

George Aletraris
Education Officer
Cyprus Agency for Quality Assurance
and Accreditation in Higher Education
Lemesou Avenue 5,
2112, Lefkosia Cyprus

21 March 2019

Response to External Evaluation Report for the PhD program in Political Science

Dear Mr Aletraris,

Thank you for sending the external evaluation report for the PhD program in Political Science. We are thankful for the excellent, thoughtful and helpful remarks of the External Evaluation Committee. We are also thankful for your careful and diligent implementation of the evaluation procedure.

We gladly note the Committee's overall view that "the PhD program is run professionally and embedded within a good governance structure" and that "the Department offers a program that fully meets international standards in terms of design despite its limited size."

Herebelow please find our responses to the detailed comments included in the Report:

Comment:

The nature of the system is to allow a lot of discretion to individual faculty members and their way to approach teaching and supervision. While this is positive in many ways, it can also create some discrepancies between the experience of individual doctoral students notably in terms of how regular their contact is with their supervisor and the specific support and feedback that they receive from them. In a way, the entire experience of doctoral students seems to depend on that individual supervisor-supervisee relationship.

While this works well in a majority of cases, it is important to note that it does not leave much room for salvaging something where things do not work optimally. The Department may wish to consider the possibility of co-supervision or at least of giving students a dissertation advisor in addition to their supervisor who may be less specialized but able to still offer secondary support. This would be particularly useful, for instance, when the main supervisor is on sabbatical. Students point out that most supervisors stay in Cyprus during sabbaticals and are thus widely available to help, but supervisory arrangements should not depend on such a condition.

Response:

The Rules for Graduate Studies at the University of Cyprus (Rules 7.1 to 7.9) clearly explicate the role of the academic advisor in the PhD process. Based on these Rules,

co-supervision is possible and the Department has had a number of students who have been co-supervised. The Department has instituted co-supervision for students with inter-disciplinary research agendas or who need methodological guidance. The idea of statutory assignment of a co-supervisor at the beginning of the process is excellent and the Department will examine how it can affect the quality of supervision, given the very small number of its faculty (and, hence, limited range of expertise).

Comment:

Contact point with further academics are limited. The proposal defense in third years to three academics is positive though it may come a little late in the game and there is no further exposure to or confrontation with the views of academics beyond the supervisor till the viva stage.

Response:

PhD students who have passed their comprehensive exams have a statutory obligation to present their ideas and research in a research colloquium organized every year. The colloquium is well-attended by faculty members, teaching staff and students at an earlier stage of their PhD trajectory. The colloquium helps students receive feedback beyond that of their academic advisors and helps socialize students to a culture of giving and receiving constructive criticism to scholarly work in progress.

Comment:

In addition to the points made above, it may be good to provide PhD students with more opportunities for international mobility. It is also unclear to what extent fieldwork (notably international) is encouraged or if any support exists for it.

Response:

The Department provides annual financial support for the participation of PhD students in conferences and workshops.

The Department welcomes the suggestion for explicitly providing support for international fieldwork and decided (meeting 3/2019) to provide, upon request, up to €1000 for each student for research support.

Comment:

The Department's efforts to develop teaching assistant opportunities are worth praising and should be further developed. It may also be good to ensure that all students – including those not taking part in that scheme – get an opportunity to have contact with younger students. Perhaps the Department could come up with a system of guest lectures by advanced PhD students or organize a series of ad hoc lectures that PhD student would give and where undergraduate and MA students would be invited as an audience.

Response:

The Department welcomes the push for offering PhD students even more opportunities for teaching on an ad hoc basis in MA and BA courses, subject to the availability of central resources.

Comment:

It would also be positive to provide the PhD students with some shared physical space in the Department to encourage them to spend some time together and feel part of the Departmental Community.

Response:

In response to the comment by the EEC, the Department has decided (meeting 3/2019) to allocate one of its allocated workspaces to PhD students.

Comment:

Consider introduce something a little closer to a doctoral training, which may include the students taking a choice of MA courses in their first year (and methods training unless they have already had an equivalent course in their MA), and a regular doctoral seminar thereafter (even if only once a year) as opposed to annual colloquium.

Response:

The Department has decided (meeting 3/2019) to regularize meetings between doctoral students and the program coordinator, once a semester, to discuss issues such as training and support.

Given the scarcity of resources available for teaching at the doctoral level and the limited number of doctoral students, the Department will consult with the rest of the Departments in the School of Social Sciences and Education to examine the possibility of offering a common training course for PhD students.

Comment:

Consider providing additional supervisory arrangements (co-supervisor, dissertation advisor who would not be a second supervisor but an additional point of contact) to ensure doctoral students do not solely depend on a single individual especially when their supervisor is on sabbatical or if they leave to move to a different department.

Response:

See above response regarding existing co-supervisions.

Comment:

Work on improving pastoral emotional, psychological, and personal support and ensure that students are aware of what is on offer and feel comfortable

using it

Response:

See above point about enhanced role of PhD coordinator.

Comment:

Ensuring the provision of technical access to data, specialized methodological training where possible, and opportunities to partake in international exchanges and fieldwork.

Response:

Although there is no coursework in the program, when admitted, PhD students are asked to take courses from the MA in Political Science, especially the methodology course.

As noted above, the Department also provides PhD students with the financial support necessary to participate in international conferences and workshops.

The Department has additionally decided to fund international fieldwork (see above/meeting 3/2019).

Overall, we are thankful for the excellent comments of the EEC and will make changes to further improve the existing quality of the PhD program in Political Science.

Sincerely,

Antonis A. Ellinas
Associate Professor
Department Chair and Program Coordinator