

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: *Date.*

- **Higher Education Institution:**
University of Cyprus

- **Town:** Nicosia

- **Programme of study
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

In Greek:

Αυτοχρηματοδοτούμενο Διατμηματικό Διεπιστημονικό
Μεταπτυχιακό Πρόγραμμα «Μάστερ σε Σπουδές Φύλου»

In English:

Self-Financed Inter-Departmental Interdisciplinary Graduate
Program "Master in Gender Studies"

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English and Greek
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):** English and Greek

In Greek: Concentrations

In English: Concentrations



The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws” of 2015 to 2021 [L.136(I)/2015 – L.132(I)/2021].

A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
 - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
 - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

1. Study programme and study programme's design and development (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

An interdisciplinary AND interdepartmental Programme at the University of Cyprus such as the Gender Studies MA Programme has to negotiate the absences, tensions, constraints and limits set by hard disciplinary and departmental lines both at the administrative and the epistemological level. What the Program has achieved so far testifies to the dynamic changes a disciplinary program can set in motion. The University of Cyprus is a new university and its aims for growth, quality assurance, representation in governance and distribution of resources have so been to a great extent harmonized with structural disciplinarity at least with regards to humanities and social sciences. The interdisciplinary and interdepartmental qualities of the GS Programme have been developed through academic synergies around and sometimes against structural disciplinarity. The evaluation of University Programs and Centers by CYQAA, the growth of area studies and interdisciplinary fields of study (from below) and the appreciation of interdisciplinarity in research funding (from above) have brought to the forefront the need to address administrative departmental boundaries, develop administrative structures and resource support mechanisms that embrace and support interdisciplinarity in teaching and research. The achieved quality of the GS Programme and the University Leadership's affirmed commitment to interdisciplinary fields of study will provide leverage for securing institutional support for the interdisciplinary and interdepartmental character of the Programme. The GS Programme constitutes a model and a success case for university's restructuring towards the direction of joint interdisciplinary actions and partnerships. University support must and will be secured towards enhancing the visibility of the Programme and the recruitment of International students.

Student evaluation at the University of Cyprus is conducted centrally by the Center for Teaching. Its philosophy, form, format and tools are regulated by Senate decisions. Procedures of student evaluation are guided by principles of confidentiality, anonymity and individual responsibility. Its main purpose is to provide feedback to instructors. Besides administering the standard University Student Evaluation Questionnaire, we have established in the Programme informal channels of feedback from students. At the end of each term a meeting is carried out between members of the coordination committee and students to map student concerns, ideas and suggestions. Based on this feedback a number of changes have been developed so far, including: dedicating introductory class sessions to establishing ground background knowledge where student academic background varies (for example, human rights, sociology, linguistics), developing new courses (for example, the new course "Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism" will be offered next term under the course code "GRS632 Contemporary Trends and Problems in Gender Studies"), discontinuing partnership with invited instructors whose methods and epistemic paradigms failed to meet student needs and programme philosophy and goals or inviting scholars to offer seminars in fields our students consider vital and cutting edge. This informal kind of student evaluation will be formalized based on the EEC's suggestions.

The effort to internationalize student enrolment in University Programs has been stumbling on legal constraints. The official languages of instruction at the University of Cyprus are designated at state level by The University Law (the Law applies only to the three public universities of Cyprus) according to which the official languages of instruction are Greek and Turkish. Turkish applies only to the Department of Turkish Studies and does not have a binding effect on other Departments due to the political situation. English and French are the languages of instruction in the English Studies and French and European Studies department correspondingly. English as the medium of Instruction has been formally introduced only at the graduate level and only in accordance with a Parliament approved amendment to the University Law which stipulates that 'a Programme can run in English as long as it also runs, in parallel or alternately, in also in Greek'. The GS Programme has navigated around this mandate by offering courses in English where and when International students are enrolled and when courses are taught by the English or French and European Studies staff. Recent developments in the broader European area of Higher Education and the affirmed decision of the University of Cyprus to promote and embrace internationalization have set in motion procedures for modifying state law and developing and offering graduate programs in English. Greek students admitted in the Programme are required to be highly competent in English, so once UCY graduate programmes' shift

to English as medium of Instruction is institutionally approved and authorized, the GS Programme will most likely be offered exclusively in English.

