

**External Examiner's Report  
Ternopil Academy of National Economy**

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## **1. Introduction**

On May 22-25, 2005, I visited the Ternopil Academy of National Economy (TANE). I had very informative meetings with the Rector, a Vice-Rector, the Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty, and several lecturers and students. This visit took place just a couple of days after Ukraine had been welcomed as a new participating partner in the Bologna process at the Bergen conference of education ministers held May 19-20, 2005. Thus, Ukraine has confirmed its commitment to coordinating its policies through the Bologna process to establish the European Higher Education Area by 2010. Given the reforms that TANE has already implemented over the past years and the improvements in the curricula that have already been achieved, I assume that TANE is one of the institutions of higher education in Ukraine that will be able to join the Bologna process successfully. It was pleasant to observe that the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty had prepared my visit very well. Insofar a problem emerged, it was solved quickly and efficiently.

## **2. Term papers**

- a. The bachelor students were required to submit a term paper in the framework of two courses: Financial Management and International Economics. I observed that the students have been provided with guidelines for writing a term paper. This is consistent with one of the recommendations presented in my External Examiners' 2002 report. The written guidelines are of high quality and provide the students with relevant and useful information. However, the students do not always follow the guidelines and often prove to have difficulty in writing an academic paper.
- b. The students were not required to sign a plagiarism declaration to certify that they have submitted their own work and that they have properly and fully acknowledged the use of materials from other sources<sup>1</sup>. However, I have understood that it has been explicitly explained to the students that plagiarism is not allowed. Although such an oral explanation may make a plagiarism declaration redundant, misunderstandings may arise. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings in future, it may be considered to add to the written guidelines for writing a term paper both the definition of plagiarism and the consequences for the student if plagiarism be detected. I assume that academy rules cover these consequences. If they do not, TANE may consider expanding this regulation by adding a rule on the consequences of plagiarism.
- c. I have read all 26 term papers that have been submitted: 14 for the course in International Economics and 12 for the course in Financial Management. Generally, the papers for the former course were of a somewhat higher quality than those written for the latter. The papers give rise to the following observations:
  - One paper has been written in English too poor to be understandable.
  - One paper presents the Table of Contents in reversed order.
  - Some papers are purely descriptive without any analytical elements.
  - One paper has an unclear subject, some papers result in vague conclusions, and one

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<sup>1</sup> For an example, see the Annex to my External Examiner's Report of June 16, 2003

paper does not present a conclusion at all.

- Bibliographies are sometimes poorly organized, for example by listing references randomly rather than alphabetically, or by listing them alphabetically according to titles rather than authors' names, or by failing to make a distinction between footnotes and references. The bibliography of one paper comprises solely Internet sources (30 in total), but there are only few references to these sources in the paper.
- References are sometimes unclear (for example [;c.]), while sources (for example, of tables) are not always included.
- Some papers basically reproduce (parts of) a textbook, while the writer sometimes adds an empirical application
- At least four papers - all submitted for the course in International Economics - seem open to suspicion of plagiarism, one of them possibly in whole. I understood that TANE has no software to detect plagiarism.

### **3. Exams**

I went through the examinations of two courses:

a. Business Law (first test - 2nd trimester; second test - 2nd trimester; third test - 2nd trimester; fourth and final test - 2nd trimester)

- Question 5 of the third test asks students to detail "Chapter 7" and "Chapter 11". Question 1 of the 4th and final test asks to detail "ADA", "COBRA", "TITLE VII (7)", and "ANTI-TRUST ACT". These questions do not seem to be very relevant for Ukrainian students. It seems that the professor taught exactly the same course as at his home institution without adapting it to the Ukrainian context. TANE may consider to request foreign professors to adjust their courses to the Ukrainian context where applicable and possible.
- Most questions of the fourth test have been recycled from the previous year. Recycled questions encourage students to prepare themselves exclusively on the basis of previous exams. Therefore, they should not be recycled in the next year, but the year after at the earliest - and preferably even later. See Annex 1 for more detailed observations.

b. Basics of Accounting (full course test make-up #2)

- The test is comprehensive and consists of three sections. Section 1 comprises 13 multiple choice questions, section 2 includes three questions regarding adjusting journal entries, and section 3 covers five questions pertaining to recording journal entries and a balance sheet. The test specifies both the time available and the points that can be earned per question.
- The multiple choice questions present five alternative answers. Question 2 has only four plausible alternatives. Smart students will consider alternative b artificial because it is the only alternative with an increase and a decrease, whereas the other four alternatives show two increases.
- The number of multiple choice questions is too small for a statistical analysis to be meaningful.

### **4. Further improvements**

I value to repeat what I wrote in my 2004 report. Generally, both teachers and students have done good work. I am confident that the gradual process towards implementing western standards at TANE will continue. This will put TANE in a good position to participate successfully in the Bologna process. I observe a great potential at TANE to realize this goal.

The following points need to be addressed to continue the ongoing process of further improvements:

- (a) Few students seem to identify corruption and bribes as impediments to a healthy business

climate. Though the examination of Business Law explicitly addresses business ethics, it does not address corruption. Generally, the awareness of this major problem should grow among students and staff alike.

(b) The format of the term papers can be further improved. In particular the language often needs to be improved, but also more or less formal aspects including referencing and bibliographies.

(c) Plagiarism remains a problem. The Internet is tempting in that it makes plagiarism fast and simple.

