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ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

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HELLENIC QUALITY
ASSURANCE AGENCY
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT of Public Relations and Communication

UNIVERSITY /TEI of Western Macedonia, Kastoria, Greece

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Public Relations and Communication of the Technical Institution of Western Macedonia, Kastoria consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Professor Costas Danopoulos (Coordinator)
San Jose State University, U.S.A.
2. Professor Victor Roudometof
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
3. Dr. Georgios Athanasiadis, ex General Director
Air Liquid Hellas, Athens, Greece
4. Professor Symeon Giannakos
Salve Regina University, U.S.A.
5. Professor George Kaloudis,
Rivier College, U.S.A.

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 five-person Committee was charged to review the Department of Public Relations and Communication University/TEI of Western Macedonia, Kastoria, Greece. The site visit took place between November 1 and November 3, 2010. The Committee followed the travel plan made by the HQAA. All the meetings took place on campus. All full-time faculty members were present in all meetings. The Committee met with students, alumni, staff members (the Head of the Secretariat, the Erasmus coordinator, the IT persons and the librarian), and all the full-time permanent faculty members (three people). The Committee also met with a representative group of adjunct faculty.

All the meetings with staff members, alumni, students and adjunct faculty members were held without the presence of the full-time faculty members.

The Committee visited classrooms and observed instruction taking place as well as labs and the library. The Committee also observed the presentation of two of the students' theses in the context of the capstone seminar. People at the university were accommodating, open and willing to assist the Committee and provide whatever information was requested of them. At the Committee's request, the Rector and the Vice-Rector of TEI of Western Macedonia traveled to Kastoria and met with the Committee on November 2.

The Committee examined the Internal Evaluation Report of 2008-09, as it was updated and completed by October 2010. The Committee also examined the various appendices to the Report. The Committee asked and received documents concerning students' grade records and statistics concerning library use, interlibrary loans, and expenditures. While at the library the Committee went over students' graded exams and students' graded theses. At the library, there was also an exhibition of textbooks used in various classes as well as sample journal articles, exam questions and student evaluations.

The Committee also received samples of CVs of various adjunct faculty members. The Committee also looked at the full-time faculty publications' record and other professional activities as well as samples of various international journals in which the faculty members serve on their editorial boards.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The Committee is fully satisfied with the documentation received in advance as well as the documentation received upon further request. All the documentation the Committee inspected was thoroughly prepared, comprehensive and easy to follow. The documentation contained ample information, highly appropriate and useful for the evaluation. The data sources appeared legitimate and the data was properly obtained and recorded. In the Committee's view, the Department has met the objectives of the internal evaluation process. The data was consistent with the Department's academic goals and objectives in both its qualitative and quantitative form.

A. Curriculum

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

APPROACH

Currently, the Department has an undergraduate program only. It has applied for an MA program, but that program is not yet in operation. All subsequent remarks pertain to the undergraduate program.

According to the internal evaluation documents, the Department's goal is to provide public relations personnel with market-appropriate scientific knowledge and skills. These skills and knowledge enable graduates to create and implement complete public relations strategies for businesses and organizations through the selection and shaping of appropriate communication networks.

The Department's aims are pursued through a curriculum that combines theoretical foundations with practical applications. The theoretical foundations are provided through a core curriculum offered in the first two years of the program. The last two years of the program concentrate on connecting theory to practice through coursework heavily relying on the use of labs and workshops that make extensive use of communications technology. There is a capstone seminar required for students in their 7th semester in preparation for writing an undergraduate senior thesis. There is also practical training taking place during the semester prior to graduation. According to the information we have received, the majority of senior theses are theoretically based while some of them are more empirical.

According to the information we were provided with, the curriculum objectives were selected after an extensive review of similar programs operating in Europe and the US (University of Southern California and Syracuse University). In the Committee's view, the Department has set the curriculum in conformity with appropriate international standards. In creating and developing the curriculum the faculty had to confront the fact that in Greece there was no comparable program and the field of public relations was hitherto unknown in its professional dimension. Therefore, the Department set up a curriculum that was quite innovative for Greece. By now, there is an additional program set up in the TEI of the Ionian islands which used this curriculum as its starting point.

