

UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT
2021

Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the online institutional evaluation process of the University of Craiova (UCV) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The online evaluation took place between Monday 28 June and Friday 2 July 2021. Before the evaluation, I received the self-evaluation report of the institution. During the online evaluation with the help of the colleagues of the University of Craiova I had the possibility to access all the documents and annexes of the evaluation process and collect every useful and important information about the university. My report is roughly following the structure of the self-evaluation report of the institution.

Legal and Organizational Framework, Mission and Objectives

University of Craiova is operating as an education and research institution and has a significant role in the higher education in Romania. UCV has a long history, and the changing conditions, restructuring processes and transformations have resulted educational programs that have permanently met the needs of the students. As one of the leader universities in Romanian higher education this institution has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills, and competencies in the offered educational programs.

The University of Craiova has 12 faculties (Faculty of Agronomy, Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Horticulture, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Letters, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology). The University of Craiova provides high quality study programs to its nearly 18,000 students in various fields, offering 95 Bachelor's programs, 89 Master's programs, a doctoral programs in different forms of

education (full-time, part-time, and distance learning programs). Beside the 12 faculties there is an autonomous department operates within the University of Craiova, the Department of Teacher Training.

In 2004, the University "Gheorghe Anghel" of Drobeta-Turnu Severin was taken over by the University of Craiova, and this institution has become the University Center of Drobeta-Turnu Severin of the University of Craiova, where the divisions of the faculties of Letters, Economics and Business Administration, Physical Education and Sports, Law and Social Sciences and Mechanical Engineering are operating.

According to the received data, the university has modernized the teaching and research infrastructure, in accordance with the standards of the European Higher Education Area. The university participates in many interdisciplinary research projects supported by the complex infrastructure of the university. UCV has strategic partnerships with the actors of the business environment and with national and international professional institutions. The entrepreneurial orientation of UCV seems to be more and more important.

The tradition, the experience, the prestige, and the competences of University of Craiova show the importance of this institution in the internal and international environment, and support and develop scientific research activities both national and international level. The institution meets the cultural, social, and economic needs of the community. The different types of national and international rankings and results also demonstrate the high prestige of the university on the field of education, research, and infrastructure. According to the self-evaluation report of the University of Craiova the strategic objectives are focusing on the maintenance of the present position and provide future development to be one of prestigious universities in Romania.

The Charter of the UCV is the basic document that provides the guidelines regarding the structure, strategy, principles of functioning, development, and regulations. The charter provisions have been harmonized with both the Romanian legislation and the principles of the European Higher Education Area. According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative

leadership of UCV have proper competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the faculties of the university, departments, centers, and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution relies on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of different types of programs, teaching staff and the other personnel of the university. The web page of the university features the organizational structure, the managerial team, as well as the offices and services available in the university.

In accordance with the legal provisions, the students' representatives, elected by universal, direct, equal, and secret vote, represent 25% of the members of the University Senate, and also participate in the work of the faculty councils. Students are represented in all decision-making and advisory structures in which issues that directly concern them are discussed.

Overall, from the beginning the university has the mission of carrying on specific higher education activities in the Oltenia region of Romania, having the purpose of training high-skilled specialists, developing, and improving professional competences, improving constantly the education process and scientific research, in permanent cooperation with similar institutions, as well as with institutions from the national, European, and international environment. It is also an important aim to build and strengthen the connections with economic actors and the society.

The current activity of the institution is based on the strategic objectives specified in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 and in the annual operational plans, posted on the UCV website and which aim to allocate the resources necessary to achieve the established objectives.

Educational Programs, Teaching Staff

According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, the development of study programs within the University of Craiova is supported by 1,838 employees, of which 1,005 teaching staff, 483 auxiliary teaching staff, 339 non-teaching staff and 11 research staff.

As far as the teaching staff are concerned, at the level of the University of Craiova, the autonomy of human resources is transposed by the freedom of the corresponding departments to develop their own policy of selection and employment of the teaching staff. The competitions for filling in teaching vacancies and teaching staff promotion are proposed by the departments, approved by the Faculty Council, by the Administrative Board and approved by the Senate, in compliance with University of Craiova.

