

The External Evaluation Report of a Doctoral Study Domain: Philology

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I. Introduction¹

This evaluation concerns the **doctoral domain of Philology of „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava**, the evaluation period being from **2.09.2021 to 8.09.2021**. In addition to myself, as Expert evaluator STRĂIN, the evaluation team for Philology was constituted by Prof.Dr. Mihaela GHEORGHE (Universitatea Transilvania din Brașov, Expert evaluator DF RO) and Amelia MISTREANU (Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, Evaluator student - DF).

The Human and Social Sciences Doctoral School, to which the Philology domain is included, was founded in 2012. In the case of **the total number of doctoral students** in the Philology domain, in 2015-2016 there were 50; in 2016-2017, 47; in 2017-2018, 50; in 2018-2019, 60 students, and in 2019-2020, 47 students. Considering the figures of the total number of doctoral students in „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava (in 2015-2016, 221 students; in 2016-2017, 232; in 2017-2018, 259; in 2018-2019, 288 students, and in 2019-2020, 302), **the number of students enrolled in the Philology domain represent a substantive percentage of the total at the level of „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava as a whole** (15%, considering the figures of the 2019-2020 academic year). **This speaks positively about the contribution of studies in Philology to the overall doctoral programme and its position within the doctoral school as an academic field.** Regarding **PhD supervisors**, from 2017-2018 to this academic year, there have been a total of 10 PhD supervisors, with an average of 5 to 6 PhD students assigned to each.

II. Methods used

¹ Each time when applicable the information shall be presented gender-wise.



For this round of examination, **all external evaluators have attended zoom meetings**; given that our meetings have been remote, my report will not refer and comment on the University's facilities. The external evaluation process in my case has relied on the written materials and documents provided by the University in advance (over 170 in total, including annexes), and uploaded to the the ARACIS cloud, as well as on participating in the following **e-meetings**:

- Monday 30.08.2021: 18:00-19:00 h. Online preliminary meeting for the preparation and harmonization of evaluation steps, in hybrid mode, of doctoral study domains and IOSUD.
- Thursday, 2.09.2021 - 11:00-11:30 h. Online meeting for the preparation and harmonization of evaluation steps, in hybrid mode, of doctoral study domains and IOSUD
- 11:45-12:30 h. Online meeting with representatives of the USV institution, the Director of the Council for Academic Doctoral Studies (CSUD) and the Directors of Doctoral Schools
- Friday, 3.09.2021. 4:30-15:30 h. Online meeting with the members of the Ethics Commission
- Monday, 6.09.2021. 10:00-11:00 h. Online meeting with the contact person for the doctoral study domain under review and the team who drafted the internal evaluation
- 12:30-13:30 h. Online meeting with the academic staff corresponding to the doctoral study domain.
- 17:45 - 18:45 h. Online meeting with the Directors/persons in charge of the research centers/laboratories within the doctoral study domain.
- Tuesday, 7.09.2021. 10:30 - 11:30 h. Online meeting with USV PhD students, on domains.
- 14:00-15:00 h. Online meeting with graduates of the respective doctoral study domain.
- 17:00-18:00 h. Online meeting with employers of doctoral graduates in the domain.
- Wednesday 8.09.2021. 10:00 - 11:00 h. Online meeting with USV Doctoral School Directors and Doctoral School Council (CSD members).
- 11:15 - 12:15 h. Online meeting with the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEAC) members/Quality Assurance Department.
- 13:00-14:00 h. Online meeting for conclusions.
- 14:00-15:00 h. Meeting with representatives of the institution under review to discuss on the conclusions of the evaluation process and the main recommendations.

The meetings that specifically concern the doctoral studies in Philology were highly useful to get an insight into the workings of the domain. This **variety of interlocutors** (from faculty, to doctoral students, to doctoral graduates, to employers thereof) sheds light on different aspects of doctoral studies, from the motivations of doctoral candidates, to their careers upon receiving their doctorate, and as such it helps external evaluators to form a better picture of the workings of Rumanian academia as a whole, which may not necessarily be entirely alike to their own academic backgrounds and contexts.

