



**REPORT
of the Expert Panel
on the
RE-ACCREDITATION OF
UNIVERSITY OF DUBROVNIK
Department of Mass Communication**

**Date of the site visit:
21st of May 2014**

July, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

This report on the re-accreditation of the Department of Mass Communication University of Dubrovnik was written by the Expert Panel appointed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education, on the basis of the self-evaluation of the institution and supporting documentation and a visit to the institution.

Re-accreditation procedure performed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), a public body listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) and ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) full member, is obligatory once in five years for all higher education institutions working in the Republic of Croatia, in line with the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Expert Panel is appointed by the ASHE Accreditation Council, an independent expert body, to perform an independent peer-review-based evaluation of the institution and their study programs.

The report contains:

- a brief analysis of the institutional advantages and disadvantages,
- a list of good practices found at the institution,
- recommendations for institutional improvement and measures to be implemented in the following period (and checked within a follow-up procedure), and
- detailed analysis of the compliance to the Standards and Criteria for Re-Accreditation.

The members of the Expert Panel were:

- Associate Professor Robert Wallace Vaagan, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo, Kingdom of Norway (chairperson)
- Professor Erika Harris, Department of Politics, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Professor Kevin Deegan Krause, Department of Political Science, Wayne State University, Detroit, United States of America
- Professor Kate Lacey, School of Media, Film and Music, University of Sussex, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Andrea Vulić, student, Department of Tourism and Communication Sciences, University of Zadar, Croatia

In the analysis of the documentation, site visit and writing of the report the Panel was supported by the ASHE staff:

- Viktorija Juriša, coordinator
- Đurđica Dragojević, translator

During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups:

- The Management;
- The Working Group that compiled the Self-Evaluation and Committee for internal quality assurance and improvement system;
- The students;
- Full-time teachers;
- Teaching assistants;
- Leaders of research projects

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, IT rooms, student register desk, student radio “UNIDU”, and the classrooms at the Department of Mass Communication University of Dubrovnik.

Upon completion of re-accreditation procedure, the Accreditation Council renders its opinion on the basis of the Re-accreditation Report, an Assessment of Quality of the higher education institution and the Report of Fulfilment of Quantitative Criteria which is acquired by the Agency's information system.

Once the Accreditation Council renders its opinion, the Agency issues an Accreditation Recommendation by which the Agency recommends to the Minister of Science, Education and Sports to:

1. **issue a confirmation** to the higher education institution, which confirms that the higher education institution meets the requirements for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities, in case the Accreditation Recommendation is positive,
2. **deny a license** for performing the higher education activities or parts of activities to the higher education institution, in case the Accreditation Recommendation is negative, or
3. **issue a letter of recommendation** for the period up to three (3) years in which period the higher education institution should remove its deficiencies. For the higher education institution the letter of recommendation may include the suspension of student enrolment for the defined period.

The Accreditation Recommendation also includes an Assessment of Quality of the higher education institution as well as recommendations for quality development

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATED INSTITUTION

NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Department of Mass Communication University of Dubrovnik

ADDRESS: Branitelja Dubrovnika 29 and 41, 20000 Dubrovnik

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: Prof Vesna Vrtiprah, DSc, Rector / Đorđe Obradović, DSc, Head of Department

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE: Integrated University

LIST OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (and levels): Undergraduate study programme Media and Social Culture, Graduate Study Programmes Media and Public Relations

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: part-time: 66 /full-time: 153 /graduates: 40 (Self-evaluation report, table 3.1.)

NUMBER OF TEACHERS: full-time: 10, external associates:

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS (doctors of science, elected to grades, full-time)

TOTAL BUDGET (in kunas):

MSES FUNDING (percentage):

OWN FUNDING (percentage):

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

The management at the University level consists of: Rector, Senate and University Council, and at Department level: Department Councils and Heads of Departments.

