

A R A C I S

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Evaluation of Doctoral Studies – IOSUD Evaluation

Universitatea “Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, România

I n t e r n a t i o n a l E x p e r t R e p o r t

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Peer of several
European Quality Assurance Agencies

1. Introduction

1.1 Context of this evaluation

This report summarizes my findings as International Expert from the Evaluation of Doctoral Studies – IOSUD of the “Lucian Blaga” University in Sibiu (ULBS) by ARACIS from July 19 to 23, 2021. In order to perform this evaluation, ARACIS has nominated an evaluation team of 10 experts (Mission Director Prof. Dr. Popa Ion, Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.Dr. Răzvan Nistor, International Expert Prof. Dr. Winfried Müller, PhD Student Expert Ovidiu Fundulache, Technical Secretary Mrs. Carmen Mirian and five IOSUD Experts for different fundamental domains of science) for the IOSUD evaluation and three Peers (Coordinator, International Expert, PhD Student) for each of the 15 doctoral study domains of ULBS. In view of the Covid-19 pandemic this evaluation was organized in hybrid format. ARACIS and ULBS arranged online conferences and a one day on-site visit to ULBS by the Mission Director, the Scientific Coordinator and the PhD Student in order to perform the required examinations.

Overall, I want to congratulate ARACIS and IOSUD at ULBS for having made this evaluation possible and realizing it in an excellent way. I am very grateful to the Mission Director Prof.univ.Dr. Ion Popa and the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof.univ.Dr. Răzvan Nistor for conducting this extraordinary evaluation process in a very efficient and careful way. My special thanks go to the Technical Secretary Mrs. Carmen Mirian from ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation and for her friendly way of holding contact with me, preparing the evaluation so well, providing all necessary information and support for this visit.

I also give my cordial thanks to the Director of IOSUD at ULBS Prof.univ.Dr. Mihaela Herciu for the friendly welcome and for assisting me before and during the visit. Last but not least I want to thank the interpreters providing translations into English during the meetings.

1.2 Organizational Details of the University “Lucian Blaga” in Sibiu (ULBS) with a focus on IOSUD

The University “Lucian Blaga” is located in Sibiu, the capital of the Sibiu County in the historical region Transylvania of Romania. There is a long history of higher education in the city beginning in the 16th century. In 1976 the Sibiu Higher Education Institution was established. By a government decreed, in 1990 the Sibiu Higher Education Institution was renamed as University of Sibiu and established as a public higher education institution with legal personality and a non-profit, apolitical, legal entity, governed by the Romanian Constitution, national education laws and the university charter. In May 1995, the University of Sibiu was renamed after the famous Romanian writer and philosopher, Lucian Blaga, into University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu.

ULBS plays an important role for the cultural, social and economic development of the city of Sibiu and the region, especially in the fields of cultural studies, technical sciences and

medicine. According to the Law of National Education 2011 ULBS is governed by the Senate, the Rector and the Administrative Council. The Senate provides the legal framework and rules for the operational management of the institution. It consists of 85 members. The Rector together with 4 Prorectors forms the Rectorate. The members of the Rectorate are responsible for the operational management of the institution and represent the institution to the outside. The Rector, the 4 Prorectors, the 9 Deans and the Administrative Director form the Administrative Council of the University (15 members). One Student Representative, the President of the Senate, the Director of IOSUD and some more university representatives are co-opted members without right to vote.

The IOSUD is led by a Director and the Council for Doctoral Studies (CSUD). The Director of IOSUD is appointed following a public competition and occupies this position for a period of 4 years. The CSUD consists of 8 members, namely the IOSUD Director, 1 member chosen through universal vote of the doctoral advisors of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School SDI of IOSUD, 1 member chosen through universal vote of doctoral students belonging to SDI and 5 members appointed according fixed rules by the Rector.

The financial resources of the University do mainly come from the government and fees from students. According to the provided information the revenue in 2019 was about 200.000.000 Lei.

The main university building is situated in Bulevardul Victoriei, Nr. 10, Sibiu, 550024.

According to the provided information and the observations made during the on-site visit on July 22, the patrimony of ULBS is well managed. Buildings, lecture rooms and research facilities and other installations are up to date and of international standard.

Currently ULBS is organised in 9 Faculties (Faculty of Law; Faculty of Engineering; Faculty of Letters and Arts; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Sciences; Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Food Industry and Environmental Protection; Faculty of Economics; Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; Faculty of Theology), 24 Departments and the Department for Distance and Part-time Learning as well as the Institution for Organizing Doctoral Studies (IOSUD).

In connection with the Law of National Education 2011, ULBS was ranked among the “Teaching and Scientific Research Universities”. The institution offers Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes.

Currently there are 82 Bachelor programmes and 83 Master programmes. The Interdisciplinary Doctoral School at ULBS organizes the following 15 doctoral programmes: Computers and Information Technology, Cybernetics and Statistics, Law, Economics, Philology, Finances, Industrial Engineering, Engineering and Management, History, Management, Mathematics, Medicine, Theatre and Performing Arts, Theology.

In the academic year 2019/20 there were 11.169 Bachelor-, 2.897 Master- and 479 PhD-students enrolled at ULBS. 41 PhD students were awarded doctoral degrees.

On 1st January of 2020, there were 664 teaching and research staff members working at ULBS. The current number of doctoral advisors including external advisors is 105.

