Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ARACIS

External Evaluator's Report

Spiru Haret University
1-3 November 2023

Introduction

Spiru Haret University is a private educational and research institution in Romania. Established in 1991 by the "România de Mâine" Foundation and officially recognized in 2002, it operates in multiple locations in Bucharest and other cities. The university is named after Spiru Haret, a prominent figure in Romanian education and academia.

The institution's mission is to generate and transfer knowledge through education, scientific research, and innovation. It collaborates with the "România de Mâine" Foundation and SC Mass Media "România de Mâine" SRL to manage resources efficiently and contribute to the development of education, science, and culture.

In 2005, by signing Magna Carta Universitatum, Spiru Haret University adhered to the European fundamental principles and university traditions that should subtend the mission of universities. In 2021, Spiru Haret University reconfirmed its responsibility to commit itself and to respond to the aspirations and challenges of the world and of the communities it serves, by signing Carta Magna Universitatum 2020.

The University carries out teaching and administrative activities meant to contribute to achieving its teaching and research mission and to achieving its fundamental objectives, as resulting from the Spiru Haret University Charter (https://www.spiruharet.ro/data/carta_SHU.pdf), adopted by the University's Senate by the Decision no. 24/2017 on 13.02.2017

Spiru Haret University offers a wide range of undergraduate (36 BA programs) and postgraduate programs (23 MA programs), accredited or with a temporary accreditation, and each of them has its own clearly mentioned teaching and research mission, specific to each of them and resulting clearly from the education plan, the structure of the activities carried out, from the content and the results of the teaching and research process.

The university's efforts to promote excellence in education and research helped SHU to be ranked relatively high in the international rankings (i.e. EduRank: 27th in Romania, 4778th in the global 2023 rating, and 59 research topics; uniRank: 34th in Romania in 2023, etc.)

General Statements

The Internal Evaluation Report is well prepared and provides thorough information regarding the institution. It consists of three key chapters: Institutional Capacity, Educational Efficiency, Quality Management, supported by additional 254 Annexes[1] that have been provided as supportive evidence to the report.

Spiru Haret University maintains an extensive online presence through its website, offering comprehensive and up-to-date information to both students and the general public. The website provides details about qualifications, study programs, diplomas, teaching and research staff, facilities, libraries, admission, student accommodation, administrative departments, international relations, events, tuition fees, learning resources, language courses, postgraduate programs, the University Senate, partnerships, competitions, archives, ethics code, and other aspects of public interest. The English web page versions are available as well, with slightly reduced content.

The University's commitment to transparency is evident as it publishes various reports and documents on its website, including decisions of the University Senate, yearly reports on university activities, reports on internal education quality evaluations, and scientific research reports. Additionally, the University provides printed materials such as guidelines for study programs and admission leaflets to inform students about academic structures, facilities, and educational offerings.

To ensure alignment with labor market requirements and CNC qualification levels, Spiru Haret University registers all of its study programs in the RNCIS system. The university also serves as an authority in the IMI system, enabling it to offer information to potential employers and educational institutions within the European internal market.

Moreover, Spiru Haret University is registered on the Study in Romania platform, a global initiative that promotes Romanian higher education, attracting both domestic and international students to its educational programs. Graduating students receive a Diploma Supplement as a testament to their academic achievements, and this practice has been in place since 2006, adhering to established procedures.

The SHU hosts have organized a tour to provide oversight of several state-of-art facilities across Bucharest. In addition, a number of meetings have been conducted during the evaluation visit, including these with the University management, students, alumni, employers, faculty, and Ethics & QA committees.

Generally, the extent and cover of information acquired from various sources were comprehensive and coherent. However, it would be appreciated if the approach to self-study preparation was a bit more analytic and self-critical, helping both, evaluators and the institution itself to understand potential weaknesses and threats and act upon them.

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[1] https://www.spiruharet.ro/evaluareinstitutionala2023/RAI-USH-RO//?folder=Anexe

Comments/Recommendations:
- It is recommended to implement a more self-critic approach by challenging institutional outcomes and implementing additional quantitative (with a focus on data trends) and respective qualitative analyses (root cause).

Managerial Structure

Spiru Haret University has established a well-structured and adaptable management system to respond to changes in the legal, social, economic, educational, cultural, and scientific landscape. The university's governance is organized according to the Internal Organization and Functioning Set of Rules and includes various management structures and roles:

> ➤ University Level: University Senate and Board: The highest decision-making bodies at the university level; Management Roles: Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Administrative General Manager.

> ➤ Faculty Level: Faculty Board: Responsible for faculty-level decisions; Management Roles: Dean, Vice Deans.

> ➤ Department Level: Department Board: Manages department-specific matters; Management Role: Head of Department.

> ➤ Central Scientific Research Institute Level: Scientific Board: Oversees the Central Scientific Research Institute.

The university follows a principle of representativeness in the election of management structures and roles, allowing the academic community to participate in choosing its leaders. The University Senate, representing the community, consists of both teaching and research staff and students, all elected through universal, direct, and secret voting.

Under the leadership of the Chancellor and its management team, has implemented a comprehensive administrative and strategic framework to ensure effective governance and continuous improvement. The university has developed several key documents and strategies for its long-term development and efficient management:

1) Strategic Planning: The Chancellor's Management Programme 2022-2026; The Strategic Plan for Institutional Development 2021-2027; The Action Plan for Achieving the Objectives Proposed in the Strategic Plan for Institutional Development 2021-2027.

These documents are shared with the academic community through direct communication and the university's website. The long-term strategic plan is periodically updated to align with higher education progress and evolving needs.

2) Management Strategies: Strategies for various areas, including quality assurance, scientific research, internationalization, and digitalization, have been developed to drive the university's progress.

The university emphasizes the involvement of various decision-making levels, such as deans,

heads of departments, and research center managers, in achieving objectives and improving performance. The fulfillment of objectives serves as a criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of management and administration.

The University's charter defines the Mission and Vision and the University Strategic Development Plan ((Annex no. 115 The strategic plan for institutional development 2021-2027) defines key Strategic Goals. However, the whole Strategy structure looks static, providing insufficient emphasis on the expected impact of its successful execution.