The curriculum was set when the Department was established (1999).

Because this was a newly found program, the curriculum was designed solely by the faculty members who initially set up the Department. There has not been a major revision of the curriculum since that time. No student input has been made toward such a goal.

Based on the information received about employment of graduates and as far as the Committee was able to ascertain, the curriculum does meet its goals. According to a survey of past graduates conducted by the Department itself and included in the Internal Evaluation, as well as to testimonials by alumni interviewed by the Committee, nearly all of the graduates are successfully employed. According to a survey of the alumni conducted by the Department and included in the Internal Evaluation, nearly 80% of graduates are employed in the private sector. This suggests that the Greek market appreciates the knowledge of the graduates and values the skills they have acquired. The alumni have set up an electronic platform with Facebook which serves as a link for the exchange of information among them. The platform has approximately 350 members, which suggests the emergence of a vibrant alumni community and of future professional association.

According to the information received, the Department has not yet set up a procedure for a major revision of the curriculum. During the program's life, minor revisions have been made to the curriculum. The faculty members consider the long-term stability of the curriculum a positive asset. They are also cognizant of the fact that revisions might be appropriate, but at the present time lack of resources is a major obstacle toward such a goal.

IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the chronic shortage of funding, resources and personnel, the Department has successfully implemented the curriculum objectives. The curriculum compares quite favorably with universally accepted standards for university-level education in this particular area of study. The structure of the curriculum is rational and clearly articulated: theoretical courses of study are taking place during the first two years of study while more practical applications are taking place during the last two years of study with requirements for labs and workshops set up accordingly. As a result, the curriculum is mostly coherent and up to date. Course material is by and large appropriate and the time offered to students is sufficient for the completion of the various tasks.

The Committee is pleased to observe that the Department has instituted a policy of prerequisites for a select number of key courses, such as the

methods courses. This is a sound policy that enables students to eventually acquire the necessary skills cumulatively and consequentially.

The major issue clearly visible during our visit is that the Department lacks the necessary resources to fully implement the curriculum. For example, the Department is facing difficulties offering senior students a timely opportunity to retake courses they have failed. Failure leads to students getting displaced from the curriculum's course sequence and as a result a good number of students have their graduation time extended. While appropriate qualified faculty is available to teach such courses, the Department cannot afford to pay.

The Department's full-time faculty is clearly well trained and fully qualified to pursue the objectives of the curriculum. Because of their small number, the Department has come to rely on a disproportionate number of part-time staff or adjunct faculty members (over 40). As far as we are able to assess, the adjunct staff are also well trained to assist in the teaching. However, there are many bureaucratic obstacles and practical constraints that do not allow the Department to make full use of the adjunct faculty. The institution (TEI) is imposing restrictions on the adjunct faculty's participation in administration and committees, even about mundane matters. Some of the adjuncts are better academically trained and have a clear academic orientation while others are more technically trained and have a more applied orientation.

In the long run, the lack of predictability of long term budget planning hinders the development and implementation of the curriculum.

In conclusion, the Department does admirably well with the fiscal resources at its disposal, but these resources clearly are insufficient for the exceedingly large number of students allocated to the Department, especially so since the 2007-2008 academic year.

RESULTS

The Committee is satisfied that the Department has been able to implement its predefined goals and objectives, despite the dearth of resources. Shortcomings in specific areas are largely the result of insufficient budget allocation of resources and the result of large number of students the Department is obliged to serve in its incoming cohort.

IMPROVEMENT

To the judgment of the Committee, the Department acknowledges the need to upgrade the core curriculum to reflect the evolution of comparable programs abroad. The Department considered the suggestions of the Committee

amicably and is contemplating adjustments. Specifically, the Committee recommended that two new courses be added to the core curriculum. One should be on ethics and public relations and the other one on comparative government. The Committee also observed that there is an introductory course in political science, but that course is mislabeled: it is called Political Sociology instead of Political Science. That should be adjusted. Also, the Department should examine and place in its core curriculum a course on culture and communication.