2. Methods and Tools used in the Evaluation

My observations are based on the analysis of the Internal Evaluation Report (IER) and Annexes for the IOSUD of ULBS of 82 pages, prepared by a drafting committee of ULBS, documents concerning the legal framework for IOSUD in Romania and guidelines for the external evaluation of IOSUD provided by ARACIS, the homepage of ULBS and the information obtained from the online interviews during the evaluation and the feedback received from the Mission Scientific Coordinator after the on-site visit. In order to complete my view of IOSUD at ULBS I arranged a private online meeting with the Director of IOSUD and had several email communications with her. I also had an email contact with my colleague Prof. Dr. Dimitrios Karagiannis from Vienna University, who is a doctoral advisor at ULBS. Furthermore, as I was a member of the ARACIS institutional evaluation team visiting ULBS in January 2021, I had already a good general knowledge of ULBS.

In preparation and during the evaluation the following online-meetings were arranged:

Monday, 12.07.2021	Online meeting
15:00 - 17:00 46 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel (technical meeting preparing the evaluation)

Monday, 19.07.2021	Online meetings
09.00 - 09:45 51 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel (technical meeting)
10:00 - 10:45 65 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel & representatives of ULBS's management
12:15 - 13:15 20 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & representatives of CSUD and SDI
14:45 - 15:45 21 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & doctoral coordinators
18:00 - 18:25 2 participants	International expert W. Müller & Director of IOSUD/CSUD M. Herciu (privately arranged meeting)

Tuesday, 20.07.2021	Online meetings
09:00 - 10:00 57 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel & Ethic Commission

10:15 - 11:15 51 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel & Commission for QA (CEAC) / QA Department
12:45 - 13:45 21 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & PhD students
15:15 - 16:15 19 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & IOSUD graduates

Wednesday, 21.07.2021	Online meetings
10:15 - 11:15 18 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & Directors of research centres/labs
12:45 - 13:45 19 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & CSUD members
15:15 - 16:15 20 participants	IOSUD evaluation panel & employers / stakeholders
16:30 - 17:30 35 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel (technical meeting)

Thursday, 22.07.2021	Onsite-visit to ULBS
09:00 - 18:00	Mission Dir. P. Ion, Mission Scientific Coordinator N. Răsvan and one student & representatives of ULBS

Friday, 23.07.2021	Online meetings
11:45 - 12:45 46 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel (technical conclusion meeting)
13:00 - 14:00 50 participants	IOSUD and domain evaluation panel & representatives of ULBS

3. Analysis of ARACIS's performance indicators

Domain A. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Criterion A.1. The administrative, managerial institutional structures and the financial resources

Standard A.1.1. The institution organizing doctoral studies (IOSUD) has implemented the effective functioning mechanisms provided for in the specific legislation on the organization of doctoral studies.

ULBS has established an Institution Organizing Doctoral Study Programmes (IOSUD-ULBS) for the organization of its 15 doctoral study programmes offered by the ULBS Interdisciplinary Doctoral School (SDI-ULBS). The doctoral studies are organized and conducted in accordance with the regulations for organizing and conducting doctoral studies within ULBS (Senate Resolution no. 2542 from 26.06.2020). The regulations for IOSUD and SDI are clearly described in the Internal Evaluation Report (IER) for the IOSUD and were verified and confirmed in all the meetings during the evaluation.

Performance Indicator A.1.1.1. The existence of specific regulations and their application at the level of the IOSUD, respectively at the Doctoral School(s):

(a) the internal regulations of the administrative structures (the institutional regulations for the organization and conduct of doctoral studies programs, the regulation(s) of Doctoral School(s));

The internal regulations of the administrative structures of IOSUD are fully documented and have been verified by the IOSUD evaluation team.

(b) the Methodology for conducting elections at the level of the Council of University Doctoral Studies (CSUD), respectively at Doctoral School(s) including elections by the students of their representatives in CSUD/Council of the Doctoral School (CSD) and the evidence of their conduct;

The election processes for CSUD and CSDI are clearly defined and follow the legal requirements. But student participation in the elections of the student representative for CSUD is very low and the student representative for CSDI is elected by a CSD vote and not directly by students.

(c) the Methodologies for organizing and conducting doctoral studies for the admission of doctoral students, for the completion of doctoral studies;

Everything is clearly defined and documented.

(d) the existence of mechanisms for recognizing the status of a Doctoral advisor and the equivalence of the doctoral degree obtained abroad;

There exist clear regulations.

(e) functional management structures CSUD/Council of the Doctoral School with evidence of the regularity of meetings;

CSUD usually assembles once a month according to a schedule which is predetermined at the beginning of the academic year, and its decisions are made public on its website (<http://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/csud/>).

(f) the contract for doctoral studies;

The doctoral thesis contract stipulates the rights and obligations assigned to IOSUD, to the doctoral students, and to the doctoral advisors.

g) internal procedures for the analysis and approval of proposals about doctoral study programs based on advanced academic studies.

IOSUD has defined internal analysis and approval procedures regarding proposals on the topic and themes of doctoral programmes. Appointed field coordinators discuss with the doctoral advisors affiliated to the corresponding field particular training programmes.

Recommendations:

Following the policy that student representatives should be elected by students, IOSUD-ULBS should reconsider the procedure for the election of the student representative in CSDI.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator A.1.1.2. *The doctoral school' Regulation includes mandatory criteria, procedures and standards binding on the aspects specified in Article 17, paragraph (5) of the Government Decision No. 681/2011 on the approval of the Code of Doctoral Studies with subsequent amendments and additions.*

The regulations of SDI provide criteria, procedures, and mandatory standards with respect to the admission of new doctoral advisors (as well as regulations for the revocation), the decision-making process for training programmes of the doctoral studies, the change of a doctoral advisor, the circumstances a doctoral programme can be discontinued, the prevention of fraud and plagiarism, the access to research resources, the students' attendance obligations (cf. Anexa A.1.1.1.01 of IER).