(d) The quality of the questions in the examinations can be further improved.

(e) The level of some of the staff members needs to be improved, while human resource management is needed.

(f) Administrative matters can be improved. This is possible in the domain of personnel management as well as in the domain of student affairs.

## **5. Recommendations**

I am convinced that TANE is able and willing to work on addressing the problems observed above. My reading of the papers and my discussions with staff and students give rise to the following concrete recommendations that may assist TANE in its ongoing efforts to improve its educational level.

(a) Although good written guidelines for writing a term paper are available, students do not always follow the guidelines, while the supervisor tends to neglect this. I observed that written evaluations are very brief. Frequently, they include two or three sentences and are basically limited to the statement that the student deserves a certain mark.

### **Recommendation 1:**

Instruct supervisors to pay attention to the guidelines both in their guidance of the students and in their evaluation of the papers.

(b) The quality of the term papers varies widely. This pertains both to the substance (including structure and conclusion) and the format (such as referencing and compiling bibliographies). A number of students appear to have difficulty writing a paper that complies with academic standards.

### **Recommendation 2a:**

Organize a course in academic writing.

### **Recommendation 2b:**

Encourage supervisors to provide students with feedback so as to enable students to learn from their efforts to write term papers and to improve their papers before they are graded.

(c) It should be clear to students that plagiarism is wrong for two reasons. First, it is wrong from the ethical point of view. Second, it is wrong from a practical point of view, as one does not learn anything from copying a text.

### **Recommendation 3a:**

Either include a statement on plagiarism in the written guidelines or require students to sign a form in which they declare that their paper is their own work (see the form in the Annex of my 2003 report).

**Recommendation 3b:**

Apply software<sup>2</sup> to detect

caught is high, will likely reduce their propensity to plagiarize.

Apply software<sup>2</sup> to detect plagiarism. Awareness among students that the chance of being

(d) The English of most of the students needs to be improved. In addition, the English of supervisors needs to be improved.

**Recommendation 4:**

Improving language skills could be made part of the English curriculum. TANE may consider requiring students to improve the language of their papers under the guidance of an English teacher and to resubmit the revised papers. However, the language used should not affect the evaluation or grading of a paper's substance.

(e) The quality of the examinations can be further improved.

**Recommendation 5:**

- a. Encourage teachers to check each other's draft examination questions. Experience shows that teachers tend to have a blind spot for mistakes or shortcomings in their own examinations.
- b. Consider the possibility to require students in their last year to write a more comprehensive paper in which they combine knowledge and insights derived from different courses.
- c. Consider the possibility to increase the number of multiple choice questions allowing for a statistical analysis of the validity of both the examination as a whole and individual questions.
- d. Repeat the course "Drafting examinations" for teachers.

(f) Human resource management is necessary for an organization to function properly. Evaluations of personnel are a regular component of personnel management. Crucial is that the evaluations of staff are carried out transparently and by using the same method for all categories of personnel. Note that evaluations of staff are a form of two-way traffic. It is not only the department head who evaluates a staff member, but also the staff member who evaluates the working conditions. For example, it gives a staff member the chance to signal the lack of certain materials, or the occurrence of certain conditions affecting the quality of their work, or the need to take courses, etc. The evaluation should be considered a staff member's right.

**Recommendation 6:**

- a. Department heads evaluate their staff members on an annual basis, while they report to the dean.
- b. Design a standardized form for this purpose so as to ensure that all staff members will be evaluated in similar ways and by using the same method.
- c. A personnel officer assists department heads in making and administering these evaluations.
- d. Organize a course on university personnel management.

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<sup>2</sup> An example is SafeAssignment, which is specifically designed for Blackboard ([www.SafeAssignment.com](http://www.SafeAssignment.com)).

## ANNEX 1

### Observations regarding the examination Business Law

#### *General*

- The fourth and final test details that the first three tests are worth 20% each toward the final grade and that the fourth test is worth 40%. The students should know the weights of the four tests at the beginning of the course. I do not know whether this is the case. The grading within each test is clear as all tests specify the amount of points the students can earn per question.
- None of the tests specify the time available to the students. However, this information may have been given orally. I do not know whether this is the case.
- None of the four tests offer the students a choice in questions to be answered. All questions in all four tests are required, while there are no optional questions. (Optional questions allow students to earn extra credit points.)
- None of the tests contain multiple choice questions. Three of the tests only present essay (or open) questions. One test (the second) also contains two true/false questions.

#### *First test - 2nd trimester*

- Students received 4 questions. The second question not only requires students to deal with legal aspects, but also with ethical considerations.
- The questions 1 and 2 seem attractively formulated to students:
  - Question 1 because it is related to a situation that could have been real.
  - Question 2 because it refers to the student's personal contribution to progress in Ukraine.

#### *Second test - 2" trimester*

Students received 10 questions including two true/false questions. Some of the questions could also have been formulated as multiple choice questions.

#### *Third test — 2" trimester*

Students received six questions. Some of them could also have been formulated as multiple choice questions. Question 6 pertains to novation and had already been asked as question 9 of the second test.

#### *Fourth & final test - 2nd trimester*

- Students received eight questions. Questions 4-8 have been recycled, i.e., they are identical to the questions asked in the previous year's exam.
- The questions 3-7 seem attractively formulated to students because they are related to situations that could have been real.