Though constrained by resources, the Department assured us that every effort will be made to respond to the Committee's suggestions.

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

The Department uses a combination of instruction methods based on lectures, labs and workshops. The Department's pedagogic policy is to combine theoretically focused lecture courses with applied labs and workshops. The goal is to have students move from theory to practice within the four years of their study.

According to the Internal Evaluation documentation, the teaching faculty/student ratio is 1 staff per 231 enrolled students. In terms of the students who are taking final exams, the faculty /student ratio is 1 staff per 114 students (approximately). According to national legislation, students are required to attend 80% of lab sessions while attendance of lectures is not mandatory.

It is clear that this is a very high student /faculty ratio, even when taking into account the adjunct faculty. Also, the Committee believes that attendance should be mandatory for all classes. That should help decrease the attrition rate but it will also help students complete their studies in a timely fashion. According to the Internal Evaluation, the attrition rate is approximately 20 to 30% over the last decade. The percentage of those who successfully complete the curriculum within four years has fallen over time. This is the result of students taking more time to complete their studies and in particular it appears related to the tendency of students to find work before completing their thesis. As a result, students take more time to complete their thesis and their time required for graduation is therefore extended.

As far as the Committee was able to determine and based on the comments made by the students themselves, instructors overwhelmingly are responsive to student queries. They are accessible by email and in person and often spent considerable time advising students. Adjunct faculty in particular also work overtime without compensation to offer assistance to students.

The Committee also notes that the teaching approach followed allows students to enroll but not attend lectures. The teaching method used in the Department (as well as in all Greek higher education units) is examination-based. Multiple examination methods – such as assignments, papers and midterms – should be formally used in order to diversify the teaching system and allow a far more accurate and fair assessment of students' abilities.

The Department's faculty has attempted to introduce papers and other assignments in order to achieve such an objective. However, all such efforts work on a voluntary basis and only to the extent that the students themselves chose to exercise these options. In such cases, students receive adequate feedback and assistance.

The Department has attempted to overcome the lack of resources by developing and implementing use of electronic communication. That has helped the Department, but there are limits imposed by the software used, which is an open source available on the Internet.

The teaching resources include library, labs and copying facilities, as well as access to the on-line network. There are some issues with availability and accessibility of these resources. First, the library is not open after 3:00 pm due to lack of personnel. As a result, students' access is limited. Second, copying facilities are available to faculty, provided they submit their request ahead of time. As a result, access to required material may not be available on time. Third, the access to electronic communication system is also restricted sometimes because of the limits of the software used. This imposes practical obstacles to the ability of the faculty members to use email and other electronic communication to effectively reach the students. In particular, lab assistants cannot also access the network to upload or download student assignments.

IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the Committee's observations, the quality of teaching is quite strong. Lectures seemed clear, up to date and well presented. Students appeared attentive and often asked pertinent questions. The teaching material was of good quality and the choice of textbooks made good use of the current Greek literature in the various fields.

As far as the Committee was able to ascertain, instructors and in particular the full-time faculty members, utilize their research and publications to enrich their course materials. This is a good means of keeping up with the latest in research and to familiarize students with contemporary research practices. The alumni praised the utility of their education and considered it quite relevant and useful in their jobs. A few of the department's graduates have been accepted to graduate schools in Greece and the rest of Europe.

Between 2004 and 2009 student mobility was 3.5 students per year outgoing and zero incoming. The Committee has no additional information that allows it to comment on student mobility.

Between 2004 and 2009 faculty mobility was 2.3 per year outgoing and 18.2 incoming. While the full-time faculty has not changed, there has been significant mobility among the adjunct faculty.

The Committee's general impression of the students' evaluation of the teaching and the course content was extremely positive. Students remarked that they value highly the assistance and guidance offered by the faculty.

RESULTS

The Committee's appraisal of the efficacy of teaching is positive. The Committee has already commented on some issues relating to issues related to time for graduation.

Students mentioned that the methods courses were challenging, especially the introductory methods course offered in the first year of study. This was the course students felt they could get into trouble. They attributed this difficulty to the fact that many enter higher education without adequate training in math.

