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EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN

FEBRUARY 6-11, 2012

External Evaluation Committee (EEC)

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean consisted of the following five expert evaluators drawn from the Registry compiled by HQA in accordance with Law 3374/2005:

1. Professor George B. Dertilis, Directeur d'Études, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France (Coordinator).
2. Professor Kostas Gouliamos, Vice Rector for Research & External Relations, European University Cyprus.
3. Professor Dimitris Michailakis, University of Linköping, Department of Social and Welfare Studies.
4. Professor Apostolis Papakostas, Department of Sociology. School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Stockholm. Sweden.
5. Professor Blanca Vilà Costa, Director, Instituto Universitario de Estudios Europeos, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Spain.

Introduction

The External Evaluation Committee [EEC] visited the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean from 6 to 8 February, 2012, and worked on its report until Monday, February 13.

On Monday 6 and Tuesday 7 February, the EEC met the University authorities, the faculty, the staff and the students of the Department. On Wednesday February 8, the EEC members consulted *in situ* the documents they had requested the day before (PhD and Master's theses, publications by the teaching staff and various data about the Department), then visited the University Library and other services, and finally had an exchange with students at the university theater workshop. The following pages describe in detail the outcome of these meetings.

A. Curriculum

Undergraduate program

APPROACH

The EEC believes that the overall aim of the curriculum in a “Department of Sociology” should be to educate students in sociological theory and methods with the ultimate aim to develop research skills adequate for systematically addressing problems of contemporary society. More specifically, the Department of Sociology at the University of the Aegean should also be responsive to the needs for professionally trained sociologists of the Greek society and of the Aegean island societies in particular. Therefore, the Department's curriculum must educate students able to meet this goal.

The Internal Evaluation Report showed that a majority of Department members did not consider the current curriculum adequate for the accomplishment of these or of any concomitant goals.

The External Evaluation Committee believed the main causes to be the excessive number of courses and the obvious thematic fragmentation of the curriculum; these reflect the fragmented composition of the competences and academic background of the staff rather than the various facets of Sociology. To understand these and other problems was the constant concern of all EEC members during their visit; and the main objective of this report is to properly consult the Department and to offer the respectful, collegial and frank advice that may contribute to the Department's future development.

IMPLEMENTATION

Before proceeding with the report, the EEC wishes to refer to the State regulations regarding Greek universities and point out three rules which, in the opinion of all EEC members, cause or exacerbate many major problems in the educational process. In simplified shorthand, these three rules allow an undergraduate student in almost every Greek university and almost every discipline of the social sciences:

- to be examined as many times as s/he wishes for any course in the curriculum; and although recent law has curtailed the re-examination possibilities, possibilities to circumvent the new regulations still exist, and it is still unclear if these new regulations will actually be applied;
- to follow many of the courses offered, as well as the concomitant exams, in almost any order s/he prefers; for there are often no prerequisites in the order of courses within the curriculum, except for the first two years, during which a student cannot choose courses offered in subsequent semesters; this exception, however, does not solve the problem; for the student is still allowed to take all his courses but to avoid being examined, thus bypassing the exception and the proper order of his studying;
- to be examined mainly on the basis of books distributed free of charge; this regulation results to some sort of an obligation or even an incentive for the staff to author textbooks and /or teaching notes which do not always meet the academic and pedagogic standards. In other words, this system provides economic incentives to professors at the expense of students.

These structural elements of the State regulations apply also in the Department of Sociology at the Aegean University. As a result, in the past two decades the three rules interacted to allow the fragmentation and the thematic incoherence of the undergraduate program; and they continued to interact until today and to reinforce fragmentation and incoherence. At present, the curriculum is not geared to the above definition of a Department of Sociology, i.e. “*to educate students, develop skills in sociological research and address problems related to contemporary society*”; it just reflects the various competences of the staff. Consequently, the Department has not been able to define a clear, well structured and functional study program at both the undergraduate and the postgraduate level.

More particularly, the routine of examinations repeated almost *ad infinitum*, tends to transform the educational experience into an examination process; for it is very difficult to convince most of the students to focus away from exams and concentrate on learning. The EEC understands that a recent law reform addressed this problem (and that of prerequisites as well). However, in order to successfully implement these and any other new regulations regarding these interacting problems, the Department must carefully and gradually re-design the curriculum, re-allocate its teaching resources, and establish

alternative and auxiliary means of evaluation, such as midterm exams, term papers and other assignments.

