

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova  
External Institutional Evaluation Report  
2021

## **Introduction**

I was invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to join the evaluation team for institutional evaluation of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova (UMF CV). Prior to the site visit I studied the English version of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) of the UMF CV. During the visit, which was carried out online due to pandemic restrictions from 29 June to 2 July 2021, I had a good chance to enhance the information I received about the UMF CV and its operation.

The site visit started with a preliminary online meeting of experts, members of the evaluation team. At this meeting, a preparation and harmonization of evaluation stages in the blended format was discussed. Then the online meeting with the UMF CV's leading representatives followed. During the whole period of evaluation, I had a chance to participate at several plenary/group meetings with representatives of the UMF CV teaching staff, students, alumni and also employers of graduates of the UMF CV. Besides this, a series of individual meetings as well as group discussions with representatives of various positions (functions) within the UMF CV and beyond followed during the site visit. This way I have met representatives of the UMF CV executive management (all over the structure: university, faculties, departments and other units), members of the UMF CV's Senate, academic and administrative staff in charge of teaching, research, international relations, quality assurance and student support. Also, I had a chance to meet some student representatives individually, including those involved in English programs, and other relevant persons.

During the site visit and upon my request, I received additional documents related to some aspects of the UMF CV's operation, and these documents also helped me to complete the picture. This way, for the purpose of the UMF CV evaluation, I had a chance to study materials related to leadership, management and governance, budgeting, study provision, research, internationalization, external relations, quality assurance and many other aspects of the UMF CV's operation.

I would like to express my gratefulness to Mr. Vlad Popescu, an ARACIS officer, for his very helpful support throughout the evaluation process. Also, I benefited from highly collegial approach of the whole group of evaluators led by Prof. Radu Oprean, head of the mission, and Prof. Marius Petrescu, coordinator of the expert evaluators' team. Last but not least, I want to thank Professor Mihai Ioana for his very helpful support throughout the whole visit and Mr. Robert Roventa for his support by interpreting some of the interviews. All this was very helpful.

On the basis of the sources of information mentioned, herewith I submit my report on the UMF CV's institutional performance as I have perceived it. I am well aware that this is a limited view by an external evaluator, and a much deeper insight would be needed to really catch the essence of some of the issues evaluated. My evaluation, as well as my recommendations for possible consideration, should be understood as a collegial attempt to provide the UMF CV and ARACIS with opinions aiming to contribute to possible improvements at the UMF CV as well as to quality assurance of higher education in Romania as such.

## **Mission statement**

The UMF CV is a public higher education institution, well-established in current context of higher education in Romania. At the same time, it strives to play a distinct role in the broader context, internationally.

The mission statement of the UMF CV clearly reflects the need of a modern higher education institution to operate actively in three main areas: teaching, research/development and public involvement (community service). This way, the UMF CV aims at education in medical and pharmaceutical sciences at various levels (including PhD), promotion and support for biomedical scientific research, provision of health services for the community, achieving a visible position among regional leaders in the development and implementation of national and European policies in the field of education, research and medical assistance, and promotion of Romanian education in general and medical education in particular at the international level.  
(<http://www.thecv.ro/en/mission>)

The mission of the UMF CV can be evaluated as relevant, sufficiently elaborated, ambitious and generally acceptable. The intentions, as formulated in the mission statement, seem to be a promising basis on which the UMF CV's activities can be built and further developed.

The main UMF CV's objectives, as formulated in the University Charter, are synergic with the mission statement. Among the main objectives there are goals such as continuous upgrade of the education process, implementation of internal management control systems, modernisation of methodology for the evaluation and recognition of studies, lifelong training for medical and pharmaceutical professionals, developing research, developing inter-institutional cooperation and others (University Charter, p. 7).

### *Recommendation:*

- *Make sure current key strategic documents are available in English and the UMF CV makes these documents easily accessible on its webpage.*

## **Academic freedom and academic integrity**

The environment of ethics and academic integrity is emphasised in relation to the mission's realisation in the SAR of the UMF CV. Main principles related to this are formulated in the University Charter, among them respect for academic liberties, university autonomy, behavioural fairness, professional and human dignity, no discrimination, and rules of morality play the lead.

The university autonomy as well as academic freedom are elaborated in the University Charter, emphasising the constitutional guarantees of the university autonomy as well as the academic freedom, including the right to select community members; the right to freely acquire, develop, share and disseminate the knowledge; the right to examine any topic in any field of fundamental medical and related sciences; the right to participate in educational, research and service activities of the university; and more. (University Charter, p. 5). At the same time, public accountability is stressed in the University Charter.

