



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

**Α.ΔΙ.Π.**

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ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

**H.Q.A.**

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AND  
ACCREDITATION AGENCY

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT

UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN

March 2014



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### **External Evaluation Committee**

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of GEOGRAPHY of the University of the AEGEAN consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. **Professor Michael Tsimplis** (President)  
University of Southampton, UK.
2. **Prof. Dimitri Ioannides**,  
Mid-Sweden University and ETOUR, Östersund, Sweden
3. **Prof. Dimitrios Kotzinos**,  
Department of Sciences Informatiques, Université de Cergy-Pontoise, France
4. **Dr. George Zodiatis**,  
Vice Director, Oceanography Center, University of Cyprus, Cyprus

**N.B.** The structure of the “Template” proposed for the External Evaluation Report mirrors the requirements of Law 3374/2005 and corresponds overall to the structure of the Internal Evaluation Report submitted by the Department.

The length of text in each box is free. Questions included in each box are not exclusive nor should they always be answered separately; they are meant to provide a general outline of matters that should be addressed by the Committee when formulating its comments.

## ***Introduction***

### **I. The External Evaluation Procedure**

- **Dates and brief account of the site visit.**

The site visit was carried out between 16:30 of the 24<sup>th</sup> of February and 17:00 of the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, 2014.

- **Who did the Committee meet?**

During the visit at the Department of Geography of the University of Aegean, the external evaluation committee (EEC) met with: the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs of the University of Aegean (Associate Professor Nikolaos Soulakelis); the Chair of the Department of Geography (Professor Eleni Briasouli); Academic staff (Professors, Associate Professors, Assistant Professors and Lecturers); IT and secretarial staff of the Department; Undergraduate, graduate and Ph.D. candidates of the Department; Alumni of the Department and stakeholders (public, private, NGO) with whom the Department of Geography has close ties.

The Department of Geography prepared a very good and productive program allowing several meetings and discussions with the faculty members, the IT and secretariat staff, representatives of the undergraduate, postgraduate students and Ph.D. candidates.

The presentations and the information provided were useful but could have been presented in a more concise way. Furthermore, the EEC met with alumni representatives, including stakeholders (local public agencies, NGO, private companies), who cooperate closely with the Department. The members of the external evaluation committee also had the opportunity to visit several educational and research laboratories of the Department. The EEC did not manage to visit the library, which is located outside the campus.

#### **Day 1, Monday, February, 24, 2014:**

In the morning, the EEC were briefed in the HQA offices and then traveled by air to the island of Lesbos, where the Department of Geography of the University of Aegean is located. In the afternoon, soon after the arrival at the premises of the Department, the EEC met with the Chair of the Department and 17 of 21 members of the teaching staff, from all 4 divisions of the Department, together with the 2 members of the IT support staff. At the beginning of the evaluation process, a general presentation of the educational and research activities of the University of Aegean was given by the Chair of the Department, Professor Eleni Briasouli, on behalf of the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, Assoc. Prof. N. Soulakelis. A long,

detailed and in-depth presentation of the Department by the Department's Chair followed. It covered the history of the Department of Geography; current teaching and research activities; infrastructure and facilities; the financial situation including funding; scientific publications; organization of summer schools; collaborations at the scientific level with other Universities and research institutions; and future perspectives. Moreover, she discussed the Department's contribution in assisting stakeholders (public, NGO, private) in solving important societal issues at the local and national level especially as they relate to the Department's educational and research domains. During and after the Chair's presentation, the EEC was given the opportunity to talk to all faculty members, ask for clarifications and provide comments on the presentation.

### **Day 2- Tuesday, February, 25, 2014**

The day was devoted to meetings with the academic staff of the Department, the IT and secretariat staff, the students (undergraduate, postgraduate, Ph.D. candidates), the alumni and the stakeholders (public, NGO, private).

Particularly, the external evaluation committee met separately with: (a) the Assistant Professors and Lecturers and (b) the Professors and Associate Professors. Members of each group presented their teaching, research and administrative activities and identified potential problems that could hinder their personal research and teaching development. Furthermore, a discussion about the current situation at the Department, as well as problems and future perspectives of their work and of the Department at large, were highlighted. A discussion concerning the Department's future and the implementation of its strategic plan also occurred with the associate and full professors.

Additional meetings were held with representatives of undergraduate and postgraduate students, and Ph.D. candidates to discuss their overall feelings about the department and difficulties they have encountered. The EEC also held a meeting with alumni concerning their experience of working in fields closely related to their degrees in geography. This gave the EEC an excellent insight concerning employment opportunities (present and future) for Greek geographers. The meeting with stakeholders including the:

- “Hellenic Union of Geographers”,
- «Διαχειριστική Αρχή Βορείου Αιγαίου»,
- «Γενική διεύθυνση Μεταφορών Περιφέρειας Βορείου Αιγαίου»,
- «Διεύθυνση Δασών Περιφερειακής Ενότητας Λέσβου»,
- «Τμήμα Περιβάλλοντος Περιφέρειας Βορείου Αιγαίου»,
- «Πειραματικό Λύκειο Μυτιλήνης»,
- «Πυροσβεστικό Σώμα Μυτιλήνης»,
- «Κέντρο Φιλοξενίας Ανηλίκων Προσφύγων»
- “HERE maps”

proved especially valuable since the EEC was able to see how valuable the Department is in terms of its networking and extensive work within the immediate community, the Aegean region, and the national arena.

During these meetings, the external evaluation committee received additional

documents regarding the research activities of the academic staff of the Department, the research performance of the Department relative to the other Departments of the University of Aegean, the training opportunities provided to the graduate students, and so on.

### **Day 3 –Wednesday, February, 26, 2014**

During the last day of the visit, presentations were given by the responsible academics of the Department regarding the:

- Internship experience of the undergraduate students: subjects, admission by the students, financing, Department and University initiatives and networking, Pan-Hellenic online system to search for vacancies for placement to carry the practical lessons of students.
- Exchanges under the ERASMUS and the ERASMUS Placement programs for students and the academic staff of the Department. Due to the present financial crisis in Greece there is a decrease in the expression of interest in this program, both from the students and the academic staff of the Department. The Department is also active in participating and organizing ERASMUS Intensive Programs.
- Summer Schools, where the Department successfully organized 4 schools between 2012-2013, with participation of new and experienced researchers, and Ph.D. candidates from all over the world.
- Financial resources of the Department, where it was revealed that due to the economic crisis of the country, the governmental budget provided to the Department through the structures of the University of Aegean is very limited, and the income from the Department's Master's Program is also reduced.

All presentations were detailed and informative, questions were asked and problems discussed. All the presentations were posted on a dedicated website, especially developed by the Department, for the convenience of the EEC.

The members of the external evaluation committee had the opportunity to visit the teaching classrooms, the 3 educational laboratories (Physical Geography, Human Geography and Geographic Information Systems), all research laboratories, as well as the Department's Secretariat offices.

The visit concluded with a meeting between the members of the external evaluation committee and the Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, Nicolaos Soulakellis (also a member of the Department), the Chair of the Department, Eleni Briasouli, and the Internal Evaluation Committee. Here, some pending questions were clarified while the committee's general impressions from the Department were offered.

The EEC traveled in the evening of the same day at 20:20 back to Athens.

### **Day 4 – Thursday, February, 27, 2014**

The members of the external evaluation committee worked on the draft of the External Evaluation Report at the facilities of the Electra Palace Hotel arranged by

the HQA.

