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**Response to External Evaluation Report for the MA program in Political Science
(International Relations and European Politics Pathways)**

Thank you for sending the external evaluation report for the MA program in Political Science. We are appreciative of the efforts and detailed and constructive comments of the External Evaluation Committee. We are encouraged by the positive remarks and commendations of the Committee and their conclusion that an ‘already excellent program’ is in place. We have carefully considered their suggestions for improvement included in the Report. Below find our Responses and Actions to both the general and specific Recommendations of the Report:

General Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Clarifying students’ expectations – the Committee recognizes the advantages of flexibility but currently, the students perceive the system as too “professor centric” and feel that they are the ones having to establish what they can expect from each individual faculty and course. The Committee would recommend that minimal standards be clarified and clearly communicated to students, preferably in writing. It would be good for students to have a better sense of what they can and cannot expect from their professors, their courses, different forms of assessments, etc. as well as what is expected from them so that they can achieve their potential and be more adventurous in exploring the diversity of the teaching and expertise offered to them.

Action 1: In responding to this suggestion, a Departmental Handbook has now been compiled and uploaded on the Departmental website (<http://www.ucy.ac.cy/sap/el>) which provides in clear and simple language student dos and don’ts as well as all the necessary information regarding academic and non-academic support.

Recommendation 2: Helping students to improve and achieve their best – the Committee believes that more should be done to provide students with feedback and guidance on how to improve, regardless of how good they already are, and to ensure the early teaching of fundamentals such as essay writing, bibliographical presentation and basic methods. More should also be done to make support students’ progression throughout their degree, notably by offering more small-group and research-oriented teaching and the students’ third and fourth years, introducing more non-exam based assessment (essays, research papers) from the beginning of the degree, and improving guidance and support for the undergraduate dissertation.

Response: In responding to the suggestion on feedback and guidance, members of the MA teaching faculty wish to underscore, without being in any way complacent, that they consistently provide feedback to all students on their coursework on the basis of university regulations. In addition to feedback following assessment, in some courses feedback is provided on their draft research papers prior to submission through class presentations. With reference to the last point of the suggestion, we respectfully note that the MA classes are already small (below 20 students) and clearly oriented to research-led teaching. Finally, the overwhelming majority of courses at the MA level already combine mid-term exam and research paper, and we will ensure that this will remain the case.

Recommendation 3: Internationalisation – the Committee considers that there is an opportunity to significantly develop through internationalization that should not be missed given the University’s geographical, infrastructural, and strategic advantages. Given the very international nature of most courses and reading lists already, the Committee recommends that the Department considers the possibility of switching to English as the teaching language at Masters level and to significantly strengthen its Visiting Professors’ scheme if possible. This would also require an effort by the University to be more flexible on Visiting Professors’ conditions but would be well worth it, especially as such a scheme would also benefit PhD and Undergraduate Students.

Action 2: The possibility of switching to English has been discussed and will be reassessed in due course together with considering what other MA programs the Department may decide to develop in English, e.g. Peace and Conflict Studies, and whilst bearing in mind that this MA program is already quite successful in terms of recruitment. With regard to flexibility and internationalization of teaching, SPS 513 Special Issues in International Relations and SPS 515 Special Issues in European Politics, could be taught in English as intensive courses, including during the Summer Semester period, if funds are available and this would not impact on student numbers of existing courses. For this to take place, contact teaching hours will be the same as in all other MA courses and the course syllabus would have to be approved in advance by both the Program Coordinator and the Head of Department.

Recommendation 4: Continuing the existing effort to emphasise diversity and accessibility – be it through recruitment and teaching.

Response: The Department reconfirms its commitment to continue the existing effort to emphasize diversity and accessibility.

Recommendation 5: Being more pro-active in ensuring that students benefit from a personally and academically supportive and fulfilling environment – this includes provisions for pastoral support, being more pro-active in identifying cases of students facing personal, psychological, or emotional difficulties, clarifying students’ pastoral expectations and support options as well as the role of Academic Advisors and systematizing a minimum contact between them and their students regardless of academic performance.

Action 3: In order to respond to this concern, it was decided at the Departmental meeting (3/2019) that each faculty member hold a mandatory session for academic advisees in each academic year.

Recommendation 6: Clarifying the mechanisms in place where something goes wrong – the Committee acknowledges the advantages of informality and that problems are rare, but nevertheless, it is important that both staff and students be given a clear sense of what routes are available to them when something is going wrong, which does not yet seem to be clear to the students.

Action 4: The MA Handbook that has now been compiled (Action 1) also targets this concern by providing all necessary information on the routes that are available if something goes wrong.

Specific Recommendations

Recommendation 1.1: Organization of Teaching Work

The procedures on feedback and clarification of student expectations should be improved.

Response: See Action 1 and Responses above.

