

**External Examiner's Report 2010**  
**Ternopil National Economic University**

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**1. Introduction**

On June 14-19, 2010, I visited the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management at Ternopil National Economic University.

During my visit I reviewed 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;
- Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management;
- Lydiya Kurant, Head of the Business Communications and Organizational Behavior Department;
- Viktoriya Kramar, Assistant Dean International Affairs;
- several teachers;
- several students.

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

Despite the fact that the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management faces difficult financial and economic conditions, its achievements are remarkable. The Faculty has created both a master's program and a bachelor's program. It deserves to be noted that the dean and staff members Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management are very dedicated, which is an important benefit for the students and the Faculty as a whole.

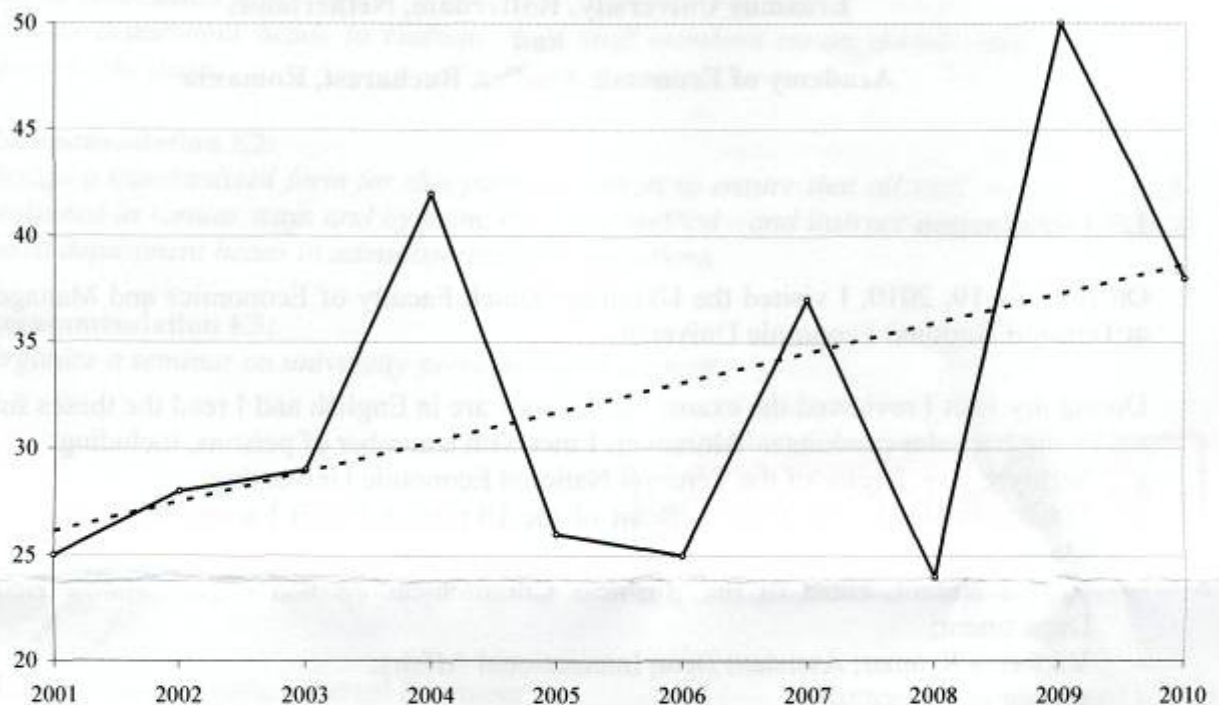
It was pleasant to observe that my visit was well-prepared and had been organized under the guidance of the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management. My transfers from and to Kiev were well-organized, my program was ready on arrival and appropriate housing was available.

I was pleased that in 2010 my suggestion to establish a Best Paper Award has been implemented in the form of an additional certificate stating that the student was the winner of the Best Paper Award 2010. Two papers stood out and their level was equal, so both students were granted the Best Paper Award. My impression was the students appreciate this novelty and in particular the winners seemed very happy with their awards.

## 2. Term papers

- a. There were 38 candidates who had submitted a bachelor thesis in order to receive their certificates. This implies a decrease in the number of candidates for a certificate compared to 2009, but it is still higher than the 24 candidates of 2008. Figure 1 displays the development in the number of candidates in the past decade.

**Figure 1. Number of candidates, 2001-2010**



Source: External Examiner's reports, 2001-2010.

The years 2004, 2007, 2009, and 2010 show relatively high numbers that are well above the annual average of 32.4 candidates. The past decade shows a rising trend, but in particular from 2007 the numbers tend to increase. It seems worth to compare this development with other faculties both at Ternopil State Economic University and other universities in different regions of Ukraine. In addition, it seems interesting to search for an explanation of the fluctuating numbers of candidates. Demographic and economic developments may be explanatory factors, but other factors including the Faculty's reputation may provide part of the explanation.

- 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 38 papers that have been submitted. Generally, the quality of the papers was similar to that of the papers in the past few years. This year the work load was shared by seven supervisors from the Department of Communication and Organizational Behavior, thereby avoiding an overload of work for one supervisor. However, the supervisors are pri-



marily language teachers. As a result, papers have been mainly judged on the use of the English language rather than the economic content.