From the meetings conducted with various external stakeholders (employers, alumni, students, etc.) it is found that the university consults stakeholders in collecting feedback on degree programs, but has no formalized mechanisms for involving them in the development of institutional strategy with reference to academic training, involvement in research, etc.

3) Operational Planning: The university adopts an annual Operational Plan to monitor and ensure compliance with legal criteria, regulatory requirements, and performance standards. These plans help in tracking and achieving specific indicators.

For monitoring the activities carried out in the institution, both in terms of education, research and in the area of quality assurance, HR and internationalization, the University adopts annually The Operational plan for fulfilling the legal criteria, the compulsory regulatory requirements, the performance standards and indicators at Spiru Haret University and monitors the fulfilment of these indicators. However, the follow-up and assessment of the level of the execution is left to the initiative owners which results in some cases with statements that may not be justifiable (Interview with the Internal Evaluation Report authors team and university QA team)

Regarding the administrative aspect, the university adheres to legal provisions and follows a matrix organizational structure. The administration is efficient, providing support for academic and research activities. Various administrative units and services are established to cater to different needs, including human resources, finances, libraries, accommodation, and social-cultural activities.

The university's administrative units are governed by specific regulations, ensuring structured and efficient operations. These include units like the Economic Directorate, Human Resources Directorate, IT Directorate, Legal Service, Marketing, Communication and Public Relations Directorate, and more.

Spiru Haret University maintains an integrated information system that supports administrative activities. This system facilitates the decision-making process, ensuring transparency and communication across the institution. Information systems like UMS (University Management System - Red Point), accounting software, and e-learning platforms are integrated into the university's information infrastructure.

In addition, the university employs communication tools such as CISCO and GoogleMeet for various aspects of its management activities, optimizing evaluation, systematization, communication, and overall management processes.

Comments/Recommendations:

- To set up functional mechanism for consultation and involvement of stakeholders (employers, graduates, students, experts, etc.) in the development of the institutional strategy, update educational programs, design and carry out research joint projects, etc.

- Although the strategic management is an important priority of the institution, because of the present higher education challenges, SHU has to monitor the results permanently and adjust the strategic aims to the changing socio-economic environment in the period of 2021-2027.

Teaching Staff

Spiru Haret University has a defined process for conducting contests to fill vacant teaching and research positions in accordance with the prevailing legislation. These positions, within various departments, are characterized by their roles, teaching functions, subjects in the educational plan, and specific teaching and research activities.

Each academic year, the university determines the required number of teaching staff to facilitate the educational process. Positions are advertised for new hires, including Spiru Haret University alumni with outstanding performance and candidates from other universities. The university may also conduct career progression exams for its existing staff, ensuring the progression of tenured faculty while adhering to the necessary standards set by the law.

As of the academic year 2022-2023, there were 438 teaching positions available, of which 262 were filled by full-time tenured faculty. The university's management aims to adhere to ARACIS regulations regarding the teaching staff's structure and its ratio to the number of students, with a focus on the development and progression of existing faculty.

Table 1: Students/tenured teaching staff ratio (accredited degree programs, bachelor/master IF cycle), academic year 2022-2023

Nr. crt.	Faculty	Number of students 2022/2023	Number of Faculty staff	Faculty/ Student ratio
1.	Physical education and sport	609	18	33.83
2.	Legal and Administrative Sciences	753	30	25.10
3.	Veterinary Medicine	267	22	12.14
4.	Engineering and Computer Science	261	15	17.40
5.	Psychology and Educational Sciences	1450	35	41.43
6.	Economic Sciences	811	38	21.34
7.	Legal and Economic Sciences Brasov	391	14	27.93
8.	Psychology and Educational Sciences Brasov	385	12	32.08
9.	Economic Sciences Câmpulung	210	7	30.00

Nr. crt.	Faculty	Number of students 2022/2023	Number of Faculty staff	Faculty/ Student ratio
10.	Legal and Economic Sciences Constanta	706	23	30.70
11.	Legal, Economic and Administrative Sciences Craiova	1447	45	32.16
	TOTAL	6217	7289	259*

The inquiry regarding the differences in the faculty-to-student ratio between faculties has revealed the different philosophies at various schools, in addition to factual difficulties to attract teaching staff in professional fields that may be better paid by industry (e.g. Engineering and Computer Science) or in regions in which SHU has campuses (Brasov, Constanta, Craiova and Câmpulung) (Table 1).

During the meetings with students and alumni, it has been identified that the extent of dedication of the faculty members may vary, however, being kept maintained above the expected quality threshold.

Upon analyzing the departments' organisational charts, it resulted that for each study programme ensuring a distinct university qualification, over 80% of the roles, opened as per the legal provisions, are filled by full-time staff or with reserved positions, tenured in the higher education, as per the legal provisions in force (Table 2), out of which at least 25% are professors and associate professors[2].

Table 2. The situation of teaching posts for the period 2018 – 2023

Univ. year	Number of tenured teaching posts					Teaching posts occupied by hourly paid teachers					Teaching posts occupied by hourly paid teachers					Total teaching saff	% of tenured th staff	% of univ. prof and assoc. Prof..
	Prof.	Conf.	Lector	Asistent	Total	Prof.	Conf.	Lector	Asistent	Total	Prof.	Conf.	Lector	Asistent	Total			
2018 - 2019	46	138	135	17	336	24	74	40	21	159	25	14	64	5	108	603	82,09%	56,97%
2019 - 2020	45	133	136	11	325	27	64	55	14	160	16	15	37	8	76	561	86,45%	55,46%
2020 - 2021	34	116	122	11	283	9	21	51	53	134	15	15	26	14	70	487	85,63%	43,17%
2021 - 2022	33	108	117	8	266	13	40	47	33	133	5	12	22	10	49	448	89,06%	48,62%
2022 - 2023	32	110	112	8	262	8	34	48	24	114	7	15	28	12	62	438	85,84%	48,94%

[2] IER, Annex no. 235 Summary of the percentage of professors and associate professors by study programs

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The university emphasizes the qualifications of its teaching staff, considering their initial training, the theme of their PhD theses, PhD leadership, and publications in line with the subjects in their respective positions. Candidates applying for vacant teaching or research positions must demonstrate expertise in their respective fields through their educational background and scientific contributions. The associated staff holding teaching positions at Spiru Haret University is tenured in higher education and meets the legal criteria for holding these positions.