The titular teaching staff in UCV has proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which results a good level of performance in education and training processes. According to the self-evaluation report of the institution the scientific potential and quality of human resources of UCV are on a good level. University has now a highly qualified staff. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that foreign language skills of the staff are good. The academic staff is also involved in research. It is also important to add that the teaching staff of UCV enjoys a large national and international recognition and appreciation, which is also leading to their presence in specialized bodies and committees in the country and abroad.

The University of Craiova provides high quality study programs to its nearly 18,000 students in various fields, and has 95 Bachelor's programs, 89 Master's programs, in all forms of education (full-time, part-time, and distance learning programs). According to the report and the received information, there are also plans for the diversification of teacher training programs, by accrediting and implementing Master's programs of Didactics, increasing the number of internships and financing internship programs from European funds. and strengthening doctoral schools by enhancing the habilitation of the teaching staff. Doctoral schools also play an important role in educational supply, where the orientation of doctoral programs towards applied research, and the diversification of joint doctoral programs with partner universities from abroad is in focus. UCV has 10 accredited doctoral schools and 27 accredited doctoral programs and led by the Council for University Doctoral Studies.

The university also offers postgraduate programs, student remedial programs, the ROSE (Romania Secondary Education Project) program, and summer schools for students. In this case there is a plan for further development of foreign language study programs and summer schools for international students. Currently the University of Craiova has six foreign study centers (French Center, Bulgarian Center, Spanish Center, English Center, Center for Polish Language and Culture, and the Center for Academic Success).

According to the future perspectives of the foreign language education programs it is recommended to develop this field, and UCV should exploit the potential of regional and cross-border cooperation and development, including the Danube area as well.

Infrastructure, material assets

According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, the assets of UCV are functionally balanced: the university has 1 main building, 5 university campuses, 10 halls of residence, 214 lecture halls and seminar rooms, 352 teaching and research laboratories, 1 central library having 14 branches serving the faculties and reading rooms with a total surface area of approx. 5000 m², 4 research and development units, and 1 university club. The lecture halls, seminar and laboratory rooms are equipped for learning, teaching and communication purposes, which enhances the teaching and learning activities, and the equipment meets with the specific requirements. In addition, the University owns or administrates a botanical garden, the Banu Maracine Research and Development Unit, the Agricultural Research and Development Unit of Caracal, the Research and Development Unit of Grassland, Biodiversity Conservation and Agrotourism (Preajba - Ranca), the Fruit Growing Research and Development Unit of Ramnicu Valcea and the Research and Development Unit of Ranca-Gorj.

University of Craiova has an ITC network that covers the university campus, including all the teaching, research, and administrative spaces. This network provides both wired and wireless internet access. Students can access the ITC network via the terminals located in the laboratories, and reading rooms, in compliance with the protocols and regulations of the use of the computer network.

For the accommodation of students, the University of Craiova provides 10 consolidated and modernised halls of residence, with a capacity of 2,805 places in the academic year 2019-2020, which meet the needs of the students. The University Center of Drobeta Turnu-Severin has three buildings where the branches of the faculties of the UCV operate.

According to the self-evaluation report and the received information, the university has proper material bases for the educational and research process. The spaces dedicated for the didactic and research-related activities are owned by the university and meet the norms and legal requirements, the present capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations. It is also important to point out that from last year due to the COVID situation, the university, just like other higher education institutions, has started to organize the educational activities online. According to the received information, the university managed to cope with this atypical situation. On one hand, because of the online solutions the current use and utilization of the infrastructure is certainly lower than the previous periods, but the university must pay a permanent attention to maintain and develop the infrastructure of the education.

Financial performance

The financial resources of the University of Craiova consist of funds allocated from the state budgets and from its own income. The allocation of funds is made by activities of the faculties and departments, depending on the number of enrolled students, in accordance with the legislation in force and the decisions of the Senate. The university also has other financial resources from tuition fees, scientific research-generated income, services provision, research units, consulting, publishing activities, donations, sponsorships, and international funds.

According to the received information, the financial resources from the basic dedicated financing and from the income generated by the faculties, departments, and research centers are used by these units, except for a share that is used at the university level. The size of this share is established by the Administrative Board to ensure the financial stability of the university and its capacity for action, in

compliance with the legal provisions. The share of basic dedicated financing, retained by the university, as well as the share retained from the income generated by faculties, departments, and research centers does not exceed 30%.

