



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ
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ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY /TEI

Spatial Planning and Development
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

January 2014

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the **Department of Spatial Planning and Development** 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. **Prof. Michael Romanos** (Chair)
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning, University of Cincinnati, USA
 (Institution of origin)
2. **Prof. Loukas Kalisperis**
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
Stuckeman School of Architecture, Pennsylvania State University, USA
 (Institution of origin)
3. **Former Prof. Alexander Papageorgiou-Venetas**
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
University of Leuven, Belgium
 (Institution of origin)
4. **Assoc. Prof. Symeon Christodoulou**
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Cyprus
 (Institution of origin)
5. **Mr. Athanasios Papaioannou**
 (Title) (Name and Surname)
Association of Greek Engineers for Spatial Planning and Regional Development
 (Institution of origin)

Introduction

I. External Evaluation Procedure

The external evaluation committee (EEC) visited the site of the Department of Spatial Planning and Development of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, from 20 till 22 of January 2014.

In the first day of the visit, the EEC arrived in early afternoon. Later in the afternoon, there was a meeting with the Rector and the Vice Rector of the University, the Dean of the School of Engineering, the Chair of the Department, and members of the Internal Evaluation Committee. During the meetings there were presentations by the Vice Rector and the Dean.

The rest of the visit included:

1. presentations and discussions with representatives of the different Departmental committees
2. group and individual meetings with the faculty and administrative staff
3. meetings with students and alumni of the Department, and local practitioners including representatives from industry and other organizations where students and/or graduates are employed
4. visits to offices, classrooms, studios and computer labs
5. informal contact with members of the Architecture faculty
6. visit of the library
7. exit meeting with the Chair of the Department and the majority of the faculty

During these meetings and visits there was discussion on related topics where several members of staff were present and responded to questions by the EEC.

The EEC appreciated the hospitality of the Department's administration, faculty and staff, as well as their willingness to facilitate our visit and access to premises, facilities and materials pertinent to the external evaluation process. The EEC appreciates the Department's willingness to openly discuss issues, problems and possible improvements.

In particular, the EEC wishes to extend its heartfelt gratitude to the Chair of the Department for his tireless commitment to accommodating our requests and facilitating the overall process.

List of reports, documents and other data examined by the Committee

There were a number of documents submitted to the EEC:

1. internal evaluation committee (IEC) report dated November 2011 and its update, dated December 2013
2. program of study for 2013/2014 and its predecessor (2010/2011)
3. course guide
4. textbooks and other course materials

5. representative samples of the work for laboratories and classes
6. representative samples of undergraduate theses, lab reports and exam papers
7. teaching staff CVs and representative publications
8. the Department's proposal for a change in the Department's title
9. digital copies of the Department's presentations to the EEC

The EEC also visited the Department's website.

The EEC was impressed by the exemplary level of cooperation of the Chair and members of the Department.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

The members of the EEC found that the evaluation report prepared by the IEC was informative and reflected the current status of the Department. The objectives of the internal evaluation process were met by the Department.

A. Curriculum

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

APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM

- In the internal evaluation report and in the study guide of the Department of Spatial Planning and Development Engineering of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki the targets of the undergraduate curriculum are not made explicit.
- Since, at the initiative of the Department, there is in progress the administrative procedure to rename it into the DEPARTMENT OF URBAN PLANNING, SPATIAL PLANNING AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, it can be concluded that the objectives of the curriculum are: (a) the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, (b) the familiarity with methods and tools of scientific and professional work, and (c) the ability to structure complex proposals for planning interventions, i.e., the scope of the three subjects mentioned in the proposed name of the Department.
- The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) strongly supports the proposed renaming of the Department, because it considers the new name as more complete and coherent, and more able to define the professional profile of its graduates.
- From the discussions of the EEC with the Department faculty and students it became clear that the curriculum has experienced successive restructurings during the first decade (2004-2014) of the Department's operations due to the gradual increase in the number of its faculty members (currently 19). The consequence was the gradual thematic enrichment of the instructional program.
- The curriculum was written and subsequently revised through the deliberations of the members of the faculty, with limited and informal student participation (during the early years of the Department). According to the faculty, the curriculum took into account the content and structure of similar programs, mainly of European universities.
- According to the approximately twenty students with whom the EEC held a discussion, the curriculum is viewed positively regarding its thematic range that, although broad, still provides a wide range of flexible skills to assist them in their careers. At the same time there is a clear desire among many students for more emphasis on urban planning and urban design. The EEC fully supports this request, with an emphasis placed on urban planning.
- The offer of many elective courses (22, of which 11 must be selected) is seen as a good thing by the students, because it allows them more opportunities to focus on their personal interests. However, the Department currently offers these elective courses only in the 7th, 8th and 9th semester of undergraduate studies. The EEC has reservations regarding this practice, and is suggesting some alternatives.
- The students also indicated that it would be useful to extend one or two synthesis courses (studio projects) over two consecutive semesters, so that the synthesis component of the studio would ripen fully and would develop better. The Committee deems this change appropriate.
- The successful efforts of the Department to ensure positions (in both the public and the private sector) for summer practical experience (internships) is recognized by themselves and by the EEC as particularly positive and necessary for the professional preparation of the

students. It would be desirable, as the ultimate goal, to transform this practical training from a two-month optional to a three-month mandatory component of the curriculum.