Recommendations:

Following the principle of subsidiarity, subordinate bodies and monocrats (director of IOSUD, supervisors) should have more autonomy. Not all decisions - concerning individuals - should need approval by Senate.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator*A.1.1.3¹. *Doctoral schools included in IOSUD are organized as disciplinary or interdisciplinary disciplines/thematic, according to Article 158, paragraph (7) of the Law of National Education No. 1/2011 with subsequent amendments and additions.*

Doctoral studies at ULBS are organised by IOSUD for the 15 doctoral studies offered by the Interdisciplinary Doctoral School SDI respecting the Romanian legislation concerning doctoral studies, the ARACIS performance indicators for IOSUD as well as the goals of the Bologna Declaration. But there is a lack of autonomy. For nearly all actions – even decisions like the extension for studies of doctoral students - final approval by the Senate is necessary.

Recommendations:

The principle of subsidiarity giving more autonomy to subordinated unities should be more followed at ULBS. The Senate should restrict itself on general decisions concerning the legal framework and rules and leave individual decisions on single students to CSUD, CSDI or even doctoral advisors.

The indicator is fulfilled.

¹ The indicators marked with an asterisk (*) hold a special status, referring exclusively to the evaluation of doctoral schools, as per Article 12 from the annex No.1 of the Order of the minister of education No. 3651/12.04.2021 approving the Methodology for evaluating university doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation In case they are not fulfilled, the Agency extends a period of maximum 3 years to IOSUD to correct the respective deficiencies.

Standard A.1.2. The IOSUD has the logistical resources necessary to carry out the doctoral studies' mission.

IOSUD and SDI have set all necessary steps to carry out the doctoral studies.

Performance Indicator A.1.2.1. *The existence and effectiveness of an appropriate IT system to keep track of doctoral students and their academic background.*

LBUS has implemented digital information systems for the registration of all doctoral students and storage of all individual study programmes.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator A.1.2.2. *The existence and use of a software program and evidence of its use to verify the percentage of similarity in all doctoral theses.*

There are two software packages (<https://sistemantiplagiat.ro/clienti/educatie/> and <https://www.checkforplagiarism.net/>) in use and all doctoral theses are examined by both packages.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion A.2. Research infrastructure

Standard A.2.1. The IOSUD/doctoral schools have a modern research infrastructure to support the conduct of doctoral studies' specific activities.

According to the provided written information, the data from the homepage and the observations made during the on-site visit, ULBS possesses a modern and adequate research infrastructure.

Performance Indicator A.2.1.1. *The IOSUD/the doctoral school(s) present proof of possessing or having rented adequate spaces for research activity specific to doctoral studies (laboratories, experimental fields, research stations etc.)*

The patrimony of ULBS is well managed. Buildings, lecture rooms, research facilities, and student service installations are up to date and of international standard.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator A.2.1.2. *The IOSUD/doctoral school(s) has/have collaboration agreements with higher education institutions, research institutes, research networks for joint partnerships and have access for using various research infrastructures; the offer for research services is presented publicly using a dedicated platform.*

There are 16 ERASMUS agreements and several partnership agreements with higher educational institutions in Romania and abroad. Moreover, ULBS has signed several cooperation agreements with private companies and research institutes.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator A.2.1.3. *The IOSUD/doctoral school(s) proves that it is/are concerned with permanent renewal of the research infrastructure to provide doctoral students access to up-dated research resources, by applying to various funding competitions and using own university resources for acquiring new research infrastructure.*

The research infrastructure of ULBS is based on the 9 Faculties, the Library and the 24 Research Centres. During the last year ULBS has invested about 1.200.000 Euro in its research

infrastructure. The research equipment and laboratories of ULBS are also supported by the business environment.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion A.3. Quality of Human Resource

Standard A.3.1. At the level of each Doctoral School there are sufficient qualified staff to ensure a quality educational process.

The didactic and research staff affiliated to SDI is highly qualified and complies with the legislation.

Performance Indicator *A.3.1.1. *The share of Doctoral advisors coordinating simultaneously more than 8 doctoral students but not more than 12 during their doctoral studies² does not exceed 20%.*

According to the provided data (cf. IER), 18 doctoral advisers out of 105 coordinate more than 8 doctoral students, but less than 12 (17,14 %).

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator A.3.1.2. *At least 50% of all teaching/research staff involved in teaching/research activities related to training programs for advanced university studies or in individual research/art creation programs have a full-time employment contract for an indefinite period with the IOSUD.*

All didactic activities related to the doctoral study programmes are delivered by highly qualified doctoral supervisors having a tenured full-time employment (cf. IER and Annexes).

The indicator is fulfilled.

Domain B. EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

IOSUD-ULBS meets the needs of the society and the labour market on the top academic level. It provides specialists to work in many different fields in scientific positions.

Criterion B.1. The number, quality and diversity of candidates enrolled for the admission contest

Standard B.1.1. Candidates admitted to doctoral studies demonstrate academic, research and professional performance and are diversified as social representation and by gender.

The analysis of the written documents and the meetings with doctoral students and graduates verified the characteristics requested.

Performance Indicator *B.1.1.1. *Admission to doctoral study programs is based on selection criteria including: previous academic, research and professional performance, their interest for scientific or arts/sports research, publications in the domain and a proposal for a research subject. Interviewing the candidate is compulsory, as part of the admission procedure.*

The admission regulations are clearly defined and documented (cf. Annex 1.1.104: Regulation for admission to doctoral studies 2020) on base of the Code of doctoral university studies

² 3 years for the doctoral university studies with the duration stipulated at Article 159, paragraph (3), respectively 4 years for the doctoral university studies with the duration stipulated at Article 174, paragraph (3) of the Law of national education No.1/2011 with subsequent amendments and additions, with additional extension periods approved as per Article 39, paragraph (3) of the Code of doctoral studies approved by the GD No. 681/2011 with subsequent amendments and additions.

