

## BA PROGRAM EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT - COMMENTS

*Blue colour: Evaluation Committee's Recommendations*

*Black colour: Departmental Board's Comments*

The members of the academic and administrative staff of the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Cyprus would like to express their gratitude to the four members of the Evaluation Committee and the Agency Officers for the whole procedure of evaluation of the undergraduate program. The meetings and the interviews with the members of the Committee have been very productive. The Committee members acknowledge in their report that the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Cyprus

*... is unique in its mission and role in the entire university and communities in Cyprus. It is playing a crucial role in promoting bicomunal understanding and peacebuilding by creating opportunities to overcome language and sociopolitical barriers. The academic and special teaching staff are setting positive role models for students of the department and promote the intercommunal dialogue and exchange. (page 9).*

Additionally, the Evaluation Committee highlights in its report the quality of the new BA program, which was made possible in 2017, underlying that:

*The committee recognizes the substantial changes made to the BA after the retirement of three members of the staff. The current BA program maintains traditional disciplines and areas of expertise in Turkish Studies such as linguistics, literature, history, and political science. The current program is improved since it provides space for innovative content and methodologies by introducing special topics classes in the list of elective courses. An emphasis on contemporary topics is particularly commendable in the current political situation in Cyprus. (page 26).*

Taking into consideration the recommendations of the Committee and the few domains of assessment that have received grades lower than 10, and in order to strengthen the Department's Program, the Board of the Department would like to comment as follows:

### **Recommendations by the Evaluation Committee and Comments by the Department**

■ *General comment: The department is doing their utmost to provide students with an ideal and inspiring learning environment. However, during the first two years the program includes introductory courses where communication between students and instructors is challenged by the use of English and Turkish instead of Greek in the classroom. To alleviate this problem the committee suggest the use of teaching assistants*

*to prepare and assist the instructor with Greek language material and to add a tutorial to ensure the learning outcome (page 8).*

■ As stated in the application, the language of instruction in the BA program is Greek with use of English and Turkish published material. The need to strengthen the use of Greek in classroom in the cases that the instructors do not have Greek as their mother tongue is an issue that the Department tries very hard to solve. Teaching assistants (in both directions) are being allocated every semester but according to the University Regulations teaching assistants are not allocated for preparing the Professors' notes. Additionally, the Professors already use teaching material in Greek. The Department will soon complete the procedure for the appointment of one lecturer and already advertised two new positions with the knowledge of Greek language as a requirement, a fact that will strengthen the use of Greek in all the years of studies.

*1.5.6 Students and teaching/academic staff reported about the online teaching evaluations that students have to fill out before they can access their final grade. The committee suggests transparency and that students evaluate their classes at the end of the teaching and not rush through the evaluation to see their final grade. For the committee it would have been useful to see a sample evaluation form. The instructors and the head of the department can get hold of the anonymous evaluations. The implementation of changes to problematic classes depends on individual teachers (page 8).*

The procedure for the online teaching evaluation on behalf of the students is centrally decided and the Department has to comply. This recommendation concerns the University. Regarding the implementation of a new procedure this is up to the University authorities. The Department will inform the University authorities and the Centre of Teaching and Learning of the University of Cyprus about this recommendation.

*1.8.3 The assessment as defined in the individual course plans sometimes do not correlate with the actual course work suggested to be completed during the semester (see language exercise classes TOM 106, 107 and 206) (page 9).*

In order to apply this recommendation, the Departmental Board decided to change the ECTS as follows: Grammar I: 11 ECTS, Grammar II: 11 ECTS, Language Exercises: 8 ECTS, Language Exercises II: 8 ECTS. After the approval of the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the University of Cyprus, the changes will be uploaded to the Department's website and applied starting from next semester.

*1.8.4. Students mentioned that some of the teaching material in introductory courses do not match their language abilities (page 9).*

The academic staff of the Department intends to take into consideration this recommendation and has already asked the staff members to increase the material given in Greek whenever this can be applied. The English published material used in the courses is necessary in order for the students to be able to study international bibliography regarding their subject of study. All the instructors have been notified to use this material in a way that will help the students to gradually become better in studying this material.