- In the opinion of the EEC the curriculum, as it stands today, offers a wide range of subjects as far as their number, the combination of theoretical knowledge, methods and tools, and the synthetic skills are concerned, and this is since as a positive.
- With 26 hours of class contact per week, and the additional time spent working on the studio projects (in the Department and at home) the program of studies can be characterized as "heavy ' but not "unbearable", given that the students di not complain about it.

RESULTS AND IMPROVEMENTS

- During our discussions with the teaching staff we found them open to suggestions for improvements and even the restructuring of the curriculum, but they did not volunteer any such changes themselves. Here appeared a tendency of the faculty members – during the initial phase of operation of the Department – to focus mainly on their own academic interests and to offer courses accordingly. However, it was stated by the faculty members that the discussion is already open and that a restructuring of the program is scheduled to commence at the end of this academic year. The EEC appreciates this perspective and insists on the need of its implementation as a first priority.
- Insofar as the structure of the curriculum is concerned, there is a lack of a clear structure (temporal and in terms of cognitive content modules). The EEC suggests a clearer structure encompassing all courses in the curriculum, in order to avoid possible duplications of their content and to ensure logical and functional time sequences of the individual courses. For this reason we present below an illustrative example of the subject area of Urban Planning that can be used as a guide for the restructuring of the curriculum, which is one of the immediate objectives of the Department, according to the Department faculty.
- The EEC recommends the following curriculum framework:
 - o Required foundation courses on basic knowledge and skills (e.g., mathematics, design, GIS, economics, etc.)
 - o Required courses of general planning interest -- the Department's subject matter (planning and design foundations, Urban Planning, Spatial Planning, Regional Development)
 - o Electives of general planning interest (e.g., urban history, environmental analysis and policy, transportation, remote sensing, mathematical models, social justice, healthy cities / regions, etc.)
 - o Electives of special planning interest and related to the three areas of focus – urban planning, spatial planning, regional development (e.g., graph theory, econometric models, urban models, regional models, anthropology, urban sociology, etc.)
 - o Thesis

Note that the above categories of courses include studios, lecture courses, seminars and labs.

- The EEC proposes three areas of focus/knowledge content (which at no time are suggested as formal "specializations" or "concentrations" that would disrupt the comprehensiveness of the study program):

- o URBAN PLANNING
- o SPATIAL/REGIONAL PLANNING
- o REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

These areas will be promoted equally and in parallel throughout the course of study.

- As an example, we offer an illustration of the subject area of Urban Planning (after restructuring and replacement of existing courses with codes: (Θ 1-1), (ΣΕ 2-1), (ΣΕ 3-1), (ΣΕ 4-1), (Ε 6-1), (ΣΕ 8-1). The courses of the other two subject areas should be restructured in a similar fashion.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF COURSE CONTENT IN THE AREA OF URBAN PLANNING

Required foundation courses on basic knowledge and skills

This includes a list of courses that all students in the Department will take, covering basic knowledge and tools.

Required courses of general planning interest

This includes a list of courses that all students in the Department will take, covering all knowledge areas ("modules "). As an example, we list below only the courses that are relevant to the knowledge area of Urban Planning. Similar lists will exist for the areas of Spatial/Regional Planning, and Regional Development.

URBAN ANALYSIS

- Mapping of existing urban structure data (graphic and verbal): urban densities, land uses, property ownership, transportation networks, arrangement of building volumes etc.
- Mapping (graphic and verbal) of existing urban form/ image of the city: Form, style, age of buildings, form and organization of public spaces, form and structure of open/green spaces.
- Graphic and verbal analysis of qualitative phenomena (intangibles) in the city: Views, orientation, information and advertising, symbolism).

URBAN COMPOSITION (PROJECTS / STUDIO)

(Prerequisite: Urban Analysis)

- How to structure (institutionally regulated) urban planning projects: street plans, general urban plans, land use plans etc.
- How to structure (institutionally not regulated) plans for urban interventions/regenerations. Scales and conventional presentation of plans.

Electives of general planning interest

This list will include elective courses of miscellaneous subjects, which are not knowledge-area specific (e.g., urban history, environmental analysis and policy, transportation,

remote sensing, mathematical models, social justice, healthy cities / regions, etc.)

Electives of special planning interest

This includes a list of courses that all students in the Department will take, covering all knowledge areas ("modules "). As an example, we list below only the courses that are relevant to the knowledge area of Urban Planning. Similar lists will exist for the areas of Spatial/Regional Planning, and Regional Development. This list will include elective courses of miscellaneous subjects which are knowledge-area specific (e.g., graph theory, econometric models, urban models, regional models, anthropology, urban sociology, etc.)