Financial resources, revenues and expenditures are planned annually by the Economic Department and approved by the Chief Authorising Officer and the Ministry of National Education. To comply with the principle of managerial and financial efficiency, the financial activity is monitored by the Committee for Economic, Administrative and European Funding Activities of the Senate, and audited, internally and externally, by audit missions performed by the Internal Financial Audit Department and the Court of Auditors.

According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university the financial activities, incomes, and expenses of UCV are relatively well balanced and research projects are also playing an important role in the budget.

Beside the state support the university permanently has to find the way to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance its activities in a reasonable level and quality. Right now, the effects of the virus crisis seem to be relatively moderate, but this situation could change easily if the crisis is going to drag on and the negative tendencies start to influence the present operation of the institution. In this case the university has to be proactive and has to have plans to utilize the available resources and find also new directions to make extra incomes.

Students

The total number of students in the academic the year 2020/2021 is 17,805, of which 13,388 (75% of the total number of students) are enrolled to the Bachelor's programs, and 4,417 (25%) are enrolled to the Master's programs. In the doctoral study programs, 565 students were enrolled on 1 January 2021, of which 539 Romanian students and 26 international students.

Also, students are enrolled to distance learning Bachelor's programs at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and Faculty of Letters, and to part-time Bachelor's programs at the at the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Agronomy and Faculty of Electrical Engineering.

The University of Craiova applies a transparent policy of student recruitment and admission, publicly announced at least 6 months in advance, either on the university's website or through other media. The dissemination of public information on student admission takes place at three levels: academic marketing, media production and direct communication.

The University of Craiova provides 2,805 accommodation places in the 10 fully functional halls of residence. The halls of residence also include reading rooms and food preparation areas, and are connected to cable TV, to the internet through the RoEduNet network. Students receive subsidies for accommodation and meals.

Well-performing students are motivated by the scholarship scheme granted by the Romanian state and by the business partners of the University of Craiova. There is a social grant fund for students with limited financial resources, as well as a fund for occasional social assistance. Scholarships and grants are awarded in accordance with the provisions of the regulation of the award of scholarships, grants and other forms of social support for students. Students participating in student competitions and win prizes at prestigious national and international competitions are financially rewarded.

It is also important to mention the Ford Resource and Engagement Center of Craiova which was among the first incubator of innovative projects in Europe, through which project competitions are held for high school and university students, the winning projects being funded by the Association for Education South-West Oltenia – EDUCOL, of which UCV is a founding member.

There are also special facilities for students with disabilities, UCV supporting not only the admission process, but also the entire educational process for the enrolled students and promoting inclusive education. The university organizes many scientific, cultural, and sport events for students as well.

To provide counselling services to students, the University of Craiova established a Center for Counselling and Career Orientation - CCOC in 1997. CCOC offers students free counselling, career guidance and facilitates and monitors student insertion to the labour market. Job fairs are also organised periodically by the

University of Craiova, attended by prospective employers from the business and cultural environment, to promote the educational offer and employment opportunities.

The University provides support to legally established organisations, by making available the necessary logistics for the smooth running of current activities and for the implementation of programs and projects. Students receive free medical care in the health care center of the university. Students can benefit from advantageous loans from the Student Loans and Grants Agency. At the University of Craiova there is a Center for Learning and Training Resources and Assistance – CRAIF, whose purpose is to increase the degree of retention of students at risk by developing specific skills, and by the provision of academic support services, aligned with the needs of students.

There is many international cooperation with other universities and there are many bilateral agreements exists in UCV. The university is also participating in the ERASMUS program where parallel with the student mobility there is also teacher mobility which usually means a one-week long visit different European destinations basically with the same main directions as student mobility. Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these contracts permanently with the partner institutions and permanently increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities. Even in the period of COVID, when the personal contacts are more complicated, the institution must pay attention to find the appropriate management of its contacts if the present situation drags on and the online world lasts longer.

The public information can be found on the UCV site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language. The English version of the website exists, although there are many parts where it should be developed if the foreign language educational programs would be in focus in the future. This could help to grow the visibility and internationalization of the institution as well.

