

Expert Team Report
For the Kosovo Accreditation Agency
Regarding the Application of Dardania College
to Reaccredit Two B.A. Programs:
English Language and American Studies,
& Applied Psychology and Managerial Studies

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Facilities	4
Overview of Previous Evaluations	5
Research	6
Introduction to Individual Program Assessments	6
Program Evaluation: English Language and American Studies, B.A.	7
Program Evaluation: Applied Psychology and Managerial Studies, B.A.	11
Summary of Final Recommendations	14

Introduction

This report communicates the judgments and findings of an expert team (hereafter: ET) assembled by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency in October 2016. The purpose of the ET was to examine two reaccreditation proposals submitted to the KAA by Dardania College, in Pristina. The ET consisted of two members:

- Prof. Dr. Melita Kovacevic, University of Zagreb
- Prof. Dr. Andrew Goodspeed, South East European University

The ET met in Pristina on the morning of 11 October 2016. Prior to that meeting, the ET had received from the KAA a number of pertinent documents, including the institutional SER; KAA code of conduct for experts; verified staff lists; a confidentiality agreement to sign and return to KAA; and other related papers. The ET would like to thank Dardania and the KAA for providing these materials for our consideration.

The ET then conducted a site visit to the Dardania premises in Pristina on 11 October 2016. During the visit, the ET was able to meet with top institutional management; program representatives; teaching staff from the programs; and students. The ET was also able to tour the facilities, and to ask questions regarding what they saw, and the roles of the people they encountered. The ET would like to thank Dardania institutionally for hosting this site visit, and also to thank the individual Dardania employees, teachers, managers, and students who met with us and shared their opinions and insights.

The ET would also like to thank publically and formally the KAA representatives who arranged this visit, provided the materials prior to the ET's arrival, and who accompanied the ET during the site visit to the premises. The assistance of Ms. Furtuna Mehmeti and Mr. Shkelzen Gerxhaliu was greatly appreciated, and is gratefully acknowledged.

This report is relatively brief, as it is focused only upon the reaccreditation of two programs, and is not a full institutional evaluation. Therefore, some elements that might be expected in an institutional evaluation (such as, for example, long-term financial stability and risk management) are not directly addressed, and most administrative or structural observations are made herein in relation to the specific programs being assessed.

It should be noted also that this report is collective, and is the joint project of the ET. Both members endorse the findings of the report. Because one member (Dr. Goodspeed) is a native speaker, the ET agreed that he would intervene to harmonize the language usage of the report, to assure linguistic consistency and clarity. Yet both members of the team composed, and support, this report. Certain inconsistencies of style and structure have been preserved from section to section, in order best to replicate the exact structure and wording of the individual team

members. We also assert that these are our professional judgments, and that no one and no group has attempted to influence these findings.

Facilities

The building shown to the ET is well designed for the purposes of education. It is located in an accessible area of Pristina and, indeed, during the meeting with students, several of them informed the ET that the location and centrality of the building were influential in their decision to attend Dardania.

The classrooms and amphitheatres shown to the ET were entirely adequate to the classroom needs of the programs being assessed in this report. The amphitheatres seemed to be designed more for collective ceremonies than regular class usage, and this was verified during the visit, particularly in regard to the amphitheater with approximately 100 seats (this was reported to be used primarily for ceremonies such as graduation).

Depending upon the room, the classrooms are generally designed around a 'layered' approach (with rows of seats behind rows of desks), or in a 'horseshoe' configuration. Yet each arrangement seemed reasonable for the spatial requirements of teaching in the room, and did not give the impression of being overcrowded.

Each classroom shown to the ET had appropriate learning and teaching materials, specifically whiteboards for written work, and computers and projectors for electronic media or slides/PowerPoint. It must be noted that in several rooms the ET tried experimentally to turn the computers on, and did not always have success—yet they felt that this was less the result of broken computers than of classrooms that are not yet being regularly and frequently used at the time of the site visit. This was also true of a computer lab shown to the ET, which was very well equipped (relatively recent Dell and HP computers running Windows software), although not all computers in the room were previously plugged in and connected.

