



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

# UNIVERSITY "FEHMI AGANI" IN GJAKOVË PROFESSIONAL BACHELOR IN PHYSIOTHERAPY

### **ACCREDITATION**

### REPORT OF THE EXPERT TEAM





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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Context

Date of site visit: 11th March 2021

#### **Expert Team (ET) members:**

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#### **Sources of information for the Report:**

- Self-evaluation report,
- Site-visit discussions,
- Additional documents provided by the university,
- Website of the university,
- *Video with the premises of the faculty.*

#### Criteria used for program evaluation:

- Standards and indicators of the KAA Manual,
- $\bullet$  ESG.
- European Region World Confederation for Physiotherapy (ER-ECPT). European Qualifications Framework and its relations to the Bologna Cycles and Directives on Profesional Qualifications.
   (https://www.erwcpt.eu/education/qualification\_systems)





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#### 1.2. Site visit schedule

#### 11th March

09.00 – 09.40 integrated (no slide p	Meeting with the management of the faculty where the programme is resentation is allowed, the meeting is intended as a free discussion)
09.45 - 10:45	Meeting with the heads of the study programme 1: Nursing/ BSc
10:50 – 11.50	Meeting with the heads of the study programme 1: Physiotherapy/ BA Professional
11:50 – 12:30	Lunch break
12.30 – 13:10	Meeting with quality assurance representatives and administrative staff
13.15 – 14.00	Meeting with teaching staff
14.05 – 14.35	Meeting with students
14:40 – 15:20	Meeting with graduates
15:25 – 16:05	Meeting with employers of graduates
16:05 – 16:15	Internal meeting of KAA staff and experts
16:15 – 16:25	Closing meeting with the management of the faculty and program

#### 1.3 A brief overview of the institution and program under evaluation

The BA Physiotherapy programme is a 3-year programme, with 180 ECTS linked to it. It intends to enrol 60 students/year with a 50 euro/semester tuition fee. The programme is designed as a professional BA thus it `aims to link the theoretical part and the fundamental knowledge of the health fields, with the practical training for mastering the applied techniques and skills in the exercise of the profession` [SER, p.16].





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#### 2. PROGRAM EVALUATION

#### 2.1. Mission, objectives and administration

The SER states that `The mission and fundamental vision of the University is to create, promote and transform knowledge` [SER, p.15]. On the other hand, the mission of the study program "Physiotherapy" is `to prepare health professionals in the professional profile of Physiotherapy, who with theoretical, professional and scientific knowledge, as well as practical skills and abilities for practicing the profession will be able to work in the public and private sector, at home and abroad, in accordance with contemporary standards in the field.` [SER, p.15]. Therefore, the study program mission is patially in compliance with the overall mission of the university, lacking just the focus on knowledge creation (research). This is explainable/understandable since being a professional BA program, the evaluated study program has a smaller focus on research. It has a well-defined didactic concept, but less of an obvious research one. The didactic concept refers to the development of health professionals both knowledgeable and competent to face the challenges of a professional in this field. `The way of learning is a combination of lectures, seminars, assignments, practical-clinical trainings, demonstrations with patients, group work, projects, follow-up, accompaniment and supervision in various health institutions` [SER, p.19].

The management of the faculty intends to offer to students `a program built on the basis of proven reference programs at reputable universities and tailored to the specific local and international needs of the time` [SER, p.16]. Therefore, it was designed in close collaboration with health professionals and institutions in the region, as well as models from universities surrounding Kosovo. The program is `based on the National and European Qualifications Frameworks [level 6] as well as Directive 2005/36 / EC and Directive 2013/55 / EU on the development and improvement of health education` [SER, p.16].

The programme will comply with the formal policies, guidelines and regulations of the UFAGJ – many of which are available on the institutional website (https://uni-gjk.org/al/dokumentet/rregullore). They are reviewed periodically according to the SER [p.18] However, it is not clear who and how does the university check whether all staff and students comply with all these internal regulations. For some, there is a special committee responsible – e.g., the Ethics Committee; and for other regular check-ups are conducted in the faculty, thus one can assume they will also be checked for the new study programme – e.g., the attendance.





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Compliance level: Substantially compliant

#### ET recommendations:

- 1. Consider new ways of checking whether the internal regulations are followed by the academic community, but also by the administrative staff.
- 2. Consider motivating the academic staff to include in their teaching information's about the recent research results in the field as well as identify those students who would be interested to get involved in research projects and offer them specific opportunities.

#### 2.2. Quality management

According to the SER `The physiotherapy program, as a new program in the Faculty of Medicine will be subject to the rules and procedures provided for quality management, the same as other programs` [SER, p.20]. This was confirmed by the discussions during the online site-visit.

The Office for Quality Assurance is responsible at the level of university for the QA processes. There is a Quality Assurance Officer part of this office. They function following the university regulations and they will also ensure the **quality of the BA Physiotherapy program.** 

The QA procress is integrated into normal planning processes of the university and faculty. They include questionnaires for academic staff, administrative staff, students. They follow inputs, processes and outputs and learning outcomes according to the SER. `The analysis of these questionnaires provides assessments achieved on the field which they elaborate so that in the coming semesters, continuous improvements are made as far as working conditions allow` [SER, p.20] To implement potential improvements to the teaching process and the programmes, regular meetings of teachers and assistants of the same subject are held. The ET considers that similar meetings could be organized with teachers of different subjects (disciplines) but with the purpose to talk about how to improve teaching.