IMPROVEMENT

The Committee considers that, given the current circumstances, the Department does a good job and there is little room for improvement. The Department is currently contemplating strategies that would allow it to maintain its current level of instruction in light of pending budget cuts. That is, in the Committee's view, quite admirable.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

According to the response of the Department's faculty members, the main areas of research for the Department are: Internet communication, e-democracy, and electronic governance. The Department encourages applied research and its members do pursue research projects. They participate in research projects involving EU and/or national funding. They are encouraged to engage in collaboration with research foundations or educational institutions involved in the production and/or dissemination of scientific knowledge.

The internal standards for assessing research are not established by the Department, but determined by national legislation. The Department's small faculty size does not allow the effective separation between the individual research agendas and the institutional research agenda. Regardless, the full-time faculty maintains an ambitious research agenda. The scholarly agendas of the faculty compares favorably with those of their counterparts in major American and European universities.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department promotes research by entering into various research programs as evidenced by the faculty's CVs. There is no institutional funding for research and there is no research infrastructure per se. Until recently, the Department had only two faculty members. A third faculty member has just joined the Department. He too shows evidence of scholarly engagement. For our purposes, therefore, we consider only these two faculty members' record.

In terms of scholarly publications and using the internal evaluation documentation, the Committee observed that the faculty members in the period 2004-2009 had 6 edited books and edited volumes, 19 articles in scholarly journals and 11 chapters in edited volumes. In addition, they have 25 paper presentations in national and international conferences.

There is evidence provided by the Department that their research has been cited in journal articles. The faculty members have indicated participation in 43 editorial boards of various journals and 20 organizing committees of

various conferences. In view of their administrative responsibilities, heavy teaching loads and lack of a Ph.D. program, this seems to be an impressive record. Their individual records could earn the faculty members promotion and tenure in major research universities in Europe and North America.

The Department has participated in ARCHIMIDES II research program and has applied for research funding in ARCHIMIDES III AND THALIS in collaboration with other Greek and foreign educational institutions (including UK and US institutions). In 2003 in Kastoria, the Department has also initiated the international conference on political marketing, which has become an internationally recognized event. Meetings were held in Bucharest, Nicosia, and Manchester.

RESULTS

The Committee deems that the Department's research objectives have been admirably implemented as evidenced by the numerous publications and conference presentations, as well as the involvement in various research projects. By and large, the publications tend to be applied research and there is considerable evidence that research is clearly enhancing teaching.

Prof. Yannas has been awarded an honorary distinction by the Greek Society of Public Relations. He has also been designated leading Communications Intellectual of Europe by the European Association of Communication Directors and invited to serve as external expert and evaluator of Public Relations programs in the Republic of Cyprus.

Professor Lappas has been invited by the Swiss National Science Foundation as external evaluator of applications. He has also been invited to chair sessions in several conferences like: the 9th international conference on Multimedia Systems (China), the 4th international conference on politics and information systems, technologies and applications (USA), and the 4th international conference on soft computing, optimization, simulation and manufacturing systems.

Key faculty publications have also been amongst the top-cited articles in the field of Public Relations.

IMPROVEMENT

The Committee commends the faculty members for their outstanding research and publication records and encourages them to continue their past excellent work.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH

In spite the severe shortage of administrative staff, the Department feels satisfied regarding the services provided to the academic community. The reactions of the various constituencies (students, faculty) are sufficiently positive to justify the confidence.

There is only one person working in the Secretariat for the Department. Given the heavy work load and the vast number of students, one person is not enough to offer services to the academic community.

Given this chronic problem with an understaffed administration, the Department has attempted to simplify administrative procedures. In 2003, it instituted a system of electronically processing registration. This practice has alleviated the situation and it offers students access to their registration records. In comparison with similar situations in other higher education institutions in Greece, the Department has done a remarkable job. But the understaffed administration is a serious problem, which in this Committee's view should be addressed.

Additionally, the Department's Information Technology support is limited to only one full-time person. The same applies to the library. Additional administrative support is provided by student assistants paid at the rate of minimum wage. These shortcomings also need to be addressed. According to the Committee's on site interviews, there is also a problem with outdated software. This issue makes it difficult to offer students the latest in information technology which is an important dimension of their teaching.

