

DUNAREA DE JOS UNIVERSITY OF GALATI
External Evaluation Report; IOSUD level
July 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 doctoral studies at the Dunarea de Jos University of Galati (DJ UG), namely of its IOSUD level. Prior to the site visit I studied the English version of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) of the DJ UG and some other relevant documents. During the visit, which was carried out online due to pandemic restrictions on 12 to 16 July 2021, I had a good chance to enhance the information I had received about doctoral studies at the DJ UG.

The site visit started with a preliminary online meeting of experts as members of the evaluation team. At this meeting, preparation and harmonization of evaluation stages in the blended format was discussed. Then the online meeting with the DJ UG's leading representatives followed. During the whole period of evaluation, I had a chance to participate at a number of plenary/group meetings with representatives of the DJ UG and IOSUD-DJ UG, directors of doctoral schools, academic staff, members of the Ethics Commission, QA representatives, PhD students, alumni, members of the Doctoral University Studies Council, employers and other persons. All this helped me to complete the image.

I would like to express my gratefulness to Mr. Daniel Botez, an ARACIS officer, for his very helpful support throughout the evaluation process. Also, I benefited from a highly collegial approach of the whole group of evaluators led by Prof. Ion Popa, the Evaluation Director, and Prof. Nistor Razvan, the Coordinator of the IOSUD Committee, for their very helpful and supportive approach. Last but not least, I want to thank the colleagues who took care for the translation during some meetings. All this was very helpful.

On the basis of the sources of information mentioned, herewith I submit my report on the IOSUD's institutional performance at the DJ UG 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 issues evaluated. My evaluation, as well as my recommendations for possible consideration, should be understood as a collegial attempt to provide the IOSUD at the DJ UG and ARACIS with opinions aiming to contribute to possible improvements at the DJ UG as well as quality assurance of higher education of Romania as such.

Institutional capacity

The DJ UG is a relatively heterogenous institution with 14 faculties and a considerable number of study programs. The same can be said about the level of PhD studies. At the moment, PhD programs are carried out at 16 fields (domains) of study including medicine, chemistry, biotechnologies, food product engineering, engineering and management in agriculture and rural development, industrial engineering, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, system

engineering, computer and information technology, material engineering, economics, management, philology, history and sports and physical education. According to the SAR, four doctoral schools with a total of 101 supervisors work at the DJ UG now. Such a heterogeneity generates demands for the development and maintenance of the unifying features of PhD programs and, at the same time, requires respect to each individual case. IOSUD-UJ DG is striving for both, as is evidenced by a set of regulations the university has adopted and strives to implement.

The mission of the DJ UG clearly points our three main pillars of the operation of the university, relating to all levels of including that of PhD studies: education, research, and public reach (social role). (SAR, pp. 7-8)

The implementation of this mission is supported by clearly and explicitly formulated objectives. They relate to all main areas of the institutional activity (including PhD) and stress both attention to current state of art (quality assurance, control) and developmental ambitions of the institution (efforts for quality enhancement).

This is projected in the organization and management of the UJ DG including the way doctoral studies are organized. Doctoral studies have their own organizing structure at the DJ UG, i.e. the Committee for University Doctoral Studies, which has four doctoral schools under command. These doctoral schools (School for Doctoral Studies in Mechanical Engineering, School for Doctoral Studies in Fundamental and Engineering Sciences, School for Doctoral Studies in Socio-Humanities, and School for Doctoral Studies in Biomedical Sciences) constitute the main structure within which doctoral studies are conducted.

It appears that the IOSUD-DJ UG has all the logistic resources and infrastructures necessary to carry out doctoral studies. Large investments were used for various facilities in recent years. This applies to facilities and infrastructure for learning/teaching and research such as study rooms, laboratories, the library, IT-supported facilities, and others.

The financial management seems to be in line with current legislation.

In general, the body of doctoral supervisors meet all relevant requirements. Many supervisors, albeit not all, manage to attract/win external research grants and provide PhD students with clear and useful links to their research along with extra funding. This is good practice, but it does not apply to all students; as a consequence, some PhD students need to search for extra funding in working opportunities and projects that are not always relevant for their research. This can result in PhD students learning something useful but also facing extra burdens for their studies.

As indicated, formal requirements for PhD supervisors cannot be neglected. The university does not seem to have a training system for supervisor skills, which evokes the question where the supervisors gain these skills, essential for their highly demanding work in the long-term and for the sensitive process of supervision as such.

Recommendations:

- *Consider possibilities to develop internal research grants in order for PhD students to focus on their own research projects and/or link them with senior research of their supervisors.*
- *Consider possibilities for systematic training of supervisors in supervision skills.*

Educational effectiveness

There are clear admission rules and procedures at the IOSUD-DJ UG. These rules and procedures accentuate relevant selection criteria such as previous academic, research and professional performance, candidate's interest in research, publication profile in the field and the proposal for a future research project. As a part of the admission procedure, the candidates are interviewed.