The EEC asked to interview personally each individual member of the staff, one of the objectives being to put into test, *inter alia*, the above opinions of the EEC members. Two identical and neutral questions were put during these interviews: (a) “Which are, in your opinion, the two or three main problems of the Department?” (b) “Which are the improvements that you consider most important or urgent?” Of the 12 members of the staff who were present and interviewed, a majority expressed the view that amendments and revisions of the whole curriculum are made on an *ad hoc* manner and reflect academic staff changes rather than actual educational needs.

In a subsequent meeting with about 40 students of all levels (organized at the EEC’s request without the presence of teachers) the problems of the curriculum re-emerged, and there was a broad consensus among those present on the need to rationalize it.

The EEC will revert to these meetings with faculty members and students in the following pages of this report, according to the subject treated.

RESULTS

The duration of studies is 8 semesters (4 years). The thesis for the undergraduate diploma is optional, i.e. neither compulsory nor usual, as students usually avoid it. Those choosing to write a thesis can skip two courses. This is a serious fault of the program. If the thesis were compulsory, the students would at least get acquainted with the fundamentals of a research culture, and this would prepare some of them for post-graduate studies. This is also a bad incentive: by offering students the choice to avoid two courses, it simply teaches them to avoid learning.

As the curriculum stands today, it seems to offer 98 courses, 38 or 40 of which are required for graduation. A thesis cannot be substituted to exams in the case of mandatory/elective courses. A number of courses are offered by other Departments of the University. Students are required to accumulate in total a minimum of 120 teaching units and 240 ECTS.

The absence of prerequisites and the regulations allowing students to carry a course repeatedly partly explain (a) a particularly low ratio of active to enrolled students (b) a low ratio of exam participation in relation to students registered in a specific course.

The curriculum provides 31 courses in Sociology, including methods, and 67 courses in other subjects more or less related to Sociology – in fact some are not related at all. Sociological courses, therefore, account for only one third of the whole program, undergraduate and graduate. Consequently, the structure of the curriculum aggravates the fragmentation of the studies and the poor attendance of students in the courses. This reinforces in turn the vicious circle by not properly teaching the required basic skills of

scientific inquiry to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The proof is the relatively poor quality of the theses produced at the postgraduate level (see below).

Seminars are offered to a selected number of undergraduates, who must take at least 4 and at most 8 seminar courses during their studies. The total number of participants in these seminars is limited to 17. A student is allowed to be absent at most three times per semester. The participants are chosen on the basis of their success in previous semesters. The preconditions imposed for participation in the seminars are rather strict and should make them a useful part of the undergraduate program, especially for students wishing to pursue their studies as postgraduates. However, the EEC has not been able to assess whether these preconditions are applied and to what extent. Moreover, thematic fragmentation and absence of sociological orientation are present in the case of seminars as well, inhibiting the good intentions of the staff.

During the above mentioned meeting with students, all members of the EEC were impressed by the students' enthusiasm and motivation, but also by their clear ideas about some major problems of the curriculum. Their comments can be summarized as follows:

- Numerous students remarked that most of their teachers are accessible and willing to collaborate with them.
- Many students noted that the objectives of the curriculum are not clear, and that the discrepancy between official description and actual content of some courses does not help; they noted the same about the bibliography proposed.
- A number of students complained that, as they do not actually have to use a large part of the study material proposed by the staff, most students do not use it.
- Some undergraduates reported that course attendance, including that of laboratories, requires between 15 and 21 hours per week during 13 weeks per semester; and that students have little time for doing homework, using the library, and for true reflection about the material taught.

Some individual students stayed late and made the following additional points:

- For a majority of students, the main concern is passing the exams and not learning through actively participating in the course, studying the bibliography, and writing good papers.
- Most of the exam questions are derived from notes distributed by the faculty and very few from the bibliography.
- As the same questions are often repeated from year to year, many students opt to study the most common repetitions and thus succeed by chance.
- Plagiarism is practiced in almost 50% of the papers (*ergasies*) submitted for the courses.

