

**Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava**  
**External Evaluation Report**  
**Doctoral study domain: Philosophy**

Evaluator: Prof. Dr Claudia Marsico  
Date of the report: 10-09-2021

### **I. Introduction**

This report is oriented to inform about the institutional evaluation process of the Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The assessment was conducted from September 2nd to September 8th, 2021, in the online modality because of the COVID19 global crisis restrictions. It is based on the activities of the Experts Committee of the Philosophy Domain and the common meetings. Based on previous institutional experiences, the Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava was established in 1990, including the supervision of doctoral studies. As a result of the organisation of the area, Philosophy studies belong to the Doctoral School of Social and Human Sciences and has conducted regular up-dates during the last years oriented to improve its performance.

### **II. Methods used**

The evaluation was focused on the Philosophy domain. It took as its basis the analysis of the internal evaluation report and its Annexes before the contact with the University, together with the interviews with the representatives of the Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava and the Council for Academic Doctoral Studies, the Ethics Commission, representatives of the Quality Assurance area, and, in the Philosophy area, the officers in charge of the internal evaluation report, the academic staff, a group of PhD students, a group of Graduates of the PhD programme, representatives of the research area, and employers of some doctoral graduates. In all the cases, the interviews were carried out together with a national expert and a PhD student also designated by ARACIS, on the basis of questionnaires oriented to obtain relevant complementary data about the performance indicators. Due to the blended format of the evaluation, all the interviews have been conducted online. However, relevant information about infrastructure was included in the questionnaires to produce a proper assessment of the institutional capacities of the program.

### **III. Analysis of performance indicators**

#### **A. Institutional capacities**

The assessment is oriented to determine the quality of the institutional structures, taking into account the existence and effectiveness of managerial procedures, the profile and abilities of the academic staff, and the situation of research and internationalisation within the PhD programme.

### *A.1. Administrative and managerial institutional structures*

The Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava has a clear regulatory framework to allow the proper advancement of academic activities. Its mission states the compromise with education and scientific research taking into account the local and national context as well as European integration. It is clearly expressed in the institutional Charter, in line with national regulations and the Grand Charter of European Universities. Suitable strategic and annual operational plans guide the concrete development of the activities. The general regulations of the Doctoral level are explicitly stated in the Regulation for organising and carrying out doctoral study programs, adjusted periodically, and complemented with specific regulations for the Social and Human Sciences Doctoral School. They are detailed enough and cover the main normative and administrative aspects to ensure the proper development of the activities. They include the election of authorities and student representatives, regulations for admission of doctoral students through entrance examinations, code of conduct, procedures for informing doctoral students of the rules of scientific ethics, steps of the doctoral studies and evaluations, and criteria for supervision and protocols for quality evaluation of teaching staff and self-evaluation reports of the study programs.

The program has the resources to control the administrative and academic processes through specific platforms and verify similarities in doctoral theses, in line with consistent policies against plagiarism. Appropriate measures for anti-plagiarism checks are implemented through subscription and use of plagiarism identification services with good results. The overall procedures allow proper monitoring and follow-up of the doctoral program. Specific funding is provided to support academic activities. There are proper measures for promoting research, with institutional support to cover expenses for academic or dissemination activities. There is a due connection with the research centres, where relevant projects are developed, all of them related to the field and addressing topics linked to academic integrity.

During the interviews, a suitable description of the management procedures was provided. The regulatory tools are consistently applied and manifest in everyday institutional life. There are periodical meetings of the Council of the Doctoral School of Social and Human Sciences, proper channels of communication, and instruments to control the adequate development of the academic and administrative tasks. Scholarships for doctoral students emerged as a shortcoming related to the lack of external programs, including the discipline. Institutional attention to this issue should be expectable.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Taking into account the characteristic of the program and the need to maintain the number of students without affecting the quality, it should be important to develop channels to get scholarships and ensure funding for mobility activities to accompany the overall development of the program.
- An enhancement of the follow-up of the graduates and their labour integration, paying attention to expanding the traditional career paths could produce positive outcomes.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### *A.2. Research infrastructure*

Research infrastructure is appropriate and well-related to the program aims. There are two research units, the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies Ethics, Philosophy and Engineering in Society since 2009 and since 2018, the Center for Applied Ethics Research. The outcomes during the last years are outstanding and show decisive internationalisation actions manifest in

academic networks, international joint work, and valuable publications. The activities are varied and include publications of books, chapters, articles, and the organisation and participation in conferences and international workshops in the field.

