

UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND VETERINARY MEDICINE EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT 2019

Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Cluj-Napoca (USAMV) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 15 May and Friday 17 May 2019. In this process as a foreign evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of USAMV focusing on the main points of continuous improvement of quality and future development aspects. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of USAMV. During my stay in Cluj-Napoca with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to insight all the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and collect every useful and important information about the university. According to my earlier experiences 5 year ago, I have had the possibility to overview and examine the past, present and future development aspects and challenges of the institution.

Background

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca is the successor of an agricultural school founded in October 1869, under the name of Institute of Agronomic Studies, Cluj-Manastur. The USAMV with its long history and old traditions has a significant role in the Romanian higher education. The institution developed continuously over the years, through time and changing socio-economic systems, under changing names, has been broadening educational programs, restructuring processes, forming new faculties, diversifying the profiles and the specializations, and permanently modernizing the agriculture and later the veterinary medicine education. In 1995, the institution received its current name.

The University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca is a public higher education institution, with legal personality and has its own patrimony. This academic research and educational institution promotes excellence in the education and research with a wide spectrum of specialties in the field of agriculture, horticulture, animal science, biotechnologies, veterinary medicine and food science and technology. The institution celebrates the 150th anniversary of its founding in this year.

As one of the leader universities in Romanian higher education this institution always has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills and competencies at high standards. The tradition, the experience, the prestige and the competences of USAMV show the importance of the institution in the internal and international environment and support and develop scientific research activities both national and international level. The institution also meets the cultural, social and economic needs of the community.

Mission and objectives

The university has the mission of carrying on specific higher education activities in agricultural and agriculture related fields, having the purpose of training highly-skilled specialists, developing and improving professional competences, improving the education process and scientific research with permanent cooperation with local, national, European and international institutions and organizations.

According to the self-evaluation report of the USAMV the strategic objectives focusing on the maintenance of the present favorable position and provide future development. The present state of the university shows that the institution has a good chance to maintain this position in Romanian higher education and scientific research in the country and abroad as well. The Charter of USAMV provides the guidelines regarding the structure, strategy, and principles of functioning and development of the University and regulates its activities. The Charter provisions have been harmonized with both the Romanian legislation and the principles of the European Space of Higher Education. The USAVM Cluj-Napoca Charter was updated in this year.

The strategic plan of USAMV for 2016-2020 period is focusing on promoting excellence in the fields of education that meet the needs of the students and market demands on the basis of national and international standards and perspective. To implement this the university provides the human resource necessary for professional education. The University permanently improves its student-centered educational environment. The main strategic objectives are set in the annual Operational Planning at university and faculty level. The Strategic Plan and the Operational Plans are published on the university site. Operations of the institution rely on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of the different types of programs, teaching staff and other personnel of the university. According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of USAMV Cluj-Napoca have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the five faculties of the university, the departments, centers and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization.

Management Activity and Institutional Structures

USAVM management structures and their hierarchy are outlined in the University Organizational Chart, as well as the Academic Functioning and Organization Regulation. The University Senate (35 members) represents an academic community (75% teaching and research staff, 26 members) and students (9 members, 25%). All members of the University Senate are elected by universal, direct and secret vote, from the teaching staff, researchers and students. The responsibilities of the Senate and the members of the Senate are determined by the Rules of Organization and Functioning of the Senate. The University Senate mandate is 4 years. The Senate has 6 specialized committees, headed by Vice-Presidents (Education, Human Resources and Quality Assurance Commission; Research, Innovation and Technology Transfer Commission; Administrative, Human Resource and Financial Management Committee; Social and Student Activities Commission; The International Relations and Institutional Strategy Commission; Charter, Regulations, Ethics and Incompatibilities Commission).

The university has 5 faculties (Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Horticulture, Faculty of Animal Breeding and Biotechnologies, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Food Science and Technology) and offering educational programs at BA, MA and doctoral level wide range of study programs for students.

The university also has professional departments and centers (Department for Teaching Staff Training; Department for Distance and Part-time Learning; Center for Student Practice Organization; Center for Career Counselling and Orientation; Center for Technology Transfer; Bureau for International Relations and Community Programs, Image and Public Relations Bureau, Project Management Bureau; Quality Assurance Department; USAVM Library; Educational Experimental Station). These organizational units show clearly the present preferences and main priorities of the university.