**Day 5 – Friday, February, 28, 2014**

The members of the external evaluation committee continued working on the draft.

**Day 6 – Saturday, March, 1, 2014**

The members of the external evaluation committee finalized the draft of the External Evaluation Report, which was subsequently submitted to HQAA.

**II. The Internal Evaluation Procedure**

**Please comment on:**

- **Appropriateness of sources and documentation used**

The documentation concerning the internal evaluation until 2013 was received by the EEC prior to the evaluation process. The report was based on adequate and appropriate sources and materials.

**Quality and completeness of evidence reviewed and provided**

The internal evaluation report describes the structure, organization, and duration of all the degrees offered, the research activities and the view of the Department for its strategic development.

- **To what extent have the objectives of the internal evaluation process been met by the Department?**

The EEC considers that the Department of Geography approached the internal evaluation process honestly and with good intentions and as a result provided a reasonable overall picture of the position of the Department. The EEC believes that the department significantly underestimated its strengths. However, the EEC sensed a tendency to justify weaknesses on external factors, for example changes in the law, the quality of the students and the dire financial situation of the country. The EEC considers that some of these weaknesses can be dealt with irrespective of the external pressures but this depends on the adoption of more pro-active management of the problems.



## **A. Curriculum**

*To be filled separately for each undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programme.*

### **UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM**

- What are the goals and objectives of the Curriculum? What is the plan for achieving them?

The primary goal of the undergraduate program is the development of geographers equipped with a wide range of knowledge and skills, who can cope with the challenges posed by the interdisciplinary and synthetic character of contemporary geography and social needs.

The Department has set the following three goals for its undergraduate program:

- 1) The education/training of geographers who will be employed in both private and public sectors and also work for non-governmental organizations.
- 2) The education/training of geographers who will work as researchers in their field.
- 3) The education/training of geographers who will work in education.

The aforementioned objectives are achieved by a program of studies along two lines. The first leads to the development of a common set of skills and geographical knowledge. The second leads to differentiation between and specialization of the graduates through a wide variety of optional courses to suit their skills and interests.

The three goals are not independent and they all relate to future employment opportunities for graduates. However, they are helpful because they identify the three major employment options for geographers and, therefore, prescribe the necessary skills the program needs to develop. If the Department wishes to develop its thinking along the same lines, the reality that many Geographers end up working for companies in non-geographic jobs, would indicate that a fourth “objective”, i.e. the development of generic and transferable skills, can be added. Such skills are presently developed in specific courses, for example, collection of information, literature research, report writing, presentation skills, foreign language development and group work but they are not expressly stated as such in the Curriculum nor specifically developed and assessed as such.

Furthermore, if the Department is primarily concerned about the employability of its students, then the policy of providing a well-rounded education for geographers should be reconsidered, particularly in the domain of the compulsory subjects, and more weight should be placed on those parts of Geography which give the best chances to provide employment opportunities. The parts of Geography, which do not contribute significantly to employability could be moved to optional status. Alternatively, the objectives of the curriculum could be widened by providing more general educational aspects (instead of focusing only on employment), such as the development of generic knowledge and research skills within the context of Geography, and the focus on employability of graduates in Geography positions could be softened. During the presentations it was mentioned that geoinformatics is/will be a central part of the Department’s focus (something that the EEC finds reasonable). Nevertheless, this is not depicted within the current curriculum and is not explicated in the plans for its update.

**(1) The EEC recommends to the Department that the General Assembly should discuss this issue and either resolve it by putting as primary criterion the one that drives the aforementioned objectives of future employability, or reconsider the curriculum's objectives.**

- How were the objectives decided? Which factors were taken into account? Were they set against appropriate standards? Did the unit consult other stakeholders?

The objectives have been decided on the basis of recommendations by the relevant committee for undergraduate studies, discussions in the general assembly and on the basis of the skills of the teaching staff.

- Is the curriculum consistent with the objectives of the Curriculum and the requirements of the society?

The curriculum is consistent with its objectives. However, the EEC considers that the curriculum exceeds its objectives and provides a much broader set of options than required.

**(2) The EEC recommends that the undergraduate committee reviews the offered options and removes those which exceed the curriculum objectives.**

- How was the curriculum decided? Were all constituents of the Department, including students and other stakeholders, consulted?

The design of the curriculum was based on the examination of similar programs at foreign Universities, discussion with the Greek Geographers' Union, interaction with stakeholders and feedback from graduates who remain in touch with the Department. A student representative is a member of the relevant committee.

The students play a role in the revision of the curriculum by providing feedback and by populating or abandoning specific courses. As an example, the number of prerequisite subjects was reduced significantly in the latest revision of the curriculum following complaints by the students.

**(3) The EEC recommends that the Department re-examines the role and necessity of prerequisite courses and their effect on students' advancement through their years of study.**

- Has the unit set a procedure for the revision of the curriculum?

The curriculum is revised every 5 years by the relevant committee. Decisions are taken by the General Assembly of the Department. Courses, which do not attract the minimum number of registered students during each year (5), do not run for the year but are not automatically considered for removal from the curriculum.

**(4) The EEC recommends that within the process of the curriculum revision a criterion is adopted to automatically remove inactive and unpopular courses which do not reach the minimum number of students for 3 successive years.**

IMPLEMENTATION

- How effectively is the Department's goal implemented by the curriculum?

The implementation of the curriculum is very good and it is facilitated by the development of groups of courses that denote directions of study from which each student is able to select one primary and one secondary direction of study. Additional options provide further differentiation and facilitate the development of specific skills. This is a process that facilitates students' development and the EEC would like to commend the Department for adopting it.

However, the EEC identified differing views among the Academic Staff on whether there are "easy" and "difficult" subjects. If there is such differentiation then this operates as an obstacle in the implementation of the curriculum because students might select courses on the basis of rates of success in exams rather than by developing a program of studies consistent with the curriculum objective. Note that some students used similar terminology concerning the same matter without been prompted to do so. This is a serious issue that requires attention.

- (5) The EEC recommends that the differing views on whether there are "easy" and "difficult" courses are discussed in the General Assembly of the Department and that the relevant committee undertakes a review of exam results over the past 5 years for the non-compulsory units a) exploring the distribution of marks, b) investigating the attempts needed to pass a specific subject and c) consulting with the students and the staff who hold the view that the difficulty of subjects is not uniform. A process for revision of marking and pass rates should be developed for all non-compulsory courses, alongside with a process that will ensure, over a period of years, that the courses will normalize their results.***

- How does the curriculum compare with appropriate, universally accepted standards for the specific area of study?

The curriculum is within the range of similar courses in other countries. However, the number of courses offered at the undergraduate level is large.

- (6) The EEC recommends that any undergraduate courses not directly connected with the curriculum goals are removed.***

The EEC recognises that this process is linked with the resolution of the issues of "easy" and "difficult" courses. Therefore, these should be dealt with by the Department at the same time.

- Is the structure of the curriculum rational and clearly articulated?

The outline of the curriculum in relation to the compulsory part of the curriculum and the study directions is clear. The availability of further optional courses is not well articulated or linked with the objectives of the curriculum.

- Is the curriculum coherent and functional?

To a large extent it is coherent but as explained above there are aspects where coherence breaks down in particular in relation to optional courses.

- Is the material for each course appropriate and the time offered sufficient?

To the extent that the EEC was able to look at the materials offered these are considered

appropriate. The time offered per course looks appropriate and it is also mandated by the ECTS credits each course has.

