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Response to External Evaluation Report for the BA program in Journalism

Dept of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cyprus

Dear Mr. Aletraris,

We are very thankful for the constructive comments we received from the External Evaluation Committee in regards to our undergraduate Journalism Program at the University of Cyprus. The Committee's overall positive evaluation of our Program strengthens us to continue upgrading our newly established curriculum, along with our facilities and infrastructure. After reading carefully the Report and considering the Committee's recommendations, please find below our responses along with our proposed actions:

General Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Given how new this programme is attention must be paid in particular to feedback and academic assessment to ensure that this is on the right tracks. It may be advisable to include some formal evaluation in the coming year – to see if the improvements and changes are working well.

Response: Since we restructured our curriculum, we closely monitored students' reactions, while implementing various changes, -- e.g. we established new production classes and we introduced new laboratories. Our faculty have been instructed to closely monitor students' progress, while gathering feedback from formal as well as non-formal settings. In terms of academic assessment, feedback is provided on various projects as well as through midterm and final exams. Most of our classes have been designed with a laboratory mentality, encompassing many in-class exercises, major projects as well as examinations.

Additional, holistic initiatives have been undertaken by the Department of Social and Political Sciences, in which the Journalism Program belongs. Our Department gathers quantitative as well as qualitative data to evaluate its classroom experiences and to follow up on its alumni. The Journalism Program benefits from those streams of information as we make our own internal assessments of our services.

Recommendation 2:

The Committee raises three (3) areas where there is room for improvement in order to reach their ambitions in equipping the students with a first-class journalism education and the best career outcomes.

- (a) It was noted that there was no opportunity in the final year for a substantive project or alternatively dissertation. This is standard practice in most Journalism degrees and gives a great chance for nearly graduating students to display their research skills and engage in a substantive piece of work – which they can show to future employers or in applications for MA degrees.
- (b) Another area of concern is the absence of a proper media law module. We note that there is an ethics course but we believe this course too should be strengthened. It is of paramount concern that students graduate with a sound understanding of media law (eg contempt, libel, privacy). Our proposal is either for a joint media law/ethics module or a new module which covers media law.
- (c) Our third suggestion is to widen the scope of electives within the Journalism core programme. We note there are plenty electives from outside and this is excellent but we believe more electives from the journalism staff (related to research areas maybe) would be optimal.

Response: All three suggestions are quite valuable and thereby we have undertaken additional initiatives to implement corrections into our curriculum.

- (a) The recommendation for a substantive project is very valuable. Therefore, our fourth-year course, titled: *Specialized Topics in Journalism* (JOU 421) will become the primary class where seniors can work on individual projects. In the context of JOU 421, seniors can design and assemble their portfolios, gathering a variety of individual projects completed throughout their four years of study. This is a new course, recently incorporated into our curriculum and designed as a specialized projects module. This adjustment will serve well the goal of helping students accumulate their projects while making critical improvements in their creative work.
- (b) To address this recommendation, we are redesigning our *Journalism Ethics* course (JOU 211), under a new title: *Journalism Law and Ethics*. Thereby, our students will be taught media law along with ethics. Furthermore, our faculty have already been instructed to deal with this discrepancy, designing a new syllabus to address all thematic areas in the fields of media law and ethics. Since our Program's evaluation, we are collaborating with our colleagues from the Department of Law with significant expertise in the field of media law. Thereby, their contribution is quite valuable as we implement those upgrades.
- (c) Starting this spring (2020) we plan to enrich our list of electives both in terms of what we offer from other departments as well as our offers in media and journalism. Currently, the program is engaging in an extensive discussion about strategically adding courses addressing new developments in the field. One of our current priorities in this area is to expand our electives in the field of audiovisual production, including more courses in directing, editing, writing for television and documentary production.

Recommendation 3:

The newness of this staff team makes it important that there is ongoing support for all of the faculty in both teaching and research areas. Junior staff should be encouraged and supported in their search for external funding.

Response:

Indeed, our full-time faculty is comprised of three lecturers, who recently joined our Program. All faculty have received starting research grants from university sources to fund a brand-new research lab in journalism, with the aim of acquiring research infrastructure for future projects. Our lab was recently established in the brand-new library building at the University of Cyprus, while creating new infrastructure for new researchers, students and media practitioners. Our faculty have demonstrated a team spirit, collaborating well with one another, while being very active in applying for international grants (e.g. Horizon2020, Erasmus+, Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, COST).

Recommendation 4:

More international exposure for students - and potentially stronger language training.

Response:

Our students benefit from three mandatory language courses which are a part of our curriculum, while their international mobility is encouraged through the Erasmus Program. We highly advertise those opportunities and thereby many of our students spend at least one semester abroad. Currently our faculty are organizing an educational trip to Brussels in an effort to familiarize our students with European Institutions and to encourage their research on European media.