- d. Each paper has been supervised by one supervisor, who provided 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. Regrettably, not all students took the opportunity to revise their papers.
- 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. 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. An alternative might be to use Google. During my visit I used Google to detect plagiarism. I suspect that at least 10 papers contain plagiarized texts. In three cases I was able to detect the sources the student had used.

One paper entitled "International financial systems" was 100% plagiarized (from two texts that are 11 and 12 years old, respectively!). For this reason, the student who submitted this paper did not receive a certificate. This has been publicly announced although without mentioning the student's name. It is interesting to watch whether this will have some deterrent effect in 2011.

The other two cases of plagiarism that I detected are:

1. The paper "Eurointegration: Ukrainian Prospects" is largely plagiarized:
    - p. 6: from A. Cohen, "Lecture on Europe and Russia and Eurasia, September 28, 2007.
    - p. 6-11: from "Ukraine in Core Geopolitical Outlines", 2006.
    - p. 11-12: from the European Union Ukraine Summit Declaration.
    - p. 13: from a Eurostat press release, 5 September 2008, STAT/08/15 and from News European Neighbourhood Policy, 7-11-2003.
    - p. 16-19: from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ukraine-EU bilateral relations, 2004.
  2. The paper "Ukraine in World Financial Crisis" contains on p. 7 text plagiarized from Bohdan Danylshyn, "Global Financial Crisis – A test for Ukraine", Zerkalo Nedeli, No. 38(717), 11-17 October 2008.
- f. Generally, the papers give rise to the following observations:
- The English is in many cases reasonable, 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.
  - Some papers do not lead to any conclusion or present vague conclusions.
  - In most papers a systematic literature search is lacking. One of the papers refers to Internet sources only. The availability of literature (just by chance?) seems more decisive for references to be included in the paper than a literature search.
  - Some papers are clearly written in combination with an internship. In these cases students tend to rely heavily on the information the company provides. They seem to take it for granted that it is complete and correct and they do not search for information from independent and objective sources.



- Some papers heavily rely on non-academic sources including newspaper articles and speeches given by businessmen, which often leads to simplistic conclusions and in some cases also to jumping to 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.
- g. The supervisors had a difficult task in judging the papers, in particular because they are primarily language teachers. In many cases the judgment seems more or less right. For example, a supervisor gave the qualification very poor to a paper that was very poor indeed. However, limited knowledge of the paper's content may result in wrong feedback. For example, one supervisor told a student to change the word *variables* into *varieties*. Thus, in some cases the supervisors' judgements raise questions:
- A paper was judged as "very well written", but the content was very poor.
  - A paper did not contain clear conclusions, whereas the supervisor observed there were clear conclusions.
  - A paper without a logical structure was qualified as well done.
  - Sometimes the judgment seems inconsistent, for example a supervisor who states that the overall quality of the paper is good, but then lists no less than 14 shortcomings.

### 3. Exams

I have understood that most of the courses taught in English have been tested orally. I have seen written tests pertaining to the following courses/subjects:

1. International marketing
2. Accounting ratios for financial statement analysis and Liquidity analysis ratios
3. Accounting (multiple choice questions)
4. International economics (open questions)

They were difficult to judge as the files contained only questions or only answers. Some tests consist of open questions, other tests consist of multiple choice questions.

### 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, six years ago. However, it seems that further improvements have not been achieved over the past three 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 identify the causes of the perceived 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 most likely it is not 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. As indicated before, I suspect plagiarism in at least 10 papers, which reduces the papers' quality.
- c. I have no insight in the extent of support that 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 most important 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;
  3. use scholarly sources as opposed to newspapers and speeches given by businessmen;
  4. include clear conclusions in their papers.
- (b) The format of the term papers can be improved. Not only the language, but also other aspects including the structure, sources, references and bibliographies can be ameliorated. 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 appears to be a growing problem that needs to be addressed seriously. It should be stressed that students who plagiarize commit forgery if they sign a plagiarism statement.
- (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* or *Organization Ethics*) to its curriculum either in the bachelor's or the master's program.



- (f) Continuing education is key to maintaining and/or increasing staff members' professional 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. It should be noted, however, that the Faculty's possibilities and means are limited. As a result, the scope for the Faculty's leadership to realize improvements is also limited. If more means would be allocated to the Faculty, more of the problems could be adequately addressed.

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, sources and conclusions) and the format (such as lists of references, bibliographies, etc.). 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:**

*Organize the supervision such that each candidate has two supervisors: an economics teacher and a business communications or language teacher. Students should submit two hard copies, one for each supervisor.*

*This would facilitate bringing about a double learning effect to the paper in that it may improve both the students' English language skills and the students understanding of the content. The paper could thus be used for two separate evaluations:*

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

### **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 where possible. 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. This perception may change after it was publicly announced in 2010 that a student did not receive a certificate due to plagiarism.

The use of plagiarism detection software would 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 as I did during my visit.

**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 very high chance to be caught if they plagiarize.*

**Recommendation C2:**

*Add to the guidelines that:*

- *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 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 test, 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. In addition, continue selecting the best paper and awarding a best paper award.

**Recommendation D1:**

*Add to the guidelines instructions about the significance of research questions, systematic literature searches, the right format and an academic attitude and writing style. These aspects should be part of the course "Academic writing" (see recommendation A1).*

**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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