Mass Communication Department of the University of Dubrovnik is a constituent part of the University of Dubrovnik and it is not a legal entity. The main function of University Department could be compared with a Faculty within a University that is not integrated. Nevertheless, the crucial difference is in the fact that University of Dubrovnik fully integrates the function of its constituent units, contrary to faculties that are legal entities. Financial management is controlled at the University level. Departments do not have financial independence, the resources are allocated per annum in accordance with the plan made by the Senate. The Department shares lecture rooms and other rooms with other Departments, teachers from other Departments participate in teaching activities at the Mass Communication Department (in particular from the Maritime Department and Department of Economics and Business Economics) and all support services of the Rector's Office are shared (financial and accounting services, marketing activities, human resources, library, information and technical support, publications etc.)

FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXPERT PANEL FOR THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

ADVANTAGES (STRONG POINTS)

Strategies for international cooperation, research and quality control are in place. The department has a very attractive location, a full-time staff of 8 (soon 9) with PhDs and several available assistant teachers, some with PhDs. Teacher-student ratios are good and students are very supportive of their teachers. The students are extrovert, many speak excellent English and they seem well motivated and also satisfied with the present undergraduate and graduate study programmes. There is some incoming mobility of students and lecturers. The university and department are integrated, allowing for resource sharing which in some cases works to the advantage of the department. Resource-sharing is also seen regarding the mentoring of PhD candidates from Dubrovnik in information science at The University of Osijek and The Catholic University of Zagreb. The department plays an important regional role and despite high average unemployment figures, it is well positioned to supply the “tourism monoculture” labour market with skilled candidates.

DISADVANTAGES (WEAK POINTS)

As the university and department are fully aware of, severe funding problems limit the possibilities of research, recruitment and other activities. Academic staff lack adequate library resources and Research Office support, and are in general not involved enough in international research. No member of the academic staff has led a research project over the last 5 years. 20 university-level cooperation agreements and 40 Erasmus agreements are not being fully exploited. Despite EU membership from 1 July 2013, academic staff are still not engaged in EU Horizon2020 research projects and continue to publish mainly in Croatian. Although e.g. Medianali accepts English-language articles, and although there is interest internationally for Croatian empirical material, there is little effort towards a more extrovert publishing strategy. These shortcomings mean that there is at present not enough research-based activity or full-time professors in department to support desired PhD programmes in Public Relations and Corporate Communication. In the face of these considerable challenges it is important not become too introvert and blame lack of resources instead of exploiting available resources through creative thinking on teaching, assessment and research.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY

1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

- 1.1. Clearer distinction in documentation of difference between department-specific and university-pooled resources. Consider changing name of department from «Mass Communication» to «Media and Communication».
- 1.2. Not applicable at department level.
- 1.3. Not applicable at department level.
- 1.4. Strive to improve quality in all areas, especially where PhDs are envisaged.
- 1.5. Strengthen cooperation with NGOs and increase partnerships with business. This could increase number of student internships. Work with the representative from Trade appointed by the Chamber of Commerce sitting on the Internal Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee.
- 1.6. Improve assessment with faculty peer review. Require some form of self assessment by external experts.
- 1.7. Staff central research office (consider partnerships for research development if necessary). Fully implement plans for faculty cooperation, peer presentations.
- 1.8. Adopt APA referencing and citation system, including guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism, in both teaching and research.

2. Study Programmes

- 2.1. See to greater monitoring of workshop instructors, equity of marking across courses, peer observation and sharing of best practices. Peer observation and mentoring could help.
- 2.2. Continue monitoring student opinion on class size.
- 2.3. Better documentation and operationalization of “the needs of society”, using e.g. alumni and/or polls.
- 2.4. Clearer statement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competencies) and progression through undergraduate and graduate programs. The English-language course on Media convergence lacks details.
- 2.5. Monitor transferrable and employability skills, as well as academic-study skills, program level learning outcomes and also workshop design and assessment. Ensure that assignments test learning.
- 2.6. Reconsider and adjust allocation of ECTS credits to eliminate asymmetries in course workload. Consider merging some courses into bigger 10-15 credit courses.
- 2.7. Work through international editors of Medianali and Circle network to improve journal resources and use these for course content as well as existing handbooks.
- 2.8. Continue good work on multiple means of learning, with class discussions, field trips etc. Consider joining The Global Class (<http://www.theglobalclass.org>) for video conferencing.
- 2.9. Use Open Access journals (Directory of Open Access Journals <http://doaj.org>) with almost 10,000 free journals.

