

External Examiner's Report 2013
Ternopil National Economic University

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1. Introduction

On June 16-22, 2013, I visited the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management at Ternopil National Economic University.

As usual, my visit had been organized under the guidance of the dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management. My transfers to and from Ternopil were well-organized and acceptable housing was available.

In 2011, the second secretary of the Royal Dutch embassy in Kiev, Mr. R. van Tooren, was present at the certificates granting ceremony in Ternopil in 2011. Regrettably, there was no embassy representative in 2012 due to several reasons. Although the intention was that the embassy's second secretary, Ms. Anneloes Viveen, would attend the ceremony in 2013, this was not materialized possibly due to bureaucratic reasons. My understanding is that the Dutch embassy would prefer to receive an invitation for the 2014 ceremony from the university rather than the faculty as the embassy considers the university the institution that is officially responsible for organising the event.

During my visit I reviewed the exams insofar they were in English and I read the bachelor theses submitted by the candidates. Regrettably, I did not meet with the Rector or a Vice-Rector. However, I did meet with:

- Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, Dean of the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management;
- Olya Kolodnytska, Assistant Dean International Affairs;
- Bjarne Rerup Schlichter, visiting professor from Aarhus University;
- several teachers;
- several students.

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

As I observed in previous reports, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management's achievements are remarkable despite the difficult financial and economic conditions the School faces. The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management has created

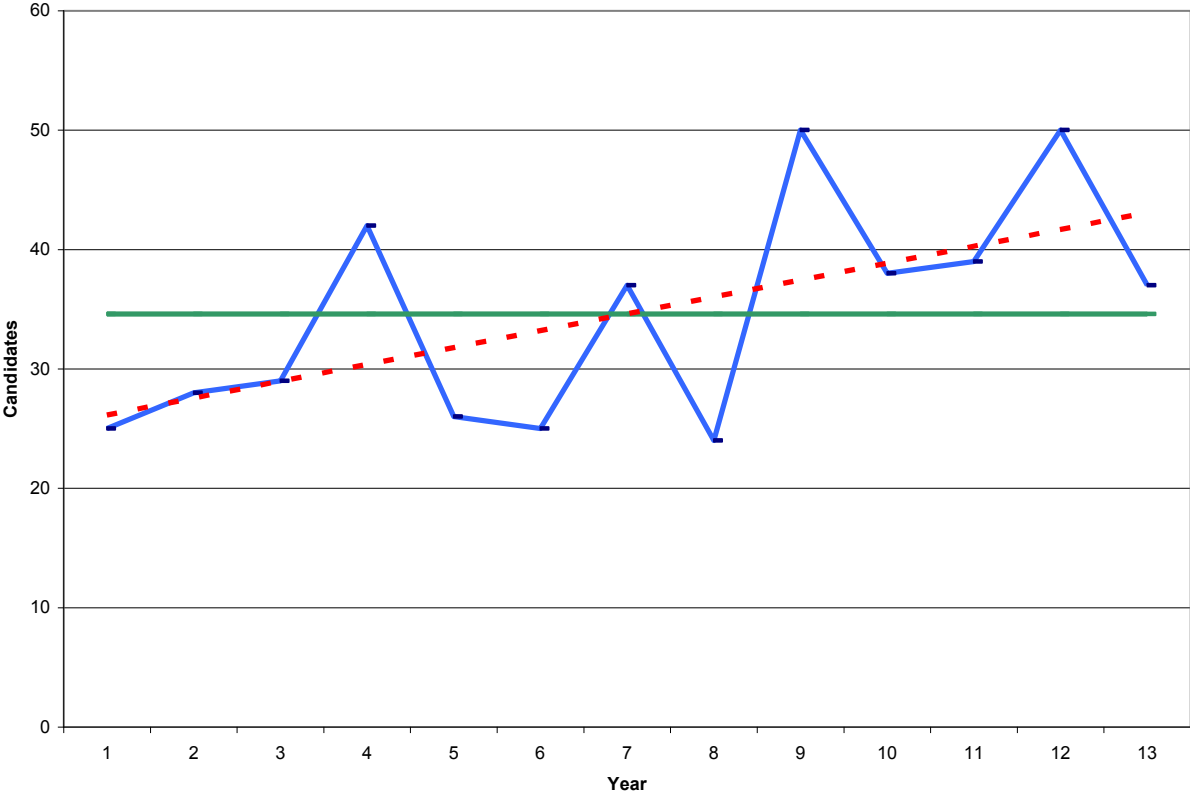
both a master’s program and a bachelor’s program and is blessed with a dean and staff members who are very dedicated. This is an important benefit for the students, the Faculty, the University and the Community.

