

Doc. 300.1.2

Date: 18 October, 2021

# Higher Education Institution's Response

- **Higher Education Institution:**  
American College

- **Town:** Nicosia

- **Programme of study  
Name (Duration, ECTS, Cycle)**

**In Greek:**

Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (12 μήνες, 90 ECTS,  
Μεταπτυχιακό, Εξ Αποστάσεως)

**In English:**

Business Administration (12 months, 90 ECTS,  
Masters, Distance Education)

- **Language(s) of instruction:** English/ Greek
- **Programme's status:** Currently Operating
- **Concentrations (if any):**

**In Greek:** Concentrations

**In English:** Concentrations



**The present document has been prepared within the framework of the authority and competencies of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education, according to the provisions of the “Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 to 2019” [N. 136 (I)/2015 to N. 35(I)/2019].**

## A. Guidelines on content and structure of the report

- *The Higher Education Institution (HEI) based on the External Evaluation Committee's (EEC's) evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4) must justify whether actions have been taken in improving the quality of the programme of study in each assessment area.*
- *In particular, under each assessment area, the HEI must respond on, without changing the format of the report:*
  - *the findings, strengths, areas of improvement and recommendations of the EEC*
  - *the conclusions and final remarks noted by the EEC*
- *The HEI's response must follow below the EEC's comments, which must be copied from the external evaluation report (Doc.300.1.1 or 300.1.1/2 or 300.1.1/3 or 300.1.1/4).*
- *In case of annexes, those should be attached and sent on a separate document.*

We have studied the report of the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) consisted of Prof. Philip Vergauwen, Prof. Pedro de Faria, Prof. Stephanie J Morgan, Prof. Pantelis M. Papadopoulos and Mr Markellos Potamitis regarding the educational evaluation-accreditation of the Master Degree in Business Administration (Distance Education) carefully and thoroughly. We find that their report is objective and very positive. Below we provide our response to all the recommendations for revisions/improvements noted in the EEC report. In addition, we refer to issues we felt they needed us to provide clarifications or further information. The revisions/improvements we made, have already been implemented and they are fully documented below and in the annexes provided.

## **1. Study programme and study programme's design and development**

*(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)*

The EEC does, however, urge the School to give students and external stakeholders a more direct (as representative members of the committees), active and dynamic role in these processes as distance learning programmes require even more attention to active participation in these processes than face-to-face educational programmes.

The EEC finds the programme only partially compliant with respect to design and on-going monitoring/review. Although all structures for quality assurance are in place, full-fledged the distance learning MBA requires a more appropriate design allowing true collaborative learning and learning assessment (including the assessment of personal development, team-work competences and a more in-depth evaluation of dynamic participation).

Although the EEC finds overall compliance with the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, it does strongly encourage the programme to think beyond “digitalization or on-line delivery of face-to-face learning” by updating the design according to the latest insights and requirements of distance learning.

The EEC has not been able to assess student progression (pass rates, tec ...) and urges the School to tighten monitoring and provide more publicly available documentation on learning progress and achievement.

### **American College's Response:**

Previously, the Quality Assurance Committee of the College included one undergraduate and one postgraduate student, as students' representatives. Following the suggestion of the EEC, the College Council has decided on 1 September 2021, to replace one of the participating students in the Quality Assurance Committee with a Distance Education student, as to bring the views of distance education students (see Annex 1 - Organization, Administration and Faculty Handbook, page 5; Annex 2 – College Council minutes). Additionally, the College Council has decided to add one external stakeholder from the field of Business in the Business Department's Quality Assurance Committee (see Annex 1 - Organization, Administration and Faculty Handbook, page 6; Annex 2 – College Council minutes).

The ongoing monitoring and review of the program of study in terms of Quality Assurance, appraises areas of teaching, learning and student assessment. To gain the full benefits of a distance learning program, based on the suggestions of the EEC, the design, on-going monitoring and review of the program now ensures true collaborative learning and learning assessment by including group projects, group simulations, peer assessment (student to student), and activities that don't just test

knowledge, but also enhance the skills and competencies of graduate students. Further, these motivate students to dynamically participate in the learning process, through interactive content (e.g. interactive activities, interactive case studies and simulations (see Section 5, Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools), that offer variety, immediate feedback, and practical application (real world examples).