Teaching staff at Spiru Haret University are expected to provide course materials for students, including textbooks, course notes, and teaching materials. The university's organizational charts, in conjunction with educational plans, demonstrate that it has the necessary faculty to fulfill the educational requirements.

Each teaching staff member holds regular consultation hours to assist students with projects, research, and academic inquiries. Students can also contact faculty members via email. The university provides academic guidance through program coordinators and year tutors to address various aspects of student life.

During the meeting with the faculty members, most of the attendees agree that the university provides sufficient financial and material resources for their teaching activity. However, the balance in evaluating teaching and research outcomes for academic promotion purposes has been challenged, emphasizing the extensive time needed for preparing and delivering quality teaching or producing some of the teaching-required research deliverables against the indicators valued in faculty evaluation.

Another aspect repeatedly mentioned by the teaching staff was the perception of the academic community and society in general comparison with the teaching staff from public universities, complaining that they receive less support in conducting research activity and, thus, being more complicated for them to excel in this regard and, therefore, to comply with minimal standards for their career promotion. The desire to have higher salaries was mentioned too.

Comments/Recommendations:
- Explore the alternative tools to attract faculty in competitive disciplines that may include campaigns, special scarcity allowances, or tailored contracts to enable dual employment (in the company and at the university);
- Attract younger generation in the teaching activity;
- Set-up the differential payment of the teaching staff based on performance indicators.

Facilities

Spiru Haret University boasts the assets required for a high-quality educational process, including both undergraduate (BA) and postgraduate (MA) programs. With eight modern

campuses, four in Bucharest and four in other locations, the university provides good facilities for education and research, catering to various study programs, teaching methods, and research objectives. These facilities include 52 amphitheaters, 76 seminar halls, 86 labs with 3,082 computers with internet access, sports complexes, swimming pools, running tracks, and more.

The university's investment in modernization is evident, with significant funds allocated for facility upgrades and technology enhancements. These investments have improved the university's infrastructure, such as sports facilities, libraries, and laboratories.

Spiru Haret University maintains a strong digital presence, offering a variety of online resources, e-learning platforms, and access to scientific databases from the campus premises and remotely. Its focus on IT infrastructure, multimedia-equipped classrooms, and digital communication tools helps enhance teaching and research activities.

During the academic years, 2022–2023, 2023–2024 and 2024–2025, Spiru Haret University is implementing the project SHU Digital (project code: 1596476127), financed within the competitive call for proposals PNRR/2022/C15/MEDU, Financing Contract no. 14032/16.09.2022, the non-reimbursable funding granted to the University being approved by the Order of the education minister no. 4168/ 30.06.2022. The project is financed within the call for proposals Grants for the digitalization of universities within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) – Component 15: Education – Reform 5: Adopting the legal framework for the digitalization of education – Investment 16: The digitalization of universities and preparing them for the digital professions of the future. Spiru Haret University defined as a priority objective the digitalization of the educational and training process. In this context, in 2022, the University Senate approved a ne strategy for the digitalization of the processes, with integrated measures for the digitalization of SHU for teaching and research purposes, meant to improve the digital infrastructure and to develop the digital skills of the students and of the teaching staff, the auxiliary teaching staff and research staff (https://spiruharet.ro/data/2022/06/strategia_de_digitalizare.pdf, https://SHUdigital.spiruharet.ro/)

With its commitment to digitalization, strong financial position, and a range of educational and research resources, Spiru Haret University remains well-equipped to fulfill its mission and provide a quality learning environment for its students.

Spiru Haret University maintains robust financial resources to support its educational and student services activities. The university follows a comprehensive budgeting process, ensuring the alignment of its short-term and medium-term financial goals with its strategic mission. The Board, University management, and the Chancellor actively analyze and approve multi-year budget projections to guarantee the continuity of educational processes over an academic cycle.

Financial planning and expenditure oversight adhere to principles and procedures established by the Board. An internal accounting service and regular financial statements, including balance sheets and verification of financial transactions, are carried out on a regular basis.

The university further engages an independent auditor to review its yearly financial statements for transparency.

As a legal entity of private law and public utility, Spiru Haret University possesses ample financial reserves, with significant available funds as reflected in its balance sheets at the end of 2022.

The budgeting process emphasizes allocating financial resources per capita and per study cycle for educational activities and research initiatives. Financial support for research projects is bolstered by a dedicated fund and co-financing mechanisms. Budget approval is a collaborative effort involving the Board and the University Senate, taking into account multi-year income and expenditure projections and ensuring the uninterrupted provision of education.

The university ensures that information about tuition fees is transparent and accessible, displayed at faculty locations and through various promotional materials. Students are informed that tuition fee revenue supports educational resources, staff compensation, administrative costs, and faculty development.

Spiru Haret University maintains a realistic financial policy with both short-term and long-term financial goals aligned with its mission and objectives. Financial and material resources are allocated to facilitate learning resources and communication tools for students, including those with part-time attendance or distance learning programs.

The university's primary income sources, as defined in its Charter, stem from nonprofit activities, primarily tuition fees. Additional revenue is derived from interest on banking deposits, dividends, rental income, economic activities, asset disposal, and other sources. The university's financial position is stable, contributing to the continuity of its educational mission.

Comments/Recommendations:
- The University should focus on maintaining the present situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work which in an optimal situation meets the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development. Further decline of the total number of students could result a decision-making point, so the management of the university must make steps to avoid this situation.
- Update the library with subscriptions to specialized journals (both in hard-copy and online databases)

Students

Spiru Haret University maintains a transparent and non-discriminatory admission policy for its

study programs, ensuring equal opportunities for all high school graduates holding a baccalaureate diploma, regardless of gender, race, religion, or political orientation. The university begins informing potential candidates about its BA and MA study programs at least six months before the admission contest. This information is disseminated through written and audiovisual media and by organizing meetings with high school students in their final year who have a profile matching the university's faculties.