- 2.10. Try to expand internships through vocational teachers, cooperation with NGOs and the business community.

3. Students

- 3.1. Continue monitoring student admission qualifications, learning outcomes through undergraduate and graduate studies and labour market needs.
- 3.2. Continue supporting student activities, especially vocational-related media and communication activities.
- 3.3. Involve Student Council and alumni.
- 3.4. Reconsider extra-curricular credits and procedures. Use intranet to enhance transparency.
- 3.5. Try to use alumni and successful graduates to develop mentorships/internships.
- 3.6. Use student radio, TV and newspaper to disseminate information also about department. Develop student internships with marketing and publishing service (*Služba za marketing i izdavaštvo*).
- 3.7. Continue good work.
- 3.8. Continue good work.

4. Teachers

- 4.1. The full-time staff need to improve quality of incentives for scientific publishing in prestigious, international journals and publishing houses.
- 4.2. Try to cope with veto on new appointments and teaching workload by introducing peer reviews and colleague assessment in classroom.
- 4.3. Continue good work.
- 4.4. An incentive system for publishing in prestigious journals and with publishing houses should be introduced.
- 4.5. Workload allocation seems fair, but try to include peer evaluation to update and improve further teaching skills, e.g. using video conferencing (*Global Class*).
- 4.6. Consider reinforcing guidelines with document on avoidance of "Conflict of interest" (if not implemented already).

5. Scientific and Professional Activity

- 5.1. Increase efforts to implement research strategy, use 20 available university-level cooperation agreements and 40 Erasmus agreements. Continue PhD mentoring at The University of Osijek and The Catholic University of Zagreb.

- 5.2. Use potential in 5.1 and introduce incentives to publish internationally.
- 5.3. Much more research activity and more department professors are needed to implement plans of PhD programs.
- 5.4. Increase international publishing.
- 5.5. Try to generate some success stories in publishing and a reward system that may encourage university to reallocate resources.
- 5.6. It depends on the department's goals, but improvement will require considerable attention by the department.
- 5.7. See 5.1. Also pursue actively Horizon2020 potential.
- 5.8. Continue good work .
- 5.9. Try to staff Research Office (e.g. with part-time graduate students) and keep abreast of Horizon2020 calls for strategic partnerships and collaborative projects.
- 5.10. Use PhD mentoring provided by The University of Osijek and The Catholic University of Zagreb in information science to increase number of PhDs.

6. International Cooperation and Mobility

- 6.1. Continue good work within Croatia and try also to increase two-way international student mobility.
- 6.2. Increase outward mobility with Erasmus exchange partners and expand inward mobility with students from more EU partner countries.
- 6.3. If department wants to lead in research, it will have to actively fund research. It is necessary to make far more active use of 20 existing cooperation agreements with other universities and 40 Erasmus agreements.
- 6.4. Do far more work integrating Dubrovnik Media Day opportunities and in particular scanning all IUC courses and conferences for potential visiting faculty.
- 6.5. Improve existing 16 English-language courses to attract more international students and faculty. Consider joining Global Class video-conferencing.
- 6.6. Use Erasmus mobility stipends for two-way exchange of students and faculty.
- 6.7. Join Erasmus+ project as partner to gain experience, then progress to become network administrator.

7. Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance

- 7.1. More funding is necessary to improve a number of functions, notable library resources, TV studio and Research Office.
- 7.2. Consider reallocating resources from some physical space resources (except perhaps the dorm) to Research Office support functions.