(Government Decision no. 681/2011 and amendments) as well as the Regulations on the organization and conduct of doctoral studies at ULBS (cf. Annex A.1.1.1.01).

The legal requirement that international PhD candidates have to prove the knowledge of the Romanian language hinders recruitment of international PhD students. This legal condition contradicts the intentions for internationalization of doctoral studies.

Recommendations:

Try to change legislation with respect the requirement to speak Romanian for international PhD students.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator B.1.1.2. *The IOSUD/doctoral school(s) have a policy for stimulating enrollment of doctoral students coming from disadvantaged social environments, by allocating reserved positions in the admission procedure and/or granting special scholarships, as well as organising support programs to prevent drop-outs.*

There are grants and means by subsidizing tuition fees or by other benefits for students from disadvantaged social environments. But the number of these supports is quite limited and does not consider regional differences.

The area of dropout is observed by ULBS. Doctoral students are monitored in order to identify needs and problems. But working load of many PhD students beside their academic studies is very high and hinders the completion of studies at ULBS.

Recommendations:

Supportive instruments for students of disadvantaged social environments and geographical regions should be further expanded and the percentage of students receiving a grant increased. With respect to the high dropout rate I recommend to intensify personal contact with students assisting and motivating them to stay active.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion B.2. The content of doctoral programs

Standard B.2.1. The training program based on advanced university studies is appropriate to improve doctoral students' research skills and to strengthen ethical behavior in science.

Performance Indicator B.2.1.1. *The training program based on advanced academic studies includes at least 3 disciplines relevant to the scientific research training of doctoral students; at least one of these disciplines is intended to study in-depth the research methodology and/or the statistical data processing.* The training program based on advanced university studies in each field includes at least 3 disciplines. Research Methodology, Ethic and Academic Integrity, Management of Scientific Projects are the main topics. However, there exists a high fragmentation caused by 15 different doctoral programmes.

Recommendations:

SDI should try to reduce the number of doctoral programmes which hardly differ technically and methodologically (e.g. Computers and Information Technology, Cybernetics and Statistics, Mathematics) in order to make better use of synergies and to increase interdisciplinary activities.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator B.2.1.2. *At least one discipline is dedicated to Ethics and Intellectual Property in scientific research or there are well-defined topics on these subjects within a discipline taught in the doctoral program.*

Ethics and Intellectual Property are topics in the training programmes of all doctoral disciplines.

Recommendations:

Cf. the remarks and recommendations under Indicator B.2.1.1.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator B.2.1.3. *The IOSUD has mechanisms to ensure that the academic training program based on advanced university studies addresses “the learning outcomes”, specifying the knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy that doctoral students should acquire after completing each discipline or through the research activities³.*

For all doctoral fields learning outcomes are defined based on the mission of the field. The aim is to train competences, skills and research attitudes for a successful completion of the doctoral thesis and to prepare for postdoctoral scientific activities. Graduates should be capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas and be able to promote their scientific field. These skills are provided by the individual training programmes. Nevertheless, in the meetings with students, graduates and advisors I observed deficits with respect to interdisciplinary research activities and the critical attitude of students. Students are not very critical and do not show much interest for improvements and changes of their study processes.

Recommendations:

Strengthen interdisciplinary thinking of students and motivate them to be more active in the formation of their studies.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion B.3. The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation

Standard B.3.1. Doctoral students capitalize on the research through presentations at scientific conferences, scientific publications, technological transfer, patents, products and service orders.

IOSUD-ULBS has provided on request comprehensive data (cf. Annex C.3.1.1, C3.1.2, C3.1.3) describing international activities of doctoral students. For the evaluation of mobility aspects during the last year the restrictions by the Covid-19 pandemic have to be considered.

Performance Indicator B.3.1.1. *For the doctoral school there are in place mechanisms for valorification of the results of doctoral studies in accordance with the specificity of the particular domain (i.e. technological transfer, products, patents in the case of exact sciences; products and services for social sciences and humanities; festivals, contests, recitals, sports competitions; cultural-arts orders in the vocational domain; presentations at national and international conferences, publication of research results in national and international publications, engaging doctoral students in writing research-development projects etc.)*

Doctoral students at ULBS are supported for the dissemination and capitalization of their research results (financial support for scientific conferences, publication of articles, scholarships, etc.). One advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic was, that there was a big number of scientific conferences which were arranged in online modus. Hence, participation was less expensive. But for strengthening contacts with the international research community it is also necessary to meet other researchers personally.

³ Or by what the graduate should know, understand and to be able to do, according to the provisions of the Methodology regarding inscription and registration of higher education qualifications in the the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS) approved by the Order No.3475/2017 with subsequent amendments and additions.

Recommendations:

The participation in online conferences is a good thing, but international experience and contacts should be obtained also by the attendance of conferences organized in the traditional way with speakers being present. Hence, as soon as there are again international conferences arranged with participants present, I recommend to motivate and support students for the attendance of international conferences, with a focus on conferences also not organized at ULBS.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion B.4. Quality of doctoral theses

Standard B.4.1. Doctoral theses fulfil high quality standards

IOSUD-ULBS has established procedures to guarantee the quality of doctoral theses. The assessment is always based on the judgement of several qualified scientists.