Faculties display admission methodologies, application requirements, and necessary documents on notification boards and the university's website. The admission fee, established annually by the Board, is made public through the university's website and faculty headquarters at least six months before the admission period.

To further inform candidates and students about Spiru Haret University, its faculties, and the relevance of study programs, the institution provides University and Faculties' Guides that align with regulatory requirements. The university also uses its media outlets, such as the weekly "Opinia naţională" and Radio Seven, and deploys leaflets, posters, and advertising in national media to promote its programs.

Spiru Haret University conducts promotional activities during the admission period, aiming to inform 12th-grade students, change their attitudes, and attract potential candidates for its faculties. These promotional actions complement strategic measures, including an extended image campaign in Bucharest high schools to strengthen relationships and attract candidates.

The university also participates in educational fairs and events at local, national, and international levels, and publishes online articles to promote its programs. The communication mix comprises direct communication, online communication through various channels (including social media), outdoor advertising (both analog and digital), and mass media communication through radio stations.

Spiru Haret University supports the National Strategy for the internationalization of the educational process and academic mobility, making adjustments to its academic structure and resources based on foreign student enrollment.

Admissions are open to high school graduates who hold a baccalaureate diploma or equivalent, and who meet the criteria set by law, regardless of whether they are Romanian citizens or come from other EU Member States, including the Swiss Confederation.

The university's admission practices are regulated by sets of rules approved by the Spiru Haret University Senate, including the admission to BA and MA programs. The admission criteria for each program may include results from the baccalaureate exam, questionnaire-fiche responses, admission interviews, and additional written or oral tests specific to the faculties and specialties.

Admission procedures for various programs, such as Psychology, Kinetotherapy and Special Motricity, Physical Education and Sports, and Veterinary Medicine, may involve combined criteria where admission exam results carry greater weight. These criteria may include

specific challenges or tests to assess aptitudes or knowledge in the relevant areas.

The admission process concludes with the public announcement of the contest results on faculty websites and notice boards within 24 hours. Admitted candidates are registered and enrolled in the Unique Register under a unique number valid for the entire tuition period. Tuition contracts and yearly study contracts are drafted and concluded between the enrolled student and the University's chancellor, ensuring clarity and commitment throughout the study period.

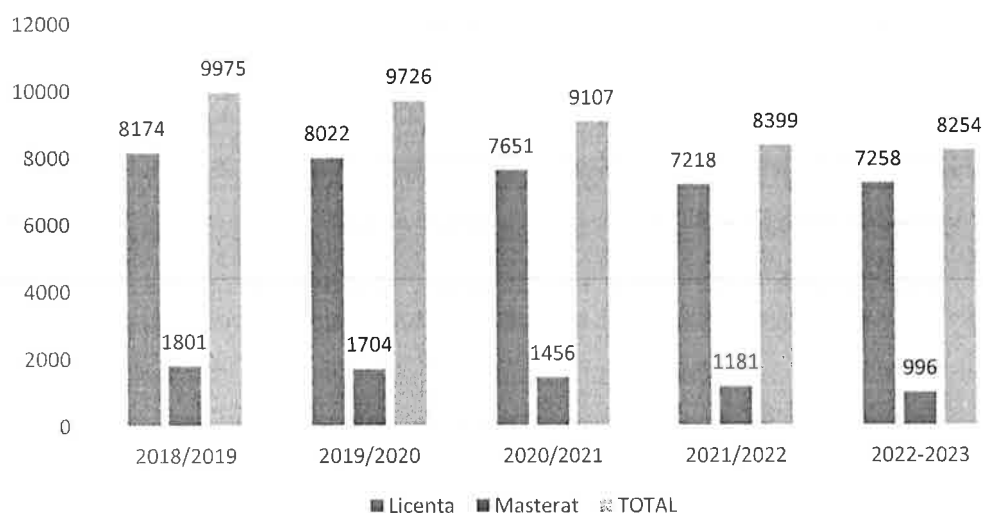For the last five years, the student enrollment trend at SHU shows a light decrease (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Student enrollment trend (Bachelor & Master, total)

The university has a strong track record of graduation rates, with a minimum of 51% of graduate students passing their final exams. Over the 2018-2022 period, Spiru Haret University achieved an impressive 78.75% graduation rate.

Spiru Haret University has established a flexible policy to accommodate interruptions in a student's professional activity for various reasons. Students have the option to request such interruptions without the need to repeat an entire academic year or face academic consequences. This policy is in full compliance with relevant legal provisions and is governed by "The Set of Rules on the Students' Professional Activity."

Under this policy, previously enrolled students, regardless of their original institution, who, for various reasons, were unable to continue their studies, may be reenrolled upon fulfilling their educational obligations. This typically involves passing any differential exams and fulfilling financial obligations related to changes in educational plans. Importantly, students may also have the benefit of recognizing credits for exams they passed before their study interruption.

This flexible approach is guided by Spiru Haret University's commitment to ensuring that students have the opportunity to go through, interrupt, or resume their study programs, all while maintaining academic standards and ensuring the fairness and equity of the educational

process. The university's policies are structured to align with the principles set forth in the university's charter and international academic standards, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The procedures for applying the credit system (ECTS) and determining the equivalence of students' academic situations play key roles in this process.

Students that have attended a meeting with the evaluation team have confirmed SHU's dedication to providing quality services, internship places and incentives for tuition fee payment (discounts to tuition fees, discounts for the participation fee at workshops, conferences (veterinary medicine and Kinetotherapy students). Regardless of minor complaints (e.g. non-existence if a university canteen), most of the students have confirmed that the faculty treat them with respect, providing support at all levels, and connecting them with industry in seeking additional training or job opportunities. The students' recommendations are taken into account when updating the curriculum.