Although the program complies with the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, American College continuously improves all elements of the learning process of distance learning. On that, we have updated the design of the program by adding current interactive tools, advanced and leading-edge simulations, and innovative digital case studies (see Section 5, Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools).

The Academic Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee at a joint meeting on Friday, 25 June 2021 (see Annex 4 – Academic Committee and Quality Assurance Committee minutes), have decided that the Review and Evaluation report prepared by the program coordinator must include performance indicators in the following areas:

- a) Admissions, Withdrawal, Progression and Graduation Rates for two academic years.
- b) Regarding admissions, the percentage of students accepted to students applied will be considered.
- c) Regarding Withdrawal, Progression and Graduation Rates, the following will be taken into consideration:
  - I. Percentage of students who withdraw at the end of every year
  - II. Percentage of students who progress to the following year at the end of every year
  - III. Percentage of students who fail to Graduate at their final year
  - IV. Percentage of students who graduate

### **EEC – Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:**

The QA process could be improved by including student representatives in the process. This is a very common approach and it usually provides the committee with more insights while it gives the students the feeling that they have an important voice within their university.

There is also the opportunity to involve external experts from the university's network, but this is not done at the moment or is done sporadically.

The material is adequate and the quality is regularly checked, but parts of the material seem outdated.

Teaching, learning, and assessment procedures also need further clarifications in the public space of the university. Even after discussing for a full day, it is still not entirely clear how students communicate, interact, and collaborate within a course. Also, the amount of self-work does not necessarily explain how student-teacher interaction is happening.

This is a case of a very small cohort. So, many services and procedures that should be there are not available, yet without a severe consequence for the students. Nevertheless, the instructional design should follow what scientific consensus is on distance learning. This includes a better virtual presence, a feeling of belonging, and resources that would alleviate the lack of physical interaction.

Regarding career paths, improvements should focus on better connecting the students with the potential pathways. This is important for all students, even the ones already working as professionals. The university must act as an academic, professional, and social hub/accelerator.

### **American College's Response:**

The College Council has decided to replace one participating student with one Distance Education student in the Quality Assurance Committee to bring the views of distance education students (see Annex 1 - Organization, Administration and Faculty Handbook, page 5; Annex 2 – College Council minutes).

The College Council has also decided to add one external stakeholder from the field of Business in the Business Department's Quality Assurance Committee (see Annex 1 - Organization, Administration and Faculty Handbook, page 5; Annex 2 – College Council minutes).

We have updated any out-of-date part of our material. Faculty members are informed to be punctilious in keeping all learning material current.

In respect to student interaction, communication, and collaboration within a course this occurs in multiple ways, through synchronous and asynchronous learning tools:

- Initially, faculty provide students with a course outline and a study guide, provide all necessary course information, including means of communication, coursework requirements, material provided, assessment criteria, etc.;
- All learning material (e.g. PowerPoint presentations, articles, videos, exercises, interactive content, etc.) and coursework upload on the online learning platform for students to access on their convenience;
- For the purpose of benefiting the entire class, a News Forum is setup up in Moodle. In this forum, instructors post news and announcements related to the course e.g. when the semester/session starts, before each graded summative assignment submission; relevant information sharing; clarifications; reminder for deadlines; general guidelines; when semester/session ends);
- Faculty set asynchronous online discussion boards (forums) for discussion purposes between all course participants (faculty and students);
- Instructors deliver online live lectures via Zoom. The aim is to help students identify the important features of course material. In addition, they serve as a “forum” for questions and answers so that the students fully understand the content of every course;
- Instructors and students use following ways of synchronous communication to communicate:
  - private chat with the use of Moodle (one to one, text only, the date and time must be arranged promptly through email);
  - private web conference with the use of Skype (one to one, voice or video, the date and time must be arranged promptly through email); and
  - telephone communication (the date and time must be arranged promptly through email).
- An instructor may email his/her students to keep in touch, send material, updates, reminders and assessments. In addition, students can email their instructor to ask questions;
- Through Moodle, instructors create weekly interactive activities so to keep students continuously engaged in the learning process;

- Simulations, digital interactive case studies and other contemporary technological tools are also provided through Moodle (some with self-generated feedback); (see Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools)
- Furthermore, to ensure student interaction, faculty:
  - frequently imitate communication using any of the means mentioned above;
  - constantly monitor Moodle access and coursework activity progress for all students, and contact any inactive ones to resolve any difficulties;
  - give appropriate and regular feedback even in cases of high marks achieved (e.g. coursework, questions asked by students, forum activities);
  - apply analytical criticism in the coursework marking and provision of feedback explaining the reasons of any objections; and
  - plan for and implement an activity at the end of the course that brings closure to the class, reinforces what was learned, and acknowledges students' contributions.

