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ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ
& ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ
ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

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HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

Department of Agricultural Products Marketing and Quality Control

Technological Educational Institute of Western Macedonia

June 2012

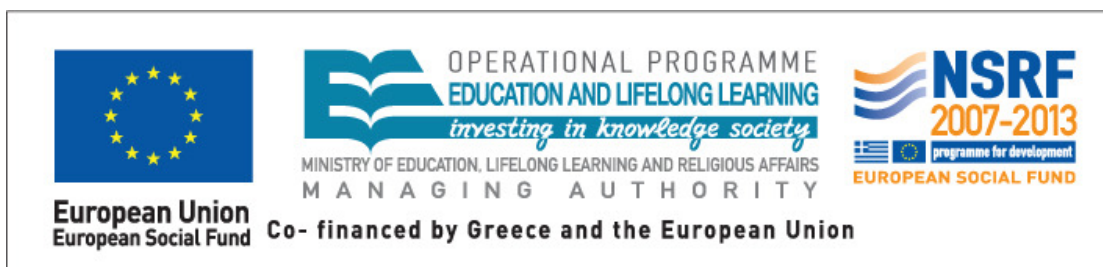


TABLE OF CONTENTS

The External Evaluation Committee

Introduction

I. The External Evaluation Procedure

- Brief account of the site visit, meetings, documents examined and facilities visited.

II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure

- Comments on the quality and completeness of the documentation provided and on the overall acceptance of and participation in the Quality Assurance procedures by the Department.

A. Curriculum

APPROACH

- Goals and objectives of the Curriculum, structure and content, intended learning outcomes.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Rationality, functionality, effectiveness of the Curriculum.

RESULTS

- Maximizing success and dealing with potential inhibiting factors.

IMPROVEMENT

- Planned improvements.

B. Teaching

APPROACH:

- Pedagogic policy and methodology, means and resources.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Quality and evaluation of teaching procedures, teaching materials and resources, mobility.

RESULTS

- Efficacy of teaching, understanding of positive or negative results.

IMPROVEMENT

- Proposed methods for improvement.

C. Research

APPROACH

- Research policy and main objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Research promotion and assessment, quality of support and infrastructure.

RESULTS

- Research projects and collaborations, scientific publications and applied results.

IMPROVEMENT

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH

- Quality and effectiveness of services provided by the Department.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration.

RESULTS

- Adequateness and functionality of administrative and other services.

IMPROVEMENTS

- Proposed initiatives aiming at improvement.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

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

F. Final Conclusions and Recommendations of the EEC

External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Agricultural Products Marketing and Quality Control of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Western Macedonia consisted of the following four expert evaluators drawn from the Registry compiled by HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Professor Konstantinos Giannakas (Coordinator), University of Nebraska-Lincoln, U.S.A.
2. Dr. Dimitris Diakosavvas, Senior Economist, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, France.
3. Professor John Sofos, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, U.S.A.
4. Professor Constantin Vamvakas, University of Ghent, Belgium

Introduction

The EEC visited the Department of Agricultural Products Marketing and Quality Control of the TEI of Western Macedonia during the period June 4-6, 2012, and completed the evaluation report during the period June 7-9 in Athens.

During the evening of June 4, the EEC met with the leadership of the Department, the School of Agricultural Technology (SAT), and the TEI of Western Macedonia. In particular, the EEC met with the Head of the Department, Assoc. Prof. Efstratios Loizou, the Director of SAT, Assoc. Prof. Paraskevi Mitliagka, and the President and Vice-Presidents of TEI, Prof. George Charalambidis and Profs. Nikolaos Tsounis, Efstathios Tamoutsidis, and Nikolaos Asimopoulos, respectively. All leaders expressed their support to the HQAA evaluation process and appreciation of the EEC's efforts.

On the morning of June 5, the EEC met with the members of Internal Evaluation Committee and the faculty of the Department who presented the Unit's Internal Evaluation Report (IER) and responded to numerous questions posed by the EEC. The meeting with the faculty was followed by meetings with groups of current students, non-permanent teaching staff, technical and administrative staff, and recent graduates of the Department. Following these meetings, the EEC visited the Departmental laboratories, lecture rooms, computer and meeting rooms, library, gym, auditorium, and dining facilities available to students. The campus visit was followed by a meeting of the EEC members at the Hotel where the process of developing the External Evaluation Report was initiated.

