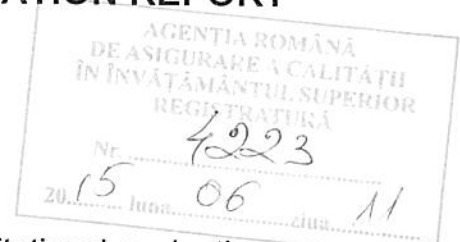


TIBISCUS UNIVERSITY OF TIMIȘOARA
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT
2015



Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the Tibiscus University of Timișoara as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 27 May and Friday 29 May 2015. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of the focusing on the main points of 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 institution. During my stay in Timișoara with the help of the colleagues of the Tibiscus University I had the possibility to insight the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and collect information about the university. My report is roughly following the structure of the self evaluation report of the institution.

Background

Timișoara where this university exists is the capital of Timiș County and with its more than 300.000 inhabitants the town is one of the largest Romanian cities where there are several universities offering wide selection of higher educational programs at different levels. Tibiscus University of Timișoara began to operate in 1991 as a limited liability company (Institute for Education and Lifelong Learning, Timișoara). Few years later this institution became an association (ISEPT Tibiscus). In 1999 the association changed its name to Tibiscus University Association, and in 2002, Tibiscus University in Timișoara was established as a higher education institution of private law and public interest, with legal personality and became a part of the Romanian higher education. Right now Tibiscus University of Timișoara is the only accredited private university in the city.

The educational programs offered by the new university soon became attractive and the institution managed to follow up the needs of the market. The university as a part of the national higher education system and European Higher Education Area is primarily offering undergraduate (bachelor) and postgraduate (master) educational programs. Parallel with certain priorities and educational fields that has been important from the beginning there is a permanent evolution of education programs in the university. As a result of the changing demand and financial sustainability, certain programs terminated in the last years. The university is a member of the European University Association (EUA), the Alliance of Universities for Democracy (AUDEM). The rector of the university is a member of the National Council of Rectors (CNR).

The university underwent external evaluation process in 2013 and received a limited trust rating that generated important structural changes in the institution in the last two years in order to meet the requirements of the ARACIS, reflecting the changing market needs and to reach financial stability in the long run.

Mission and objectives

Tibiscus University of Timișoara is the only accredited private university which complements the educational offer of the large public universities in the city. According to the self evaluation report, with the development resources mainly from the funds paid by the students, the university has established itself as an institution which is focused on high standard of quality education, with applied research activities, meet the demand for university-level training and for continuous improvement of local and regional community parallel with taking steps to be integrant part of the national system of education.

The university is also focusing on strengthening the connections with other higher education institutions in the country and abroad, organizing educational programs in areas of common interest. The collaboration with the other universities of Timișoara is good, and there are also connections with "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, with Emden-Leer University (Germany), "De Montfort" University, Leicester (England), "La Sapienza" Università degli Studi di Roma or Paris-Est and Marne-la-Vallée University (France). These

partnerships and connections seem to be an important priority of the institution. Most of these activities are coming from the connections of the colleagues of the university. In the future is recommended to strengthen the existing connections parallel with developing new ones according to the activities of the research centers of the university that could lead more intensive national and international visibility besides the applied characteristic of the institution.

The institution has also developed close ties with local and regional governmental, nongovernmental and market actors as well. Some of the students of the institution are also coming from these places to get knowledge and degree on specific fields.

It is important to point out that Tibiscus University of Timișoara as a private institution has to cope with the challenges of a competitive higher education market, national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields and it has to offer attractive study programs which are really based on the demands of the students. It seems that the present 'answers' of Tibiscus University of Timișoara for these permanently appearing challenges are generally successful, as the earlier mentioned steps toward stability happened in the last two years but it is important to point out that parallel with maintaining the present situation the university also has to find other market niches where it could operate successfully between the dominant state universities of the city.

Management, organizational structures, human resources

The Tibiscus University of Timișoara has made several necessary steps in the last years in order to stabilize its operation, and some changes affected the management, organizational structures and human resources as well. According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of Tibiscus University of Timișoara have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly.

According to the self evaluation documentation of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of Tibiscus University of Timișoara is on a good level. The teaching staff in Tibiscus University of Timișoara seems to have proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees

which certainly results a good level of performance in education processes. Some teaching activities are developed by recognized specialists, form the outside of the university, which bring their important contribution to the teaching programs with their specific knowledge, field expertise and competencies.