For the past decades, the College has built strong connections with the industry (see Annex 5 - Organizations Collaborating with American College), not only for research purposes but also to act as a career commencement centre for our graduates. Through the Career Office, students and graduates get full support to become connected with our strategic partners. Due to the fact that all enrolled students are currently employed (with some having managerial positions), students exploit our market and industry linkages only for the purposes of research (projects and thesis).



## 2. Student – centred learning, teaching and assessment (ESG 1.3)

Although the e-learning methodology is appropriate for the particular programme of study given the small numbers of students, further growth in student numbers will require a more formal and better structured and adequately designed distance learning environment.

The EEC does, however, confirm partial compliance to this standard as the programme really needs to implement improvement measures with respect to the “future-proof” specificities of e-learning. The process of teaching and learning should be adapted and extended focusing on students’ individual and social development and requires broadening of the set of different modes of e-learning delivery, pedagogical methods and student-interaction and collaborative learning approaches.

The EEC does, however, strongly encourages the School to more formally and structurally include team-work into the practical training and learning experience of the participants.

The EEC does, however, confirms partial compliance with respect to student assessment and repeats the importance of including non-individual study performance such as group-work, projects, etc .... as it seems that knowledge is assessed, but skills and competencies are not, at least not formally and documented. It is not always clear whether students’ self-regulation, self-organization, presentation, reflection, collaboration, and other skills are routinely part of the assessment procedure. Since the end-product does not necessarily guarantee the development of certain skills, the programme is strongly advised to redefine the assessment procedure to take into account the assessment of skills and competencies that are part of the program goals. As a piece of general advice, curriculum alignment should be checked for all courses to make sure that the learning goals are aligned with the learning activities of a course and that the assessment methods measure accurately the outputs of these activities.

### **American College’s Response:**

The e-learning methodology is appropriate for the particular program with the number of students currently enrolled, or even with a further growth in the number of students. The program is designed and structured as to accommodate and support larger number of students; still, continuous review and monitoring will reveal future needs assuming the number of students substantially increases. Nevertheless, hearkening the needs of students and driven by recent technological advancements in education, we have augmented the structure and the e-learning methodology by adding contemporary interactive tools (see Section 5, Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools).

The College encourages the interaction and collaboration of students. Thus, we have structurally included team-work and cooperation of students into the practical training and learning experience which is also formally assessed by faculty in each module.

With respect to the “future-proof” specificities of e-learning we have taken the following measures related to different modes of e-learning delivery and student interaction and collaborative learning approaches (all based on the EEC comments):

- a) We have enriched the available interactive tools faculty can use in the learning process, by adding interactive videos, interactive books, multimedia presentations, flashcards, and dialog cards (see Section 5 of this report; Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools).



- b) We have augmented the e-learning delivery, pedagogical methods and student interaction approached with simulations and digital interactive case studies in the form of serious gaming (see Section 5 of this report; Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools).
- c) We have requested faculty to focus more on collaborative work and team activities, utilizing all available interactive tools, simulations and digital case studies, as well as coursework activities such as assignments and projects.

All coursework (assignments, interactive activities, simulations, etc.) and final examinations are developed so that to examine competencies, problem solving and critical thinking skills, and not just knowledge. Furthermore, all coursework will be developed so that to promote collaboration and interaction between students. Consequently, students will be mainly assessed on their critical assessment and evaluation skills, both individually and in groups; testing knowledge will continue to be part of the assessment process, though bearing a much lower weight. By all means, all assessed coursework and final examinations are aligned with the learning goals of each related course.

### **EEC – Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:**

Student-teacher and especially student-student interaction and collaborative learning and skill development can be further improved.

The lectures are quite long and hard to follow as they are highly compact and cover a lot of ground. Both the quality and the integration of video lectures can be improved.

For larger cohorts, there are several instructional approaches that would further IT (also human resources, expertise) investments.