*2.3. Although a system of academic advisers is in place, students mentioned their hesitancy to make use of it because of language barriers. This means that some members of staff are more frequently contacted by students adding to their work load (page 12).*

The academic staff of the Department who does not have Greek as mother tongue, will try to have a better communication with the students. For this reason, meetings of these staff members with the students will take place during this semester.

*2.4. The committee has information about specific courses but cannot make a general assessment. However, particular concerns about the language of instruction in some of the classes in the first and second year were raised by a number of students. With regards to the coordination between grammar and language exercise a tighter coordination between the instructors is needed to improve the learning outcome. The committee supports the idea of the head of the department to import general methodological courses from other departments to the BA in Turkish (page 12).*

The need for the Language Exercises courses (TOM 106, TOM 107, TOM 206) to work in parallel with the grammar courses was discussed in the past in meetings of the Departmental Board as well. And it is for this reason that the Language Exercise classes' instructors in cooperation with the Grammar classes' instructors redesigned the content of the program. Additionally, the Board of the Department will supervise every semester the better coordination between Grammar and Language Exercises courses. The re-designed courses have the following content description:

[TUM 106] The course is offered to those students of the Department who have no previous knowledge of the Turkish language. From the point of view of methodology, content and technique, the course is linked to the course TUM 100 and TUM 101, "Grammar and Syntax I and II". It seeks to give to the students a basic vocabulary and practice in the reading, comprehension and composition of simple texts. Emphasis is placed on communication in Turkish through practice in the oral use of the language, using language labs, simple dialogues and audio-visual means.

[TUM 107] The course is a continuation of the course TUM 106, "Language Exercises I" and is offered to those students of the Department who have successfully completed the courses TUM 106, "Language Exercises I" and TUM 100, "Grammar and Syntax I". In the framework of the course and bearing in mind the needs of the course TUM 101, "Grammar and Syntax II", the enrichment of vocabulary, practice in reading and in the oral use of language, the comprehension and the composition of texts are continued. The aim of the course is intermediate level knowledge of the written and oral forms of the Turkish language. Emphasis is placed on communication in Turkish through practice in the oral use of the language, using language labs, simple dialogues and audio-visual means.

*2.5 Students mentioned that some staff does not provide sufficient feedback (page 12).*

The academic staff of the Department will discuss with the students in each course issues relating to the increase of the feedback on behalf of the staff members and more feedback will be given to the students whenever is necessary.

*2.9 The Turkish and English teaching material is at times repetitive and not updated. The professors on the committee are unable to assess the Greek teaching material and the availability of secondary literature in Greek (page 12).*

The academic staff of the Department constantly update the material used in all the courses. In certain cases some basic references works are used or suggested to the students every time the course it taught.

*2.12 The students are only provided with one session about academic writing at the beginning of their BA. This is insufficient. The committee recommends to add an entire*

*course about academic writing in order to ensure the training of students in the research process that is particular to the Turkish Studies BA (page 12).*

The Departmental Board recently decided that an academic writing course will be added in the first semester of studies. The existing introductory course 'Introduction to Turkish Studies' has been redesigned to include an academic writing component, and its implementation will start in September 2019. The new course title is *Introduction to Turkish Studies and Academic Writing*. After the approval of the revised content and course title by the Undergraduate Studies Committee the new course will be uploaded to the website of the Department. The new content of the course is as follows:

[TOM 120] The course aims to familiarise students with the spectrum of Turkish Studies including historical, literary and religious topics and the historical development of the discipline. Participants will become acquainted with research tools such as encyclopaedias, manuals, scholarly journals and bibliographies and the major centres of Turkish Studies. Additionally, the course aims to prepare the students for academic writing by introducing to them the techniques of writing an academic essay, making references, preparing bibliography etc.

*3.1 Since the retirement of three members of academic staff the department has been understaffed. The financial crisis meant that the positions were not readvertised until only recently. The prospect of adding three new members to the department will alleviate the work load for the current members of staff. According to the information provided to the committee, scholars are being hired in the adequate fields of expertise needed to fill the gaps (page 14).*

Three new positions have been allocated to the Department. One of these positions (Contemporary History of Turkey) will be filled with a lecturer before the end of this semester and the new colleague will join the Department in September. The other two new positions (Turkish Literature/Turkish Linguistics) have been advertised and the procedure will be completed in late 2019. It is expected that by the end of the calendar year the staff of the Department will be increased with three new colleagues in the required fields. The advertised positions require the knowledge of the Greek language a fact that will have only positive effects in issues highlighted above.

