



ΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
HAROKOPIO UNIVERSITY



Co-financed by Greece and the European Union

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Marine Sciences of the University of the Aegean consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Professor George Arhonditsis (Coordinator)
University of Toronto, Canada

2. Professor Helen Couclelis
University of California Santa Barbara, U.S.A.

3. Professor Nikos Mamoulis
University of Hong-Kong, China

4. Professor Michael Tsimplis
University of Southampton, United Kingdom

N.B. The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department.

The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The visit of the Department of Geography (DG) of Harokopio University was carried out from 11:00 am on 16/12/2013 until 5:00 pm on 18/12/2012.

Day 1 - Monday December 16, 2013:

In the morning, the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) members were briefed in the HQA offices. The EEC was then transferred to the Harokopio University. At the beginning of the visit, the EEC members met with the Rector (Demosthenes S. Anagnostopoulos) and the Vice Rectors of Academic Affairs and Student Welfare (Evangelia Georgitsoyanni) and Economic Planning and Development (Apostolos G. Papadopoulos) of the Harokopio University, and the Chair of the Department (Christos Chalkias). An introduction was held on the history and structure of the Harokopio University of Athens (HUA). The discussion also revolved around the performance of HUA along with various statistics that offered insights about the development of the Institution over the past two decades.

Following this meeting, the EEC attended a very comprehensive presentation by the Chair of the Department of Geography, regarding its history and evolution, its goals, structure and objectives, and its current teaching and research activities. In particular, the presentation included an overview of the Department’s educational and research activities; its general research achievements, such as publications, citations, and research grants; the curriculum of the undergraduate program as well as the educational activities (courses, undergraduate thesis). The presentation also included a briefing about the plan for the development of the department in the future. During and after the talk, there was opportunity to discuss and comment on the presentation. The day concluded with an extensive discussion with Professors Thomas Maloutas and Kalliopi Sapountzaki about the post-graduate program and the practices followed to evaluate teaching quality in the Department.

Day 2- Tuesday December 17, 2013

On the second day, the EEC met with all the academic staff members of the Department, the administrative staff and the technicians. The EEC visited all teaching and research laboratories (Human Geography, Physical Geography, and Geographic Information Systems and Cartography), and the administrative services of the Department. There was also a classroom visit, where the EEC members had the opportunity to discuss the general level of satisfaction and problems of the undergraduate students. In addition, the EEC met with a number of representatives from the post-graduate and doctoral programs offered in the Department. The EEC received additional documents regarding the research highlights of the faculty members, the training opportunities for the graduate students, evaluation reports from internship placements, and the research performance of the Department relative to the other units of the Harokopio University of Athens. The schedule was kept flexible with enough time to address a broad range of issues and provide relevant input to the EEC.

Day 3- Wednesday December 11, 2013

On the third day, the EEC met with alumni and representatives of the Hellenic Union of Geographers. This meeting offered an excellent opportunity to gain insights into the current professional status and future perspectives for the discipline of Geography in Greece. The EEC also visited the library, the psychology counselling team of the University, and the Network Operation Center. The visit concluded with a meeting between the EEC members and the Chair of the Department along with several senior faculty members, where we clarified a few pending questions and also discussed our general impressions from the Department.

Day 4 - Thursday December 19, 2013

The EEC members worked on the draft of the External Evaluation Report (EER) at the hotel facilities arranged by the HQA (Electra Palace Hotel).

Day 5 - Friday December 20, 2013

The EEC members continued working on the draft.

Day 6 – Saturday December 21, 2013

The EEC members finalized the EER draft, which was subsequently submitted to HQAA.

Summary: The Harokopio University Department of Geography prepared a program that enabled meetings, discussions and visits of the entire University. In these meetings, the vast majority of the Department's academic staff was present. The EEC also met and had discussions with a number of students (undergraduate and post-graduate,), doctoral candidates, postdoctoral research associates, alumni, and the administrative staff. Our visit was very successful thanks to the warm hospitality of the faculty members and the administration of HUA. They were extremely accommodating to all of our requests.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The EEC members had at their disposal during the evaluation process the reports on teaching and research activities of the Department for the period 2012-2013, annual Internal Evaluation Reports from 2008 onwards, and a wide range of documents related to the Department's teaching and research enterprise.. These documents included detailed information on the organizational structure of the Department and the associated regulations, facilities, research aspects (e.g., awards, papers, and citations), and educational materials (textbooks, theses, brochures for outreach activities). The documentation supplied accurately depicted the current status of the Department up to 2013, including its pedagogy, goals, structure, teaching and research philosophy, instructional facilities and research laboratories. The EEC is very satisfied by the articulation level and the overall quality of the documentation provided as well as the prompt response to all of our questions regarding the performance of the Department.

A1. Undergraduate Curriculum

To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.

APPROACH

• ***What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum?***

The Curriculum is developed in accordance with the general objective of the Department to promote and develop Geography and its applications. The general goal of the curriculum is the development of high quality educational programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. At each level different goals and objectives are set but there are three common principles:

- a) the education of geographers with proficiency in all three fundamental areas of geography (i.e. human, physical, and technical);
- b) the education of geographers with practical skills and a good understanding of research techniques;
- c) the education of geographers able to work in an interdisciplinary environment and able to communicate with other specialists and the general public

The Undergraduate Geography Degree is a 48-month course of studies. It is structured around an extensive list of required courses with optional courses, practical experience and an optional dissertation in the final semesters. The additional goals are well described in the Undergraduate Studies Guide, though much better in the 2003 version than in the most recent one. These goals aim to help the students to:

- d) develop the generic skills required for University education
- e) develop a broad knowledge of several areas of Geography

- f) develop critical thinking
- g) develop a practical understanding of applied geography
- h) become competitive for the job market in the private and public sectors and for post graduate education

• ***What is the plan for achieving them?***

The plan set by the Department involves:

- The provision of basic courses in the first year of studies which provide general background knowledge and raise the level of the students who generally enter the program with insufficient skills.
- Motivating the students by providing a program of study that encompasses the most relevant aspects of Geography
- Providing hands-on experience with the integration of the three basic aspects of Geography in an innovative synthetic practical course during the third year
- Enabling students to engage with stakeholders through internships at companies and organisations of the public and private sectors.
- Enabling students to gain practical experience and apply their skills and knowledge during the development of an (optional) final-year Thesis.
- Developing professional skills through written assignments in addition to exams, requiring them to give oral presentations and encouraging team work in the context of specific projects.
- The provision of an excellent educational environment with pleasant and clean building facilities and very good technical facilities
- The provision of practical skills through laboratory work
- Exposing students to lectures by excellent external speakers from various fields, from leading academics to contingency planners and representatives from non-governmental organisations and emergency services.
- Educational excursions to educate them on the natural and human geography

• ***How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?***

The objectives were decided by taking into account the practical needs of the students who include the Department as a (usually low-ranking) choice in their university-entrance applications. The Department is aware that the skills of the students entering are not the best and that there is further a percentage of students transferred from other Universities with even lower entry requirements. The professional competitiveness of the program's graduates was also taken into account and corresponding programs of leading foreign universities were consulted. The approach chosen favours a general knowledge of Geography rather than specialised training in some of its aspects. The Hellenic Association of Geographers and the employed graduates who stay in touch with the Department represent a significant path for feedback regarding the stakeholders' views and needs.

