



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY

ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

February 17, 2011

External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Psychology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki consisted of the following five (5) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Professor John Adamopoulos (Coordinator)
Grand Valley State University, USA
2. Professor George A. Marcoulides
University of California at Riverside, USA
3. Professor Andrew Papanicolaou
University of Texas Medical School at Houston, USA
4. Professor Irene-Anna Diakidoy
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
5. Professor Konstantinos Petrides
University College London, UK

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visit took place on February 14 through February 16, 2011.

Upon arrival, the EEC was met by representatives of the Department of Psychology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUT) for a brief introductory meeting.

The official visit began with a meeting with the Department Chair and the Vice Chancellor of AUT for a discussion of the general state of the university and the department in particular. This was followed by a meeting with the faculty of the Department of Psychology that included a formal summary presentation of the departmental self-evaluation report and a broad discussion with the faculty members. Subsequently, the EEC met on an individual basis with the majority of the faculty and selected members of the student community.

On the second day, the EEC met with the administrative staff of the department and obtained further details concerning the functions of the unit. This was followed by visits to the facilities, including laboratory spaces, and faculty offices in the department. The EEC subsequently conducted additional faculty and student interviews. The day concluded with a visit to an off-campus community outreach facility coordinated by members of the department.

The EEC made full use of the material placed at our disposal. Available to the committee were among others:

- The internal evaluation report
- Statistical data related to the evaluation report
- Samples of theses and dissertations
- Course syllabi and examinations
- Faculty curriculum vitae
- Textbooks and other learning materials
- Samples of department meeting minutes
- Graduate and undergraduate program guides

The EEC wishes to express its appreciation to all individuals who provided assistance during the visit and all requested documents.

The atmosphere during the entire visit was cordial and professional. Faculty members, staff, and students were friendly, responsive, and eager to engage in constructive dialogue.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

Overall, the quality of the internal report was good. Specifically, the report provided extensive details and data for the programs associated with the department, including information on the teaching, research, and service responsibilities of faculty members. In the few cases where additional information was required, the department made it readily available.

The EEC feels that the major objectives of the internal evaluation process were met, and is grateful to the members of the Department for the significant amount of time and effort that they invested in the process.

A. Curriculum

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

I. Undergraduate Program

The objectives of the curriculum are to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the discipline of psychology, and to prepare them for further study and research in postgraduate programs as well as for the delivery of clinical and consulting services, mainly in schools, community centers, and hospitals. The plan for achieving these goals is met by exposing students to a variety of courses, involving them in faculty research projects, and engaging them in the delivery of services. The objectives appear to have been decided in faculty meetings over the years and modified accordingly by the evolving interests of individual faculty members.

A sentiment shared by many of the faculty members interviewed during the visit and the EEC is that the curriculum needs adjustment in order to effectively meet all of the objectives outlined above. As far as we were able to determine, there is no specified formal procedure for such revision and long-range planning, although some attempts have recently been made to modify the curriculum appropriately.

II. Graduate Program

The objectives of the curriculum vary by program area as well as within programs. Three of the programs attempt to be research and practice/applied-oriented, whereas a fourth program is oriented toward community outreach services.

These objectives also appear to have been decided in faculty meetings over the years and modified by the evolving interests of individual faculty members. The division of graduate program areas reflects current departmental interests and needs, more so than typically differentiated disciplinary lines.

III. Doctoral Program

As far as the EEC can determine, the main objective of the program is to provide doctoral-level credentials by means of the completion of a research dissertation. There is no formal curriculum. Admission to the program has as a prerequisite the successful completion of an accredited postgraduate degree.

IMPLEMENTATION and RESULTS

I. Undergraduate Program

As mentioned earlier, there appear to be several discrepancies between the program goals and their implementation. These derive from three main sources: (1) governmental and legislative directives that affect all higher education in Greece; (2) university-wide policies; and (3) departmental practices.

With regard to (1), we see the following limitations:

- (a) The program is limited to four (4) years, when at least a 5-year course of study would be necessary. This is because of the fact that the program leads to a professional degree which renders it comparable to programs in Europe and North America that require both a bachelor and a master degree in psychology.
- (b). The government requires that the department accept more students than it can ever possibly train effectively.
- (c). The typical time-frame for the completion of studies can be excessively long, thus placing an undue burden on limited resources.
- (d). The practice of students taking examinations for the same course multiple times results in inefficient resource utilization.

With regard to (2) above:

- (a). There is little provision for the sharing of resources, courses, and laboratories across departments, schools, and disciplines.
- (b). The placement of the Psychology Department in the School of Philosophy, rather than in the empirical sciences, makes the sharing of appropriate and needed resources—such as courses and research facilities—problematic. This also limits the department’s ability to achieve its objective of training professional psychologists.

With regard to (3) above:

- (a). The lack of enforced course prerequisites complicates the proper sequencing of program courses, instruction, and knowledge acquisition.
- (b). The Psychology Department is organized into three program areas, thereby reducing the curriculum’s cohesiveness and making it more difficult to achieve stated educational and training goals.
- (c). Essential course offerings are missing from the curriculum. These include, among others, courses on testing and measurement, psychometric theory, a variety of clinical intervention approaches, and physiological psychology.
- (d). The requirement that everyone complete a bachelor’s thesis depletes human and material resources, cannot be implemented in a way that assures program and product quality, and creates conditions that are conducive to extensive plagiarism.
- (e). More than 30% of the current faculty obtained their doctoral degree from the AUT. Furthermore, only about a quarter of the faculty have no previous institutional affiliation with the university. This could create an environment that tends to limit the diversity of approaches both to the study and the teaching of psychology.

