

Doc. 300.1.2

Higher Education Institution's Response

Date: 9 March 2020

- **Higher Education Institution:**
American College

- **Town:** Nicosia

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

In Greek:

Πτυχίο στη Διοίκηση Επιχειρήσεων (4 Χρόνια, 240 ECTS, Πρώτος Κύκλος)

In English:

Bachelor Degree in Business Administration (4 Years, 240 ECTS, First Cycle)

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

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) 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 deficiencies noted under the quality indicators (criteria)*
 - *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).*
- *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. Dimitrios Kousenidis, Assoc. Prof. Dionisis Philippas and Assoc. Prof. Christos Kolympiris regarding the educational evaluation-accreditation of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration 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 appendices provided.

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

(ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.8, 1.9)

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

The college offers no foundation courses. Students requested that there must be at least one foundation course in Modern Greek Language for international students.

American College's response:

We offer a foundation program which consists of intensive English language courses to those students who do not have adequate knowledge of English language. Such students can only progress to the courses of their program of study provided they successfully complete their English language courses. We believe that the English language courses are the most useful courses to be offered to students prior to studying the courses of their program of study. In addition, all our courses taught in the first year of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration do not require students to have any knowledge of the field in order to grasp the syllabus of the courses. We never had any problems with students who are adequately studying in terms of not being able to understand the syllabus. All such students coped with their studies.

The curriculum of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration includes GRE101 Modern Greek and GRE201 Modern Greek II. International students can take the first or both courses during their studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

The content of the program could be rebalanced to include more elective courses at the expense of the general education courses. We propose free elective courses that cover topics such as sustainability, digitalization, financial markets and institutions or fintech. This would ensure that the recent educational and societal trends are reflected in the program of studies.

Moreover, the international dimension of the program is rather weak and could be improved by inviting more visiting professors from abroad who could help in the development of the quality of the program and in the strengthening of the research profile of the program and staff through collaborations.

American College's response:

Based on your recommendations, the College academic committee has approved the revision of the curriculum of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration. More specifically, we have reduced the credit requirements for General Education courses from 84 to 78 ECTS credits, we have reduced the credit requirements for Business Core courses from 72 to 66 ECTS credits and we have increased the credit requirements for Major courses from 60 to 72 ECTS credits. In addition, the courses ACC113 Management Accounting and FIN101 Financial Management were taken to the list of Major Courses and the following courses were added to the Business Core courses:

- FIN301 Fintech
- MAR206 Digital Marketing
- MGT317 Corporate Sustainability

Finally, we have revised the syllabus of CSC101 Introduction to Computing so that it teaches more applied information technology issues for the local and international markets and changed the title of the course to CSC101 Fundamentals of Information Technology so that the title reflects better the revised course syllabus. All the above additions/revisions in the syllabuses were done so that the recent educational and societal trends are reflected in the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration. In **Appendix 1** you may find the revised curriculum of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration and in **Appendices 2 to 5** you may find the syllabuses of the above courses.

Inviting instructors of other academic institutions to American College to meet with our faculty members and give lectures to our students is a procedure embraced, some years ago, by both the Administration as well as by the faculty members of American College. The interaction of faculty members of American College with colleagues from other institutions helps in the development of the teaching and research skills of our faculty, thus accelerating their academic development. This interaction enhances the internationalization of the College and opens doors with the visiting instructors and their institutions for academic collaborations in teaching and research. In **Appendix 6** you may find a list of visiting instructors' activities (instructor's name and institution, dates and activity details) that took place in American College.

Based on your recommendations on inviting more visiting professors which we communicated to our faculty and administration staff in December 2019 and taking into account the academic benefits our faculty members have from their interaction with professors of foreign academic institutions visits, we have intensified our efforts to organize such activities more regularly. Our efforts included, sending an email to all our Erasmus Partner Institutions inviting their faculty members to give lectures aligned with the curriculum of the program as visiting professors, and other academic collaborations and to have more of their students study for a semester at American College. As a result, apart from the visiting instructor activities that took place in January and February 2020 we have also arranged for the following visiting professor activities in the forthcoming months:

Instructor: Prof. Galina Chipriyanova
Institution: D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov, Bulgaria
Date(s): 7/4 – 10/4

Will give lectures to students taking the course ACC101 Financial Accounting.

Instructor: Prof. Annamaria Artner
Institution: Milton Friedman University, Budapest
Date(s): 11/5 – 15/5/2020

Will give lectures to students taking the course ECO101 Principles of Microeconomics.

