

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION'S RESPONSE FOR EVALUATION - ACCREDITATION OF A PROGRAM OF STUDY

- **Higher education institution:**
University of Cyprus
- **Department of Higher education institution:**
Department of Biological Sciences
- **Town:** Nicosia
- **Program of study**
In Greek:
Πτυχίο Βιολογικών Επιστήμων, 240 ECTS, Τετραετές Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών
In English:
Bachelor Degree in Biological Sciences, 240 ECTS, Four-Year Program
- **Language of instruction:** GREEK
- **Program's status:**
Currently operating

1. EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING WORK – AVAILABLE RESOURCES

We are glad that the External Evaluation Committee (EEC) agrees with our assessment of the Department's program of study. As the EEC has pointed out, our undergraduate program is principally organized around the expertise of existing permanent teaching faculty. Regarding the involvement of special teaching staff in certain courses, we note that our Department has not yet reached its full capacity in terms of Teaching and Research Faculty. We expect that with future hiring's, our Department will have in-house experts to cover all the required disciplines and further enrich the program of study. We strive to maintain a diverse and high-level of classroom and practical training for all of our programs of study, including the undergraduate program. Currently, there is an open call for a tenure-track academic position at the rank of Lecturer or Assistant Professor, who will cover the gap created by the retirement of one of our existing Teaching and Research Faculty.

Future hirings would eliminate the need for temporary employment of special teaching staff to cover existing needs for courses such as neuroscience, botany and animal physiology. However, it is unlikely that the Department will reach its full Teaching and Research Faculty capacity or even increase significantly in size in the following years due to the existing limitations in building infrastructure. While the University is committed to constructing a new building to house our Department, as of today, we have not yet received an official estimate as to approximately when the construction will commence or be completed.

Despite the limitations in building infrastructure, courses such as botany and animal physiology will continue to be taught by highly qualified experts employed as temporary teaching personnel until our Department has both the necessary infrastructure and allocated government-funded budget to employ permanent personnel with the expertise in these disciplines.

2. PROGRAM OF STUDY AND HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

The EEC has captured the purpose of our undergraduate program of study quite effectively. It was designed to provide students with a broad background in the biological sciences and provide them with the necessary hands-on laboratory training to facilitate their entry into graduate programs of study or the employment sector.

The program is managed primarily by the Department's undergraduate studies committee, which consists of three faculty members in collaboration with the Chairperson of the Department. Any curriculum changes to the program must also be discussed and approved by the Departmental Council followed by the approval of central administration of the University of Cyprus.

As stated in our application, we consider that the administrative and technical support teams of the Department are understaffed. Although we agree with the assessment of the EEC that processes in the Department run smoothly, we consider that the number of administrative and technical personnel in the Department is limited. Nevertheless, the existing staff is consistently handling tasks which far exceed their official duties. The workload of the undergraduate program is primarily handled by one of the two Secretaries, the University Officer (Laboratory Officer) and the Laboratory Technician who are also involved in all 6 programs of study and handle other administrative tasks. In addition to the above and considering that our undergraduate program is tentatively growing the Dept. will require additional technical and administrative staff.

To further enhance the hands-on training of our undergraduate students, our program currently has the following two courses. The first course "**Internship in Biology**" is a departmental elective course that allows our students to join one of the Departmental research labs in order to obtain additional research experience. The second course, "**Student placement in other institutions**", is an optional course, which is currently in the process of being approved and will give our students the opportunity to experience and connect with the labor market.

To further assist our students in connecting with potential future employers, starting in Fall 2019, the Department through its council is committed to regularly organize and host an event so that students will have the opportunity to learn more about potential future employers and to meet with their representatives. Our students also have the opportunity to get exposure to the labor market through the annual Career Fair organized by the central administrative services of the University of Cyprus, usually organised in the spring.

3. RESEARCH WORK AND SYNERGIES WITH TEACHING

As the EEC points out the synergy of research and teaching is an inextricable and essential part of our undergraduate program of study. Our Teaching and Research Faculty combine their research work with teaching which allows us to boost our limited teaching supplies budget through our research activities, which are well funded through competitive local and international grants. Additionally, we consider that research experience as indispensable part of student training for all our programs of study.