The Department's participation in exchange programs like Erasmus is still embryonic. This constitutes a serious impediment to the student's personal, cultural and professional development (see also under *Post-graduate Program*).

IMPROVEMENT

Understandably, the EEC concurs with the opinion expressed by students and most academic staff that the curriculum is unbalanced and that the insufficient coverage of sociological theory and the excessive number of other options reflect the Department's identity.

The EEC considers that the curriculum is overloaded and the courses too diverse, due to the divergent interests and competences of the academic staff. Flexibility is clearly not an advantage in this case; the distinction between mandatory and elective courses seems arbitrary. The courses are not well integrated, they do not abide to a rational sequence and they often overlap.

The EEC believes that the Department should now clearly define its identity and its comparative advantages. Therefore, the EEC strongly recommends that the competences in Sociology be radically strengthened and the non-sociological courses drastically reduced. The EEC also recommends that action is taken to reduce the total number of courses and especially the share of elective courses.

The EEC encourages the Department to urgently tackle the two fundamental drawbacks of the program: the absence of prerequisites, and the regulations allowing students to carry a course almost indefinitely. The problem creates resource strain for the Department and a major economic and social problem for both students and their families. Three facts increase the urgency of a solution for the sake, precisely, of the students and their parents living elsewhere in Greece:

- that the majority of the students come from other regions of the country;
- that the University Departments and facilities are scattered in six different islands which are not even linked directly by sea or air;
- that the present and future economic crisis will exacerbate financial problems.

Finally, the EEC wishes to stress an obvious precondition for the success of such initiatives and of every other reform: student and staff collaboration.

Post-graduate program

APPROACH

The Department offers a program for a Doctoral Degree (PhD) and the following three programs leading to an M-Sc degree:

- (a) Regional social development and cohesion.
- (b) European societies. European integration.
- (c) The city and the environment. Applied and Clinical Sociology.

The objectives of each program are exhaustively described in the study guidelines published by the Department.

The PhD program is entirely research-based with no required course work; the rest of this section, therefore, concerns the M-Sc curriculum only.

IMPLEMENTATION

Students of the three M-Sc programs are required to take courses covered in three semesters, and to write an M-Sc thesis during the third.

For both programs, the ratio between success rates and failures or drop-outs cannot be ascertained because of lack of data.

During the interviews conducted with members of the staff and students, the EEC could not derive satisfactory information regarding the demarcation and progression between the successive levels of the process (from undergraduate to M-Sc and from there to the doctoral level).

The EEC notes that occasional invitees from other Greek and European universities teach courses in the Department.

RESULTS

The basic objectives of both the M-Sc and the PhD program should be to assist students in acquiring the appropriate skills for conducting high quality research at each of the two respective levels. However, the EEC considers that almost all the problems of the undergraduate curriculum are also present in the three M-Sc programs, seriously impeding their success. To wit, during the interviews and meetings already mentioned, a few members of staff and some students voiced the following concerns:

- The number of courses is excessive.
- In some cases, courses depend on presentations of core material by students without sufficient explanatory participation by the professor himself.

- Writing skills and technical skills for the preparation of theses and papers are taught in an haphazard manner and too late in the year;
- Numerous students with degrees from other disciplines receive insufficient training in the principles of Sociology.

The EEC members reviewed rapidly a sample of M-Sc theses having led to a degree, as well as a few doctoral theses passed by the Department. Following this, and having heard and discussed the above comments of staff and students, the EEC members regretfully concluded that the above basic objectives of the M-Sc and the PhD program are not attained.

The following are examples of the problems observed in M-Sc and to a minor extent in PhD theses:

- The interface between the three programs should be Sociology. This is not the case.
- There is a great variety in quality and quantity, some theses being too "theoretical", some just descriptive, some too long and some rather short.
- A significant number of M-Sc theses do not comply with conventional or USAL academic standards, or even with the Department's regulations described in the Internal Evaluation Report.
- In most theses the definition of the basic problem and of the theoretical perspective used is unclear, and in some it does not even exist.
- Reviews of the existing research and bibliography are missing or insufficient (e.g., in one of the theses the review of the existing literature covers less than a page).