Regarding the appropriateness of the facilities to the programs being assessed in this report, the ET was generally satisfied that the educational conditions were adequate. The ET would like to note that an 'English Room' has been added in response to a previous ET report, and this is a welcome development; Dardania is encouraged to develop this space with more Anglophone resources being available in the room—books, videos, recordings, etc. Related to the program in psychology, there is a room called a 'laboratory.' Mainly, students use it for work/practice in the administration and interpretation of psychological tests. One should note that such a room furnished in the way that it is, and with its purpose, is not really a laboratory and does not meet the requirements to be called a laboratory. It seems that Dardania College put efforts into providing students with some relevant psychological tests necessary for their education; however, the system still needs to be better organized, more transparent and enriched with more materials.

A College library exists, and regarding this library the ET concurs with all the previous evaluations: it needs to be updated and enriched with more recent literature, in particular journals, relevant textbooks and on-line databases. It does not seem that any significant improvements have been undertaken. The library seriously needs a further development of its collections; it needs more copies of relevant books for the courses, in particular those listed as obligatory readings, and access to computers in the library. It is not appropriate to have only one computer that is used by the librarian. These kinds of conditions could become a serious obstacle for the further development of Dardania and could have a serious negative impact on further evaluations, both of the institution and of individual programs.

There is one major flaw in the structure of the building that the ET very much wishes to criticize: there appears to be almost no consideration given to disability access. There are multiple staircases, but no evident ramps for wheelchairs or the mobility-impaired (users of crutches or canes). We saw no elevators or escalators. When the ET inquired about this, we were informed that there has not yet been a need. Yet one must prepare ahead: it is entirely unlikely that the institution could accommodate an incoming student with a pre-existing mobility handicap, or a current student whose mobility is reduced by accident, injury or disease. Dardania is therefore strongly urged to add to the significant merits of their primary building by incorporating, at the very least, a small elevator that can accommodate an individual seated in a wheelchair.

With the abovementioned reservations, however, the ET concludes that in general terms the building shown to us seems effective as a learning and teaching environment.

Overview of the Previous Evaluations

The ET received previous evaluations and accreditation reports from 2010, 2011 and 2013, including both institutional and program accreditation/reaccreditation reports. These three reports gave us the opportunity to follow the development of the educational system at Dardania College as well as to observe how the institution implemented changes recommended in the respective reports. A high level of consistent agreement among different evaluators was easily identifiable. While the programs, at least some of them, received relatively positive and encouraging evaluations, almost all of the experts have warned about some weaknesses of the system, such as the poor condition of libraries, a low level of research and a continuous shortage of sufficient full time of staff.

Unfortunately, the present ET has to confirm a very similar situation. During the visit we were not able to identify significant changes in those areas that were recognized as the weakest parts of Dardania College. This fact could seriously jeopardize outcomes of future evaluations and it should be seriously taken into account. We should like to urge future ETs visiting Dardania to pay particular

attention to specific and demonstrable improvements based upon ET recommendations in previous assessments and site visits.

Research

Dardania College, as a kind of higher education institution focused more on applied studies and translational research, does not need to be fully concentrated on research, in particular not on basic research. Nevertheless, both teaching staff and students need to have conditions to participate in research. The teaching staff needs to be involved in research in order to be able to be promoted. Students need to be exposed to teaching based on research. Moreover, on the master level, students have to be more directly exposed to research as well as to perform research on a small scale.

In order to be able to be more involved in research, first of all staff would need financial and other resources (as previously mentioned, working conditions, library, laboratories, equipment, administrative support, etc.). Although it could be noticed that there have been some steps undertaken to improve the level of research, it seems that above all an increase in the research budget is needed. During the visit there were significant discrepancies in the information obtained about the increase of research funds in the last few years. Decentralizing the budget distribution among programs should perhaps also be considered (there is a bit of confusion of structure of Dardania; there are programs, but no departments and sometimes it is hard to define and understand the role and function/responsibilities of particular stakeholders; the impression is that the system is over-centralized, and a similar remark on this structure has been already given by previous experts).

Introduction to the Individual Program Assessments

The ET would like to begin the individual program assessments with several remarks applicable equally to both programs.

It was noted in both programs that all classes are accorded 6 ECTS credits. This was true for first semester introductory courses and sixth semester advanced courses. When the ET asked about this, no satisfactory answer was provided: we heard simply the general assertion that students undervalue courses that are fewer than six credits, and therefore a harmonized solution was proposed whereby every course is allocated six credits.

