



a) Reply to the External Evaluation Report for the New Program of Study “MA/LLM in Maritime Law and Shipping Business – Distance Learning”.

We would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee for their valuable comments and suggestions concerning the improvement of the new program of study. The External Evaluation Committee’s comments are quoted below (in bold), followed by a corresponding answer.

1. Effectiveness of Teaching (Recommendations page 12).

a. Making clear the content of the pre-sessional course for potential applicants.

The content of pre-sessional course for potential applicants is improved as recommended. Appendix 1 gives the outline of the pre-sessional course.

b. English proficiency criteria not very clear (for example IELTS 6.5 no stated; whether an interview will be required).

The English proficiency criteria is amended and is now clear for potential applicants – see amended admission criteria - Appendix 2 (point 1.3).

c. No information in the programme specification about the pre-sessional shipping seminars.

Pre-sessional shipping seminars are mandatory to potential applicants with no academic or professional shipping background. This has been also indicated to the amended admission criteria - Appendix 2 (point 1.2.4).

d. Introduce an introduction to legal method, legal institutions/systems and legal skills course as a preparatory course.

The pre-sessional session has been enriched with the topics recommended – see Appendix 1.

e. Continued provision of academic skills and competencies (eg. Writing skills, referencing skills etc.) programme.

This forms an integral part of the newly introduced research methodology course which ensures that students are appropriately prepared for conducting independent work. It is also noted that through the use of Turnitin the students will be exposed and trained in appropriate referencing practices and acceptable presentation of individual work.

f. Information about what students can expect from dissertation supervisions.

g. Amend the different word limits for the Dissertation in the conventional course (15,000) as against the distance learning programme (20,000).

f - g: Dissertation course outline is enhanced with information and clear guidelines about what students shall expect from dissertation supervisions. Moreover, the word limits for the Dissertation in both conventional and Distance Learning program has been set to 20,000 - as shown in Appendix 3.

2. Program of study and HE qualifications (Recommendations page 12).

a. Supervision training for visiting lecturers (given that some VLs are not active academic researchers but eminent professionals).

Supervision of visiting faculty is of paramount importance for the University. All visiting faculty receives training and informational material regarding the University's rules and regulations. The Visiting Faculty Handbook describes procedures, deadlines, the examination and grading policies, student progression and graduation. The University has also in place, at the start of each academic year, a specialised, intensive and hands-on training seminar regarding "Teaching and Evaluation", in which new visiting faculty members. New visiting faculty members teaching for distance learning programs also participate in the training seminars held by the DLC at the beginning of each semester, gaining knowledge, skills and competences regarding the pedagogical framework employed, and the technological tools used to deliver the courses. In addition, visiting faculty's performance will also be monitored by the university-wide quality assurance policies and procedures, ensuring that education provided will be at the desirable level. Finally, mentoring new visiting faculty members by Department Heads and the programs' coordinators will also have a significant positive impact on their training and monitoring.

b. No sample teaching materials available for scrutiny.

For each course offered in the program a detailed Study Guide is developed which describes in depth the learning material of the students as well as the activities and assessment methods which will be undertaken at each unit of the course. It is noted that faculty involved undertake the necessary training to ensure that the study guides developed conform to the adopted pedagogical framework for distance learning programs at the university.

A sample study guide for course "ITSM 512 – Commercial Management of Ships" is provided in Appendix 4 for evaluation.

As noted, within the guide access to teaching material in various forms is included. A sample of the teaching material in written form for the same course is provided in Appendix 4.1.

c. No actual mock-up of the web learning platform for scrutiny.

A mock-up of the first two units of course ITSM 512, Commercial Management of Ships prepared by Dr Alec Coutroubis and Dr Evi Plomaritou, can be found in Appendix 4.2. The mock-up follows and reflects the corresponding study guide of the course.

d. Student exchange (especially Erasmus) programme not convenient given the programme structure; students on course need to be properly informed.

Although the Erasmus program is available to all university students, as the Committee correctly identifies, the program may not be suitable for Erasmus participation. Students will be properly informed of this and should they wish to participate in the program the University will make clear that this may affect the duration of their studies

e. Should demonstrate how the online delivery actually supports the achievement of the learning outcomes expressed in the individual modules. The course team refers to the immersed learning model for the DL course – clearer articulation on how interactivity is achieved is needed (not enough, perhaps, only to use the online discussion board).