The Ethical Code of the UMF CV is an integral part of the University Charter. It refers to the principles and rules of professional academic ethics and it imposes standards of ethics. Through this Ethical Code, the UMF CV defends values of academic freedom, university autonomy, and ethical

integrity. There seem to be clearly described practices and mechanisms for the application of the Ethical Code at the UMF CV, including the status and operation of the Commission of Ethics.

The UMF CV pays attention to the danger of plagiarism and uses antiplagiarism software to fight intellectual frauds. There are two systems in place: sistemantiplagiat.ro (to check texts in the Romanian language), and ithentitace.com (for texts in English).

The bodies of the UMF CV seem to be in agreement with legislation; they provide the faculties with respective academic freedom.

*Recommendation:*

- *Publish current key documents related to academic freedom and academic integrity in English and make them more easily accessible.*

## **Organisation and management**

The UMF CV is a well-established university. It consists of four faculties which are specifically focused on segments in the field of medicine and pharmacy: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Pharmacy, and Faculty of Midwives and Nursing.

Management and administration of the UMF CV are reasonably developed both vertically and horizontally as well as in other directions across the university. The principles of organization of the UMF CV and its functioning are described in the University Charter; they relate to teaching, research, administrative structures, management structures and functions, institutional cooperation, university ethics, quality assurance and other relevant areas of operation.

There is a standard set of main units of the management system at the UMF CV. This especially includes the University Senate, the Board of Directors, Faculty Councils, and Department Councils. Among them the superior management forum is the University Senate, composed by teachers as well as students (3:1 ratio).

The Rector's team includes four vice-rectors who are in charge of specific agendas (academic issues; teaching; scientific research and international relations; resident and postgraduate studies). In this way, the main areas of UMF CV activities seem to be in principle covered. The Deans' offices and university administration services also relate to the strategic management structures of the UMF CV. The management bodies of the departments seem to reflect the university and faculty structures. An important role is played by the Research Centres and as well by the Council for Doctoral Studies (CSUD) at the UMF CV. Several support units established at the university level seem to cover the main areas of the university operation. This applies to the Centre for Medical Education (development of teaching and skills of the staff, improvement of programs), the counselling and vocational guidance office, the research support unit, technical department, library, financial department, legal office, international office and others.

The electoral regulations stipulate a transparent procedure for electing the rector, members of the University Senate and members of the Faculty Councils.

Students are represented in consultative, decision-making structures within the UMF CV. The university does not condition the status of a student representative as depending on academic performance or attendance at courses, seminars and laboratory practice.

Communication within the UMF CV is supported via internet and intranet systems, both managed by Department of Informatics and Multimedia.

### **Academic programs and student management**

The UMF CV currently offers a range of programs at all three levels as well as residency programs. All programs directly relate to health care. Some are provided parallelly in Romanian and English (Medicine, Dental Medicine, Pharmacy). The study programs seem to be in correspondence with the UMF CV's mission statement and international standards. All programs are regularly monitored, evaluated and updated if necessary. As it appears, the quality, range and academic aims of the curriculum are appropriate for the academic degrees awarded.

The UMF CV is using clear admission procedures in accordance with existing legislation. These procedures are described adequately in the SAR, and they are made publicly available at the institution's webpage. The candidates for the studies (secondary school students) are offered a simulation of the admission contest by the UMF CV every year. For programs in English, candidate students are admitted on the basis of evaluation of their school performance and personal achievements. The results of the admission procedures are analysed and used for possible improvements for the following year.

The rules related to assessment of student results throughout all study stages are clear and publicly accessible. During the interviews, students did not make any critical remarks on these matters.

The UMF CV declares the student-centred approach as the key didactic principle in the programs concerned, with the encouragement of active involvement. Student support is carried out in various ways at the UMF CV. There are elements of tutoring system that help students integrate into academic education, with tutors established for each study program, respectively for each year of study, including programs conducted in English. Consultation hours (two hours a week), student circles coordinated by teaching staff, extra classes and some other possibilities to support students learning seem also be a part of the reality at the UMF CV. In the cases identified by the counselling centre, students can have an individualized study plan. A positive view at tutoring and its potential was voiced by student respondents during the interviews. The size of the student groups seems to be acceptable throughout the study.

The Centre for Psychological Counselling and Career Guidance serves students of the UMF CV. It is well organized and produces a number of relevant activities.

Students' organisations are involved in the development of a number of activities supporting student learning as well as social life at the university. The documents available as well as the data from the interviews indicated there is a potential for more integration of both student groups (Romanian students and foreigners) at the UMF CV (see the paragraph on internationalisation).