SHU provides support to its students to enhance their learning process and career development, facilitated through various means:

- Weekly Consultation Hours: Each member of the teaching staff holds weekly meetings with students during designated consultation hours. These schedules are available on the webpage of each faculty. During these meetings, students receive guidance on their projects, including research, personal development projects, Bachelor's thesis, dissertations, etc.

- Center for Career Counseling and Guidance (CCOC): The university operates a CCOC, which follows specific regulations for its organization and functioning. The CCOC offers career counseling and guidance services at various campuses, including Bucharest, Braşov, Constanţa, Craiova, and Câmpulung. The CCOC collaborates with career counseling and guidance commissions within the university's structure, comprising teaching staff members, psychologists, and career counselors. SHU has a dedicated web page for the Career Counseling and Guidance (https://ccoc.spiruharet.ro/).

During the academic year 2021-2022, the central office of the CCOC conducted 312 individual educational and career counseling sessions with BA, MA students, and graduates. These sessions aimed to help students understand their skills, interests, educational paths, presentation skills, and potential career directions. Group meetings addressing various aspects of career guidance, psychological support, educational counseling, personal development, and vocational counseling were also organized, both in-person and virtually.

- Employer Engagement: The university facilitated meetings between students and employers, focusing on topics related to employability and the development of transversal competencies and entrepreneurial skills. Thematic workshops were organized to help students acquire essential skills for designing research and gain

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fundamental knowledge in scientific research.

Spiru Haret University collaborates with external partners to provide students with practical training opportunities, aligning with ARACIS standards. The university's academic staff fosters student engagement and interaction.

Spiru Haret University actively monitors the employment of its graduates, with a significant percentage (76.05% of BA program graduates and 90.94% of MA program graduates) securing employment related to their field of study within two years of graduation.

During the meeting with graduates, most of them mentioned the fact that they are unhappy about the SHU unfavorable image in the media, disagree with this and would like to change it. The graduates, are in general satisfied by the quality of studies obtained at SHU and have good feedback on their learning experience, quality of the teaching staff, the connection with the professors.

Even though the university has an ALUMNI network, none of the invited students and graduates to the meeting with the evaluation committee were not members of the network or participated in an event organized by the SHU Alumni network. Additionally, graduates could not confirm weather they are invited/ consulted in the update/improvement of the curriculum or course contents (at least those present to the meeting with the evaluation committee were not contacted by the university in this regard).

Being asked what recommendations they have for the improvement of the educational process within the university, the following recommendations were formulated:

- SHU to deliver better and more tailored career orientations
- To better promote the university performances at the national level, to enhance the role of Alumni in promoting the image of the university.

During the meeting with employers (representatives of the National Association for Children and Adults with Autism, the Labor Inspectorate of Bucharest, companies in the field of veterinary medicine, Sports Club, psyhologists, etc), they have shown appreciation to the quality of students they host for the students interships and to the competencies of the graduates. The discussions with employers highlighted strong relationship between SHU and employers, emphasizing the value of practical training, the success of alumni in various fields, and the positive impact of SHU graduates in the workforce. The collaboration extends to guest lectures and employment opportunities, fostering a mutually beneficial connection between the university and the business community.

Furthermore, some employers mentioned that they were consulted in the development of a master's program, where they provided input on relevant disciplines, such as public finance and budgeting. However, most employers noted that there are no formalized mechanisms for collecting their feedback, and any input provided tends to be sporadic.

Despite the good appreciation of students/graduates, representatives of employers came with several recommendations:

- To update curriculum considering the suggested improvements of the employers recommendations, to update the course content and align it with legislative changes and industry-specific developments.

- To involve more actively the employers in the curriculum planning/uodating to ensure it meets the demands of the job market.

- To enhance the preparation of psychology graduates for their professional careers entry;

- To introduce in the curriculum the ethics-related courses.

Comments/Recommendations:

- The present number of students is certainly lower than it was in the earlier periods, but still seem to be enough to keep the operation of the institution in balance. From strategic point of view, it is an important priority to keep this level of students in the next years and with the diversification of the educational supply to grow if it is possible.

- To enhance structured collaboration between SHU and the business community to further align educational offerings with the evolving needs of the job market. In this regard, it is recommended to establish an advisory consortium/board with the business community at the faculty or university level to facilitate information exchange regarding academic and research processes, on the one hand, and the trends of the real economy and labor market, on the other one. This would also help SHU faculty staff to constantly update the content of the courses and align it with legislative changes and industry-specific developments, develop joint reesearch projects, involve employers in establishing reesearch topics/case studies within the courses, topics for graduations thesis, etc.

- To update curriculum considering the suggested improvements of the employers recommendations, to update the course content;

- Foster ongoing relationships with employers to promote lifelong learning and skills development.

- To deliver better and more tailored career orientations

- To better promote the university performances at the national level, to enhance the role of Alumni in promoting the image of the university.

- To enhance the preparation of psychology graduates for their professional careers entry;

- To introduce in the curriculum the ethics-related courses.

Research

The university's primary goal is to enhance its standing as an academic and research

institution, both nationally and internationally, aiming to be recognized among advanced research universities.

The university's research is guided by its research strategy for the period 2021-2027, its institutional development plan, and a digitalization strategy. These strategies align with national and European research and education policies and initiatives. The university's research strategy is tailored at the faculty and specialty level, focusing on the specific areas of its accredited study programs and the needs of the economic and social environment.

SHU conducts scientific research while upholding ethics and best practices. It employs an anti-plagiarism tool called BB-SafeAssign to maintain research integrity.

The university operates 12 research centers within its faculties and departments, serving as administrative structures for managing RDI activities and projects. These centers are equipped and follow legal provisions and quality standards. They function independently, with coordination from the Central Scientific Research Institute (ICCS). The ICCS is led by the vice-chancellor and evaluates research results at the institutional level, with reports displayed on the university's website.

The research centres use the structure of the yearly research scientific plan available on the website (http://cercetare.spiruharet.ro) – the section Research management for drafting the yearly scientific research plans, as per the own research strategy. Research activities are conducted by teams of researchers, teaching-research staff, MA students, and BA students, often based on the specific objectives of research projects. The involvement of faculty and staff in research activities is generally mandatory.