According to the self evaluation report of the institution, in the academic year 2014-2015, there are 77 teachers in the institution. From these 77 colleagues 59 are tenured teachers (6 professors, 12 associate professors, 28 assistant professors/lecturers, 13 assistant lecturers, 50 have a PhD, 2 are not registered in a doctoral school, and the remaining 7 are PhD students) and 11 are associate teachers, while 7 colleagues are not tenured in higher education. All non-tenured teachers are coming from socio-economic environment, have university teaching experience and also have a PhD degree. It is important to note that the 9 teachers of the Department of Cross-Curricular Teaching serve study programs of the four faculties, the staff consisting of teachers with training in communication, foreign languages, journalism, design, and sports. This department is a result of the changes, after liquidation of the faculties and educational programs a new organizational structure was formed to offer its services for the other organizational units of the university.

Besides the Department of Cross Curricular Teaching, the Counseling and Career Guidance Center, the Life Long Training Center, and the library also plays very important role in the university. The Commission of Recognition and Equivalence of Studies (CRID) is the structure responsible for the recognition and equivalence of learning results obtained in formal or non-formal contexts, through mobility and placements or through partial completion of programs of study in another university. The Office of Programs, Institutional Projects and International Relations is the structure which manages the database regarding the scientific research activity, the artistic production and sports performance, as well as the theoretical, applied and contractual research of the university and coordinates the activities of the research centers operating in the university.

There are two employees at the University Library, both graduates of the Faculty of Journalism. Both librarians have attended the postgraduate librarian course Library

and Information Science; one of them graduated and the second will support the final examination at the end of the second academic semester 2014-2015.

Educational programs

The evolution of educational programs in the last years show that the main focus of the university has remained the developing, perfecting and diversifying of the study programs with satisfying the demands of the labor market parallel with satisfying the demands of the students. As a result, some of the earlier offered education programs had been terminated and new education programs developed. All the present BA and MA education programs are seem to be still marketable although most of these fields are not very 'special' as these programs can be found in many private and state higher education institutions in Romania.

The university has implemented the Bologna principles, which allows the institute to connect to the European Higher Education Area, although the third level, PhD studies are 'missing' from the educational programs. According to the present situation in the near future it is not very realistic to start a PhD program.

In the 2014-2015 academic year the university has 4 faculties organizing 5 undergraduate programs and 5 postgraduate programs. Most of these programs are full-time programs. In the assessed period, the university has liquidated the Faculty of Journalism, Communication and Modern Languages (2013) and the Faculty of Design (2014) with the transfer of the students to other universities through inter-institutional agreements. Moreover, in the 2013-2014 academic year the postgraduate program Human Resources Management also terminated at the Faculty of Psychology. In 2014-2015, two program studies of the Faculty of Economic Sciences were liquidated (the undergraduate program International Business and Economics and the postgraduate program European Business Strategy). These changes were very serious steps in the life of the university but as a private institution without state finance the university was forced to adjust the offered programs to the market needs and achieve again a more stable financial situation.

Besides these changes there are certain steps to develop new programs: for example the University Senate recently proposed the establishment of the

postgraduate program 'Accounting, Taxation and Heritage Management of Territorial Administrative Units'. Since the academic year of 2012-2013, the faculties of the University have organized specialization and development training courses that are part of the lifelong learning program of the university. In these courses the number of students trained is already more than 500.

There are also tertiary activities which are the provision of services, consultancy, expertise, and assistance in study programs organized by the university. These types of activities aimed at transferring knowledge and expertise to the socio-economic environment, finding jobs for graduates and fundraising to support teaching and research in the university.

Financial activity

As a nonprofit institution, the university is self financing, establishing funds for activity from the annual school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university right now the financial activities – incomes and expenses of Tibiscus University of Timișoara are well-balanced. It is important to point out that without state support Tibiscus University of Timișoara has to cover its expenses with its own incomes which means that the most significant part is coming from student fees (85%, 84%, in the last 2 academic year and expected to be 74% in the present academic year) and from some other outside resources, extra budget incomes. The present number of the students and the present amount of fees paid by them parallel with the strict economic activities and reduction of expenses seems to be enough to sustain the university processes.

In the academic year 2012-2013 and in the academic year 2013-2014, wage were around the two third of the expenses of the institution and 79% and 71% of the total incomes, while the level of incomes reduced by 16%. By the 2014-2015 academic year the estimated incomes are higher than the previous years parallel with a significant changes in a level of wages: only the 29% of the expenses and 23% of the incomes are the wages in this academic year. In the last years the university operated with a budgetary deficit generally caused by the decreasing number of

students enrolled to the university. Consequently, the university closed the Faculty of Journalism and the Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages (2013), Faculty of Design (2014) and two study programs of the Faculty of Economic Sciences (2014). As a result of these changes in the academic year 2014-2015 the university would probably reach financial balance and in an optimal situation would make surplus as well.