On June 6, the EEC met with the members of the Department and visited the Prespes beans agricultural cooperative "Pelekanos." Following the visit, the EEC met with the Director of SAT and members of the Department for a debriefing before departing for Athens to complete the evaluation.

The EEC was provided with several reports and documents, including the Study Guidebook of the Department, statistical data and various documents related to the operations of the Department. In addition, a brief demonstration of the impressive inter- and intra-net programs available to staff and students was presented.

The EEC found the IER and supplementary material provided to be comprehensive, sincere and, as such, a very valuable input in the evaluation process. The faculty efforts to provide up-dated material (the IER covered the period up to the 1st semester of 2009) is much appreciated. The faculty, staff and students of the Department were welcoming, courteous and appreciative of the EEC's efforts and evaluation process.

A. Curriculum

APPROACH

- **What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum? What is the plan for achieving them?**

The Department of Agricultural Products Marketing and Quality Control began operating during the academic year 1999-00, after its establishment under EPEAEK, and it still operating under the leadership of the central administration of the TEI of Western Macedonia in Kozani.

The Department offers an undergraduate program. As stated in its web page, “The purpose of its establishment was to educate and train appropriate professionals to cover labour market needs in scientific fields of Marketing, Production and Processing of agricultural products (food), specializing in quality control. Its advantage is the combination of two scientific disciplines. This combination is dictated by market needs but also benefits the provision of comprehensive knowledge in the management of agricultural products and foodstuffs (Marketing and Quality Control)”.

As stated in the IER, neither the goals of the Department nor its mission are mentioned in its establishing act. The initial curriculum aimed at delivering highly trained professionals “to apply basic scientific and business principles to manufacturing, processing, distribution, utilization and marketing of food (agricultural) products that meet the needs and desires of consumers. Course work emphasizes the basic principles of converting raw agricultural (food) materials into safe, acceptable consumer products.”

The program of studies in the Department of Agricultural Products Marketing and Quality Control extends to eight semesters. Studies during the seven semesters focus on lectures and laboratory practice, while the eighth and final semester focuses on the completion of a diploma thesis and student practical training.

- **How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?**
- **Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?**
- **How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted?**

The initial curriculum of the Department was drafted with input from a committee composed of staff from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki which was formed to facilitate its establishment. Its content corresponds to those in Departments of Agricultural Economics and Food Technology. A partial revision of the curriculum was introduced during the academic year 2008-09. The revised curriculum was prepared by the faculty of the Department and approved by the TEI Council. It is not clear whether other stakeholders were consulted. Similar to the initial curriculum, the duration of studies under the revised one is eight semesters long with the last semester being dedicated to the practical exercise and the completion of the diploma thesis.

- **Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?**

A new revision of the curriculum is not planned for the near future. For the time being, the two curricula have been running in parallel with the old curriculum becoming invalid after September 2012.

IMPLEMENTATION

- **How effectively is the Department’s goal implemented by the curriculum?**

Based on the number and variety of courses described in the program of studies, the curriculum covers partially the goals and objectives of the Department. Undergraduate

students and alumni expressed their desire for more laboratory teaching and practical training. The EEC feels that the program of studies needs to better reflect the Department's focus on marketing and agricultural product quality.

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

The curriculum is similar to that in Departments of Agricultural Economics and Food Technology. Course offerings are grouped into four categories: i) *General course infrastructure* (e.g., mathematics, statistics, chemistry, information technology etc.); ii) *Special course infrastructure* (e.g., modules on plant and animal processing and technology, their quality and sanitary control, agricultural economic analysis, food marketing, food industries management and economics); iii) *Specialization courses* (e.g., modules on agricultural economics, marketing and food quality control); and iv) *Management, Economy, Law, Humanities courses* (e.g., agricultural sociology, co-operatives, rural economics and development, international studies).

Normal progress would require students to take 5 to 6 courses per semester, which is a reasonable workload.

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

The current ratio between theoretical teaching and laboratory practice is 52:48. The practical training lasts one semester and is completed in the last (8th) semester.