During their individual interviews, some of the teaching staff complained that the PhD program is structured *ad hoc* and in some cases *ad personam*. Students are unable to take a course unless their supervisors propose it to the assembly, which in turn must approve the proposal. This tedious procedure makes the courses offered a matter of discussion or even negotiation, regardless of academic criteria.

Post-graduate students are not exposed to practical work subject to ECTS and/or ECTS label. Finally, very few PhD students are employed in funded research projects.

IMPROVEMENT

The EEC feels that post-graduate students should be encouraged to select courses across the three M-Sc programs, provided that these are more closely integrated and streamlined. This can be achieved by designing a common program of core courses in sociological theory and method.

Crash courses should be offered to students with a weak background in Sociology. These would accelerate their integration in the Department and would not burden the curriculum if they do not overlap with undergraduate courses.

The Department should try to raise funds in order to finance PhD students. This will attract higher quality students, enhance their motivation and improve their research and professional skills.

There are no formal processes for monitoring the career development of graduate students. The Department should address this issue as it can help improve the structure of its programs.

In view of the economic crisis and the expected cuts in the public sector, increasing the number of teaching staff will be difficult or impossible. The Department might be able to establish a long-term plan to ensure the viability of its programs, taking into consideration major strategic objectives and priorities, and cutting superfluous courses and activities. A special effort may be necessary in order to assure increased funding from the European Union and perhaps the private sector.

B. Teaching

APPROACH

Teaching load

Undergraduate program

The minimum teaching load per faculty member is determined by law and, at the undergraduate program, is currently 4 courses per academic year / faculty member. This does not include supervision of undergraduate and post-graduate theses.

Graduate program

Most faculty members teach at the MSc program for about 2.5 hrs/week on average. There is no additional compensation. All courses are taught in Greek. The staff invite occasionally professors from Greek and foreign universities for seminars or lectures.

Teaching Methods

Undergraduate program:

Teaching depends mainly on lectures. During courses or in the parallel, occasional seminars, some members of the staff offer training in technical matters (quantitative data, writing of papers etc). There are no midterm exams and assignment of papers seems rare.

Adequacy of means and resources

The EEC visited the facilities available to the Department and found them to be adequate. The building infrastructure is almost satisfactory, with classrooms used being comparable to those in other Greek institutions. Most offices and lecture rooms were well-equipped and in relatively good condition. Members of the Department stated that, if attendance rates were increased, the existing facilities would not suffice.

Teaching staff/student ratio

For about 40% of the undergraduate courses the number of registered students is between 8 and 20 (numbers derived from the internal evaluation report). Very low and expensive by international standards, this ratio should normally produce students of very high caliber.

According to the data of the internal evaluation report, the teacher/student ratio is 1/33. By international standards, it is satisfactory for the undergraduate level; but in reality it is much lower and therefore much more costly, if one considers the excessive number of drop-outs, absentees, and the reduced number of students regularly attending courses. In fact, attendance of lectures is not mandatory and students did state that class attendance is indeed low (compare with teaching load as above).

Teacher/student collaboration

At the undergraduate level there are lots of possibilities for teacher/student collaboration. Students were almost unanimous in commending favourably the staff's presence and willingness to help. However, some students complained that many courses are taught weekly in three-hour sessions, causing stress and fatigue. Others added that time schedules are tight, dispersed in space and condensed in time.

At the post-graduate level there is close contact between teachers and students in all three Master programs. The EEC has not been able to establish if this applies as well in the case of doctoral candidates and their supervisors.

M-Sc students complained that they cannot always understand the content of seminars. The EEC felt that the main reason is the various problems of the secondary education in Greece.

As for the quality of the doctoral program, the EEC members noticed serious faults in some of the finished doctoral theses and in many M-Sc papers.

Use of information technologies

The teachers have modern audio-visual equipment at their disposal. Reading material and course information may be obtained at the library.

Examination system

The EEC wishes to mention once again that students have almost unlimited opportunities to take exams, and this will not change until recent legislation is actually implemented, which is still uncertain, unfortunately.