The University also has a restaurant, a student club, and student accommodation dormitories. USAVM has an electronic system for academic management that covers all areas of the educational process. The university has its own website, which is periodically updated, and all public information can be found on the site.

According to the self-evaluation report and my field experiences, USAVM Cluj-Napoca is among the best universities of Romania. The different types of rankings and results also demonstrate the high prestige of the university on the field of education, research and infrastructure. In the earlier years the university had an initiative in Viterbo, Italy where offered educational programs to the local Romanian communities but later this initiative ceased.

According to the data of the self-evaluation report of the institution from 2014, in the 2013-2014 academic year, there were 5.961 students and course participants enrolled in all study programs and all types of learning (compared to 6.207 in 2011-2012 and 6.081 in 2012-2013). The university has 5427 students in this schoolyear. 77% of them are learning on Bachelor programs, 17% on Master study programs and 5% are doctoral students. It is remarkable that almost 10% of them are foreign students, most of them (96%) are attending Bachelor programs and only a small number of them are participating in Master, or PhD programs. The most popular educational program among

foreign students is the Veterinary Medicine Bachelor program, although there are some foreign students on other Bachelor program as well. According to the total number of students, the greatest number of them are learning at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (1.424) and the Faculty of Horticulture (1.402). Although the state financed places are dominant, certain part of the students are paying taxes for their studies.

It is important to point out that the total number of students is decreasing and there is 14% drop in the last 8 years. Parallel with these processes the students of the English and French language educational programs are growing from year to year. These changes could have several reasons like certain effects of demographic changes, decreasing interest, worsening financial background of potential students, changing role of higher education, educational programs of other universities in the same fields. Lower number of students certainly could not be a challenge, as long as the financial background is stable and long-term financial sustainability of the institution is not in danger. This slow change could be an important sign for the leaders of the university to deal with these challenges and make efforts to stabilize or grow the present number of students.

Teaching staff

Since 2014 the number of the educational staff has risen a bit (from 270 in the 2013/2014 schoolyear to 291 in the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year, although during the first semester of the university year, according to the report of the institution, 4 teachers retired). The earlier better age structure of the staff has changed in the last five years, there is a relatively great number of professors which is certainly good from the point of the academic and scientific performance, but the number of assistant teachers is relatively low. Although the present situation is maintainable, in the next years the university should pay attention to the age structure keeping in mind that in a long run, younger generations would continue the work of the older generation. According to the self-evaluation report and my personal experiences, the teaching staff of USAMV has proper competencies, qualifications and academic degrees which results

a good level of performance in education and research processes. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that the language skills of the staff are good which is certainly necessary if the internationalization remains one of the important focuses of the institution. The teaching staff from USAMV enjoys a large national and international recognition and appreciation, which also results their presence in specialized bodies and committees in the country and abroad. Parallel with the number of tenured teaching staff (291), during the 2018-2019 academic year, for the bachelor and the master educational programs within USAVM, 616 teaching positions were stipulated. For those teaching positions covered by associated teaching staff not in higher education or employed by other higher education institutions.

Material resources

The campus of USAVM is at Calea Mănăştur 3-5, Cluj-Napoca, in a very beautiful, carefully maintained green environment. The majorities of the existing buildings were built during the last century. Amphitheatres, classrooms, rooms for practical courses, seminars and laboratories are well suited for the educational and teaching process. During the last years, there has been a permanent investment in infrastructure and material assets in USAVM Cluj-Napoca, to permanently modernize the teaching spaces and build new spaces. The existing equipment and the facilities are in accordance with the technical standards of functioning. These facilities meet the needs of the students and perfect for the scientific research activities of the academic staff.

USAVM Cluj-Napoca also has practice facilities for teaching and practice for students in Jucu (vegetable farm), Cojocna (vegetable and animal farm), Hoia (animal farm) and a Horticultural Research Station. In these farms students can have real knowledge and practice experiences and there is also a market on the campus where among other products some products of these farms are sold. The beautiful green campus, the botanic garden, the aquarium and the museums of the university are available for the entire community. The sport facilities were renovated in 2017 and also meet the needs of the students and teachers as well.