- 7.3. Engage in EU-funded projects which can provide administrative staff with training and experience.
- 7.4. Not applicable.
- 7.5. Maximise use of free public domain software (Moodle is being used) and Open Access journals.
- 7.6. More funding for university library is necessary.
- 7.7. With some success stories in research and scientific publishing, the University may allocate more resources to department.
- 7.8. The University should consider reallocating some resources to support faculty research in particular.

DETAILED ANALYSIS BASED ON STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

1. Institutional management and quality assurance

- 1.1. The Department of Mass Communication is not a legal entity but an integrated part of the University of Dubrovnik and follows the overall strategy of the university, including research and quality assurance. The Department therefore draws on the pooled resources of the university and of other universities, such as the PhD mentoring in information science provided by The University of Osijek and The Catholic University of Zagreb (Self-evaluation p.2). In some cases, this makes it difficult to assess department-specific resources and ratios. For instance, the department lists 8 teachers with academic rank yet includes “three teachers from other departments” (p.104, Self-evaluation). The Head of Department stated that his unit only started in 2004, and needs until 2022 to “reach maturity”.
- 1.2. Effective organizational structure and processes appear to be in place.
- 1.3. Not applicable at departmental level
- 1.4. The allocation of credits plus the vocational bias of many courses may not fully meet the goals of the profession or the highest standards of the field, esp. regarding Public Relations where the department states it wants to develop a PhD.
- 1.5. Quality policy and procedures are in place, but faculty members working on quality control could actively and specifically report better on quality control: In the Self-evaluation report p.21 under the reported results in 2013 by the Internal Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee there is no mention of the Department of Mass Communication.
- 1.6. The department computes average scores for teaching quality. Student and self evaluations seem to be functional and system is stated to allow monitoring of each teacher and course. But peer reviews among teachers could be significantly improved. Teacher self-assessment is resisted by external teachers, and in these cases it is not enough to recommend students who may complain, to switch courses.

- 1.7. Mechanisms to monitor and improve research have some promising features (e.g. growing number of PhDs) but remain vague and need active attention to implementation. It is a major problem that the central research office has never been staffed. There is e.g. no central monitoring or dissemination of calls for research projects in EU.
- 1.8. A University Code of ethics is in place, but evidence suggests few complaints, perhaps due to informal mechanisms and small communities. This means that there is less need to test ethics mechanisms, so it is difficult to evaluate. BA and MA dissertations shown to panel do not reflect adopted or recommended bibliographic standards such as APA, which includes plagiarism issues. It is also not clear how the monitoring mechanisms are fed back to students.

2. Study programmes

- 2.1. Students express strong satisfaction with outcomes and attest to functioning of quality of monitoring. Department appears to be able to respond actively and appropriately to any issues that arise.
- 2.2. Class sizes are appropriate.
- 2.3. Class sizes are appropriate and cited as advantage by the students.
- 2.4. Learning outcomes seem extremely descriptive, and could be improved with clearer statement of knowledge, skills and competencies as well as learning outcome progression through undergraduate and graduate programs.
- 2.5. As a consequence of 2.4, there is room for improvement in terms of the appropriateness of assessment of learning outcomes at the level of qualification. Consider also creating joint programmes with other departments, along the line of 'Media and....' Public Relation and....'. At graduate level this could be done even with institutions outside Dubrovnik.
- 2.6. Students reported significant asymmetry among courses in workload. Courses range from 2-3 ECTS (undergraduate study programme in Media and Social Culture) and 3-6 ECTS (graduate study programmes in Media and in Public relations). Yet many courses with same ECTS appear to vary in terms of content and workload.
- 2.7. There is overreliance on translated books and textbooks without significant reference to recent, updated journal articles. English-language materials tend to be handbooks rather than advanced content or even textbooks.
- 2.8. Students report strong use of multiple means of learning including active class discussions, field trips and other methods.
- 2.9. Extremely poor library resources, lack of multiple copies of key books, lack of online journal access combine to prevent further development in this area.
- 2.10. Vocational education efforts are rather strong, with students involved in local firms, but students argue that they still do not have enough practical experience. First three years appear to have enough support but students say that final two-graduate years do not have sufficient internship opportunities.

