

Evaluation Report                      The University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary  
Medicine of Bucharest (UASVM)

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First, I would like to express my thanks to ARACIS for selecting me to be a member of the evaluation committee. Special thanks are offered to all who were involved in the preparation and the implementation of the evaluation process. I have appreciated the chance to meet both the expert colleagues of the evaluating commission and the dedicated members of the host university. The university leadership created very favourable working conditions and provided good materials and database for the evaluation. I really valued the attentive care and friendly hospitality which I was fortunate enough to enjoy.

The efficiency of the institutional procedures of programme quality assurance.

Mission, Values and Competitiveness

The University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine is an institution of long historic standing as its forerunner agricultural school was established in 1852 by a princely decree with large scale donations regarding land and assets. The UASVMB has three branches in its patrimony, which operate as veritable centres for research, production and work experience - "Pietroasa" Viticulture and Enology Research and Development Station, "Istrița" Fruit-growing Farm and "Moara Domnească" Didactic Farm. The existing Royal Foundation still supports the university and maintains fruitful contact with it.

UASVM is a public university and a prestigious member of a Consortium of the 4 Romanian universities of the same kind. In only Bucharest, Iasi, Timisoara and Cluj are study programmes in agronomic sciences offered in the country and the relationship among them is much more of a collaborative than a competitive nature. This partnership took the form of a public utility body in 2014 and concluded a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The university is positioning itself to the category of advanced level education and research according to the universities' classification introduced in 2011.

Its mission is expressed by a recently chosen motto: „*Agriculture for life, life for agriculture.*” This means a strong commitment to both educating highly skilled professional practitioners and researchers and providing a qualitative academic and scientific environment, thus serving the fields of agronomic sciences and veterinary medicine nationwide. The ALLA-motto has been used to label the big annual international conference UASVM organized in the first week of June since 2012.

The university's „third mission” is not particularly precisely detailed but „service to society” is one of the strategic priorities and building „national and international relationships” and achieving academic visibility is a goal pro-actively pursued.

In 2014 new framework agreements were made with China, Moldova Republic, Kazakhstan and Russia. Erasmus mobility contracts have been operating mostly with Italian, Spanish, French, Turkish and Polish universities. UASVM is a member of the Frankophone University Association and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine has joined the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Association.

The Charter of UASVM is the document that defines the mission of the institution, emphasizing the values of „*integrity, academic freedom and university autonomy, public liability and responsibility.*”

The document is public, can be read in the official website. ([www.usamv.ro](http://www.usamv.ro)).

## Quality Culture

Establishing a strong quality culture is another strategic priority. Since 2012 developing and deepening quality culture within the institution has been a constant ambition. External bodies have been invited to perform periodic assessment procedures and make valuable proposals for betterment. ( ISO, IEP-EUA, ARACIS). I can safely say I was impressed by the steady progress the institution has made over the years, a huge body of regulating framework, and an efficient and transparent internal structure exists within the institution. A Quality Manual contains all the forms and regulations.

The leadership and the staff is adequately knowledgeable about the criteria and operation procedures. One of the vice-rectors is responsible for the Institutional Quality Assurance and Assessment Commission 's work. This commission is actively collaborating with the faculty level Quality Commissions. There is a separate unit, a Department for Quality Assurance with a staff of 3 practitioners that prepares the evaluative forms and organizes the whole process of evaluation and handles documentation. The overall summary of quality assurance and assessment is part of

the Rector's Annual Report on the State of the University as discussed and approved by the Senate. Harnessing of quality issues works as a horizontal mainstreaming in the institution.

### **The efficiency of the institutional procedures of ensuring graduation standards**

The university operates 7 faculties (Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Science, Veterinary Medicine, Land Reclamation and Environmental Engineering, Biotechnology, Management and Economic Engineering in Agriculture and Rural Development), each of which is divided into departments. (15) . There are 50 laboratories attached to them.

There are 10 research centres without legal entity and one research institute.

UASVM at present offers 33 BA study programs (1 in English, in veterinary medicine) and 33 MA-degree programmes, it operates two doctoral schools. There were no mentioning of joint study programmes with international universities.

Students are offered practical training centres both on the campus and at special farms outside Bucharest. Students' practical activities are conducted at 160 production and research units. Internships and work placements are negotiated with external companies and made available for the students.

The quality is as much dependent on students' ability and efforts as on the provision the institution offers. Admission policy is congruent with what the national legislation prescribes. All students are informed on course and examination requirements.

At present there are 8982 full time students.

Recently the university aimed to reduce the number of students per teaching staff to enhance seminar and laboratory work. (10-14 students is the average ratio in most of the faculties.)