The expressed concern of the EEC regarding the limited effectiveness of merely using discussion boards as the teaching tool for achieving the learning outcomes of the program is in alignment with our Pedagogical Framework for the delivery of distance learning programs. That is why the e-learning platform developed and used for the delivery of the DL program integrates all state-of-the-art Web 2.0 tools available today and can accommodate the fully-immersed e-learning model adopted by the Pedagogical Framework in place at Frederick University. These tools include, In addition to discussion forums, students' and instructors' blogs for communicating personal opinions and standpoints, Wikis for collaborative writing, chatrooms for synchronous written communication among students and between students and instructors, on-line quizzes and tests for continuous assessment, as well as self-assessment of students, sharing of video and audio learning resources. The e-learning platform is also capable of producing, on-demand, extensive participation statistics, tracing at-risk students using specific algorithms. The e-learning platform also allows for student collaboration in groups, enabling their allocation in small groups with dedicated communication and collaboration tools to prepare assignments work with case-studies or solve problems or exercises. The immersed e-learning model adopted by the Pedagogical Framework also takes advantage of Adobe Connect, a highly sophisticated virtual meeting platform that allows for various types of interactivity, such as synchronous communication with video and audio, sharing of resources and collaboration. Such virtual meetings are held at least four (4) times during a semester and are used for clarifying concepts, tutoring, discussions, flipped classrooms, sharing of learning resources, clarifying assignment

specifications and, generally, give the students the opportunity to come into direct contact with their instructors.

The material used by the program's courses goes beyond typical text-based resources, such as books, articles and other references. The learning resources made available to students are in electronic form and are easily accessible via VPN connection or direct download. The material used for each week within a course also includes a series of narrated and/or annotated presentations, or presentations with notes, carefully designed, so that they do not exceed specific duration or length, making it easy for DL students to study.

The above provisions can assure that the learning outcomes laid out by the program, and by individual courses will be achieved. The Pedagogical Framework adopted by Frederick University has been in place for approximately four (4) years and has so far produced excellent student attrition rates which are positively compared to those of other distance learning programs of study in Europe and elsewhere.

3. Research and Synergies with Teaching (Recommendations page 13)

a. To consider using some of the research projects as a platform for learning and teaching (for instance, the project could be used as a case study for formative assessment or self-reflection).

Although synergy between research and teachings exists through the transfer of knowledge and experience created by such research within the class context, this synergy has to improve. An enhancement of this synergy, as a fruitful suggestion by the committee, will be realised by incorporating components or parts of completed and on-going projects as research assignments/cases studies in subjects like International maritime law and shipping management / business modules constituting parts of students' formative assessment. In specific, the following actions will be undertaken to increase such synergies:

1. Disseminate information on research projects that have been completed on a program and class level. This can be facilitated through the electronic platform module area in where students can review the details of various projects. Briefings as part of the course content/syllabi will follow within a class session of modules such as international maritime law, dispute resolution, and shipping business/management.
2. Create assignments in the form of case studies or short research projects related to previous dpt. research so that students produce evidence of their own critical evaluation of such research and or expand knowledge and or update data. Focus can be given to

projects like the PreMarpol Project, E-medi@te Project, ECDIS, and ANDROMEDA.

3. Incorporate such research in creating research topics for final thesis dissertations completed by students (MLSM 520).
4. Involve students actively in departmental future research projects by assigning parts of such projects to them in order to assist in their completion. This will be incorporated as a component of the students' formative assessment in their relevant modules and will create a distinctive program research culture and character. The on-going project "Research to identify markets, ship types and potential customers that may be attracted in the Cyprus Register" on behalf of the Department of Merchant Shipping, is an example of a project that students will be involved.
5. Introduce in the longer term modules that derive for departmental research which can include public law aspects such as environmental protection, maritime law and shipping business and their interaction with energy and natural resources. As the dpt. has focused on such research areas in the past and given the dpt.'s ability for program development (Interreg Initiative Greece – Cyprus 2007–2013; e-learning modules developed for the Cyprus Department of Merchant Shipping for shipping business officials as well as for merchant marine officers) this goal is achievable.

b. The Research Methods module does not refer to legal research methodologies or indeed a bibliography with some of the more important legal research materials.

c. Although the course team stressed that the research methods module will focus on law and shipping business, the module description is not quite explicit about that emphasis.

Reply for b & c

The Course Outline for the Research methods Module (MLSM 506) is revised and amended, as shown in Appendix 5.

d. To reconsider whether an examination is an appropriate means of assessing Research Methods

The delivery of The Research Methods (MLSM 506) module incorporates a number of in-class activities such as article/s' review, practical exercises and in-class questions/answers quizzes. These are an integral part of the acquisition of knowledge required for completing successfully the Midterm Assignment and the Final examination assessment. The research module consists of two equal forms of assessment:

- i. Midterm Assignment on Research Methodology (50% of total marks for module)
- ii. Closed-book Final Examination on Quantitative methods (50% of total)

marks for module)

Marked Assignment

The assignment is designed to create a practical implementation of what is learned in class. Students are asked to select a topic relevant to their programme domain and produce a mini research project applying the principles of a final thesis in terms of structure, referencing and methodological rationale and tools. A presentation of the research paper is required for the student to receive a final grade.

The Examination

The examination is focusing on assessing students on the quantitative part of the module and the knowledge and skills acquired for effectively input quantitative data interpret it and be able to present findings arising from the analysis of such data.