### **Internationalisation**

Learning/teaching and research tend to be profiled as activities which include international dimension at the UMF CV. The institution under review has a set of bilateral cooperation contracts with universities abroad, including those related to the Erasmus program. The UMF CV

documentation as well as interviews with the staff, students and graduates provided the evidence about mobility and other academic exchange activities. These activities take place within the framework of different EU programs, but also within the framework of some other schemes. According to the data provided, the number of outgoing students is not very high, although there has been a slight tendency of growth in recent years (excluding the pandemic phase, of course). During the interviews, some students were appreciative about organisation of mobilities and their inclusion into their study path. Overall, mobilities still have a potential for the development at the UMF CV, on the side of outgoing students/staff as well as incoming students/staff.

Similarly, this can be seen in the case of research (a number of international research projects, and more – see the chapter on research).

One of the specific features of the UMF CV is the presence of a relatively large number of international students, mainly those who study full-length programs in English. There can be found some examples of efforts to integrate Romanian and non-Romanian students within the UMF CV (cultural events, and more), but also indications that these two groups still tend to “live parallelly”, next to each other. Undoubtedly, this is a complex issue, and the need to overcome the challenge of “the myth of internationalisation” (Knight, 2010)<sup>1</sup> is present too.

The English version of the UMF CV’s website does not seem to be very supportive for the internationalisation efforts of the UMF CV.

#### *Recommendations:*

- *Make sure especially student mobilities (outcoming as well as incoming) are growing in numbers, and they effectively reach students in programs taught in Romanian as well as in English.*
- *Consider still some more possibilities to help integration of Romanian and foreign students at the UMF CV, in order to use fully the potential of a culturally very rich student body at the UMF CV.*
- *Consider possibilities to make an English version of the UMF CV’s website more informative and up-to-date.*

## **Research**

Research seems to be one of the priorities of the UMF CV. The institution has a research strategy and specific supporting plans.

The research is coordinated at the university level (Scientific Commission of the Senate, vice-rector for scientific research, department of management of scientific research contracts and structural funds) as well as at the level of faculties. There are currently seven scientific research centres accredited or under accreditation at the UMF CV which seem to be playing an important role in research development at the university (Research Centre for Studies of Microscopic Morphology and Immunology; Drug Research Centre; Research Centre in Gastroenterology and Hepatology; Rheumatology Research Centre; Research Centre for Clinical and Experimental Medicine; Research Centre in Dentistry; Research Centre in Minimally Invasive Surgery). (SAR, p. 15)

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<sup>1</sup> Knight, J. (2010). *Five myths about internationalization*. International Higher Education, 62, 14-15.

A considerable number of research projects and also research results (mainly publications) indicate the positive orientation of the UMF CV towards the research and its relatively strong position mainly within the academic community in Romania but in some extend also beyond. Research at the UMF CV has an international ambition and there are visible links to the international research community. Also, there are initiatives supporting the transfer of technologies, public-private partnership, cooperation between/among universities in the research. It appears, though, that the research results of different research teams vary.

The UMF CV is accredited as IOSUD, currently with almost 90 PhD supervisors. Their academic qualification (in the field) cannot be denied and is proven by the formal qualification requirements they meet. Their skills to supervise is not in focus, though, the UMF CV does not seem to have in place a more systematic strategy of supervisors' training in the skills to lead effectively the supervision process. One of the specifics of the PhD studies at the UMF CV is that the vast majority of students are part-time. This brings extra demands on both sides, students as well as supervisors, and it also makes the aim to internationalize PhD studies more effectively by including mobilities into the curricula more complicated.

At the same time, it can be appreciated there are efforts to link teaching and research and involve students (especially but not exclusively oat the PhD level) to senior research projects and other activities. Besides this, there is also the evidence about the support of the UMF CV to student research (research grants, student research conferences, student research circles, and more).

Monitoring and evaluation of scientific activities of the staff seems to be playing a positive role in developing research-related activities at the UMF CV.

#### *Recommendations:*

- *Consider possibilities to develop and implement the system of training of supervisors in the skills to effectively lead the supervision process.*
- *Consider possibilities to make sure PhD students get sufficient international experience during their studies.*
- *Consider possibilities to introduce grant schemes that would make it easier for some researchers to return to and/or follow their careers (such as those returning after parental leave).*
- *Consider possibilities to attract more internationals to postdoc positions at the UMF CV.*

#### **Staff**

The UMF CV has a significant number of highly qualified staff, namely in the positions of professors and associate professors. Overall, the teacher-student ratio is 1:5.8, according to the SAR.

The UMF CV has a clearly defined policy regarding the recruitment of the academic staff (its core is a part of the University Charter). Typically, the staff are appointed on the basis of competition.

