



Republika e Kosovës
Republika Kosova - Republic of Kosovo



Agjencia e Kosovës për Akreditim
Agencija Kosova za Akreditaciju
Kosovo Accreditation Agency

Universum College

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM

Brno, July 5, 2019



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

Date of site visit: June 11, 2019

Expert Team (ET) members:

- *Milan Pol*

Coordinators from Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA):

- *Avni Gashi, Acting Director of KAA*
- *Shkelzen Gerxhaliu, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Monitoring*
- *Arianit Krasniqi, Senior Officer for Evaluation and Accreditation*

Sources of information for the Report:

- *Self-evaluation report and other documents submitted by the Universum College*
- *Site visit and interviews*

Criteria used for institutional and program evaluations

- *Accreditation standards and manual of the KAA*

1.2. Site visit schedule

08.15	Meeting at the Kosovo Accreditation Agency
09.00 – 10.30	Meeting with the management of the institution
10.30 – 11.30	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative services



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11.30 – 13.00	Meeting with the heads of study programs
13.00 – 13.50	Lunch break <i>(to be served at the institution)</i>
13.50 – 14.20	Visiting tour of the facilities and infrastructure
14.20 – 15.00	Meeting with teaching staff
15.00 – 15.50	Meeting with students
15.50 – 16.30	Meeting with graduates
16.30 – 17.10	Meeting with employers of graduates and external stakeholders
17.10 – 17.25	Internal meeting – Expert Team and KAA
17.25 – 17.40	Closing meeting with the management of the institution

1.3. A brief overview of the institution under evaluation

Universum College (UC) has been established in March 2005 in Pristina and Ferizaj. At the moment, it offers 4 bachelor level programs (Business and Management; Political Science; Computer Science; and English) and one master level program (Management). Currently, the UC operates in Pristina, Ferizaj and also in Gjakova.

2. INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION



2.1. Public mission and institutional objectives

The UC has developed its mission statement and this statement reflects three main pillars of higher education institutions' operation: teachers, research and public outreach (community involvement).

The mission statement was redefined newly in relation with the process of the development of Strategic Plan of the UC for the years 2018-2022. At the moment, the mission statement aims to “support students to become good citizens, successful and broad minded learners and thrive in the Revolution 4.0, the digital and globalized era” (SER, p. 12).

There are indications the process of mission statement development was a consultative and participatory one. Internal staff of the UC as well as external stakeholders were involved in this process, and the guiding role of the expert consultation was used to make sure the process and its results are successful and relevant. It is not clear whether and until what extent students were involved in this process.

During the interviews representatives of different groups within the UC and beyond mostly confirmed their awareness of the mission. It can be said the UC's mission can serve as an effective basis for strategic planning, decision making and operations of the institution.

There are five so-called strategic pillars emphasized by the UC in its Self-evaluation report (SER): (1) Students and Learning in the Centre; (2) Quality Improvement; (3) Innovation and Entrepreneurship; (4) Digital Transformation; and (5) Internationalisation. With regard to the mission statement and also to these pillars, the set of institutional objectives is then defined. These objectives are consistent with and support the mission.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider possibilities of engaging students more effectively into the process of work with the mission statement and its use in leadership, management and governance of the UC.*



2.2. Strategic planning, governance and administration

The UC has Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2022. As already indicated above, similarly to the mission statement development, also the strategic plan was developed through the process of consultations within the UC (including the students) and also with relevant external bodies. The Strategic Plan is designed into five main directions (pillars) and each of them is elaborated further in a detailed way. These directions (pillars) create a meaningful and a relatively complex whole.

It can be said that strategic planning of the UC is integrated with budgetary processes, and the planning takes a realistic account of the external factors and their changes. Monitoring and evaluation of how the plans are being fulfilled is taking place at the UC.

Responsibilities of decision-making bodies are divided in a logical way. The highest body of governance is Board of Trustees (9 members, each having mandate for 6 years, except of one member – the student representative, max. for a duration of his/her studies). Academic issues are in the agenda of Academic Council (9 members, each for 4 year with the exception of student representative – similarly to the case of Board of Trustees). Executive Board, Heads of Programs, Program Boards, Research Department and some other bodies are also a significant and logically defined part of the organizational map of the UC, with clear rights and responsibilities. The evidence about student engagement in Program Boards was not found.

It seems, the UC has its decision-making processes and internal regulations of operation in line with existing legislation. The election criteria and decision-making processes are clear and made available.