***(7) The EEC recommends that the uniform distribution of ECTS credits should be reconsidered and more teaching hours are reflected into higher ECTS points.***

- Does the Department have the necessary resources and appropriately qualified and trained staff to implement the curriculum?

The Department considers that after the appointment of the three elected members it will be sufficiently manned.

***(8) The EEC recommends the appointment of a coordinator for teaching allocation, separate for the undergraduate and the graduate programs.***

## RESULTS

- How well is the implementation achieving the Department's predefined goals and objectives?

To the extent that the predefined goals have to do with the employability of the Department's graduates, the EEC's meetings with graduates of the Department, the master's and research students and the Greek Geographer's Union provided indications about the extent the objectives are achieved. Within the context of high unemployment among young people in Greece the education provided by the Department leads to reasonable levels of employment in the public and private sectors. Based on the same evidence, it appears that this is owed to the breadth of knowledge the graduates are equipped with.

On a more general approach, which is not the one expressly adopted by the curriculum, the measure of success of the curriculum are: the desirability of the degree as expressed by student demand; the retention of students enrolled; the number of graduates; and the grades of the degrees awarded. These criteria are partly distorted by the general legal framework which made the Department for a period of time a targeted department for students wanting to transfer to Athens on social and economic provisions, and by the location of the Department at the periphery of Greece, which is problematic because of the skewed distribution of the population, concentrated in the capital and a handful of other cities. The first problem has been legally resolved recently but the second remains. The EEC fully understands the challenges faced by the Department and considers that the performance of the Department in relation to undergraduates has been good. However the EEC also notes that the number of graduates per year is low (~ 30/year, 151 graduates between 2008-2013). Also, there is a large number of students that extend their studies beyond the 4-year period and even beyond the 6 years presently established by law.

***(9) The EEC recommends that the Department adopts a specific target for the increase of graduates to at least 40/year over the next five years (but without compromising the quality of the graduates).***

A major obstacle in delivering the specialised and practical knowledge as planned relates to the lack of funds for fieldwork during the last few years. This is crucial especially for geography but it is beyond the Department's ambit. In that respect the EEC would like to

acknowledge the efforts of the Department's faculty members to fund such student activities as much as possible.

- If not, why is it so? How is this problem dealt with?

The employability of the graduates depends on the existing legal framework, which is dominated by privileges granted exclusively to specific graduates (for example surveying engineers), and are independent of specific skills. The Department is aware of the difficulties but there is very little that can be done except from hoping that the evaluation of the University system will refocus licencing for specific activities to the relevant skills rather than the existence of privileges.

***(10)The EEC recommends to the State to lift constraints and permit Geography graduates to compete with other disciplines/degree holders on the basis of skills gained during their studies.***

It is also known to the Department that the employability of the graduates could improve if more emphasis on some aspects of Geography was placed. The Department gave the impression that unanimously they reject this option for more skill-based education and wish to preserve a curriculum, which covers all aspects of Geography. The EEC points out that the latter view contradicts the attitude taken against the privileges granted to engineers, which is based on the argument that skills should be the basis for licencing for, for example, surveying because only by acquiring the same or better technical skills than those offered in competitive degrees the geography graduates will get better employment opportunities.

- Does the Department understand why and how it achieved or failed to achieve these results?

The Department is aware of the problems but attributes them primarily to the legal framework, the restrictions in the market imposed by dominant professions linked with specific degrees and the financial difficulties which take their toll on the student participation.

#### IMPROVEMENT

- Does the Department know how the Curriculum should be improved?

The Department relies on the scheduled revision of the Curriculum in order to improve the curriculum. This process is clearly appropriate. However the EEC considers that the very good curriculum that exists provides the basis for the development of an excellent program of studies with better employment opportunities and increased retention and completion rates for students.

***(11) The EEC recommends that the undergraduate Curriculum is revised within this academic year.***

- Which improvements does the Department plan to introduce?

The Department plans to improve the attractiveness of the Curriculum through internationalization, developing courses in English language, and by implementing the outcomes of this evaluation.

## ***B. Teaching***

### **APPROACH:**

**Does the Department have a defined pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology?**

The pedagogic policy with regard to teaching approach and methodology in the field of Geography meets levels set at institutions of Higher Education in Western Europe and North America. The EEC believes the department's approach and implementation of teaching is satisfactory. However the pedagogic policy is identifiable only through the Department's actions and is not clearly outlined in any of the available documents.

***(12) The EEC recommends the development of a document outlining the adopted pedagogic policy and the adopted approaches to teaching. The newly recruited academic members of the Department should be guided through the implementation of such policy by the more senior members of the Department.***

### **Please comment on:**

- **Teaching methods used**

The Department utilizes several approaches to teaching according to the requirements and objectives of each course.

1. Regular in-class lectures utilizing up-to date projector systems and whiteboards.
2. Interactive lectures where students utilize computers in-class to learn applications of computer science and geographic information systems.
3. Laboratory training (for subjects such as geomorphology, biogeography, and geospatial sciences) whereby students gain first-hand knowledge and experience.
4. Field-based courses.
5. Practical training through internships with private or public agencies or placements in schools.
6. In class presentations by students.
7. Group projects.
8. Work placements.

Each class offers a reading list, including one or more textbooks. Lists of textbooks are distributed for each class through the centralized Eudoxos system and each enrolled student receives the required textbooks for free. Several of the textbooks used in various classes have been authored by faculty members of the department. Additionally, a significant number of books used for the classes are translations of well-known international contributions in the fields of geography and related subjects. The quality of the readings, most of which are recent, is on a par with what would be found in geography departments in other parts of the

world.

Students have easy access to the members of the faculty. They can visit them at their offices or maintain a conversation via e-mail. The students the EEC talked to indicate a high degree of satisfaction in terms of their ability to openly communicate with the faculty.

- **Teaching staff/ student ratio**

There are 21 faculty members in the department and the total number of registered undergraduate students listed in the Internal Evaluation report amounted to 426. That is a staff/student ratio of 21/426 or 1 per 20, which seems reasonable for a Department of this nature. The statistic is, however, misleading as many students do not actually attend classes regularly and, indeed, in the 5-year period 2007-2012 only 151 students graduated in total. The low graduation rate per annum is problematic. The peripheral location of the university is a major explanation for the low attendance and continues to pose a major challenge for the Department.

Overall, the faculty members expressed satisfaction in terms of their ability to undertake their tasks, especially when the three already elected additional members are formally hired by the university.

When it comes to the postgraduate program there were 52 registered master's students and 40 PhD students in the period 2011-2012.

The EEC is under the impression that there is a discrepancy in teaching loads between junior and senior faculty members. It is common practice in many institutions internationally to offer junior faculty members incentives so they can formalize their teaching skills but also identify and solidify their research program. This situation needs to be examined to make the environment for new faculty members more supportive for their research program and developing their teaching skills.

***(13) The EEC recommends that new members of staff are given reduced teaching loads over the first and the second year of their employment.***

***(14) The EEC recommends that the teacher-training skills available in the Department should be utilised to improve the effectiveness of teaching in the Department, especially in relation to new faculty members***

- **Teacher/student collaboration**

There exists a high degree of camaraderie between students and teachers. The students we talked to, both undergraduate and graduate, are positive about their experience in being able to approach faculty members, who they say maintain an open-door policy. Students are not intimidated by their teachers and feel comfortable enough to talk to them not only about the course work, but also difficulties they are having both within the classroom and beyond.