In the MSC courses, the students take exams or submit an exam paper. This practice is consistent with international standards and practice, and reflects, mainly, similar examination practices in the social sciences. Up to the present, given the repeated

examination system, students' participation in exams is very low: between 30% and 50% for undergraduates. Exam attendance at all post-graduate programs is high.

All students are required to write a thesis before graduation. While the writing of the thesis is supposed to take place during the 10th semester of a student's studies, it is normally postponed for much later as the average total time between registration and graduation (9.6 years in 2009), has always been significantly greater than the average duration of studies reported (4,75 years, see below).

IMPLEMENTATION

Unfortunately, government regulations do not allow the translation and use of internationally recommended textbooks. The students receive textbooks and notes provided free of charge by the central government. While the EEC did not have the opportunity to examine all the books and notes made available to students, it has examined a good number of those willingly provided by the staff and found that many textbooks are of low academic standards; this does certainly not stimulate students to study them and really comprehend what they read.

In fact, numerous students noted that in many courses they only study from the "notes" and this enables them to obtain acceptable grades. This indicates three serious problems:

- The education process is examinations-centered and not learning-centered.
- The examinations promote memorization rather than reflection.
- The examiner cannot really evaluate the students' understanding of the subject.

Many faculty members use their research topic and its findings as the main subject of their courses. Although this allows them to actually teach their competence, it is not necessarily useful at the undergraduate level. It contributes to the fragmentation of the curriculum and leaves little room for teaching in the core theoretical and methodological issues in Sociology.

The EEC asked for information about mobility of undergraduate students and faculty under the Erasmus program and found it rather limited. The numbers for the period 2008-2011 are as follows:

- Greek students in other European universities: 9 undergraduates and 10 postgraduates.
- Foreign students in the Department: 12 undergraduates and 0 (zero) postgraduates.
- Department faculty members visiting another European university: 5
- Foreign faculty members visiting the Department: 11.
- Administrative staff exchanged: 0 (zero).

RESULTS

The EEC recognizes that many of the problems mentioned earlier are systemic to the Greek higher education system characterized by:

- Limited correspondence between the education received and the social needs for University graduates.
- An education system that is subject to a complex and ever-changing legal framework. As a result, the system is geared around multiple examinations with students focusing on passing the exam(s). Comprehension of the subject matter and further reflection about it are generally not encouraged.

The number of drop-out or de-registered students is large: 849 out of 2179, i.e. 40%. For those who stay, the success rate seems to be high: 649 students out of the 2179 ever registered have received a diploma or degree. The average length of studies is satisfactory: 4.75 years. However, this may also be due to the rather lenient examination system, as indicated by the much longer time required for graduation (9.6 years).

Only one student mentioned that he had a paid job outside the university, considering it as a factor of delay in his studies. Very few PhD students receive remunerations for their work in the Department and those remunerations are allegedly low.

IMPROVEMENT

During the personal interviews conducted with each individual member of the staff, their comments about teaching were as follows.

- Post-graduate studies are not properly planned.
- Courses are not rationally organized.
- Once established, a course cannot be easily removed from the program.
- Some members of the teaching staff do not expose their personal research during their teaching.
- A few members of the staff stated that interpersonal relations or even political party affiliations play an important role in the attribution of minor teaching facilities, in the approval of proposals by the general assembly, and even in the promotion procedures.
- Problems of “infrastructure”, and especially library facilities, hinder student work.
- Lack of funds is a universal problem; in particular, it is also a factor inhibiting proper and timely planning of international contacts and programs.

The EEC members believe that most problems associated with teaching originate from:

- The curriculum structure, namely, the disproportional short core, the excessive disparity between courses and, mainly, the insufficient teaching of Sociology.
- The constraints and rigidities posed by an archaic regulatory framework.
- These problems inhibit the students' smooth progress from year to year and from each level of knowledge to the next.

Concerning staff evaluation by the students, the EEC feels that the process is organized according to official regulations and on the basis of "leading" statements. Most of these are stipulated according to the following format: "*The person teaching this course had a very good knowledge of the subject*". To comment this statement, the students had to choose along the following scale of possible replies: *I totally agree // I agree // I disagree // I totally disagree*. The initial statement can influence some of the students' answers* in favour of the teacher.