ELEMENTS OF URBAN SOCIOLOGY

Methods of social consultation and participation in urban planning. Methods of analysis of population composition. Behaviors and interpersonal relationships in the city .

HISTORY OF THE CITY

Form and structure of the city from ancient times until today. Examples of temporal evolution of major cities. Important theoretical proposals for new cities over the centuries.

PLANNING HISTORY

Important proposals and approaches to city design before the establishment of urban planning as a science. The genesis of urban planning as a discipline in the 19th century. Urban theories of the 20th century. History of urban planning education and accreditation of the profession.

URBAN PLANNING PROJECT

Design proposals based on urban analysis of data and potential of a particular site for the establishment of new or the improvement of existing neighborhoods, communities, and metropolitan areas. Concerns mainly the structure and form of the urban fabric.

URBAN DESIGN PROJECT

Design proposals based on analysis of the current situation for the renovation/ restructuring of existing public spaces, residential complexes, urban neighborhoods or urban sectors.

Elective courses – Prerequisites – Synergies - Thesis

- In the opinion of the members of our committee it would be advisable that the Department continues its current practice to renew/modify the subject matter of elective courses every two or three years.
- Taking elective courses should be allowed from the beginning of a student's study, so that the required courses can be supported and enriched throughout the duration of the study (Fig. 1). In this way there is continuing flexibility in support of the personal choices of

students.

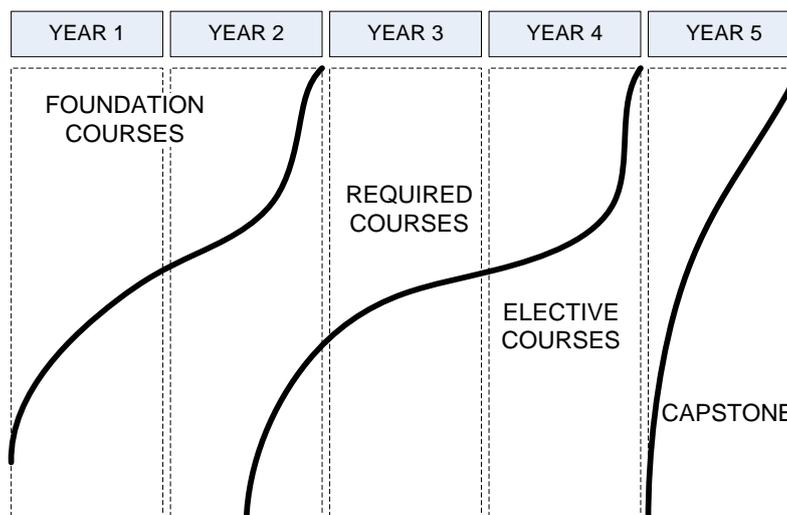


Fig. 1. Schematic of proposed academic structure.

- For each required course or for certain electives it may be required to have completed one or more prerequisites.
- It would be advisable to consider the possibility for students of the Department to take specific courses (e.g., Econometrics, Statistics, Geodesy) in other departments, so as to lighten the teaching load of the faculty, which will thus be able to put more emphasis on the synthesis studios with the collaboration of several instructors.
- It is the opinion of the EEC that the final degree requirement, which now consists of a "diplomatiki" (project) and an "erevnitiki" (thesis) part, both of which can be completed independently during the last year of studies, should be integrated into one final requirement consisting of an independent student project which will contain both a theoretical research background and the analysis and synthesis of a real-world project. It is recommended that this new final project be initiated during the first semester of the fifth year and be allocated 15 ects, and that it is completed during the final semester with full-time dedication of the student to it (30 ects).
- It would be useful to limit the annual "thesis" topics to a relatively small number that will be proposed by the Department. This would facilitate monitoring among faculty and would allow comparisons of student performance, which is very useful for them.
- Finally, it is suggested that the "thesis" requirement be carried out by teams of two to three students so as to also practice teamwork.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

The Department has no unified pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology. Faculty members have the discretion to select and implement their own approaches to teaching, and the majority of them have been diligently experimenting with innovative teaching techniques and the wide use of modern teaching and technology tools. The university in general encourages the use of *Blackboard*, and the faculty of the Department has taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the *Blackboard* instructional tools.

There appears to be no problem with the teaching methods followed by the members of the Department's faculty. The students appeared well satisfied with the approaches taken by their instructors and the results of their teaching efforts. However, this may be partly because of the limited exposure of the students to other methods, and partly because broader and more detailed explanations of course requirements may be given orally in class. In our review of the individual course folders, we noticed that the majority of the courses had a short and inadequate description and syllabus, lacking all but the most basic information, offering little guidance to students about the organization, content and requirements of the course, and providing little in the form of main and supplemental educational tools, web resource assistance, and other readings. The EEC is aware of instances where such information was communicated to the students through class discussions and lectures. However, such information should be codified and made available as standard practice. As the Department's faculty declared, in most cases the required information and guidance as well as supplemental tools and readings are provided through the *Blackboard* platform.