While interdisciplinarity has been pursued and achieved by the Programme at the academic level, interdisciplinarity at the administrative level has been achieved only through mutual agreements and concessions between departments. Academic Programmes at the University of Cyprus can be developed, approved by the Senate and run ONLY under the disciplinary roof of Departments. This is a constraint that limits the administrative independence of the Program. Though the academic autonomy of the Programme has been respected and supported by all participating Departments, the structural autonomy of the Program would safeguard academic autonomy against any future non friendly to the Programme contingencies. Though the Programme was developed by an interdepartmental Committee of academics, it was submitted for approval and has been 'housed' under the Department of Education because it had to be placed under a specific departmental 'roof'. The Department of Education has served so far as this 'roof' for two reasons: first, three of the academics involved in the development of the Programme were/are from the Department of Education and, second, the UNESCO Chair for Gender Equality that provided and continues to provide a gender identity core to the Programme is also administratively housed under the Department of Education. The need for administrative independence is highly felt by the Programme Coordination Committee. Thus, based on the Programme's successful development and strengthening since its founding, the Coordination Committee in agreement with the participating Departments and Schools, will pursue the administrative autonomy of the Programme through its transfer under the roof of the Gender Studies Center. This requires modification of the administrative rules of the University. Based on preliminary exchanges we had with the Rector and the Rectors' Council as well as based on the University's commitment to embracing and supporting the Programme, we believe this change will be feasible to pursue. The administrative relocation of the Programme under the roof of the Gender Studies Center would affirm and shield the Programme's autonomy, enhance the academic identity of the Programme and enable the Programme to secure further University funding from University funding allocated to Centers.

Childcare support for student parents, support for working students or students who need to commute from far are currently missing and need to be introduced at the University at large. Towards this direction, the Programme needs to take up a leading role. Currently, the University is developing a Gender Equality Action Plan and such structures of support are being recommended and promoted by members of the Programme who participate in the development of this Action Plan. Gender mainstreaming of UCY human personnel management, administration, student welfare and curricula is highly needed and the GS Programme's suggestions and interventions towards this direction are of crucial relevance.

2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

The suggestion for strengthening the focus on sexuality, including in particular queer and transgender studies, is well received. Besides the mandatory course GRS 776, sexuality and queer theory are covered under the rubric of many electives, more importantly those cross-listed with the English Studies Department. The offer of these courses, however, remains contingent on the offer of these courses by the specific departments. Transgender Studies would be more extensively covered by a separate course. Developing and offering such a course is among the Coordination Committee's priorities. What we plan to do, beginning with next semester, is to dedicate one of the two 4 ECTS seminars to transgender studies and to host a series of invited international scholars to give lectures.

Sharing and exchanging ideas and skills among instructors will be formalized as a brown bag seminar to take place once a semester. Visits to each other's classrooms will be pursued on a more planned basis. Strengthening student autonomy and diversifying student assignments with emphasis on (a) experimentation, (b) multiple literacies and writing styles, (c) methodologies from below, (d) decolonizing the curriculum and (e) bridging faculty research with instruction (sharing out work with students and presenting them with different idioms of discourse and methodology) will be the topic of this semester's faculty development brown bag seminar. A seminar where graduate students will present work in progress will also be initiated.

Digitalizing the profile of the Programme, creating digital forms of interface between the Programme and the Society as well as developing digital formats of knowledge diffusion (for example, online publication of student work) are among our priorities, both for purposes of Programme outreach but also for purposes of recruiting new students. This is one of the guiding lines for the Program's new webpage but also the focus of our pursued synergies with the University Library. The publication (online and in print) of an annual volume of student works has already been planned and the first volume will be available by the end of this academic year.

Enriching teaching and classroom culture across the University with queer pedagogies and gender informed methodologies could be pursued in partnership with the University Teaching and Learning Centre but also by developing a series of workshops on feminist and queer pedagogies to be offered across the University by visiting scholars who teach in the Programme.