- **Is the curriculum coherent and functional?**

The curriculum is considered functional, as indicated by the close relationship between its theoretical and applied components. Students commented on the effectiveness of their theoretical and practical training and indicated their strong preference for the latter (i.e., practical training and hands-on experiences). Nevertheless, the sequencing and overlapping between some courses, particularly those of economic nature merit further consideration.

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

Students consider the course material adequate and appropriate. The EEC finds the economic part of the curriculum agricultural economics- rather than marketing-focused. Students have indicated certain challenges with various courses originating, at least in part, from the Pan-Hellenic entrance examinations not being suitable for all institutions (resulting in the admission of students without appropriate background in subjects, such as chemistry, that are directly related to, and required by, the Department). Nevertheless, during the discussions most students stated that they have had no major problems to follow the courses and that this Department was among their top choices.

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

Due to sharp reduction in financing, the Department appears to operate at the "low limit" of human resources. While the permanent academic staff is well-qualified, it cannot cover all the teaching requirements and appears overextended. Consequently, there has been a marked dependence on external, part-time non-permanent teaching staff. Part-time teaching staff seems adequately qualified, but due to foreseen financial constraints, there is a great risk of not being able to cover all the didactic needs of the Department in the foreseeable future. The one laboratory assistant and the IT technician are well qualified and enthusiastic but they also appear overloaded.

The infrastructure and equipment are adequate. The library is well equipped with teaching and research material relevant to the subjects of the Department in a pleasant environment. The students have free access to electronic literature and course material.

RESULTS

- **How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?**
- **If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with?**

From the meetings of the EEC with the alumni, employment opportunities do exist for many of those that actually graduate; this is an indication that the implementation of the program achieves the aims of the curriculum to a high degree.

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

It is not easy to determine the Department's responsibility for the success or not of the achievement of the results. EEC considers that the student entrance system into higher education institutions and the legal framework of higher education as the most important contributors towards these results. When student entrance requirements are improved, and adequately qualified and interested students are admitted and follow the new legal framework that does not allow for "perennial students", the Departments and Institutions should be held more accountable for such results. The visit and discussions of the EEC demonstrated the willingness and efforts of Department staff to improve these results.

The number of students admitted each year should reflect the actual capacity of the Department and the needs of the Greek economy. In addition, entering students should be better prepared to attend the curriculum offered.

IMPROVEMENT

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

The Department has developed a new curriculum which has been implemented since the academic year 2008-09. The initial reaction to the EEC's suggestion for a further curriculum review appeared quite positive.

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

The Department appears to have every intention to implement plans that assure the success of its curriculum.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

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

Teaching methods used

Teaching methods used include lectures and laboratory exercises for the application of theoretical knowledge. Power point presentations are used as teaching aids.

Attendance in lectures is very poor because it is optional for students, and due to work hours overload as indicated by students. Students indicated that they find more interesting and prefer laboratories, practical training, and industry site visits compared to attendance of theory lectures. Both faculty and students indicated that laboratory teaching includes adequate background theory lecturing to make laboratory exercises independent of classroom theory lectures.

The EEC strongly supports the implementation of teaching methods that foster student participation in the process of learning and increase class attendance.

Teaching staff/student ratio

According to data provided by the Department for the year 2010-11, the permanent teaching staff of the Department consisted of four associate professors, one assistant professor, and three applications professors. One of the associate professors has retired recently. The scientific collaborators (part-time, non-permanent faculty) were reduced to 18 (including five laboratory collaborators) for the academic year 2010-11. The number of registered students for the year 2010-11 was 1,064, of which 558 were active. Thus, the registered student per faculty member ratio was 43, or 22.3 for active students, compared to 20.7, the overall average for all Greek universities. The student to teacher ratio for laboratory exercises was twenty to two.

The issue of determining student to teacher ratios becomes complicated because of students with various degrees of activity in the Department at different times and because during the past four years there were major fluctuations in the number of admitted students per year, mostly due to the enforcement or non-enforcement of the high school base grade of 10 as a cut off point for admission, which changes with government policies.

Teacher/student collaboration

The students appear to be highly satisfied with their collaboration with the faculty who make themselves available for consultations as needed. A formal student advising system would be useful and should be applied to all Departments and Institutions in the future.