Recommendation 1.2: Teaching

The use of a broader range of pedagogical techniques and tools and teaching activities could be increased for more effective student learning. Model UN and Model EU are great examples of such activities already in use at the department. A broader variation in assessing learning outcomes beyond exams would enhance independent and critical thinking and research papers and essays would equip the students for writing BA- and MA-thesis. A transparent and clearer assessment schedule, highlighting the criteria and expectations for the different grades would make clear to the students how to improve and progress. In addition, there is a need for more streamlined and systematic feedback to students. More attention could be paid to the diversity of the bibliography.

Response: Assessing learning outcomes beyond exams is the norm at the MA level. The Departmental Handbook now compiled and uploaded on the Departmental website highlights criteria, expectations and progress assessment (see Actions 1, 3 and 4)

Recommendation 1.3: Teaching Personnel

The permanent faculty is engaged, enthusiastic and well qualified exceeding the academic requirements for permanent staff, and they are supported by adjuncts that are well qualified and committed. The teaching personnel and the coordinators have the necessary administrative capacity and pedagogical experience to ensure a high quality of teaching and that the students achieve the course objectives.

Response: We gladly agree.

Recommendation 2.1: Purpose, Objectives and Learning Outcomes of the Program of Study

The dissertation training could be improved and more systematic.

Action 5: The current Research Methods course (SPS 500) will be retitled Research Methods and Dissertation Writing course (SPS 500) and extended by 9 contact hours. The extra 9 hours of this revised course will provide students with dissertation training, specifically in preparing a research question/hypothesis, conducting literature review, acquaintance with referencing formats, and most significantly developing and completing the MA research proposal so that they can proceed with writing their dissertation in the next semester. This change has been approved in the Departmental meeting (3/2019).

Recommendation 2.2: Structure and Content of the Program of Study

Dissertation training should be improved and more systematic. The qualitative parts of the methods training could be developed further.

Action 6: See Action 5 for dissertation training. Furthermore, SPS 500 will be revised to further enhance qualitative methodology, specifically to address (a) content (verbal and visual) analysis and (b) observation and ethnography, as decided in Departmental meeting (3/2019).

Recommendation 2.3: Quality Assurance of the Program of Study

The quality assurance is online and measure student evaluation of the courses. The student evaluations are outstanding. There is however room to further develop the questionnaire to include questions concerning feedback and assessment schemes as well as open space for independent evaluation. There is no mentioning of teacher self-assessment and reflection on delivering of teaching.

Action 7: Members of staff can add specific questions on the student questionnaire of their course and they will be encouraged to do so. From September 2019 onwards, teaching staff will be asked to reflect on their performance and inform the Head of Department and Program Coordinator on what action, if any, they will take to rectify any concerns identified in student questionnaires. The Program Coordinator and Head of Department can also take up any specific concerns raised by students with teaching staff.

Recommendation 2.4: Management of the Program of Study

It is somewhat difficult for students to complete their degree in the default two-year period due to the late start on the dissertation. Consequently, only a minority of students complete their programme of studies in two years. It is recommended that dissertation thinking takes place earlier and that a formal dissertation training be offered to support it. The provisions for working students to still be able to study at the same time are excellent.

Action 8: In order to improve completion rates, from September 2019 onwards, MA students

will be asked to contact potential supervisors and start preparing their dissertation in the second semester. They will need to submit the completed MA Research Proposal in the third semester of their study, as this will be part of the revised Research Methods and Dissertation Writing course (SPS 500) as outline above (see Action 5).

Recommendation 3.1: Research - Teaching Synergies

The research methodology course is well developed particularly the basic quantitative part, but the qualitative research methodologies could be strengthened further as most of the students seems to have an interest in these types of research methodologies. While there is a handout given, the Department should offer a dissertation training course in addition to individual supervision. Students could be more involved in departmental research activities.

Response: See Actions 5 and 6 concerning methodology. Students at PhD level are already involved in departmental research activities, especially in internally and externally funded research projects, MA students less so.

Recommendation 4.1: Administrative Mechanisms

There is a student welfare service, but students are not aware of it, have difficulties finding it and unsure how to use it. More information and communication about this service seem to be needed. The Academic Advisor relationship is under-used and meetings should be more systematic to pro-actively detect and help resolve issues. Students are not aware of where to go in case something goes wrong and they experience a serious problem. Those routes need to be clarified to them.

Response: See Actions 1, 3 and 4.

Recommendation 4.2: Infrastructure - Support

Library provisions are excellent but access to empirical databases for students is not entirely clear. There are opportunities for teaching personnel to participate in pedagogical seminars, but the incentives to do so seem limited. The teaching part of our profession is not upgraded and not seriously considered or given equal attention in the appointment of new staff and in promotion procedures.

Action 9: The Department will explore possibilities for teacher training and development with the central University authorities. Note that it has recently become compulsory to submit a teaching portfolio for staff promotion.

Recommendation 4.3: Financial Resources

More resources could be devoted to turn adjunct staff into permanent faculty and to limit the number of students in class to make more small-group learning and student oriented learning

practices possible. Visiting professor programmes should be developed further.

Action 10: The Department has already made and will continue to make strong representations to the University authorities about the urgent need for more permanent staff to cover the teaching needs of its programs.

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