

**FOREIGN EVALUATING EXPERT REPORT 2021
OF VALAHIA UNIVERSITY OF TARGOVISTE
FOR ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER
EDUCATION (ARACIS)**

Introduction

I was appointed as a Foreign Evaluating Expert for institutional evaluation of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was invited to be a member of the evaluation team for the institutional accreditation process of Valahia University of Targoviste (VUT). The audit took place on 04-07 October, 2021, in form of the online meetings on ARACIS ZOOM platform and university TEAMS platform as well as personal visit of chosen team members.

The Evaluation team consists of following members, except of me:

The Evaluation director - Prof.univ.dr. Nicoleta CORBU – Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative București

The Coordinator of the institutional committee - Prof.univ.dr.Marius Gabriel PETREȘCU – Universitatea de Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești

The Representative of the advisory committee - Prof.univ.dr. Gheorghe SOLOMON – Universitatea Politehnica București

The Expert of the institutional committee - Prof.univ.dr. Doinița ȘENDRE – Universitatea Româno-Americană din București

ARACIS - Technical secretary - Mihaela BĂJENARU

The Representative of the students - Andrei LĂCRĂRU - Universitatea Națională de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică „I.L. Caragiale” din București

The Representative of the students - Antonia PĂTRAȘCU - Universitatea Petrol-Gaze din Ploiești

The study program evaluator – Marketing - Prof. univ. dr. Bogdan Vasile NICHIFOR – Univ. Vasile Alecsandri din Bacau

The study program evaluator – Finance and banking - Prof. univ. dr. Marius Sorin DINCĂ - Universitatea "Transilvania" Brașov

The study program evaluator - Mathematical Informatics - Prof. univ. dr. Octavian AGRATINI - Universitatea „Babes-Bolyai“ din Cluj-Napoca

The study program evaluator - Technologies and Telecommunication Systems Conf. univ. dr. Florin GROFU - Universitatea "Constantin Brâncuși" Târgu Jiu

The study program evaluator - Engineering and environmental protection in agriculture - Prof. univ. dr. Constantin-Horia BARBU, Universitatea "Lucian Blaga" Sibiu

The study program evaluator - Pedagogy of primary and preschool education - Prof. univ. dr. Marius Claudiu LANGA – Universitatea din.Pitești

The study program evaluator – Geography - Prof. univ. dr. Liliana DUMITRACHE - Universitatea din București

The study program evaluator: Administrative Sciences, Master's degree program, European public administration -Prof. univ. dr. Luminita Gabriela POPESCU – Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative București

The evaluation process consisted of the following meetings:

- Online preliminary meeting for the preparation and harmonization of the evaluation steps in the hybrid work mode both at institutional and study programs levels; 04.10.2021
- Online meeting for establishing the details of evaluations, both at the institutional and study programs levels; , 04.10.2021
- The online meeting with „VALAHIA” University of Târgoviște teaching staff members; 04.10.2021
- Online meeting with students; 05.10.2021
- Online meeting with representatives of graduates; 05.10.2021
- Online meeting with representatives of employers; 05.10.2021
- Online meeting for conclusions; 07.10.2021
- Final online meeting to present the main evaluation findings and recommendations for study programs and the institution; 07.10.2021

Besides of formal collegial meeting, the Evaluation Team Members had online face-to-face working meetings. Chosen Members of the Evaluation Team had personal visit in the VUT educational and research infrastructure and they share their impression to all other Members during online meeting as well as they answered for additional questions. I would like to confirm that VUT administration and authorities supplied me with all necessary additional documents and as well as they were happy to answer my questions and explain the issues and explain aspects that were not clear.

General Statements

The University of Târgoviște was created as higher education state-run institution in 1992 by the Decision of the Romanian Government. Present name of “Valahia” University of Târgoviște has been changed in 2002.

The present structure of “Valahia” University of Târgoviște is regulated by relevant regulations of the Romanian Government. At present, the structure of VUT comprises ten faculties, the Teacher Training Department (DPPD), the Department for Distance Learning and Continuing Education (DIDFC), the Department for Studies in Foreign Languages (DSLS) and the Doctoral Schools (Economics and humanities sciences, Engineering sciences). It should be noticed that “Valahia” University of Târgoviște is the only state university in the South Muntenia region that has an extension in the Alexandria Municipality, Teleorman County in which the Science and engineering Faculty functions. It is important to notice crucial legal internal regulation of the VUT functioning that allows for stable and effective management. I mean “The strategic plan for the period 2020-2024” that includes the strategic goals, specific actions and indicators measuring performance for the following priority domains: education; scientific research; institutional development; students; national and international relations, administrative management. “Code of Academic Ethics and Professional Deontology”, elaborated according to the National Education Law no. 1/2011 to apply the provisions of this code, in the university, an Ethics Commission has been created, whose members were validated by the University Senate “The Regulations of the Ethics Commission (approved by the

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University Senate) which contains clear practices and mechanisms available for the application of the code and foresees ways of controlling its application.