The EEC notes (and applauds) the student satisfaction with the teaching staff and the commitment of the teaching staff to the student body of the Department.

Adequacy of means and resources

Existing lecture rooms and laboratories are adequate, properly equipped, and in excellent condition. On-campus student housing is very limited, less than 60 beds, considering the number of students attending the Institute.

Books and other teaching materials were found adequate for the subjects covered. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the availability of books through the EUDOXUS program. The central library of the Institute, with 12,000 volumes and electronic access to international literature, is considered satisfactory by faculty and students.

Use of information technologies

Most of the lectures are presented using power-point projection, which is permanently installed in most classrooms and laboratories.

The EEC feels that the student educational experience could be enhanced with an increased use of applied term papers both as means of learning and student evaluation. Writing several term papers during the course of their study is expected to also improve the quality of students' undergraduate thesis. The quality of the undergraduate theses would also improve through a better use of electronic data bases and statistics. It should be noted that there is no formal student support in this area (such as an IT person that will show them how to make full use of the library facilities or a statistician to guide them through the proper statistical methods/packages).

Examination system

The Department follows the traditional examination system in lecture and laboratory courses. The exact type of examination may vary with the nature of the course. The evaluation procedures and examination schedule are communicated to students at the beginning of the course, and all students are evaluated in the same way.

The number of students usually participating in examinations is low, ranging between 19 and 54%. Of these, 37 to 55% pass the examinations successfully. The grades achieved by students are generally low and decreasing. The average grade of most (76.2%) graduating students is 6.0 to 6.9, out of a maximum of 10. The overall average for the same period (2003-04 to 2010-11) was 6.68.

IMPLEMENTATION

- **Quality of teaching procedures**

The teaching methods utilized by the faculty are the same with those used in other similar academic and technological institutions. They include multimedia, chalkboard, intranet, laboratory analyses, and limited fieldwork. The EEC believes that the use of laboratories has improved greatly in recent years as well adequately developed facilities became available; students and graduates also recognized this.

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

The EEC believes that the teaching material is adequate for the topics covered. In general, books, instructor notes and other teaching material are considered adequate. The library is adequate and appropriate for the needs of students, but more access to electronic journals and related resources would be useful.

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

The quality of course material is adequate for the topics covered. Although a large number of available books are not extremely out-dated, renewal efforts should be made for more up to date editions.

- **Linking of research with teaching**

Since research is not a major activity of the Department, student involvement in research is almost non-existent. Students are involved in bibliographic searches during their thesis preparation, but involvement of students in laboratory or field research has been limited.

- **Mobility of academic staff and students**

Mobility of students and staff is very limited. The EEC believes that the Department would benefit from stronger participation in mobility programs. For example, the EEC encourages seeking participation in programs such as ERASMUS.

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

In 2007 there were two organized attempts to evaluate, through surveys, the program of studies and the teaching effort; these evaluations led to the revision of the curriculum in 2008. The EEC found that the changes in the curriculum were in the right direction.

In 2007-08, the Department established a more systematic procedure for the evaluation of teaching and courses on the basis of appropriate questionnaires as suggested by the HQAA. The Department General Assembly has determined that the evaluation will take place annually.

RESULTS

- **Efficacy of teaching**

Average teacher and course evaluation scores for the periods 2007-08 and 2008-09 ranged from 3.30 to 4.16 out of the maximum of 5.0. It is disappointing that students admittedly spent an average of only 2.07 hours per week studying.

Increased attendance would probably go long ways toward providing more meaningful student evaluations of the courses taught by the Department.

The EEC strongly supports the strengthening and improvement of the evaluation process as well as the increased student involvement in it.

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

It appears that some students entering the Department are weak in subjects such as chemistry. Since this is a common deficiency for most similar Departments of Technological Institutes, the EEC strongly suggests that subjects, such as chemistry, should be included in the entrance examinations for students interested in geotechnical studies.