### **American College's Response:**

Student-teacher interaction is now strengthened with the addition of more interactive activities (see Section 5 of this report; Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools) encompassing further communication and feedback by instructors. Moreover, implementing the suggestions of the EEC, there are now 8 online meetings throughout the 13 weeks of study whereas students meet instructors to discuss the course core elements. In addition to that, students can meet one-to-one with instructors to interact on course materials such as notes, assignments, announcements, and more. Similarly, student-student interaction and collaborative learning is also enhanced through collaborative activities among students, such as group assignments, group simulations, and interactive group case study analysis.

The number of live online lectures have doubled and the duration of each lecture is reduced to 30 minutes each. The lectures include transitional interactive activities and focus on discussion on the elements covered in the course content.

The program is designed and structured in order to accommodate and support larger number of students; Of course, the continuous review and monitoring of the program will reveal future needs including any future needs in infrastructure and IT for a substantially increased number of students. In such a case the College will make the necessary investments to meet these needs.



### 3. Teaching staff (ESG 1.5)

No Comments by the External Evaluation Committee.

#### **4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification** (ESG 1.4)

With respect to student progression, the EEC repeats the lack of formal documentation.

The EEC did not see any data on formal student progression monitoring. The School could not provide directly available information on pass rates and on (individual level) progress review (processes). Student progression currently seems to be based on “keeping an eye on” individual students and their engagement with the system and assessments. This is not, however, sufficient and certainly not scaleable.

The EEC finds the programme only partially compliant with the standards related to student recognition. Fair recognition of higher education distance learning qualifications requires a different approach, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and including essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in a virtual learning environment. A classical individual exam is not enough to fully assess learning progress and to recognize achievement of learning outcomes in a virtual learning environment.

#### **American College’s Response:**

The Academic Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee at a joint meeting on Friday, 25 June 2021 (see Annex 4 – Academic Committee and Quality Assurance Committee minutes), have decided that the Review and Evaluation report prepared by the program coordinator must include performance indicators in the following areas:

- a) Admissions, Withdrawal, Progression and Graduation Rates for two academic years.
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  - I. Percentage of students who withdraw at the end of every year
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  - III. Percentage of students who fail to Graduate at their final year
  - IV. Percentage of students who graduate

Prior to the EEC visit, students were recognized for their output on the final exam and some coursework activities, such as assignments, projects, and on some of the interactive activities. Following EEC suggestions, we have enriched coursework activities, comprising of individual and group assignments, individual and group project, interactive activities (interactive videos, interactive books, course presentations on html, dialog cards, dialog flashcards, arithmetic quizzes, essays, multiple choice, fill in the blanks and true false interactive exercises, multimedia hotspot exercises, timeline, virtual tour, and more), digital case studies, and individual and group simulations. All the above coursework activities are now evaluated so students are holistically assessed and recognized for all their individual and group learning.

#### **EEC – Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:**

Student progression policies, structures and procedures need to be formally put in place. Close monitoring and clear documentation of student progress is absolutely required.

With respect to student recognition, as mentioned already several times in the above, recognition should include and cover all aspects and facets of collaborative online/distance learning.

**American College's Response:**

The Academic Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee at a joint meeting on Friday, 25 June 2021 (see Annex 4 – Academic Committee and Quality Assurance Committee minutes), have decided that the Review and Evaluation report prepared by the program coordinator must include performance indicators (rates) concerning Admissions, Withdrawal, Progression and Graduation.

With respect to student recognition, following EEC recommendations, now includes and covers all aspects and facets of collaborative online/distance learning by assessing all types of learning activities.

## 5. Learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6)

Although the standard/basic teaching and learning activities and processes are in place, the EEC finds that true distance learning (as opposed to a virtual/digital delivery of face-to-face education) requires a more broad, more rich and up-to-date set of IT instruments and matching pedagogical methods, such as serious gaming, simulations in virtual environments, interactive learning and formative assessment games, etc ... Such activities not only help in building skills both in experiences and attitudes like in real life, but are quintessential to a distance learning experience. Further investments in adequacy of (fit-for-purpose) resources is needed to ensure for future-proof circumstances for student-centred learning.

