

External Examiner's Report 2007
Ternopil National Economic University

M. Peter van der Hoek
Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands
and
Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

1. Introduction

On June 19-23, 2007, I visited Ternopil National Economic University, where I had pleasant meetings with the Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty and some lecturers and students. The meetings were very informative and I am grateful to those willing to spend time on sharing their views with me.

The awareness of one of Ukraine's most serious and widespread problems, corruption, seems to increase gradually among teachers and students. Four of the term papers make at least mention of corruption,¹ although it is not always obvious that the students consider it a problem. Generally, the awareness of this major problem should grow further among students and staff.

It is admirable what the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty has achieved despite the very difficult financial and economic conditions. The recent addition of a master program has further improved the faculty's scholarly standing.

I value to note that my visit was very well prepared and organized under the guidance of the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty. Although one organizational aspect (housing) could and should be improved, it is beyond the dean's power. The responsibility for this aspect rests at the central level.

2. Term papers

- a. The bachelor students were required to submit a term paper by December 30, 2006. This deadline has not been enforced as a number of papers appeared to be submitted in 2007. There were 37 candidates. However, two of them failed to submit a term paper.
- b. The students have received good and elaborate written guidelines and useful information for writing a term paper. However, a number of students neglected the guidelines. Obviously, they find it difficult to write an academic paper.
- c. I have read all 35 term papers that have been submitted. Generally, the quality of the papers was similar to that of the papers in 2006. The supervisor left the decision about granting the certificate in 9 of the 35 cases to the external examiner.

¹ Ironically, one of them belongs to the papers that I suspect of plagiarism. See also section 2 under e.

d. I observed several improvements the supervisor has realized:

1. Her written comments were more elaborate than in 2006. In addition, students received more feedback on their papers, while they were given a chance to revise their papers by incorporating the comments. This is very valuable as it creates a learning effect. However, it also adds to the supervisor's workload. The dean should be aware of this additional workload.
2. The supervisor suspected several students of plagiarism and already warned them in an early stage, so that they could remedy the problem. Regrettably, they did not do so. Rather, they bluntly signed the plagiarism statement² even though it clearly defines plagiarism, specifies what is permitted (and what is not) and details the consequence if students plagiarize: they will not receive their bachelor certificate. So far, however, this has not been enforced.

e. Plagiarism is a fastly growing problem and threatens to get out of hand. There are web sites selling papers including custom-written papers. My impression is that students do not (yet) use these sites. Rather, they search the web for texts they can cut and paste into their papers. They frequently copy rather old texts (from 2001 or so) without taking the trouble to update it suggesting that they do not even read the copied text (see also Annex 1).

I suspect at least 12 of the 35 students of plagiarism, while one paper seems to resemble a paper submitted in 2006 or 2005. A quick check of two of these papers by using Google confirmed my suspicion. One student had cut and pasted parts of a speech of the Ukrainian ambassador to the EU into her paper.³ Another student had cut and pasted parts of a speech of the Turkish ambassador to Ukraine.⁴ If no measures will be taken to fight plagiarism in the academic year 2007/2008, the war against plagiarism will be lost.

f. In my 2006 report I observed that economics and English language teachers had been communicating about term papers. This year, however, I observed that the papers have not been signed by an English language teacher suggesting that the papers' language is no longer being checked.

g. For some detailed observations regarding the papers I refer to Annex 1. Generally, the papers give rise to the following observations:

- Some papers have been written in poor English.
- Some papers have a poor structure and are poorly organized.
- Some papers are purely descriptive and/or journalistic and do not contain any analytical elements.
- Some papers do not lead to any conclusion or present vague conclusions.
- Bibliographies are sometimes poorly organized, for example by listing references randomly rather than alphabetically, by not including the year of publication and/or the place and publisher, etc.

² However, I observed that the plagiarism statement was missing at one of the papers.

³ Obviously, it was not a recent speech as Yulia Tymoshenko is Ukraine's prime-minister according to the paper.

⁴ The plagiarism in this paper was immediately clear due to the use of phrases like "Turkey has also submitted all *our* reports ...", "*We* have also initiated ...", "Turkey will of course continue *our* efforts ..." (italics added).

- Some papers contain references to sources that are not included in the list of references and vice versa.
- Some papers simply reproduce (parts of) a textbook including examples.
- Some students do not number the pages and/or submit their papers in an awkward and annoying form (each page in a different folder making it time-consuming to read through the paper).