The EEC believes that academic units should be able to determine the standards they require in order to register students. Transfers between Departments should be limited only to those students who meet the standards of the Department they choose. These conditions stimulate healthy competition among similar Departments and the overall improvement of education. Therefore, they should be an important concern for the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean in planning its development: to define the profile of its future students in accordance with that of its teaching staff and its own identity.

The Department should try to reduce the number of examinations. This would encourage both students and teaching staff to take them seriously. It would also ameliorate the teaching standards and the quality of the educational experience. In order for this reform to be effective and fair, however, it should be implemented in combination with midterm exams, class assignments, term papers and in-class presentations. The teaching programs should be re- oriented towards participatory and continuous learning. Students could also be asked to write reports about their overall progress from the early stages of their studies. Such involvement would also help students to better understand the material and would improve their writing and analytical skills.

The almost exclusive use of the available textbooks and "notes" is detrimental to the quality of teaching. The use of material outside (and beyond) these one-sided tools should be strongly encouraged by the Department. Finally, the serious problem of absentee students may be attenuated if teachers could make courses more attractive.

C. Research

APPROACH

Apart from generalities about a certain vision of research (see Internal Evaluation Report, chapter 9), the policy and strategy of research are not clearly defined. However, the EEC identified a good research culture among some junior members of the faculty. Moreover, all members of the EEC noticed the motivation and commitment of the PhD students present during the visit.

IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to the three graduate programs, the Department has tried to promote research by organizing five research laboratories. Their titles, literally translated from the Greek, are as follows:

- Laboratory of Social and Political Institutions.
- Laboratory of the Sociology of Labour.
- Laboratory of the Sociology of Youth, Leisure and Sports.
- Laboratory of Social and Cultural Digital Documentation.
- Laboratory of Informatics.

The fragmentation is evident: five laboratories for 16 members of staff. Research is conducted in an *ad hoc* manner. Faculty members design and implement their own, independent research agenda.

RESULTS

The EEC has met the staff collaborating with the above laboratories. Some have mentioned that they have been successful in obtaining funds from both the private and the public sector, which allowed numerous publications. Indeed, several refereed publications in international journals were written by junior staff. This is a very encouraging sign, but it runs contrary to some rather disappointing information the EEC derived from the global list of publications provided by the Department and featuring almost 500 titles for the past ten years (books, articles, conference papers, contributions to collective volumes etc). In fact, this impressive number contains numerous double listings and includes publications in newspapers, non-academic journals, minor local colloquia, items in encyclopaedias, monographs of low academic standards published by Greek publishing houses etc. Very few of these appear in international book publishers and in internationally recognised specialized journals, and none in major international journals of Sociology. Finally, less than a fifth of the total number is written in a foreign language - a clear disadvantage for a discipline like Sociology. These conditions clearly indicate that many members of the staff do not sufficiently participate in international communication among sociologists.

The EEC noticed the absence of specific procedures for supporting and promoting the attendance of international colloquia and conferences. The absence of these mechanisms has a negative impact on the intellectual production of the staff, especially on the number of peer reviewed international scientific publications.

All the conditions described so far prove once more that there is neither a centrally designed research policy and strategy, nor the set of objectives and research standards that might consequently shape planning and implementation.

IMPROVEMENT

The EEC believes that the Department has the potential to produce quality research and recommends the following reforms and measures that may reinforce the Department's research environment:

- The faculty members could engage an intensive discussion in view of a long-term reform of the research conditions in the Department. The purpose of such a discussion should be to form a clear research vision, to define a research policy and strategy, to establish the ways to implement it in order to improve research productivity and quality. This new policy and strategy should support more decisively all junior faculty members and establish clear and transparent standards for electing new members, for promoting members already employed and to grant tenure to junior staff. Senior faculty members should be engaged to support, motivate, and, whenever possible, collaborate with their junior colleagues – not only within their own Department, but also with other faculty members of the University, especially in related disciplines like Anthropology and Social History.
- The Department could easily institute regular research seminars where all faculty members and all PhD students will present their work, without being confined within their own laboratories and subjects.
- Sabbatical leaves, attendance of research colloquia, workshops and conferences abroad could promote the research and international contacts of the staff.
- Many members of the Department have already opened their activities to numerous foreign contacts and invitees. The Department should embrace and pursue this policy.
- The faculty members should further increase research collaboration with post-graduate students.
- Finally, the EEC feels that in the coming times of deep economic crisis, the only reliable and potentially constant source of funds may prove to be the European Community programs (ESPA).