• ***Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?***

The curriculum is generally consistent with its objectives. However, in the view of the EEC, there are too many courses and the balance between the required skills by the job market and the need for a broad academic education in Geography is biased towards the latter. Some students suggested that they would be better off if their degrees were differentiated in accordance with the stream of lessons they followed. The Hellenic Association of Geographers also made it very clear that accreditation for specific types of consultancies depends on the existence in the curriculum of a minimum number of courses taught in disciplines already accredited for the same consultancies. In the opinion of the EEC, the needs of the domestic job market should become a more significant driver for the future development of the curriculum. This will lead to better employment opportunities for graduates, will make the Geography degree more attractive and raise the entry level for new

students.

The goal of developing professionally competent graduates, which is well supported in general, is in a sense contradicted by the fact that internships at companies and organizations as well as the final thesis project are optional. Thus, some students may graduate without doing either. This possibility undermines the strategic goals and objectives of the Department and should be phased out. In the view of the EEC and subject to the relevant logistics, both the internship and the final thesis should be made compulsory for all students. It is, of course, clear to the EEC that this must be subject to the ability of the Department to provide supervision and placements for all students, especially when the number of entering students is formally outside their authority. This is an area where careful planning is required and where new staff may be required.

• How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted?

The curriculum for the Undergraduate program is overseen by the Department's Curriculum Development Committee, which meets regularly and reviews on a cycle of about 5 years on average the content of the program and its ability to satisfy its goals. Decisions are taken at the General Assembly of the Department in which all members participate. There has already been a reduction of the courses offered and the Department is in the process of evaluating whether further reduction is needed.

All members of the staff are involved with the running of the Undergraduate program. The relationship with present and past students is excellent and direct informal feedback is obtained in addition to the formalised questionnaires. Our understanding is that stakeholders are not formally involved in the development of the curriculum. However, the Department consults informally with the Hellenic Association of Geographers who oversees the professional accreditation of graduates of the Department. In addition, for every internship, a personalised report is provided and this can be developed further to engage with stakeholders and their views on the required skills of the students.

• Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?

The curriculum is revised regularly by the relevant committee and the needs for changes in the curriculum are reported to the General Assembly.

IMPLEMENTATION

• How effectively is the Department's goal implemented by the curriculum?

Generally the goals are well implemented. There are innovative approaches including the introductory courses, the third year course that helps synthesise different aspects of the knowledge acquired, the possibility of internships, and the final project. However, there are difficulties arising from the multiplicity of courses, the options available and the general tendency to avoid premature specialisation. The EEC respects the views expressed by the Department and the philosophy behind it, which supports a broad academic education, however, it believes that the goal of a competitive degree and success in the employment market cannot be ignored when the students invest significant resources in their education. The curriculum already has general courses during years one and two with options for specialisation in years three and four. However, the support for professional preparation should become clearer and the requirements for accreditation for geographers should be taken seriously into account.

• How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study?

The Department's curriculum is equivalent or superior to those at other universities, including foreign ones. This view is supported by statements made by several students who have followed undergraduate studies at other Universities.

• Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated?

Yes, in principle, but it is not always clear why there are so many courses and to what extent each of these courses offers something new and necessary for the curriculum. A detailed evaluation of all courses and their prioritisation is recommended. Optional courses with small number of registered students, which implies even smaller numbers of attending students are, in the view of the EEC, not justified. The Department does not run courses with

fewer than 5 registered students. A review of student numbers in the various courses should be made and that do not succeed to attract more than 10 students on average in a 5 year cycle should be considered for withdrawal.

• Is the curriculum coherent and functional? Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient?

The EEC's view is that the curriculum is in general coherent but it is too broad and extensive and requires consolidation of courses. New courses should be introduced on a trial basis and several factors including their attraction to students should help decide whether they will be continued or not. The EEC reviewed and number of sources used for teaching both electronic (e-class) and books provided to students at no cost and found them fit for purpose, with some of them being of exceptional quality.

• Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum?

The Department relies on post-graduate students to deliver part of the teaching especially in relation to practical work and laboratories. Most of this is unpaid work, which indicates lack of resources.

At the time of the review there were two members of the faculty on study leave and one on a 3- year unpaid leave. There was concern that some of the absent colleagues might be moving to foreign universities. As there is no redundancy in the Department, reducing the options and streamlining teaching duties will be necessary should this be the case, in addition to at least one further appointment.

RESULTS

• How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?

As explained above, there is good implementation overall that meets in general the Department's goals and objectives. Although the entry grades of most students are mediocre there are several graduates who continued their education in Greece or abroad at the Masters or the PhD level, demonstrating that the education they received in the Department is of very high quality, at least for students who engage with their studies.

• If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with?

There are several improvements that can be made. These have been identified above and are added at the end of this document as recommendations. The Department reviews its undergraduate curriculum every 5 to 7 years and is in the process of considering a reduction of the number of courses, although there are no clear principles as to how this is going to be done. There is a healthy diversity of views within the Department regarding the balance between the provision of broad-based academic education and the need for specific skills required by the job market. The EEC does not adopt one or other position. It only considers that an appropriate process for the resolution of this issue should be established and the possibility of providing specialised degrees in addition to a general one should be explored for the purpose of improving the employability of graduates, which will also have several benefits for the Department.

• Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results?

Yes, the Department is aware of possible ways to improve its undergraduate program. However the arbitrary annual changes in student numbers forced upon them by transfers from other universities, coupled with the lack of authority in recruiting students and resourcing (financial and other) reduce the available options for improving it further.

IMPROVEMENT

• Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?

Presently, there is a process for reviewing the number of optional courses and a regular review dealing with difficulties in specific courses. However, the EEC was not made aware of an established process involving appropriate criteria for dropping or altering specific courses. The EEC is of the opinion that careful evaluation of all courses offered should be undertaken with clear criteria including a) direct relevance to the objectives of the curriculum; b) course evaluations by the students; c) relevance to the job market, and any other criteria considered appropriate by the faculty of the Department. The weight of these three criteria could vary across the years of study with greater weight being given to the views

of fourth-year students in connection with job requirements.

The Department also considers the possibility of making the final project in year four compulsory and the EEC recommends this subject to logistic requirements (e.g., availability of supervisors, lab space).

It was not clear whether the Department intends to make internships compulsory. The EEC would strongly recommend this for students planning a professional rather than academic (teaching) career.

• **Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?**

The Department was very open and responsive to the discussion on the improvement of the undergraduate program. The program is presently well received by the students. Reduction of courses is seriously considered.

