

**External Evaluator's Report**  
**to the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education**  
**(ARACIS)**  
**about the Institution Organizing Doctoral Study Programmes**  
**(IOSUD)**  
**University of Craiova 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

I was appointed as an International Expert for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and was invited to join the evaluation team for the evaluation (IOSUD) of University of Craiova (UCV). Since 2009, I have been participating in quite a number of accreditation procedures in Romania but it was the first time that I evaluated of an Institution Organizing Doctoral Study Programmes (IOSUD). The audit was planned to take place between 5-9 July, but it was extended till 16 July. The evaluation process was conducted online. The evaluation team had a preliminary meeting (Zoom) Friday 2 July in the evening to discuss the main methodological aspects related to the institutional evaluation and establish the details of the visit.

A huge evaluation team (74 members) took part in the evaluation process as UVC has 10 Doctoral Schools with 27 doctoral domains carried out in 5 fundamental fields and UCV has 441 PhD students. UVC is an important representative of the Romanian higher education, its tradition extending nearly 75 years.

The evaluation process began on Monday 5 June at 9 a.m. at Zoom platform with the meeting for the preparation and harmonization of the evaluation steps in the hybrid work mode both at institutional and doctoral study domains' level. Prof. univ. dr. Ioan Ianos (mission director) also asked the members of the evaluation team to introduce themselves. Next prof. univ. dr. Cezar-Ionut Spinu the Rector mentioned a few basic facts about UVC and also presented his team.

## **METHOD**

In my role as an International Expert Evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of IOUSUD.

Therefore

- I previously studied the Self-evaluation Report of the IOSUD and its' Annexes;
- I also studied the websites of UCV, which were available in English;
- I attended most of the common sessions according to the timetable of the institutional evaluation visit (5-9 July) as an observer (simultaneous translation was available);
- I addressed written questions to the stakeholders, which I could not discover in the documents in advance or could not follow during the online meetings;
- I had an extra meeting, which was not previously scheduled, with representatives of the Department of International Relations 13 July.

My findings and comments are based on the studied documents, the information I have gained from the websites of UVC and I have heard during the meetings and interviews. Some quality indicators are used according to Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) to carry out the diagnosis.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

**The administrative, managerial institutional structures and the financial resources**

UVC is a public higher education institution and its Doctoral Schools seem to operate according to the legal provisions that govern the higher education system in Romania and in compliance with the university's own internal regulations.

The methodology are dedicated to organising the admission to doctoral programmes are clear.

The Council of Doctoral Studies of IOSUD - University of Craiova (CSUD -UCV) has seven members (5 professors and 2 students) that is the required minimum. They are partially elected or appointed. It was considered that its members should represent all the fundamental doctoral fields in which the University of Craiova has accredited doctoral fields. The Director and the Council of the Doctoral School (3-10 members) coordinate the activity of each Doctoral School. Foreign professors can be found also among the members of CSD at a few Doctoral Schools.

The Doctoral Schools are mainly organised disciplinary, linked to fundamental domains, but at the same time interdisciplinary synergies can be found among them.

UCV use appropriate software application (The Evidenta Studentilor Information System) for the record of doctoral students and their academic achievements. Scientific research is continuously monitored and evaluated annually.

UCV also uses a dedicated software to check the similarity index of all doctoral theses (<https://sistemantiplagiat.ro/>).

### **Research infrastructure**

It is very difficult to gauge that the research infrastructure of Doctoral Schools fulfil all the requirements (research and development units, laboratories, libraries etc.) without being present myself on site. I was convinced by my colleagues, who took part in the site visit, that the research facilities improved in the last few years.

According to the Self-evaluation Report with its annexes and the information gained on ERRIS (Engage in the European Research Infrastructures System) platform, UCV has collaboration agreements concluded with higher education institutions, research institutes, research networks for the joint exploitation of various research infrastructures.

### **Quality of Human Resource**

The quality of human resources and the scientific potential at UVC is on a good level. The transparencies of the personal records are clear.

The doctoral supervisors' number is in proportion with the number of students. The workload must be reduce of those supervisors who has too many doctoral students for the quality. Around 25% of doctoral supervisors are part-time employed. In a few doctoral domains the part-time employed supervisors' proportion are high (e.g. Sociology, Electrical engineering).

## **EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

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

The potential students need to be strongly committed and willing to be enrolled in a doctoral school. To ask for a motivation letter from all candidates might be needed.

The admission requirements and procedures are well documented. The admission criteria and selection procedures are in line with the European standards. Besides the recognition of prior studies results, other scholarly activity such as research and publication records are taken into consideration in the selection process.

The dropout rate was very high in academic year of 2016/2017. Since then the dropout rate of doctoral students have been decreasing. Most of the dropouts due to the students' subjective reasons influenced by external factors, not because of dissatisfaction with the doctoral programme. In order to reduce the drop-out rate, the IOSUD Regulation provides support for doctoral students within legal terms, such as: students may benefit from programme extension up to 2 years; students may suspend their studies for a period up to 2 years; students may be granted a period of grace up to 2 years after the extension period.

### **The content of doctoral programmes**

Doctoral Programmes at UVC try to respond to the needs of the labour market and expectations of the national economy. UCV is engaged in scientific research also through doctoral programmes. Research is materialised in books, scientific articles

published in specialized reviews, patents etc. The results of the scientific activities are presented at scientific conferences.

The level of the curriculum design, teaching and assessment and the academic and professional standards are, in general, in line with the standards expected of a qualification at EQF Level 8. I believe that, in general, the learning outcomes of the Doctoral Programmes are consistent.