Problems exist with regard to the evaluations that are distributed electronically to students upon completion of each course. Overall, a very low number of students complete these evaluations given that their completion is not compulsory. This means the current evaluation process has not been effective in terms of measuring the quality of the classes and identifying

issues with teaching. Students reflected several reasons why they do not fill in the evaluations, including the feeling that a more effective way to let the teachers know about their feelings is through direct contact.

On the plus side, many faculty members carry out their own evaluations in-class, which they use to measure satisfaction of students and to assess changes to be made in the future.

The Department's Internal Evaluation report indicates that the teaching evaluations are monitored by the Department Chair. If a review indicates deficiencies in a person's teaching abilities and effectiveness the President can intervene. However, this statement contradicts what was discussed during the study visit, when the EEC was led to understand the evaluations are not referred to given the low response rate.

***(15) The EEC recommends that the teaching evaluation process is formalized and improved by selecting the most efficient way whether in the form of an on-line survey or an in-class handout.***

***(16) The EEC recommends that the department utilises the student responses to the teaching evaluation for identifying problems/deficiencies that exist in certain classes and awarding teaching awards to the best teachers.***

- **Adequacy of means and resources**

The Department is housed in its own stand-alone building, which it shares with one other unit. There are several lecture halls and classrooms as well as teaching labs and space is adequate for present needs, especially for the undergraduate and master's students. Overall, the facilities are of a good quality and the furniture and in-class equipment is in good condition.

The EEC noted that there is limited space for PhD students to carry out their work.

An all-purpose room for students and staff to have meetings and share a lunch or coffee would improve the interaction of research students with staff.

- **Use of information technologies**

The heavy usage of geospatial technologies for the program's purposes generates demand for up-to date computer equipment and software. There are adequate computational spaces to fulfill student demand in classrooms and labs but the EEC notes the computer equipment is somewhat antiquated. On the plus side, the EEC notes positively the use of open source tools for the use of geospatial technologies. In general terms the labs and classrooms are well equipped, responding to the program's teaching demands.

- **Examination system**

Students are evaluated in several ways. In addition to final examinations, depending on the nature of each class, students are asked to write term papers, work on group projects, or give in-class presentations. In lab-based classes students are expected to complete both in-class assignments and other lab-oriented exercises. There are classes with a field component



and students write a field report. Moreover, in classes that are internship/practical training oriented, students are evaluated by writing a report and through an assessment of their performance by their employer. In cases where the students are working in schools they are obliged to teach classes and are assessed according to their performance. Overall, the examination system is similar to systems found in other universities of Greece and Europe.

The EEC notes that it is not always clear, especially when it comes to group projects and other assignments (e.g., term papers) how the assessment takes place. More importantly, there is no evidence that students obtain feedback for their performance; in some cases, there were very few comments on the reports evaluated by the EEC.

***(17) The EEC recommends the development of a standardised feedback form for all submitted coursework.***

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

**Please comment on:**

- **Quality of teaching procedures**

Despite several challenges, the Department offers good quality teaching at all levels. The teachers are enthusiastic and their students and alumni indicate an overall high degree of satisfaction with what they have learned. What is particularly impressive is that while many students who come into the program have not declared Geography as one of their top preferences, through the experience they gain in the program several of them go on to post-graduate work in the discipline while persons who have graduated with a degree in the subject have managed to gain employment in closely related fields. Being the first of its kind in Greece, the Department has had a long-term challenge of promoting the field of geography in the country and indications are that through teaching (and research) this has been achieved.

The EEC is satisfied the teachers are highly accessible to the students and truly dedicated to improve the program's quality. The registered students who attend classes regularly are especially positive about their experiences.

An area that is lacking is the availability of field trip opportunities, which in the field of Geography is problematic. The EEC recognizes that due to the financial crisis in the country at the moment such opportunities are limited. However, it suggests that various alternatives for low-cost field experiences are offered, for example, on Lesbos itself.

***(18) The EEC recommends to the University the allocation of funds for the performance of at least one field trip per year.***

- **Quality and adequacy of teaching materials and resources.**

The quality and number of textbooks and other reading materials are satisfactory and on par with what is offered by similar programs in other parts of Europe or North America. There is not much evidence, however, of the extensive use of e-class platforms other than for the distribution of lecture notes. This is something that could be considered in the future.

- **Quality of course material. Is it brought up to date?**

The courses are reviewed and updated on a frequent basis. The teachers are in a position to update readings and other course materials every year. In several classes the use/application of geospatial technologies is made or referred to, demonstrating the flexible use of these systems in various facets of human as well as physical geography. The topics taught are up-to date dealing with several current issues such as migration/mobility and risks relating to, among others, climate change. The course material is also in general up to date and the Department takes good care of following up with any advances in the different fields of study.

- **Linking of research with teaching**

All Department members are carrying out research, while many of them are quite active and up-to date with contemporary literature, ideas, and theories in the discipline. The students themselves are often actively encouraged to undertake research activities of their own, either in terms of class-projects or their thesis work. In classes like environment and ecology or planning of protected areas there is a field element requiring hands-on research. It should be noted that a few undergraduate students and several graduate students (master's students) are actively engaged in research projects, sometimes through one of the department's research labs. The integration of research into teaching is left to the individual faculty members.

- **Mobility of academic staff and students**

The Department is well connected with other departments in Greece and abroad. Exchange arrangements have been established with several universities throughout Europe, especially in the context of the Erasmus program. These have been underutilized in the past and they have become almost completely inactive over the last few years due to the economic crisis. A few of the academic faculty have been abroad to teach as part of the Erasmus experience and occasionally the department has hosted academics from abroad.

The EEC acknowledges the effort the Department does in the area of the Department's relation with other universities/departments. The EEC suggests that the Department intensifies its efforts, especially in providing mobility for students, both undergraduate and graduate.

- **Evaluation by the students of (a) the teaching and (b) the course content and study material/resources**

As has been indicated earlier the department carries out an online assessment of each class upon its completion. Problems relating to low completion of this tool have been discussed.

## **RESULTS**

### **Please comment on:**

- **Efficacy of teaching.**

Given the low completion of the online assessments it is hard to draw conclusions on the efficacy of teaching. Testimony from various other sources including current students and alumni indicates a high level of satisfaction regarding the teachers and the quality of teaching

itself. Students are very complimentary about their teachers and particularly positive about the openness with which they interact with them. It was obvious through the site visit that the students we met were happy with the education they receive.

- **Discrepancies in the success/failure percentage between courses and how they are justified.**

There are no major discrepancies in the success and failure percentages of the various courses, although in some courses the large number of students who fail skews the results. However, there has been an issue raised by academic members as to whether some courses are easier than others. This is discussed in full under Section A and it will not be repeated here again.

- **Differences between students in (a) the time to graduation, and (b) final degree grades.**

The Department's self-study indicates that for the required courses during the period 2011-2012 53,9% of students passed the exams. The average grade for undergraduates for the period 2007-2012 was 6,94/10 while for the master's students it was 8,36/10. In 2012 34 students graduated with their undergraduate degree obtaining an average grade of 6,95 while the year before 38 students graduated with an average grade of 7,08. The grades, while hardly impressive are an indication of the low level of academic preparation of students entering the program in the first instance and their very low average entrance exam scores. Given that challenge, the fact that students who graduate from the program show drastic improvement should be praised.