Performance Indicator B.4.1.1. *At the level of IOSUD, the percentage of theses non-validated, at the level of General Council of the National Council for Attestation of University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNADTCU), without the right of further amendments and re-organizing the process of public defending, is not exceeding 5% in the last 5 years.*

Not applicable. There were no invalidated doctoral theses during the evaluation period.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Domain C. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Not least by the influence of ARACIS, quality assurance and quality management have a high value at Romanian universities. IOSUD-ULBS has established all necessary instruments in order to monitor and improve quality of doctoral education.

Criterion C.1. Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system

Standard C.1.1. There are an institutional framework and procedures in place and relevant internal quality assurance policies, applied for monitoring the internal quality assurance.

Performance Indicator C.1.1.1. *The IOSUD shall demonstrate the continuous development of the evaluation process and its internal quality assurance following a procedure developed and applied at the level of the doctoral school(s), the following assessed criteria being mandatory:*

- (a) the scientific work of Doctoral advisors;*
- (b) the infrastructure and logistics necessary to carry out the research activity;*
- (c) the procedures and subsequent rules based on which doctoral studies are organized;*
- (d) the academic and social services (including participation to various events, publication of papers etc.) and counselling made available to doctoral students.*

IOSUD monitors the scientific activity of doctoral advisors. There are regular investments in the infrastructure for research. Admission procedure and obligations of doctoral students are regulated and publicly available. There exist several support services for doctoral students (attendance of conferences, publication of articles).

Recommendations:

Observe that bureaucratic burden does not superimpose the benefits of evaluation procedures. Make results and consequences of evaluations visible for all members of ULBS. Motivate students to take a more active role in quality assurance procedures.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.1.1.2. *Students' associations and, according to the case, representatives of students organise elections in the community of doctoral students, for positions in the CSUD, by universal vote, direct and secret, all doctoral students having the right of electing or being elected.*

The representative of doctoral students in CSUD is elected by universal, direct and secret ballot of all doctoral students. But participation in this ballot is very low.

Recommendations:

Students should be motivated to take more interest in university affairs including improvements of their study programmes and of the IOSUD.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.1.1.3. *Students' associations and, according to the case, representatives of students organise elections in the community of doctoral students at the level of each doctoral school, for positions in the councils of doctoral schools, by universal vote, direct and secret, all doctoral students having the right of electing or being elected.*

The student representative in CSDI is appointed by SDI vote and not elected by students.

Recommendations:

Following the policy that student representatives should be elected by students, IOSUD-ULBS should reconsider the procedure for the election of the student representative in CSDI.

The indicator is partially fulfilled.

Performance Indicator *C.1.1.4. *Following the internal evaluation, IOSUD and the doctoral schools draft strategies and policies aiming to eliminate the identified deficiencies and to stimulate scientific and academic performance of IOSUD.*

The regulation for the organization and development of doctoral studies at ULBS (cf. <http://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/legislatie.php>) includes a series of directions to eliminate deficiencies and to stimulate scientific performance.

Recommendations:

This aspect of the evaluation procedure should be more emphasized. The elaboration of the IER is a very fruitful procedure providing a good base for improvements and further developments.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion C.2. Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources

Standard C.2.1. Information of interest to doctoral students, future candidates and public interest information is available for electronic format consultation.

Performance Indicator C.2.1.1. *The IOSUD publishes on the website of the organizing institution, in compliance with the general regulations on data protection, information such as:*

(a) *the IOSUD/Doctoral School regulation;*

(b) *the admission regulation;*

(c) *the doctoral studies contract;*

(d) *the study completion regulation including the procedure for the public presentation of the thesis;*

(e) *the content of the training study program based on advanced academic studies;*

(f) the academic and scientific profile, thematic areas/research themes of the Doctoral advisors within the domain, as well as their institutional contact data;

(g) the list of doctoral students within the domain with necessary information (year of registration; Advisor);

(h) information on the standards for developing the doctoral thesis;

(i) information on the opportunities for doctoral students aiming to attend conferences, to publish articles, awarding scholarships etc.

(j) links to the doctoral theses's summaries to be publicly presented and the date, time, place where they will be presented; this information will be communicated at least twenty days before the presentation.

All relevant information for doctoral students, potential candidates and doctoral advisors are publicly available via the following links:

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/admitere/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/legislatie/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/domenii-si-conducatori/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/cursuri/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/ordine/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/taxe/>

<https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/teze/teze-2021/>

Recommendations:

In order to attract international students and to increase international visibility of IOSUD-ULBS all the information should be available also in English language. At the moment the majority of the links is only in Romanian language.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Standard C.2.2. The IOSUD/The Doctoral School provides doctoral students with access to the resources needed for conducting doctoral studies.

Performance Indicator C.2.2.1. All doctoral students have free access to one platform providing academic databases relevant to the doctoral studies domain of their thesis.

Doctoral students have free access to online platforms of relevant academic sources and data via the platform "AnelisPlus". Access to literature is provided by ULBS Library.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.2.2.2. Each doctoral student shall have access, upon request, to an electronic system for verifying the degree of similarity with other existing scientific or artistic works.

Provided the approval of the doctoral advisor, each doctoral student has access to the two systems "sistemeantiplagiat.ro" and "checkforplagiarism.net".

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.2.2.3. All doctoral students have access to scientific research laboratories or other facilities depending on the specific domain/domains within the Doctoral School, according to internal order procedures.

All doctoral students have access to scientific research laboratories or other facilities according to the specific domain(s) within their doctoral school, subsequent to a request approved by the doctoral advisor and in keeping with the availability of the infrastructure.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion C.3. Internationalization

Standard C.3.1. IOSUD/Doctoral school has a strategy in place and it is applied to enhance the internationalization of doctoral studies.