Investments made during the financial years 2013 and 2014 were made from the own revenues of the university. Tibiscus University of Timișoara has purchased two properties, the building of the Rector's office as well as the ground floor and the first floors of the building B and there were modernization and improvement works in all 3 buildings. With the income raised from taxes, projects and programs, as well as other revenues, acquisitions and development project were made, to ensure adequate materials for teaching and research process.

It is important to point out that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. It has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies. There is also a financial assistance for students depending on the financial situation of the university as granting of scholarships and other forms of financial support as well as other social assistance to the students. Additionally, Tibiscus University of Timișoara fees seem to be lower than the average level of fees of the competitors. BA graduates could also continue their studies in in master programs: according to the data, this is not very significant in this moment, so it is also an important task to convince the freshly and earlier graduated students to come back and study here on Master programs or other educational offerings.

International visibility and collaboration

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, univesities and state institutions and nonprofit orgazizations as

well. These connections show that the university has an important role in Timișoara in economical, cultural and social aspects.

The importance of research activities seems to be significant at the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In Tibiscus University of Timișoara, the European resources become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities. There were 2 projects in the last period where the university was/is the the lead beneficiary, and in 8 projects the university is a partner of other univeristies, organizations, institutions. In consideration of the institution prestige, it would be important in the future to organize conferences and workshops which could be very important for the national and international visibility of the institution and beside the 'outsider' lecturers and participants it gives possibility for the students and teachers from Tibiscus University of Timișoara to present the results of their research activities.

The research is organized within research centers, established beginning with the academic year 2008-2009, by decisions of the University Senate. These centers were reorganized when the two faculties of the university were liquidated. The present research centers are the next:

- Faculty of Computers and Applied Computer Science - Scientific Research and Technology Innovation Center in Applied Computer Science
- Faculty of Law and Public Administration - Center of Fundamental and Applied Reseach in Law
- Faculty of Psychology - Center of Study and Research in Psychology
- Faculty of Economic Sciences - Center of Fundamental and Applied Research in Economics
- Department of Cross curricular teaching - Center of Media Communication and Education

Most of the research activities are strongly connected to the activities of the colleagues based on personal relationships or personal research work. According to the self evaluation report of the institution, between 2010 and 2015, the teachers of the university have delivered 25 ISI papers, 300 papers in journals in recognized

databases, 95 scientific papers published in journals B and B + categorised by CNCSIS. The publishing activity is completed with the 65 books published by nationally recognized publishers and chapters published in 12 books of the same category and 29 chapters in national recognised volumes. Within the university there is a tradition on organizing annual conferences and symposiums in each faculty with participating specialists from the country and abroad. During the reported period twenty events were organized. Academic community members are part of university boards of national and international journals, internal and external conferences organizing committees. Many teachers are part of prestigious national and international professional associations. Professional associations or subsidiaries of such associations like Geogebra Institute of Timișoara are functioning within the Tibiscus University as well.

University has had the Erasmus Charter since 2007, so the first mobility for students and teachers took place in the academic year 2007-2008. During the 8 years of activity the number of Erasmus agreements has grown so in the academic year 2013-2014 there were cooperation agreements with 17 institutions of higher education and one research center in 9 European countries. In 2013 the University has applied for and obtained Erasmus Charter which allows the continuation of activities from 2014 to 2020. The university is also working on renegotiating collaborative agreements for organization of activities within Erasmus + 2014-2020.

Tibiscus Magazine is the publication of the university, initially performed as a newspaper. The magazine is published quarterly and is available for the faculties and students to present their performance, scientific and social events. Although national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning at Tibiscus University, the university has to concentrate on more to participate and generate special research programs which also could lead to create a special image and knowledge which – over the applied education characteristic of the institution – could contribute to find the specific position of the university and offer special programs for the community.

Material resources

Tibiscus University of Timișoara is permanently working on reaching a relatively good material base for education. The earlier mentioned rationalizational processes also have affected the material resources of the university. In this academic year, the University operates in its own spaces located in three owned buildings. The Building R is primarily for the administrative activities (Rector, the Human Resources Office, the Accounting, the IT Department). In the Building B teaching activities take place and Building C is also for educational activities which is under construction right now and it is certainly not used in this moment. The B and C buildings are next to each other while the administrative offices are in a different location, so this part is not an integral part of the place where the educational activities are operating.