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

According to the IER, of the students that entered the Department in 2000-01, 105 have not graduated, while 24, 47, 24, 32, 7, and 3 graduated in 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 years, respectively. For students that entered in 2004-05, 13, 27, and 30 graduated in 4, 5 and 6 years, respectively, while 97 have yet to graduate. Only 41 of the 209 students who entered the Department in 2005-06 and 7 of the 38 students who entered the Department in 2006-07 graduated during the academic year of 2010-11. The EEC notes that these graduation rates are mediocre and together with the low graduation grades reflect weaknesses in the overall educational system of the country and procedures for student admission.

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

These data are common to other Departments and may be attributed to the elimination of the minimum threshold of grade 10 baseline for admission to higher educational institutions,

along with entrance of students with poor background in science and with almost no background in mathematics and chemistry.

The data collected through course and teacher evaluation should be utilized for future improvements.

IMPROVEMENT

The EEC concludes that, in addition to promoting a more meaningful educational experience, increased student attendance of the theoretical component of the program of studies would:

- enable the focus of laboratories on the applied component of the subject matter (that constitutes the main focus, and key differentiating attribute, of TEI)
- reduce the length of studies of students
- increase the success rate of students during their first and second attempts at passing a course, and
- increase the grade point average of graduating students.

The EEC also recommends the establishment of a limit in the number of examinations the student is allowed to participate. Such a limit should be accompanied by a system of continuous moderation of the Departmental examinations.

Finally, the EEC suggests that the Department should make an effort to recognize and reward its most effective teachers and encourage and support the student participation in the ERASMUS program.

C. Research

APPROACH

- **What is the Department's policy and main objective in research?**

As the Department operates within a TEI, research is not its main task. While the faculty has been involved in numerous research projects, an overall research policy with concrete objectives is difficult to identify. Research is conducted in an *ad hoc* manner where faculty members design and implement their own research agenda. Moreover, the limited number of staff members (permanent and non-permanent), together with the fact that most of the non-permanent teaching staff members are contracted for a few teaching hours during the academic year, impede the design and implementation of an overall research policy with concrete objectives.

- **Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?**

There are no internal standards for assessing research.

IMPLEMENTATION

- **How does the Department promote and support research?**

Although research is not a main objective of TEIs, according to the IER and related material, the research performance of a faculty member is a critical factor for career development.

- **Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support**

Research is accomplished through existing teaching infrastructure. Research infrastructure and support are limited with several factors (such as the small number of permanent faculty, funding constraints and lack of technical personnel) hindering the development of research to a desired level.

- **Scientific publications**

Based on the IER, for the nine academic-year period (2002/03-2010/11), the overall publication record of the permanent and temporary staff that worked in the Department comprised of 5 books or monographs and 605 publications of which: 185 in peer-reviewed journals; 168 conference proceedings (mainly national conferences); 10 non-refereed presentations in conferences (mainly national conferences); 194 conference abstracts; and 25 articles in books.

Permanent staff has 237 publications of which: 1 book or monograph; 73 in peer-reviewed journals; 76 conference proceedings; 11 non-refereed presentations in conferences; 55 conference abstracts; and 21 articles in books.

It is important to note, however, that the majority of this scientific work (around 60%), has been published by the temporary, part-time teaching staff undertaken in other academic and non-academic settings. In addition, the majority of research focuses on issues outside the scientific areas of the Department.

Research projects

According to the IER and related material, all regular academic staff of the Department may develop research initiatives. Non-permanent staff members are not eligible for applying in national calls for research funding. External resources are obtained through regional, national and European programs.

The faculty is active in submitting proposals for obtaining competitive research projects and funds. For the period 2002/03-2010/11, permanent faculty of the Department participated in 47 national or European research projects and coordinated five of them. These were funded through Archimedes (I, II and III) and INTEGREG II. In the last two academic years (2008/09-2010/11), the seven permanent staff coordinated two research project and participated in other four projects, bringing to the Department a total of approximately 422,050 euros from national and European Union sources.

Research collaborations

Research collaborations and partnerships at the national and international level have been developed with researchers in: i) national academic institutions (e.g. the Department Agricultural Economics and Rural Development of the University of Athens, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the Departments of Food Technology of TEI of Athens and of TEI of Larissa, the Department of Animal Production of TEI of Epirus, the Chemistry Department of the University of Ioannina and the Medical School of the University of Thessaly), ii) international academic institutions (e.g. Universitat de Lleida, Spain; University of Newcastle, United Kingdom; University of Wageningen, the Netherlands; University of Parma, Italy; University of Wales at Aberystwyth, United Kingdom; Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Sweden; Justus-Liebig University of Giessen, Germany; University of Saint Clementine of Ochride, FYROM; Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary; the University of Korytsa, Albania; and the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania), iii) and local government agencies.