The infrastructure is adequate and includes a library with many volumes, information and documentation services with loan and exchange between domestic and international libraries, and access to databases. Protocols for the acquisition of new books are at disposal. There is a clear diagnosis of the improvement to be done in the future to enhance the research environment.

During the interview related to research centres, the particularities of the research units were adequately described, underlining the relevance of the topics and the connections with academic activities within and beyond the philosophy program. The measures implemented during the COVID19 crisis to ensure the continuity of the research activities were adequately described, including specific theoretical development about this issue. The management and academic staff emphasised the actions to support investigation based on the freedom to explore different subjects, underlining the participation of students and graduates. The interview with the PhD students showed that the research units are well-known among the academic community. At the same time, some of the resources at hand were not fully integrated into everyday activities. For instance, the library was entirely incorporated, but the access to databases was not, undermining the exploitation of resources already at disposal.

*Recommendations:*

- The PhD students' participation in the activities of the research units could be reinforced on the basis of the existent interest in their initiatives.
- A stronger policy oriented to disseminate among the academic community members the information about resources at disposal, for instance, remote access to databases, could enhance their efficient use.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### A.3. Quality of Human Resources

The teaching staff has excellent profiles and are fully able to provide high-quality education to the students. Their track record is fully adequate and well-aligned with the subjects and goals of the PhD program and includes relevant academic achievements through publications in indexed journals and recognised publishers in the framework of significant international development. The ratio of students by supervisor is adequate, although it would be desirable to elevate the number of tenured staff.

During the interview, the academic staff described their activities and provided suitable information about the institutional support and the existence of enough funding for academic activities. The work environment is fully adequate, and the staff is wholly aware of the points to be enhanced on the basis of a clear diagnosis. They provide proper answers about pedagogical perspectives and explained how they managed the situation of the students without specific studies in philosophy, offering interesting examples about the positive outcomes from this diversity. When the challenges of the pandemic crisis emerged, the staff described the measures employed and evaluated the results positively, in line with the opinion of the PhD students.

Regarding the topics covered by the program, they emphasised the strong subjects of the program, which are in line with the research units, providing a suitable account for the identity of the doctoral program and their role in this development. The broadness provided by

the joint work with external experts in the team that accompanies the task of each PhD student was adequately underlined. In agreement with the Doctoral studies of Philosophy regulations, research is a clear objective within the PhD programme, and the academic staff contributes to its developments through research projects funded by different sources. Those research projects also include PhD students and graduates, ensuring proper training oriented to acquiring investigation skills, which indicates a proper compromise with these relevant tasks. The PhD students expressed themselves satisfied with the work of the academic staff both in their courses and their supervising activities. They underlined the excellent relationship with the supervisors.

*Recommendations:*

- It should be desirable to elevate the number of tenured staff.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

## **B. Educational effectiveness**

Under this criterion, the quality of the PhD programme is taken into account, paying attention to the enrolment procedures, the content of the programme, the outcomes and evaluation protocols, and the quality of the doctoral theses.

### *B.1. The number, quality and diversity of candidates enrolled for the admission contest*

The PhD programme in Philosophy has clear and suitable procedures for the enrolment. They include an examination by a committee of specialists and requires accreditation of languages and general criteria of excellence. The retention ratio is very good and indicates effective overall measures. Although the graduate MA students have diminished during the last years, the program has attracted students, which is a good signal. They came from different fields, and only some of them have previously conducted specific studies in philosophy. In order to face this situation, the programme has suitable measures to provide adequate tools and the critical mass of knowledge sufficient to ensure proper disciplinary abilities as well as appropriate means to enhance the skills of those with previous experience in the area. This situation should be enhanced through adequate actions to attract new students. Both the academic staff and the students have positive opinions about these measures.

*Recommendations:*

- Given that this is a young program with excellent results, as far as it grows, the measures to attract students could be enhanced through specific initiatives.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### *B.2. Content of the doctoral programme*

The training programme is based on obligatory and optional courses, reasonable in number and structure, and an individual scientific research program. It is thematically adequate, up-to-date and open to include cutting-edge topics, with the program as a forerunner in the region in some of these areas related to the philosophy of technology and applied ethics. All the members in all levels recognise this aspect as an asset. The courses also pay due attention to academic ethics. The learning outcomes related to critical skills and professional effectiveness are clearly stated and taken into account in the design of contents of the program.