An integral part of working with the staff are regular evaluations/assessments. This includes self-evaluation, the assessment of the performance of teaching as well as administrative staff, which is done periodically by the hierarchical superior body, following the procedures approved by the UMF

CV management. Student evaluation and collegiate evaluation are part of the procedure as well. The academic staff's performance and its multicriteria evaluation are linked with the promotion criteria.

Professional development activities take place at the UMF CV in a number of directions and forms. Academic staff are trained in several basic areas, which include use of new teaching technologies, and also courses of pedagogical/didactical methodology. The latter is focused mainly on junior categories of academics. During the pandemic, the staff was offered courses on developing communication with the student in hybrid and online teaching. Administration staff is also getting some relevant training opportunities.

During the interviews, students and alumni were positive about the academic staff as well as about administration support.

*Recommendation:*

- *Consider further possibilities of providing management training for leaders at various levels of the UMF CV structure (e.g., departments).*

## **Finance and infrastructure / Space and equipment**

As a public higher education institution, the UMF CV is financed from several sources: the state budget, extra-budgetary revenues (tuition fees, registrations, re-enrolments), revenues from research activities, revenues from economic activities, income from student dormitories and finance from other sources. The institution has an annual budget in line with its financial policy. On the general level, financial issues are coordinated by the economic director (subordinate to the rector). The management of financial resources is monitored by both the Court of Accounts and the Internal Public Audit of the institution. No sanctions were applied recently except for a few recommendations and a plan of measures to adopt in this regard.

The UMF CV provides students with possibilities to receive various types of scholarships, including those for lower SES students. There is evidence that the UMF CV supports students in their participation in other activities, such as research projects, scientific events, cultural activities.

The UMF CV has its own campus that seems to provide adequate conditions to conduct teaching as well as research and other activities, and it also uses the UMF CV public health establishments which is in logic with the focus of the study programs/the UMF CV. The spaces seem to be in line with laws and regulations. Since the last evaluation, the UMF CV has increased the land area it uses by 90% (from 1.67 ha to 15.1 ha) and the university has ambitious investment plans to construct new and reconstruct existing facilities.

As for the equipment, teaching rooms seem to be equipped adequately to facilitate quality teaching and the learning process. The same applies for research activities: on the basis of cooperation agreements, facilities of hospitals and other clinical units are available to students and the staff.

About one fifth of the students (21%) can use three student dormitories of the UMF CV. A student restaurant and sports/culture facilities are also part of the infrastructure of the university.

The Library of the UMF CV has over 63 thousand books and periodicals as well as e-resources (databases). The central library offers 215 study places, departmental libraries provide over 300

places to students. During the interviews, most students evaluated the functioning and availability of study resources in a positive way.

The UMF CV has IT systems serving as a platform for students and administration procedures. As it appears, significant endowments have been made for IT and communication equipment at the UMF CV in recent years, and the level of digitalisation of daily operations is up to date at the UMF CV. The Department of Informatics and Multimedia cares for maintenance and further development.

Due to pandemic restrictions, I could not physically visit the above-mentioned spaces and facilities. My information comes from the documentation and other information resources provided by the UMF CV and from interviews.

*Recommendation:*

- *Consider possibilities to decentralize (some part) of the budget down to the level of departments.*

## **Quality management**

The UMF CV seems to be paying enough attention to quality assurance (QA) of major processes. The structure and processes of quality assurance are well developed and regularly focus on teaching, research as well as the administration processes. The structures and tools for QA are described by the Guide to the Quality Assessment and Assurance System at the UMF CV, and they are in accordance with national laws. Internal evaluation reports related to these matters are published annually – it is the material indicating how much balance the institution reaches between quality assurance/control and quality enhancement. From the data available, it seems, these two focuses (assurance/control vs. enhancement) are looked after by the institution.

Quality assurance explicitly falls under the agenda of one of the top university leaders, and there is also the QA Committee at the UMF CV. There is the evidence that quality assurance processes are increasingly working with the data, on all three levels: university, faculties and departments.

At the level of each faculty there are operational structures that carry out periodic quality evaluation of study programs. It can be said that the structures aimed to develop QA are well elaborated at the UMF CV.

Students' level of satisfaction in relation to the teaching services is measured annually at the UMF CV. The results show an overall positive evaluation done by students, which was confirmed during some interviews.

The UMF CV is periodically subjected to external evaluation, usually with positive evaluation judgments.

It can be concluded that quality management is adequately organized, consisting of a series of processes and measures and focusing on relevant areas of evaluation and feasible possibilities for improvement.



## **Final recommendation**

**I recommend providing the UMF CV with institutional accreditation with the rating High Confidence.**

Professor Milan Pol

Masaryk University  
Brno  
Czech Republic

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