RESULTS

- **How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented?**

As noted earlier, being a TEI, research is not the Department's main activity and there is an absence of a coherent research policy and strategy.

- **Scientific publications**

The EEC considers that research productivity of the Department average, at best. The publication record of the faculty members of the Department indicates a ratio of about one peer-reviewed publication per tenured faculty per year and about 12 citations per tenured faculty per year. While these ratios are comparable to that in similar institutions in Greece, there are only a few publications that are directly related to the mission of the Department.

- **Research projects**

The faculty has indicated involvement in local, national, and European Framework projects and networks. Information about the application of research findings is not provided in the IER and related material. The EEC finds that there is a large number of projects originating from either the TEI of Western Macedonia or the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, specially "earmarked" for structural/ renovation/upgrading purposes of TEI. The EEC feels that more efforts are needed to disseminate and actually apply the results of this research.

The EEC also feels that, despite progress being achieved in recent years to attract competitive

funds (e.g. INTERREG), the representation of the Department in nationally- and European Union-funded competitive research projects could be further improved. In particular, attracting funds for regional co-operation is of paramount significance since such achievement could potentially increase the visibility of the Department.

- **Research collaborations**

Research collaborations are mainly with other national partners, but also include international partnerships with researchers from countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Sweden, FYROM and Albania.

- **Efficacy of research work. Applied results. Patents etc.**

Specific information about application of research findings is not provided in the IER and related material. No patents were awarded to faculty members.

The EEC noticed considerable diversity in the research areas pursued by faculty members. The EEC is of the opinion that most of the Department's research is not aligned with the goals and *raison d'être* of the Department.

- **Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department? Rewards and awards**

The Faculty members publish in specialized scientific *fora* and their publications are often cited, albeit some of the journals are not among the most internationally prestigious in the field of quality, safety and marketing of agricultural products. Four intra-departmental awards were reported in the IER, all in 2008.

The ECC considers that the Department's visibility is quite limited and efforts should be made to raise it, particularly with respect to the uptake of new knowledge by the pertinent stakeholders.

IMPROVEMENT

- **Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary**

Faculty should be commended for their willingness to get involved in research activities.

The Department would like to improve its research capabilities. Key issues are the lack of permanent staff and trained technicians, and decreasing public funding. Furthermore, the Department believes that the development of a graduate program will enhance its research potential and capability.

- **Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department**

According to information presented to the EEC, the Department has been working towards filling vacant positions and increasing specialised technical personnel.

The EEC recommends the development of a clear research strategy that enhances analysis of quality, safety and marketing of agricultural (food) products at the local and national level, and contributes to student training.

The EEC feels that, given the severe socio-economic turmoil facing the country and the Greek agriculture's potential for producing high quality and safe products, more attention should be paid to closer collaboration and dialogue with industry and other stakeholders.

D. All Other Services

APPROACH

- **How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students)**

The faculty, staff and students of the Department find the facilities and services, like administration, information technology and library, very satisfactory. The library, in addition to its primary function as a book lending service, provides online access to numerous data bases, e-books, and scientific journals.

- **Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically?**

The secretarial staff has made significant progress in this direction and the use of TEI-online has provided streamlining for administrative procedures. Most procedures exist in electronic form, including applications, certifications needed by students, submission of grades, etc.

- **Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on campus?**

It does not appear that the Department has a policy aiming at increasing student presence on campus. Based on comments by students (and faculty), the limited number of dormitories and location of the Department may impede the student presence on campus.

IMPLEMENTATION

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

The Department is supported by one secretary and one IT support employee.

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

There is a nice restaurant on campus as well as a nicely equipped gym, table tennis room, and soccer fields. Students and faculty view all the above services as satisfactory.

RESULTS

- **Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?**

The one-person secretarial support staff is competent and helpful. The collaboration between administration and faculty is excellent, providing high-level support to the faculty.