2. Teaching, learning and student assessment (ESG 1.3)

Justify the numerical scores provided for the quality indicators (criteria) by specifying (if any) the deficiencies.

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

Undergraduate students usually do not involve in research.

American College's response:

The curriculum of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration includes MGT315 Business Research. This course is designed to help students undertake a research project. It provides a clear guide on how to undertake research as well as highlighting the realities of undertaking research, including the more common pitfalls. Topics covered include ethics in business research, the research process, clarifying the research question through secondary research and exploration, research design, qualitative research, observation studies, surveys, measurement scales, questionnaires and instruments, selecting samples, data preparation and description, exploring, displaying and examining data as well as writing and presenting the research project. In **Appendix 7** you may find the syllabus of MGT315. In addition, the students of our Bachelor Degree in Business Administration learn how to research, through the various projects and assignments they carry out during their studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

The international aspect of the program could be enhanced. The college participates in Student exchange programs with other European Erasmus collaborating institutions, however this possibility has not been fully capitalized.

The links of the college to the local industry/ market could be improved. This could provide students the opportunity to find employment after graduation and would add to the industry/market link of the program. Also, possible internships for current foreign students would add value to the program and would improve the already good reputation of the college in the market.

The programme has a small number (four) of free elective courses that the students can take. This number has to be increased if the programme is to grow in the future.

American College's response:

About enhancing the international aspect of the program see our reply in: 1. Study programme and study programme's design and development. In addition, American College was awarded the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education by the European Commission and it participates in the Erasmus+ mobility program. We offer our students a wide spectrum of opportunities to learn, develop, improve their skills and have a good time by participating in exchange programs. A number of our students have studied for one or two semesters in a partner institution. For the above to be possible American College has signed bilateral agreements with the higher education institutions shown in **Appendix 8**. Based on EEC's recommendation for enhancing the international aspect of the program, we have encouraged more of our students to participate in the Erasmus+

student exchange programs by introducing (via email) these exchange programs to our students and inviting them to participate. We assigned 3 administration officers to deal with student enquiries regarding these exchange programs.

In terms of collaborations and interaction between American College and the Cyprus industries/market, our students benefit from guest speakers that are often invited and give lectures to our students. The guest speakers consist of professionals in various industries who give speeches in their areas of expertise. In addition, we organize for our students educational visits to organizations where they get the opportunity to have a tour around facilities, meet some of the people working for the organization and have someone talk to them about the organization (how it works, what the departments are, the role of the people working for the organization etc.). Moreover, every year we organize a job forum at the College where we invite representatives of employing organizations to meet and interview our students and find suitable employees from our student community. This year's forum took place on 28/2/2020.

We have officers and faculty members at the College that deal with student career matters. They help students to prepare their curriculum vitae, they take calls from organizations that want to employ our students on a part-time or full-time basis (during or after their studies) and arrange that students who match the organizations' needs are interviewed by the organizations. The same officers and faculty members deal on a similar basis with placing of students in internship programs with various organizations in order to give students a flavor of industry experience. According to the current legislation, internship (paid or unpaid) for international students is only possible for the placement of Hotel Management and Culinary Arts students in hotels or restaurants. Last year many of our Hotel Management and Culinary Arts students were placed in internship programs in hotels and restaurants. In **Appendix 9** you may find a list of organizations collaborating with American College in terms of placing our students for an internship, providing data for our student's thesis, hosting educational visits of our students and attending our annual job forum.

In order to encourage faculty members to engage more heavily in activities related to intensifying our links with the local industries and market we have increased the budget available for such activities and the academic committee in its 20 February 2020 meeting decided that the organization and participation of a faculty member in such activities will give additional credit points for the faculty member's end of year performance evaluation by his/her Department Head (the end of year performance evaluation is linked to a faculty member's salary raise and promotion).

According to the curriculum as described in the application for evaluation-accreditation of the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration the student is free to take any course offered by the College (provided it fulfills its prerequisites) in terms of the free elective requirements. The four courses were given as an example.

3. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

The college has not invested in resources that could help the faculty to conduct quality research. The acquisition of some databases (i.e., Bloomberg, WRDS, etc.) would enhance and intensify the research activities of the faculty.