D. All other services

APPROACH

During the meetings with and interviews of teaching staff and students, the EEC has had no comments about the Department administration, negative or positive.

The EEC found the quality of facilities and level of support services to be, generally, adequate. The gym and athletic courts were closed during the EEC visit.

IMPLEMENTATION

The library facilities are scattered in six islands. This serious institutional problem increases costs and reduces dramatically the efficiency of the personnel. During a long meeting with the staff, the EEC noted that:

- In a previous consultation, a teaching staff member had stated that there have been no new acquisitions since 2002; a library administrator confirmed this during the visit.
- Some members of the teaching staff had also complained that the choice of books depends on the approval of the general assembly which is granted *ad hoc*, without clearly defined criteria.
- The members of the library staff are interested in their job and motivated towards improvement.
- A staff of 29 persons seems excessive, even for the six different units.
- The percentage of administrators and technicians among the staff is excessive: 40%.
- State regulations increase costs and prohibit flexible use of the personnel.
- The library is closed after 15:30 pm and throughout the evenings and weekends.
- Students complain that these hours coincide with courses.
- During these restricted time limits, the library offers only 10 places for study.
- The delivery time for long-distance loans and the cost (24 €) prohibit extensive student use.

The library is connected by internet with the Hellenic Academic Libraries Network and private institutions. It is also connected with the Blackboard Learning System (Vista Enterprises).

The EEC members were impressed by the eagerness and motivation of the Theatre and Music group organized by University students and regretted the absence of students from the Sociology Department.

RESULTS and IMPROVEMENT

See above.

E. Strategic planning, perspectives for improvement and potential inhibiting factors.

The EEC members applaud the intention of the Department to develop a new strategic plan (see the Internal Evaluation Report), and hope that their observations and recommendations, as stipulated in this concluding section of their report, will be helpful to this effect.

F. Conclusions and Recommendations of the EEC

The EEC is conscious of the fact that there has been no Sociology Department in Greece until the 1980s. The Aegean University was actually experimenting when it instituted a Department of Sociology.

In evaluating *ex post facto* this experiment, the EEC members' first general impression was that of a relatively young Department built by State decree and from above, assembled in haste, without planning and with little knowledge of Sociology as an academic discipline.

The faculty members elected subsequently had to find their way by trial and error, with very few possibilities to seek peer advice from outside Greece, in a formalist and empiricist frame of mind, and with a commendable, but not necessarily productive enthusiasm. Today, the comments of both teachers and students are clear indications of a general malaise; they are also the proof of an ardent desire for improvement. Therefore, the times are now ripe for a sustained effort to correct the disadvantages of an un-natural childbirth and a difficult childhood. This effort can neutralize the systemic impediments still in presence by exploiting the potential of the staff, especially younger members, and by responding to the motivation and aspirations of the students. The EEC's suggestions, both in the body of this report and in the summary conclusion to follow, aim to help the Department in planning such a long-term reform.

Curriculum

Undergraduate

The share of elective courses in the undergraduate program of studies is excessive, making the tailoring of the educational experience to the student interests and needs almost impossible. The share of courses in Sociology is insufficient and prepares students inadequately to effectively address the important sociological challenges they are supposed to be able to tackle upon graduation. Therefore, the EEC strongly recommends

- to reduce the total number of courses in the curriculum;
- to significantly decrease the share of electives in the overall program of studies.

The EEC also suggests that the Department institute and enforce pre-requisite courses. The introduction of pre-requisites will curtail the length of studies and their cost to the state and society, to the Department, and to the students.