- **How does the Department view the particular results?**

Not applicable.

IMPROVEMENTS

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

The Department has identified the need to continuously upgrade and streamline the administrative and communication services in the Department.

- **Initiatives undertaken in this direction**

The Department has adopted software that enhances the efficiency of administration and interactions in the Department.

Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations

Please, comment on quality, originality and significance of the Department's initiatives

The Department has been trying to enhance its presence in the local community through a series of collaborations with the Chamber of Commerce, neighbouring municipalities, local and regional businesses and cooperatives. While important, these collaborations are still limited and quite *ad hoc*. The EEC strongly supports and encourages the strengthening of such relationships, which are instrumental for the future development and success of the Department. The EEC feels that the Department needs to be more proactive in the relationship with its constituents communicating its willingness and, where appropriate, its ability to address important current and emerging issues of relevance and significance to the private sector, cooperative organizations, policy makers and/or different consumer groups. In addition to bolstering the impact of the Department's research, the development of meaningful relationships with its constituents could enhance the goodwill and resources available to the Department, motivate the research on emerging relevant and significant issues, and create important employment opportunities for its graduates.

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

The Department has initiated the process of modifying the Greek version of its name to better reflect its focus on the marketing of agricultural products and the EEC is very supportive of this initiative. The EEC is also very supportive to the allocation of resources for the hiring of at least two (2) permanent faculty members to cover critical needs in marketing and the areas of consumer behavior in quality-differentiated markets, contracts, innovation, and food safety that are currently absent from the program of studies.

The EEC is less supportive of the Department's desire to develop graduate programs at the M.Sc. and Ph.D. levels. In fact, the EEC strongly discourages this development. Given the significant capacity constraints faced by the Department (which were further intensified by recent retirements and resignations of permanent faculty and the reduction in the budget available for the hiring of temporary staff), the EEC feels that the Departmental resources are insufficient for the development of a successful graduate program. Not only are the current resources not able to justify the development of new programs, a re-allocation of scarce resources would weaken the undergraduate program and applied component of the Department that should, in the EEC's opinion, constitute the key focus of the Unit's efforts.

F. Final Conclusions and Recommendations of the EEC

The Department of Agricultural Products Marketing and Quality Control focuses on areas of relevance and significance to the local, regional and national economy and has the potential to make meaningful academic and socio-economic contributions.

Curriculum

- The EEC found the recent curriculum changes of the Department proper and to the right direction. Nevertheless, the EEC feels that further curriculum changes are warranted to better reflect/service the economic/marketing component of the Department.
- The EEC feels that the current economic component is more of a traditional agricultural economics- rather than a marketing- (and quality-) focused one. The addition of courses focusing on behavioral/experimental economics & consumer behavior in quality-differentiated markets, vertical and horizontal product differentiation, innovation & intellectual property rights, food safety and minimum quality standards, would strengthen the marketing component and greatly improve the curriculum.
- Furthermore, the addition of a course on the economics of contracts (that increasingly govern the, vertical and horizontal, relationships in the agri-food marketing system) is essential for the development of the human capital the Department aspires to.
- The EEC also suggests that the Department institutes and enforces, where appropriate, pre-requisite courses as a way of ensuring a more meaningful and fulfilling educational experience for those involved. In addition, the introduction of pre-requisite courses should go long ways in addressing both the problem of high length of studies and the low grade point average of students.
- Finally, the EEC finds the current policy of excluding the optional courses from the calculation of the students' final grade point average indefensible and highly counterproductive.