Both forms of assessment are of equal weight and their combination is perceived as a way to prepare students effectively for their final research thesis (MLSM 506).

4. Administration services, student welfare and support (Recommendations page 13)

a. Should consider referring students to bailii.org for free legal materials.

Special donations to Cyprus Bar Legal Database (CyLaw) and British and Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILii) are being arranged, as sincere and genuine appreciation of their service to legal education and practice.

For easier access, special links are being incorporated within the Library's page interface, containing links to Cylaw and BAILii as well as the Social Science Research Network / Legal Scholarship Network (SSRN / LSN).

b. A long term enhancement would be a paid subscription to [lexis](http://www.lexis.com) or [Westlaw](http://www.westlaw.com).

We would like to thank the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) in relation to the above comment and agree with the finding. Investment in electronic resources is critical to the success of the distance learning program. The Information Systems and Library Committee (ISLC) of the university has already extended online subscriptions for the new academic year, most notably with full access to academic journals from Elsevier as well as purchase of the full e-book series of Elsevier and Springer.

Library is updated regularly with new books, periodicals and journals. Over the last few years, hardcopy material pertinent to the Programme has

risen substantially. Specifically, the Library subscribes to the following Electronic Databases:

- Cambridge University Press
- Oxford University Art Online
- Springer Publishing
- Wiley online Library
- ProQuest Central Database
- Cyprus Bar Association Legal Information Database (www.cylaw.org), which also links to British and Irish Legal Information Institute (www.bailii.org), World Legal Information Institute (www.worldlii.org) and Commonwealth Legal Information Institute (www.commonlii.org)
- Athens Bar Association Legal Information Database - Isocrates (www.dsanet.gr)
- ACM Digital Library
- ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis
- Κυπριακός Οργανισμός Τυποποίησης (CYS)

Further steps underway:

- Proceed with institutional subscriptions where needed. Further subscriptions to Law-specific research publications such as those noted in the recommendation will be considered for addition to the current services in the next review of the ISLC.
- Library is expecting delivery of recent hardcopy editions, relating to Maritime Law and Shipping Business

c. Revising the module specifications to consider specifically introducing relevant e-books.

Modules are being revised with the introduction of relevant e-books and other electronic journals.

d. Devise a careers support scheme which is relevant specifically to postgraduate students (perhaps build on the excellent programme for undergraduates)

Given that most of legal practitioners - in Cyprus and Greece - are independent professionals (serving either as sole practitioners or through small-size partnerships), the University offers scholarships to the jurists that are either trainees or members of the Bar Associations of Cyprus and Greece respectively. This initiative aims to link the Programme further with the profession, and subsequently disseminate – to a great level - information about its usefulness to the relevant professional circles.

5. Distance Learning (Recommendations page 14)

- a. Technical specifications of IT equipment should be made clear to students (including for example processing speed and data storage).**

We agree with the recommendation. Both in the Student Handbook and other supportive information the minimum and suggested technical requirements will be specified. It is noted that for the particular course such requirements are de facto available to modern students wishing to commence distance learning education however, it is accepted that it is best they are explicitly specified.

- b. There is no sample of the VLE (virtual learning environment) training module for students and staff. A useful model should include an FAQ troubleshooting sheet, contact details of the IT support team, a 'how to' video, and a forum board for students to post problems/concerns**

There is a FAQ sheet for prospective and new students but it should be amended to reflect additional common queries, as identified through the experience gained from DL operations at the university. We fully agree that provision of rich-media information to DL students such as 'how-to' videos which significantly reduce the fears and anxieties of students. To this end, the DLU and LSU have already started preparing such welcoming and 'how-to' videos. Furthermore, the DLU has organized and pre-commencement DL induction week, similar to the 'week-0' concept employed in classes so as to allow for students to communicate with and have a smooth induction to the University.

- c. Clearer information in the module specifications as to how often discussions on the platform should take place.**

As per the instructor's contract and guidelines, the minimum number of tele-meeting sessions for each course-group is 4. The DLC will ensure that this is clearly reflected in the study guides of courses.

- d. Consider assessing participation in the forums to encourage engagement from students.**

This is a positive recommendation which we agree to adopt. The course design guidelines are amended to require instructors to provide a participation component in forums, case study analysis sessions, etc in the continuous assessment. This should account to a minimum of 10% of the continuous assessment component and 40% maximum.

e. Articulate a target IT support staff-student ratio

Articulate a target IT support staff-student ratio: Staff-student staff ratio is an extremely important quality indicator in higher education and, specifically, in distance learning. For Frederick University the staff-student ratio is closely monitored and maintained at an appropriate level. Therefore the following guidelines are strictly followed: 1) students enrolled in a course section are less than 30, 2) when more than 25 students enrol in a course then a Teaching Assistant is assigned to the group.

The DLC committee is currently working on establishing staff-student ratios for administrative support. The current ratio of dedicated administrative staff to students is about 120.