This is one of points where IOSUD-ULBS should set further steps. The international strategy of IOSUD-ULBS is not very visible. The required knowledge of the Romanian language (a legal condition) and the missing comprehensive information in English for foreign PhD candidates hinders the recruitment of international students.

Performance Indicator *C.3.1.1. *IOSUD, for every doctoral school, has concluded mobility agreements with universities abroad, with research institutes, with companies working in the field of study, aimed at the mobility of doctoral students and academic staff (e.g., ERASMUS agreements for the doctoral studies). At least 35% of the doctoral students have completed a training course abroad or other mobility forms such as attending international scientific conferences. IOSUD drafts and applies policies and measures aiming at increasing the number of doctoral students participating at mobility periods abroad, up to at least 20%, which is the target at the level of the European Higher Education Area.*

Annex C.3.1.1 states that 70 out of 422 doctoral students during the evaluation period have passed a praxis abroad (16,59%). 289 doctoral students have attended international scientific conferences or completed another mobility form (68,48%). There are 16 Erasmus agreements open also for for doctoral students. But caused by the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no mobility during the second semester of the academic year 2019/20.

Recommendations:

IOSUD-ULBS should increase participation of doctoral students and teaching staff at international conferences organized abroad. It is different experience to present scientific results in English at an international conference abroad compared with a conference organized by the home university.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.3.1.2. *IOSUD supports, including providing financial support, to the organization of doctoral studies in international co-tutelage or invitation of leading experts to deliver courses/lectures for doctoral students.*

6 of the current 105 doctoral supervisors come from a foreign university. 4 foreign experts have been invited to thesis defence committees during the evaluation period. Mobility agreements with the Misr University for Science and Technology in Egypt and with the University Sorbonne Nouvelle have been signed. During the evaluation period 21 foreign doctoral students studied at ULBS.

Recommendations:

International activities should be increased. SDI should try to include more international experts into the supervision of doctoral theses. The recruitment of international students for doctoral studies should be intensified.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator *C.3.1.3. *At least 10% of the doctoral theses of every doctoral schools of the IOSUD are drafted and/or submitted in an international foreign language or are organised in international co-tutelage.*

According to the provided data, from 220 PhD theses in the evaluation period, 30 were submitted in an international foreign language. Some of the Romanian language theses have been presented at international congresses in an international foreign language. But there are

doctoral programmes without any thesis in a foreign language. But it should be noted here, that some topics where all the experts speak Romanian are not suitable to be written in a foreign language (e.g. the area of national Romanian legislation).

Recommendations:

Strengthen efforts in all doctoral areas to make research and research results internationally more visible. Intensify links to the international scientific community in all research fields.

The indicator is partially fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.3.1.4. *The internationalization of activities carried out during the doctoral studies is supported by IOSUD through concrete measures (e.g., by participating in educational fairs to attract international doctoral students; by including international experts in guidance committees or doctoral committees⁴ etc.).*

IOSUD-ULBS participates in international educational fairs and is a partner of the EUA Council for Doctoral Education and of the Pride Network. International experts are co-opted to thesis defence committees. 15 out of the 105 doctoral supervisors do not belong to ULBS. 6 doctoral advisers come from universities outside Romania.

Recommendations:

International cooperations in the supervision of PhD theses and their defending should be increased. IOSUD should look for more international co-advisors.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Criterion C.4. System for assurance of ethical and academic integrity

Standard C.4.1. IOSUD/Doctoral school has a functional and efficient system in place for prevention and assuring ethical and academic integrity norms

ULBS has a Code of Ethics including all university members and cycles of education and an Ethics Commission. There is also an Ethics Commission for Scientific Research.

Performance Indicator C.4.1.1. *IOSUD, applies the current provisions regulating ethics, deontology/academic integrity, respectively to academic freedom and has developed:*

- *policies based on prevention regarding possible violations of the Code of ethics and academic integrity, demonstrated by public postionings, studies, analyses or measures taken;*
- *practices and mechanisms for preventing fraud, from an institutional perspective as well as from the perspective of the doctoral students;*
- *practices for preventing possible fraud in academic activity, research or any other activity, including active measures for preventing and avoiding plagiarism of any kind, as well as promoting ethical and integrity/deontology principles or observing intellectual property norms, authors' rights and other related rights, among all members of the academic community;*
- *administrative instruments which allow applying effective and eliminatory sanctions;*
- *mechanisms and measures to assure equal opportunities and protection against intolerance and discrimination of any kind;*

IOSUD monitors and permanently evaluates these practices and can prove they are applied to all activities and engagement of students in all these processes, and the results of the monitoring is made public yearly or whenever it becomes necessary.

The Ethic Commission publishes regularly reports on the findings and actions.