In the year of 2014/2015 nearly 100 students achieved merit and excellent scholarships, 472 were awarded by study scholarships and 391 received social scholarships. Each year 3-4 full scholarships are guaranteed to Gypsy students.

High performance students are invited to take part in research projects and may benefit from mobility scholarships. Italian, French, Spanish, Portugal, Austrian, Turkish and Swedish universities were visited by the the students (=175 months of student mobility in 2014).

The percentage of students completing their full studies and receiving the adequate credits in the previous academic year was: 54 %. Around 10 % of the students'

advancement had to be rejected because of levels of non-achievement, the rest had to make up for the losses in necessary credit number later.

Over 75 % of students positively appreciate the academic environment.

70 % of the graduates find employment according to their qualification according to follow-up surveys. In the case of horticulture and agriculture there is a series of meetings with employers (6-7 a year) where staff and more mature students exchange information about needs and new developments in the area, job potentials and requirements and the availability of internships. Companies like Monsanto, Syngenta, Pioneer, Euralis are very active in this process but even individual farmers initiate exchanges.

Having met some of the employers it was striking that they would expect to acquire a fully-fledged practitioner when they employ a graduate. Especially committedness and engagement were the required attitudes.

**The efficiency of the institutional procedures supporting the educational process. The internal evaluation results of the study programmes' quality.**

There was a slight increase in the BA students' number from 2575 (2013/14) to 2605 (2014/2105) due to the launch of the English Programme in Veterinary Medicine. Part-time and distance learning BA study programs attracted 1025 students this year.

For the MA level training programmes 1155 full time and (of which 406 fee paying) students were recruited in addition to the 225 student who have chosen the part-time and distance learning study.

Each faculty has in place permanent commissions for initiation and monitoring of curricula.

Study programmes, course syllabuses are reviewed and updated each year in September. Students are partner to this process. ECTS credit requirements are addressed.

#### **Teaching staff:**

The staff consists of very experienced, well-known professors, a lot of them were former students of the university who excelled in their studies.

The total number of teachers are: 629 (407 tenure positions). The number of tenured teaching staff holding a Phd: 369 (= 90,6%).

Only 35 persons among the teaching body are under 35 years of age (over 10%). This seems a little bit low, however nobody mentioned it as an issue.

Nobody can enter a teaching job at the university without having completed 2 psycho-pedagogic moduls. If a junior teacher is employed he/she automatically will become an assistant to a professor, and this tandem arrangement seems a fine mechanism for them acquire the practical experiences needed for effective teaching.

A complex teacher evaluation package has been introduced that includes each year a Self-evaluation report, a Peer evaluation, a Student evaluation of the teaching and a Synthesis report by the faculty director that is followed by a face-to-face discussion and then jointly agreement on areas for improvement in the future.

The Self-evaluation form has been recently renewed. Teaching and scientific activities and membership in professional organizations are elicited.

Students' evaluations were very favourable: they rated the quality of programs at an average score of 4,16-4,79 on a scale of 1-5 (when 5 is top)

The student evaluation of the teaching is ranging from 4,23-4,96.

The 90% of peer reviews ended up with the grade „very good“. The remaining 10 % achieved: „good.“

### **Research:**

Since 2012 the university has reorganized the research management with the aim of strengthening research capacity and supporting young researchers' integration. A new research database has also been built listing research and business partners.

Before 2012 each faculty organized a scientific conference annually. 3 years ago UASVM launched a joint scientific conference with the new logo and an underpinning modern online platform. A new interdisciplinary journal was created (The AgroLife Scientific Journal) in addition to each Faculty's Scientific Papers. All papers are open accessed, can be downloaded from the digital archive. The volume of publications in English is constantly growing.

Biodiversity was selected as an integrated research area within the institution. A huge interdisciplinary project HORTINVEST has been started.

This year an Office for Technological Transfer has been opened for sizing up and utilizing the numerous patents UASVM has.

This autumn a new series of Research- Business Forum is expected to start.

Within the EU's research framework HORIZON 2020 the university has for first time ever applied for a research coordinator role.

### **Learning environment:**

The main campus has impressive grounds with natural environment, parks, gardens, glass house area, vineyards and fields for active use by the students. The 38 hectare area also contains the faculty buildings and attached laboratories, dormitories, restaurants and canteen, sport and leisure time facilities, shops, chapel and a cultural centre.

Most buildings have undergone renovation, and some new ones have been developed as well. The new building of Biotechnology will be completed in 2016.

The campus of the Veterinary Medicine is located at the banks of the River Dambovită in the centre of the city offering a unique historical milieu.

