

**UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND
VETERINARY MEDICINE
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT
2014**



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 11 June and Friday 13 June 2014. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of USAMV focusing on the main points of continuous improvement of quality and future development aspects, with outlining the present and future challenges of the university. 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 of the evaluation process and collect information about the operation of the USAMV. My report is roughly following the structure of the self evaluation report 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. Earlier traditions show the importance of agriculture related education in this region: in the second half of the 16th century Jesuit monks settled in the city, and they – similar to other religious orders in that time – brought and taught agriculture methods and elements in Cluj. Some of these monks used to live at the present location of the university campus (the ruins of their church has been built to a new, representative house of the university).

The USAMV with its long history and old traditions has a significant role in Transylvania and Romania. The institution evolved 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. From 1995, the institution received its current name "THE UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND VETERINARY MEDICINE CLUJ-NAPOCA".

As one of the leader universities in Romanian higher education on the field of agriculture and veterinary medicine this institution always has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills and competencies at a high standards. UASVM Cluj-Napoca is an academic and advanced research educational unit, which promotes excellence in the educational and research process and offers a wide spectrum of education programs on the field of agriculture, horticulture, animal science, biotechnologies, veterinary medicine and food science and technology. The tradition, the experience, the prestige and the competences of USAMV Cluj-Napoca show the importance of the institution in the internal and international environment and also support and develop scientific research activities both national and international level. On the whole the institution meets the cultural, social and economic needs of the community.

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 as well as abroad.

Leadership, managerial structures

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. The operation 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. The university permanently promotes excellence in education, research and innovation on the field of agronomy, horticulture, forestry, animal science, veterinary medicine, biotechnologies, biology, food product engineering, environment engineering, engineering management, chemical engineering and geodesic engineering. Assuring quality is an important focus of the university as well as the transparency, compatibility and convertibility in educational and education-related processes.

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 in the above mentioned fields, improving constantly the education process and scientific research with permanent cooperation with similar institutions, as well as with institutions from the local, national, European and international level.

Educational programs, teaching staff

The university has 5 faculties (Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Horticulture, Faculty of Animal Science and Biotechnologies, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Food Science and Technology) and offering educational programs at BA, MA and doctoral level. The university has a wide variety of study programs on the earlier mentioned fields. According to the self-evaluation report, in 2011 UASVM Cluj-Napoca was among the 12 universities of "advanced research and education." The main study programs of the university (Agronomy, Horticulture, Forestry, Forest Engineering, Animal Science, Biotechnology, Food Science and Technology and Veterinary Medicine) also were in category A in the national hierarchy of the study programs performed by the MEN (Ministry of National Education) in 2011. With the study programs and research contracts the university is a regional leader of academic education and research.

According to the data of the report, in 2008, UASVM Cluj-Napoca held 9th place regarding IC quality indexes among the 49 state universities in Romania. The university also held 1st place in 2007 and 4th place in 2008 regarding the research index (number of contracts and value per educational staff), and in 2011, at the national evaluation, it held 5th place. These rankings and results also demonstrate the high prestige of the university on the field of education, research, investments in infrastructure and equipment.

Department for Distance Learning and Part-time Courses has been functioning since the academic year 2000-2001. Distance learning offers learning programs based on using specific resources for a computerized education, communication systems, self-teaching and self-evaluation programs, as well as a tutorial system. Part-time education offers learning programs with compact training periods and periodic meetings with the students. Students opting for distance learning or part time education have assistance and counselling from the tutors, and receive specific learning resources.

The Experimental Didactic Resort functions within the University and has four farms designed for learning, research, practice and production activities. The importance of field work and practice is very notable in the university.

That is also important to note the present initiatives of the USAMV in Viterbo, Italy where the participation in educational programs is offered to the local Romanian communities.