An additional challenge relating to the program has to do with the time of graduation. The average time it takes for a student to graduate with an undergraduate degree is 5,9 years. It is worrying that in the period 2007-2012 a total of only 18 students graduated in the prescribed time it takes to complete an undergraduate program, whereas 55 took an additional year (k+1), 44 took k+2, and 34 took k+3 or more. In this period 340 students out of a total of 491 had not completed their studies. This is a major problem for the department and an indication of the fact that many students who are admitted and although subsequently register, rarely, if ever, turn up for class and examinations. There is much room to improve the time it takes to graduate and the situation should improve once the full effect of the k+2 law takes effect. To this extent the economic crisis in the country might have played a certain role in that a percentage of students might have already abandoned their studies.

- **Whether the Department understands the reasons of such positive or negative results?**

The Department is well aware of the reasons behind the low graduation rates and the reasons behind the mediocre grades at graduation. Many students are admitted into the program even though Geography is not their main preference and a significant number rarely if ever come to the university given they live in other parts of the country. Economic hardship is during the last few years a major reason for the lack of attendance. However, the fact the several students who actually manage to complete the program are successful in finding employment should not be discounted.

Although it is difficult to counteract actual financial difficulties, the Department can consider alternative means of reaching the students, for example by delivering a number of lectures on line by teleconferencing as a combination of a virtual class and internet discussion group.

**(19) The EEC recommends that the Department develops a list of options for enabling students to participate in some classes remotely.**

### **IMPROVEMENT**

- **Does the Department propose methods and ways for improvement?**

The EEC does not detect a specific targeted effort on the part of the Department in order to address improvements in the teaching domain. There are general suggestions regarding actions to be taken by the administration of the department regarding teaching but for the most part these are fragmented and lack a concrete/implementable focus. The Department suggests, for instance, that the department needs to: be strengthened in numbers in terms of teaching staff, especially temporal replacements due to sabbatical leave of the faculty members; adopt steps for standardization of teaching procedures; find ways to develop further collaborations with other programs abroad; cooperate with other universities but also the community at large; recognize new funding opportunities; etc.

Whilst there exists a high level of comprehension within the Department as to the causes of several inherent problems there is a lack of a specific targeted action plan for improving teaching at all levels within the department.

- **What initiatives does it take in this direction?**

The Department does not *per se* have an action plan for improvement in the lines described above. There is limited evidence of actual initiatives that have been implemented.

## **C. Research**

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.*

### **APPROACH**

- **What is the Department's policy and main objective in research?**

*From its establishment the Department's research policy has been guided by the common desire amongst faculty members to promote research at both the European and international level. The main objective in this direction is the development of applied research relevant to the Department's disciplinary tracks, which responds to the needs of the local society and of the country as a whole in issues related to natural hazards, immigration, urban transport safety, and societal problems.*

*The research in the Department is currently carried out by 21 members of staff, and a varying number of PhD students, post-docs and other research associates funded through research projects.*

- **Has the Department set internal standards for assessing research?**

*The department uses the common international standards for assessing the published results of research (i.e. number of publications and citations) and, in addition, the recognition of the Department via domestic and international activities. The Department*

*accepts the guidelines of an average of 2 publications per year per member of staff.*

***(20) The EEC recommends that the Department adopts a system of personal annual progress review for the Department's members setting appropriate standards for publications and research income. These should differ with seniority and specific discipline but there should not be less than two international publications per year per staff and funding at least one PhD student per year,***

#### **IMPLEMENTATION**

- **How does the Department promote and support research?**

The Department provides laboratory facilities for research and actively supports research collaboration among the staff and with other departments of the University of Aegean, as well with other Universities and research institutes, in related fields. The Department actively encourages and promotes the submission by the academic staff of applications for funding in response to national and international calls.

- **Quality and adequacy of research infrastructure and support.**

The Department has established 11 research laboratories and constantly, upon the availability of funds, obtains required equipment for research, such as for example the plants' development chamber, which was obtained recently. The research laboratories are:

Biogeography and ecology lab.

Geography of natural hazards lab.

Satellite meteorology and climatology lab.

Applied geomorphology and environmental geology lab.

Analysis/spatial design lab.

Urban geography and urban planning lab.

Migration/mobilities lab.

Economic geography, regional development, and spatial planning lab.

Cartography and GIS lab.

Spatial Analysis, GIS, and Remote Sensing lab.

Analysis and geovisualization of space-time data.

The way different research groups interact was not evident from the discussions the EEC had onsite. The collocation of some laboratories improves collaboration. The number of research laboratories seems high given the number of faculty members (11 labs for 21 faculty members).

***(21) The EEC recommends that the Department reduces the number of research laboratories by integrating those performing research in closely related fields.***

This would facilitate and increase collaboration among the researchers plus lead to better sharing of resources.

***(22) The EEC recommends that the Department requires and reviews yearly***

***development plans for each laboratory in terms of both research and funding plans.***

- **Scientific publications.**

The Department follows the Greek Education Ministry's guideline of a two-publication minimum per faculty member per year, though the average is slightly higher.

According to the Internal Assessment Report, during the period 2008-2013 the faculty staff of the Department has published 223 papers in peer reviewed academic journals, 25 monographs and books and had 4149 citations. Moreover, there are few hundred of other publications in conference proceedings and reports.

- **Research projects.**

According to the Internal Assessment Report during the period 2010-2013 research funding reached 6.5 million euro. In the last five years the faculty members of the Department have participated in 30 research projects, while for the entire period of the Department's existence, 114 projects have been carried out. The good results shown by the Department in obtaining funds within the frame of competitive calls from the European Union make the EEC optimistic that the research capability of the academics of the Department can sustain and grow the research activities despite the financial difficulties in national funding.

The EEC commends the Department members for their research activity which is the primary source of research funding for the Department.

- **Research collaborations.**

The department apparently has numerous research collaborations with domestic, European and international academic and research institutions. The internal evaluation report provides an extensive list of collaborating institutions and this list provides specific information on the nature of each collaboration effort. The EEC acknowledges the breadth of the Department's research collaborations and encourages the Department to enhance these collaborations through active participation in joint research proposals and publications.

## **RESULTS**

- **How successfully were the Department's research objectives implemented?**

The departmental objective in research is broadly attained. At an average of 2 refereed journal publications per year, per faculty member over the past 5 years, plus a total of 679 Greek and foreign-language papers, books and chapters in books and conference proceeding the publication rate of a member of the Department is in excess of the official 2-paper minimum set by the Ministry of Education. The average varies by research area, as a result of the multi-disciplinary character of geography. This is also true considering the form of the publications as refereed or non-refereed, as articles versus books or as chapters in books versus conference proceedings. This complicates the comparison using citations. An additional difficulty is that publications in Greek are under-represented in citation indices because of the limited Greek-language readership, regardless of the quality of the work.

**(23) The EEC recommends to the Department to prioritise publications in peer-reviewed international journals or proceedings of international high-level scientific conferences with competitive acceptance rates by demanding at least two publications per year per person in such journals or conference proceedings.**

- **Scientific publications.**

*(see comments in the IMPLEMENTATION section)*

- **Research projects.**

*(see comments in the IMPLEMENTATION section)*

- **Research collaborations.**

*(see comments in the IMPLEMENTATION section)*

- **Efficacy of research work. Applied results. Patents etc.**

Several notable research outcomes of the Department include: the development of a fire modelling system for forests that supports the relevant local response agencies; an urban online system to increase local traffic safety; several high quality thematic maps of Greece in the Greek language released in schools and other national agencies, as well as the European Union; a website for online visualization of data received in real time from the 4 meteorological stations owned by the Department, all located on the island of Lesbos; the amazing and impressive reference collection of wild bees with more than 150,000 species from around the Mediterranean; and many others applied results from the ongoing research activities of the Department.