The EEC does, however, stress the importance of up-scaling and up-grading the resources, including the human resources, needed for continuous improvement of distance learning delivery. The EEC strongly encourages the School to significantly invest in the Digital Learning Unit by recruiting a specialist/expert in distance learning technology and pedagogy.

### **American College's Response:**

To improve the distance learning experience, we have enriched our contemporary pedagogical methods by up-to-date instruments such as interactive activities and simulations. More specifically, in terms of interactive activities we have added the following interactive tools to the list of available interactive activities and tools used in our distance education program:

- **Interactive Video:** Faculty add multiple choice and fill in the blank questions, pop-up text and other types of interactions to their videos, making the videos more engaging and interactive. Videos may be enriched with interactivities like explanations, extra pictures, tables, Fill in the Blank and various types of questions that support adaptivity; all question types can be configured to perform adaptive behavior, meaning that a correct answer could cause the student to skip to a specified place in the video while an incorrect answer could take the student somewhere else in the video. Typically, submitting a wrong answer will cause the student to be directed to the place in the video where the answer to the question is presented.
- **Interactive Book:** Faculty put together large amounts of interactive content like interactive videos, questions, course presentations and more on multiple pages creating interactive books with a mix of informational content and tasks.
- **Course Presentation:** A HTML5-based presentation consisting of slides with multimedia, text, and many different types of interactions like interactive summaries, multiple choice questions and interactive videos. In this way faculty create engaging presentations and students can experience new interactive learning material and test their knowledge.
- **Flashcards:** Faculty create sets of stylish and intuitive flashcards that have images paired with questions and answers. Students are required to fill in the text field and then check the correctness of their solution.
- **Dialog Cards:** Dialog cards are used as a drill to help students learn terms and theories. Dialog cards are highly and fully responsive, and they can incorporate images and audio resulting in a simple but highly interactive tool.

In terms of simulations we have added the following:

- Digital Interactive case studies and simulations: Digital Interactive Case studies emphasize real world applications and move knowledge from theory to practice, and at the same time they provide interactivity. Case studies are presented in the virtual environment and students make decisions as they read through the case scenario; their decisions show immediate effects and affect the remainder of the case elements. Interactive case studies and simulations can be taken individually and in groups, so to enhance teamwork and collaboration (see Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools).

American College maintains a Distance Education Unit that, among others, employs a Head of Pedagogy and an Information Technology Administrator. In Annex 6 you may find their name and qualifications and in Annex 7 – Distance Education Unit Handbook (pages 6 and 7) you may find their duties and responsibilities. The Head of Pedagogy and the Information Technology Administrator ensure the adequacy of the delivery of our Distance Education program.

### **EEC – Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:**

Even though the basic infrastructure is there (Moodle, Zoom), the available learning resources are limited and could be significantly enriched. Specifically, there is a long list of PDF files and some links to YouTube videos. However, there is little interactivity (i.e., opportunity for the student to engage with technology and receive automated feedback). For example, there are no simulation, live case-studies, sandbox tools, serious games, or other highly interactive instructional tools that would allow the student to experiment, try out different things, and engage in an inquiry-based process. The interactive activities at the end of each week offer too few opportunities for such engagement as they are primarily closed-type quizzes that focus in many cases in memory recall or limited knowledge transfer.

Since video lectures are the primary mode of information delivery, the School is encouraged to increase the production value. It is also advisable to embed interaction within the video with tools such as H5P or Adobe Connect (H5P can be added on any YouTube video and create, for example, an index of the topics covered in the video thus allowing the students to jump easily to the needed parts, quiz questions that would provide feedback and that would direct the student to different parts of the video (e.g., skip the explanation of a concept if the student has answered correctly a few questions on this topic), etc.).

The American College is strongly advised to establish a distance learning unit with experts on instructional design and online learning. This unit should also be formally involved in quality assessment procedures, designing of teaching and assessment methods, and be a contact point for the students and the teacher for all pedagogical issues related to the online nature of the program (e.g., advice on studying, collaborating, and working while in an online learning setting). Adding such expertise could address many of the issues mentioned in the program and could provide additional value to the whole College.