In a number of cases, it was explained to the EEC that assignments such as papers and short projects beyond the major readings and the final examination were hard to manage because of the large number of students in each class, and the lack of support personnel to assist in the administration of such exercises, labs and field work. The EEC understands the difficulties caused by these two factors, but we also observed that a number of the faculty members have been able to overcome these difficulties and experiment with interactive, seminar-type, student-participatory teaching and assessment techniques, the results of which have been more than satisfactory for both the students and the instructors. This approach should be encouraged.

It may be useful to make a comment about instructional resources here. In general, classrooms are adequate, although we found the condition of the teaching facilities non-conducive to the creation of a learning environment. Computer labs appear to be well organized, better maintained and adequately equipped than the rest of the buildings. The library is well-designed, clean and well organized, although its holdings can be greatly improved in terms of numbers, significance and international exposure.

Regarding the distribution of free textbooks, the EEC found that the students normally select one of a small number of book choices for each course each semester, and that they are issued these books by the government without charge. We find this practice academically ineffective and financially wasteful. First, many of these books may be simple basic textbooks

that may have little value beyond their introductory nature, and may not constitute particularly useful long-term additions to student/professional libraries. Second, this process tends to limit the choice of readings in each class because of the limitations provided by the choice of the 3-4 proposed books for each course, resulting in a limited range of materials that can be tested at the examination stage. And third, and most importantly, this practice creates significant limitations on the teaching of the subject matter, especially for advanced upper-level courses.

In this Department, the student/teacher ratio has been relatively high up to now, because of delays in the approval of several new hires. This has now been alleviated, since four new faculty members – one Lecturer, one Assistant Professor and two Associate Professors -- were approved recently. However, the fact remains that a number of courses has an unacceptably high number of students, instructed by only one individual faculty member, and without any teaching or administrative support. With the extraordinary workload this entails for the instructor, we believe that this situation compromises the quality of the students' education, and significantly reduces the opportunities for student/teacher interaction. Of the need for this interaction, the entire faculty of the Department is keenly aware, and goes into extraordinary lengths to make up for its lack by making itself available out of class time. As a result, there is a uniformly high level of satisfaction among the students regarding faculty accessibility and advising. We also observed that there is much enthusiasm and dedication among the faculty for these interactions, and a genuine effort to make the students feel at home and welcome, and well advised. Students specifically commented about the easy accessibility to most of the faculty, and several faculty members commented about their efforts to know each student by name and recognize any special needs and interests of the students. For a department that has been on the move, and has lacked adequate resources, this is a very commendable practice. However, the EEC is greatly concerned that this excellent learning environment cannot be sustained in the future due to the increasing number of incoming students.

IMPLEMENTATION/RESULTS

Because most of the syllabi did not provide detailed course descriptions, we are not in a position to comment on the adequacy of the materials and the level of sophistication of teaching in each course. We found the courses to vary considerably in quality and depth of coverage, though. Based on the examples of the textbooks included in the course packages made available to us, we conclude that course material coverage in general may have been adequate but not demanding. Judging from the samples of student projects, however, we find that the students had learned a lot in each course. Also, student course evaluations have been very positive, and students seem quite willing to participate in the evaluation of their classes and their instructors, a fact that to date has resulted in an approximately 55% response rate among the students in the Department, as compared to 25%-30% response on the average for the university as a whole.

No peer evaluation for teaching has been practiced in the Department, or the School of Engineering for that matter, and none is even being contemplated. We find that peer review of teaching methods, practices and behaviors can be decisive for the improvement of course delivery. Academic institutions in other countries have gone to lengths to conduct

assessment of faculty teaching performance and effectiveness. In this effort they have used tools such as videotaping of individual faculty instructor performance, and/or utilization of the resources of the Department of Education thus benefiting from the expertise of the faculty of that department regarding alternative approaches to teaching and innovations in instructional methods. These tools would assist Department instructors in improving their lecture delivery, achieving command of the class, using techniques to keep student attention and participation in class activities high, and improving the general dissemination of knowledge and enthusiasm for the class subject among the students. It would be desirable for the university as an institution to consider organizing such a program of quality instruction improvement, especially since most of its units are being faced with an undesirable increase of its student populations, and therefore with a straining of both resources and faculty capacity to be effective teachers and communicators. The EEC itself also did not have the opportunity to observe any classes in session because our visit coincided with the final-exams period.

To date there does not appear to be much connection between teaching and research. Faculty members have indicated their desire to improve on that point, by mentioning the need for a master's degree program and by indicating the involvement of doctoral students in both teaching and research, now that the first four doctoral candidates have enrolled in the Department. Such practice is highly recommended.