„Valahia” University of Târgoviște Charter, approved by the University Senate, is the document regulating the life of the academic community and specifying the employees’ rights and obligations, and the university’s operation norms. It is worth to noticed that „Valahia” University of Târgoviște, Quality Evaluation and Assurance Commission (CEAC) is operating, promoting a quality culture in the institution. So, “Valahia” University Târgoviște has internal auditing practices in the main activity domains, to make sure that its commitments are rigorously respected, under public transparency conditions. At the UVT level, the planning of the public internal audit activity for 2020 materialized with the elaboration of the Public Internal Audit Plan, a document that was approved by MEN - Public Internal Audit Service. The results of the last internal audits were presented in the Report on the analysis of the quality management system in the UVT of 11 November 2020 and are the basis for establishing the measures for continuous improvement of the processes / activities from the university.

VUT Management System

„Valahia” University of Târgoviște leadership structure consists of:

- University Senate and Administrative Board (Consiliul de Administratie - CA), on the university level;
- Faculty Council;
- Department Council.

The academic leadership positions in „Valahia” University of Târgoviște are:

- Rector, Vice-Rectors, on the university level;
- Dean, Vice-Deans, on the faculty level;
- Department Director on the department level

The Administrative Board of “Valahia” University of Târgoviște is formed by the Rector, Vice-Rectors, Deans, General Administrative Director and a students’ representative.

The faculties are led by Faculty Councils. The Dean chairs the meetings of the Faculties’ Council and applies the decisions of the Rector, of the Administrative Board and of the University Senate. The Vice-Deans exert skills and accomplish functions that are decided by the Faculty Council, or established by the Dean through the job description.

Comment: The formal description of the management areas of individual VUT bodies is transparent and enables comprehensive, effective administration of the university. It is worth to notice that in June 2019, the University Senate approved the Methodology regarding the process of setting up and choosing the structures and management functions at UVT level (revised in October 2019) and students are represented in all management structures. Their number in each management structure is in accordance with legal regulations.

Teaching Staff

The evolution of the number of teaching positions in „Valahia” University of Târgoviște shows decreasing trend in numbers. It means development of demand from 391 total positions in 2016/2017 up to 437 positions in 2020/2021. However number of occupied position is quite lower and it decreased from 283 positions in 2016/2017 to as much as 258 positions in 2020/2021.

The number of teachers with the scientific title of doctor compared to the total number of teaching staff with the main employment at „Valahia” University of Târgoviște is approximately 99%, while professors amount to 18%. The proportion of students to the number of teaching staff is 29 (7564/258) and it seems similar as in other European universities. I would like to notice the decreasing number of the habilitations in evaluated period that shows lower interest of VUT staff in career development.

In the selection and promotion of the personnel in „Valahia” University of Târgoviște, the national quality criteria are respected. Teaching vacancies are filled in by the organization of contests according to the Contest Methodology for filling in teaching and research positions During the period 2016-2020, 104 teaching positions were announced in the Official Journal by „Valahia” University of Târgoviște. They were occupied by newly hired people or „Valahia” University of Târgoviște personnel promoted on higher levels in the didactic positions grid. The associate professors who occupy teaching positions were designated respecting the legal conditions: each teaching staff member handed over a file containing, among others, a written declaration by which the institution he comes from agrees that the respective person may undertake teaching activities at „Valahia” University of Târgoviște, according to a certain weekly program.

Comment: The quality and quantity of teaching staff in VUT are on the good level however I highly recommend to assure better employer competitive conditions to decrease vacant positions and develop VUT own human resources in larger scale. Moreover the new internal career development plan should be introduced to increase level of habilitation and other employees' promotion.

Infrastructure

The didactic and research activity in the VUT is mainly focused in the university campus Building A hosting the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Information Technology, the Faculty of Environmental Engineering and Food Science and the Faculty of Materials Engineering and Mechanics. The building, covers an area of over 9,600 m² including 5 amphitheatres, 40 rooms for courses, seminars and other teaching activities, 50 laboratories and a library. About 2000 students and 150 academics and auxiliary personnel are carrying out their activity here. Second flagship infrastructure is building B, which hosts the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Political Science, Letters and Communication, and the Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences. The new educational spaces have been arranged and endowed to the highest quality standards, covering an area of over 8000 m², , 2 amphitheatres, 18 rooms for courses, seminars and other teaching activities, 7 laboratories, a book depository and a library. Approximately



1600 students and 80 academics and support staff will carry out their activities here. The number of seats in the course, seminar and laboratory rooms is correlated to the size of the study formations according to the legal norms.