Moreover, the college should pursue to regularly conduct research seminars in which faculty members could present research papers to others in order to discuss them, a practice that is likely to improve the quality of the research. These initiatives could be undertaken not only within the college but also together with other Cypriot Universities and Colleges (sharing of seminar email lists, organization of joint research seminars etc.).

American College's response:

Based on the recommendation of the EEC we searched to find suitable resources that would further help our faculty to conduct quality research. After evaluating the resources found we have finalized a list of such resources (see **Appendix 10**). To enhance and intensify the research activities of our faculty we have circulated the list of the resources to all our faculty members with the recommendation to get acquainted with the resources and to use them wherever possible for their current and future research.

In **Appendix 11** we provide a list of Research Paper Presentations which helped our faculty members improving the quality of the research they carry out. Based on the EEC's recommendations provided in December 2019 we intensified our efforts for such activities and since then managed to organize one more Research Papers Presentation in January.

In terms of conference participation an internal funding policy of the academic personnel's research activity is in place which financially supports faculty members to participate and present papers at international conferences as well as at conferences held in Cyprus. The College Academic Committee in its 20 February 2020 meeting decided to increase the internal funding of our academic personnel's research activities. The revised policy below applies as from the date of the academic committee's meeting and it aims to enhance the research activities of our faculty members and to help them in networking with other academics in other institutions.

Every academic year each tenured full-time faculty member is entitled to the following:

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Membership subscription in a professional association	100
Local or International conference subscription fee	150
Presentation of a paper at a conference held in Cyprus	350
Presentation of a paper at an international conference held abroad (maximum 2 per year)	1.100

The academic year starts on 1st September and ends on 31st August.

With the above policy our academic personnel knows that specific internal funding is available to them every academic year and it now enables them to attend up to 2 conferences per year. In **Appendix 12** we provide a list of the Research Activity and Publications of our faculty members including details of their participation in conferences.

Other activities that improve the quality of the research conducted by our faculty include the following:

- For a number of years, faculty members of the College serve as reviewers of papers submitted to the Southern Management Association, for presentation at its annual meeting.
- Our faculty members have regular contact with and participated in seminars and conferences both in Cyprus and abroad organized by the following academic institutions and research centres:

Cyprus Centre for Business Research
Cyprus Institute of Management
Cyprus Technological University
Economics Research Centre of the University of Cyprus
EuroMed Academy of Business, University of Nicosia
European University
Frederick University
Klaipeda University, Klaipeda, Lithuania
Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)
The Makridakis Open Forecasting Center (MOFC), University of Nicosia
University of Nicosia

- Our faculty members are members of the following professional associations:

American Management Association
American Marketing Association
Association of International Accountants
Brand Ambassador of Northcentral Association
British Psychological Society (BPS)
Cyprus Economic Society
Cyprus Hotel Management Association
European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP)
Maritime Association
Society for Human Resource Management
Southern Management Association
The Chartered Institute of Marketing

- American College, publishes a peer-reviewed, academic journal, “The Cyprus Journal of Sciences”, which serves academia at local and international level. The Journal has a rich Editorial Board, comprised from professors of Universities in Cyprus as well as from Universities abroad. Periodically, “Calls for Papers” are sent to academics who submit papers to be considered for publication. The publication of The Cyprus Journal of Sciences, contributes to the internationalization of American College and enhances the contribution of the College to the academic community at an international level.

American College administration provides adequate motivation for our faculty members to research since research is one of the main criteria by which faculty members are evaluated, receive salary raises and get

promoted. A credit points procedure is in place for evaluating the research activity and the publications of the faculty members, which as it is structured, encourages faculty members to publish papers in high ranked peer-reviewed international academic journals.

Our faculty members in many occasions collaborated with other academic institutions and academics from other institutions to conduct research. Below we provide examples of such collaborations:

On the 5th of December 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between, the American College and the workshop of Sociology of Work and Employment with Emphasis on New forms of Work, of the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean. The main objectives of this research collaboration, are to design and execute research activities, to publish papers in peer reviewed academic journals, books, the organization of conferences and research seminars as well as the interaction between the societal environment and our academic institutions. In **Appendix 13** you may find the signed MOU.

Faculty members of American College have formed collaborations with faculty members of the University of Nicosia, that led to the publication of the following papers in peer-reviewed academic journals:

1. Korres, M. George, **Michailidis, M., Louca, Ch.** and Papanis, E. (2019). A Review for Regional Growth: European Policies & Perspectives. *Journal of Regional & Socio-Economic Issues*, 9(2), pp. 44 – 54.
2. **Louca, Ch.**, Kokkinou, Aikaterini, **Michailidis, M.**, Korres M. George and Papanis, E. (2018). Enterprise Resource Management and Stochastic Frontier. *Journal of Regional & Socio-Economic Issues*, 8(3), pp. 5 – 14.