There are enough good quality lecture halls (altogether 28 in the faculty buildings ranging from 50-to 300 seats) and seminar rooms, well-equipped for teaching purposes. Each faculty has its own specialized library with reading rooms and internet access. Having visited several of them it was obvious that the students were well served. The students are able to have internet access from their hostel rooms as well. Access to several international scientific databases are ensured.

### **Support services to the Students:**

Students' issues are addressed both at Vice-Rector level and at the Senate Specific Commission. A representation rate of 25% in representative and decision making bodies is ensured. Student Union is active. There are seven youth associations corresponding to the 7 faculties. All the inquiries made elicited satisfactory responses.

The 10 dormitories offer places to 3852 students (= 42,5 %) who feel fortunate enough to get access to these relatively cheap form of accommodation. (120-360 lei). Observation revealed the rooms are very small with basic furniture and there are no adjoining spaces for social life or learning, there is no dining area, the kitchen doesn't offer any cutlery or pots, or a refrigerator.

Medical services are very well organized, 2 dentists and other general practitioners are available in a well equipped medical center.(but not a psychologist.)

The Centre for Career Guidance is only partly functioning now as the facility is under construction.

### **The credibility of the information disseminated by the institution with regard to the study programmes**

Access to the university website and faculty websites is easy and the institution promotes the policy of transparent communication targeting both the existing students and the potential ones.

The main website gives detailed information on the university, on the study and research programs, degrees offered, links to the faculty websites.

### **Good practice aspects**

An efficient research management structure (weekly meetings of the team responsible consisting of one of the vice –rectors and the 7 vice –deans) capable of expanding the annual Conference-scheme and promoting a higher level of international visibility through the re-designed symbols/colours /formats used for the conference and the related scientific platform. It has resulted in creating a new Interdisciplinary Journal complementing the Faculty scientific publications in English. The ever-growing research database is listing research and business partners offering the cultivation of fruitful contacts.

Negotiated internships-offers for the students (paid by the companies) as a result of good contact with business actors.

Training and Staff development : Operating a unit of 9-10 practitioners of educational scientists, responsible for in-service continuous professional training and enhancing innovative teaching methods is a valid idea and a good practice.

### **Statement related to the confidence granted to the institution**

I propose a “high degree of confidence” grade.

## Recommendations for the institution's activity

I wish to further encourage the conscious move of the Quality Commission in the direction of developing more quantifiable/ value-attached criteria to monitor performance and progress in the different concrete areas and of using much more benchmarking indicators when setting targets.

I agree and support the initiative ( already used in some faculties) to launch online evaluation systems for the students.

It seems, more human resource is needed for the strengthened research activities: not only for researching but for the dissemination and communication activities: editors, writers, website organizers. I'd recommend exploiting more the resources of Phd-students in this matter.

It would be worth allowing the Career Guidance and Counselling Centre to be shaped and run by students more. At present the professional staff (4 statuses) are not filled in, the headquarter is under construction, the student support services are run by faculty personnel, mentors, etc. More intensive preparation and skill development for job interviews, job fairs and contact with the job market might be expected resulting from a proactive student involvement.

Having met the students they would prefer more optional courses or modules: it would be worth reconsidering the factors that make this possible. There was an agreement among them that a longer practicum would be preferable for their employability. The university staff should take steps towards describing tasks and criteria for the field-practice or internship assignments in a more detailed fashion.

There remains scope for establishing structured ways of integrating employer feedback into the teaching process and revising study programmes. There are good examples found at some of the faculties to utilize.



At present alumni affairs are managed at a faculty level. I would suggest having them organized at the institutional level as well. I propose more information on alumni should be disseminated and used for the universities' purposes: broadening the existing alumni programs or creating satisfactory forms of cooperation would benefit by getting in more feedback and opening the chance of university-enterprise collaboration, potentially drawing in more funds. Follow-up surveys would be more easily handled.

The needs of the disabled shouldn't be overlooked, at present there are very few lifts and there are no barrier-free rest-rooms for wheelchair users. I've been told that fitness is ensured by a compulsory medical statement as a condition for admission. Anyone can be disabled, older staff members as well later in their life, so this argument can't be an excuse. Even the admission criteria should be reconsidered as there is a faculty of management that potentially could be chosen by a physically disabled.

#### Recommendation to ARACIS

Meeting with students, graduates and employers separately is a standard and very important part of the institutional evaluation. Each gets only one hour, which usually is rather short. I would propose an online questionnaire or the opportunity for possible prior reflection sent through Alumni members. Graduates and even external partners/employers could have been asked to send comments on the related issues when the news is disseminated that an ARACIS evaluation will be conducted at the university. At present only Bucharest-based actors turn up and people from rural areas are not represented at all.

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