### **American College's Response:**

Prior to EEC visit we had and continue to have available a list of interactive tools for faculty to use through our distance learning platform, such as Drag and drop, Fill in the gaps, Images with multiple

hotspots, Multiple choice questions, True false questions, Arithmetic quiz, Bar and pie chart generator, Image sequencing, Essays with immediate feedback, Image sequencing, and Timelines. However, to further engage students in an inquiry-based process, based on the EEC recommendations we have added highly instructional interactive tools, which include a variety of interactive activities (Interactive Videos, Interactive Books, Course Presentations, Flashcards and Dialog Cards), simulations and digital cases studies (see Section 5 of this report; Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools).

To increase the production value of video lectures, we have included Interactive Video creation. Faculty embed multiple choice and fill in the blank questions, pop-up text and other types of interactions to their videos, making the videos more engaging and interactive. Videos may be enriched with interactivities like explanations, extra pictures, tables, Fill in the Blank and various types of questions that support adaptivity; all question types are configured to perform adaptive behavior, meaning that a correct answer could cause the student to skip to a specified place in the video while an incorrect answer could take the student somewhere else in the video. Typically, submitting a wrong answer will cause the student to be directed to the place in the video where the answer to the question is presented.

As explained above, American College maintains a Distance Education Unit that, among others, employs a Head of Pedagogy and an Information Technology Administrator. In Annex 6 you may find their name and qualifications and in Annex 7 – Distance Education Unit Handbook (pages 6 and 7) you may find their duties and responsibilities. The Head of Pedagogy and the Information Technology Administrator are involved in quality assessment procedures, designing of teaching and assessment methods, and act as contact points for the students and the teaching personnel for all pedagogical issues related to the online nature of the program (e.g., advice on studying, collaborating, and working while in an online learning setting).





## 6. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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## 7. Eligibility (Joint programme) (ALL ESG)

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## B. Conclusions and final remarks

To conclude, and to be read as the more consultative part and follow-up of the interesting, open and transparent discussion the EEC had with the American College faculty and staff, the EEC encourages the School to:

1. Update the distance learning materials, activities, learning processes and evaluation/assessment methods to truly deliver a distinctive and differentiated distance learning MBA programme that is attractive to both local (working) and international students. Ideas to this extent include an increase of the number of (recorded and/or live stream) lecture hours but at the same time shorten the duration of these lectures per course, the creation of extra interactive and truly participative live sessions with Q&A, collaborative learning activities, social and/or personal development focused events, etc ...

2. To think of ways to make the School's extensive network of business and industry relations more accessible to the distance learning students in order to really include them in the American College family and to increase the added value of the programme for its participants. This could be done, e.g., by linking the master thesis to projects or collaboration with these external stakeholders/parties.

3. To further clarify teaching, learning, and assessment procedures in the public space of the American College. Although the EEC realizes this is a case of a very small cohort of students, many services and procedures that should be formally there are not available (yet without a severe consequence for the students). Nevertheless, the instructional design should follow what scientific consensus is on distance learning, including a better virtual presence, a feeling of belonging, and resources that would alleviate the lack of physical interaction. This is a fortiori the case when the School decides to grow the programme in terms of numbers of participants.

4. To clarify and specify its Internationalisation-globalization (@home) strategies.

Internationalization requires scaling-up and diversifying the Virtual Learning Environment by making it much more than a repository of lectures, powerpoint presentations, an electronic library, etc... i.e., by adding specific add-ons to the live-stream lectures where direct interaction with students should go beyond Q&A or providing feedback. An international distance learning programme has to provide and deliver a living platform of experiential learning in which the industry and practice play an equally active role as in face-to-face learning.

5. The development of a clear strategy for the scaling-up of distance learning including necessary investments (IT infrastructure, software and human resources, i.e. digital learning experts) is required if the School should decide to pursue the growth path of distance education.

Ideas to help the School further improve include making use of available technologies that allow for more student-teacher interaction and, more specifically, collaborative learning/skill development, teamwork (important for metacognition) and assessment. (See e.g. Bloom's taxonomy of learning: understanding a concept requires lower cognitive skills than explaining a concept. Therefore, students that understand the lecture will not ask a question, but if they do not discuss their understandings, they miss opportunities for further development. As a suggestion, engagement and motivational theories should inform the instructional design, especially in cases where student engagement may affect severely the learning experience. A very common approach for motivational instructional design is Keller's ARCS model, standing for Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. The model provides practical suggestions on how to increase and retain engagement throughout a course). Furthermore, multimedia design is crucial (but also expensive) and requires expertise in aesthetics and cognitive psychology. Nevertheless, since the lectures are the primary mode of information delivery, it is advisable that the university invest in developing presentation