- **Is the Department's research acknowledged and visible outside the Department?**
- **Rewards and awards.**

There are faculty members with international recognition reflected in publications in high visibility journals. The research contributions of the Department's faculty members are being recognized through invitations to lectures at foreign universities and for plenary lectures at international conferences, and through a range of other honours. A notable aspect of the Department's research activity is the initiative of the faculty members in organizing national and international conferences and workshops.

#### **IMPROVEMENT**

- **Improvements in research proposed by the Department, if necessary.**

The Department is content with research achievements of the faculty members. It is mainly concerned by the lack of adequate support from the State and the University for funding PhD

scholarships.

The Departmental suggestions for improving the research activities are:

- funding of fellowships for doctoral studies;
- funding for experimental and computational research infrastructure;
- use of international citation metrics as evaluation measures;
- further increase of involvement in consortia for submitting proposals.

- **Initiatives in this direction undertaken by the Department.**

The Department is trying hard to fund PhD students and research associates through EU- or nationally-funded projects. Although this effort has been highly successful so far, it has the apparent drawback of uneven split of resources and limited support for those who are not equally successful in project proposals.

The EEC feels that the Department should better integrate the newly appointed faculty members into the research of the Department and mentor them better in order to achieve improved results in their proposal bidding.

***(24) The EEC recommends to the State to increase funding of research to the Department of Geography increasing both structural funds and competitive funds.***

***(25) The EEC recommends to the Department that the most successful academics in terms of attracting funding and producing publications lead the development of the research strategy and assist newly appointed academics in their search of research funding.***



## **D. All Other Services**

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.*

### **APPROACH**

- *How does the Department view the various services provided to the members of the academic community (teaching staff, students).*
- *Does the Department have a policy to simplify administrative procedures? Are most procedures processed electronically?*
- *Does the Department have a policy to increase student presence on Campus?*

The Department has adequate facilities to support its research and educational endeavours. The Department views the support provided by the University as generally adequate and in some cases excellent. The Department has excellent secretariat support (by 3 very dedicated and capable staff members) that allows the faculty members to deal efficiently with the requirements of bureaucracy in terms of students' needs and management of administrative issues. The Department has excellent technical support provided mainly by the two members of the Department's technical staff, who exceed their responsibilities in an effort to successfully support both faculty and students. Overall, the Department is satisfied with the provision of these services.

The Department relies heavily on electronic processing. This includes the use of an electronic system to manage students, including registration, administration of paperwork and management of grades; grades are actually inserted directly by the professors in the system, greatly simplifying the process and securing it at the same time. Unfortunately, this is not yet available for graduate students but the Department is working with the University towards adapting a similar system for them. The Department also uses the University's online course evaluation system. It seems that the participation of students reduced after the introduction of electronic questionnaires. The Department is concerned about this and the EEC shares the Department's concerns. Recovery steps might be necessary if the problem persists.

***(26) The EEC recommends to the University the implementation of the electronic management system for graduate students by the beginning of the academic year 2014-2015.***

The available building facilities of the Department are deemed as adequate, although minor issues related to offices for PhD students and post-docs do exist. The Department is trying to resolve this internally.

Many PhD and master level students are usually present on campus. However this is not true for many undergraduate students. The Department acknowledges the problem and assesses that students can be split into two broad categories: those who come only to participate in the exams and those who are occasionally on campus but do not go to courses where attendance is not compulsory. The Department has taken some steps to increase the presence of students on campus, mainly by introducing more compulsory labs and exercises. The EEC accepts this as one of the indicated lines of action for the problem. The EEC also accepts the Department's reasoning that the situation will substantially be improved by the application of the new (k+2) rule for graduation, although this is expected to take some time.

***(27) The EEC recommends to the Department that the legally permissible exceptions to the new rules, which permit prolongation of studies are applied only in exceptional cases and only where real hardship will otherwise result to***

***the relevant student.*****IMPLEMENTATION**

- *Organization and infrastructure of the Department's administration (e.g. secretariat of the Department).*
- *Form and function of academic services and infrastructure for students (e.g. library, PCs and free internet access, student counseling, athletic- cultural activity etc.).*

The secretariat of the Department consists of 3 members who support the faculty members with the undergraduate and graduate programs. The administrative staff members have been with the Department for many years (one even from the beginning) and this has resulted in the automation of tasks and the development of high trust between them and the faculty members. There exists a superb atmosphere of collaboration, trust and friendliness between them and the faculty members.

The Department does not offer any specific support to students with special needs and relies mainly on the University services for that. The University has not yet developed adequate infrastructure to support students with disabilities, psychological problems or just in need of counselling.

***(28) The EEC recommends to the University the development of student support services for students with special needs and students with mental health problems by the beginning of the academic year 2014-2015. .***

The Department copes with this lack of dedicated support through personal relationships developed with the students and by providing whatever possible in cases of need. The EEC would like to acknowledge the faculty's efforts but would still like to see more specialized support made available to the students.

The technical infrastructure available to the students is deemed adequate by both the students themselves and the faculty. The students have daily (09:00 – 21:00) access to an equipped computer lab that can be used for doing class projects or thesis work. One impressive aspect is that the two members of the technical staff of the Department support technically the Department from 09:00-21:00 based on splitting the overall supporting hours on a daily base, as well support technically the students even while the latter use their own computers. This should be commended and shows the high level of services provided to the students by the staff. There is free internet access for students available in the Department's premises. Unfortunately, the EEC did not visit the University's library, which is off campus, due to the limited time available during the site visit.

Students have also the ability to engage in a series of extracurricular activities like joining astronomy and film clubs and participating with their classmates in theatrical plays. There seems to be a very vivid student life and the students we talked to did not report any serious problems related to their abilities to have a normal student life in Mytilini.

**RESULTS**

- *Are administrative and other services adequate and functional?*
- *How does the Department view the particular results.*

**IMPROVEMENTS**

- *Has the Department identified ways and methods to improve the services provided?*
- *Initiatives undertaken in this direction.*

The Department is adequately staffed for the moment but it is operating at the maximum capacity of its administrative and technical personnel. If any expansion is to be considered increases in infrastructure and personnel are unavoidable. Most faculty members also

provide additional, to their normal duties, work in teaching and research. Thus forward planning should be done very carefully, especially when the second master's course starts, as the department is working already at full capacity on all levels.

***(29) The EEC recommends to the University the provision of additional technical support to the Department and facilitation of the training for the personnel of the secretariat.***

### **Collaboration with social, cultural and production organizations**

*Please, comment on quality, originality and significance of the Department's initiatives.*

The Department maintains an excellent and healthy relationship with the stakeholders and the local community at large. The Department has undertaken specific initiatives to enhance the collaboration with the stakeholders that have led to impressive results. The Department has acted both as a consultant and a provider of services and specialized software to local agencies like the Forest Management Authority and the Fire Brigade in order to help them with management and response capabilities in cases of forest fires, through the development of an innovative numerical model that simulates the spread of forest fires. Another impressive collaboration is with the local authority for the management of the urban traffic accidents in an effort to spot the dangerous places and reduce the number of accidents, thus increasing the traffic safety. The Department has a long-standing collaboration with the Directorate of Primary and Secondary education where it runs various educational programs and has provided widely acclaimed maps to be used in the classroom, as well to other governmental agencies. In general the stakeholders have provided their ample support to the Department and have spoken very highly of it; it is important that they consider the Department as a viable partner in all of their high level activities. This has an important impact on the contribution of the Department to the local communities. The Department is also well connected with museums, companies and other agencies. This has mainly resulted in facilitating students' practical training by offering placement for them. The fact that the department is well connected with alumni and various organizations/companies on and off the island was also supported by the Department's graduates who talked with the EEC. The Department has also various collaborations at the European and the international level. Overall, the Department has created a very impressive collaboration network.