According to the report, dissemination of public information is one of the priorities of the University of Craiova, encompassing three levels: academic marketing, media production and direct communication. The academic marketing component is managed by the Vice-Rector for International Relations and Academic Image. The University of Craiova has a very powerful tool: its own TV station - Tele U (<https://www.teleucraiova.ro/>). This communication channel is complemented by media broadcasts planned by the Department of Public Relations and Academic Image (DRPIA). The media production consists of the editing of catalogues and brochures - published centrally through Universitaria Publishing House, recognized by CNCS, or in a decentralised manner by the faculties - banners, films, and other advertising materials, coordinated by DRPIA.

It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The good reputation of UCV 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 scholarships and other forms of financial supports.

Research activities and international visibility

UCV plays a very important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In UCV, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European financial resources, projects, and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities. 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. In case of UCV these connections seem to be in a perfect level as national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning. UCV pays more and more attention for collaboration focusing on countries, universities, or other institutions where the main fields of education also

appear in educational programs and research activities of partner institutions in Europe. Regarding to this process, it is recommended to develop joint projects and research activities with these partner universities and make more intensive steps to strengthen cooperation with other universities of the region.

The scientific research strategy for the period 2020-2024 is aligned with the mission and objectives of the University of Craiova regarding scientific research, innovation, and technology transfer as specified by the University Charter and is part of the national strategy in the field of research. Research-generated revenues of great number of projects contribute to the budget of the institution.

The scientific research activity at the University of Craiova is carried out through research centers, which operate at the level of faculties and departments, being coordinated by university management entities, and correlated with the national policies in the fields of education, scientific research, funding, and quality assurance. To provide an institutionalised form of scientific research, independent research centers have been set up.

Additionally, UCV should continue to organize conferences more intensively which could be very important for strengthening the national and international visibility of the institution and beside the 'outsider' lecturers and participants it gives possibility for the students and teachers from the institution to present the results of their own research. Participating in projects and research are not only possibilities for the staff, but for the students as well.

The university also uses the advantages of Erasmus program and the importance and proper management of this exchange program provides students and staff members taking part in mobility activities funded and supported by the EU.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a fundamental principle underpinning the functioning of the University of Craiova, and, alongside quality evaluation, represents a component of the public accountability of the University of Craiova.

The University of Craiova has organized quality assurance and evaluation in a quality management system (SMC), governed by policies and implemented through

practices of quality assurance. The policies of quality assurance are stipulated in different documents: The Rector's Statement of the Quality Policy at the University of Craiova, the University of Craiova Charter, and the Quality Assurance Code.

At the University level, there is a Quality Evaluation and Assurance Committee, which includes a representative of the business environment, as well as a representative of the students. At the level of the faculties there are study programs committees, including representatives of the business environment as well.

The quality assurance within the university can be defined as the set of organizational structures, responsibilities, regulations, standards, procedures, tools, and resources contributing to high quality educational services at all stages. Reviewing the structure and activities of the quality assurance of the university, these processes operate well, but the main principle and an objective has to be that quality assurance has to become the part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus. The nation-wide competitive advantages of the university justify the need for the continuous quality assurance: the institution permanently has to face with economic, social and environmental challenges, so there is a continuous adaptation pressure for quality assurance processes to adjust to the changes and improve the quality of teaching and research processes.

Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have read and have heard before and during the online visit. I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- Although the present situation, role and reputation of University of Craiova is good, the university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, etc.), and attracting students from the operating areas of UCV;

- University of Craiova should permanently invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow;
- It is also recommended to start new foreign language education programs;
- UCV should exploit the potential of the regional and cross-border cooperation and development, including the Danube area;
- The university has to concentrate on the diversification and further development of the educational programs (developing new education programs reflecting for the sustainability challenges of humankind, e-learning programs, focusing on other new potential target groups, etc.), parallel with managing the human and financial resources to maintain the present level of education;
- The university should cooperate permanently with higher education and research institutions of other countries and with business actors to strengthen the present, favorable recognition and competitiveness.

Finally, I would like to thank to the Rector, the university staff and the evaluation team for the pleasant atmosphere and support during the online evaluation. 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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