3. Exams

a. I have understood that most of the courses taught in English have been tested orally. I have seen three written exams in English: *Basics of Marketing* and two unspecified and undated exams. I went through the examination questions of these courses and observed that the tests are comprehensive. The exams contain a mixture of multiple choice questions, true/false questions and open questions. However, the number of multiple choice questions is too small for a statistical analysis to be meaningful.

b. Observations related to grading and examination questions:

1. *Basics of Marketing, Final Exam, Version I, November 8, 2004*

For the answer to question 22 a maximum of 4 points could be earned. However, one of the students received 8 points for his answer.

2. *Unspecified and undated exam*

Question 6 uses the term “marginal benefit”. This may have caused confusion on the side of the students as the regular term is “marginal revenue”.

3. *Another unspecified and undated exam*

Question 5 tests the students’ knowledge of two different issues:

- a) the concept of total revenues;
- b) the difference between elastic and inelastic demand.

It is undesirable to test two different issues in one question. If the student does not understand both issues (s)he will earn zero points. However, if the student understands one of the two issues (s)he will also earn zero points. Thus, it is desirable to split this question in two separate questions: one about the first issue and the other about the second issue. A student who understands one issue will now earn points, whereas a student who does not understand both issues will earn zero points.

4. Continuing improvements

I value to repeat what I observed in earlier reports. Generally, both teachers and students have done good work. However, the growing problem of plagiarism seems to jeopardize the prospect of continuation of the process towards implementing western standards. The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty’s great potential should not be endangered by cheating or plagiarizing students. This requires that some measures will be taken.

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

- (a) Plagiarism was a much bigger problem than in 2006. It is growing so fastly that it has become a serious threat in that it may make all improvements irrelevant.
- (b) Given the widespread problem of corruption in Ukraine, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty may want to consider adding a course on *Ethics* (or more specific a course on *Business Ethics*) to its curriculum either in the bachelor or the master program.
- (c) The format of the term papers can be further improved. In particular the language often needs to be improved, but there is also ample room for improvements with regard to other aspects including the structure, references and bibliographies. Generally, academic writing could be improved.
- (d) Both the format and the composition of the examinations can be further improved. Oral exams have some advantages. For example, they may be efficient, in particular if the number of candidates is small, and errors and inaccuracies of questions can easily and timely be rectified. Oral exams also have some disadvantages, however. One major disadvantage is that they tend to be more subjective than written exams. Another drawback is that the quality of oral exams cannot be monitored, certainly not by the external examiner.
- (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

In the past, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty has proved to be able and willing to work on addressing the problems mentioned above. My reading of the papers and my discussions with staff and students give rise to the following concrete recommendations that may assist the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty in its ongoing efforts to increase its academic level.

A. Plagiarism

I suspect that at least 12 of the papers are largely based on texts copied from the Internet. This clearly illustrates the magnitude of the plagiarism problem. My impression is that plagiarizing students currently take it for granted that their chances of being caught are negligible. The use of plagiarism detection software could increase the chance of being caught to close to 100%. Thus, installing plagiarism detection software should have a high priority.⁵

JPlag is free software, but users have to obtain an account (www.jplag.de). Another free method offers Google (see <http://www.marywood.edu/library/detectplag.htm>). A paid program is SafeAssignment (www.mydropbox.com), which can also be used inside Blackboard (www.blackboard.com). A web search will show more paid programs available at different prices.

⁵ A number of sources on the web explain plagiarism detection strategies and plagiarism detection software. See for example: <http://www.lib.iastate.edu:9050/resources/facultyguides/plagiarism/detect.html> and <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/faculty/plagiarism/detecting.html>.

Recommendation A1:

Require students to submit an electronic copy of their papers (in addition to the two hard copies, see recommendation C2 below). This would not only facilitate the application of plagiarism detection software, but would also send a clear signal to the students.

Recommendation A2:

Add to the guidelines that from the academic year 2007/2008:

- *All papers will be subject to a plagiarism check by using plagiarism detection software and that as a result the chance of being caught will be close to 100%.*
- *No certificate will be granted at the graduation ceremony if plagiarism has been detected. In these cases students can submit a new paper by August 31 (because the enforcement of this rule is new). If the new paper is acceptable and passes the plagiarism check the certificate will still be awarded in September. In all other cases no certificate will be granted.*

B. Incentive

Although good written guidelines for writing a term paper are available, students do not always follow the guidelines. To provide the students with an additional incentive, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty may consider introducing an award.

