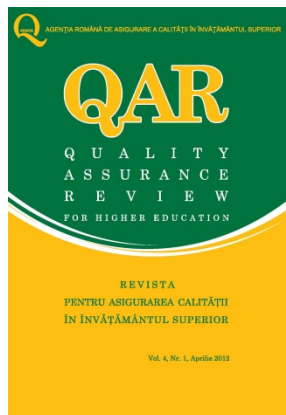




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## Quality Assurance Review For Higher Education

***Innovative Trends in Curricula Design. The Acquisition of European Competencies in Master's Studies: A Successful Project at the Lucian-Blașa University of Sibiu – German and European Studies (Cultures in Contact)***

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# **Innovative Trends in Curricula Design The Acquisition of European Competencies in Master's Studies: A Successful Project at the Lucian-Bloga University of Sibiu - German and European Studies (Cultures in Contact)**

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## **1. Preliminary remarks**

The profound social and political changes of the last twenty years, which can be described as “historical”, have increasingly encouraged the development of a new “Erinnerungskultur“ (culture of memories) and have conferred a fresh impetus to the study of European history and European spirituality.

The holding of multiple congresses and conferences, exhibitions and all kind of cultural events as well as a continuously growing interest of Europeans (who are already quite conscious of traditions and history) – in their own specific histories and cultures, bear witness to this trend. This new historical consciousness, i.e., the rediscovery of European cultural values, are clear signs of the fact that these European issues are experiencing a boom and steadily gaining in popularity, the same way they did in the 1950s and 1960s. This, at least, is a characteristic of the traditionally educated middle-class intellectuals, to such an extent that it has become a broader consumer product in the new century.

This cultivation of memories (*Erinnerungskultur*) is also a visible proof that in difficult and insecure times, Europeans return to a great extent to the fundamentals of their cultural and spiritual heritage, from which they have only (apparently) grown apart. After an (initially) successful economic integration, after the introduction of the European currency (a process which, till recently, could be regarded as accomplished on the whole), Europe's peoples must now step forward towards a new profound second stage in their unified development.

## **2. Towards a new spirituality and identity - The guiding principles of the curricula's design**

This second level of the Europeanization should be characterized by a process of reconsideration not only of the motivations of the founding fathers of the new Europe, but also by an increased attention paid to the immaterial fundamentals of this Continental integration.

As a matter of fact, it becomes imperative to discover behind the current syntagm of “Europeanization of the Common European Core” (“Europäisierung des Gemeineuropäischen”) the necessity to forge a new sense of unity within the diverse European community, granting it an important role in establishing a trans-European identity and legitimacy. (Europe should, so to say, acquire a new individuality).

The initial rejection of the European constitution by several states and the difficulties in reaching consensus on so many levels of European issues (with the current financial and economic crisis bearing witness of this status), the openly sceptical attitude extant among the population on the adequacy of European enlargement illustrates one more aspect insufficiently considered up to now,

i.e., that politics needs the moral backing and support of European citizens in order to be effective.

However, we do not need a new version of the Carolingian idea of Europe, but rather a renaissance of the true European spirit of the Enlightenment, that is, a rebirth of that era when the 'European consciousness' was not only an intellectual concept for elites but had also entered (for the first time in history) the actuality of the people's existence (the *res publica*). In other words, we need a second Enlightenment, or, so to speak, another European mainstream culture-creation, oriented to the values of the Enlightenment, on whose bases we could determine the finality of European integration policies and define the future destiny of EU-Europe. (This process should preferably be accomplished in the frame of a widespread public debate.)

Similar considerations and reflections were made nine years ago in the Department of German Studies at LBUS in several intensive brainstorming sessions (which accurately anticipated some of the subsequent developments in Europe). These deliberations led to the elaboration of a master's study programme that would foster and develop the European competences of its students.

### 3. Objectives and aims of the Master's study programme

Faced with the accelerated process of globalization in contemporary society, with a huge impact on all levels of social and spiritual life, it became absolutely essential to promote a way of thinking in new dimensions and categories and to also implement its vision into the general and professional education of the young generation, all the more so because this generation was destined in the first place to ensure the proper accession and integration of Romania into the structures of a United Europe.

The setting up of the master's study programme, *German and -European Studies, Cultures in Contact*, nine years ago created these prerequisites for the training of top Romanian specialists with interdisciplinary competences and international awareness who would distinguish themselves within the EU. The achievement of this goal requires deepening, at the same time, explicitly pre-vocational studies. Due also to the interdisciplinary nature of this master's programme, the graduates can expect to be competitive for excellent working opportunities in the fields of: cultural management, journalism, community policies, communication management (as press officers, public work officials, public relation's experts), NGOs and enterprises, in education and the diplomatic services, public opinion polling, in personal consultancy etc.

### 4. The structural concept of the study programme: Content and topics

The extant master's programme, designed in a close collaboration with our partner university from Marburg (Germany) and benefiting the financial support from the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), is primarily oriented towards the deepening of German studies, whereas this is no longer regarded as a purely philological discipline but as part of the modern cultural sciences. At the same time, a second important focus on essential aspects of European sciences and European politics aims to consistently widen the students' knowledge on broader European issues.

These curricular components take into account, on one hand, the general interests of Romanian undergraduates; on the other hand, they are grounded on the actually existing interdisciplinary teaching potential and the proven professional qualification of professors from the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. The modularization, internationalization and interdisciplinary quality of teaching and learning in the programme is ensured by a harmonious combination of science and practices-oriented courses, seminars, exercises, workshops, colloquia and exams.

The study programme has been structured into four interdisciplinary modules, which can be differently combined in different semesters as circumstances warrant. The two core modules are

represented by the German and European studies and they are completed by a third module, which possesses a focus on cultural aspects of European society, and a fourth one that addresses religious issues in the EU.

