields: Electrical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Energy Engineering, Economy, Medicine, Biology, History, Philology, Geography, Sociology and Agronomy.

The Research Centers are organized by the departments, faculties or at the level of the university where they develop the research activity under the coordination of a center director. Between 2008 and 2012, at the University of Oradea, a number of 34 institutionally certified research centers developed their activity. The research objectives of the University of Oradea show the main directions of research activities:

- New energy sources (geothermal resources);
- Modern systems of production;
- Cross-border and regional cooperation;
- Tourism and landscape architecture;
- Establishing the risk factors for the environment;
- Transfusion medicine;
- Economic competitiveness and sustainable development.

It seems very promising that the research questions of cross-border and regional cooperation, environment protection, and sustainability are in focus in Oradea. Beside the regularly organized national and international conferences, symposiums and workshops the University of Oradea organizes annually, usually in May, a scientific week with national and international participation. A great part of the research performed has been capitalized in papers presented within the scientific session and by their publishing in the Annals of the University of Oradea or in other publications, in nationally and internationally certified publishing houses and journals.

Financial Activity

Funding of the University of Oradea as a public university has three basic elements:

- Funding from the state budget is based on a contract between the Ministry of National Education and The University of Oradea (basic institutional funding agreement to fund student scholarships and welfare, for the institutional development fund and for funding investment objectives; supplementary agreement to fund repairs, endowments and other investment expenditures, as well as accommodation and food subsidies);
- Own revenues from fees and activities of higher education institutions, income from tuition fees received under contract for tuition and other school fees, donations and sponsorships;
- Revenues from production, from the activity of experimental teaching places;

- Own revenues of the hostels from student accommodation;
- Revenues from research activity funded by the state budget or based on a contract with the socio-economic environment;
- Revenues from projects funded by non-refundable external grants.

The expenditure structure of the university in 2012 was the next:

- Staff expenditures - 61,75%
- Goods and services - 8,49%
- Projects external grant funding - 18,34%
- Welfare - 0,68%
- Other expenditures, scholarships - 8,28%
- Capital expenditures - 2,46%

According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university the financial activities, incomes and expenses of the University of Oradea despite of the permanently changing financial conditions and fluctuating state finance are relatively well-balanced.

I think that these permanently changing conditions could result a new strategic orientation in the next few years: instead of less secure level of state support the university has to find the ways to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance its activities in a reasonable level and quality. Right now there are lots of signs of this change of way of thinking: there are plans to utilize the available resources and find also new directions to make extra money. Another way to keep the present financial situation relatively stable could be to realize more income from study fees with raising the present level of fees or enrolling greater number of students for the present education programs or offering new, desirable programs which could attract more students. The third way could be to intensify the participation in projects where certain parts of the resources (without threatening the project goals and if the given project allows it) could be used for financing operational expenses (wages, infrastructure, etc.).

According to the received information, it is important to maintain the present average number of students in the future which is 'enough' to make the system financially sustainable. To maintain this situation is an important challenge, as the number of students could become lower because of the demographical loop (just like everywhere in the Central Eastern European countries), and the negative effects of the financial crisis has already reached higher education. The third factor is certainly the effect of the potential competitors, universities

in the neighboring cities, regions or Hungarian universities on the other side of the border with similar education programs.

If this scenario is going to happen in the near future, the decreasing number of students and decreasing incomes result that University of Oradea would be forced to find other outside resources, extra budget incomes, or has to find new ways, education programs, which could maintain the present situation in a long term as a strategic orientation.

Students

University of Oradea offers a wide range of social, cultural and sport services: accommodation, canteen, sports base, counseling services, etc. Within the university a Social Service is functioning which is an administrative structure coordinated by the Vice-Rector in charge with the management of social and student services. The Social Service is designed for solving the social problems of students, and responsible for provision of accommodation in hostels, their maintenance and repair; provision of accommodation for the teaching staff/teachers and delegates from abroad.

In the academic year 2011-2012, the university had 4 hostels, with an accommodation capacity of 1,390 places. The degree of satisfaction of the demand among students was 74%. Student accommodation in hostels is limited to the places allocated to each faculty, depending on the number of students from the higher education financed from the budget and their grades average.