The University Library is organized in 5 locations, endowed with a computer network, but also with branches in the university micro-campuses.

All computer users at „Valahia” University of Târgoviște have access to the Internet. In „Valahia” University of Târgoviște, an Intranet network is operating, which is served by a specialized department with its own staff. In 2021 year „Valahia” University of Târgoviște signed a new contract with Microsoft for 8000 M365 licenses, covering the current necessities and even future expansion.

It is important to notice that from the first days of the Pandemic, „Valahia” University of Târgoviște was capable to provide its students and teachers a feasible technical solution allowing them to perform a quality educational act. The instruments used were Moodle + Microsoft Teams.

To assure a decent social life for our students, „Valahia” University of Târgoviște has arranged or modernized student hostels/ accommodation areas and a Students’ outdoor Amphitheatre (building permit no.07/18.01.2017), with a surface of 983,73 and a capacity of 330 seats, the value of the investment being of 466.437.26 lei. Furthermore, a university cafeteria with a capacity of 192 seats was built in Alexandria, within the project “Rehabilitation, re-functioning and extension of building C1 and the construction of the University Campus building for the “Valahia” University in Alexandria, Teleorman County valued at 6.480.381,33 lei. At the same time, “Valahia”.

University has its own small chapel, its own medical services for students, for the teaching and non-teaching personnel and a service of university police.

University assure also physical development of students offering them infrastructure for sports activities. The University Sport Club and Sport Complex in Building S, host current teaching activities, but also the extracurricular activity of the sport associations of the University Sport Club.

Comment: The areas where the teaching activities are taking place correspond to the standards imposed by ARACIS, the number of places in the course, seminar and laboratory rooms being correlated to the size of the study formations. It is important to notice that all the infrastructure is adapted for people with disabilities as well as the sports infrastructure is available for students in their spare time.

Students

The University Valahia of Targoviste (UVT) has its own policy for the recruitment and admission of students. This policy is transparently and rigorously applied, respecting the principle of equal opportunities for all candidates, without any discrimination.

The information referring to the admission and the educational offer is made public on the UVT website (<https://admitere.valahia.ro/>), in the local press and the advertising materials. Each study program/specialization within UVT is based on the correspondence



between the expected results of the teaching process, respectively, through research, Master's degree or doctorate, and university qualification.

In year of 2020/2021, VUT has enrolled 7564 students including 10 faculties, doctoral school, Teacher Training Department and Department of Distance Education and Training Continuing. The highest number of student have been enrolled to the Faculty of Economics - 1004; Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences – 762; Faculty of Electrical, Electronics and Information Technology Engineering - 625, while the lowest number of student were enrolled to the Faculty of Political Science, Letters and Communication – 267. It is important to notice that the number of students with paid studies amounts to 29%. Total number of disabled students – 23 (15 bachelor, 5 master, 3 PhD). Number of incoming Erasmus students were up to 7 in evaluated period but in 2017/2018 it amounted to 0.

It is worth to notice that at least 20% of the graduates of the last two promotions of bachelor studies within UVT are admitted to Master's degree studies per field, regardless of the field. At the university level, at least 40% of graduate students capitalizes on the qualification by continuing the Master's degree studies.

More than 50% of UVT students positively appreciate the learning/development environment offered by the university and their learning path. The ARACIS questionnaire on student satisfaction, posted on Moodle in the bachelor's / diploma/dissertation exams, was completed in 15 of the 68 exams taken in July 2020.

The proportion of the institution's own resources in the scholarship fund is 12.29%. The scholarship fund allocated for the budget year 2020 was in the amount of 9,431,883 lei. To this was added a scholarship fund in the amount of 68,274 lei coming from own revenues, a scholarship fund in the amount of 78,245 lei coming from external financial sources, a scholarship fund in the amount of 935,505 lei from POCU projects. The categories of Scholarships are: performance – 950 lei/month (aprox. 200Eur), study – 750 Lei (aprox. 150 Eur), social – 600 lei (120Eur).