Also, there are procedures for hiring administrative staff and for increasing quality of their work. At the moment, they seem to be effective, the staff responsibilities are clearly defined in position descriptions and they match the qualifications of the individual.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

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ET recommendations:

1. *Consider possibilities to involve student representatives into the Program Boards.*

2.3. Financial planning and management

The UC has a sufficient financial resources in short as well as medium term that should make it possible to reach the mission and objectives as they were formulated.

There are 1-year and 3-year financial plans at the UC. These financial plans as well as longer-period financial plans seem to be realistic but also ambitious – for instance, at the moment the vast majority of income is generated by the students' fees, in 2022 the UC wants to reach diversification of the incomes in such a way that up to 30 % of finances should be generated by other means of income that study fees. It also expects to receive more money from Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects and other international schemes of education development projects (at the moment 3 Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects are linked to the UC). Also, the UC plans to build a new campus in the outskirts of Pristina and for this it plans to take the loan for the next 10 years.

The College expenditures fall into several categories: staff and programs; financial aid to students; research and development; administration, library and equipment; and capital investments and loans. In most of them there is an annual growth. The same can be said about the income (students fees; research and development; commercial activities; donations), though.

The budget is centralized on the level of the College, programs are sending their requirements to this level. The oversight of the budget belongs to the role of Board of Trustees, the accounting is in line with International Accountability Standards, and the external auditor is regularly involved in the work with the UC's budget, too.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:



1. *None*

2.4. Academic integrity, responsibility and public accountability

The UC has developed the Code of Ethics which relates to the values of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and ethical integrity. The Code of Ethics requires that all internal stakeholders act consistently with high standards of ethical conduct. It also stands against plagiarism in research, teaching, performance evaluation, and in the conduct of administrative duties. And it also declares the avoidance of conflicts of interest.

There are practices in place as for the work against plagiarism at the UC, namely the staff is trained by the Centre of Excellence of Learning and Teaching. The UC uses Platforma Akademia, the only antiplagiarism system available in Albanian language.

Overall, though, the Code of Ethics is enforced through clear processes and mechanisms across the UC, and there is the evidence that the UC is making the effort to apply the Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics foresees the Ethical Committee which is gathered in cases of violation of rules.

Most of the information about the procedures and policies and also about many other aspects of the UC and its operation are placed on the UC's website and made publicly available this way (sometimes with some inaccuracies – for instance Strategic Plan declares to have 5 pillars, on the webpage there are only 4 (no Internationalization). Also, SER is not made publicly available on the webpage.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider possibilities to make the information about policies and strategies of the UC more complete and accurate on the UC's website.*



2.5. Quality management

The UC has a clear and formally adopted quality assurance (QA) policy, and this policy offers the description of the UC's quality assurance system with its main processes, mechanisms, instruments and other provisions. It also indicates involvement of different units and individuals in these processes. The information about QA at the UC is placed on the College's website.

The QA is adequately resourced. The main infrastructure (resources) for the QA is the Office for QA, the central body for QA at the College. Besides to it, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning can be seen as a supplementary mechanism. And annual reviews of the study programs with their set of procedures represent another important element of QA at the College.

There are different ways of finding out the actual quality of different areas of the UC's operation and there is the evidence that the tendency to learn from mistakes and weaknesses is in place and further steps in the whole development cycle can be seen, especially in relation to teaching, administration and some other aspects of the UC's operation.

Overall, the main focus of QA is on teaching/learning which is easy to understand. And the whole set of methods is in place, such as student evaluation surveys, student dialogue and focus group, evaluation done by the staff (peer evaluation), evaluation of the staff by superiors, work with the data about student successes and alumni employment, and more. At the same time, some other important areas of the UC's operation are rather implicitly in focus of QA (research, management, public outreach, for instance).

The evidence about the existence of QA Committees was not found, the same can be said about the practice of regular monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance arrangements.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider possibilities to focus QA on all main areas of UC's operation, including research and public outreach, for instance.*



- 2. Consider possibilities to set up QA Committees (with student representatives included) and involve them into the QA processes at the UC.*
- 3. Consider possibilities to regularly monitor and evaluate quality of quality assurance arrangements at the UC.*

2.6. Learning and teaching

The UC has developed and adopted policies and procedures that are applicable to all academic programs. Also, the UC monitors relatively closely whether/how effectively are these policies and procedures implemented.