The university collaborates with both in-house entities and external organizations to carry out RDI projects and to enhance its visibility at national and international levels. These entities are involved in various aspects of research, development, innovation, and knowledge transfer.

SHU utilizes several regulations, procedures, and digital tools to maintain and assess research quality and the qualifications of those involved. These mechanisms include:

- The Regulation for Organizing and Conducting Scientific Research Activities at Spiru Haret University.
- The Regulation for the Organization and Functioning of the Senate Commission for Education and Scientific Research at Spiru Haret University.
- Procedures for the Evaluation and Approval of Scientific Research Results.
- The SMICEC (System for Institutional Monitoring of Quality in Education and Scientific Research) information system.
- The SAPIC (System for Self-Assessment of Performance in Education and Scientific Research) information system.

SHU's commitment to maintaining research quality and human resources is exemplified by the "HR Excellence in Research" logo awarded by the European Commission, which acknowledges their alignment with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. SHU has adhered to these principles since

December 2011.

The university allocates resources for research in terms of human and material resources. Human resources mainly consist of teaching staff with experience in RDI specific to the targeted areas. Financial resources (mostly coming from the budget of implemented projects) cover salary costs for research time, administration costs for research projects, and co-financing for sustainability. Material resources include necessary facilities, equipment, and infrastructure. For the staff that is not involved in the externally funded projects, the university does not have dedicated grants and other types of financial support from its own revenues to cover the research-related costs of the teaching staff.

SHU currently has 11 active scientific publications, with nine of them published in English and indexed in international scientific databases. Some notable publications include "The Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series," "Journal of Academic Research in Economics," "Journal of Applied Economic Sciences," and "Journal of Economic Development, Environment, and People."

SHU aimed to integrate further into the European academic environment, enhance its involvement in ERA's (European Research Area) development, and transform research into an economic driver. To achieve these goals, the university made several accomplishments:

Researchers-teaching staff members presented scientific communications at 44 conferences organized by faculties.

SHU secured funding through competition for 47 projects, involving approximately 66 researchers-teaching staff members.

Funding for scientific research activities comes from both internal and external sources. Internal funding, allocated by SHU, supports fundamental and applied research, organization of scientific events, consortia and partnerships, and payment of own contributions for projects. External funding is obtained through competitive proposals for national and European programs such as Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, Erasmus Plus, and The European Social Fund (ESF).[3]

SHU successfully obtained non-reimbursable funding for these projects, totaling approximately 219.93 million lei (around 44.63 million euros), with around 14.37 million lei (approximately 2.92 million euros) allocated for research within these projects.

SHU's research activities during 2018-2022 are focused on three major directions: fundamental research, applied research, and technological and knowledge transfer. These encompass international projects, postgraduate programs, scientific and technological development, educational resources, and consultancy programs. The university's goal is to enhance the quality of education, promote research, and prepare graduates for the dynamic

[3] http://cercetare.spiruharet.ro/cercetare/proiecte_internationale_parteneriate.pdf,
http://cercetare.spiruharet.ro/cercetare/Proiecte_POCU.pdf,
http://cercetare.spiruharet.ro/cercetare/mobilitati_ERASMUS.pdf,
http://cercetare.spiruharet.ro/cercetare/Proiect_ANELIS_Plus.pdf;

labor market, adhering to national and international trends in education and RDI.

Students and professor have access to the antiplagiarism system through the e-learning platform/Blackboard which runs the anti-plagiarism system SafeAsign

The Ethics and University Deontology Code of the teaching, research staff and students of Spiru Haret University stands for the chapter IX of the Charter (https://www.spiruharet.ro/data/carta_ush.pdf) and represents a set of compulsory principles, regulations and moral and professional conduct rules, which must govern the activity of the staff within the university community, based on the legal provisions in force and on the regulations that draw upon the European space for higher education and scientific research and the ethical principles accepted by the international scientific community.

According to the Activity reports of the Ethics Commission (Annex no. 158 Activity reports of the University Ethics Commission), at Spiru Haret University there were no breaches of the Ethics and university deontology code. However, during the meeting with the University Ethics Commission, it was found that even though, at one moment, non-ethical information about persons affiliated to the university was circulated in national media sources, the ethics committee was not convened and the regulations in place were not applied.

Comments/Recommendations:

- For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific research and educational fields SHU must manage the existing connections and develop new ones in accordance with the institution's strategic goals.
- Set up initiatives at the level of the USH to cover (at least partially) the teaching staff' expenses for publishing in high impact journals or participation to international conferences;

Internationalization

Spiru Haret University meets The National Strategy for the internationalization of the educational process and for increasing academic mobility. To this end, the University dimensioned its academic structure and material base as per the number of foreign students for whom it got a favourable approval from the Ministry of Education. SHU has an Internationalization strategy for 2021-2027 (https://www.spiruharet.ro/data/strategii/strategia_de_internationalizare_2021-2027.pdf)

SHU aims at consolidating its position at global and intercultural levels and at promoting the principles of international cooperation and mobility of its members of the teaching staff, students and of ideas in all dimensions. The university follows specific methodologies and procedures to manage student academic mobility, including the recognition of study periods completed abroad. The university have signed many cooperation protocols/partnership agreements with

academic and economic organizations, both nationally and internationally. At the international level, within Erasmus + programme (KA 103/131), 31 cooperation protocols are signed with universities from Spain, Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland, Belgium, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia and are aiming to facilitate academic mobilities for internships for almost all study programs.

In the evaluated period, 47 members of the teaching staff participated in Erasmus + mobilities, out of which 22 were teaching mobilities, while 25 mobilities were training-based (Table 3).