Comment: I found slight development of students number in relation to the last evaluation however it is decreasing in last few years as I got to know. So I recommend strengthening promotional campaigns as well as reconsideration of the study programs to more updated to the future market requirements. I encourage VUT for advertising and popularizing the educational offer abroad, as VUT certainly has a competitive advantage in terms of quality and cost compared to universities in Western Europe. I evaluate very positively that VUT offers scholarship coming from own resources that is very rare practices.

Research activity

The scientific research activity developed and supported by UVT is one of the most important training methods of the teaching and research teaching staff for educating towards the university students' innovation, regardless of the form of studies.

Scientific research - a fundamental component of the UVT mission - includes:

1. fundamental research (exploratory or strategic) - refers to rules and principles that are disseminated in publications.

2. applied research (translational or practically informed) - refers to the application of knowledge resulting from the fundamental research or procedures; the knowledges are also disseminated through publications.

3. research for development and innovation - refers to the procedural knowledge resulting from the applied research that can be transposed like products, technologies or services and disseminated both in publications and patents or prototypes.

„Valahia” University of Târgoviște has supported the institutional recognition of the research centres and, at the same time, their fusion and interdisciplinary collaboration, as a need clearly demonstrated by the creation of excellence in domains of major impact for the socio-economic environment. „Valahia” University of Târgoviște has its own research institute – The Multidisciplinary Scientific and Technological Research Institute (ICSTM) – including 17 research centres. These Research Centres elaborate each year an internal research plan including the research topics, the research team and ways of valorification of the research results.

The research programming considers the national program and is carried out in this framework taking into account the competitiveness and capitalization of the results. The current research structure of UVT is quite modern, similar to the structure of universities abroad, covers various scientific fields and ensures elaborating interdisciplinary research topics, at which the teaching staff from departments, specialists from the university, and the socioeconomic environment contribute.

VUT has scientific collaboration relations with the most prestigious universities in the country, with 90 universities abroad and numerous R&D institutes, both national and international.

The results of the scientific research activities achieved by the teaching and research staff are capitalized in publications as ISI listed or indexed journals, ISI indexed Proceeding papers, in the BDI indexed journals, in books published in the national publishing houses, and international publishing houses.

The number of papers indexed in ISI listed or indexed journals, ISI indexed Proceeding papers has decreased significantly from 263 in 2015 to 86 in 2020, this crucial decrease was in the ISI indexed Proceedings papers and was related to rare participation of the researchers in the international conferences. Unfortunately number of the paper listed in BDI indexed journals also decrease from top result 235 in 2017 to 53 only in 2020. The same situation can be observed in the papers in the national conferences without ISI or BDI indexes or books in national publishing houses. Number of books published in international publishing houses were small up to 4 annually in 2017-2020 while 10 books in 2016.

Comment: I can see serious decrease in number of publication in evaluated period. I can understand that conference proceedings papers number can be decreased due to lack of staff mobility as results of pandemia but there are still many attractive online conferences with precious publication moreover the number of BDI indexed publication should be improved. To be honest the university provide for all academic and research staff a grant for publication (200 EUR)/author. I found also the university have some journals – it

should be important to support their development to apply for Scopus and ISI indexation that would be fruitful for future scientific development.

Quality system

The quality management system is supervised by the Rector of UVT, which establishes the quality strategy, policy and objectives, monitors their assimilation and application throughout the institution, allocates and checks the appropriate use of allocated resources. The Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission, whose activity is conducted on the basis of the Regulation on the Organization and Functioning of the Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission, monitors the implementation of quality assurance strategies and policies in agreement with the vision, mission and policy of UVT.

The organization of the quality assurance system in the UVT is described in the Quality Assurance Code and in the quality management system guidebook, approved by the University Senate.

In 2020, the Evaluation and Quality Assurance Department was also involved in the activity of the Monitoring Commission operating under Order no. 600 of April 20th, 2018 on the approval of the Code of internal managerial control of public entities. The involvement of students in the evaluation and quality assurance has become a common practice in UVT. The students are members of all evaluation and quality assurance commissions in the faculties.

Comment: The structure and procedures of quality assurance at VUT are quite proper and suitable to ARACIS requirements. Except of formal documents of quality assurance I have studies courses descriptions with special attention on quality assurance and I found them very professional including all necessary elements with clear descriptions. I have even noticed that the study course lecturers gave their own authorship sources in the course reference that shows they are well prepared and properly designated to the elaborated course.