For the EEC, the undergraduate Degree offered is the introduction of the discipline of Geography to the employment sector and the Greek society. It provides the basis for the reputation of the Department as a quality academic institution and a good choice for undergraduate studies. Making it more efficient towards the development of skills, the accreditation by professional bodies and the fulfillment of legal requirements for consulting is one possible future for this degree. Ensuring broad academic knowledge, interdisciplinarity and also competitiveness in the job market is a difficult balance to strike, but the Department has proven able to do so in the post-graduate program. The EEC is confident that if the Department so decides, it will be able to sharpen and focus the undergraduate degree further. The Department has stated that the gradual increase in student numbers with appropriate increases in staff recruitment and resourcing is one of its mid-term objectives. In the view of the EEC, the suggested curriculum changes should assist this objective.

A2. Post-Graduate Curriculum

To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.

APPROACH

• **What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum?**

The Department's Curriculum is established at the undergraduate, post-graduate and doctoral levels in accordance with the general objective to promote and develop the field of Geography and its applications. The general goal of the curriculum is the development of high quality educational programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. At each level different goals and objectives are set for the education of professionally competitive geographers but there are three common aims for all levels:

- a) a thorough appreciation of the contributions of all three sub-fields of the discipline (i.e., human, physical, and geographic techniques)
- b) the development of practical skills and a good understanding of research methods
- c) the ability to work in an interdisciplinary environment and to communicate with other specialists and the general public

The post-graduate program in Geography is an 18- month course of studies that involves two teaching semesters and an additional one for the development of a Diploma Thesis. It is structured around three study streams. The additional goals of this program are well described in the Postgraduate Studies Guide. They aim at helping the students to:

- d) further develop their knowledge of Geography
- e) be able to follow scientific developments in the discipline
- f) develop specific skills and abilities at an advanced level
- g) become competitive in the job market in the private, public and academic sectors

• **What is the plan for achieving them?**

The plan set by the Department involves:

- The selection of appropriate candidates who are academically strong and who

represent a good mix of people already working in the public or private sector and who bring in their relevant experience, along with a number of excellent recent graduates.

- Compulsory attendance of courses
- Numerical balance among the three study streams
- The provision of an excellent educational environment with pleasant and clean building facilities and very good technical facilities
- The development of specialisation and practical experience during the writing of the thesis.
- The provision of an excellent series of external speakers from various sectors, from leading academics to contingency planners, non-governmental organisations and emergency services.
- The development of conferences on specialised and issues of within the Department
- Encouragement and assistance in submitting their work to conferences and other appropriate venues
- The possibility of contributing to ongoing research projects
- Educational visits to leading research and contingency management establishments in Europe

• How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?

The objectives were decided by taking into account the practical needs of the public and private sectors, as understood through the extensive engagement of members of the Department with the national and international scene, and by examining corresponding programs of leading foreign universities. The Hellenic Association of Geographers and the feedback received from graduates who stay in touch with the Department provide a significant conduit for feedback from stakeholders.

• Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?

The curriculum is consistent with its objectives and with Greek societal requirements for competent applied scientists. The program is oversubscribed, with a good part of the students consisting of experienced professionals especially from the public sector involved with resource management and contingency planning who seek to upgrade their qualifications, as well as GIS specialists and spatial planners.

• How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted?

The curriculum for the post-graduate program is overseen by a committee which meets regularly and reviews on a cycle of about 5 years on average the content of the program and its ability to satisfy its goals. Decisions are taken at the General Assembly of the Department in which all members participate. Most members of staff are involved with the running of the post-graduate program. The relationship with present and past students is excellent and direct informal feedback is obtained in addition to the formal questionnaires. Our understanding is that stakeholders are not formally involved in the making of the curriculum. However, the Department consults informally with the Hellenic Association of Geographers which oversees the professional accreditation of graduates of the Department.

• Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?

The courses are reviewed annually by the relevant committee and the needs for changes in the curriculum are reported to the General Assembly.

IMPLEMENTATION

• How effectively is the Department's goal implemented by the curriculum?

The post-graduate program implements the Department's goals and objectives very well.

- ***How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study?***

The curriculum is at least equivalent to European standards of education. This view is supported by statements made by various students with undergraduate and Master's studies from France, and the Netherlands, as well as the National Technical University and the Medical School of the University of Athens. All statements were to the effect that their studies were better at the Harokopio Geography Department.

- ***Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated?***

Yes, it is. However the EEC discussed the possibility of reducing the three streams to two and making the current third stream of geoinformatics compulsory for all post-graduate students. Taking into account the very successful curriculum which attracts and delivers motivated and skilled professionals, the EEC would leave this suggestion as a possibility for the Department to consider.

- ***Is the curriculum coherent and functional? Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient?***

To the extent that it was possible to assess this, the EEC is confident that the answer in both questions is positive.

- ***Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum?***

The Department seeks, in their plans for development, the employment of three new faculty members, one for each of the three main streams. Part of the work of the new faculty will be further contribution to the post-graduate program. The EEC considers that the Department adequately supports the post-graduate program, but this is at the cost of the current faculty working overtime and is also to the detriment of the research activity and the personal life of the members of the Department. Thus, the EEC is of the view that there is a need for new staff in the Department. However, such increase should be linked to a clear prioritization of educational objectives in the post-graduate program. As mentioned earlier, the need will be especially urgent if one or more of the faculty members currently on leave do not return. New hires should provide the confidence that the post-graduate program will continue running.. However careful consideration should be given to the post-graduate program's needs for specialised skills and prioritisation of needs among the three streams would be necessary.

RESULTS

- ***How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?***

The post-graduate Program is of excellent quality and value for money. Graduates of this degree go on to do research, go back to their jobs being more able to work with colleagues from other specialisations, or start up their own companies, especially in the field of geoinformatics.

- ***Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results?***

Yes, the Department developed post-graduate degree with great care and understands clearly the reasons of its success. The EEC considers that the outcome is very good and recommends first, the increase of the numbers of students admitted to this program and second, an examination of the possibility of the development of the course in English to attract international students

IMPROVEMENT

- ***Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?***

Presently there is no clear plan for the restructuring of the post-graduate degree and the EEC thinks that there is no such need. The Department undertakes fine-tuning from year to year. The possibility of providing geoinformatics, as the common basis of the degree has been raised in the meeting with the Department, even if geoinformatics is retained as a separate stream for advanced specialization, as well as the possibility of developing a post-graduate program taught in English. The response was varied and clearly careful consideration should

be given to the educational, financial and administrative implications of such decisions.

- ***Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?***

The Department has been willing to consider the two aforementioned suggestion of the EEC with hesitation on their feasibility due to the financial and recruitment restrictions presently faced by all Greek Institutions.

For the EEC the post-graduate degree offered is the most attractive aspect of a very good Department. It provides visibility in the professional environment of geographers, it demonstrates the use of the skills of geographers in various areas of applied research activity, it provides modest funding to support research related activities for the members of staff of the Department and value for money for professionals wishing to develop their skills more or wanting to expand their knowledge in the interdisciplinary environment of geography. Ensuring the expansion and the continuing excellence of this program should be a primary objective for the Department.

A3. Curriculum PhD Program

To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.