⁴ Doctoral studies are completed by presenting the doctoral thesis in public session in front of a committee whose members hear and judge the final public presentation of the thesis

Recommendations:

The existence and work of the Ethic Commission have to be commended. But as I have already mentioned on other occasions, an ethic commission formed by members only from the institution will not be able to handle sensitive cases like corruption and academic misconduct of senior university members. I strongly recommend to install – if necessary informally – an inter-university commission with half members coming from ULBS and the other half from other universities.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.4.1.2. *All intimations regarding suspicion of plagiarism related to doctoral theses have been analysed and resolved by the IOSUD within the time interval legally established for expressing in writing its position regarding the intimation received.*

All indications of plagiarism were followed, the cases were analyzed and resolved by IOSUD.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.4.1.3. *Annual Reports of the Ethics commission of the IOSUD contain information on the stage of solving each case of intimation or own-initiative intimation regarding violation of norms or ethical aspects relevant for university doctoral studies. description of the facts, the findings from the assessed institution's documents and the evaluation visit itself.*

Information on the status of each case can be found in the annual reports of the Ethics Commission.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.4.1.4. *The measures taken by IOSUD after the final decision of CNADTCU to withdraw the title of "doctor" following accusations of plagiarism have addressed all the aspects mentioned in CNADTCU's decision and in the current legislation.*

Not applicable. During the evaluation period there was not any doctoral degree from ULBS withdrawn by CNADTCU.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.4.1.5. *The measures aiming to prevent academic fraud in the doctoral studies, taken by IOSUD, could be:*

- a) *Suspension of the right to advise newly enrolled doctoral students, for a period of 3 years, in the case of doctoral advisors having coordinated a doctoral thesis with a definitive decision of withdrawal of the "doctor" title for plagiarism;*
- b) *Exclusion from the IOSUD of the doctoral advisor having coordinated at least two doctoral theses with definitive decisions of withdrawal of the "doctor" title for plagiarism;*
- c) *Suspension of the right to organize the admission process of new doctoral students in the Doctoral studies domain, for a period of 2 years, if in the respective domain a doctoral thesis has been finalized and defended with a definitive decision of withdrawal of the "doctor" title for plagiarism.*

IOSUD prevents academic fraud in doctoral studies following the Code of doctoral studies (cf. GD 681/20, June 2011) and the ULBS Regulation on the Organization and Conduct of Doctoral Studies approved by the Senate on 26.06.2020.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator *C.4.1.6. *The scientific reviewers members in the commissions for public defense of two or more doctoral theses with definitive decisions of withdrawal of the "doctor" title for plagiarism,*

have not been nominated in other commissions for public defence of doctoral theses for a period of at least 3 years.

Not applicable. During the evaluation period there was no “doctor” title withdrawn for plagiarism.

The indicator is fulfilled.

Performance Indicator C.4.1.7. IOSUD has a database open to the public containing all the doctoral theses defended in the institution beginning at least in 2016 in a format including: the domain, author, doctoral advisor, title of the thesis and the thesis in electronic format (if there is an agreement of the author).

All doctoral theses defended at ULBS since 2016 can be found under <https://rei.gov.ro/teze-doctorat>. In <https://doctorate.ulbsibiu.ro/teze-2020/> the following information is published: doctoral field, doctoral advisor, doctoral candidate with CV, thesis title and summary, date of public defense, commission appointed by the Rector.

The indicator is fulfilled.

4. SWOT Analysis

<p><u>Strengths:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * IOSUD-ULBS meets the requirements of a modern, internationally competitive PhD education. Latest achievements in medicine, humanities, science and technology are reflected. * Director and members of IOSUD-ULBS show very high identification and are highly committed to the institution. * The qualification of doctoral advisors is very high. Several supervisors perform research together with industrial and academic organizations outside ULBS. * Quality management has a high priority and procedures are defined clearly in the internal documentation of IOSUD-ULBS. * PhD graduates work in a wide variety of jobs. 	<p><u>Weaknesses:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The age distribution of the academic teachers at IOSUD-ULBS requires the replacement of several professors within the forthcoming years. * Doctoral students are not very critical and not very active in university affairs. * There exists a high fragmentation of research disciplines. * Romanian universities have a favor for bureaucracy and collective descisions and distrust against individuals. Consequently, institutions are highly centralized and there is a lack of autonomy of lower levels. The principle of subsidiarity is not realized. * Mobility of teachers and students is quite low. * The number of PhD grants and financial support for PhD students is relatively low. * The dropout rate among PhD students is high.
<p><u>Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Supervision has changed from being a private relationship between one professor and one PhD student to becoming a collective research group inclusion (also one of the Bologna ideas). * ULBS is located in a historically important and very interesting region. It has an excellent starting position for international activities, especially the recruitment of international students. * Living costs in Romania are quite affordable. 	<p><u>Threats:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Legal constraints and “homemade buraucracy”. * Legal requirement for international PhD candidates to know Romanian.

5. Overview of judgments awarded and of the recommendations

The following table summarises the key judgments and key recommendations included in the chapters above:

No.	Performance indicator	Judgment	Recommendations
1	Criterion A.1.	There exists a detailed regulatory legal framework for IOSUD together with a narrow scope of autonomy, complemented by “homemade bureaucracy”.	The principle of subsidiarity giving more autonomy to subordinated unities should be followed. The Senate should restrict itself on general decisions concerning the legal framework.
2	Criterion A.2.	ULBS possesses a modern and adequate research infrastructure. But there is a high fragmentation of research disciplines which affects also IOSUD. The fragmentation of research hinders the use of synergies and interdisciplinary research.	Focus research under consideration of existing strengths and their sustainability.
3	B.1.1.1 .	The admission regulations for doctoral study programmes are clearly defined and documented. The legal requirement asking international PhD candidates to prove the knowledge of Romanian language hinders recruitment of students from abroad.	In order to be more attractive for international PhD students, try to change legislation with respect to the requirement of knowing Romanian.
4	B.1.1.2.	There are grants and means by subsidizing tuition fees or by other benefits for students from disadvantaged social environments. But the number of these supports is quite limited and does not consider regional differences.	Try to increase financial support for PhD students especially from disadvantaged social environments and disadvantaged geographical regions.
5	B.2.1.1.	There exists a high fragmentation caused by 15 different doctoral programmes.	SDI should try to reduce the number of doctoral schools which hardly differ technically and methodologically.
6	B.2.1.3.	In the meetings with students, graduates and advisors I observed deficits with respect to interdisciplinary research and the critical attitude of students.	Strengthen interdisciplinary thinking of students and motivate them to be more active in the formation of their studies.