The records show little mobility among faculty and students, but a strong desire to participate in domestic and international exchanges and collaborations with other academic institutions and research agencies. There is already the beginning of a number of collaborations between members of the faculty and European university research groups, and there is every indication that these collaborations will continue and expand, with benefits for the entire faculty and their research productivity in addition. A number of students have taken advantage of the practical training opportunities being administered by the Department in the past few years, under which students are being placed with public agencies and private firms for short periods of time. This has been an effective program, which the Department is now attempting to make a permanent feature of its activities, even in the event that national and European funding of the program is discontinued. A number of students have also travelled abroad for short or longer periods of time, either for graduate studies or for attendance in workshops and conferences. There is genuine desire to expand on all these activities, which we strongly encourage.

IMPROVEMENT

We find that teaching, while satisfactory, can be improved considerably by developing a model of course syllabus that each member of the faculty can use and modify appropriately to fit their courses, subject to the minimum requirements of clearly defining course content, grading policies, examinations and other procedures; explaining workload and course expectations; and listing course material references, bibliography and minimum amount of material to be covered. The EEC recommends early and full adoption of the ECTS label system.

Second, we would like to suggest that the Department initiate a program of faculty teaching reviews by instituting peer review wherein colleagues from other departments may be asked to assist in the evaluation -- especially instructors who may have become known for their teaching innovations and their exceptional class performance. To encourage teaching excellence -- and recognition of that excellence -- the School of Engineering might consider instituting an annual Teaching Excellence Award, accompanied by some tangible benefit to the awarded instructor, such as coverage of the cost of participation in an international conference. Selection of the instructor would be made via student and peer evaluations, as well as using other evidence of exceptional teaching performance, such as external recognitions and teaching awards and publications in pedagogic/educational/instructional subjects.

Third, the EEC strongly recommends limiting the number of incoming students to better utilize the current available human and instructional resources, and to reflect the uniqueness of the curriculum. Under the current operating conditions, the EEC suggests that the number of incoming students (including transfer students) not exceed 60 and that for studio and lab instruction the faculty-to-student ratio not exceed 1:20 and 1:30 respectively.

Finally, the EEC recommends that the Department explore opportunities of participation in their instructional activities of faculty from other units with expertise in appropriate subject matter, such as graphic communication, economics, political science, sociology and land surveying.

C. Research

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

APPROACH

The Department of Spatial Planning and Development (DSPD) consists primarily of junior faculty, pursuing activities in a wide range of research topics. Despite the relatively high number of faculty (19), most of them were elected in the last few years (academic years 2008/2009 and 2013/2014). As a result, as the faculty also admit, the Department has not yet established a focused research profile.

Even though the faculty seems to be engaged in a variety of project-oriented research areas through several funded projects, fundamental research is undertaken by only a few individual members of the staff in areas of their scientific interest.

Despite the utilization of a university-wide process to record the faculty members' research activity on an annual basis, there are no clear standards for research evaluation within the Department, the School and/or the University. Furthermore, there is no defined research policy and even though there exists a small number of courses which seem to stem from research activity, research in general is not integrated in the curriculum. Similarly, the research project and the undergraduate thesis which students take in their final year of studies are mostly project-based and not research-oriented.

Finally, the Department does not offer any graduate (MSc) programs and only recently started a doctoral (PhD) program, which currently houses four PhD candidates.

IMPLEMENTATION

The necessary academic qualifications asked of the new faculty are higher. In general, there is research output as an outcome of important individual efforts, some collaboration with colleagues from within the Department and other university departments, as well as with other national universities, an adequate level of external funding (about 500,000 euro in the last three years), but no graduate (MSc) students and limited success in attracting PhD students (4 students for 19 faculty members).

The availability of laboratory or computer equipment (hardware and software) for academic and research purposes is very good. The Department has recently moved its base from the city of Veria to Thessaloniki and the facilities given to it, or established by it, are mostly new and up-to-date, with basic (computers, software, etc) and cutting-edge technology (laser-scanning, 'google car', etc.) and equipment also at hand.

Research activity has heavily suffered from the lack of a Departmental research focus and

synergies, and from the faculty's heavy teaching load.

Even though there is room for improvement in the research aspects of the students' undergraduate thesis, the efforts of faculty members in directing the theses towards research are appreciated by the EEC.

RESULTS

The Department, for the period 2003-2013, lists several externally funded research projects and publications in its record. Funds are primarily streaming from national sources (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Development, Ministry of Finance) and some from international sources (the European Commission, FP7, Cyprus Research Promotion Foundation). The Department lists 11 projects that its faculty coordinated and 31 projects in which its faculty participated as project partners. The total revenue the Department's faculty generated in the period 2010-2013 is about 500,000 euro.

Most of the research done is in collaboration with researchers from other departments and universities. Research activity, though, is primarily focused on project-based activities and not fundamental research per-se. Additionally, the Department lacks a research focus and strategy. The output is adequate and mainly related to the individual interests and efforts of the faculty, but can and should be improved quantitatively and qualitatively. To achieve that, though, (a) the Department has to clearly establish its research goals and stigma, (b) the teaching load of active-research faculty members has to be better managed so as to free time for research activities, (c) faculty members should pursue/enhance their scientific collaboration with researchers at other universities and/or research institutes, and (d) the University has to institutionally facilitate such research activities through a series of changes.