Faculty members of our College were invited to participate at the conferences organized by the EuroMed Academy of Business of the University of Nicosia where they published the following in the conference proceedings:

1. Magos N. (2019). *To what extent should companies be concerned with ethical issues in advertising, sponsorship and other forms of sales promotion? To what extent should companies be concerned about customers' perceptions of such 'ethical' behavior?' Findings of an Empirical Study.* EuroMed Academy of Business, September 2019, Thessaloniki, published in proceedings.
2. Magos N. (2018). *The Cyprus Hotel Industry against Porter's 'Five Forces Analysis' in the middle of the financial crisis.* EuroMed Academy of Business, September 2018, Valletta, published in proceedings.

4. Students

(ESG 1.4, 1.6, 1.7)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

In our interview with the students we asked for the reasons why the American College is an institution where students would like to study. The responds that we got were that students find it is easy to combine their studies at the College with work, and that the program is cheaper than other comparable programs offered by Cypriot Universities and colleges. Although these reasons may be acceptable or welcomed by present students, it could flag up areas of concerns. These factors however could be issues that the college can work on and develop in the future.

It seems that the College is not very selective in its admission criteria: All students who want to study at the American College and whose qualifications are sufficient (i.e. having a High School degree and some fluency in the English language) could do that. We noticed that there is no interviewing process for admissions. This could be beneficial for at least two reasons. First, including an interview in such an institutionalized process could help the College to learn about soft facts that are not apparent in CVs about a certain “fit” between the student body and the “culture” of the College. Second, admissions based on interviews (they could be undertaken online via skype for foreign students), could result to a body of students that has a diversity of experience, background and culture.

American College's response:

American College tuition fees are not lower than those of other Colleges in Cyprus. They are though lower than those of Private Universities in Cyprus (as it is the case with all Colleges). We believe that what American College offers to its students it is value for money education. Our fees are very much similar to those of other Colleges in Cyprus despite the fact that we have bigger and more modern facilities and better qualified faculty members compared to Colleges of similar tuition fees. We believe that this is the reason why students choose to study at American College.

The admissions criteria applied for this program of study are in line with the current legislation and have been approved by the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth and the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education. Our admission criteria are the same with those of other Colleges and Private Universities in Cyprus. As long as an institution has the capacity to accept a student and the student fulfils its admission criteria, the student is accepted to study for a program. Of course if too many students are accepted in a program of study then additional groups of courses must be offered to satisfy the increased number of students accepted. In addition, it is worth writing that students from certain countries (currently Pakistan and Bangladesh) undertake an interview with 3 interviewers (1 from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, 1 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 1 from the Ministry of Interior) and their admission is dependent upon their success in the interview. Finally, we agree that interviewing students can be beneficial for the College. If demand for the program rises, we are happy to apply interviews with specific criteria as part of our admission process.

5. Resources

(ESG 1.6)

Findings

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

We believe that the involvement of teaching staff in the management of financial resources regarding the program of study is limited. The teaching staff is not very involved in administrative matters beyond the organization of their own courses. This could be good because it allows them to have more time for research. On the other hand, the lack of formal authority over financial resources could be disadvantageous for a student-oriented program of studies (according to the DIPAE guidelines). However, we were informed that there is a number of mechanisms that allows for feedback and empowerment of the faculty (e.g. regular faculty meetings, the evaluation of their own courses).

American College's response:

Teaching staff have various ways to impact the College's decisions on administrative matters and resources. Firstly, through faculty meetings were their opinion and demands concerning administrative matters and resources are written in the minutes of the meetings and are communicated to the College administration. Secondly, teaching staff can provide their feedback through direct correspondence with the College administration. Thirdly, the College has an annual budget for additional resources and the Head of each Department can provide suggestions on where to spend this annual budget. Demands for new resources are usually born from the need to better serve our students. As a student-oriented College such requests are taken very seriously and in many occasions they are satisfied. Some recent examples of facilities improvement is the creation of a new spacious training restaurant (January 2020), purchase of equipment for the training restaurant and cookery laboratories (January 2020), purchase of audio-visual equipment for the Red building cafeteria (November 2019). Finally, apart from the teaching personnel, students can also provide suggestions regarding resources through the Student Facilities and Services Evaluation form they complete, once per semester and through the Student Faculty and Course Evaluation form they complete for each course every semester.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

We believe that premises are in good shape but they could be modernized here and there. For example, the students complained about the cafeteria which operates with vending machines and offers small variety of food and beverages.