The Information Technology Center (ITC) ensures the mechanisms for implementing and developing ICT technologies in USAVM Cluj-Napoca, in order to increase management efficiency for the academic process. The USAVM Cluj-Napoca computer network includes 620 PCs and 8 informatics student laboratories. As such, the whole IT infrastructure of the university is managed by this center.

The Library of USAVM Cluj-Napoca offers significant study and relaxation areas, depositories for books and periodicals, and offices for library staff. The Library on 6 levels and over 5,000 square meters is providing services to the highest standards for the 5000 users with over 175.000 volumes.

On the whole, the university meets the demands of European standards, but it is important to invest permanently to maintain and develop this infrastructure.

Financial activity

As an institution with a nonprofit character, the university is establishing funds for activity from the annual state finance, school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university the financial activities, incomes and expenses of USAMV are well-balanced. Universities have to find the ways to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance their activities in a reasonable level and quality. According to that fact that research activity is very intensive at USAMV that would be good to have more connections with the business sector to generate resources and make extra budget incomes.

According to the received information, it is important to maintain the present average number of students in the future which is certainly 'enough' to make the system sustainable. It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The good reputation of USAMV attracts lot of potential students and the

university also has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies. There is also a financial assistance for students as they could apply for scholarships and other forms of financial supports.

Students

The university has 5427 students in this schoolyear. The university, beside the offered educational programs continuously improves its educational environment, for students. USAVM Cluj-Napoca offers equal chances to all candidates, regardless of their environment, race, sex or religious option. The university provides the students with social problems or disabled students with equal chances for studying and even study support to complete their education. Alongside the Romanian, Moldavian and Roma students, there are also foreign students enrolled at USAVM Cluj-Napoca, for the two lines of study, in English and French. The university also has 2 doctoral schools.

The Center for Career Counseling and Orientation (COCC) is part of the USAVM structure and functions according to its own regulations. Its mission is to counsel and guide students and graduates in order to efficiently integrate the labor market, as well as to develop their abilities for career planning. The university has 5 student dormitories with a total capacity of 1.744 beds (in 2014: 1.250 beds). Also, the USAVM Cluj-Napoca has a Student restaurant with 100 seats, a Pub and a Club as well. Students also benefit from sport facilities offered by the university as well. In 2017 a Dental Office and a General Medicine Offices for students opened in partnership with the Cluj-Napoca City Hall.

Students from 2002 also have a scientific symposium every year. The best papers for each section are awarded prizes. The Faculty of Food Science and Technology organizes the Food Festival, where students present, the results obtained for their graduation theses. The Faculty of Agriculture organizes the Student exhibition-Traditional products. Students of the university take part in the annual contest "Agronomiada", as well as in other sports contests with significant results. Students may join the USAVM Cluj-Napoca folklore ensemble "Tradiții", known for the quality of their

performance in Cluj as well as in other cities in the country and abroad. The USAVM Cluj-Napoca students are organized in student associations and the university also has an Alumni Association. Students participate in the work of the faculties and the Senate of the university. It is important to point out that students of the USAMV – beside the university farms and local agribusiness actors - have several other possibilities for field work and practice abroad.

Scientific Research

USAMV plays a very important role in scientific research and the importance of research activities seems to be very significant in the university. In USAMV, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources, projects and funds have become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities.

The research centers and research laboratories help this process and have significant capacity to design/develop products with innovative technologies for the business environment.

For national and international visibility and recognition of the scientific, educational performance, higher education institutions have to develop connections with their academic and social-economic environment. In case of USAMV these connections seem to be in a good level. The university also promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intensive collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities and state institutions as well. USAVM Cluj-Napoca and staff members are members and participate in the operation of many prestigious international organizations.

USAVM Cluj-Napoca is signatory of the Erasmus charter and has concluded 71 bilateral Erasmus agreements with higher education institutions of 14 countries. The university also hosts various teachers and scientists of foreign universities, who participate in

scientific events, organized by USAVM Cluj-Napoca or are invited to hold lectures at the university.