According to information provided by the university, the DJ UG provides support measures for disadvantaged students. Also, various projects in which the DJ UG has been involved are focused on support for PhD students in their learning, research and employment. Examples of such projects are described by the SAR (pp. 96-97); they were also mentioned by various stakeholders during the interviews.

The training programs in PhD studies across the domains are based on adequate development of doctoral students' research skills and ethical behaviour in science. Development of transversal skills makes part of the curriculum as well. PhD students are offered a mixture of general and domain-specific courses. Typically, PhD programs consist of two components: training as based on advanced university studies (including research methodology) and individual scientific research programs. Also, the programs comprise issues of ethics and pedagogical training/activities. The supervisor's say seems to be crucial in profiling the study path of the PhD student. All this should be appreciated.

Services for academic and social support including counselling services (provided by the Career Counselling Centre) seem to be at hand for PhD students at the IOSUD-DJ UG.

A procedure of analysis of topics of the PhD study programs including self-evaluation activities is regularly carried out at the IOSUD-DJ UG. There is an internal mechanism that covers the initiation, approval, monitoring and evaluation of PhD study programs. Evaluation by supervisors as well as evaluation of supervisors and programs by PhD students is conducted on a regular basis and makes part of the arrangement.

The DJ UG seems to support the efforts of PhD students to capitalize on the research by conference presentations, publications, technology transfer and other forms of dissemination of the results of their research; the PhD students seem to make use of this. Some doctoral schools intensely support PhD students in developing their grant proposals and competing for external funding while others do so in a slightly less intense way.

In general, the quality of PhD dissertations seems to be in line with the national standards and the evaluation mechanism is effectively in place.

Recommendation:

- *Consider possibilities to strengthen systematically the curriculum across the domains in terms of elements that can enable PhD students to enter the international research community, understand its functioning and gradually integrate within it.*

Quality management

Based on a methodology approved by the university, the IOSUD-DJ UG annually conducts internal evaluation of the activities of the doctoral schools. A periodic self-evaluation is part of this process. The focus of this procedure is on the fulfilment of legal requirements, identification of good practices, evaluation of human resources, research, material endowment, evaluation of research results, quality management and other aspects. It can be said that an adequate institutional framework and procedures are in place and relevant quality assurance policies are applied at the IOSUD-DJ UG.

The university follows an evaluating scientific activity of doctoral supervisors, also adopting self-evaluation methods.

The IOSUD-DJ UG monitors and controls periodically the infrastructure and logistic procedures necessary to carry out research. This involves maintenance, repairs, safety and efficiency of infrastructure as a basis for adequate support for research activities.

Evaluation actions are coordinated by the internal Evaluation Committee on the level of doctoral schools. The annual internal evaluation report of the IOSUD-DJ UG is approved by the University Senate.

There is evidence about efforts of the IOSUD-DJ UG to develop further activities as based on the reflection of the findings of evaluation.

On its website, the IOSUD-DJ UG publishes main information on relevant procedures from admission to doctoral studies to their completion. This includes the methodology of the organization of and admission to doctoral studies, conduct of doctoral studies, regulations for the operation of doctoral schools, approval, monitoring and periodical evaluation of study programs, methodology of self-evaluation of the IOSUD-DJ UG and doctoral schools and other procedures.

The IOSUD-DJ UG and its doctoral schools seem to provide PhD students with adequate access to resources and infrastructure for their doctoral studies. All PhD students have free access to national and international information resources. The library provides students with a significant number of documents including electronic resources.

The DJ UG runs a software system to detect plagiarism (sistemantiplagiat.ro).

The documentation and interviews indicate that PhD students have good access to scientific laboratories and other facilities they need for their dissertation research. Their work seems to be connected adequately with the operation of research centers and corresponding to general rules and regulations accepted at the level of the university.

As for internationalization, PhD students can benefit from mobility arrangements. It appears that PhD students often prefer short visits with conference appearances to long study stays such as one-semester-visits to relevant foreign institutions. The mobility traffic seems to be rather one-way oriented: there are not many incoming students who could integrate into PhD studies at the IOSUD-DJ UG. Also, more frequent participation of guest speakers/visiting professors in some parts of the PhD studies at the IOSUD-DJ UG would be beneficial.

Some joint-degree PhD studies take place at the IOSUD-DJ UG and there is undoubtedly potential for further growth in this.

Recommendations:

- *Make sure there is constant quest for balance between quality assurance and quality enhancement in relation to all IOSUD-DJ UG activities.*
- *Consider possibilities to encourage PhD students to use opportunities for longer study stays at relevant foreign institutions.*
- *Consider possibilities to attract incoming international mobility students more effectively so that they get involved in IOSUD-DJ UG activities.*
- *Make sure that visiting professors create a vital part of the offer of IOSUD-DJ UG across the domains.*
- *Consider possibilities to encourage recruitment of promising external students in PhD studies at the IOSUD-DJ UG in a proactive manner.*

Critical indicators

As follows from the SAR and other sources of information, critical indicators are met by the IOSUD-DJ UG.

Final recommendation

Professor Milan Pol

Masaryk University
Brno
Czech Republic

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