IMPLEMENTATION

As already stated, there is only one secretary for the Department. This problem cannot be remedied due to lack of funding. The Department does not have the logistics to offer typing services to faculty and students, and should be provided with funds to purchase a copier. In addition, there is no money to purchase new hardware for the central server. These problems necessitate reliance on outdated technology which in turn creates a host of

technical and logistical problems.

In terms of library resources, the Committee observed that there are nearly 60 desktop computers in the library. The main issue is therefore not with the lack of hardware. Rather, it is the fact that the library closes down at 3.00 pm and it is not accessible to students in the evening. This is because currently the TEI of Western Macedonia in Kastoria is served by only one librarian. Therefore, the main goal should be to have an additional librarian or other employee to ensure the library's availability to students for access throughout the week.

There is no student counseling, and as far as the Committee can tell, athletic activities are not offered either. There are no student dormitories at TEI in Kastoria, although there is a cafeteria serving the students free of charge.

RESULTS

It is clear that the administrative and other services are inadequate. To the extent they are functional it is mainly at the expense of the personnel who make of personal sacrifice to make things work for the students. These sacrifices are typical of the sentiment of community-based support that permeates the entire TEI.

IMPROVEMENTS

The Department is aware of most of the above problems. It does not appear however capable to have the suitable resources for the necessary tasks. In large part, this is because TEI funding is centrally and arithmetically distributed to departments and is not need-based.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The Department is conscious of the important role in the area. As such, throughout its short history, it has made every effort to cultivate ties with the local community and has pursued a series of collaborative cultural activities with local agencies.

The Department has created a free university lecture series with the support of the local municipality. It has organized various one-day seminars on several topics ranging from introduction to research, to gender issues, to encouraging entrepreneurial activity among students, etc. It has used its facilities for cultural activities such as the premiere of Pantelis Voulgaris' movie "Psihi Vatheia." The Department also has sponsored presentations about a number of issues such as the local history of the Jewish community of Kastoria.

The above are indicative examples of the type of ties the Department has cultivated with the community.

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.

It is clear that as far as the Department is concerned, the major inhibiting factor has to do with the Greek State and the institution (TEI of Western Macedonia). The Department is currently part of the broader TEI unit of Western Macedonia. The Committee was informed that funding is distributed horizontally among the 17 units of TEI and distribution is not determined by the number of enrolled students and/or the needs of individual departments. The skewed distribution of funding creates a long-term structural problem regarding the adequacy of funding for the Department's various activities.

The Committee considers that the above distribution policy is of immediate urgency the institution (TEI of Western Macedonia) should address. Addressing this issue would alleviate the most pressing needs of the Department, including the compensation of adjunct faculty, the hiring of the necessary administrative staff, and other infrastructural concerns mentioned in the report.

In its Internal Evaluation, the Department has proposed the following medium-term goals:

1. restructuring and modernizing of the undergraduate curriculum
2. making the curriculum relevant to the needs of the labor market

3. hiring qualified administrative and teaching staff in order to meet current and future teaching and administrative needs
4. implementing the already developed M.A. program
5. acquiring state of the art technology and using it to improve the curriculum
6. safeguarding the quality of teaching and academic research
7. creating a Multimedia and Internet Research Lab
8. strengthening mutual cooperative ties with businesses and other educational institutions
9. gaining recognition for the Department in academic and entrepreneurial contexts
10. supporting and strengthening the material infrastructure and innovation technology
11. rationalizing the various administrative procedures
12. increasing student exchange programs

The Committee feels that this is an ambitious program and requires discriminating between immediate priorities and more long-term goals. According to the Committee, the immediate priorities should be items (3), (10) and (11). Medium-term goals (for the next 5 years) should include items (4), (5) and (8). The long-term goals (for a period of more than 5 years) should include the rest of the items from the above list.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

The TEI of Western Macedonia in Kastoria offers an undergraduate degree in Public Relations and Communication and does not offer a graduate degree.