7	B.3.1.1.	Participation in online conferences and attendance of international conferences organized at ULBS are good things. But for strengthening contacts with the international research community it is also necessary to meet personally other researchers at conferences abroad.	Motivate and support staff and students to present their research results also at international conferences not organized at ULBS.
8	C.1.1.1.	IOSUD monitors carefully the scientific activity of doctoral advisors.	Reduce wherever possible bureaucratic burden in order not to superimpose the benefits of evaluation processes.
9	C.1.1.2.	Participation in student elections is very low.	Students should be motivated to take more interest in university affairs including improvements concerning their study programmes and the IOSUD.
10	C.1.1.3.	The student representative in CSDI is appointed by SDI and not elected by students.	Following the policy that student representatives should be elected by students, IOSUD-ULBS should reconsider the procedure for the election of the student representative in CSDI.
11	Criterion C.3.	The international strategy of IOSUD-ULBS is not very visible. The required knowledge of the Romanian language and the missing comprehensive information in English for foreign PhD candidates hinders the recruitment of international students.	Strengthen efforts in all doctoral areas to make research and research results more visible. Intensify links to the international scientific community in all your research fields. Increase international cooperations in the supervision and defence of PhD theses. Try to change legislation with respect of the required knowledge of Romanian for the recruitment of international PhD students. Provide on the homepage all important information for international students also in English.

6. Conclusions and general recommendations

IOSUD-ULBS is well-established and recognized and has set important steps of development and improvement during the last years. Doctoral Studies at ULBS are very important for the region of Sibiu and for Romania. Teachers and programmes reflect the latest scientific achievements and are of international standard. All significant legal requirements (Romanian legislation concerning doctoral studies, ARACIS performance indicators for IOSUD) as well as the goals of the Bologna Declaration for doctoral education are observed. Nevertheless, there are some areas, where IOSUD-ULBS should further develop or improve:

6.1 Reduce fragmentation of doctoral programmes

Research and Doctoral Programmes at ULBS are very fragmented. There are 24 Research Centres, 15 Doctoral Programmes and 9 Faculties. For example, I cannot see a technical reason, why the doctoral programmes “Computers and Information Technology”, “Cybernetics and Statistics” and “Mathematics” need to be separated. At most one doctoral programme per faculty would be more reasonable. Moreover, the high fragmentation hinders the use of synergies and interdisciplinary activities.

6.2 Reduce internal bureaucracy and increase decentralization following the principle of subsidiarity

Despite of the lack of autonomy of Romanian universities there is a big amount of “homemade bureaucracy” as well. As I have already mentioned on other occasions, a Senate with 85 members is far too big for a modern university governing body. Together with the Romanian favor for bureaucracy and collective decisions this means an enormous waste of human power. All so more, as many non-strategic decisions (despite that according to the Law of National Education 2011 the Senate is responsible for the legal framework and the strategy of the institution) at ULBS need the approval of the Senate (cf. Senate meeting December 2020, top. 8 and top. 10 (change of scientific coordinator of a PhD student), top. 9 (extension of studies of a PhD student)).

6.3 Encourage students to develop more independence and creativity in order to become critical members of our society

Participation of PhD students in elections is very low and students seem not to be really engaged in academic affairs including improvements of their studies and the IOSUD. Strengthening the involvement of PhD students in university affairs could also help to reduce the high drop-out rate.

6.4 Increase international visibility of IOSUD-ULBS

Up to now, the international strategy of IOSUD-ULBS is not very visible. Participation in international and EU research projects, encouraging publications in foreign languages, inviting international researchers and increasing mobility should be further developed. The recruitment of international students for doctoral studies should be intensified. The required knowledge of the Romanian language (a legal condition) and the missing comprehensive

information in English for foreign PhD candidates hinders recruitment of international students.

6.5 Final remarks on the ARACIS evaluation procedure of IOSUD

The current ARACIS evaluation procedure for IOSUD is strictly conducted in correspondence with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The focus is on 36 performance indicators, the evaluated institution has to prove. The ARACIS evaluation procedure for IOSUD is certainly an important step for quality assurance in doctoral education in Romania. The process is very well organized and works with excellent peers. But the procedure is more or less an inspection and as a consequence of a bad evaluation an institution could lose accreditation of PhD programmes. Hence, the evaluated institutions try to present themselves as good as possible and hardly mention any problems. The documentation and the verification of all the indicators means a high bureaucratic workload for the institutions and the members of the evaluation teams. What I am missing in the procedure is more motivation for evaluated institutions to think in organizational and qualitative improvements. Indicator C.1.1.4. should be more strengthened. By my impression it is ignored within the extensive list of other indicators. The institutions work for the fulfillment of the numerous other indicators and are discouraged to be more self-critical and to make better use of the evaluation procedure by looking more into the future than into the past. Hence, I recommend a revision of the IOSUD evaluation procedure reducing bureaucracy, merging similar indicators and the evaluation of related PhD programmes together. Furthermore, in addition to indicator C.1.1.4. some other open questions concerning improvements and future goals of the institution should be included into the procedure. ARACIS should promote more clearly the benefits and improvements deriving from the evaluation procedure.

My remarks and recommendations should assist IOSUD-ULBS and ARACIS to proceed their successful way for high quality in doctoral education into the future.

7. Annexes

- Schedule of the IOSUD-ULBS evaluation visit
- Evaluation Panels for IOSUD-ULBS