In terms of publications, the Department's faculty lists several journal and conference publications (approximately 55 per year in total, for the past 6 years). This is about 0.9 journal publications/year/faculty, and 2.0 conference publications/year/faculty. Third-party citations are 1.93 per year per faculty. The aforementioned statistics may be deemed adequate considering the Department's young age, the small number of faculty in the Department's first years, the faculty's heavy teaching load and the Department's struggle to find a research direction. The number and quality of publications, however, should be increased now that the Department has been moved back into the facilities of the Polytechnic School and has completed the hiring of four more faculty members, with an emphasis on peer-reviewed and high-impact indexed publications. The increase can be achieved through the pursuit of more research-oriented activities.

In terms of research infrastructure, the Department is in possession of quality equipment (hardware and software), but here again there is more room for improvement. Indicative areas of improvement are: national databases (GIS, property, land-use, etc.), remote sensing, high-powered computers (HPC) and/or clusters, laser scanners, 4D animation and high-end visualization, and specialized software.

IMPROVEMENTS

The Department cites the availability of new research funding streams (primarily through national and European competitive calls) and the possibility of autonomously offering an MSc-level program of studies. The intent should be not only to strengthen the Department's teaching profile but to also utilize such programs and financial streams in attracting graduate students, supporting research activities relating to the Department and in financially strengthening the Department's research profile.

The EEC, in summary, proposes the following:

- DSPD faculty
 - Focus the Department's research goals to areas of strength and clearly define the Department's research profile.
 - Strengthen the synergies with other faculty members, within the Department and the University. The establishment of interdisciplinary research clusters/units/labs can greatly help in doing so.
 - Actively pursue externally-funded research projects with an emphasis, as much as possible, on research-oriented and not project-oriented projects.
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
 - Allocate, on an annual basis, portions of the funding/overhead streaming to the University directly to the Departments and their faculty, to be used in support of their research activities (recruiting of researchers, purchasing of equipment).

D. All Other Services

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

Overview

The Department strives to offer the highest possible quality of services to both students and teaching staff, and to a great extent this is achieved, but mainly through hard work and commitment by both administrative and academic staff. In general, the student body has expressed its satisfaction for the services offered to them, recognizing the current limitations and constraints faced by the Department, whilst indicating areas of improvement.

Organization

The EEC spoke at length with the full-time and part-time faculty members. We concluded that the faculty members hold appropriate degrees in related fields from respected academic institutions. Faculty work was found to be of high quality, as evidenced through practice, exhibitions and professional work. The level of dedication and teamwork by the faculty members was found to meet expectations of the highest standard. The core teaching staff is dedicated, motivated and enthusiastic. The overwhelming majority of the faculty are at the level of Lecturer or Assistant Professor, which the EEC views as potentially problematic in the development of the faculty team and the Department overall. The Department's lack of senior faculty members impedes the independent development of the educational mission of the Department, and although the current Chair of the Department (on loan) is a dedicated and well-meaning individual allowing the faculty independence, the system **does not** guarantee independence. It is unacceptable for a Department not to be able to manage its own affairs.

The Department's administrative staff consists of 2 persons (reduced significantly the last year) and 5 technicians, supporting 19 faculty members. The student body in the 2013/14 academic year consisted of about 372 registered students. The increase in numbers of the incoming students will **adversely** affect the organization and services offered by the Department.

Student Services

The high number of students serviced by the Department lately has put a very high strain on both the Department's resources and its quality of service to its students and teaching staff. In terms of student services, the Secretariat is also responsible for monitoring and implementing the changes to the Department's academic programs.

The Department should improve on the efficiency of the class schedule through better management of the course hours, student groups and registrations. A system of pre-requisites must be enacted (to allow for planning and control of growth); or 'course slots' can be institutionalized to avoid conflicts in courses and overcrowding.

Academic advising is only done on an informal basis and is mostly student-initiated. While the current student cohort seems satisfied with this arrangement, the EEC is concerned that such advising may not continue to be effective as the number of entering students increases.

Furthermore, both current students and recent alumni suggested that it would be beneficial for the Department to institutionalize the provision of academic advising and assistance for professional placement.

Finally, even though the students acknowledge that the Secretariat is generally accessible and helpful, the limited office hours during which the Secretariat is open for serving students should be extended.

Financial Services

The Department has a very limited budget of its own, and in particular is not in control of, nor directly benefit from the overhead income from research. It is imperative that direct research funding be fully allocated to the Department and utilized for the improvement of research infrastructure and academic services within it.

Travel

Academic staff reported that opportunities to travel to conferences and other professional engagements using institutional funds have been eliminated due to the significant recent budget cuts at the institutional level. Overhead research funds could be used to offset these budgetary constraints, especially in support of junior faculty members in order to advance their standing.