standards that would be more appealing as these could be used in other programs as well. Finally, the length of the lecture and especially the continuous presentation without breaks for interactive sessions is problematic as studies on cognitive workload and attention suggest an effective duration of 20'. It is advisable, therefore, to break down the long lectures into mini-lectures that would be more focused and more manageable for the students and connect the micro-lectures with transitional interactive activities). Last but not least, for larger cohorts, there are several instructional approaches that would not create a higher need for broadband connection. (For example, a teacher may ask a random group of 4-5 students to keep their cameras open while the remaining cohort has the cameras closed. This will still give the teacher an audience and will create a better connection between students and teacher – even for the students with closed cameras, as they can connect by looking at their peers in the audience.) Last but not least, since video lectures are the primary mode of information delivery, the School is encouraged to increase the production value. It is also advisable to embed interaction within the video with tools such as H5P or Adobe Connect (H5P can be added on any YouTube video and create, for example, an index of the topics covered in the video thus allowing the students to jump easily to the needed parts, quiz questions that would provide feedback and that would direct the student to different parts of the video (e.g., skip the explanation of a concept if the student has answered correctly a few questions on this topic), etc.).

### **American College's Response:**

1. We have enriched the available interactive tools faculty can use in the learning process, by adding interactive videos, interactive books, multimedia presentations, flashcards, and dialog cards. Likewise, we have augmented the e-learning delivery, pedagogical methods and student interaction approached with simulations and digital interactive case studies in the form of serious gaming (see Section 5 of this report; Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools). All coursework (assignments, interactive activities, simulations, etc.) and final examinations examine competencies, problem solving and critical thinking skills, and not just knowledge. Furthermore, coursework activities are developed so that to promote collaboration and interaction between students. Lastly, we have doubled the number of live stream lectures to 8 and shorten the duration of each lecture to 30 minutes. The lectures include transitional interactive activities and focus on discussion on the elements covered in the course content.
2. The College has built strong connections with the industry, and through the Career Office, students and graduates get full support to become connected with our strategic partners. Postgraduate students (both in the conventional and distance learning MBA) fully exploit our market and industry linkages for the purposes of research, including coursework (projects) and their final year thesis.
3. American College continuously improves all elements of the learning process of distance learning. On that, we have updated the instructional design of the program by adding latest interactive tools, advanced and leading-edge simulations, and innovative digital case studies to promote student interaction and collaboration, alleviate the lack of physical interaction and create a feeling of belonging.
4. Instigated by the suggestions of the EEC, live quizzes, live surveys and polls, and breakout rooms are added to the live-stream lectures as to enhance and enrich direct interaction and collaboration with students. By incorporating live quizzes during the discussion and surveys

through the chat option, further brainstorming and argumentation can evolve, resulting in high interaction while the interest of students is kept immense. Students are assigned into breakout rooms as to create a more collaborative setting than the large whole-group zoom experience.

5. The e-learning methodology, IT infrastructure, software and human resources are appropriate for the particular program. The program is continuously reviewed and monitored and if there are will be any additional needs in the future, these will be identified and fulfilled.

Student-teacher interaction is strengthened with the addition of more interactive activities (see Section 5 of this report; Annex 3a - Simulations and Interactive Digital Case Studies and Annex 3b - Interactive Tools) encompassing further communication and feedback by instructors. Applying Keller's ARCS model, the added interactive activities, simulations, and digital case studies aim for added participation, variety, link theory to practice and provide immediate feedback to students. In addition to that, students meet one-to-one with instructors to interact on course materials such as notes, assignments, announcements, and more. Similarly, student-student interaction and collaborative learning is also enhanced through collaborative activities among students, such as assignments, simulations, and interactive case study analysis.

In terms of the online live lectures, we have doubled the number of live stream lectures to 8 and shorten the duration of each lecture to 30 minutes. The lectures include transitional interactive activities and focus on discussion on the elements covered in the course content.

Lastly, to increase the production value of the video lectures Interactive Video Creation is added to embed interaction within videos, integrate class videos with questions and exercises with immediate feedback, break the class into chapters, and combine a variety of interactive tools within the video.



### C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

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**Date:** 18 October, 2021