The Best Paper Award that I had proposed in previous reports was awarded for the fourth year in a row in the form of an additional certificate stating that the student was the winner of the Best Paper Award of that year. Like in previous years, it was also 2013 difficult to select the Best Paper Award winner as two students had submitted very good papers. My impression is that the Best Paper Award has established the status it deserves.

2. Term papers

- a. There were 37 candidates who had submitted bachelor theses in order to receive their certificates. All candidates had submitted individual papers.¹ The blue solid line in Figure 1 displays the development in the number of candidates in the period 2001-2013. The red dotted trend line shows that a growth trend can be observed over the whole period. However, the year-on-year fluctuations are considerable (the numbers range from 25 to 50).

Figure 1. Number of candidates, 2001-2013



Source: External Examiner’s reports, 2001-2013.

Two of the previous years - 2009 and 2012 - show the highest numbers (50), well above the annual average of 34.6 candidates (represented by the green horizontal line in Figure 1). In 6 years the numbers lie below the average and in 7 years above the average. It seems

1. In past years I observed several times that two students had submitted a joint thesis.

worth to compare this development with other faculties both at Ternopil National Economic University and other universities in different regions of Ukraine. In addition, it seems interesting to analyze the fluctuations in the numbers of candidates. Demographic, administrative and economic developments may be explanatory factors, but other factors including the Faculty's reputation may also provide part of the explanation.

- b. The students have received clear and elaborate written guidelines and useful information for writing a term paper. The guidelines include a statement that the section Introduction should comprise "a brief explanation of the problem, the research question including sub-questions and the objective of the paper". Yet, I observe each year that many papers lack a clear research question. Many students write that the aim of the paper is to study or to analyze something. Sometimes a candidate seems to aim at making an inventory of problems with a research question in the form of: "What are the most significant problems of X and Y?" Or a candidate wonders whether something is important with a research question in the form of: "Is it important to understand the meaning of X and Y?"

The guidelines also state that the paper should be concluded with a section Conclusions. However, a number of candidates present trivial, vague or meaningless conclusions or definitions of concepts in lieu of conclusions. Examples are:

"So can draw a conclusion that the company has a close cooperation with the BMW Group, which brings invaluable experience and technology."²

"The research that was made showed us the importance of understanding other cultures."

"We can summarize that the company is doing its best to remain the market leader in beverages not only in Ukraine but also in the world."

This kind of "conclusions" is often the consequence of inadequate research questions.

The students have received written methodological recommendations for writing course papers, but quite a few students appear to have neglected the guidelines. Obviously, they have problems in writing an academic paper.

- c. Each paper has been supervised, but it is not totally clear how and by whom. Evaluators from different departments may have been involved and some evaluators remained anonymous. In two papers I observed that an anonymous evaluator complained in angry language about the quality of the English:

"This paper was poorly written! Buy a grammar book and study it!" and

"This is a very badly written paper! Titles are in capital first letter for each word (...). You wrote several words in Ukrainian because you did not know the English translation."

Nonetheless, the English of the two papers concerned was not much worse than on average.

- d. I have read all 37 papers that have been submitted. Generally, the quality of the papers is similar to that of the papers in the past few years. I understood that students are required to submit their papers both in print and electronically, which is in line with one of my recommendations in previous reports.

- e. The students are required to sign a plagiarism statement. During my stay I observed that four statements were missing. After I had made inquiries about the missing declarations they have been submitted. One of them was submitted as late as June 19, 2013.

Despite the presence of signed plagiarism declarations, plagiarism continues to be a serious problem. Students search the Internet for texts that they can cut and paste into their

² All quotes are the original verbatim text.

papers. In previous reports I recommended to apply plagiarism detection software.³ A (poor) alternative for supervisors might be using Google. Like in previous years I suspected plagiarism in a number of cases. I was unable to prove it as I could only use Google, but I assume that plagiarism detection software would have detected it. Below I will elucidate two of these cases.

One paper contained the statement that a plagiarism checker had been used. However, this statement was probably written by the candidate. I suspected plagiarism in this paper.