3. Students

- 3.1. Department is in close touch with especially the regional labour market (cf. “tourism industry monoculture”, p.22 in Self-evaluation) and most recruits now hail from region. Student recruitment from other parts of Croatia is limited by university’s regional focus, and recruitment from Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Montenegrin students is limited through new Croatian state exams.
- 3.2. Both at university and department level there is strong support of extracurricular activity, and there are many student associations. Students are credited for working in radio stations (Radio Dubrovnik, Radio Ragusa), TV channels (Dubrovnik television plus UNIDU television which is to start soon) or in print media such as Medianali and the UNIDU Alumni university paper etc.
- 3.3. Both at university and department level there is strong support of counselling, mentoring and extending professional orientation services to students, partly through The Student Counselling Centre.
- 3.4. Extra-credit procedures and crediting of extracurricular work may be overly generous and should be more firmly codified and transparent
- 3.5. Department uses figures from central authority and has an alumni authority.
- 3.6. The University does this through its marketing and publishing service (*Služba za marketing i izdavaštvo*).
- 3.7. Student response suggests strong satisfaction with procedures, with teachers and management. (“If you are unhappy with a problem, it will be fixed by teacher/management”.)
- 3.8. Student response suggests strong satisfaction with procedures, and dialogue with teachers. Yet resources are scarce and students at the same time express need for more internships, and criticize lack of practical workshops at MA level, lack of adequate library resources and that all literature is in Croatian.

4. Teachers

- 4.1. There are currently 8 staff with PhDs and one will soon obtain her PhD. There are also 8 teaching assistants, several of whom teach languages. In addition, pooled university staff is available. Staff argued that main problem is veto (2010) on new appointments. Student-teacher ratio is good especially at graduate level, and provided academic staff from outside department is included. Core disciplines appear to be covered. Yet there is too much teaching in individual topics by one or two department members. Teachers are aware of dangers in fragmented course structure and institutional prioritization of “widest possible choice for students”.
- 4.2. National policy of veto on new academic appointments inhibits growth at the moment. In other regards, department is aware of personnel needs and takes steps when appropriate to fill them through pooling resources.

- 4.3. Student-teacher ratio seems good, especially at graduate level, although there are different answers to the question depending on perspectives (see 4.1 and 4.2).
- 4.4. Development is informal, but with very little mentoring, particular in research, and there is no formal teacher training for graduate students. Visiting scholars such as Prof. Klaus Krippendorff (content analysis) and Prof. Mark Deuze (social media), only taught students and provided no workshops for staff.
- 4.5. Teaching assistants and department members seemed satisfied with workload allocation.
- 4.6. Formal processes are in place but it is not clear that the guideline of "maximum 30% additional" needing approval by Rector is sufficient to prevent undermining of quality of departmental teaching and research.

5. Scientific and professional activity

- 5.1. Overall university strategy on research 2009-2015 in place, but a number of restrictions (limited funding, no new appointments, unstaffed Research Office, insufficient literature and mainly Croatian-only publishing) mean that implementation is highly inadequate. University and department express commitment but provide almost no support to faculty members for travel, research and consequently - publications.
- 5.2. Other than Inter-City PhD program, department does not have clear plans for cooperation with other institutions nationally or internationally. The proposed collaboration with Coventry University (UK) in 2008 collapsed due to financial crisis.
- 5.3. Some faculty members are too reluctant to pursue international research and publication, leading to relatively limited availability of competitive researchers. Management and teachers claimed new appointments necessary to strengthen scientific publishing, visibility and strategic research agenda.
- 5.4. Scientific output (see Self-evaluation pp.118-120) is severely circumscribed and with a few exceptions, limited to Croatian. There is a mismatch between publishing record and ambitions of PhD programs. In addition to limited publishing by some staff members, department suffers from overall lack of support personnel for greater publication and increased impact.
- 5.5. Department acknowledges absence of reward system for high-ranking publishing (p.124 Self-evaluation). Reward system is severely limited by financial and disciplinary boundaries.
- 5.6. The number of peer-reviewed publications depends on department goals and ambitions, but significant improvements will require considerable attention and effort by the department.
- 5.7. The number of domestic and international research projects is extremely limited. No staff member has headed a research project over the last 5 years (p. 122 Self-evaluation).
- 5.8. Ambition and will are in evidence, e.g. some staff members take part in public debate and appear in the media, student placements and external teachers contribute to knowledge transfer. Students also contribute to knowledge transfer through various media outlets.
- 5.9. The Research Office remains without staff and there are overall funding problems limiting activity, including planned new dormitory which is one of the most pressing issues. Yet The Student Council and other bodies are active.