Currently, the research infrastructure of USAVM Cluj-Napoca comprises: 45 research laboratories and 2 research institutes – the Life Science Institute and the Advanced Horticultural Research Institute of Transylvania. The Life Science Institute was inaugurated in 2011 as the first institute of this type in the country. The institute is located in a 4 storey building and occupies a 7.500 m² surface. The Institute accommodates the only knowledge-based biotechnology platform in Romania, while the 45 laboratories of the Institute benefit from the latest equipment, thus creating the best conditions for the members of the educational staff and the PhD students who work in the institute.

Scientific research is reported annually, and analyses are conducted periodically to improve scientific work. In order to encourage teachers and researchers from USAMV Cluj to publish the results of their research activity in ISI-rated journals, starting with 2017, the Executive Board and the Senate decided to provide financial support for Q1 and Q2 journals.

Despite the more significant financial restraints in the last years, the university management has provided support for the participation of the members of the educational staff and researchers in important scientific events (conventions, conferences, symposiums, scientific sessions, etc.), in the country and abroad, as this activity is viewed as a highly important means of communication in the academic and research world for the results of research activities carried out by the university staff.

The Academic Press Publishing House founded in 2001, is currently equipped with the latest digital equipment. Communication and public relations office was founded in 2007. This office is responsible for the presentation of the USAVM Cluj-Napoca, and manages its relations with the media, various other organizations, institutions and economic actors. The Communication and Public Relation Office creates and maintains positive

internal and external public image, which is more and more important, even in higher education. 15 scientific journals are published under the university aegis.

International Relations

The university has 181 active international agreements (including Erasmus+) with 53 countries, from all around the world. USAMV is also an active member of the University Agency of the Francophonie for Central and Eastern Europe (AUF ECO). According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, in 2012, AUF ECO supported the opening of the USAMV Cluj Napoca Academic Success Center, aiming to increase interest in French language specialties, increase the number of Francophone students, improve communication skills in French for students and teachers, as well and the promotion of modern learning methods.

Students (and as well as the staff) can take part in the Erasmus mobility programs. Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these connections permanently and increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities parallel with making efforts to increase the number of incoming students.

The public information can be found on the USAMV site, which has appropriate information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian and English language.

Quality Assurance

USAVM Cluj-Napoca develops a quality assurance system for education and research and incentives for human resources in their fields of study, according to such principles as transparency and compatibility. An institutional quality management system is regulated and functions within USAVM. the main objective is the implementation of a quality evaluation and assurance system based on policies, an organizational structure

and documentation able to permit monitoring and evaluating, prevention and adjusting interventions and the continuous quality increase.

In 2008, the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) has been founded. In the 2010-2016 period the university received its ISO 2001:2009 certification, while the ISO 2001:2015 was received in 2017. The mission of the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) is to support the university's management in establishing educational quality assurance policies, through specific actions, to ensure a background for quality evaluation and constant improvement, integrated in the Quality Assurance System.

Although the present quality assurance system of the institution operates quite well, the evolution and development of the organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus. The institution permanently has to face with economic, social and environmental challenges, so there is a continuous adaptation pressure for quality assurance processes to adjust to the changes.

Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. In the last 150 years USAVM Cluj-Napoca has developed as good academic institution, both at regional, national and international level. I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- Although the present situation, role and reputation of USAMV are good, the university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial stability, changing needs of the potential students, etc.);
- USAMV should permanently investment in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow;

- According to the success of the foreign language (English, French) education programs it is also recommended to start foreign language education programs on other fields;
- The university has to concentrate on diversification and further development (developing new education programs reflecting for the sustainability challenges of humankind, e-learning programs, focusing on other new potential target groups, etc.), parallel with managing its resources to keep the present system work;
- The university has to increase the number of students on Master Study programs, and increase the number of foreign students in other educational programs as well;
- The university should cooperate permanently with higher education and research institutions of other countries and with business actors for further strengthening of the present, favorable international recognition and competitiveness.

Finally I would like to thank to the Rector, the university staff and the evaluation team for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Cluj-Napoca. At last but not least I would like to thank to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

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Iván Zádori PhD
Associate Professor
University of Pécs
Hungary