In addition to these meetings, evaluators were presented with a **'Self-evaluation report'** on the part of the domain together with a list of over 170 annexes. The self-evaluation report is a valuable tool to gain an insight into the workings of doctoral programmes in general at „Ștefan cel Mare” University of



Suceava, and specifically the study of Philology. Other documents were provided upon request over the course of the meetings.

As recommendations for the future, given that the annexes in the case of Philology were almost in their entirety in Rumanian, at least the most crucial ones (for instance, Annex II.23 and II.22, among others, which I found of particular relevance) should be provided directly in English as well, without waiting for the evaluator's request. **In addition to the list of Annexes, as included at the end of the 'Self-evaluation report', providing a list of links to the webpages mentioned throughout the report itself** with a brief (one, two-line) description of what is available where, as well as other links to webpages that, even without having been mentioned in the report but may be still of interest, would **help evaluators navigate the report better**, and connect, contrast and compare the information provided in the dossier with the one made public online.

III. Analysis of ARACIS's performance indicators

After the meetings and after studying the report and the appendixes provided, I can conclude the following regarding the performance indicators that assess the doctoral performance of „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, as far as the Philology domain is concerned. My comments will focus exclusively on those performance indicators which are not fulfilled in their entirety (underlined):

Domain A. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Criterion A.1. The administrative, managerial institutional structures and the financial resources

- *Performance Indicator A.1.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator A.1.1.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator A.1.2.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator A.1.2.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator A.1.3.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *A.1.3.2. → The indicator is partially met.*

→ Criterion A.1.3.2. establishes that the proportion of doctoral students who benefit for at least 6 months from sources of funding other than government funding, through scholarships granted by individuals or legal entities or are financially supported by research or institutional development / human resources grants, should not be less than 20%. In the case of the Philology domain the figure is, however, 11, 3%. This means that, on average, from the years 2015 to 2019, only 28 doctoral students



out of the 254 students enrolled in doctoral studies in the domain of Philology received some kind of funding for a period of, minimum, 6 months. As a consequence, the vast majority of doctoral students have to work while pursuing their doctoral studies, which explains why many of them cannot complete their degree in the three-year period generally envisioned for doctoral studies, but need to request a two-year extension. This may also be the reason why some of them eventually decide to interrupt and abandon their doctoral studies, not due to lack of motivation or disappointment with the doctoral programme (which on the contrary they assess favourably and consider stimulating), but rather because of the strain of having to work full time and pursue a doctoral degree in parallel.

The self-evaluation report, and conversations with faculty from „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, explain the difficulties of obtaining funding for both the domains of Philology and Philosophy given the fact that, according to the report: “Although at university level the number of projects and funding from sources other than government funding is significant, Order No. 5376/2017 of October 19th 2017 of the Ministry of National Education concerning the approval of fields and specialisations/university study programs correlated with economic sectors with potential growth in Romania removed humanities specialisations such as Philology and Philosophy from the list of eligible fields, which subsequently made it impossible to access these funds” (p. 16). Funding the Philology domain appropriately should be at the top of the priorities of the Human and Social Sciences Doctoral School, as this shortage of scholarships for doctoral students puts the field of study as a whole, together with its doctoral students, in a vulnerable position. Vindicating both Philology and Philosophy as fields that deserve doctoral funding is not the sole responsibility of „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, but one shared by all the universities in the country. Still, „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava can, specifically, advertise more extensively in their webpage funding opportunities for doctoral students in the realm of Philology. In the meeting with the doctoral students, many affirmed having been awarded an Erasmus scholarship to conduct doctoral research abroad for a few months. The fact that, in the round of meetings, no student manifested having received a grant/scholarship of a different sort is also indicative of the dissemination of a limited range of funding opportunities on the part of the university. At the level of the The Human and Social Sciences Doctoral School, advertising online more and more diverse funding from institutions and international research centres/projects/groups would increase the current percentage of funded doctoral students.