ECTS credits are not a mathematical game. They are not designed to quantify the merit of the material or the prestige of the subject. They are intended instead to reflect an appropriate ratio of time spent in the classroom and the additional working time spent outside the classroom. To attempt an artificial harmonization is too commonly seen in the southern Balkans—yet it serves no purpose except to distort the expectations of in-class and out-of-class work required of the student.

These harmonizations also distort mobility arrangements with external institutions that may calculate ECTS in the proper way.

Dardania is urged to move away from this meaninglessly uniform model in which all classes are six credits. (The ET would also suggest training for academic staff about how to calculate ECTS credits, and what they mean in practical terms of in-class and out-of-class learning; when the ET asked the program teachers about the ECTS calculations, there was general confusion in the room, and some frankly incorrect assertions made about ECTS purposes and calculations).

Secondly, in both programs it was noted that there seem to be some difficulties of internal communication. There does not seem to be an effective means of communication (meetings, message boards, online resources) to unite managers, administrators, staff, and students. To exemplify: the research support that was claimed by institutional executive management seemed significantly greater than what the teachers claimed they had access to or received—and the teachers stated quite clearly that they were generally pleased with the support their research receives. The discrepancy arose not through complaint, but simply through ET questioning. The students too, interestingly, repeatedly asked to meet with governmental representatives, as they felt that there were needlessly reduced employment opportunities for graduates of a private institution when compared with graduates of a public HE institution. This is a major concern of the students, yet the executive management, the program representatives, and the collected teaching staffs were all silent about this pressing concern for the students.

The ET wishes to make clear that we have no interest in shaping the dialogue between or among staff, students, teachers, managers, and administrators in Dardania. Yet it was our observation that there were strange discrepancies between what different groups asserted, and how they perceived the concerns of other groups in the institution. It is the belief of the ET that if regular meetings, or online meetings or resources, could be developed, it would greatly increase the sharing of knowledge in the institution, particularly related to policies, institutional strategy, and student or staff requests.

Program Evaluation: English Language and American Studies, B.A.

The program proposed for reaccreditation by Dardania is a three-year, 180 ECTS credit degree in English Language and American Studies. It is primarily intended to build English language capability in practical terms, and many of the graduates were reported to be employed in fields related to formal or informal translation of Albanian into English or English into Albanian. (Informal translation here would refer to fields such as translation for hospitality purposes, where specific translation certification may not be required, yet the ability to translate A-E and E-A is a skill highly attractive to employers). The program managers also reported that graduates have found successful employment in the teaching field, specifically in private language schools. More formal teaching employment is unavailable to the graduates

of this program, as it is a private educational institution; this was a source of concern raised by the students.

The program structure is thoughtful. It shows evidence of careful planning in regard to the proper development of skills and the principle of increasing complexity of subject matter. The primary focus of the program is—as it should be—on the development of practical English language usage, both written and spoken. There are relevant but not burdensome courses on necessary elements of the language (syntax, phonetics and phonology), and a decent spread of literature offerings. Accordingly, the program seems well designed to produce graduates who are confidently able to use the English language, in both spoken and written forms, and to recognize major elements of Anglophone literary culture.

It is unnecessary to go through all course elements, but several well-designed elements should be noted, if only in order to bring Dardania's institutional attention to what they are doing well. For example, the heavy emphasis on practical language skills courses is valuable and proper; in every semester the student has some skills course ('English Language I,' 'English Language II,' 'English Language III,' 'English Language IV,' 'English for Academic Purposes I,' 'English for Academic Purposes II'). This strong commitment to practical language use is commendable, as it requires the student to build ability and competence. Similarly, the language component courses also have a full-program commitment, and the development of the subject matter from semester to semester is logical. Thus, students begin with 'Introduction to English Grammar I,' then proceed to 'Introduction to English Grammar II,' 'English Phonetics and Phonology,' 'English Language Morphology I,' 'English Language Morphology II,' 'English Syntax I,' 'English Syntax II,' and 'Lexicology.' This represents a serious effort to provide students with a functional knowledge of the components of English, and should result in students with a firm understanding of the English language both through practical usage and grammatical and syntactical analysis.