APPROACH

- ***What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum?***

No guide for PhD studies was made available to the EEC. There are internal regulations for the PhD. Thus the goals and objectives of the Curriculum for PhD students have not expressly been stated in any document provided. The lack of a Guide for PhD studies is an important omission. However, the EEC considers that it can infer at least some of the goals and the objectives from the general strategy of the Department and by reference to the objectives as expressed in our home institutions. These goals are:

- The development of high quality researchers
- The production of new knowledge
- The production of a number of original publications preferably in peer reviewed journals
- The preparation of a successful career for the researcher in an academic or non-academic research environment.

- ***What is the plan for achieving them?***

The Department encourages PhD applications and presently had 55 PhD students. With 15 members of staff available at various stages of their career, this number indicates a strategy of encouragement by the Department to students interested in research. Applications for doctoral studies are received during the whole year in response to solicitations from the faculty and there is no dedicated process for offering PhD nor for funding at least some of them. However, there is a regular scheduled review of the received applications. Most PhD students work on ongoing research programs and thus there is occasional financial support.

- ***How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?***

PhD studies have different degrees of structure and support around the world. Leaving the PhD student alone to resolve his/her own difficulties and develop the necessary skills in the process represents the most traditional practice. Presently, dynamic PhD programs with high rates of completion require a more structured approach to the PhD, including introductory classes, opportunities for training, a status upgrade to 'candidate' following examinations after the first 12-18 months of study, failure of which may mean termination, and completion within 3-4 years. The EEC recommends that the Department adopt a prototype system from a leading foreign University and implement it gradually to also include existing PhD students.

- ***Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?***

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted? • Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum? <p>The EEC could not identify a relevant curriculum or program for doctoral studies.</p>
<p>IMPLEMENTATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively is the Department's goal implemented by the curriculum? <p>Twelve PhDs have presently completed their degree in the Department. Many of the students are self-funded and either partly or fully employed. The EEC was told that a minimum of 2 publications is expected from each PhD dissertation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study? <p>There is currently no officially instituted curriculum for doctoral studies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated? • Is the curriculum coherent and functional? Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient? <p>Not applicable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum? <p>The Department has very good researchers who can and do have successfully supervised students.</p>
<p>RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives? • If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with? • Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results? <p>The EEC met with some of PhD students as well as two PhD graduates. They were all very supportive of the PhD program but for some of them their PhD research was clearly a secondary activity. The lack of funding was considered as the primary reason for not devoting more time to the completion of their PhD.</p>
<p>IMPROVEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce? <p>The Department recognizes the limitations created by the lack of funding but apart from support from projects there is no alternative funding mechanism presently available. No plans for improvement of the funding situation or of the structure of the doctoral program have been identified.</p>

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

- **Does the Department have a defined pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology?**

The Department's objective is to train professionals in the discipline of Geography, equipping them with multi-disciplinary knowledge and life-long learning skills. Toward this goal, the Department's pedagogic policy and teaching methodology is on par with the standards of international universities and consistent with the objectives of the curriculum. The EEC is satisfied by the Department's approach and implementation.

Please comment on :

- **Teaching methods used**

The teaching methods by the Department include:

- 1) conventional lectures based on whiteboard and modern projection facilities
- 2) laboratory training, where students get hands-on experience
- 3) remote instructional support via the e-class platform, where students get access to resources and in-course assessment material
- 4) field trips, where students receive training on collecting data and experiencing real working conditions
- 5) practical training, where students experience short-term employment related to their discipline by companies and organizations

Teaching is based on textbooks published by Faculty members and also on international textbooks translated into Greek for courses of more general nature.

Homework assignments and answers are made available to students via the e-class platform. The distribution of textbooks to registered students is done via the Evdoxos system. The combination of these methods reflects the good quality and teaching expertise of the academic staff. The teachers and the laboratory staff have an open-door policy; they are available to the students not only through regularly scheduled office hours but also on demand at any requested time by the students.

• **Teaching staff/ student ratio**

The ratio of the overall teaching staff to the number of active undergraduate students (n+2 years of study) is $16/447 = 1/28$. When considering the total number of 630 registered students, the ratio becomes $16/630 = 1/39$. The EEC believes that the ratio is low and that the department is under-supported by teaching staff, especially given the fact that about 15% of teachers per year are expected to be on academic leave. Considering the undergraduate program only, on average each faculty member teaches 4 courses per year and in addition has to supervise a number of final-year theses. Upon consideration of the postgraduate curriculum, the number of courses per teacher increases to 6 and the number of hours allocated to supervision also increases accordingly. Finally, the sudden increase of the student intake in the past few years renders the size of laboratory areas inadequate to accommodate the students. As a result, the students are divided into groups that have to be taught separately; this greatly increases the teaching load of the academic staff, given the inadequate number of non-faculty laboratory staff.

• **Teacher/student collaboration**

The relationship between the students and teachers is excellent. The students highly appreciate the effort, support, and availability of their teachers. The Department has established a course evaluation questionnaire for assessing the quality of each course as well as teaching effectiveness. The participation of the students in this scheme is quite low (around 10%), because providing feedback is not compulsory and it is done electronically. On the other hand, student participation in class is satisfactory; on average more than half of the enrolled students systematically attend the classes.

• **Adequacy of means and resources**

The EEC found the space allocated for teaching to be adequate. More importantly, the classrooms were well-equipped and organized, clean, and kept in excellent shape. The laboratories were satisfactory, but they can only marginally accommodate the growing numbers of students. The Department and the University have established an excellent teaching and academic environment and should be commended for this.

• **Use of information technologies**

Computer equipment and internet resources are used, including online bibliographic databases, electronic books and the e-class platform. Dedicated computational facilities with personal computers are available to the students within the Department. During their coursework, the students are trained to use the online search tools offered by the library, but they also learn to use the internet in order to access resources worldwide. However, the Department should make sure that the operating systems and software on the machines used by the students are up to date.

• **Examination system**

The performance of students in each course is evaluated via in-course assignments and final examinations. The final grade is typically a combination of lab assignments, written reports, oral presentations, and the final examination mark. The final examination procedures are the typical ones for a Greek university. Past examination papers are made available to students via the e-class platform. The majority of course assignments are group projects, where students learn how to work together and how to orally present their results.

IMPLEMENTATION

Please comment on:

- **Quality of teaching procedures**

The Department is highly commended for the implementation of teaching. The teachers are highly available to the students and dedicated in continuously improving the teaching quality. The students collaborate well with the teachers not only in the delivery of classes but also in the design of teaching methods and the curriculum. The communication between teachers and students is excellent. The Department has invested a lot on the practical training of students via internships and field trips, which are well implemented.

- **Quality and adequacy of teaching materials and resources.**

The EEC was happy with the number and quality of the textbooks and notes contributed by the faculty members. The e-class platform is extensively used by the instructors to provide additional resources to the students.

- **Quality of course material. Is it brought up to date?**

The lectures in all courses are reviewed and updated frequently. The quality of the course material is considered very good, emphasizing both fundamental concepts in the subject areas and modern topics of particular socioeconomic and environmental management interest (e.g., immigration, natural hazards, climate change adaptation).