In addition, it should be noted that Criterion A.1.3.2. considers the students who have received a minimum of “6 months of funding”. This is, nonetheless, a very low minimum for a 3-year full-time doctoral scheme, which, in most cases, precisely as a result of lack of funding, becomes a 4 to 5 year programme. The 11,3% figure would be much lower if the minimum were raised to, for instance, 1 year, that is, a third of the recommended duration of the doctoral programme. Appendix II.22, however, does not record the number of months of the scholarships awarded to each of the 28 students that received some kind of funding; neither is there information about their sources of funding / names of the scholarships / institutions granting these. Including this information in future dossiers is strongly recommended.

- *Performance Indicator *A.1.3.3.² → The indicator is fulfilled.*

² The indicators marked with an asterisk (*) hold a special status, referring exclusively to the evaluation of doctoral studies domains, as per Article 12 from the annex No.1 of the Order of the minister of education No. 3651/12.04.2021 approving the Methodology for evaluating university doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used



Criterion A.2. Research infrastructure

- Performance Indicator A.2.1.1. → As I have not visited the venues or seen the material equipment available to the doctoral school I cannot fully comment on this point. This being said, however, after speaking with faculty and current/past students, no complaints were expressed in this regard, which may suggest that this performance indicator is effectively fulfilled. The research carried out by the Philology faculty in terms of their publications, involvement in managing peer-reviewed academic journals, leading funded research projects, etc. indeed suggests so as well.

Criterion A.3. Quality of Human Resources

- *Performance Indicator A.3.1.1.* → *The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *A.3.1.2.* → *The indicator is partially met.*

→ Criterion A.3.1.2 establishes that at least 50% of the doctoral supervisors in the evaluated doctoral field should be tenured within IOSUD. In the Philology domain, there are currently eleven PhD supervisors, ten of whom are tenured professors at the "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, and another is a tenured professor at the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, also affiliated to IOSUD - USV. The occupancy rate is thus of 45.45%. It should also be noted that five out of the ten tenured professors at the "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava are retired.

Considering that this figure is only 4.55 points away from the required 50%, and that, according to the self-evaluation report, two of the retired PhD supervisors will not supervise new PhD students in upcoming years, and that two faculty members, who recently defended their habilitation theses, are in the process of being granted the validation to supervise PhD dissertations, mathematically the indicator is bound to be met in its entirety in the near future. Yet, "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava should encourage and adopt measures to ensure that their faculty have enough opportunities to promote and reach tenure, and thus to become potential PhD supervisors, which would benefit doctoral students in, among other aspects, having a wider range of supervisors and lines of research to choose from for their dissertation.

- *Performance Indicator A.3.1.3.* → *The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *A.3.1.4.* → *The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator A.3.2.1.* → *The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *A.3.2.2.* → *The indicator is fulfilled.*

in the evaluation. In case they are not met, the Agency extends a period of maximum 3 years to IOSUD to correct the respective deficiencies.



Domain B. EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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

- *Performance Indicator *B.1.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled. .*
- *Performance Indicator *B.1.2.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator B.1.2.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*

Criterion B.2. The content of doctoral programs

- *Performance Indicator B.2.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator B.2.1.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator B.2.1.3. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator B.2.1.4. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator B.2.1.5. → The indicator is fulfilled.*

Criterion B.3. The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation.

- *Performance Indicator B.3.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *B.3.1.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *B.3.2.1. → The indicator is fulfilled..*
- *Performance Indicator *B.3.2.2. → The indicator is partially met.*

→ Criterion B. 3.2.2 establishes that the ratio between the number of PhD theses assigned to a scientific referee from an institution of higher education different from the one where the defence of the PhD thesis is held, and the number of PhD theses defended in the same doctoral field of the Doctoral School should not be higher than 0.3. In the case of the Philology domain, 33 PhD dissertations were defended during the last 5 years; 23 scientific referees from other academic institutions participated in their committees of public defence. The reason why this indicator is partially and not fully met is because two scientific referees were assigned 11 PhD theses each, hence surpassing the limit envisioned in the criterion. For the future it is recommended, prior to approving the boards of examiners of doctoral dissertations, to double-check the number of theses in which each proposed expert has been



invited to participate in the previous five years so as to ensure greater diversity among doctoral evaluators.