Moreover, the students complained about the software which in some of the labs is quite old. During our visit to the computer labs we noticed that while there are some labs which are fully modernized, there are still some labs that have PCs operating the Windows 7 system. When we asked the owner about this, he assured us that the College is in the process of upgrading its software and that in the near future all computer labs will be renovated.

There seem to be enough books in the library however, many of the existing books are not updated with the most recent editions.

The Moodle online platform could be used with more of its functionalities (e.g. uploading of student theses),

American College's response:

In order to better serve our students apart from the 2 cafeterias with vending machines we have available for our students, we have agreed with the coffee shop based on the ground floor of the College buildings to serve our students with discounted prices. The coffee shop serves hot and cold snacks and beverages.

We continuously upgrade our computer facilities in terms of hardware and software. In 2019 we purchased:

- 2 new latest technology, fast and more reliable computer servers which mirror each other so no data is lost;
- 1 more reliable uninterruptible power supply (UPS) device; and
- 1 Network Attached Storage device with very big capacity that allowed us to increase the data we backup and made it easier to retrieve backed up data whenever necessary.

All this information technology upgrading ensured we have faster and more reliable IT facilities and reduced the possibility of any down time.

Most of our computer facilities are fully modernized but we still have some PCs that have Windows 7 operating system. This is not something urgent but we indent to upgrade the operating system of this PCs to Windows 10 during Summer time. Any upgrading of computer laboratories usually takes place during Summer time (unless it is an upgrading that is needed urgently) when the computer laboratories usage is at its minimum.

American College subscribes to ProQuest ABI/INFORM Global online library resources. The resources contain the full text of thousands of journals, including essential scholarly journals and the most important trade journals, thousands of dissertations, working papers, reports and news sources. In addition, the online resources provide its users with advanced tools for research and writing such as search tools and automatic generation of bibliographies. Our students use our computer laboratories to access these online library resources. Following EEC's suggestion for updating our library with the most recent editions of books, we have obtained access to ProQuest Ebook Central platform. The platform provides access to more than 975,000 authoritative ebooks across a diverse range of subjects, from over 750 trusted academic publishers and university presses.

Based on your suggestion the academic committee decided in its 20 February 2020 meeting from now on to upload all new theses and visiting professors' presentations and supporting educational material in American College Moodle platform and to be accessible by all faculty members and students. Moreover, it was decided to upload in our Moodle platform all the past theses we maintained in electronic form and the visiting professors' presentations and supporting educational material and this was completed by 25 February 2020.

6. Additional for distance learning programmes (ALL ESG)

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7. Additional for doctoral programmes (ALL ESG)

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8. Additional for joint programmes (ALL ESG)

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B. Conclusions and final remarks

External Evaluation Committee's comment:

Areas of improvement:

- Research can be intensified.
- Internationalization could be improved (primarily through student exchange).
- Intensify links with the industry

American College's response:

As described in our responses in sections 1, 2 and 3 above:

We have found and circulated to our faculty suitable resources for research, intensified our efforts for organizing more Research Papers Presentations and increased the internal funding of our faculty members for conference participation. All these improved the quality and intensified the research of our faculty members.

Moreover, we took measures that have improved the internationalization of this program of study. Specifically, we encouraged more of our students to participate in the student exchange programs we maintain with a number of European partner institutions, we hosted more visiting faculty from institutions outside Cyprus and we invited our European partner institutions to send their faculty members to American College to give lectures to our students and to encourage more of their students to participate in the student exchange programs and study for a semester at American College.

Finally, we have intensified the links of this program of study with the local industries/market by placing more emphasis on activities such as guest speeches by industry experts to our students, educational visits of our students to organizations, organization of a job forum at the College and internship placement of our students in various organizations.

As a conclusion we want to state that we took into account all EEC's comments for revisions/improvements and we have implemented all necessary revisions/improvements. Once again we would like to thank the members of the External Evaluation Committee for their very positive report.

C. Higher Education Institution academic representatives

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Signature</i>
Dr Charalambos Louca	Program Coordinator	
Dr Andreas Petasis	Program Coordinator	

Date: 9 March 2020

