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**Response to External Evaluation Report for the undergraduate Political Science Degree**

Dear Mr Aletraris,

Thank you for sending the external evaluation report for the undergraduate 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 view that "the Department offers a program that fully meets international standards in terms of design despite its limited size." As the Committee notes, "the teaching is of very high quality and student evaluations evidence this" and "the purpose, objectives and learning outcomes are well linked and coherent."

We are particularly pleased with the observation that "students are proud of their University and their Department, they are bright and well-educated, and satisfaction scores are high."

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

**Comment:**

- 1) Clarifying students' expectations – the Committee recognizes the advantages of flexibility but currently, the students perceive the system as too "professor centric" and feel that they are the ones having to establish what they can expect from each individual faculty and course. The Committee would recommend that minimal standards be clarified and clearly communicated to students, preferably in writing. It would be good for students to have a better sense of what they can and cannot expect from their professors, their courses, different forms of assessments, etc. as well as what is expected from them so that they can achieve their potential and be more adventurous in exploring the diversity of the teaching and expertise offered to them.

**Response:**

According to the General Rules for Undergraduate Study at the University of Cyprus, “During the first week of teaching the instructor gives in writing to the students the course syllabus, which details the course objectives, material and evaluation methods. The course syllabus is submitted to the Departmental Secretariat and the relevant information, including the evaluation methods, are uploaded on the Banner Web. The evaluation method cannot be changed after the first week of classes without the consent of the students.”

All teaching staff of the Department comply with this Rule by submitting their syllabus to the Secretariat during the first week of teaching.

Therefore, the objectives, material and evaluation of the course are clear from the beginning of the term and, in the past years, there has been no complaint or evidence suggesting even minor deviations from general university rules.

To further facilitate the convergence of student expectations regarding the evaluation and to address the point made in the Report, the Department has taken on board the suggestion of the Committee and put together an extensive student guide regarding the evaluation of essays and research papers. The guide describes in detail the criteria for assessing essays and theses within each mark bracket (e.g. from 5.5 to 6.5 out of 10).

The guide was unanimously approved by the Department (meeting 3/2019) and is now available online: <http://ucy.ac.cy/sap/el/>

After a decision by the Senate regarding access to student evaluations, program coordinators regularly and diligently examine student evaluations to more effectively identify and rectify possible problems.

**Comment:**

- 2) Helping students to improve and achieve their best – the Committee believes that more should be done to provide students with feedback and guidance on how to improve, regardless of how good they already are, and to ensure the early teaching of fundamentals such as essay writing, bibliographical presentation and basic methods. More should also be done to make support students’ progression throughout their degree, notably by offering more small group and research-oriented teaching and the students’ third and fourth years, introducing more non-exam based assessment (essays, research papers) from the beginning of the degree, and improving guidance and support for the undergraduate dissertation.

**Response:**

The teaching staff is devoted to helping students enhance their writing and research skills and provides sufficient feedback on their work.

Despite strict university rules (Rule 1.8 of the General Rules for Undergraduate Study at the University of Cyprus), which require all undergraduate courses to have a final

exam worth up to 60% of the total grade, and thereby limit the scope for non-exam based assessments, the teaching staff uses multiple methods for assessing student progress in courses.

The introduction of non-exam-based evaluation methods and the overall teaching environment has been enhanced by regulatory caps on class audiences (80 for lectures; 25 for computer laboratories). The Department has been diligently following the new requirements since September 2018.

The analysis of all 47 courses taught by the Department in Spring 2019 shows that, on average, instructors evaluate students using three evaluation components, one more than the university requires.

The break-down of the evaluation components shows that, apart from exams, nearly half (47%) of the courses expect students to write essays or critiques, 26% include exercises (usually methodological courses) and 28% have projects (13%) and presentations (15%).

**How courses are assessed at the Department of Social and Political Sciences (n=47; spring 2019)**

	%
Midterm exam	68
Final exam	89
Essay/critique	47
Exercises	26
Projects	13
Participation	55
Presentation	15

**Average number of assessment components** **2.96**

Notwithstanding the devotion of the faculty to using non-exam-based methods of assessment, the Department agrees with the recommendations of the Committee and has decided (meeting 3/2019):

1. That all courses with small audiences (less than 20 students by the end of the registration period) will include essays and/or practical assignments in their evaluation methods.
2. That the Introduction to Political Science be turned into a writing-intensive course of 20 students per class requiring students to write at least two essays and/or practical assignments throughout the term.
3. That all courses with more than 20 students be allocated, upon request, a teaching assistant if they assign an essay and/or a practical assignment.

All decisions are subject to the allocation of extra resources from the University.

**Comment:**

3) Continuing the existing effort to emphasize diversity and accessibility – be it through recruitment, teaching, or internationalization.

**Response:**

The Department is devoted to ensuring diversity and accessibility and, in recent years, it has implemented a number of reforms to improve on both fronts, such the expansion of its Erasmus program; the offering of 4 courses in English in each term; the organization of an international summer school; and the recruitment of international staff. Moreover, five out the seven most recent recruits have been women.

**Comment:**

4) Being more pro-active in ensuring that students benefit from a personally and academically supportive and fulfilling environment – this includes provisions for pastoral support, being more pro-active in identifying cases of students facing personal, psychological, or emotional difficulties, clarifying students’ pastoral expectations and support options as well as the role of Academic Advisors and systematizing a minimum contact between them and their students regardless of academic performance.

**Response:**

To respond to the challenge of offering pastoral support to the second largest undergraduate body of students at the University and to effectively handle the remarks made in the Report, the Department:

- a. Compiled, agreed upon (meeting 3/2019) and uploaded on its website a Student Handbook, which provides in a clear and simple language all necessary information regarding academic and non-academic support.
- b. Decided (meeting 3/2019) that each faculty members hold a mandatory session for academic advisees at the beginning of each academic year.

**Comment:**

5) Clarifying the mechanisms in place where something goes wrong – the Committee acknowledges the advantages of informality and that problems are rare, but nevertheless, it is important that both staff and students be given a clear sense of what routes are available to them when something is going wrong, which does not yet seem to be clear to the students.

With such changes, the Committee believes that the University and Department have the team, infrastructure, and tools in place to continue developing and already excellent program.

**Response:**

According to University regulations, students have 25% of all members of the Departmental Council and, as a matter of fact, frequently and regularly bring their suggestions, ideas and grievances before the Council.

To address the concerns of the Committee, the Student Handbook outlines the procedure for raising student complaints, individually or collectively.

Overall, the Department remains committed to maintaining the high quality of its program and will seek to enhance the resources available to implement all the suggestions made in the Report of the External Evaluation Committee.

Sincerely,

Antonis A. Ellinas  
Associate Professor  
Department Chair and Program Coordinator