In the 2013-2014 academic year the total number of the appointed members of the educational staff, upon the record of employment and standard norm within UASVM Cluj-Napoca were 270 professors. The age structure of the staff is good: according to the data 37.77 % of them are under 40, and those who are aged 61–65, represent only 10%. The ratio of educational staff with PhD is also very high. The titular teaching staff in USAMV has proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which results a good level of performance in education and research processes. According to the self-evaluation report of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential,

the research activity and quality of human resources of USAMV seems to be on a good level. University has now a highly qualified staff. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that the language skills of the staff is good. It is also important to add that the teaching staff from USAMV enjoys a large national and international recognition and appreciation, which is also leading to their presence in specialized bodies and committees in the country and abroad.

According to the data of the self-evaluation report, 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). According to the data, in the last three years the number of students is slowly decreasing (BA, MA and also PhD level) although in this moment this decrease is not a serious one. Parallel with these processes the students of the English and French language educational programs are growing from year to year. These slow changes could have several reasons like certain effects of demographic changes, decreasing interest, worsening financial background of potential students, changing role of higher education, offerings of other state universities on the same field. Lower number of students certainly could result better level of teaching with improving the quality of the educational processes and scientific research as long as the financial background is stable and the longer 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 the number of students at the present level.

Material assets

The campus of UASVM is at Calea Mănăştur 3-5, Cluj-Napoca where the headquarters, management and administrative bodies of the university and the faculties of Agriculture, Animal Science and Biotechnologies, Veterinary Medicine operates in a very beautiful, carefully maintained green environment, just The Faculty of Food Science and Technology has its headquarters at another location in the city. The majority of the existing buildings were built during the last century. There are 11 buildings within the university campus, comprising areas designed to be used during the teaching process

(amphitheaters, rooms for courses, rooms for practical courses, seminars and laboratories). Most of these spaces are equipped with projectors, computers and projection screen. All the rooms for courses have Wi-Fi. During the last years, there is a permanent investment in infrastructure and material assets in UASVM Cluj-Napoca in order to rehabilitate and modernize the teaching spaces as well as for the building of new spaces:

- In 2010 the building of the Biodiversity Research Center was inaugurated;
- In 2011 the Life Science Institute building was put into service;
- In 2012 the reconstruction works of the new student dormitory, Agronomia 2, were accepted;
- The Institute for Advanced Horticultural Research of Transylvania has been under construction since 2012. The building will have a built surface of 2.402 m² and the unfolded surface of 8.765 m². The research activity will take place in 44 laboratories and 8 experimental greenhouses;
- In 2013 the construction of the new library was accomplished, and probably starts to operate at the end of this year.

Education and research areas represent adequate material resources for a high level academic performance, being equipped with multimedia systems and other means required by the teaching process, laboratories well equipped for practical courses (instruments, and laboratory equipment, licensed software etc.) rooms for seminars and other educational activities. The existing equipment and the facilities are in accordance with the technical standards of functioning. These are perfectly enough for the carrying out of the teaching and research activities, characteristic to all of the fields and programs of study (Bachelor, Master, and PhD) students are enrolled to.

UASVM Cluj-Napoca comprises 4 practice facilities for teaching and practice purposes for students, within the Experimental Teaching Resort, located in: Jucu (vegetable farm), Cojocna (vegetable and animal farm), Hoia (animal farm) and Șapca verde (animal farm). Within these farms students can perform specific practice activities and expertise. There is also a little market on the campus where certain products of the farms are sold.

The botanic garden was extended and turned into an agro-botanic park, covering literally all of the university's campus (central park, the orchard, the vineyard and the forest) available for the entire community. Also, Transylvania's largest aquarium is operating at USAVM Cluj-Napoca, with a diverse thematic collection of fish of the region.

Computerization and Communication Center ensures the ICT facilities provided to all USAVM Cluj-Napoca users (students, teaching personnel, and administrative staff, academic and administrative management). The present library of the university has a 98 seat reading room and 19 work stations with internet access, a 20 seat reading room with free shelf access for publications and reference books and wireless access to Internet in every area of the library. The interior of the new library of the USAVM is under construction.