Note. Many of the issues raised above are relevant for the next two sections.

II. Graduate Program

Three of the four graduate programs have mixed basic and applied orientations, which tends to result in a rather unclear focus. Nevertheless, the programs provide supplementary training sorely needed in order to produce professional psychologists.

III. Doctoral Program

The Department does not currently provide structured course offerings.

IMPROVEMENT

There appears to be disagreement within the department concerning the overall structure of the program and the curriculum, as well as the methods for their improvement. Nevertheless, individual faculty members recognize these issues and appear more than willing to work toward a solution.

B. Teaching

APPROACH, IMPLEMENTATION, and RESULTS

There are limited teaching resources (e.g., classrooms, laboratory facilities, and computers as discussed above).

Faculty members utilize effectively a variety of teaching methods, including those relying on information technologies, based on a stated goal of diversifying their approach. However, the limited availability of departmental computing resources for students limits the type of instructional strategies that can be implemented. In addition, student/teacher ratios are excessively high.

Course materials are up to date and there is an effort to expose students to a variety of sources, and examination strategies and topics are generally appropriate.

The evaluation of courses by students is a relatively recent practice. Student participation in this process is relatively low despite the fact that they have a vested interest in the process. There appears to be a need to more effectively communicate to them the importance of the overall evaluation process.

Time to graduation and degree grades

Of the total of 1249 registered students, 377 (approximately 30%) have exceeded the expected degree completion time (4 years). We did not obtain detailed assessment data on actual graduation grades, although staff members anecdotally commented that there has been a recent trend toward lower grades.

IMPROVEMENT

Faculty members are eager to improve their teaching effectiveness through a variety of methods and strategies. For example, an increasing number of faculty members are utilizing the resources of Blackboard in their classes. In addition, there have been concentrated efforts to increase project-based learning activities.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

An examination of faculty curricula vitae reveals that members strive to be productive often under conditions that would be deemed unacceptable in institutions abroad. International visibility of the faculty is somewhat limited due to (a) inadequate facilities, resources, and funding, (b) excessive teaching and administrative responsibilities, and (c) a lack of explicit departmental policies concerning research objectives and evaluation criteria. This has led to the proliferation of local and regional publications at the cost of quality research products in international outlets. Nevertheless a number of faculty members have managed to overcome these limitations and have produced such high-quality research.

The lack of laboratory space is severe. Laboratory space consists mainly of one large seminar/group room, a single observation laboratory, and an adjacent “island” with several computers. This area is surrounded by many faculty offices, several of which are shared. This situation is not conducive to the effective collection of data and related research activities.

In general, there is little opportunity for undergraduates to participate in research, and little external and administrative support for research funding. There are no research assistantships available for either undergraduate or graduate students.

IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS, AND IMPROVEMENT

As indicated in the Department’s internal evaluation, no long-range planning and strategy concerning research has been discussed or implemented. Nevertheless, a large number of faculty members are actively involved in collaborative research activities with colleagues in various institutions in Europe and North America.

A small number of faculty members have served or are serving on the editorial boards of international scientific journals.

D. All Other Services

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

APPROACH, IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS and IMPROVEMENTS

The Department feels that it provides an important service to the community, both through their academic programs and outreach activities, a sentiment with which the EEC is in agreement. There is no support from instructional technology for the Department's website, but the administrative staff within the Secretariat appear to provide exceptional service.

Department members feel that they have adequate access to library facilities and bibliographic resources, although occasionally subscriptions are temporarily suspended until governmental and university funding is made available.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The Department operates a high-quality community outreach program in which undergraduate and graduate students are involved.

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 factors that contribute to the difficulties that the Department faces in meeting its objectives derive mainly from state policies. Nevertheless, the faculty could initiate improvements independently, both in the undergraduate and graduate programs. The role of strategic planning related to program and research development is of utmost importance for the continued growth and improvement of the Department. Specific issues that the faculty can address independently of any legislative changes are outlined in the following section.

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F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

Many faculty members are making significant efforts to improve the quality of teaching, research, and training in applied areas of psychology under difficult conditions. The current organizational limitations mean that these efforts may prove insufficient for achieving the fundamental goal of training professional psychologists, unless:

- a) the student-staff ratio is drastically reduced
- b) the duration of the studies is extended to at least five years
- c) an interactive supervised training across the entire range of the various applied areas is implemented

On the other hand, governmental and legislative changes designed to address the foregoing issues need to be complemented by:

- a) the design of a comprehensive curriculum in order to provide a more complete coverage of all essential areas of psychology
- b) the implementation of an appropriate course sequence with prerequisites and the relevant adjustment of registration and examination practices
- c) the improvement of current faculty hiring practices with a view toward attracting the best scientists internationally as opposed to individuals with close ties with current or past members of the department. The onus to inform potential applicants worldwide should be on the Department
- d) intensification of efforts by the faculty to obtain extramural funding and to produce a larger number of high-impact publications.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname	Signature
1. JohnAdamopoulos	
2. George A. Marcoulides	
3. Andrew Papanicolaou	
4. Irene-Anna Diakidoy	
5. Konstantinos Petrides	