Learning and teaching are declared as the core activities of the UC, and the main supportive body is the above mentioned Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (7 people, out of them 3 professors, 2 administrative staff, 2 students). This infrastructure which provides consultations, resources, trainings and workshops to the UC's teaching staff, has the mission as follows: "to support, promote, and enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning; encourage modernization of teaching and learning, communicate the importance of teaching and learning to both internal, and external audiences; and serve as a catalyst for learning-centered education" (SER, p. 48). It seems, these ambitions are fulfilled in a number of forms at the UC.

The UC builds the programs on correlation between learning outcomes, and these are in line with National Qualifications Framework and with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The UC pays sufficient attention to the assessment methods, and it can be said that there are effective processes in place to ensure the fitness and effectiveness of the assessment methods for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

The teaching staff is adequately qualified and there are measures to provide training in the development of teaching skills, with special emphasis on student-centered approaches.

The feedback from the students and also from alumni is collected about the teaching process. It is not clear how the feedback providers are informed about what happens with the data collected.



Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Make sure feedback providers (students, alumni) are well informed about what happens with the data collected by the UC from them.*

2.7. Research

The UC has the ambition to be actively involved in the research, particularly in applied research. It has developed its research plan, yet the evidence about clearly specified indicators and benchmarks for performance targets was not found.

Also, the financial plans reflect increase of investments from the UC to research-related activities, and also they envisage the increase of finances gained from the external sources – for research-related activities.

Research is validated mainly through research publications and technological transfer at the UC.

There are some good examples of involving students into the existing research projects at the UC. And also, there are some specific infrastructures explicitly focused on the research, such as Institute for Social, Political and Economic studies which is a research-focused unit existing within the UC.

The UC specifies expectations toward the academic staff as for their research performance and results, including the expectation to relate teaching and research in their work. And this is in some extent projected into appraisal and evaluation of the academic staff performance, it seems.

It seems apparent that academic staff publish under the name of the UC if they are affiliated to it as full time staff.



Policies are established for ownership of intellectual property and clear procedures set out for commercialization of ideas developed by staff and students at the UC.

The Code of Ethics deals – among other issues – with the safeguarding of ethical principles in research at the UC.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

- 1. Consider a possibility to include clearly specified indicators and benchmarks for performance targets in the research plan.*
- 2. Consider a possibility to provide academic staff in systematic research methodology training.*

2.8. Staff, employment processes and professional development

There is a staff employment handbook (staff manual) available at the UC – this includes a set of policies and regulations, information about rights and responsibilities, recruitment processes, supervision, performance evaluation, promotion, support processes, and professional development.

The processes of recruitment of the staff make sure that people with a required expertise are hired for specific positions, and the process also ensures equitable treatment of all applicants who are provided with a sufficient information in advance at the UC.

There are arrangements to provide newly appointed staff an opportunity to induce, to get a good orientation at the UC and its plans and activities.

The level of provision of teaching staff (the ratio of students per full time staff member) seems to be acceptable, teaching loads are equitable across the institution. The staff seems to be qualified for the work to be done, staff development opportunities are offered mainly in teaching, but also in some other areas.



Criteria and processes for performance evaluation are clearly specified and they are made known in advance to all staff. Academic staff evaluation is conducted in several forms, including self-evaluation, student, peer and superiors evaluations. These evaluations are organized regularly and frequently. The results of the evaluation are made publicly available in some extent. Development plans are a follow up step made after the evaluation.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider possibilities to make evaluation reports available.*
2. *Consider possibilities to train the staff in diploma thesis supervision skills.*

2.9. Student administration and support services

The UC has specified appropriate admission requirements, and it seems to be applying them consistently and fairly. This information is made publicly available prior to the admission process via the UC's website, hard and soft copy promotion materials, social channels etc. This includes – among others – also the information about a range of scholarships provided by the UC. These scholarship aim at different groups of students, they are often merit-based, but some scholarships are specifically available to SES students and some other groups/individuals.

The UC organizes orientation sessions (orientation week) for beginning students but also for those who will start their 2nd or 3rd year of studies, supplying them with relevant information. Student handbook and brochures are available, information sessions from the administration staff, too. Besides to it, the module Intro to College Study Skills is offered to newly coming students.

The UC uses a software DMIS to collect relevant data about students, their profiles, study records, financial commitments etc., and uses these data for QA purposes.

A detailed specification of student appeal procedures is available and known within the UC. And also, appropriate policies and procedures are in place at the UC for the purpose of dealing with academic misconduct, including plagiarism and other forms of cheating.



