

External Examiner's Report 2009
Ternopil National Economic University

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1. Introduction

On June 23-27, 2009, I visited the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management at Ternopil National Economic University. I went through the exams insofar they are in English and I read the theses submitted by the bachelor candidates. Moreover, I met with a number of persons, including:

Serhiy Yuriy, Rector of the Ternopil National Economic University;
Bohdan Lutsiv, Vice-Rector International Affairs;
Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management;
Mykola Shynkaryk, Vice-Rector for Education;
Lydiya Kurant, Head of the Business Communications and Organizational Behavior Department;
Oleksandra Bratko, Vice-Head of the Marketing Department;
Viktoriya Kramar, Assistant Dean International Affairs;
Halyna Ostrovska, Deputy Dean of Science;
several students.

During my stay a delegation of the European University Association was visiting Ternopil National Economic University to evaluate its management and educational programs. I had a short meeting with the members of the delegation prior to the presentation of their report.

The meetings were very informative and I am grateful to those willing to spend time on meeting and sharing their views with me.

The achievements of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management are notable in particular in view of the difficult financial and economic conditions. The Faculty has created a master's program in addition to the bachelor's program. It seems notable that I have rarely met a dean and staff members who are as dedicated as in the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management.

I was pleased to observe that my visit was well-prepared and had been organized under the guidance of the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management. My transfers from and to Borispol airport were well-organized, my program was ready on arrival and appropriate housing was available.

2. Term papers

- a. Fifty candidates had submitted a bachelor thesis in order to receive their certificates implying a considerable growth compared to the 24 candidates in 2008. These candidates were divided over two groups:
 1. a group of 24 candidates with International Economics as their major;
 2. a group of 26 candidates with Management of Foreign Economic Activities as their major.
- b. The students have received clear and elaborate written guidelines and useful information for writing a term paper. In addition, they received methodological recommendations for writing course papers. However, some of the students appear to have neglected the guidelines. Obviously, they have problems in writing an academic paper.
- c. I have read all 50 papers that have been submitted. Generally, the quality of the papers was similar to that of the papers in 2007 and 2008. The supervisor left the decision about granting the certificate in some cases to the external examiner.
- d. The supervisor, Viktoriya Kramar, did a very good job by providing the students with feedback on earlier versions of their papers. Thus, the students have been given a chance to revise their papers by incorporating the supervisor's comments. This is very valuable for students as it creates a learning effect. It should be noted, however, that this implies a huge workload for the supervisor, which was double the load of 2008. The faculty should be aware of this additional and fastly growing burden.
- e. Although the students are required to sign a plagiarism statement and a signed statement was present for each candidate, plagiarism continues to be a serious problem. The supervisor suspected plagiarism in a number of cases and addressed the problem, although it was not quite clear how. The supervisor's suspicion is absolutely right. I also suspect that a number of students have committed plagiarism. Students search the web for texts that they can cut and paste into their papers.

In previous reports I recommended to apply plagiarism detection software. Although attempts have been made to do so, there were some problems in applying the plagiarism detection software. An alternative might be to use Google. In two cases I simply used Google to detect plagiarism. In one case, the student appeared to have plagiarized text from a presentation by the CEO of British Airways. In some other cases the students had plagiarized from Wikipedia and/or Answers.com.

Plagiarism may result in strange papers, in particular if the student cuts and pastes texts into the paper that are out of date. Some examples:

 1. One of the papers advocates an accelerated completion of WTO accession. This was probably plagiarized from an old government document. Ukraine already joined the WTO on May 16, 2008. Moreover, the paper mentions the WTO (twice) only in the conclusions and nowhere else in the paper, which is illogical.
 2. One of the papers contends that the Ukrainian banking sector is functioning and developing quite stable. This statement may have been taken from a banking or government document. One may wonder, however, whether those who cannot cash their money from their bank account would agree with this statement.
- f. I value that some of the papers make mention of one of Ukraine's most compelling problems: corruption. This may indicate a growing awareness of this very serious problem.

However, some papers are normative rather than positive, which may jeopardize the paper's logic and consistency. For example, one of the papers heralds that the new customs code will solve staff problems and disputes. Also, it states that Ukraine's customs service holds a leading place among the other customs systems on our planet. Government documents may contain this kind of propaganda, but it should not appear in academic papers.

- g. Like the past two years, I observed that the papers have not been signed by an English language teacher suggesting that the papers' language has not been checked.
- g. As noted above, the level of the papers is comparable to that of 2008. Generally, the papers give rise to the following observations:
- The English seems generally better than in 2008, but some papers have still been written in poor English.
 - Many papers do not present an adequate research question. Formulating a good research question is a necessary element and determines the paper's quality to a large extent.
 - In most papers a systematic literature search is lacking. The availability of literature (just by chance?) seems more decisive for references to be included in the paper than a literature search. For example, a paper dealing with money laundering did not contain any reference to an authoritative source like the OECD.
 - 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, or alphabetically according to first names rather than last names, or by not including the year of publication and/or the place and publisher, etc.
 - Some papers contain references to sources that are not included in the list of references and vice versa.

3. Exams

I have understood that most of the courses taught in English have been tested orally. The written tests that I have seen consist of open questions and are partly based on cases presented to the students. The exams do not contain multiple choice questions or true/false questions. The written exams I have seen pertained to the English language course and some to a course in business law. Both subjects do not belong to my core expertise. Therefore, I will not deal with these tests in detail.