Tabel 3. SHU Outgoing Teaching staff mobilities within the ERASMUS Programme (KA103)

Nr. crt.	Contract Erasmus	Nr. mobilities	Value of total support, Euro	Value of the total support, lei
1	ERASMUS+ KA131/2023(1 stagiu/ 980 euro, 4.96 lei/euro)	1 mobilities (training)	980 euro	4,868,34 lei
2	ERASMUS+ KA131/2021 (14mobilities/ 13,175.00 euro, 4.93lei/ euro)	14 mobilities (6 teaching, 8 training)	13,175,00 euro	64,952,75 lei
3	ERASMUS+ KA103/2020(4 mobilities /3,615.00 euro)	4 mobilities (1 teaching, 3 training)	3,615.00 euro	17,641,20 lei
4	ERASMUS+ KA103/2018(12 mobilities/ 11,030.00 euro)	12 mobilities (7 teaching, 5 training)	11,030.00 euro	51,841.00 lei
5	ERASMUS+ KA103-2017(16 mobilities/ 14,110.00 euro)	16 mobilities (8 teaching, 8 training)	14,110.00 €	66,317.00 lei

Considering the profile of the SHU students, most of them opt for the internship mobilities. In the period of 2018-2023, 63 students participated in academic mobilities, out of which 7 were for studies, while the rest were the 2-3 months internship mobilities (Table 4). All these mobilities were carried put and financially covered by the Erasmus +KA projects that the university is implementing.

Table 4. SHU outgoing students within ERASMUS Programme (KA103)

Nr. crt.	Contract Erasmus	Nr. mobilities	Value of support, euro	Value of support, lei
1	ERASMUS+ KA131/2023	2 (1 studies, 1 internships)	8,369.00 €	28,165,04 lei
2	ERASMUS+ KA131/2021 -2022	14 (14 internships)	24,375.00 €	120,168.75 lei
3	ERASMUS+ KA103/2020	9 (1 studies, 8 internships)	13,886.00 €	67,763,68 lei
4	ERASMUS+ KA103/2018	17 (4 studies, 13 internships)	29,400.00€	138,180.00 lei
5	ERASMUS+ KA103-2017	21 (1 studies, 20 internships)	31,283.00 €	147,030,10 lei

During the evaluated period, SHU hosted approx. 50 incoming students, the majority of which coming for internship. The incoming students for study mobilities, do preparatory year, during which they study Romanian language.

Through its internationalization strategy, SHU promotes internationalization at home. In this regard, SHU has designed few study programs in English language (which have been accredited). However, no students were enrolled at these programs and, therefore, these programs are not active.

Additionally, SHU implements several research and capacity building projects financed from EU funds, that are implemented in consortium with universities from different countries.

SHU concluded a cooperation agreement with the Santa Clarita Community College District, a college district in California, with the goal that in the academic year 2022-2023 to organize graduate study programmes of joint type of double diploma for promoting internationalization and for encouraging innovation and education within the institution (Annex no. 1 The cooperation agreement between the Santa Clarita Community College District and Spiru Haret University).

Comments/Recommendations:

- In the future it is recommended to strengthen the existing connections with local and international actors and developing new ones that could lead more intensive national and international visibility.
- SHU has to strengthen the presence of the institution in international university ratings and increase the number of international students.

Quality Management

SHU has an ongoing Quality Assurance Strategy that is regularly updated. This strategy outlines the principles, responsibilities, objectives, and action directions aimed at fostering an internal culture of quality assurance and ensuring the quality of various university activities. The strategy encompasses areas such as education, scientific research, human resources, international cooperation, quality management, financial resources, and the material base.

The university's Quality Evaluation and Assurance Committees (CEAC) operate at different levels. The University Senate's CEAC oversees the implementation of quality assurance strategies and policies, aligning with the university's mission and international standards. The Department for Quality Management (DMC) collaborates with CEAC and focuses on the evaluation, assurance, and auditing of the educational process quality.

Each faculty has its Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (CEACF), which oversees quality at the faculty level. These committees include both teaching staff and students and continually evaluate the quality of the educational process and student outcomes.

The University Senate's Commission for Quality Internal Audit (CAIC) conducts internal audits to assess the effectiveness of quality management procedures. Faculty-level internal audit committees work in tandem with CAIC, providing audit reports and implementing

recommendations.

SHU has established a holistic Quality Management System (QMS), comprising sets of rules, system procedures, operational procedures, and methodologies. These elements serve as a reference for maintaining and assessing the functionality of the QMS.

Students play an active role in quality evaluation and assurance processes. They can address their concerns through CEACF, and procedures are in place for addressing non-conforming products or services, corrective actions, and preventive actions.

SHU involves all stakeholders, including decision-makers, faculty, staff, and students, in complying with regulatory requirements, performance standards, and indicators. The university adopts an operational plan to monitor and ensure compliance with legal criteria and regulatory standards.

SHU follows a structured approach to initiate, monitor, and revise study programs, ensuring that they meet the demands of the labor market, student satisfaction, and educational quality standards.

This process is guided by a set of rules outlined in "The Set of Rules for Initiating, Approving, Monitoring, and Evaluating Study Programs," approved by the University Senate.

The Directorate for the General Secretariat of the University creates an annual calendar for evaluating study programs, primarily focusing on administrative controls and ensuring compliance with legal deadlines.

Evaluation procedures include assessing students' satisfaction, graduates' satisfaction, and employers' satisfaction. The quality of teaching activities is also evaluated by students, leading to potential revisions of study programs.

Internal audits of study program quality are carried out by Audit Commissions based on the Yearly Audit Plan approved by the Senate.

Procedures are in place to continually improve course materials and teaching methods through evaluations by students, peer evaluations, and assessments by department heads. The results of these evaluations are found in yearly reports.

The correspondence between diplomas and qualifications is a key aspect of this process, and the university actively engages with employers, students, and regulatory authorities to achieve these goals.

Study programs are designed to meet the demands of university and graduate qualifications, providing employment and professional development opportunities for graduates. Diplomas awarded to students align with their graduate qualifications and are correlated with the CNC levels of qualifications.

The university reviews its study programs periodically to ensure they correspond with changes in the graduate and professional qualification market.