The range of student services is relatively broad, covering all the main students' needs, requirements and areas of activities. They include support in learning (moodle, library, tutoring), in other areas of student needs (health service, career counselling), and also student clubs and the student association. Besides to it, relevant services for graduates and employed students are specifically offered at the UC, too.

Student services seem to be resources adequately at the UC. These services are a subject of regular evaluation and – if need be – adjustments.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Consider possibilities to provide mobility scholarships to students.*

2.10. Learning resources and facilities

The UC seems to provide adequate financial resources for acquisitions, cataloguing, equipment, and for services and system development.

The study literature seems to be mostly available, although sometimes a deficit of the literature in Albanian is felt – however, the staff is usually trying to find individual ways how to overcome this situation. Some relevant databases are also available to students and the staff, and the beginning students as well as newly coming staff members are provided training in how to make use of them.

Facilities in Pristina are tidy and well equipped. I could not visit any facility in Ferizaj and Gjakova, therefore do not refer about them – according to the information from the SER, they are in a relatively good shape. It seems apparent that the realization of the plan to build new campus in Pristina is very much needed, as it will bring more space to the UC and its activities. At the moment the space especially in the center of Pristina is relatively small.

Library seems to be growing in a positive direction, it has a reliable system of loans and returns offers services in extended hours (Monday-Friday 8-20, Saturday 8-16).



Provisions for SEN students and staff are developed in a very limited way.

QA processes used include in some extent the feedback from students and the staff about the adequacy and quality of facilities, and mechanisms for considering and responding to their views at the UC. This is mostly done by student surveys, focus groups and during the evaluation interviews with the staff.

Inventories are maintained of equipment owned or controlled by the institution including equipment assigned to individual staff at the UC. It seems, space utilization is monitored and when appropriate facilities reallocated in response to changing requirements.

Adequate computer equipment is available and it seems, a qualified technical services are in place. Training in how to use the equipment is provided, too.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

ET recommendations:

1. *Develop more sophisticated provisions for SEN students and staff.*

2.11. Institutional cooperation

The UC has developed its internationalization strategy which is built on 4 pillars: increase of student, faculty and staff mobility; internationalization at home; increase of knowledge, skills and perspective exchanges with different sectors; international projects.

The International Office of the UC is well resources (4 full-time staff, and some other people supporting its work) and is responsible for fulfilling the internationalization strategy of the UC.

The UC makes the effort to establish partnerships (based on agreements, memoranda) with relevant foreign institutions (mainly those providing same or similar study programs) and this efforts seem to be successful. There is a relatively high number of professional contacts of this kind between the UC and foreign institutions.



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As for the number of mobility of students and the staff, there is a considerable number of outgoing students (80), while only 4 incoming students are evidenced at the UC. The number of outgoing staff (21) and incoming staff (23) almost equals.

The UC play an active role in joining different international projects. Very successful record has the UC as for the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project – since recently, it has been a part of three such projects: Innovative Teaching Education in Mathematics; MsC in Sustainable Food Production Systems; Enhancing and Validating Service-Related Competences in Versatile Learning Environments in Western Balkan Universities. These projects seem to be most visible at the moment but the list of international projects in which the UC has been involved is longer. No doubt, such projects can increase the capacity of the UC, promote internationalization and professional co-operation, and also make the intercultural exchange possible.

Also, the UC staff is encouraged to attend different international events (mainly conferences) – about 20 such events a year. During the interviews I was informed that every full-time academic staff member is entitled to spend 1.500 EUR/year for his/her participation at the conferences. The UC's administration staff is encouraged to get the international mobility experience, too.

The UC also organizes international events, such as International week (May) with about 30 foreign partners participating.

Besides higher education institutions, the UC is developing professional ties with local as well as international industry and other sector organizations and institutions. Their list is relatively long and they seem to be relevant partners to the UC.

The UC also keeps in touch with alumni. Both employer, and alumni representatives have a certain access to the UC's activities, by means of consultations, for instance, as it was evidenced in the case of the Strategic Plan development.

Compliance level: Fully compliant

ET recommendations:

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1. *Consider possibilities to develop more courses in English language (for incoming students).*

3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND JUDGEMENTS OF THE ET

Standard 2.1	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.2	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.3	Fully compliant
Standard 2.4	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.5	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.6	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.7	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.8	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.9	Fully compliant
Standard 2.10.....	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.11	Fully compliant

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that:

The Universum College is *substantially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends to *accredit this institution* for a duration of 3 years.



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Expert Team

Chair

Prof. Milan Pol

July 5, 2019

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Member

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(Date)

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