*The German studies philological module* aims at both widening and deepening knowledge of German language and literature, and offers a large variety of exercises for achieving high competences in German for philologists and terminologists. It also introduces European language areas for study, points out the cultural contact phenomena in the dissemination of the German language in Romania, and gives due consideration to widespread minorities' languages (including Romanes) and their interferences with the majority language and culture.

These study specializations offer also an overview of life experiences in the German-Romanian literary context (especially through the history and practice of literary translation), they also focus on the city as a literary motif, and, lastly, they explore and examine European cities and their varying importance for both German and Romanian literature.

The second core module of the master's programme, entitled *European institutions/European policy*, offers students current information on different European organizations, institutions, perspectives and development tendencies. Other courses in this module focus on national and European identity, European regions, and European Union, European cultural policy, societies in transition in South-Eastern Europe, the culture of dialogue in multicultural societies, international conflicts, and conflict-solving potential, Romanian strategies and priorities in the EU integration process.

The complementary module on *cultural sciences* creates, by concentrating on the city as a phenomenon, generous points of contact for the interdisciplinary perspective. The city is presented as a form of habitat in its architectonic variety, as a motif for the creative arts, as a touristic attraction, and as a place for intercultural encounter. Modern topics such as the city economy and city ecology, city reconstruction and rehabilitation are also covered. The anthropological perspective within this module is present in the courses and seminars on city festivals, traditions and customs, as well as tendencies in modern gastronomic development in different European regions.

The fourth module on *religion* directly addresses varied religions and confessions in Europe, by analyzing ecumenism, piety versus atheism, the moral and political engagement of the church in civil society and the state; yet it also addresses the indirect influence of religion on modern Europe, as reflected in the capturing of biblical motifs in secular literature, music and arts, thus proving that the Bible is an inexhaustible source for such motifs.

The master's study programme is structured in four semesters and is concluded by a written thesis paper of at least 100 pages in length on a specific research topic. At graduation, the student is granted a master's diploma in German with a noted specialization in "intercultural European studies".

The principle of international recognition and academic/employment mobility under this degree has been ensured by the ECTS system and the pyramidal structure of the modules: in the first two semesters, the knowledge and the competences acquired are rather general ones (within the respective module), whereas in the following semesters (the third and the fourth) the number of hours in each module is diminished in favour of integrative, inter-modular courses. This approach has proven to be an effective way of accomplishing, on graduation, the main objective of the study programme: to give the participants a general picture and consciousness of European identity, built up from a complex of social, economic and political elements mixed with cultural elements, such as a religious history and the spiritual experiences it has fostered.

## 5. Favourable conditions for the study programme

A great number of favourable conditions have justified the establishing of the study programme at Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu:

- highly qualified teaching staff, researchers from the university and the theological insti-

tute with excellent knowledge of German, who can teach the courses in the different modules with the highest standards;

- traditionally good relations with the best teaching staff from the universities of Cluj and Bucharest to be engaged as visiting professors;
- agreements of collaboration and scientific contacts to many universities from the German-speaking countries, e.g., the institutional partnership with the Philipps University in Marburg, financially supported by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service);
- a great number of papers and documents in the archives, along with well-known museums and picture galleries of national and international importance in Sibiu (e.g., the Astra library and Brukenthal library);
- an internationally recognized theatre company in Sibiu (with both a Romanian and a German stage);
- important libraries in different fields of study;
- information and possibilities of publishing in scientific journals (e.g., *Germanistische Beiträge*) and in intercultural oriented journals like the *Euphorion* (with papers in English and French) or in the Romanian cultural publication *Transilvania*, that pays particular attention to German culture and German literature;
- the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (a branch of the Romanian Academy in Sibiu) with professional publications like *Historia Urbana, Ethnological Studies and Research, Forschungen zur Volks-und Landeskunde (Folklore, Regional and Cultural Studies)* an institution that concentrates top specialists from Romania and abroad. “The Historical Atlas of Cities in Romania” (“Der Städtegeschichte-Atlas Rumäniens”) as well as the “Transylvanian-Saxon Dictionary” (“Siebenbürgisch-sächsische Wörterbuch”) are being published here, the latter one in close collaboration with the Romanian Academy, The Saxon Academy of Sciences in Leipzig and The Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz.
- Examples of academic activity carried out under the master’s programme over the last decade include:
  - Researchers from the institute and professors from the university have published a history of the German literature in Transylvania from the beginning till 1848, enjoying a consistent support from the Institute for German Culture and History in South-Eastern Europe (Munich);
  - A documentation centre of the Evangelical Church A.B in Romania has been established in Sibiu. This centre has a rich, unexploited holding of documents from the 17th to the 20th centuries, which completes the well-known Brukenthal and Astra libraries with valuable Transylvanica; these facilities and the close collaboration with the Transylvanian Institute in Gundelsheim (Germany) offer various possibilities for further research and documentation.
  - The existence of the General Consulate of Germany in Sibiu, of a German Cultural Centre and of the headquarters of the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, all of them institutions to which the university has excellent connections, and which support (with human resources and logistics) the present master’s study programme

These are all important underpinnings and arguments in favour of the success of the existing master’s study programme, *German and European Studies: Cultures in Contact*.

## 6. Conclusions

The awareness of the fact that a United Europe cannot be founded on finance and economic factors alone and that successful European integration is conditioned by the feeling of belonging to a “Common European” home (with a distinct core of common values, where identity in diversity

needs to be cherished and celebrated), has caused many decision-makers of curricula design in western universities to include in their plans an offer in European Studies. At the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu these decisions were taken nine years ago, a fact which well entitles us to speak of prospective thinking and innovation at our Department and institution.

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