The teaching laboratories are organized by the faculty departments in order to meet the needs of the educational process designed by the curricula. The laboratories are equipped with IT equipment, software and teaching materials. The university buildings are equipped with wired and wireless internet. The internet service can be used freely in every course and seminar room, or laboratory of the university. The faculty has access to a forensic laboratory in County Hospital of Timișoara and students also have access to sport facilities in other institutions/organizations of the city. Students can opt for sports activities organized by the Tibiscus Sporting Club or for swimming classes, based on the cooperation with School. 30 of Timișoara, equipped with a pool.

The library of the university was founded in 1992. The library operates in its own space in the B building (160 m² - 80 seats), in 10 rooms out of which 5 are designed for book depository. The library has 10 computers. The university also owns the Harry Morgan Book Collection, books donated by the American professor H. Morgan at the end of his teaching activity in the institution.

On the whole, this material basis meets the needs of the educational process. In the future it would be important that the university should operate in the same place – if the resources let – from Building B and C and the surrounding area it might be possible to build a 'campus like' university. Right now the university doesn't have an

Aula Magna which also could be useful for social events, conferences, ceremonies, and doesn't have an own dormitory and cafeteria. On one hand these facilities are certainly not the most important elements for a proper level of educational processes and students of the university seem to be satisfied with the present situation, but on the other hand it would be very useful for the institution to have its own facilities in these fields.

It is important to point out that these investments and developments are financed through the institution's own sources. On the whole it is important to continue the present work to invest permanently and maintain the infrastructure of the university.

Students, public information

The decrease of number of students in the last two years is correlated with the liquidation of two faculties and the earlier mentioned educational programs. Liquidation was due to the lack of profitability of study programs and in some cases the inability to maintain quality standards of education. Although the number of students is certainly lower than it was few years ago, one of the most important attractions for the students is the flexible organization of the educational process. Large part of the students (younger and older generation as well) is working, so it is much easier them to attend the classes in the afternoon: that is the reason why most of the classes are organized atypically in this time of the day.

The university has its own radio, on the frequency of 100Hz, is located in Building B. The broadcast is used to provide information of interest to the university and the academic community. The programs are conducted with the students, the radio being a place for their practical training.

In 2002, the University Athletic Association was founded (Tibiscus Cycling Club) in the university with the participation of the students. In 2005 the club was reorganized, and the new name became Tibiscus Sports Club. By the end of 2014, Tibiscus Sporting Club has organized over 125 activities and club athletes have successfully participated in nearly 350 national actions and nearly 300 international actions, having almost 400 first prizes, 300 second prizes, 250 third prizes 9 national

championship titles and 7 records in the Guinness Book for extreme sports. Of these, in 2014, 90 podium places were achieved by participating in 70 national and international competitions, joined by three national championship titles.

The public information can be found on the Tibiscus University of Timișoara site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language. The university as well the faculties, have their own web site (www.tibiscus.ro, www.fcia.tibiscus.ro), in Romanian language, which gives visitors information about the study programs, admissions, curriculum, final exams, national and international relations, as well as information regarding management, documents and regulations, contact possibilities. For better, faster and easier communication with the students, there is also an online discussion forum (forum.tibiscus.ro). Because the virtual environment has grown significantly in recent years, the university has a presence on social networks: the university and as well as faculties have a Facebook page. Students also have the possibility to use DreamSpark Program and to join CISCO Academy.

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. According to the fact that from the time of the last evaluation visit the university has done several serious steps to stabilize its operation and make strong efforts to reorganize its activity to meet the educational and professional training standards, I recommend the level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- The present educational programs offered by the university are not really unique as these programs can be found in the other (state) universities in the city. The institution has to find market niches where it can operate successfully in a longer run. The present competitiveness lasts only until the competitors, as a reaction for the changing market situation, start to use the same flexible

techniques in educational programs. The University has to focus on maintaining the present situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work which in an optimal situation meets the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development (developing new education programs, distance learning and e-learning programs, focusing on other potential target groups, etc.). Further decline of the total number of students could result a decision making situation again when the management of the university is forced to cope with this challenge as well.

- Tibiscus University of Timișoara should maintain and continue to invest in the infrastructure and facilities when own resources, and any other funds allow.
- I suggest developing more international links and collaborations to support local and international research activities and encourage students and staff members taking part in exchange and mobility programs.
- In the future it is recommended to strengthen the existing connections parallel with developing new ones according to the activities of the research centers of the university that could lead more intensive national and international visibility besides the applied characteristic of the institution.

I wish that Tibiscus University of Timișoara would find the right way for success and the right position in the Romanian Higher Education. Finally I would like to thank to the Rector of Tibiscus University of Timișoara and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Timișoara. At least but not last special thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

Pécs, 06-06-2015



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