International collaboration

VUT international collaboration is very important part of the consideration for the Foreign Evaluating Expert. Among the extremely positive UVT international achievements the following can be listed:

- the first contact made by a non-governmental institution in Romania with an astronaut from the International Space Station (contact ARISS, April 12, 2016);
- grand prize for microrobotics in the Mobile Microrobotics Challenge - IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation - Brisbane 2018, Singapore 2017, Stockholm 2016, Seattle 2015;
- In the UVT operate concrete programs to stimulate mobilities in international cooperation projects, participate in symposia with the fee paid by the university, obtain performance scholarships
- UVT concluded Erasmus contracts with 90 international organizations/universities



- UVT is as a member of prestigious international research institutions and professional associations AIELF - International Association of French Language Economists, ECR - Efficient Consumer Response, CEDIMES - Centre d'Etudes sur le Développement International et les Mouvements Economiques et Sociaux in Paris, ELFA - European Law Faculties Association, AUF - Association of Francophone Universities, EUMMAS - European Management and Marketing Association, AMS - American Mathematical Society

However some imperfections can be listed as well:

- the reduced number of foreign languages study programs and the small number of foreign students. Incoming Erasmus students number were very low (2015/2016 – 5; 2016/2017 - 7; 2017-2018 - 0; 2018/2019 - 5; 2019/2020- 17;
- the low level of interest of UVT students participating in Erasmus + mobilities (2015/2016 – 37; 2016/2017 - 23; 2017-2018 - 22; 2018/2019 - 30; 2019/2020- 5
- limited funds for professors' participation in international conferences;
- limited number of visiting professors;

Despite of rather not efficient international development the UVT has a very impressive new strategy of internationalization those should be a base for fast development of this area in the future. The internationalization strategy of UVT is harmonized with the priorities set out in the „New EU Agenda for Higher Education” and other European and national reference documents in the field of internationalization, the new UVT strategy, in force since 2021. Strengthening digital skills and educational processes such as distance learning - and not only in the context of the current global pandemic - is good objective of the internationalization strategy, that can be managed to achieve remarkable results in terms of transferring teaching to the online environment through the use of the Microsoft Teams and Moodle platforms in particular for the entire community of professors and students of the university. UVT aims to increase the number of Erasmus + mobilities for professors and students, by increasing the number of programs and expanding the range of foreign language courses within the UVT, facilitated by the operation of a Department of Foreign Language Studies. They also intend to expand Erasmus programs for UVT administrative staff, in order to develop the quality of services provided to incoming international students, but also the administrative performance of the university as a whole.

The current internationalization strategy has in view the development of joint / double / multiple degrees time programs, especially at doctoral and master's level, but, gradually, also at the level of UVT bachelor degree programs. Consequently, UVT continues to promote partnerships with traditional partner universities in such programs and shall be involved at a strategic level through a program such as the European University Consortium (funded by the Partnerships for Excellence - European Universities) for robust internationalizations and the realization of new joint / double degrees programs. Specific objective of the strategy sets out the increase of the number of study programs carried out in foreign languages, of doctoral mobilities and of the one of doctorates realized in international co-supervision, being clearly established activities, responsibilities and terms.



Comment: The present level of international activity and engagement of VUT can be acknowledge as insufficient however we cannot forget this is in large part the effect of Covid pandemia situation in the world and lockdown in last two years. I appreciate this developed strategy very high and I am sure that it will bring positive results in the near future. As evidenced by enrolling 20 new foreign students in VUT regular study program in the Fall, 2021.

Conclusion

I would like to confirm my high evaluation of Valahia University of Targoviste performance in all studied areas and I propose the “High confidence rating” as VUT is well managed in the formal, organizational, education, research, quality assurance and international relations activities. I would like to point on some facts as introduction of the sustainability aims to the VUT development strategy and mission or flexible management during Covid pandemia time when VUT has opened accounts for TEAMS and Moodle to be accessible for all teaching staff, has opened accounts for TEAMS and Moodle to be accessible for all students and has given digital materials and access for digital library has provided trainings for these platforms. They has provided sanitary materials. VUT hostel has provided the accommodation for max.2 student/room at the same price. No doubt they have certainly coped with difficult challenges and will be able to continue their development.

I hope they accept my comments and recommendations for development those I have included in the assessment of individual areas.

I would like to congratulate and express my high appreciation to the authorities and the entire VUT community for their work to increase the quality of the university's functioning. I would like to thank the VUT authorities for a pleasant and fruitful cooperation during the evaluation process, including providing me with additional documents, discussions and answers to my questions.

I would like to thank the ARACIS authorities for appointing me to the VUT evaluation. I also want to thank all the members of the ARACIS Team for the warm welcome and for their excellent knowledge which has enriched my approach to university evaluation.

Prof. Eng. Sebastian Kot, Ph.D.
The Management Faculty
Czestochowa University of Technology