4. The future

The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management has achieved considerable improvements over time under the leadership of its strongly committed dean, Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen. As a result, the current level of both teachers and students is remarkably higher than, say, five years ago. However, it seems that further improvements have not been achieved over the past two academic years even though this is hard to evaluate by an outsider during a short visit.

If the previous observation is true, it seems equally difficult for an outsider to assess whether the perceived lack of further improvements is a temporary phenomenon or not. In addition, it is even more difficult to ascertain the possible causes of a lack of further improvements. Nonetheless, I will present some possible causes below:

- a. The higher the level, the more difficult it is to achieve further improvements. This might be an explanatory factor although it does not seem to be the only factor.
- b. In my 2007 report I already signaled that the problem of plagiarism may jeopardize the prospect of continuation of the improvements. It might be that this is now becoming reality. Indeed, quite a few papers' quality suffers from plagiarism.
- c. I have no insight in the extent of support the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management receives from the university's central level. If there has been a change in this field, it might be the strongest cause of a lack of further improvements. If this is true, the problem for the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management would be that it has only a very limited influence on the support received from the university. The responsibility rests at the university's central level.

I am convinced that the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management's potential continues to be high and promising for the future. Reviving the process of continuous improvements of the Faculty's level should be possible provided that it receives sufficient support from the University in terms of funding, personnel and incentives.

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

- (a) The content of the papers can be improved by instructing the students to:
 1. formulate an adequate research question and possibly testable hypotheses;
 2. search the literature systematically, for example by using EconLit.
- (b) The format of the term papers can be improved. Not only the language, but also other aspects including the structure, references and bibliographies can be ameliorated. Moreover, in one of the papers I found the following statement: "Hypotheses 1 and 2 have been proven true." This indicates little understanding of methodological issues as Karl Popper developed long ago. Generally, the skills of academic writing and research could be strengthened.
- (c) Oral exams have some advantages. For example, they may be efficient, in particular if the number of candidates is small, while errors and inaccuracies of questions can easily and timely be rectified. However, oral exams also have some disadvantages. One major drawback is that the grading of oral exams tends to be more subjective than the grading of written exams and in particular more subjective than the grading of multiple choice exams. Another disadvantage is that the quality of oral exams cannot be monitored, certainly not by the external examiner. An exam consisting of a combination of open and multiple choice questions seems to combine the advantages of both question types.
- (d) Plagiarism continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed seriously.
- (e) Given the widespread problem of corruption in Ukraine, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management may want to consider adding a course on *Ethics* (or more

specific a course on *Business Ethics*) to its curriculum either in the bachelor's or the master's program.

- (f) Continuing education is key to staff members to maintain and/or increase their level. This may be considered a component of the human resources management.

5. Recommendations

Under the leadership of Lyudmyla Havrylyuk- Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management, the school has established a track record of being 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 of Economics and Management in its ongoing efforts to increase its academic level further.

A. Quality of term papers

The quality of the term papers varies considerably. This pertains both to the content (including structure, research questions, literature search and conclusions) and the format (such as lists of references or bibliographies). A number of papers are poorly organized and/or journalistic rather than academic in nature. Some of the students appear to have a problem in writing papers that meet academic standards.

Recommendation A1:

Organize a student seminar or practical work on "Academic writing" and include it as a required component in the curriculum.

Recommendation A2:

Require students to submit two hard copies of their term papers: one to their economics supervisor and one to a staff member of the Department of Foreign Languages. This would facilitate to connect a second learning effect to the paper in that it may improve the students' English language skills. The paper could thus be used for two separate evaluations:

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

Recommendation A3:

Enforce the submission deadline. If late December is too tight for the final version, consider to set January 15 as deadline for initial submissions and a later date, for example March 31, for submissions of the final versions.

B. Quality of exams

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

Recommendation B1:

Encourage teachers to comment on each other's draft exam questions.

Recommendation B2:

Include both multiple choice and open questions in exams. The number of multiple choice questions should be large enough to allow for a statistical analysis of the validity of both the individual questions and the examination as a whole.

Recommendation B3:

Organize a seminar for teachers on "Drafting examinations".

C. Plagiarism

The plagiarism problem continues to grow. Plagiarizing students seem to 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 nearly 100%. Thus, solving the problem with the application of plagiarism detection software should have a high priority. If this appears impossible, Google may be used as an alternative.

Recommendation C1:

Require students to submit an electronic copy of their papers (in addition to the two hard copies, see recommendation A2 above). This would facilitate plagiarism detection, while it would also send a clear signal to the students that there is a real chance to be caught if they plagiarize.

Recommendation C2:

Add to the guidelines that from the academic year 2009/2010:

- 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 or revised paper by August 31 (because the enforcement of this rule would be new). If the new or revised 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.*

D. Incentive for students

Although good written guidelines for writing a term paper are available, they may be further improved by adding instructions about a well-formulated research question and a systematic literature search. To provide the students with an additional incentive, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management may consider introducing a best paper award.

Recommendation D1:

Add to the guidelines instructions about the significance of research questions and systematic literature searches.

Recommendation D2:

Consider the introduction of an award for the best bachelor paper and possibly for the best master paper. Winners should receive recognition in the form of a plaque.

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 maintain or improve their skills in the framework of continuing education, 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.



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