- **Linking of research with teaching**

Research techniques are integrated in training activities related to the courses of the curriculum. For example, field trips are organized for the students to collect data, on which research practices are then applied. The advanced courses in the different specializations of the program stimulate students to engage with research and motivate them to extend their studies by enrolling in related postgraduate programs. It is notable that a significant number of undergraduate students (51 in 2011-12) participate in research activities of the Department.

- **Mobility of academic staff and students**

The Department encourages the mobility of staff and students via funded EU programs like Erasmus. Within this program, the Department has established links with 19 universities from 9 European countries. However, the EEC notes that only a limited number of students (in the order of 5%) participate in this exchange program, due to financial and language reasons.

- **Evaluation by the students of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content and study material/resources**

The Department invites the students to complete an online questionnaire at the end of each course offering, in order for them to assess the effectiveness of teaching and the quality/suitability of the course material.

RESULTS

Please comment on:

- **Efficacy of teaching.**

Based on the feedback obtained by the students and the statistical results obtained by the teaching evaluation questionnaires, the EEC considers teaching to be very efficient and highly appreciated by the students. The main reasons are the dedication of the faculty to high-quality teaching and their excellent relationship with the students. The EEC commends the department for the notable maturity of the undergraduate students and for their good knowledge of their career perspectives.

- ***Discrepancies in the success/failure percentage between courses and how they are justified.***

The EEC did not notice any notable discrepancies in the success and failure percentages among courses.

- ***Differences between students in (a) the time to graduation, and (b) final degree grades.***

A collective statistical study for the period 2004-2013 shows that more than 90% of the students are awarded an average degree grade between 6/10 and 8.5/10. However, the number of students who excel (a grade above 8.5) is only 1.6%. These figures should be seen in the context of the low level of academic preparation of the students entering the program. The Department understands the importance of producing excellent graduates and is currently investigating ways to increase this percentage.

Based on the same statistics, 24% of the students complete their studies within 4-4.5 years, 77% of them graduate within 6 years, while there is a percentage of 23% students who study beyond the 6-year (i.e., n+2) period. Although these figures are typical for a Greek institution, the Department and the EEC believe that there is room for reducing the average study time, which in turn will reduce the expected number of current students, bringing several benefits (i.e., lower demands for equipment, administration, and teaching).

- ***Whether the Department understands the reasons of such positive or negative results?***

The Department attributes the reasons behind the current length of graduation to the culture of Greek students not to work too hard in their first years of studies. In addition, the great majority of students do not enter the Department as their first choice; therefore, they are less motivated to study. Another reason why the students delay their graduation and underperform is that a significant percentage of them come from low-income families and they have to find employment in parallel to their studies.

IMPROVEMENT

- ***Does the Department propose methods and ways for improvement?***

The Department proposes the following directions toward improving teaching quality:

- 1) A reduction of the number of courses required for the undergraduate degree. This can be done by a careful curriculum reform, which would merge similar courses and eliminate others (or make them elective). The result would be a lower coursework load to the students, who could then graduate earlier. At the same time, the teachers would have a lower teaching load and would offer even higher-quality teaching; thus, helping the average students pass the course more easily and the better ones obtain higher grades.
- 2) A reduction of the student intake. Recently, the Ministry significantly increased the intake of the Department. The Department rightfully suggests a reduction of this number because the current resources are marginally adequate to support it.
- 3) Hiring additional staff holding a PhD degree for the support of teaching and research. This would result in lowering the excessive load of the current faculty and further improving their teaching effectiveness.
- 4) The continuous maintenance and improvement of the laboratory equipment. Since a large percentage of the coursework is laboratory-based, the quality of the laboratories plays a vital role to the education of students. The Department is seeking ways to fund the purchase of new equipment, the appropriate maintenance of the existing one, the hiring of technical staff that can help in its operation and maintenance and the training of students.
- 5) Encouraging the mobility of students via exchange programs.
- 6) The continuous improvement of teaching evaluation procedures in order to collect appropriate and sufficient feedback by the students, which would help toward further improving the teaching methods and curricula.
- 7) Establishing mechanisms that can measure the degree to which the objectives of the undergraduate and MSc programs are achieved in teaching.
- 8) Increasing outreach efforts in advertising the undergraduate program in order to attract more students with stronger academic backgrounds, who would also select the program as one of their first choices. The EEC believes that a well-designed, complete, and regularly updated web site that showcases the Department's strengths and achievements could significantly assist in this effort.

- **What initiatives does it take in this direction?**

To implement the aforementioned proposals, the Department has taken action toward the approval of additional faculty, teaching, and technical staff positions by the Government. In addition, it closely works with the University toward establishing an autonomous and flexible budget that is controlled by the department in order to serve the current needs. Moreover, there are efforts by the Department to make first-year students aware of the benefits and career perspectives of a degree in Geography.

C. Research

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

APPROACH

- **What is the Department's policy and main objective in research?**
- **Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?**

The Department's main objective is to develop applied research that serves the country and deals with pressing problems ranging from immigration to natural hazards and the impacts of economic recession on society. Thus, it addresses all three basic facets of the discipline of geography: human, physical, and technical, while focusing more specifically on those sub-areas of the discipline that are of more immediate relevance to Greece within the European context. These sub-areas include: (a) urban, political, and population geography, with special emphasis on immigration, domestic migration, and the location patterns of public services; (b) the environment, geomorphology, and climate change, with an emphasis on environmental protection techniques, coastal and riverine geomorphology, and paleogeography; (c) landscape analysis and protection, local and regional development and planning, and in particular, the analysis and management natural hazards such as earthquakes and wildfires; and (d) geoinformatics, spatial analysis, and related areas such as digital cartography, geographic information systems (GIS), the analysis of remotely sensed imagery, and so on.

Research is assessed in the context of each faculty member's regular personnel evaluation process. The Department strives for excellence in their areas of emphasis, given a largely applied focus. Several members of the Department have very respectable research records as judged by international standards. Others focus on field work addressing pressing societal problems. They too produce excellent research that is more relevant and has greater impact when published in Greek journals or presented at national conferences. The Department's faculty is aware of its limitations in terms of size and circumstances (the latter including a heavy teaching load). Thus, they focus collectively on serving their primary strategic objective.

IMPLEMENTATION

- **How does the Department promote and support research?**
- **Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support.**
- **Scientific publications.**
- **Research projects.**
- **Research collaborations.**

The Department does not have an independent budget to promote research. Incoming funds through the post-graduate program are partly used to support research. The Department's policy to grant 2.000 Eu/year in research funds to each faculty member who actively participates in the doctoral program serves as an important incentive that benefits both faculty and their advisees. Further, the Department supports each of the three main facets of the discipline (i.e., human, physical, and techniques-oriented) with a separate laboratory (one being currently under renovation) as well as with the necessary computational infrastructure, which appears accessible and current. Several research projects are or have been undertaken by members of the Department. The EEC deems the research laboratories to be adequate for the Department's needs, though part of the research is assisted by laboratories in other Departments of the same University.