Post-Graduate

The EEC wishes to make the following suggestions:

- The three M-Sc programs should be integrated into one, with a common core of courses in sociological theory and method.
- The five laboratories should be recognized for what they really are: research programs with very limited human and material resources and very ambitious scopes and objectives. Each program should redefine the subject of research, tune it to Sociology, reduce its scope and sharpen its objectives.
- The Department should develop a clear and more elaborate PhD program based upon common advanced courses in sociological theory and method, clearly distinguished from the M-Sc courses mentioned above.
- Before the formal beginning of the graduate programs, the teaching staff could offer crash courses for students with a weaker background in Sociology.
- The post-graduate program must be the basis for developing a trans-disciplinary culture among the staff, mainly through intensive relations with other Departments and especially those of Anthropology and History.

Teaching

The EEC strongly recommends the implementation of teaching methods that will foster greater student participation in the process of learning and increase class attendance. Increased student attendance would facilitate the teachers in evaluating their students and in using assignments, applied term papers and midterm exams. On the other hand, it would help the students to evaluate the courses they are taught and offer them a more meaningful educational experience. By writing several term papers during the course of undergraduate and M-Sc studies, a student can greatly improve the quality of his post-graduate thesis.

Teaching could also be enhanced through the wide use of up-to-date teaching material and by gradually reverting emphasis from textbook based learning to a bibliography and research based culture.

The EEC strongly believes that the Department should encourage and support massive student participation in the Erasmus program, in order to come closer to the quotas proposed by the European Union.

Finally, the EEC suggests that the Department should make an effort to recognize and reward its most effective teachers.

Research

The EEC suggests that the Department's research policy and quality standards be clearly defined, developed and communicated. Hiring, promotion and tenure decisions, critical for the Department's relevance and its development, should be clearly defined and based on meritocracy.

The EEC wishes to stress again the weak relationship between the number of projects, the real research output of the Department, and the quality of this production. The EEC recommends measures to encourage the communication of research findings to academia, in Greece and abroad.

More specifically, the EEC finds the average basic research productivity (international refereed publications) of the Department to be very low. The distribution of research productivity is highly skewed, with a small share of the faculty accounting for the vast majority of the Department's research output.

The faculty is encouraged to make an effort to disseminate their research findings through international refereed, high-quality publication outlets. Publication in mainstream publishers will enhance the impact of their research findings. The same applies for publications in journals like the Annual Review of Sociology, Current Sociology, Sociological Methods and Research, Law and Society Review, Gender and Society, etc.

Sabbatical leaves and participation in seminars and workshops abroad, as well as collaboration with foreign colleagues, would certainly enhance productivity.

The EEC also believes that the Department should support the professional development and growth of its junior faculty members, recognize and reward those faculty members who are particularly active, convince the students to get involved in research projects and, finally, develop a global seminar around the ongoing research of all its members.

Finally, the Department must urgently spot eventual sources of financial support for research, public and private, with most of its efforts directed toward programs financed by the European Union. For this latter source of financing, success depends on the relevance of the programs proposed to the most urgent problems of Greece in a time of deep economic, social and cultural crisis.

Other

The EEC is convinced of the urgency to address the following problems mentioned during the personal interviews conducted with individual members of staff:

- Frequent changes in the interpretation of regulations either at Department level or even at the ministry level, cause confusion and a constant feeling of insecurity among persons waiting to be promoted.
- In the general assembly, majorities and minorities are frequently formed according to political or interpersonal networks or affiliations.
- The composition of the electoral boards, although passed by the general assembly, has often been arbitrary.
- Promotion does not necessarily correspond to academic achievement.

Finally, the EEC wishes to add the following comments:

- Most Department members are hard working, competent in teaching, and dedicated to students and to the University. The students do appreciate the support they have.
- In recent years, the Department has elected some very promising junior faculty members.
- The heterogeneity diagnosed in the Department should be drastically reduced. The existing centrifugal tendencies should be tamed and all departmental activities should be targeted to aim at Sociology, thus reinforcing the Department's identity and productivity. In addressing these challenges, all faculty members should have the possibility to determine what characteristics they value in a Department of Sociology.
- The Department should integrate applied research productivity with teaching efficiency, according to its general educational objectives.
- The Department should seek to contribute to general courses and programs offered by other Departments.
- The Department members should consider spending a class period or at least establish an advisory course on (a) program choices open to the students and (b) career opportunities.

Before closing this evaluation report, all members of the EEC would like to thank the faculty, staff and students of the Department for their cooperation, and hope that both colleagues and students will find its comments and suggestions useful.