The PhD students count on regular monitoring and supervision through the advice of a supervisor and a guiding committee based on regular reports that lead to a PhD thesis. The committee of three specialists complementing the supervisor's role and the teacher of the doctoral courses, some of them being external, reinforce diversity and extra-institutional integration.

The students were satisfied with the PhD programme during the interviews, claiming that it provides new knowledge on cutting-edge matters and valuable professional skills. They also manifested satisfaction with the election of the program among other national and international options, which indicates strong bonds with the institution, manifest in the interest in post-doctoral studies. The procedures oriented to monitoring and supervision constitute part of the everyday life of the program. The overall scheme was described as intense and challenging, but in general this is considered inherent to the kind of study, and the Graduates agree that the schedule and the length are adequate and produce the expected results.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### *B.3. The results of the doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation*

The PhD programme of Philosophy takes into account learning outcomes adequately, promoting the acquisition of strong professional abilities reflected in the production of academic skills. The stimulus to participate in conferences and academic activities is adequate, even if the academic staff members consider that it could be improved, which indicates a strong will for continuous improvement. It also comprises suitable attention to method focusing on adequate procedures to improve the PhD students research skills and abilities related to review of academic journals, editorial work, scientific committees in the country and abroad and other activities specific to academic life.

Publication of articles is encouraged, and regular presentations of advances before the guiding committee and the doctoral supervisor are part of the requirements to be covered. Furthermore, as a condition to complete the doctoral studies, a reasonable number of indexed papers and participation in international academic events must be carried out, and financial support is at hand to stimulate participation. The samples provided with the report are high quality. At the same time, a competition for the title of doctoral student-year has been established with these aims.

Concerning the overall results, the graduates considered that the PhD program provided them with strong professional skills and enough tools to succeed in the labour market. The open channels to continue participating in academic activities was underlined. The possibility to conduct dissemination activities as joint activities with their labour institutions was also emphasised. In the same line, the employers claimed that the capacities of the graduates and their ability to fulfil the requirements of the labour market are remarkable. Their contribution to institutional is understood as an identity mark of the formation at the philosophy program.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### *B.4. Quality of doctoral theses*

The procedures to ensure the high quality of the doctoral theses are within accepted standards and fulfil the institutional procedures and parameters. During the interviews, the managerial officers, the teaching staff, the students, and the graduate expressed no troubles related to the associated aspects. The reviewers of the theses include renowned specialists from other universities.

*Recommendations:*

- Improve mobility experiences, a point that is not fully present among the activities of the PhD students and could strengthen the learning results and the overall internationalisation of the program.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

## **C. Quality management**

Under this criterion, the measures for quality assurance are taken into account, paying attention to the implementation of specific procedures, the access to information and learning resources, and the quality of internationalisation mechanisms.

### *C.1 Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system*

The quality assurance system within the philosophy program is in line with the Code of Academic Quality Assurance at the university level, following the European Higher Education Area requirements about institutional responsibility and transparency of information of public interest. There is a proper focus on results and continuous improvement of quality and management. The University Ethics Commission monitors the issues related to academic ethics.

The PhD programme of Philosophy properly considers the implementation of procedures for internal institutional evaluation of the different processes that constitute the everyday life of the programme. They include monitoring the quality of the PhD students work, the current state of infrastructure and the improvement needs, the quality of the outcomes of the different members and levels. The design and contents of the program are subject to internal self-assessment procedures con independent exam to determine its consistency with ARACIS' indicators, with regular processes of evaluation of the doctoral supervisors and monitoring of the infrastructure, internationalisation opportunities, grants and research support on the basis of sound mechanisms for feedback concerning student satisfaction.

During the interview with the quality evaluation managers, suitable measures for monitoring diverse areas were described, underlining positive outcomes. Among them, it is worth noting that the abandonment rate is low. Questions about the protocols in forcé, especially those referred to the admission of PhD students, were well-justified and answered convincingly, emphasising the role of the admission commissions. The procedures for quality assurance at the level of the philosophy program were also well-described. The students express that they are satisfied with these measures and their participation in decision-making.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### *C.2. Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources*

The channels for institutional communication are in line with the general regulations and are effective enough. They provide accurate information on the regulations, methodologies and procedures for admission, expected tasks, completion of doctoral studies, the content of the study programs, list of PhD students, with relevant information about the defence protocols. The dates of defence of particular theses are properly spread and can be accessed by the public at large. Furthermore, suitable resources needed to conduct doctoral studies, e.g. international scientific databases, are provided to the academic community.