4. ADMINISTRATION SERVICES, STUDENT WELFARE AND SUPPORT OF TEACHING WORK

As stated in our application, we consider that the administrative and technical support teams of the Department require further personnel, as existing staff (2 Secretaries, 1 Accounting Office Assistant, 1 University Laboratory Officer, 1 Laboratory Technician and 1 Information Systems Assistant) cope marginally with the diverse and extensive demands of our six programs of study as well as the administrative and academic processes of the Department and the University in general. Due to the limited number of personnel the existing staff, most of whom hold higher degrees than required for their employment status, is regularly assigned task and responsibilities well beyond their official duties. The workload of the undergraduate program is primarily handled by one of the two Secretaries, the University Officer (Laboratory Officer) and the Laboratory Technician who also hold other administrative duties and support administrative and academic processes for the other five postgraduate programs of study. Thus, it is evident that, in the long run, our undergraduate program will require additional staff, mainly in the position of Secretary and Laboratory Technician. With regards to the needs of the Department, we consider that the central administration of the University is adequately staffed.

Regarding the infrastructure of the University, in recent years, great efforts have been made to develop the new University campus in order to fulfil current and future needs of the University. Despite these efforts, the construction of the building that will house our Department has been significantly delayed and as indicated by the EEC, this limits the ability of the Department to provide sufficient space for research and laboratory teaching. While the University is committed to constructing a new building to house our Department, as of today, we have not yet received an official estimate as to approximately when the construction will commence or be completed. In reference to residence/dormitory beds, we agree with the EEC that the current infrastructure is insufficient, however, with the completion of the University Campus the number of residence/dormitory beds will increase significantly.

As the EEC points out, the budget allocated to teaching consumables is indeed limited. The shortage stems from the limited government funds our Department receives for consumables. These funds are allocated for the support of undergraduate practical courses, undergraduate research thesis projects and graduate level research training. Based on the EEC's recommendation, we will intensify our efforts to receive additional funds for undergraduate practical courses and research training.

5. DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS

N/A

6. DOCTORAL PROGRAMS OF STUDY

N/A



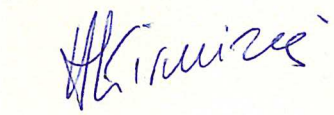
COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT TO THE CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Since its establishment in 2002, the growth and development of the Department of Biological Sciences have been remarkable. The Department now boasts a broad range of research areas, the highest concentration of state-of-the-art research infrastructure and the largest selection of academic programs in the biological sciences in Cyprus. Qualitative indicators such as competitive external research funding, high-impact publications, and international collaborations, attest to the continuous and diligent efforts of the Department to produce and disseminate knowledge, based on good international practices of research and scholarship. Our programs of study, including the undergraduate program are designed to provide students with high quality academic and research skills.

This exponential academic growth of the Department, however, is not matched by its expansion in building infrastructure. Teaching, office and laboratory space is sparse and prohibits the employment of additional Teaching and Research Faculty, which would add to the disciplines of expertise of current faculty and limit or eliminate the need of temporary teaching staff. The considerable delays in the construction of the new building impose hurdles in the growth and development of the Department and in extent similarly affect further development of our programs of study. The current unofficial estimate for the completion of the new building stands at more than 3 years without that deadline being solidified, since construction has not yet started.

With regard to the minimum number of students required per elective course, our Department agrees with the EEC's recommendation that the University *"...should reduce the minimum number of students per elective course to 5-7, that is proportional to the number of students in this program."* Our Department has requested the University's central administration to consider a decrease in the minimum number of students per elective course. Should the minimum number of students per elective course is indeed reduced to 5-7, there will be no need for further actions. The additional recommendations of the EEC on pre-registration and inter-departmental courses are nevertheless under consideration. Pre-registration by the students for departmental elective courses would allow for better planning and prediction of the size of the audience, but since the students are not committed officially to their courses till after the semester begins, the effectiveness of this measure is uncertain. Likewise, establishing inter-departmental courses with the department of medicine, and potentially other departments would be helpful, but the courses of the medical school are yearly and modular, and thus not compatible with ours. Inter-departmental courses offered by our department to both our students and students of the computational, chemistry and physics department would also be helpful, but background knowledge inequality should be carefully considered. Per EEC's advice one possibility would be to create interdisciplinary lab courses in the fields of computational and chemical biology and biophysics. This would indeed increase the choice for students from different departments of our relatively small university and help them enroll into courses of broader interest.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ACADEMIC REPRESENTATIVES

Name	Position	Signature
Assoc. Prof. Pantelis Georgiades	Department <i>Chairperson</i>	
Assist. Prof. Yiorgos Apidianakis	Undergraduate Studies Committee - <i>Coordinator</i>	
Assoc. Prof. Antonis Kirmizis	Undergraduate Studies Committee - <i>Member</i>	

Date:4/06/2019.....