Domain C. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

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

- *Performance Indicator C.1.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator *C.1.1.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*

Criterion C.2. Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources

- *Performance Indicator C.2.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator C.2.2.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator C.2.2.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator C.2.2.3. → The indicator is fulfilled.*

Criterion C.3. Internationalization

- *Performance Indicator *C.3.1.1. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator C.3.1.2. → The indicator is fulfilled.*
- *Performance Indicator C.3.1.3. → The indicator is fulfilled.*

IV. SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths:**

- The motivation of the hardworking doctoral students of the Philology domain at „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava and their eagerness to produce quality doctoral research
- The motivation and commitment of faculty members of the Philology domain at „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava to supervise their doctoral students and engage with their research
- The existence of research centres such as the Interlitteras Research Centre and the Anadiss Research Centre, and the research projects and initiatives resulting/connected to both

- **Weaknesses:**

- Low number of doctoral students with grants/scholarships in the realm of Philology

- **Opportunities:**

- Grants/scholarships funded by international research groups/projects, etc. different from the Erasmus programme. These should be advertised among doctoral students, who should be encouraged to apply
- Ongoing research projects within the field of Philology, which will attract new doctoral candidates in the next years, and research initiatives such as the Anadiss international journal
- The fact that faculty members of the Philology domain will join the list of PhD supervisors within the next years

- **Threats:**

- Lack of funding of doctoral programmes of the field of Philology
- The persistence of the misbelief that Philology as a domain is not correlated with economic sectors with potential growth

V. Overview of judgments awarded and of the recommendations

List of performance indicators which are not fulfilled in their entirety:

No.	Type of indicator (PI, PI *, CPI)	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
1.	PI*	A.1.3.2.	The indicator is partially met.	See above (IV).
2.	PI*	A.3.1.2	The indicator is partially met.	See above (IV)
3.	PI*	B.3.2.2.	The indicator is partially met.	See above (IV)

VI. Conclusions and general recommendations

Some final general recommendations concern the presentation of information on „Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava’s webpage. In the case of certain crucial sites, this information is not updated. Such is the case of <<https://usv.ro/academic/programe-academice/doctorat/programe-de-pregatire-universitara-avansata/scoala-doctorala-de-stiinte-sociale-si-umaniste/>>, where the information regarding the domain of Philology refers to the academic year 2018-2019: ‘4. Filologie: - Plan de pregătire avansată 2018-2019 - Fișele disciplinelor’. In addition, the two PDFs uploaded are not searchable PDFs, which makes it more difficult for international evaluators and readers who rely on Google Translator to translate information from Rumanian into English. Uploading searchable PDFs instead allows copy-pasting texts, which facilitates non-Rumanian speakers understanding these texts. Incidentally, the fact that both documents show handwritten signatures of professors is perhaps not advisable, as this is sensitive information.



Overall, the university should ensure that all the information available online is updated regularly. For instance, judging by its webpage, the Inter Litteras Research Centre (<https://usv.ro/cercetare/centre/centrul-de-cercetari-interlitteras/>), of particular relevance within the Philology domain, would appear to have stopped all its activities in 2010, when its webpage seems to have been updated last, as suggested by the statement: 'MAIN RESEARCH THEMES: The broad-spectrum research topic for the period 2005 - 2010 is entitled Metamorphosis of the Text and has the following subtopics...'. Evidently the activities of the research centre have been numerous since 2010, but there is no acknowledgement of this in its institutional webpage, and the misleading impression is that the centre is no longer active.

VII. Annexes