Three of the student hostels are located in the central campus of the University, where there is an access to the material basis of the University (faculties, library, sports hall, gym, sports basis, etc.). The fourth hostel is in the city, functioning in a space rented from Oradea City Hall. All four hostels are well-equipped. The student canteen (in central campus) is presently run by a private firm with a capacity of 250 seats offering services for students and employees.

Students also could use accommodation and other services of the two didactic/teaching bases belonging to the University (Stâna de Vale Resort and Gurahont Gaudeamus didactic Base).

The Student Club provides conditions for organizing cultural, artistic and recreational activities and functions on the basis of the program elaborated by a commission for sporting and artistic student activities, part of the Council of Social and Student Services.

It is important to add that the medical office offers preventive and curative healthcare to the students of the University of Oradea.

University of Oradea also offers specific skills/competences for career orientation. In the academic years 2010/2013, a total number of 900 students have benefited from counseling services either through projects carried out in the university, or from advising services given by master students from the Department of Psychology.

Focusing on the conditions of the local and regional labor market, University of Oradea aims to provide a realistic and effective support to graduates who are looking for a job. To achieve this objective, within the University of Oradea a Center for Career Counseling and Services (CCSC) is operating. CCSC has the mission to increase the students/graduates insertion on the labor market and provides services for personal development, career counseling and mediation. These services were conceived to meet the needs of vocational counseling, vocational guidance of students and to continuously improve the links with the labor market by facilitating the connection between students, graduates and economic actors.

The university permanently tries to attract potential students. The good reputation of the University of Oradea attracts lot of potential students and the university also has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies. There is also a financial assistance for students as granting of scholarships and other forms of financial supports (students from the Republic of Moldavia and the Diaspora, Roma students, foreign students, etc.).

Among the marketing communication activities and promoting events organized by the University of Oradea it is important to mention the University of Oradea Fair, The Caravan of the University of Oradea, which is a presentation of the University of Oradea in high schools, the Open Days, and Summer University program of the university from this year.

Although the present number of students seems to be 'enough' to maintain the permanent high-level operation of the university, there are certain changes which could affect the University of Oradea like the effects of the earlier mentioned demographic changes, decreasing interest, worsening financial background of potential students, changing role of higher education, market competition, offerings of other state universities or private institutions. Lower number of students certainly could result better level of teaching with improving the quality of the educational processes and scientific research as

long as the financial background is stable and at longer term the financial sustainability of the institution is not in danger. These changes also could affect wide range of management activities of the University of Oradea from human resources management to reengineering of services related to the educational processes.

Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. On the whole the performance of the University of Oradea meets the educational and professional training specific standards, as well as the community social and economic development standards, European standards of education and the standards of scientific research.

I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- Although the present situation, role and reputation of the University of Oradea are good, the university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, etc.);
- Although the present number of students is 'enough' to maintain the institution and quality of educational processes, it would be worth to expand the education services and activities of the university. The easiest way could be to strengthening the existing distance learning programs parallel with developing e-learning programs;
- University of Oradea should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow, parallel with the more effective management of the present infrastructure and buildings;
- Some study programs have only a low level of interest from students, which certainly leads less revenue for certain faculties and departments. This situation practically means cross-financing between the faculties with good and bad financial performance. In a long run if this situation does not change it could lead serious conflicts between the faculties and could result changes of the present structure;
- Despite the recent progress further development is needed in connection with the internationalization of study programs - in order

to attract a larger number of foreign students it is suggested to create more English language study programs;

- The university has to strengthen the foreign language online communication – to achieve this it is recommended to develop a good English language homepage (right now the major areas of interest could be found in English, but clicking to the details, in most of the cases the page navigates back to the Romanian language version);
- Strengthening cross border cooperation, attracting non-refundable grants through development projects financed from structural funds, or other cross-border projects;
- The university should continue to increase the quality of processes for a better national and international classification.

Finally I would like to thank to the Rector and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Oradea. At last but not least I would like to thank to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

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