During the interviews with the PhD students, the general opinion of all the members agrees that all the relevant information is at their disposal in a simple way, and the channels are sufficient and effective. The information about grant opportunities seems to be at disposal. However, few of them take them as a real option, suggesting that more decisive actions to promote these should be expected. Regarding the administrative procedures in general and those oriented to access learning resources, all the members of the PhD programme claim that they tend to be easy and the obstacles are minimal, finding willingness of the administrative staff to help them and solve any issue. However, the PhD students were not wholly aware of the databases, which could be solved through a specific spreading.

*Recommendations:*

- Reinforce the use of existing learning resources through active dissemination on the topic.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

### *C.3. Internationalisation*

Internationalisation is properly taken into account as part of the objectives of the philosophy program. Many agreements are at disposal, but during the last years, the mobility activities were few. Joint supervision and mobility could be improved in line with the experience of other domains within the same doctoral school. The participation of the academic staff in international networks and events is excellent, and a considerable number of PhD students has taken part in them, which is remarkable and shows the existence of an internationalisation plan well-oriented. The invitation of international specialists to activities at the university is also worth noting and constitute a potent stimulus for internationalisation from early career stages.

During the interview, the managerial staff underlined that these actions struggle against significant issues that threaten the aims to promote the internationalisation of PhD students, noting that many of them are indeed involved in internationalisation processes due to their foreign origin. Notwithstanding, the students were well aware of the current actions within the program in the field of global research, and this could be a solid basis to improve this aspect in the future.

*Recommendations:*

- Internationalisation of students should be strengthened. Measures related to better use of mobility programmes, enhancement of the global belonging of the research projects, publication in well-ranked international journals and publishers and participation in international networks and societies, which are especially active in the field of Philosophy, are expectable.

*The indicator is fulfilled.*

## **IV. SWOT Analysis**

### *Strengths*

The teaching staff is high-quality and has excellent bonds with the PhD students. The students are motivated. The research units are excellent and conduct valuable scientific activities. The infrastructure is adequate to conduct academic and research tasks. It is worth noting that the program members at all levels have a great awareness of the strengths of the program and the points to be enhanced.

### *Weaknesses*

The number of tenured staff should be elevated. The internationalisation of students is not fully developed, even if the framework of opportunities is reachable. The knowledge about learning resources at disposal is not well spread among the students.

### *Opportunities*

There are quite good research units related to the program. The local, regional and international network of academic collaboration could be enhanced, considering the current development. There are suitable channels of dialogue with graduates and employers as well as awareness of potential channels to attract international students that could be the basis for further improvement.

### *Threats*

There is some risk of decreasing the program's dimension that needs to be controlled by adequate mitigating measures. Uncertainty about funding and the absence of due support oriented to the Humanities is always a threat in this kind of discipline.

## **V. Overview of judgements and recommendations**

No.	Type	Perf. indicator	Judgement	Recommendations
1	A1	Institutional capacities	Needs of additional funding	Strengthen the current strategies to improve the students' access to scholarships
2	A1	Institutional capacities	Good bases to develop follow-up of graduate activities	Given the strong links with the graduates, include the follow-up of the graduates and their labour integration to expand the traditional career paths
3	A3	Human Resources	Possibility to enhance the situation of tenured staff	Elevate the number of tenured staff to strengthen the program
4	B1	Candidates enrolled	Benefits to broaden the number	On the basis of the positive e results, develop strategies to attract new students
5	B3	Results of the doctoral studies	Convenience to promote mobility experiences	Strengthen the existent measures to promote mobility experiences among the PhD students
6	C2	Access to learning resources	Incomplete access to existent institutional services	Improve access to the databases the University has enhancing information
7	C3	Internationalization	Possibility to improve the connection with graduate and labour market	Enhance the follow-up of the graduates and their labour integration to expand the traditional career paths



## **VI. Conclusions and general recommendations**

The PhD program of philosophy at the Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava is a high-quality option. It is worth emphasising that the academic community members at all levels have a remarkable acuity and critical disposition to analyse the situation of the program, which was manifested in all the interviews. It is a clear indication of institutional maturity and a trait especially valuable in the philosophy domain. The overall outline complies with the expected performances satisfactorily.