- 5.10. There is no PhD study programme offered at the Department. There are, however, aspirations of starting a PhD in Public Relations and another in Corporate Communication in the future. Instead, for PhD mentoring the Department draws on the resources of the University of Osijek and the Catholic University of Zagreb in information science mentioned under 1.1. The 8 teaching assistants included several PhDs and aspiring PhDs. There is little evidence of significant, ongoing research and scientific publication involving PhD candidates.

6. International cooperation and mobility

- 6.1. Within Croatia, mobility mechanisms are strong. Absence of dormitories, however, may limit incoming mobility for Croatian students. 16 courses in English announced on website for incoming international students (11 at MA and 4 at BA level, but no details on course in Media convergence). But there are few incoming students from abroad and mostly from Poland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic.
- 6.2. Students are encouraged to study abroad and receive excellent Erasmus advice. They do not lose a year with study, as the panel was informed is often the case in Croatia. Yet only one student confirmed plans of outward mobility (Dublin).
- 6.3. At university level, there are 20 cooperation agreements with other universities and 40 Erasmus bilateral agreements (p.132 Self-evaluation). Faculty members seem extremely limited in their mobility due to funding constraints and apparent lack of encouragement from department. The international editorial committee of Medianali also provides an interesting network for increased efforts.
- 6.4. Efforts are being made but at the moment there seems to be almost no sustained communication or institutional connection with universities and networks abroad, including any follow-up with Coventry University. Dubrovnik Media Day is a powerful potential tool but does not seem to be integrated well enough with departmental efforts.
- 6.5. Weather, scenery, history and attractive, centrally located new building all offer excellent potential. Accommodation for incoming international students is not a problem and not linked with absence of dormitory, which apparently only affects Croatian students. The 16 English-language courses cover broad scope, but lack depth of coverage of key issues (e.g. no announced details on course in Media convergence) may discourage students from abroad.
- 6.6. Strong conditions for attracting short term lecturers and teachers and some medium and long term teachers. With EU accession there should be additional opportunities that the department should pursue.
- 6.7. Despite favourable conditions and occasional guest lecturers from abroad and despite some incoming student mobility, there is still little institutional cooperation through Erasmus+ or Horizon2020 with EU-countries and potential EU partners.

7. Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances

- 7.1. Despite funding problems, the department is located in a newly renovated building with 2 spacious auditoriums, several functional lecture rooms and PC equipment. But the department still falls significantly short in terms of library with adequate print and electronic resources. TV studio resources are limited.
- 7.2. Administrative resources are pooled from university and seem sufficient, with the exception of the overall lack of research staff.
- 7.3. Administrative staff for department has some opportunities for development within overall university policy and means.
- 7.4. Not applicable
- 7.5. Physical equipment is in good order but online networks, journal subscriptions and other research support technology is limited.
- 7.6. Library is significantly underdeveloped and needs major help.
- 7.7. Lack of dorm and research funding are significant hindrances, though there is no control on many of these matters by the department or even the university.
- 7.8. University resources for research fall significantly short of the level necessary for the department to move forward in terms of research rankings and development of 2 desired PhDs in Public Relations and Corporate Communication.