Another paper was probably partly plagiarized from a very old source as it states: "Mainly the currency operations are conducted in U. S. dollars (2/3 of total amount), also in German marks, British pounds, Japanese yen, French and Swiss francs. Recently the international means of payments are included in a currency turnover- SDR, ECU and other collective currencies." The number was only right in a distant past and both the German mark and the ECU ceased to exist in 1999. I met with the student to ask questions about this quote from her paper, but she was unable to answer them properly and appeared in fact quite ignorant about the subject.

In both cases I was unable to detect plagiarism by using Google,

f. Generally, the papers give rise to the following observations:

1. The English is in many cases reasonable, but quite a few papers have been written in poor English.
2. A number of papers are purely descriptive and do not contain any analysis. Rather, the candidate presents a number of facts or a piece of history, while their relevance for the paper is unclear. Some papers contain very minor and/or irrelevant details. An example is a list of the main brands of the company Amway in paper that is reasonable for the rest. There was also a paper that included a questionnaire in an addendum, but does not present any survey results.
3. Usually, students mention in their papers a research object, a research subject, a purpose and also some (vague) tasks (like explore, determine, etc.). But a concrete and adequate research question is often lacking even though formulating a good research question is a necessary, although not sufficient condition for a good paper. Evaluators often do not mention this crucial omission.
4. Some papers do not lead to any conclusion or present vague, trivial or meaningless conclusions. In some papers there is no difference between the introduction and the conclusions.
5. 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 its relevance.
6. Clearly, some papers have been 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 do not search for information from independent and objective sources. Students and supervisors should be aware that an internship report is not a bachelor paper.
7. 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. Moreover, some papers contain references to sources that are not included in the list of references and vice versa.

3. Exams

³ This is an important reason for requiring students to submit their papers also in electronic form.

My understanding is that a limited number of language and communication courses are taught in English, but hardly any economics courses.

I observed one test (The economic analysis), which was very simple.

I also observed sociology and psychology tests, which failed to indicate the number of points that candidates could earn per question.

In addition, I observed language tests. The number of points that candidates could earn was clear at:

Unit tests 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 12

Word dictation 1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15

Finally, I observed that files of students do not always contain the same tests, sometimes a test is missing in a student's file.

4. The future

The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management has achieved considerable improvements over time under the leadership of its dean, Lyudmyla Havrylyuk-Yensen, who has consistently showed a strong commitment. As a result, the current level of both teachers and students is remarkably higher than, say, nine years ago. However, it seems that further improvements have not been achieved over the past six academic years even though this is hard to evaluate by an outsider during a short visit, the more so as hard and measurable criteria are lacking.

If the observation above 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 hypotheses below:

- a. The higher the level, the more difficult it is to achieve further improvements. This might be one of the explanatory factors.
- b. The problem of plagiarism seems to hamper the continuation of the improvements. I already hinted at this danger in my 2007 report. Each year I suspect plagiarism in a number of papers, which reduces the papers' quality.
- c. Insufficient financial means may pose problems in employing sufficient and sufficiently qualified supervisors. 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, but a lack of sufficient resources might be the most important cause of a lack of further improvements. The responsibility rests at the university's central level.

The Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management's potential continues to be high and remains promising for the future thanks to its dedicated leadership and staff. Reviving the process of elevating the Faculty's level further seems possible if it will receive 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, diplomats and politicians;
 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 an external examiner. Exams consisting of both open and multiple choice questions combine the advantages of both question types.
- (d) Plagiarism continues to be a growing problem that needs to be addressed seriously. Students routinely sign plagiarism statements, but fail to walk the talk. They all sign a plagiarism statement, but quite a few still plagiarize.
- (e) Given the widespread problem of corruption in Ukraine, the Ukrainian-Dutch Faculty of Economics and Management may 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 and that more of the problems could be addressed adequately if more resources would be allocated to the Faculty.

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/language teacher.⁴ 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 remains big. Plagiarizing students seem to take it for granted that their chances of being caught are negligible. 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.

Recommendation C:

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%. It goes without saying that a necessary condition is that all papers have (also) been submitted in electronic form.*

⁴ Ukrainian universities face a brain drain in that qualified staff move to other countries due to low pay, lack of academic facilities and overload of work. This brain drain can be discouraged by providing universities with more support and enabling them to cooperate internationally. This is in line with the recommendation of the European University Association to support internationally oriented staff members. See European University Association, Institutional Evaluation Programme, Ternopil National Economic University Evaluation Report, July 2009, p. 12).

- *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 D:

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” (also 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 staff members who evaluate the working conditions. For example, it gives staff members the chance to signal the lack facilities, or conditions affecting the quality of their work negatively, 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.