Grant Management

There is an institutional policy in place that allows charging research overhead to grants. However, the allocation of overhead income generated by departments is not standardized and does not directly benefit the departments generating it, but rather remains at the sole discretion of the University Research Committee (*“Επιτροπή Ερευνών”*). Staff can request from the central research administration committee internal funding support for purchasing lab equipment or other related items from the University Research Committee, but the decisions for such spending are made by the central administration. Furthermore, the decision-making process for the allocation of overhead research funds within the Department is left upon the discretion of the Chair. At these early stages of the Department’s development, overhead research funds could be used to offset budgetary constraints, especially in support of junior faculty members in order to advance their standing, and for the establishment of appropriate research infrastructure.

Library

The EEC believes that the library is performing well and providing a valuable resource. The Library facilities for the Department of Spatial Planning and Development are adequate to run the undergraduate degree program. The faculty members, library staff, and students that we interviewed have reported their satisfaction with the current book and magazine collection. Additionally, they have reported the administration’s support of ordering new books as demand arises. The EEC however observed that the specialized book collection in support of the program is still incomplete.

The holdings are available in an electronic catalogue; there is access to journals and free internet. A trained librarian shared encouraging facts with the EEC regarding the number of

students using the resources, checking out books, and responding respectfully to the rules and regulations set by the library staff. A degree of informality afforded by the small size of the community is utilized to resolve issues and challenges in a friendly manner. Members of the Departmental community value this highly. The library has access to most field journals. The library has also an adequate open-space reading room for onsite studying and internet access. In fact, the EEC observed that there is ample available space that could perhaps be utilized to accommodate functions other than a simple book repository, such as by installing individual or group study spaces.

Despite the quality of premises, though, the Library can be improved through: (1) a more robust and widely accessible web-based access to its catalogues; (2) reliable remote access (through VPN); and (3) variable-faction reading spaces (e.g. individual spaces, group spaces, etc).

Information Technology (IT)

The Department of Spatial Planning and Development website is adequate, but could be improved with regard to interactive aspects enabled by contemporary web platforms. It should also be expanded to include ways to showcase student achievement and to invite opportunities for collaborations such as student exchanges and research, to enable direct instructor-student interaction, to facilitate hosting of coursework content, etc.

IT facilities are adequate and well equipped. The Information Technology staff is knowledgeable and very helpful. The labs, the computer network and the hardware are all well managed. There should be a constant review of computer resources and this should be updated as often as possible. Software titles should be made available to students off-campus through a **reliable** authenticated remote connection system. We found the current printing service very good. The students also have good large-format plotters. The practice of providing free printing service to students needs to be rethought, as the resources currently allocated to that might be better used somewhere else.

Space and Buildings

The Department of Spatial Planning and Development is accommodated in facilities that are on loan from other departments within the School. The move from Veria, although a very appropriate and welcomed move, created a number of problems with respect to the available infrastructure of the Department. The current state of the lack of dedicated space resources is cause for concern. Overall, the current facilities of the Department provide a good infrastructure for the study of planning, development and urban design curriculum. Unfortunately these facilities, being on loan from the other departments within the School, are creating an atmosphere of “filoxenia” and as such, there is a lack of identity and lack of memorable image specific to the unique character of the program. While a lack of identity is a problem for any program, it is especially inappropriate for a design/planning-oriented program. Without a strong memorable image, the Department does not have the ability to demonstrate to its own students the significance of good design and planning. This condition creates some concerns regarding the ability of the program to instill a strong sense of community within the Department and fulfill its academic mission. Indeed, the unit needs a positive working environment that includes a dedicated space allowing the students to be inspired and work in a milieu that is not transient, generic and of poor quality.

The classroom space seems to be adequate for the number of students currently enrolled in the program, but the EEC is greatly concerned that the higher number of incoming students

into the program will render the available facilities grossly inadequate. The Department has expressed its readiness to implement an electronic classroom administration system, recognizing the potential benefits from such a move.

There have also been many facility improvements that serve to adequately position the Department for most issues associated with the teaching of necessary courses, particularly the GIS computer lab. It is unclear how the Department will provide space for a higher demand of studios, classrooms and labs as more students enter the program and matriculate from one semester to the next. However, with the increase in students, additional space and equipment as follows will enhance the program:

- Additional classrooms, labs and studios.
- Better space allocation and grouping of all related spaces.
- Current trends in computing suggest moving away from centralized computer labs and emphasize the integration of computing in the studio space. The availability of internet-connected computers in the studio would allow the search and retrieval of relevant information.
- Students need a dedicated studio space that is not used for other classes, lockable storage units (lockers), and extended building hours.

Finally, safety and security are of some concern as well as cleanliness, as evidenced in the graffiti-covered walls and reports of vandalism. The quality of public toilet facilities, even though not bad, should be improved and maintained in good condition.