There is also a strong commitment to literature, as one sees in the curriculum a chronologically-based survey of English literature: 'English Renaissance,' 'English Neoclassicism,' 'English Romanticism,' 'Victorian Literature,' 'Modern English Literature,' and 'Modern American Literature.' This is a valuable survey, although the ET would suggest a slightly different structure: if the chronological model is to be followed, it might be valuable to conflate the 'Renaissance' and 'Neoclassicism' classes into a course called something like 'English Literature 1564-1750', and then to create an earlier course of 'English Literature 750-1564.' This is not strictly speaking a necessity. Yet it is odd to begin the literature survey with some of the most difficult material (Shakespeare and his contemporaries), particularly when there is a rich heritage of earlier material (Anglo-Saxon poetry, Chaucer) that is available in accessible modern translation. This is offered merely as a suggestion, but it would incorporate a serious and valuable area of English literature that is currently unrepresented in the present curriculum structure.

What is somewhat stranger about the literature offerings is the American offering. There are several courses in American literature offered: 'Outline of American Literature,' 'British and American Civilization,' and 'Modern American Literature.' There is absolutely nothing wrong with these courses, but they illustrate an oddity of this program. It is strange that a program entitled 'English Language and American Studies' should have no particular focus on American culture. It is true that there are two literature courses, and one civilization course split between the United Kingdom and the United States, yet it seems odd that the emphasis on American Studies should be relatively underdeveloped. Dardania is encouraged to consider developing electives to strengthen the offerings related to American culture, particularly in those artistic areas in which Americans have excelled—film, music, computer and internet content—and in historical and intellectual history (civil rights, constitutional protections, etc.). It should be noted that there is nothing inherently wrong in the offerings Dardania already proposes, but it is desirable to see a greater depth and breadth to the element of American Studies specified in the program, and the degree title obtained.

The elective offerings are also generally good. Of particular note are the three courses related to translation, specifically 'Non-Literary Translation,' 'Literary Translation,' and 'Theory and Practice of Translation.' Although these are not required as a module, a student would be well advised to take all three, because they seem well-structured and practice oriented, and these would seem to build valuable and marketable abilities for the graduates.

Aside from the excellent translation offerings, several of the other electives seem somewhat incongruous, such as 'European Integrations' or 'Intellectual Property Law.' When the ET asked about these courses, the program representatives noted that these courses have valuable elements—'European Integrations' offers perspectives on the developments and challenges of the European Union, and 'Intellectual Property Law' provides insight into the often nebulous Balkan application of Intellectual Property ownership. This is likely true; yet one seriously wonders if the space taken by these courses might not better be offered to more subject-specific instruction, perhaps along the lines of 'English as a World Language' or 'English Etymology'—or indeed any of the suggested areas for the exploration of American culture. As proposed now, it is hard to escape the suspicion that 'European Integrations' and 'Intellectual Property Law' should be replaced by more useful, and more pertinent, courses on English language, English linguistics, or American culture.

There is also the opportunity for a student to take German for four semesters. This is laudable, and offers a serious student a good opportunity to pick up a third language to quite a high level of proficiency, if diligently pursued. The ET have only this comment to make: this offering is fine, except for those students who may wish to take another language, or who already know German. If possible (given budgetary and hiring restrictions) it would strengthen the curricular offerings if there were two language options, perhaps adding French or Italian to German. In this way,

students who already know German, or who may wish to pursue a Romance language, would have that option.

The final notable element of the course is that the first year offers students the courses 'Albanian Language in Public Use I' and 'Albanian Language in Public Use II.' These are courses designed to give native speakers of Albanian a solid linguistic and grammatical knowledge of their own language, as a supplement to their study of English. This is likely necessary, and is entirely justifiable. The program managers affirmed that Albanian is invariably the native language of the students they recruit, and that they often arrive with a weak understanding of the structure or components of their mother tongue.

On the whole, therefore, the program is well designed, with good structural elements, and a clear intention to develop skills and increase content complexity. It is well designed to produce linguistically capable students.