*3.4. Visiting professors are carefully chosen according to the needs of the curriculum. (page 14).*

Visiting scholars are chosen by the Departmental Board according to the needs of the Program. All the Visiting Professors in the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies (1992-today) are listed in the website of the Department. The Department would like to express its gratitude to the University authorities for maintaining the institution of Visiting Scholar, an institution with very positive results for the Program and for the students as well.

*3.5. One member of the special teaching staff does not have a doctorate but the adequate specialization required to offer students cultural and language expertise. (page 14).*

The doctorate is not a requirement for the Special Teaching Staff. However, the University of Cyprus encourages and funds the instructors under the status of Special Teaching Staff to do research in their field, participate in relevant seminars related to their teaching, etc. Regarding the specific member of the Staff and because of her specialization, she offers compulsory and restricted elective courses in Turkish Literature and Turkish Cypriot Literature.

*3.14 The feedback process is in place but the implementation of any improvement is dependent on the individual instructor. (page 14).*

The individual instructors take into serious consideration all remarks/suggestions made by the students in their evaluations and implement the necessary improvements. Additionally, the Chair of the Department has the right to see all the evaluations and, whenever a problem arises, the Board of the Department makes suggestions for improvement. This practice has many positive results since it allows the Department to spot all the necessary gaps and implement improvements whenever this is necessary.

*4.3. The evaluation mechanism in place seems to be ineffective from the point of view of students. In the case of insufficient command of the Greek language of staff teaching introductory courses the committee strongly recommends to hire teaching assistants (e.g. PhD students of the department) to support the staff and students and to improve the learning outcome.*

The language of instruction in the Program is Greek and the knowledge of Greek is required in all the courses, and not just the introductory, in order to have a good learning outcome. This problem is expected to be gradually solved with the appointment of three Greek speaking colleagues before the end of this year. Additionally, it needs to be pointed out that, although the University steadily allocates to the Department teaching assistants in both directions of the Program, the University Law makes specific provisions relating to their duties. The employment of other persons to support the staff that does not have Greek as their mother tongue is not compatible with the University of Cyprus Law.

*4.4 Other Turkish Studies programs require extensive time in Turkey. However, the Erasmus exchange program set up by the Turkish Department of the University of Cyprus is very good because of connections to highly regarded universities in Turkey and elsewhere (page 17).*

Notably, the Department has signed Erasmus agreements with three universities in Turkey and steadily encourages students to participate in the Erasmus Program. The Department keeps trying to increase its Erasmus agreements with universities in Turkey (private universities) because due to the political situation the state universities do not sign agreements with the University of Cyprus. The Erasmus coordinator of the Department has already asked for more Erasmus positions in the universities that we have signed agreements with and he already asked from other universities in Turkey to sign Erasmus agreements with the Department. Additionally, the Department, on a yearly basis, partially funds Summer Language classes in Turkey for its students.

*4.5 There is an infrastructure in place to ensure the welfare of students. However, students of the Turkish Department seem not to be aware of the existing support system. The committee suggests to inform their students about these opportunities (page 17).*

The Department (administrative and academic staff) and the University services as well, inform the students about the student's welfare and support services on a regular basis. This will continue to be done in an effective way but it's the student's responsibility to seek guidance from the Department staff when they face a problem. Additionally, all the students are informed about all the services provided by the Department and the welfare services of the University.

*4.6 Although a system of academic advisors is in place, students mentioned their hesitancy to make use of it because of language barriers (page 17).*

Again, this problem will be solved with the appointment of three Greek speaking members of academic staff and with the effort undertaken by the members of staff who do not have

Greek as their mother tongue to have a better communication with the students in their capacity as Academic Advisors.