### **The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation**

Between 1.10.2015-30.09.2020, within IOSUD University of Craiova, 292 doctoral theses were publicly defended and validated by CNATDCU in all accredited fields in which doctoral study programmes were carried out. Nearly 10% were foreign citizens from seven different countries. The majority (more than two-third) from Iraq.

An extensive number of documents and guidelines offered about the research process, supervision and evaluation criteria of the doctoral studies. The evaluation of students is clear.

### **Quality of doctoral theses**

According to the Self-evaluation Report most of the students have excellent or very good competencies to formulate their doctoral theses and present research results, but 5% were invalidated at the level of the General Council of CNATDCU in the last 5 years.

## **QUALITY MANAGEMENT**

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

The internal quality management system is well described in the Quality Assurance Code of the University of Craiova. UVC has structures, strategies, policies and procedures for quality assurance. The Commission for Quality Evaluation and

Assurance (CEAC) with the assistance of the Quality Assurance Department coordinate, guide and control the activities regarding the quality management. The QM system is defined by its embedment in the governance structure, resources and in the programmes.

In 2018 the introduction of the procedure for the annual periodic internal evaluation of doctoral schools take into account important indicators (scientific performance of doctoral supervisors; infrastructure and facilities required for carrying out the research activity; regulations and procedures on the basis of which doctoral programmes are organised). It was complemented with other components (social, academic support service and counselling available to doctoral students) in 2019.

UCV has spaces for social, cultural and sport activities for students.

### **Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources**

The doctoral students have access to academic relevant databases and scientific publications are provided by the (e)libraries also.

Academic misconduct and plagiarism are serious breaches of academic standards. So an internet-based plagiarism detection service is available for doctoral students (<https://sistemantiplagiat.ro/>). Allegations or suspected cases of academic misconduct or plagiarism are investigated and managed by the Ethics Commission in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Deontology ([https://www.ucv.ro/despre/structura/comisie\\_etica/regulamente\\_comisie\\_etica.php](https://www.ucv.ro/despre/structura/comisie_etica/regulamente_comisie_etica.php)).

UCV implements a policy of transparency considered the available documentation (reports, publications and the public websites etc.). UCV has a comprehensive documentation about the doctoral study programmes, the implementation of the regulations and processes.

### **Internationalization**

According to the public website UCV has 122 Erasmus+ Mobility agreements. The mobility among the doctoral students was very few for the size of the university and the number of PhD students. There were only 5 incoming and 20 outgoing students

in the last five academic years. The students of Doctoral School of Law are the most active and the most popular destinations is France for the outgoing mobility. With the exception of one student from Ireland, all the others among the incomings were Bulgarian. The doctoral students do not show any interest about the grants of CEEPUS at UCV. It seems that attending international scientific conferences are the most popular mobility form at UVC. Professors have mentioned the lack of adequate financial support of conference or workshop participation for doctoral students.

Visible efforts for internationalization can be experienced mostly in the field of Philology. Their doctoral research programmes are available also in English and in French for not only Romanian but international doctoral students too. More than half out of the international students, who defended and validated theses between 2015-2019, were from the Middle East. The tendency is very similar in the proportion current international doctoral students.

Increasing co-supervisions with foreign professors is encouraged. It might be beneficial for all stakeholders. The duties and obligations of the co-supervisors are specified in the joint supervision contract, in accordance with the legislation in force at the two universities.

### **System for assurance of ethical and academic integrity**

UCV has procedures for plagiarism and collusion. The supervisor has to do everything to prevent plagiarism, but it is not a supervisor's primary responsibility to ensure that thesis does not contain plagiarised elements. The student should ensure that all copyright requirements avoiding plagiarism are met.

Allegations or suspected cases of academic misconduct or plagiarism are investigated and managed by the Ethics Commission in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Deontology. Significant number of major cases were not detected in the last few years.

The public database of the defended doctoral thesis is not transparent and the available information is limited. In the current database, it is not possible to access

online the full text and foreign language abstract of publicly defended and approved doctoral thesis.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS**

### **Strenghts**

- Appropriate coordination of doctoral programmes
- Quality assurance approach
- Culture of innovation and self-reflection
- The information system is well organised

### **Weaknesses**

- International visibilty and mobility
- The availability of each doctoral school's website in foreign languages with real information
- High number of part-time empolyed supervisors in a few doctoral domains

### **Opportunities**

- Stronger European/international cooperation
- Increasing the number of international students
- Investing in human resource and physical infrastructure when funding allows.
- Using eLearning environment and culture

### **Threats**

- Decreasing number of graduates in master programmes
- Students' professional obligations
- Lack of appropriate learning support
- Students' motivation

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

I would encourage the university to develop its international collaborative links, as there is much to be learned from the experience of colleagues across Europe and elsewhere.



It is recommended to increase the number of students taking part in mobility activities especially doing some of their research abroad.

The information system is well organised, but UCV needs to set up a subpage dedicated to the potential international doctoral students available in foreign languages to inform about: selection criteria, intended learning outcomes of the doctoral programme, teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, funding opportunities available for the students etc.

I suggest reducing the number of part-time supervisors (mainly in those doctoral schools where the participation of them are high) and at the same time I encourage increasing the number a co-supervisors from different foreign universities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

I would like to emphasize that UASVMB represents a high quality in the Romanian higher education system and the activity reach the requirement of the European standards of education and scientific research. Although some room for improvement can be found, what I have mentioned in my report. The doctoral students' motivation, the staff (teachers, researches and administrators) commitments and professionalism are the basis of the success of UVC.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to leadership of UVC, all the university staff and each member of the evaluation team for the support during the evaluation mission. Also thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this online evaluation process.

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