As is standard practice in modern universities, scientific publications are the main indication of research output. The Department follows the Greek Education Ministry's guideline of a two-publication minimum per faculty member per year, though the average is slightly higher. Failure to meet that minimum standard is highlighted in personnel evaluations and there are

salary and promotion implications for faculty members who may be repeatedly falling behind.

Research projects are developed mainly in the context of doctoral dissertations and most, though not all, are at least partially funded with external funds, from either domestic or EU sources. Research collaborations are formed internally around the (typically) multi-disciplinary topics of the dissertations, or internationally, as appropriate.

RESULTS

- ***How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented?***
- ***Scientific publications.***
- ***Research projects.***
- ***Research collaborations.***
- ***Efficacy of research work. Applied results. Patents etc.***
- ***Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department? Rewards and awards.***

Considering the limitations of a very small and little known (though remarkably well-functioning) university, and the youth of the Department, which first opened its doors in 2000, the research objectives of the latter are well on their way of being met. At an average of 8 refereed journal publications per faculty member over the past 5 years, plus a total of 81 Greek and foreign-language books and contributions to books, the publications rate exceeds the official 2-paper minimum. Clearly, the average varies by research area and by faculty member. This is not unusual for a trans-disciplinary field such as geography, which has social science, natural science, and technological dimensions. This is also true of the distribution of single- and multiple-authored papers and of the form of the publications as refereed or non-refereed, as articles versus books or as chapters in books versus conference proceedings. Such diversity hampers comparisons using citation data. An additional difficulty is that publications in Greek are under-represented in citations indexes because of the limited Greek-language readership, regardless of the quality of the work. On the other hand, publications in Greek are very desirable given the ignorance of the Greek academic community, as well as the country's broader educated public, that university-level geography actually exists and is a vibrant discipline.

Over the past 10 years, extra-mural research funds to the amount of 1.7 million euros have supported some 51 research projects. Of these, 30 projects continue today and are distributed among 10 out of the 16 faculty members. 12 of the projects are international and are funded by a variety of European agencies. Topics range widely, from the protection of the Mediterranean monk seal, the social integration of African immigrants, or the management of natural hazards, to technical and applied projects such as the creation of an atlas of low oblique aerial photography or the development of an improved composting method. The latter project resulted in 2 patents. Other tangible research outcomes include the development of popular web sites for data from the Department's meteorological station, for the observation and evaluation of the landscapes of Greece, and for immigration issues. Further, members of the faculty are involved in the publication of '*Geographies*', the first Greek journal in the discipline of geography.

The research contributions of the Department's faculty members are being recognized through invitations for lectures at foreign universities and for plenary lectures at international conferences (more than 30), and through a range of other honours and awards.

A notable aspect of the Department's research activity is the high degree of initiative among faculty members in organizing national and international conferences, symposia and workshops. Major examples are the hosting of 17th European Colloquium in Quantitative and Theoretical Geography (2011), the 1st Hellenic Conference in Spatial Analysis, and the 4th Advanced Training Course in Land Remote Sensing of the European Space Agency (a 2011 summer school). There were also several one-day symposia, both national and international, on issues ranging from population geography (in particular, immigration) and regional inequalities to climate change and green energy. Several very well-known geographers from the UK, Ireland and the USA have presented invited lectures at different times. The Department is particularly proud of its very special association with Professor Emerita Doreen Massey of the Open University (UK), one of the world's most prominent human geographers, who in November of 2012 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the

Geography Department of Harokopio University.

IMPROVEMENT

- **Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary.**
- **Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department.**

Overall, the Department is very aware of the need to develop more research projects and understands the use of international citation metrics as evaluation measures. The EEC recognises that these measures underestimate the significance of applied, local research as well as the research in the field of human geography, which has particularities in the numbers of publications and citations when compared with physical geography. Furthermore the Department is overstretched by teaching commitments and by needing to deliver tangible results under existing, mostly applied research projects.

The ramifications of the economic recession for the interplay between the socioeconomic life of Greece and the environment are a growing research interest of the EU community. There is a need to further increase involvement in international consortia on such issues and even to seek leadership positions. The significant work done at local and regional levels and the engagement with local government and business provide an opportunity for the Department to develop joint projects dealing with applied problems. This aspect should be promoted in the view of the EEC. Translating the results of high-quality local and regional research into refereed publications relevant to scientists in other countries is a challenge that the Department is strongly advised to undertake.

D. All Other Services

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

APPROACH

How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students)? Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically? Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?

Appropriate facilities exist to support the Department's educational and research needs. The Department views the various administrative and technical services provided to the academic community as very good, despite the small number of personnel and the high level of bureaucracy in the Greek University system. Our interviews confirmed that the support staff members are highly appreciated by the students and the faculty members. Student admissions and the recording of course grades are handled by the capable secretarial staff of the Department. The HUA has not yet obtained software for electronically managing course grades. Once this becomes available, the Department will be able to more effectively protect the students' privacy and to communicate useful summary statistics with respect to the performance of individual students relative to their peers. Teaching evaluations used to be conducted in the classroom using hardcopies, but more recently the Department has obtained an electronic platform to collect the students' input. There seems to be some scepticism though about the latter strategy because it is less effectively targeted towards students who regularly attend the lectures and therefore does not seem to result in higher levels of student participation or more meaningful feedback. The EEC shares the Department's concerns about the efficacy of the electronic platform. The administrative staff made suggestions for simplifying bureaucratic procedures. One of the issues raised involved the work load associated with the financial administration of the post-graduate program (e.g., expenses, tuition), which appears to be somewhat overwhelming at certain times of the academic year. The EEC also recommends that the Department consider offering training opportunities to its personnel, including scientific seminars and degree-seeking opportunities, as appropriate.

The facilities of the new Geography building (computer labs, library) along with the fairly demanding nature of the courses offered have ensured a high student presence on Campus (>50-70%). In particular, the library is very satisfactory and the school has made concerted efforts to create reading spaces or other facilities (e.g., self-check option, up-to-date computer terminals, lockers) that would ensure its functionality. According to the statistics

provided, the library seems to be enjoying an increasing registration of new users with a total of 2296 active users. We also note the number of workshops and other initiatives (thematic portal ΔΙΑΤΩ, portal of Social Sciences) that are indicative of the highly qualified and deeply dedicated library staff members. Via the Networking Centre of the university, students are offered high-speed internet connection, e-mail accounts, and technical support. The Centre is also responsible for the operation and maintenance of the electronic teaching (e-Class) platform. All university members can use the video-conferencing platform WebConf to communicate and participate in meetings when they cannot be physically present.

IMPLEMENTATION/RESULTS

Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).

Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g. library, PCs and free internet access, student counselling, athletic-cultural activity etc.).