Teaching

- The EEC notes (and applauds) the student satisfaction with the teaching staff and its commitment to the student body of the Department.
- The EEC strongly supports the implementation of teaching methods that foster student participation in the process of learning and increase class attendance.
- In addition to promoting a more meaningful educational experience, increased student attendance of the theoretical component of the program of studies would also
 - enable the focus of laboratories on the applied component of the subject matter (that constitutes the main focus, and key differentiating attribute, of TEI)
 - reduce the length of studies of students
 - increase the success rate of students during their first and second attempts at passing a course, and
 - increase the grade point average of graduating students.
- The student educational experience could also be enhanced with an increased use of applied term papers both as means of learning and student evaluation. Writing several term papers during the course of their study is expected to also improve the quality of students' undergraduate thesis.
- The quality of the undergraduate theses would also improve through a better use of electronic data bases and statistics. It should be noted that there is no formal student support in this area.
- Increased attendance would also go long ways towards providing more meaningful student evaluations of the courses taught by the Department. The EEC strongly supports the strengthening and improvement of the evaluation process as well as the increased student involvement in it.
- The EEC also recommends the establishment of a limit in the number of examinations the student is allowed to participate. Such a limit should be accompanied by a system of continuous moderation of the Departmental examinations.
- Finally, the EEC suggests that the Department should make an effort to recognize and reward its most effective teachers and encourage and support the student participation in the ERASMUS program.

Research

- Understanding that research does not constitute the key component of the TEI mission, the EEC notes and applauds the Department's efforts to attract grant funding and be involved in relevant national and European research projects.
- The EEC recommends the greater focus of research on issues that relate to the mission of the Department (i.e., Marketing & Quality Control of Agricultural Products) and issues of relevance and significance to the local and regional economy.
- The EEC also recommends the development of closer ties with the stakeholder groups at all stages of the research process as well as the better communication of the research findings to academia and the stakeholder groups involved.
- The EEC finds the research productivity of the Department to be average, at best. Perhaps more alarming is the fact that the distribution of research productivity is highly skewed with a small number of non-permanent faculty accounting, at times, for the vast majority of the Department's research output (which is, generally, not well aligned with the mission of the Department).
- Encouragement of faculty re-tooling through sabbatical leaves, participation in seminars and workshops and collaboration with more active colleagues could assist in enhancing the Departmental productivity.
- The faculty is also encouraged to make an effort to disseminate the research findings through higher quality publication outlets. In addition to enhancing the impact of its research findings, publication in mainstream field journals will bolster the relevance and reputation of the Department.
- Finally, the Department should also make an effort to recognize and reward its more active faculty members, increase the student involvement in the research projects of the Department, and develop an active research seminar series.

Other

- The EEC feels that the Department needs to be more proactive in the relationship with its constituents communicating its willingness and, where appropriate, its ability to address important current and emerging issues of relevance to the private sector, cooperative organizations, policy makers and/or different consumer groups. The Department needs to do a better job in marketing itself. In addition to bolstering the impact of the Department's research, the development of meaningful relationships with its constituents could enhance the goodwill and resources available to the Department, motivate the research on emerging relevant and significant issues, and create important employment opportunities for its graduates.
- The EEC supports both the change in the Greek version of the Department's name to "Τμήμα Μάρκετινγκ και Ποιοτικού Ελέγχου Αγροτικών Προϊόντων" and the allocation of resources to the hiring of permanent faculty to cover critical needs in the areas of marketing, economics of contracts, consumer behavior in quality-differentiated markets, innovation and food safety that are currently absent from the curriculum.
- Finally, the EEC would like to discourage the Department from its plans of developing graduate program(s) at the M.Sc. and Ph.D. levels. Given the significant capacity constraints faced by the Department (which were further intensified by recent retirements and resignations of permanent faculty and the reduction in the budget available for the hiring of temporary staff), the EEC feels that the Departmental resources are insufficient for the development of a successful graduate program. Not only are the current resources not able to justify the development of new programs, a re-allocation of scarce resources would weaken the undergraduate program and applied component of the Department that should, in the EEC's opinion, constitute the key focus of the Unit's efforts.

Concluding Remark

Before concluding its evaluation report, the EEC would like to point out that it very much enjoyed its interaction with the faculty, staff and students of the Department and hopes that those involved will find its comments and suggestions useful in their quest to realize the great potential of this important component of TEI of Western Macedonia.

The Members of the Committee

**TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTE OF WESTERN MACEDONIA
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL
PRODUCTS MARKETING AND QUALITY
CONTROL**

Name and Surname

Signature

Dr. Dimitris Diakosavvas

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Paris, France

Prof. Konstantinos Giannakas

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, U.S.A.

Prof. John Sofos

Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, U.S.A.

Prof. Constantin Vamvakas

University of Ghent, Brussels, Belgium