Clarification of the process of thesis writing during Master Thesis I and II is centrally conducted by the Graduate School. Besides general guidelines set by the Graduate School, instruction of thesis writing remains formally unregulated and non-monitored, with advisors relying on personal philosophies, methodologies and accumulated experience. The Programme, however, has been following several steps of clarification and instruction. Students are informed about the process of thesis writing at the end of their first semester and formal procedures and steps are explained. Currently the 120 ECTS Programme Structure includes three and not two seminars as outlined in the new, under evaluation, 90 ECTS version of the Programme. One of these seminars, entitled "Academic Writing", is conducted in the form of a workshop. Its aim is to provide instruction and promote skills development for term papers and thesis writing. This seminar will continue to be offered as mandatory under the new Programme structure (as "GRS 774").

To sum up, the domains of prospective course improvement, either through course modification and/or through new course addition(s): formalizing thesis writing instruction, decolonizing the curriculum and being critically conscious of Eurocentrism, increasing the relevance and gravity of trans studies, including translation as part of research methodology.

3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

The need for increased University support for the Programme in order to obtain manageable workloads for staff and ensuring that qualified teachers can remain active in the Programme is highly felt by the members of the Programme Coordination Committee. The Programme is not so much vulnerable to staff changes as it is to intra-departmental limitations to course offering. The offer of cross-listed courses is dependent on both staff preferences and department needs. The recent hire of a new gender and sexuality faculty member by the Sociology and Political Science Department is an important development as this new faculty member will be joining the staff of the GS Programme. This, however, does not resolve the problem of staff overload particularly with regards to mandatory course offer frequency. Participating departments require that faculty members teach two courses every semester. When GS Programme staff are teaching cross-listed courses, their teaching load does not increase. When, however, they are teaching courses which are not cross-listed and are offered exclusively by the GS Programme, their teaching load does increase. This problem can be resolved in the following way: either by hiring Gender Studies academic faculty for the Center who would also teach in the GS Programme and/or by allowing GS staff to split their teaching load responsibility between GS and their own Department. In other words, teaching non-cross-listed courses should count towards meeting department staff requirement for two course teaching load per semester. This could also be pursued through another change, that is, Programme transitioning from self-financed to a regular University Program. These changes require changes at the higher level of University Administration and Structure and will be discussed in the meeting we will have with the Rector, the Rectors' Council and School Deans.

Teaching staff development has been addressed in the previous section.

4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification *(ESG 1.4)*

Unlike undergraduate programs, graduate programs at the University of Cyprus are not tuition fee free. Tuition fees for the GS Program are the same as the fees that apply to any regular graduate program (the only other self-financed Program in the University of Cyprus is the MBA Program and tuition fees for this Programme are almost twice as the fees for regular programs). Some other graduate programs offer courses in the morning or in the afternoon. In the context of facilitating working student attendance, GS Programme courses are strictly scheduled as evening courses (6-9 pm). The self-financed form of the Program is contingent on the history of its development. The Programme was developed and approved by the Senate in 2012, at a time when the University was less committed to the development of new graduate programmes and even less committed to the development of interdisciplinary programmes. The self-financed framing of the Programme secured the necessary force for its approval but also secured academic autonomy for the Programme from departmental control and also secured an autonomous handling of its budget. Fees from other, non-self-financed Programmes are also channelled to Departments and handled by the Coordinators of the specific Graduate Programmes. Thus, the self-financed character of the Programme ensured autonomy for an interdisciplinary Programme, an autonomy which could not have been secured through or against departmental structures in the University of Cyprus.

University higher education policy and politics have changed a lot since 2012 as the University has become more receptive to the need for interdisciplinary and interdepartmental support at both the administrative and the academic level. It is within this new framework that the Coordination Committee will propose and pursue the structural autonomy of the Programme. As explained in previous sections, this would also secure more University funding for the Programme in general and for graduate student research in particular.