The administrative staff (4 members) supports the secretarial work and other needs of the undergraduate and graduate programs of the Department. Generally, despite the multiple commitments of the faculty members and the technical and administrative personnel, there exists a very positive, collaborative, warm and friendly atmosphere that allows the accommodation of the student needs and the accomplishment of most day-to-day tasks. The EEC found very impressive the presence of support services for students with learning disabilities. Similarly, outstanding counselling is in place for students who have academic performance problems or face severe financial problems. It was truly inspiring to witness the passion and unconditional commitment of the (shockingly underpaid) counselling team to meeting the students' needs. Much to our dismay though, we were informed that the efficient operation of this service is in jeopardy in the very near future due to the lack of financial resources to support additional personnel. The EEC strongly encourages the central governance of the Harokopio University to exploit any available resources (or find other creative ways) that will allow the current counselling team to continue offering its invaluable services to the University. The EEC believes that the impressive work of the counselling team sets a bright example of the potential of the Greek Universities to offer excellent learning environments with equal opportunities for every student regardless of his/her socioeconomic background or other personal characteristics.

IMPROVEMENTS

Has the Department identified ways and methods to improve the services provided?

Initiatives undertaken in this direction.

The Department is still understaffed in terms of the technical and administrative personnel. The EEC finds somewhat troubling the fact that one single person is responsible for the majority of the administrative and financial issues related to the postgraduate program. There is also limited technical personnel responsible for the uninterrupted operation of the computer labs. If we also consider that most faculty members are already overcommitted, there is concern that the Department will face serious challenges to further expand its research and teaching enterprise. While recognizing the restrictions imposed by the prevailing economic conditions in Greece, the EEC advises the central governance of the Harokopio University to consider accommodating the Department's needs with respect to technical support and teaching. In parallel, the Department should pursue other avenues, such as the contractual hiring and training of qualified personnel.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Since 2000, when the first students were admitted, the Department of Geography has developed some collaboration with commercial enterprises and consulting firms primarily through the internship placements of the undergraduate students. The EEC believes that the interaction with the private sector is certainly an area that needs to be further cultivated. If the department aspires to disseminate the potential role of geographers in the Greek society and thus significantly improve the marketability of its alumni, it needs to make significant progress towards establishing connections with the industry and various non-governmental

agencies. This view was also echoed by the representatives of the Alumni Association. The Department has also been engaged in a number of outreach activities including visits of elementary schools, presentations, interviews, and workshops for the societal benefits from the Department's research and teaching enterprise. A number of faculty members actively participate in various Hellenic and international scientific union councils, and as expert evaluators of national and international scientific programs. The Department of Geography, however, recognizes that more work needs to be done in this direction and its faculty members should be more actively involved in promoting its visibility at a national level and increasing the recruitment of higher calibre students. The EEC strongly encourages such initiatives.

E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

The overarching goal of the Department is to achieve a high level of excellence in education and research, and to improve the quality of incoming students, making them qualified for graduate and postgraduate studies and highly competitive for positions in industry, government, and academia. In general, the EEC considers the Department's Curriculum rational, functional and effective. Under- and post-graduate teaching quality is on par with international standards and continuous (and fairly rigorous) self-evaluation processes are already in place. The research enterprise of the Department is very satisfactory, but the EEC also believes that the Department's research profile would greatly benefit from a clearer strategic focus on priority subject areas. While our discussions with individual faculty members did provide evidence of their aptitude to develop strategic partnerships with other European academic institutions, there seems to be a lack of centrally-instigated efforts to participate in international cooperative research activities and to demonstrate active leadership commensurate with the excellent credentials of the research personnel. The EEC is convinced that this is a worthwhile goal within the Departments reach, which is encouraged to consider our recommendation.

The main inhibitors negatively impacting the Department at the State and Institutional levels include the continuing severe economic crisis in Greece, limitations in funding, lack of appropriately allocated personnel, a number of incoming students greatly exceeding the Department's request, the increasing bureaucracy, and the lack of a sufficient level of independence from the central governance of the University. Several of these factors have been increasingly important under the rapid growth of the Department over the past decade and are likely to undermine its future prospects. At the departmental level, the EEC identified as one of the main inhibitors the large percentage of insufficiently qualified incoming students, long delays in graduation (resulting in a fairly large number of inactive students), low mobility rates through the Erasmus programs, absence of consistent policy with respect to the rigour of the undergraduate diploma thesis and the internship placements, and lack of clear policy regarding the financial support of the graduate students.

The Department of Geography has excellent potential to overcome the aforementioned inhibiting factors. The EEC was truly impressed by the collegiality of the departmental community (faculty, staff and students) and the high level of motivation to orchestrate their efforts towards the success of the Department. Our extensive interactions with a large number of representatives from all groups revealed an excellent "team-spirit" and many personal sacrifices to ensure that the high standards set by the department are maintained and lead to successful outcomes. Another very important positive aspect is that the Harokopio University has managed to protect itself from the pathogenic symptoms of other historical academic institutions that are located in Athens and Thessaloniki. The impressive maintenance level of the infrastructure, the open faculty-students rapport, the excellent collaboration among the different academic units, the support of senior faculty toward junior faculty through mentoring, co-teaching and research collaboration offer excellent reasons to ponder the future with significant optimism.

The Department believes that the imminent opening of "closed professions" in Greece and the liberalization of the job market will greatly improve the prospects of its alumni. The EEC concurs with this view but also believes that the Department should intensify its efforts to promote the role of geographers in the nation's socioeconomic life. Because of the lack of awareness in Greece of the potential role/prospects of the discipline of Geography and the rigor of the study program, the Department needs to consider various outreach activities that will disseminate knowledge about the appealing features of its programs, and effectively establish a brand identity. The Department also recognizes that it is extremely important to attract undergraduate students with higher scores at entry level examinations. The EEC agrees and recommends the development and implementation of specific plans to achieve this goal.

The Department's short-term goals include the optimization of the utilization of the existing resources, maintenance of the existing infrastructure, establishment of strong linkages with the private sector, participation in and (when possible) leadership of large scale international projects, a dedicated and well-thought outreach plan to showcase the strengths of ography as a field of study to the student body and the general public (especially parents and teachers), and an increase of the research deliverables, including publications in higher profile journals and patents. The Department also recognizes the need to magnify the role of internship placements in the educational process and thus capitalize upon the very promising record of past students who took advantage of this excellent "hands-on" opportunity. The Department also aims to further develop its own capabilities (recruitment of postdoctoral research associates, increase of the technical personnel that could effectively assist with the operation and maintenance of the instrumentation) to conduct independent research on issues where it already leads on a national scale, such as on immigration and demographic changes in relation to the environment, and the socioeconomic implications of natural disasters.

The long-term objectives include the consolidation of the Department's international profile as an academic unit that serves its original pedagogical mission and can also offer tangible solutions to emerging environmental challenges and related socioeconomic needs. In this regard, the EEC enthusiastically agrees with their aspiration to develop an inter-university English-language post-graduate degree. In doing so, not only the odds of achieving financial sustainability (greater pool of applicants) will increase, but also the visibility of the Department at an international level will improve. The gradual administrative independence, their capacity to successfully compete for larger-scale research grants, and their potential success to reach out are critical milestones to further expand the existing infrastructure, to more effectively accommodate the ever-growing demand for increase in the number of student admissions, and to ultimately establish the relevance of the discipline of Geography in Greece.