Recommendation B:

Consider introducing an award for the best bachelor paper.

C. Quality of term papers

The quality of the term papers varies widely. This pertains both to the substance (including structure and conclusions) and the format (such as referencing and compiling bibliographies). A number of papers are poorly organized and/or journalistic rather than academic. A number of students appear to have difficulty writing papers that meet academic standards.

Recommendation C1:

Organize a seminar “Academic writing”.

Recommendation C2:

Require students to submit two hard copies of their term papers: one to their economics supervisor and one to the Department of Business Communications and Organizational Behavior. This would facilitate to connect a second learning effect to the paper in that it could improve the students’ English language skills. The paper could thus be used for two different evaluations:

- 1) *an evaluation of its economic content;*
- 2) *an evaluation of the English language.*

Recommendation C3:

*Enforce the submission deadline. As December 30 may be too tight for the final version, consider to set December 30 as deadline for initial submissions and a later date, for example April 30, for submissions of the final versions. **Add to the guidelines, however, that in contrast with previous years these deadlines will now strictly be enforced and missing the deadlines will imply missing the certificate.***

D. Quality of exams

My insight in the quality of exams is limited given the few written exams I have seen. Generally, however, teachers tend to have a blind spot for mistakes or shortcomings in their own examinations. Moreover, the number of multiple choice questions should be adequate.

Recommendation D1:

Encourage teachers to check each other's draft examination questions.

Recommendation D2:

Increase the number of multiple choice questions such that it allows for a statistical analysis of the validity of both the examination as a whole and each individual question.

Recommendation D3:

Repeat the seminar "Drafting examinations" for teachers.

E. Human resource management

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. 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 members who evaluate the working conditions. For example, it gives staff members the chance to signal the lack of certain materials, or the occurrence of certain conditions affecting the quality of their work, or the need for training to improve their skills, etc. The evaluation should be considered a staff member's right.

Recommendation E1:

Instruct department heads to evaluate their staff members on an annual basis, while they report to the dean.

Recommendation E2:

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 - and instruct a personnel officer to assist department heads in administering the evaluations.

Recommendation E3:

Organize a seminar on university personnel management.

ANNEX 1

Observations regarding term papers. To protect the students' privacy I have numbered the papers and refer to paper numbers rather than student names.

Paper 1

This student most likely copied full paragraphs from other sources. In addition, this student presents contradictory statements. Compare the following statements:

- “I have chosen service business, as it more understandable for ordinary consumer than different manufacturing industries.” (p. 10).
- “I used experience of two manufacturing companies to show how risk management is applied.” (p. 23).

Paper 2

This student most likely copied and merged pieces of a textbook (probably S. Robbins, *Organizational Behavior: concepts, controversies, and applications* (4th ed).

The student even copied irrelevant sentences. Examples:

- “You can gain some insight into your propensity to exhibit Type A behaviour by completing the exercise at the end of this chapter [11; 509-511].” (p. 10)
- “... psychological symptoms have the least directly relevance to students of OB.” (p. 11. Note that the paper nowhere uses or explains the acronym OB.)
- “... PTA meeting ...” (p. 13. Note that the paper nowhere uses or explains the acronym PTA.)
- “In the case of the five programmers, Steven may tell them ...” (p. 14. This sentence is typical for a textbook and the case is not included in the paper.)
- “Kahn and his associates suggest” (p. 15. Kahn is not included in the list of references.)

Paper 8

This student copied a a speech of the Turkish ambassador to Ukraine without updating it. Thus, according to this paper EMU has 12 members (rather than 13) and the EU has 25 members (rather than 27). In addition, the conclusions are written as an introduction: “In particular, the impacts of the negotiation processes on the potential economic outcomes *will be* analyzed in detail. In order to fulfill these objectives, the paper *will examine* the relationship between Turkey and the EU ...” (italics added).

Papers 13 and 16

These students copied the same text (in each paper on p. 4).

Paper 19

This paper was probably already submitted in 2006 or 2005.

Paper 23

The plagiarism statement was missing.

Paper 24

This paper is largely copied. The most recent sources mentioned date from 2000, 1998 and 1994! Thus, EMU has 12 members according to this paper.