5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Limited opportunities for fellowships for MA students is a University wide problem. Whereas this is not perceived as a problem by other Programmes across the University, it is perceived as a problem by the GS Programme. Student recruitment has been high enough to secure the viability of the Programme yet it could have been better. Opportunities for fellowships could enhance student recruitment but would also enable enrolled students to focus on their studies, attend on a full-time basis and complete their studies faster, and engage in research and writing for publication.

Though we recognize there are weaknesses with staff teaching load and staff resilience, labour precariousness of academic staff might be a too broad frame. The main difficulty is that teaching non-cross listed GS courses implicates additional teaching load. This load is manageable on the short run but on the long run it puts staff at a precarious position with regards to allocating sufficient time for research. All staff would prefer to teach under a scheme where teaching GS courses would count towards meeting university teaching load requirements. Extra payment for teaching above the regular teaching load has never been a motive for teaching in the Programme. The way we intend to deal with this problem is to pursue the transfer the Programme under the administrative jurisdiction of the Center for Gender Studies and to develop a scheme of dual appointment (between the Center and the Departments) for academic staff who teach in the Programme on a regular basis. With regards to international visiting teaching staff, we are in the process of recuperating from the freezing of mobility imposed by the Covid Pandemic. Arrangements for partnerships and exchanges are already in place.

Digital and distance teaching has been imposed on the Programme, as with all other UCY Programmes, as an emergency and temporary *modus operandi* due to the pandemic. The Cyprus University Law for public universities restricts distance education provision, with the Open University of Cyprus being designated as the only provider of distance higher education. Physical enrolment and class attendance are mandatory for all, undergraduate and graduate, Programmes at the University of Cyprus. Transitioning to hybrid forms of provision at the graduate level had already been among the University's agenda before the beginning of the Covid Pandemic under the mandate for increasing internationalization. Dealing with the Pandemic has changed views and attitudes for digital distance education, both at the state and the university level. We have lost a lot due to the Pandemic but we have also learned a lot: how to operate online, how to combine digitalization with creative and multi-vocal modalities of teaching and learning, how to bridge communities online. In the context of reconsidering modes of provision, we will be considering and pursuing modifications that would allow part of the Programme to be conducted through distance education.

Office space for students and faculty to meet and work is a priority. It is one of the main topics to be discussed with the Rector's Council and the Administration of the University. We have managed to build and foster a sense of community among our students, yet the provision of physical space specifically for the Programme would further enhance their sense of community, support the students in their research, and provide a physical anchor of identity to also serve as an interface with the society, media, policy actors and other academic units and communities.



6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

The evaluation of the Gender Studies MA Programme has been a productive and thought provoking process for the Programme Coordination Committee, staff and students. We are thankful to the Chair and members of the External Evaluation Committee and to all the administrative staff of both the University of Cyprus and the CYQAA for facilitating and supporting this process. We believe the External Evaluation Committee managed to 'see' the Programme but also to 'see' *through* the Programme and *behind* the Programme. All the recommendations for improvement are appreciated and welcomed as they reflect a comprehensive understanding of the Program's vision and praxis as well as an informed and critical analysis that takes into consideration contextual constraints and potentialities at the local institutional level as well as at the international level of higher education economies, fluidities and flexibilities.

The MA Program in Gender studies has been training a new generation of gender researchers who are already contributing both to societal institutions and policy making, working within NGOs and engaging in scholarship and teaching in universities. We have also managed to gain visibility and recognisability in the national public sphere as policy expert and our events, programmes and forms of public action have been introducing intersectionality to the gender frames and framings of gender equality, gender based violence, sexual rights, diversity, human rights, democratization. Our intervention could become more effective, even ground breaking, if the University put the Programme and its people (staff, students, graduates) at the flagpost of the University engagement in and with society.

We also believe that the becoming autonomous of the Programme combined with increased support and resources from the University would put a vitalizing spin to the Programme's development, outreach and internationalization, shelter the staff from over-teaching fatigue, and protect the Programme from future contingencies.

We fully embrace the recommendation for introducing participatory democratizing procedures for planning and decision-making as well as recommendations for accelerating programme completion rates and rhythms.



C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Zelia Gregoriou	Coordination Committee Chair	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
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Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	
Click to enter Name	Click to enter Position	

Date: 1.10.2021