Staff Room/Areas/Private Offices

The currently available staff rooms are **barely** adequate for the needs of the Department's faculty members. A separate identifiable working area for all the staff in the Department (not in the basement) will enhance the team spirit and group dynamic. There is minimal private space where the teaching team can confer with students or other staff in total privacy. There are individual offices for some of the full time faculty members but most share offices or a "common" office. Both of these are considered inadequate.

Appropriate faculty offices and common meeting spaces for faculty and staff should be provided for the wellbeing of the Department at the first available opportunity.

IMPROVEMENTS

The EEC recommends the following:

- The number of incoming students should be reduced to a maximum of 60, based on the current Departmental resources.

- The required minimum of two senior faculty members with the rank of Professor should be a top priority for the Department, because it will allow it to become autonomous.
- The Department should be given the authority to manage its own affairs.
- Overhead funds generated by the Department should be directly allocated to it and utilized to offset public budgetary cuts.
- The Department should be allocated its own space (offices, labs, studios, student work/study areas). A centralized management system for classroom allocation will alleviate Departmental space problems.
- The Department library should expand its specialized book collection.
- IT infrastructure (both hardware and software) should be improved and made reliable, especially for remote access (VPN).
- Student services should be enhanced with formal academic advising services.
- Faculty offices should be enhanced.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

The EEC was made aware of the Department's adequate links with professional organizations and municipalities for the placement of students (practical training) and recruitment. During the appraisal meetings the EEC met with several alumni and current employers, and was also made aware of several initiatives that the Department has undertaken in order to make its work known to the community. Such efforts should be enhanced and supported by the University administration. Strong links with professional organizations, governmental agencies and industry will better facilitate the very necessary expansion of the practical training/internships that need to be implemented as part of the educational program.

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 EEC is of the opinion that, as short and mid-term goals:

- The Department should focus on gaining its administrative and financial autonomy. The temporary Departmental governance through regular faculty meetings should be reestablished. Moreover the Department should explore possible solutions for acquiring two Professors, in order to be able to elect the Chair of the Department and thus secure its interests and autonomy in decision-making.
- The faculty members should develop a common understanding of the strategic priorities of, and vision for the Department as well as, work towards developing specific research focal points.
- Research output (external funding and refereed publications) should be increased.
- The quality of the curriculum should be enhanced. The Department must place top priority on this objective.
- The curriculum should be restructured, (a) to give equal weight to the areas of urban planning, regional planning, and development, and (b) to strengthen the areas of planning theory and legal aspects of planning.
- Now that the Department has moved in the main campus, it should take advantage of the presence of other academic units with the expertise and course offerings in order to cover some of its foundation courses and alleviate some of the teaching pressures on its own faculty. This, in addition, will benefit the students by exposing them to the language and thinking of other disciplines and instructions, and better integrating them into the overall university community. The current structure does not foster inter-disciplinarity.
- The decision of TSMEDE for discontinuing the funds distributed to the engineering academic programs should mobilize the Department in securing alternate sources of funding.
- Using the School's operating funds, a fair and adequate budget for each fiscal year should be allocated to and managed by the Department. Furthermore, the Department should explore additional sources of funding to support each research and teaching activities. These sources may include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) research collaborations with other institutions for jointly submitting proposals at the national and international level; (2) collaboration with private and public organizations on design and/or consulting contracts; (3) offering specialized training courses to practitioners; and (4) securing of competitive funding from national and international foundations. In addition, an appropriate percentage of the overhead income generated by such activities should be allocated to the Department along with the right to use the space and facilities when not utilized by these activities.
- The Department should finalize the procedure of changing its name, in harmony with the same program offered by the University of Thessaly in Volos.
- The Department should continue its efforts in promoting its unique academic

program (balanced association of urban & spatial planning and regional development), develop a unique character, and capitalize on its differentiation from other programs in the same discipline in order to improve its recognition and attractiveness for future candidates.

- The Department should strive to limit the number of incoming students to a manageable level (up to 60 per year in total) for both academic and practical reasons, as well as for professional placement of its graduates.
- Because of the overlap of interests, academic objectives, and faculty expertise between this Department and the Urban Planning Program (“Τομέας”) of the Department of Architecture the EEC strongly recommends consideration of the possibility of the merger of these two units into a stronger Department of Urban and Regional Planning and Development.
- The Department should explore the need for, and passing of a specific law (“ΦΕΚ”) that would establish and confirm the professional standing of its graduates.

F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC

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

Overall, it is the EEC's view that the Department functions adequately, despite several existing external and internal constraints and limitations. The EEC recognizes the commitment and dedication of the Department's faculty and staff. There is a general climate of cooperation and collegiality, and cordial relations between faculty and students. The EEC became aware of a strong appreciation by the professional community of the region for the quality of education provided by the Department.

Specific recommendations for improvement in each of the areas of concern are being made in the appropriate sections of this report.

The Members of the Committee

| Name and Surname | Signature |
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