### **Strengths:**

■ *The committee recognizes the substantial changes made to the BA after the retirement of three members of the staff. The current BA program maintains traditional disciplines and areas of expertise in Turkish Studies such as linguistics, literature, history, and political science. The current program is improved since it provides space for innovative content and methodologies by introducing special topics classes in the list of elective courses (e.g. Karamanlidika; Kurds in the Middle East; Bilingualism and Language Contacts; Armenians under Turkish Rule). An emphasis on contemporary topics is particularly commendable in the current political situation in Cyprus. This department is unique in its mission and role in the entire university and communities in Cyprus. It is playing a crucial role in promoting bicomunal understanding and peacebuilding by creating opportunities to overcome language and sociopolitical barriers. The academic and special teaching staff are setting positive role models for students of the department and promote the intercommunal dialogue and exchange (page 26).*

The members of the academic and administrative staff of the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Cyprus would like to express their gratitude to the four members of the Evaluation Committee for highlighting the quality of the BA program and their positive remarks regarding the Department, its operation and its mission.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

■ *Recognizing the strengths and the central role of the department, the committee makes the following recommendations for future consideration: To expand the interdisciplinary reach of the department the committee recommends to add a sociologist to the academic staff. Adding a scholar with expertise in social transformations, the changing ethnoreligious makeup of societies, and the relationship between state policies and social change will only enhance the interdisciplinary horizon for students of the department (page 26).* ■ *Underrepresented in the current curriculum are Gender Studies. Although some staff might add gender studies aspects to their individual courses it is not yet an elementary part of the curriculum. Topics courses could be introduced to highlight the interrelationship between gender and nation-state, the history of women's and queer movements, or the state control of reproduction (page 26).*

■ The Department is currently trying to reach a balance of academic staff in the existing disciplines/directions as required by the BA program of studies (History, Politics, Literature, and Linguistics). Additionally it must be noted that topics on Sociology, Gender Studies, History of Women, Queer Movements are already part of existing courses in the BA Program while very often the Department invites Visiting Scholars who are specialists in the above fields and they teach relevant courses. Furthermore, interested students select courses (as free electives) on Sociology, Gender Studies and other disciplines offered by other Departments of the University of Cyprus. The relevant suggestions by the Evaluation Committee will be taken into consideration when the University will give new positions to the Department.

■ *The committee recognizes long lasting tensions between members of the staff. The committee suggests that the university implements a structure that allows for conflicts to be resolved with the support of a neutral ombudsperson at the University of Cyprus who treats any issues confidentially. The resolution of tensions and issues would further improve the learning atmosphere (page 27).*

■ In order for any issue to be solved in the aim of further improving the learning atmosphere, this issue needs first to be mentioned to the Board (such an issue has not been mentioned to the Board or the University authorities before). Additionally, it must be mentioned that the University of Cyprus is planning to operate an internal *ombudsman office* in order to solve any issues among staff members. Until then, the Departmental Board will ask the members of the staff who would like to report any tensions and issues to do so.

■ Regarding academic promotion there is a lack of transparency that needs to be addressed (page 27).

■ This is an issue that concerns the authorities of the University and not the Department. The Department will forward this recommendation to the central authorities of the University.

■ *The central administration of the university has not yet implemented an equal opportunity commission that enforces laws against work place discrimination during hiring processes (page 27).*

■ This is an issue that concerns the authorities of the University and not the Department. The Department will forward this recommendation to the central authorities of the University.

■ *The committee encourages teaching staff to make use of the language lab and the use of tutorials (page 27).*

■ The Department has already applied the tutorials in language teaching (3 hours per week) and the Departmental Board noted the positive results in previous meetings. Regarding the language labs the Language Exercises instructors included the use of the labs in the new content of the specific courses (see 2.4).

■ *The six students were not elected by students as representatives but were asked by staff to join the evaluation. In order to gain more transparency, it is suggested that next time elected members of the student body join the evaluation process (page 27).*

■ There are two students' representatives in the Departmental Board. Because of the different directions of the BA program of studies (linguistic/literature and history/politics) the Department – after the approval of the central authorities – and in order for the Evaluation Committee members to have a more comprehensive information regarding the BA program in the Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies, six students from all the directions and all the years of study (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>) were invited to participate in the evaluation procedure.

■ *The committee emphasizes that the international profile of the academic and teaching staff is a crucial asset of the department and contributes to the international reputation and visibility of the department. The international and bicultural profile should be fostered while finding ways of providing instruction in Greek in the first two years of the study program (page 27).*

■ The Departmental Board expresses its satisfaction for the acknowledgement on behalf of the Committee members that *the academic and teaching staff is a crucial asset of the department and contributes to the international reputation and visibility of the department* and underlines that the efforts for improvement are continuous. In relation with instruction in Greek see comment in page 2.