The Department has also taken various steps in promoting the concept of Geography and allowing the general public to better identify the function and capabilities of a geographer. Various outreach activities took place over the years by faculty members. Faculty members also participate in scientific organizations as board members or external experts. Additionally, they also participate in various cultural or local organizations increasing the visibility of the Department.

The EEC would like to congratulate the Department for the effort put into creating a collaborative atmosphere with various stakeholders and into making geography known throughout the Greek society. The EEC suggests that the Department keeps the efforts at this high level.

### ***E. Strategic Planning, Perspectives for Improvement and Dealing with Potential Inhibiting Factors***

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.*

*Please, comment on the Department's:*

- *Potential inhibiting factors at State, Institutional and Departmental level, and proposals on ways to overcome them.*
- *Short-, medium- and long-term goals.*
- *Plan and actions for improvement by the Department/Academic Unit*
- *Long-term actions proposed by the Department.*

The overall goal of the Department is to achieve internationally renowned teaching and research and to find the appropriate ways to transfuse these to the students that graduate from all its programs, making them qualified ambassadors of the department's achievements. The EEC considers that the Department's Curriculum (both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels) is within the range of international standards of teaching in the specific field.

The Department's research work (both in terms of scientific publications and (revenue from) research projects) is also quite satisfactory. The Department has spent considerable effort in building partnerships with public and private bodies and the local communities and its outreach is regarded as critical by the local stakeholders.

This evidences a dynamic department despite its location in a peripheral region of Greece and Europe. The Department has managed to develop a successful teaching and research profile, build an increasing sphere of research influence through substantial external funding and employ a significant part of post-docs and PhD students.

However, the overall strategic plan of the Department is fragmented and excessively influenced by the current socioeconomic situation in the country. The EEC understands that the consequences of the economic situation are profound and can dominate, to an extent, the planning and strategic thinking of the Department. The Department must have a strategy and a plan even if the present situation is unfortunate.

***(30) The EEC recommends a radical revision of the strategic planning documents so that they produce a strategic forward looking plan for development with specific deadlines for the achievement of clear intermediate targets and approximate deadlines for the long term objectives.***

The Department's strategic plan on teaching and curriculum includes frequent updates of the curriculum at all levels based on the scientific advances and the needs of the market. Some of these reforms are within the ambit of the Department, however for some, for example the reform of the Master's course, the Department's willingness to adapt and change is subject to legal restrictions, which need to be removed by the State.

The EEC feels that the undergraduate curriculum revision should be coupled with an initial reduction of courses and a further set of rules on adopting or removing courses from it. Each course preserved should be precisely linked to the overall educational goals of the programs. This should also include a more detailed plan on the evaluation of a course's outreach to the students. Integration of advanced ICT technologies in the teaching at a high percentage of the Department's courses is also recommended; so far the use of ICT is limited to creating material repositories for the courses. The EEC suggests that the Department includes in its

strategic planning both issues and establishes mid and long term objectives in relation to both of them.

The Department's strategic planning on teaching focuses on improving students' abilities during their studies at a high level in order to cope with the low academic credentials of the students entering the degree. This has provided successful results so far and is a result of collective faculty effort. It also responds to one of the main factors that inhibit Department's teaching, which is the high number of insufficiently qualified incoming students which results in low graduation rates and in low mean graduation grades.

The EEC commends the Department on its stance on quality teaching and supports intensifying these efforts. The main problems identified by the Department are the State's inability to quickly appoint already elected faculty members thus inhibiting teaching for various subjects and the lack of adequate financial resources to support different ways of teaching such as field trips.

The EEC supports the Department's requests for both issues and suggests that the State and the University take the necessary steps to resolve these issues.

The plan of the Department includes the adoption of a second MSc Program on "Ανθρωπογεωγραφία, Ανάπτυξη και Σχεδιασμός του Χώρου" which will enhance the Department's attractiveness to students and increase the number of graduate students while it will also provide synergies with the existing MSc Program. The EEC considers that this will improve both the Department's student numbers and its outreach to diverse student populations, and agrees with the Department's goal to start it as soon as possible.

***(31) The EEC recommends to the State the approval of the new MSC program as soon as possible.***

The Department has also expressed its intention to support studying at the graduate level (both MSc and PhD) through scholarships and has already established two of them at the MSc level (funded by the Department). The Department requests more funds on that both from the University and the State.

***(32) The EEC recommends that the University provides at least 2 MSc and 2 PhD scholarships per year to the Department.***

The Department's strategic research plan relies on the individual research plans of the faculty members. Although this creates a common starting position it lacks integrative approach.

The only procedure employed by the Department as an evaluation of research production of the faculty members is the one concerned with their evaluation when applying for advancement. The Department acknowledges the need for support and encouragement of faculty members in order to improve their work.

***(33) The EEC recommends to the Department the development of an overall strategy for the Department, which would also provide for and plan for better integration of, especially, the new-coming members of the Department.***

The strategic planning for the department must also include the development of a robust and funded PhD programme of studies. The main inhibiting factor for advancing the Department's strategy for research is the lack of funding from the State or the University, especially the lack of PhD studentships. The Department's faculty members have an excellent tradition of attracting competitive funding both at national and European level and the EEC commends this fact and urges all faculty members to engage further in such activities.

The main inhibiting factor for the implementation of the Department's strategic plans is the lack of funding that prohibits the seamless execution of the Department's teaching and research plans. The EEC would like to commend the Department's faculty and staff for their

dedication to high quality work, even under those difficult circumstances.

The Department acknowledges the need for a comprehensive and coherent strategic planning at University and Department levels that would integrate Evaluation and Quality Assurance factors. The Department is also asking for more financial and administrative independence and self-governance. The EEC assesses that the Department has demonstrated self-sufficiency and supports its requests; nevertheless, the EEC urges the Department to produce its own coherent strategic plan for the next years without necessarily waiting for the University to provide a higher level one.

The EEC also urges the Department to capitalize on the relations with others in both the scientific and the social world. The EEC was truly impressed by the outreach of the Department at the various local and Aegean Sea communities and agencies and would like to congratulate the Department and its members for the dedication in serving the local communities and establishing a truly functional and beneficial relationship with them.

The Department has the potential to overcome several of the presently inhibiting factors. The students who attend receive good education and they are happy with it. The faculty members are active in research and in bringing in research funds and the Department has the people to drive it through its evolution.

The current socioeconomic crisis in the country is evident in all aspects of the Department's activity and affects the strategic planning of the Department. However, the financial conditions have also led to the challenging of existing privileges and the opening up of the employment market. This can assist the Department's argument for skill based qualifications for professionals rather than for giving licences on the basis of engineering or non-engineering character of the institution granting the primary degree.