The EEC is optimistic about the Department's evolution, both due to the internal positive forces outlined above and the very good caliber of its research and teaching personnel. An additional source for optimism is the Department's open-mindedness and commitment to impartially evaluate its current strengths and weaknesses, as well as its willingness to adopt more extroversive academic and research activities. The need for additional academic members of staff, support for technical facilities and technicians and the development of a post-doctoral program as presented by the Head of the Geography Department are reasonable, in line with the needs of the Department and supported by the EEC.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

The Department of Geography of the Harokopio University of Athens has established an excellent teaching program and a very respectable research record. The overall assessment of the Committee is very positive. The Department's success lies in the engaged and highly motivated student community, the excellent credentials of its dynamic faculty members, and the outstanding environment and infrastructure characterizing the Harokopio University. The performance of the Department is admirable and the EEC is pleased to report a number of strong points identified during this comprehensive evaluation process:

- A successful learning and research environment that is founded upon a positive and open student-professor rapport, and highly qualified and very dedicated faculty members.
- The existence of several research clusters that are engaged in high-profile projects. There is also a great deal of important research in the Department that is however not capitalized in terms of citations or other metrics (e.g., h-index) typically used to assess research productivity.
- An increasing appreciation of the importance to compete for external research grants.
- Excellent support from the small but very efficient administrative staff.
- A carefully designed graduate curriculum that offers a truly unique opportunity to specialize in Geography. The strongly positive comments of the graduate students speak volumes about the high quality study program and the excellent cultivation of skills that contribute to the training of a new generation of geographers in Greece.
- Outstanding facilities and modern instrumentation, despite the fairly limited technical support.

The Department of Geography is now at a turning point. The EEC members wish to make the following recommendations to address some of the current weaknesses and enhance the future development of the Department. Some of these recommendations are intended for the Department, while others are directed at the University and State authorities:

Recommendations on Curriculum

The EEC recommends the following:

Undergraduate Studies

Recommendation 1: improve the Guide for undergraduate studies by clearly explaining the goals and objectives of the undergraduate curriculum

Recommendation 2: review the contribution of each course in conjunction with the goals of the undergraduate curriculum with a view to reducing the number of courses offered

Recommendation 3: develop a system for introducing new course options and removing options that are consistently undersubscribed

Recommendation 4: consider making the fourth-year synthetic research project required of all students

Recommendation 5: consider making the internship a requirement for all students, assuming that sufficient internship opportunities are available

Recommendation 6: involve stakeholders (e.g., from public agencies, the private sector, the profession, academia) in the further development of the curriculum

Recommendation 7: consider developing the curriculum with a view to enhancing the employability of the alumni by directly connecting some of the courses offered with the needs of the job market

Post-Graduate Studies

Recommendation 8: consider the possibility of reducing the three streams of the Post-Graduate curriculum course to two, with the current Geo-informatics stream becoming part of the two other streams.

Recommendation 9: recruit an academic member of staff to support the delivery of the Post-Graduate Program

Recommendation 10: consider increasing the numbers of students admitted to the Post-Graduate Program

Recommendation 11: consider the possibility of developing English-language courses in order to attract international students

Doctoral Studies

Recommendation 11: develop a Study Guide for doctoral students

Recommendation 12: adopt specific procedures for the organization and management of the PhD program

Recommendation 13: institute competitive research awards for at least one incoming doctoral student per year

Recommendation 14: encourage and promote the publication of research derived from doctoral dissertations

Recommendations on Teaching:

Recommendation 15: The Department correctly considers the establishment of mechanisms for assessing progress towards the implementation of curricular objectives. The Department should consider adopting the framework of ‘outcome-based education’, which provides systematic tools for measuring teaching quality and course effectiveness. The Department currently does not have a mechanism for evaluating the appropriateness of course assignments and final examination questions, beyond collecting student feedback through course evaluations.

Recommendation 16: The Department should find ways to reward the best teachers and to help those who underperform improve their teaching. The Department should advocate the establishment of campus-wide awards for excellence in teaching.

Recommendation 17: The Department should take action to encourage student feedback concerning course evaluations. The electronic survey should be replaced by hard copy questionnaires, the questions should be reduced or simplified in order to encourage participation, and/or reward mechanisms could be used to increase the incentive for students to provide feedback.

Recommendation 18: The EEC recommends that the Department spend more effort towards increasing the mobility of students under the umbrella of the ERASMUS program. Students who have the necessary language skills should be strongly encouraged by the Department and, with the potential help of the Career Services Office, be assisted in their preparation to participate in student exchange programs. Special fellowships should be developed to support students lacking the necessary financial means. A seminar series should be established in which returning students will present the highlights of their experience abroad.

Recommendation 19: The EEC recommends that the University help the Department to be more autonomous financially and toward implementing its strategic plan.

Recommendation 20: The University should seriously consider establishing campus-wide awards for excellence in teaching.

Recommendations on Research:

Recommendation 21: The EEC strongly recommends that the Harokopio University and the Department of Geography establish mechanisms to support newly hired academics in the development of their own research programs. The EEC suggests three possible ways for achieving this: (i) provisions for new faculty mentoring, (ii) professional development opportunities, such as additional support for travel in scientific conferences; and (iii) reduction of the overheads retained by the Research Committee of the University from competitive grants led by the non-tenured researchers.

Recommendation 22: It is strongly suggested that the Department’s faculty undertake a concerted effort to substantially increase the number of publications in high quality journals. This is imperative in order to secure and strengthen the Department’s international visibility. Tools to enhance motivation to publish and to improve writing skills should be actively implemented, such as paper reading clubs on priority topics and writing seminars (both of which should also engage students); and greater emphasis should be given to the publication

record during departmental faculty evaluations, as well as for hiring and promotion.

Recommendation 23: The Department should strive to maintain and improve its high research standards, encouraging collaborations among faculty members toward research clusters that can leverage resources. These units should develop strategies for team continuity through well-developed research targets that would strengthen existing “niches”, while in synergy with emerging research priorities.

All other services

Recommendation 24: The EEC recommends that the Harokopio University create a centralized e-system in accordance with the administrative staff’s suggestions for bureaucratic simplification. The central e-system should aim at handling student admissions, registrations, grades, and other student-related information and inquiries. Course grades should be available to students on-line.

Recommendation 25: The EEC urges the central governance of Harokopio University to exploit any available resources (or find other creative ways in collaboration with other local counselling groups) that will allow the psychological counselling team to continue offering its invaluable services to the school. The EEC believes that the impressive work of the counselling team sets a bright example of the potential of the Greek Universities to offer excellent learning environments with equal opportunities for all students regardless of socioeconomic background and physical or mental problems impacting their studies.

Recommendation 26: The EEC strongly recommends to the Department to update its website in order to showcase the career opportunities and the multi-disciplinary nature of the geographer’s profession.

Recommendation 27: In collaboration with the Careers Centre of the University and the Hellenic Association of Geographers, the Department should collect success stories of geographers and post them on their website. In addition, the web site should help potential and current students to link the courses included in the curriculum to specific career paths.