The equipments and installations in connection with the educational process is seems to be an important priority and supply the demands of students and staff quite well. On the whole the university meets the demands of European standards but it is important to continue the work to invest permanently to 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 in spite of the permanently changing financial conditions are well-balanced.

The financial activity is relatively decentralized which could certainly help for the units of the university to improve their activities and try to generate own extra budget incomes. Of course the different units have different abilities to operate this way and certain university level priorities could result to maintain units which generate deficit but on the whole this relative financial 'independence' could stimulate the management of the faculties and employees and result more and systematic research activities and projects.

Universities have to find the ways to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance its 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 (agri) business sector to generate resources and make extra money 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, beside the offered educational programs continuously improves its educational environment, focused on the students.

The dormitories of the university have the total capacity of 1.250 beds. Also, the UASVM Cluj-Napoca has a student restaurant, and the students also benefit from a club, a gymnasium, a basketball court, table tennis, fitness hall, tennis and mini football court.

The UASVM Cluj-Napoca students are well organized in student associations and also 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 taking place abroad. One part of these activities are based on agreements started 8 years ago with the University of Hohenheim, allowed more than 250 students to participate, during the summer holiday, a 3 month practical activity within farms in

Baden-Württemberg. Every year, more than 200 students carry out practical activities within units in England, Italy, Spain, and in France (students from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine). In the Center for Career Education students could participate in career counselling as well.

According to the self-evaluation report, together with the university management, the students organize the annual scientific Symposium. This symposium takes place every year, and has 14 sections. The best papers for each section are awarded. The Faculty of Food Science and Technology organizes the Food Festival, during which the students present, practically, the results obtained from their research activity. The students of the university also take part in the annual contest AGRONOMIADA, as well as in other sport contests. The students of the university have the possibility to join the UASVM Cluj-Napoca folklore ensemble, "Tradiții", with a high level of performance in Cluj-Napoca as well as in other cities in the country and abroad.

Students (and as well as the staff) also have possibilities to take part in the Erasmus mobility programs. Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these connections permanently with European and also with non-European universities and increase the number of students and staff members taking part in mobility activities.

The public information can be found on the USAMV site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian and English language.

Research activities

USAMV plays a very important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be very significant in the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. In USAMV, just like everywhere in the European Union

member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources, projects and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities.

Currently, USAVM Cluj-Napoca has 12 research centers, 22 research laboratories and 1 research institute – the Life Science Institute. As feature of the capacity of the university to design/develop products – innovative technologies for the business environment, the encouragement regarding the patenting represented a constant concern of the management of the USAVM Cluj-Napoca. Scientific research is carried out through themes and projects closely connected to the institutional programs of the departments, faculties, doctoral schools and research centers, which certainly result a high level of visibility of the institution and shows the importance of the university at local and international level.

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of USAMV these connections seem to be in a perfect level as national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual as well as student level. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities and state institutions. As a result of internationalization in focus, UASVM Cluj-Napoca is a member of many prestigious international organizations. UASVM Cluj-Napoca is also a co-founder of the Euro-Mediterranean University and signatory of the Kiev Declaration. Furthermore, UASVM Cluj-Napoca has concluded international agreements with 38 foreign universities, most of them from the European Union.

UASVM Cluj-Napoca is signatory of the Erasmus charter and has concluded 71 bilateral Erasmus agreements with higher education institutions of 14 countries and also a

partner in 2 International Erasmus Mundus programs: Master Food identity and Master Biohealth computing, as well as a project developed through Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie. 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.

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 as well.

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. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. In the last 145 years USAVM Cluj-Napoca has developed as an elite academic institution, both at regional, national and international level: the maintenance of the present favorable situation and competitiveness is an important challenge and appears the key element of the sustainable future of USAMV.

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 continue the permanent 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 generate more connections with the business and the agribusiness sector to connect research activities with the market, generate resources and make extra money incomes;
- The university should cooperate permanently with higher education and research institutions of other countries 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.

Pécs, 06-22-2014



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