The Department also fears the relative isolation it has because of its location at the periphery and away from Athens and Thessaloniki. However, the failures of the Greek government to divert the economy and the population away from the two major cities and the associated with this development of very expensive Universities in the centre should not mean that the Department should be disheartened about its prospects. The Department has built very strong links with the local society of the Aegean Sea and contributes to the development of novel applications in teaching, protection from natural hazards, urban traffic safety and education. It produces research part of which is well recognised internationally.

Thus, it has already in place the required components in order to develop further. The financial crisis requires clear planning, persuasive targets, identification of alternative sources of funding and building of new alliances with foreign universities. The potential of the Department looks excellent both in the short- and long-term; the Department needs to plan things more comprehensively, understand better its strengths and weaknesses and capitalize on the first and respond to the second; it also needs to adapt to the ever-changing environment around it. The EEC feels optimistic that the Department has the experience, the resources and the human capital to correctly respond to these challenges.

## ***F. Final Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC***

*For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.*

Conclusions and recommendations of the EEC on:

- the development of the Department to this date and its present situation, including explicit comments on good practices and weaknesses identified through the External Evaluation process and recommendations for improvement
- the Department's readiness and capability to change/improve
- the Department's quality assurance.

*The Department of Geography of the Aegean University has established a very good teaching program, which includes an excellent post-graduate course. In addition it has developed a good research record extended both towards publications and external funded research projects. The overall evaluation of the EEC is very positive. In particular, the contributions of the Department to the local and island society of the Aegean Sea is exemplary and demonstrates the significant contribution of the Department to the sustainable development of the islands.*

*The performance of the Department is very good and this is achieved despite the significant external pressures and its isolated location. In particular, the EEC is pleased to identify the following strong points:*

*-A successful learning and research environment founded upon a positive and open student-professor relationship.*

*-The development of projects important to local regional and European stakeholders (public, private and NGO).*

*- The development of a self-funded research sphere, which involves a significant number of post-docs and PhD students.*

*- Excellent support from the small but very efficient administrative staff.*

*- A carefully designed postgraduate curriculum that offers a truly unique opportunity to specialize in Geography, which attracts graduates from a large variety of disciplines.*

*- Good facilities and some modern instrumentation.*

*The EEC members wish to make the following recommendations to address some of the current weaknesses and enhance the future development of the Department.*

*Some of these recommendations are intended for the Department, while others are directed at the University and State authorities. Please consult the relevant part of the text for clarifying the intentions of each recommendation. The numbering of the recommendations appears as in the text above*

### **Recommendations to the Department of Geography**

***(1) The EEC recommends to the Department that the General Assembly of the Department discusses the objectives and goals of the curriculum along the lines described in section A above.***

***(2) The EEC recommends that the undergraduate program committee of the Department reviews the options offered in the undergraduate program of studies and removes those which exceed the curriculum objectives.***

**(3) The EEC recommends that the Department re-examines the role and necessity of prerequisite courses and their effect on students' advancement through their years of study.**

**(4) The EEC recommends that within the process of the curriculum revision a criterion is adopted to automatically remove inactive and unpopular courses which do not reach the minimum number of students for 3 successive years.**

**(5) The EEC recommends that the differing views on whether there are "easy" and "difficult" courses are discussed in the General Assembly of the Department and that the relevant committee undertakes a review of exam results over the past 5 years for the non-compulsory units a) exploring the distribution of marks, b) investigating the attempts needed to pass a specific subject and c) consulting with the students and the staff who hold the view that the difficulty of subjects is not uniform. A process for revision of marking and pass rates should be developed for all non-compulsory courses, alongside with a process that will ensure, over a period of years, that the courses will normalize their results.**

**(6) The EEC recommends that any undergraduate courses not directly connected with the curriculum goals are removed.**

**(7) The EEC recommends that the uniform distribution of ECTS credits should be reconsidered and more teaching hours are reflected into higher ECTS points.**

**(8) The EEC recommends the appointment of a coordinator for teaching allocation, separate for the undergraduate and the graduate programs.**

**(9) The EEC recommends that the Department adopts a specific target for the increase of graduates to at least 40/year over the next five years (but without compromising the quality of the graduates). (11) The EEC recommends that the undergraduate Curriculum is revised within this academic year.**

**(12) The EEC recommends the development of a document outlining the adopted pedagogic policy and the adopted approaches to teaching. The newly recruited academic members of the Department should be guided through the implementation of such policy by the more senior members of the Department.**

**(13) The EEC recommends that new members of staff are given reduced teaching loads over the first and the second year of their employment.**

**(14) The EEC recommends that the teacher-training skills available in the Department should be utilised to improve the effectiveness of teaching in the Department, especially in relation to new faculty members**

**(15) The EEC recommends that the teaching evaluation process is formalized**



*and improved by selecting the most efficient way whether in the form of an on-line survey or an in-class handout.*

*(16) The EEC recommends that the department utilises the student responses to the teaching evaluation for identifying problems/deficiencies that exist in certain classes and awarding teaching awards to the best teachers.*

*(17) The EEC recommends the development of a standardised feedback form for all submitted coursework.*

*(19) The EEC recommends that the Department develops a list of options for enabling students to participate in some classes remotely.*

*(20) The EEC recommends that the Department adopts a system of personal annual progress review for the Department's members setting appropriate standards for publications and research income. These should differ with seniority and specific discipline but there should not be less than two international publications per year per staff and funding at least one PhD student per year.*

*(21) The EEC recommends that the Department reduces the number of research laboratories by integrating those performing research in closely related fields. (22) The EEC recommends that the Department requires and reviews yearly development plans for each laboratory in terms of both research and funding plans.*

*(23) The EEC recommends to the Department to prioritise publications in peer-reviewed international journals or proceedings of international high-level scientific conferences with competitive acceptance rates by demanding at least two publications per year per person in such journals or conference proceedings.*

*(25) The EEC recommends to the Department that the most successful academics in terms of attracting funding and producing publications lead the development of the research strategy and assist newly appointed academics in their search of research funding.*

*(27) The EEC recommends to the Department that the legally permissible exceptions to the new rules which permit prolongation of studies are applied only in exceptional cases and only where real hardship will otherwise result to the relevant student.*

*(30) The EEC recommends a radical revision of the strategic planning documents so that they produce a strategic forward looking plan for development with specific deadlines for the achievement of clear intermediate targets and approximate deadlines for the long term objectives.*

***(33) The EEC recommends to the Department the development of an overall strategy for the Department, which would also provide for and plan for better integration of, especially, the new-coming members of the Department.***

**Recommendations to the University of the Aegean**

***(18) The EEC recommends to the University the allocation of funds for the performance of at least one field trip per year.***

***(28) The EEC recommends to the University the development of student support services for students with special needs and students with mental health problems by the beginning of the academic year 2014-2015.***

***(29) The EEC recommends to the University the provision of additional technical support to the Department and facilitation of the training for the personnel of the secretariat.***

***(32) The EEC recommends that the University provides at least 2 MSc and 2 PhD scholarships per year to the Department.***

**Recommendations to the State**

***(10) The EEC recommends to the State to lift constraints and permit Geography graduates to compete with other disciplines/degree holders on the basis of skills gained during their studies.***

***(24) The EEC recommends to the State to increase funding of research to the Department of Geography increasing both structural funds and competitive funds.***

***(26) The EEC recommends to the State to increase funding of research to the Department of Geography increasing both structural funds and competitive funds.***

***(31) The EEC recommends to the State the approval of the new MSC program as soon as possible.***

The Members of the Committee

**UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN**  
**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**

Name and Surname

Signature

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