The program has only one major flaw, but it is a significant one that must be addressed: the staff are almost entirely engaged from other institutions. Among the staff listed, both as full time and part time, are people known to the ET to be employed full time in other institutions. Although Dardania does not appear to be in violation of the minimum requirements determined by KAA, it is simply irresponsible to base an entire academic program on people whose primary work, and commitment, is for other institutions, often in other countries. To exemplify this problem, but without specifying individual names, the ET noted that among the English teachers listed there were two individuals who are departmental heads in other institutions, and one who is the head of an institutional language center in another university. Whilst the ET has no doubt that all of the individuals contracted by Dardania wish to provide serious teaching and responsible education, it is entirely mistaken to attempt to create an academic program on people being borrowed from other institutions. Dardania is seriously urged to consider making good offers to a few core staff, and then to require them to teach only, and exclusively, at Dardania. (A previous report also suggested hiring a native speaker; this is a good recommendation, if the staffing and visa difficulties can be overcome).

It should also be noted that the program offering aims at 120 students per year/cohort. This seems slightly excessive. Although the ET will not make a formal requirement of intake size, the ET would like to suggest that an intake of 100 per year/cohort seems more reasonable, given the structure of the program and the emphasis on practical language use.

The program 'English Language and American Studies' is therefore a strong and considered program, evidencing good curriculum design and thoughtful offerings. It should provide solid education to a motivated student. As mentioned, there should be a serious revision of the staffing policy for this program, and committed employees kept permanently (and exclusively) at Dardania. Yet it remains an impressive program, and it is the recommendation of the ET that it be reaccredited.

Final Recommendation

The BA program in English Language and American Studies ***should be reaccredited for three years.***

Program Evaluation: Applied Psychology and Managerial Studies, B.A.

Introduction

The program of Applied Psychology and Managerial Studies was last evaluated in 2013. Evidently, this is a program that slowly, but continuously, is developing and reaching a higher level of quality. It has a good structure: the overall content is fine and adequate for the BA level, and what is additionally important is that students also perceive it as a program of good quality. They report a high level of satisfaction and recognize it as valuable for their later employment. Apparently, this program connects students directly with the market and proves to be well balanced between theory and practice.

Teaching Staff

Dardania College gathered in their program a significant number of well recognized names in the field, as well as a younger generation of staff from different areas - psychology, economics, law, who obtained their degrees at different foreign institutions. Within the program they are still in a process of waiting for a few new members of their staff to obtain their PhDs from different European institutions. This should contribute further to the quality of teaching. The impression was that the staff is very engaged in their work and that they are trying to do their best to run a good BA program.

However, it was hard for an external evaluator to fully grasp the positions and involvement of individual teachers in Dardania College vs. other institution/s in which they are involved or they work. It seems that their full commitment and their availability is still an open question. Although it could be fully understandable that their possible involvement outside higher education could be beneficial for students, it is still unclear and hard to justify teaching positions at two and more different higher education institutions. This becomes in particular a problem for research and full commitment for all other aspects of academic work at one institution.

Recommendations:

- It is extremely important to assure enough full time employed staff who will be fully devoted to Dardania College and work with students, as this will also allow them to be more engaged with applied research.
- It would be beneficial for the College and program to redistribute time between teaching, research and other services.

- It is very important to have a head of the program to be fully committed and involved within the program; it has to be a person who is employed full time at Dardania and who is involved in all the process and implementation of the program.

Research

Although it seems that staff is involved in applied research and they expressed their interest, it is very unclear how much they are actually involved and supported at the level of institution. The information related to funding and the increase of funding was controversial. It seems that the resources are very limited, both in terms of funding and infrastructure. During the site visit the impression was that the most frequent form of support was participation at conferences. Nevertheless, it is clear that funding is not sufficient, it is scarce, there is a lack of recent and relevant literature and, as a consequence, not enough published papers in international journals. It has been also noticed that here are some differences between the full time staff and part time staff, where some part time staff, being supported by their 'other' institutions are also performing interesting and relevant research. Of course, this could raise a question (ethical and conflict of interest) of which institution has an ownership of that research.

Recommendations:

- There is a need for more profound financial support; if Dardania College wants to support quality and to follow its mission, it should invest also more money into applied research.
- There should be higher-level of exchange of ongoing research among staff members; this could also contribute to more involvement of students and their translation of knowledge into society.
- Being in the psychology field, it is very important also to develop different methods of research and to develop new conditions of conducting research (vs. the existing laboratory which actually is not a laboratory).