SHU ensures that its student evaluation procedures are well-defined, transparent, and in line

with ECTS principles. The university employs a variety of assessment methods to gauge student learning and provides mechanisms for challenging exam results. The ongoing formative evaluation provides continuous feedback on teaching quality.

Spiru Haret University maintains rigorous rules for student examination procedures, outlined in "The Set of Rules regarding students' professional activity" and "The Set of Rules on the examination of students and grading." They employ various evaluation methods, including written and oral exams, tests, and practical assessments, with exams and colloquia supervised by at least two staff members, including a subject's tenured staff.

Subject fiches detail evaluation criteria, methods, weightage, and grading procedures, ensuring transparency and providing this information to students. Students have the right to challenge exam results, and the university follows specific procedures for this, including graduation exams.

The university adheres to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and follows established rules for its application, facilitating credit transfer.

The evaluation of the teaching staff by students is compulsory and is carried out every semester based on the questionnaire for the evaluation of teaching staff's activity by the students approved by the University Senate, included in The Procedure for the evaluation of the teaching staff by students (Annex no. 139 The Procedure for the evaluation of the teaching staff by students), and the date collected are cumulated in a summary table and processed by the staff in charge with quality assurance at department level. The evaluations measure teaching staff compatibility with student expectations. The results are processed, analyzed at the faculty level, and discussed with individual teaching staff members.

Additionally, teaching staff members assess their performance using the SAPIC self-assessment system, which provides data regarding activities aimed at improving educational processes and achieving performance objectives. These assessments are sent for verification and validation to university management structures. Each teaching staff member undergoes a yearly multicriteria evaluation. This evaluation combines input from student evaluation, peer evaluation, self-assessment, and others to provide quantitative assessments. The results contribute to evaluating individual professional performance.

The university's Quality Management System is built upon approved structures and documents designed for quality evaluation and assurance, sanctioned by the University Senate. The University's Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance operates under established rules and guidelines, overseeing the implementation of procedures and producing annual internal evaluation reports. These reports, approved by the University Senate, are made accessible on the University's website. The Commission plays a pivotal role in supporting the University's management to continually enhance institutional quality standards. Proposals for improvements are formulated by the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance, and the University consistently implements these measures. At the faculty level, similar structures produce their yearly reports and initiate quality

improvements based on recommendations from both the Senate's Commission and ARACIS's external commission. Spiru Haret University actively collaborates with national and foreign institutions to identify and adopt best practices in education, administration, and research processes, further enhancing quality evaluation and assurance.

Spiru Haret University maintains a continuous monitoring system to ensure compliance with the mandatory regulatory requirements and performance standards outlined by ARACIS for evaluating its BA programs and MA areas. This monitoring primarily involves administrative checks, focusing on adherence to legal deadlines for accreditation and periodic evaluations. The University undergoes annual external audits of its Quality Management System. Notably, Spiru Haret University of Bucharest holds Certificate 611C, confirming conformity with the SR EN ISO 9001:2015 standard for higher education at both BA and MA levels. This certification extends to scientific research, quality management, adult training and professional development, project management, and audit processes. The University consistently renews this certification by undergoing on-site audits to evaluate, maintain, and enhance the Quality Management System, covering all areas and processes. Additionally, the institution is certified under the SR ISO 37001:2017 standard for its anti-bribery system, as validated through thorough audits.

Comments/Recommendations:

- Reviewing the structure and activities of quality assurance of the institution, these processes seem to operate well, but it is important to point out that the main principle and objective must be that quality assurance become an integral part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus permanently.
- Responsiveness of the QA systems to the students' evaluation impact is evident and accordingly recommended.
- Enhance the extent of QA tools for analyzing processes and impact of SHU activities and operations, e.g. Examination results, Student satisfaction (Services), peer evaluation, etc.
- Ensure that all additional quality-related processes "close the loop" by implementing a full PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle.

Conclusions: *Alongside the demographic trends during the last five years, SHU shows a slight degree of enrollment trends. However, by maintaining satellite campuses, SHU supports community development with a wide geographic range.*
The Self Evaluation Report is comprehensive, very readable, and covers beyond areas and topics related to the accreditation process. However, it would be suggested to enhance the level of analytics and self-investigation to ensure continuous improvement at the recommendable level.
The range of offered study programs is wide and in alignment with the university's mission. However, some revisions shall be considered to ensure the agility of the offer and the efficiency of operations.

The SHU has a rich and impressive facilities that enables the educational and research process to be carried out and achieve its strategic objectives. The University should focus on maintaining the present situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work in an optimal situation to meet the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development. Further decline of the total number of students could result a decision-making point, so the management of the university must make steps to avoid this situation.

SHU has several collaboration partnerships with the business environment, mainly being oriented to ensure internship places for its students. The recommendation is to continue to enhance structured collaboration between SHU and the business community to further align educational offerings with the evolving needs of the job market. In this regard, it is recommended to establish an advisory consortium/board with the business community at the faculty or university level to facilitate information exchange regarding academic and research processes, on the one hand, and the trends of the real economy and labor market, on the other one. This would also help SHU faculty staff to constantly update the content of the courses and align it with legislative changes and industry-specific developments, develop joint reesearch projects, involve employers in establishing reesearch topics/case studies within the courses, topics for graduations thesis, etc

Considering the high competition in the educational sector, in order to keep its comparative advantage SHU might need to explore the alternative tools to attract young faculty staff, but also experienced teaching staff in competitive disciplines that may include campaigns, special scarcity allowances, or tailored contracts to enable dual employment (in the company and at the university).Additionally, in order to promote further excellence in education in research, SHU is recommended to design and put in place support initiatives for publication and dissemination of the university's staff research results.

In the future, it is recommended to strengthen the existing connections with local and international actors and developing new ones that could lead more intensive national and international visibility.

SHU has in place QA procedures and tools *especially from the quality evaluation perspective. Still there is room for improvement, particularly it is recommended to ensure that all additional quality-related processes "close the loop" by implementing a full PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle.

Finally, the overall impression after the visit provides the trust that the leadership, and the university at large, possess the sufficient capacity for stable growth aligned with the national and international standards of academic quality and rigor.

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