The Committee is favorably and enthusiastically impressed with the quality of education offered by the Department. The blend of academic and practical education allows the Department to buttress the education of its students in an unmatched fashion. Indicative of the quality offered, and its effectiveness, is the fact that the Department's graduates have secured employment in their

field in a most competitive market, often times, immediately after presenting their degree thesis; sometimes, employment is secured even prior to the completion of the degree thesis. In the Committee's view this is an indisputable testimony of educational effectiveness accomplished with disproportionately meager resources. This is also a testimony of admirable efficiency and an exemplary case of educational investment.

The curriculum is comparable to established programs in internationally recognized universities. The program is an innovative one in the Greek educational environment and provides an indispensable service to the market. It is conducive to good practices long established in the rest of Europe and the United States. In particular, the Committee is impressed with the institutionalization of prerequisite courses in the core curriculum. This is a positive practice which needs to be maintained and worthy of imitation by other departments. The Department has been able to implement its goals and objectives. Student performance demonstrates so easily. The Committee has recommended to the Department some minor revisions to the curriculum mainly through the introduction of a few new courses and updating a few others.

Shortcomings in specific areas are largely the result of insufficient budgetary resources and the result of large number of incoming students, particularly since the 2007-2008 academic year. The infusion of additional students has not been met with a comparable increase in the numbers of the full-time faculty. The same applies to the administrative services, which are grossly inadequate. The skewed distribution of funding by TEI Western Macedonia is a critical factor inhibiting the rational allocation of resources. Distributions of funding would best be based on variables such as student population and unit-based academic and administrative needs.

The Committee acknowledges the exemplary, by Greek standards, establishment of an alumni network, which should be developed and relied upon for the further growth of the Department and the development of the field at large. To date, the field of public relations is not institutionally recognized in its professional capacity and potential. An effort should be made to remedy this shortcoming and stronger alumni could help make such an effort possible.

As stated in Section E, the Committee feels the Department's strategic planning is ambitious and requires goal prioritizing. Out of the 11 items listed in the Internal Evaluation Report, immediate priority should be given

to items (3), (10) and (11). Medium-term goals (for the next 5 years) should include items (4), (5) and (8). The long-term goals (for a period of more than 5 years) should include the rest of the items from the list of the Department's recommendations. Finally, the Committee encourages the Department to seek collaboration with other departments in order to offer an interdisciplinary M.A. degree.

The fact that the Department has been able to adjust to unpredictable conditions demonstrates its propensity and ability to adjust, make changes and undertake necessary remedial efforts for improvement. The Department has basically succeeded in an environment in which others have been failing. The Department is sensitive to the demands for continuous improvement and is amicable to suggestions for change. It is a dependable, flexible, resourceful, effective, and efficient educational unit.

The Department is doing everything within their means to provide quality education to the students, and a much needed economic outlet for the development of the local community. The Committee attributes part of the Department's success to its hitherto administrative independence, which should be maintained. However, should administrative independence prove to be impossible, it would be a wise educational investment to connect the Department to an established educational unit in Political Science and/or Communications. Such a connection would enhance the Department's core curriculum by allowing it to tap into existing academic resources to broaden the scope and depth of its educational services for a discipline that is becoming increasingly politically and socially indispensable to both the private and public sectors. Clearly the disciplines that can facilitate this are Political Science and/or Communications due to their encompassing nature rather than professional program such as Business Administration or its subfields like Marketing or Management.

The Members of the Committee

TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF WESTERN
MACEDONIA (KASTORIA CAMPUS)
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS & COMMUNICATION

Name and Surname

Signature*

1. Professor **Costas Danopoulos**, San Jose State University,
Department of Political Sciences, California ,U.S.A.

2. Professor **Victor Roudometof**, University of Cyprus,
Department of Social and Political Sciences, Nicosia, Cyprus

3. Dr. **Georgios Athanasiadis**, ex General Director,
Air Liquid Hellas, Athens, Greece

4. Professor **Symeon Giannakos**, Salve Regina University,
Department of Political Science, Newport, U.S.A.

5. Professor **George Kaloudis**, Rivier College,
Department of History, Law and Political Science, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

*The original signatures were placed on the archive copy of the HQAA