Academic Program

As already mentioned, the program consists of relevant courses and it has a good structure. This has been already reported in previous evaluation reports.

A good development is the fact that the number of electives has increased and students have a higher degree of freedom in forming their own curriculum.

However, as mentioned earlier, there is an issue about the distribution of ECTS credits. All the courses receive the same number of ECTS (6), and they have the same structure of teaching hours (lecture and exercise). This is not appropriate, cannot be justified and it does not follow the content of courses, or their demands towards learning.

All the courses have listed obligatory readings, however it is unbalanced and sometimes definitely not realistic in terms of students' capacities (it goes from one

title to five or six). Some titles are still very outdated and they should be replaced with more recent readings.

Recommendations:

- ECTS distribution must be redefined, according to the content and level as well as teaching form (lecture vs. exercise) should be matched with the content.
- The list of readings needs to be refreshed and better fitted to the needs and capacities of students.
- The program needs to be cleared from the redundant information and tables repeated course after course (such as the grading system) in the SER.

Quality Management

The program is following Bologna standards (although there are some misinterpretations, such as ECTS) and it is possible to compare this program with similar programs at other international institutions. It was a nice experience to talk to teachers and staff who were eager to share their experience but also ready to implement more changes and to further develop the program. They expressed sincere interest to improve the program if needed.

There is also regular feedback collected from student evaluations. The feedback is given to all the teaching staff. What seem to be missing are still clear procedures, who is giving the feedback, and how to proceed when multiple negative feedbacks appear. Accordingly, it would be good to further elaborate procedures.

Recommendations:

- It would be beneficial for all staff members to have some meetings focused on academic issues, such as, for example, better understanding of Bologna procedures (especially, because of staff fluctuation and staff who has relatively limited experience at HE institutions).
- To develop transparent procedures for QA, including student evaluations.

Final Recommendation:

This program Applied Psychology and Managerial Studies has already been in place for some years and prove to be relevant and appreciated by students. It is with no doubt different from many other programs in Kosovo and it is valuable for Kosovo society. It has committed teachers and progress continuously, both in terms of teaching staff and the content of the program.

Therefore, the ***recommendation is to re-accredit this program for another three years.***

However, due to the fact that it is observed that some of the previous external evaluators' recommendations were not followed at all (this is predominantly linked to the role of the institution), as well as the fact that some serious objections were made about the ECTS structure, the recommendation for future evaluations is not to

re-accredit the program three years from now if those changes are not to be implemented.

Summary of Final Recommendations

The program in English Language and American Studies, B.A., ***should be reaccredited for a period of three years;***

The program in Applied Psychology and Managerial Studies, B.A., ***should be reaccredited for a period of three years;***

Both members of the ET feel strongly that the next ET to visit Dardania regarding these programs should examine carefully the improvements (or lack thereof) made by the College over the next three years, particularly to address deficiencies identified in this report, and to hold the institution accountable if it fails to make good-faith efforts to fix systemic problems identified by this and previous ETs.

Addendum: ET Response to the Comments of Dardania on the Initial Draft of this Report

It is the laudable policy of KAA that institutions are permitted to see initial drafts of these ET reports, and to make formal comments on what the team has submitted. The ET is then provided with those comments, and is invited to reply. We have received Dardania's comments, and would like to add simply this addendum to comment on their replies.

The ET would like to thank Dardania for their agreeable answers. The institution has clearly read the report carefully, and we are pleased to see that there are no notable areas of disagreement or factual error between the ET and Dardania College.

The ET would simply like to emphasize the following basic points, as the ET considers them crucial recommendations of the report, and crucial areas of investigation for future ETs:

- 1) There really must be some effort made to accommodate disability access. This does not have to be an elevator, but at the very least ramps should be made available.
- 2) The ECTS harmonization is illogical, and does not reflect the courses as they are taught or studied.
- 3) The library needs serious support for both programs; the library and research resources are not adequate to the programs as evaluated.
- 4) There should be clear and provable follow-up actions from this report, which may be demonstrated to any future ET that may inspect Dardania.

These are merely reaffirmations of points made in the report. The ET believes that the report is clear, and makes useful and practical recommendations for improving the teaching and learning environment at Dardania. We wish them and their students the best in their future endeavors.

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