The self-evaluation is `Serious, detailed and periodic self-analysis on the basis of these standards gives staff a valuable opportunity to understand in time its strengths and weaknesses` [SER, p.21]. The self-evaluation instrument is designed to guide the process of self-improvement. However, it is not clear whether the academic or administrative staff are also evaluated by their superior or peers.

A great attention and effort is dedicate towards monitoring the attendance of both teachers and students in lectures and practical stages.





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Though all QA instruments are meant to be used to improve the quality of the programme, it is not clear whether they succeed to check if the standards of the university are met – for e.g. to check whether the preset learning outcomes are reached or whether

Reports are prepared and discussed with teachers to offer them the opportunity to improve their teaching. Some summarized reports are prepared at the level of the university but they are not publicly made available on the website of the university (<a href="https://uni-gjk.org/al/dokumentet/raporte">https://uni-gjk.org/al/dokumentet/raporte</a> only includes some statistics about the number of students and the budget of the universities, and there is an internal audit report from 2019, but nothing more recent). Periodical reports showing strong and weak points along with plans to improve the current situation should be made public.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

#### ET recommendations:

- 1. Publish periodic reports with plans to improve the current situation.
- 2. Organize meetings to discuss new developments in teaching methods with all academic staff, no matter the discipline they teach.
- 3. Consider 360 degress-evaluation, that includes self-evaluation, evaluation by superior, evaluation by peers and evaluations by beneficiaries (students);
- 4. Include questions regarding the examination process.
- 5. Continue efforts to address questionnaires to the potential's employers of the graduates of the new program.

#### 2.3. Academic staff

The selection of academic staff is done in a transparent way, based on the public tender, which is published by the UFAGJ Senate. It was clearly indicated in the self-evaluation report in a table (according to standards of KAA accreditation manual) the name of academic staff, full time or part-time contract, academic title, qualifications, duration of contract and labour load. These all fulfil the standard specified by KAA accreditation manual and the needs of the programme at its current dimensions.

The staff engaged in the Program of physiotherapy is listed in the courses of the curriculum. The physiotherapy program is covered by full-time and part-time staff. None of the academic staff covers within an academic year, more than two teaching positions (one full-time, one part-time), regardless of the educational institution where they perform their activity. FM in its





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framework with a regular employment contract has 5 professors with the title of Associate Professor (Prof. Assoc.) 3 professors with the title of Assistant Professor (Prof. Ass.), 1 lecturer, 8 Assistants (4 of them attend the programs of doctoral studies in countries outside Kosovo). From the University of Gjakova - Department of Education it is planned to hire 2 professors (1 Prof. Assoc. And 1 Prof. Ass.).

The teachers from the physiotherapy department and other departments have been detailed in a list provided to the accreditation team. Overall, the teaching staff clearly is competent, and the number of teachers is sufficient, but continued education of teaching members will be essential to adapt more modern teaching that enhances the learning effects. The person in charge of the physiotherapy program says that teachers will be constantly encouraged to update curricula, teaching materials and teaching literature, in which case they must include the most up-to-date and relevant findings in this field (and related fields), information and knowledge about their research and activities.

In addition to the academic staff stated in the KAA, the Physiotherapy program collaborates with international staff, who are with PhD, who will also hold lectures in English for Physiotherapy students, but ET suggests additional employment of competent higher education teachers in the field of physiotherapy. The academic staff of the Physiotherapy program is also engaged not only in participating in various local and international conferences, but also in organizing local conferences.

Teachers take care of the teaching quality strategy and regularly update their curricula, including contemporary literature. Moreover, during the online discussions, training opportunities offered to the academic staff members were mentioned.

UFAGJ adheres to criteria and standards imposed by the law. In the discussion, they say they don't have teachers retired at age limit.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. Increase employment of academically educated higher education teachers in the field of physiotherapy.
- 2. Encourage teachers to continue to write books and scripts for students in Albanian.
- 3. Financially support teachers involved in doctoral studies.





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#### 2.4. Educational process content

The study program Physiotherapy is modelled on qualification objectives. These include subject-related and interdisciplinary aspects as well as the acquisition of disciplinary, methodological, and generic skills and competencies. The study program complies with the National Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The study program comprises 6 semesters over 3 years of full-time studies (180 ECTS). One (1) ECTS is equivalent to twenty-five (25) hours of studies. All courses are graded by ECTS values. The allocation of ECTS is appropriate and justified and the assessment/examination methods are adequate.

The professional program in Physiotherapy is consisted of several mandatory (32) and elective courses (8), which are combined in a way to best achieve the specified qualification objectives and provide for adequate forms of teaching and learning. The program also includes practical education and diploma work. The group of experts found that the subject of Medical Ethics which is extremely important, it is otherwise implemented as an elective subject, which means that it is chosen only by a certain number of students and might be better to place the subject as a mandatory subject.

All courses are graded by ECTS values. The allocation of ECTS is appropriate and justified and the assessment/examination methods are adequate. Elective courses are evaluated with 3 ECTS.

The program is designed for a full-time study form. The teaching methods seem to be understandable and acceptable in given circumstances; there is a mix of larger as well as smaller groups used during the teaching process (lectures/seminars), it seems. One of the stronger aspects of the program is practice that students undergo in institutions across the whole region. The amount of practice is satisfactory and the system of organizing practice as well (there is involved a supervisor from the Faculty, a mentor from the pre-school institution site during the process of practice). Allocation of ECTS seems to be acceptable. An overlap of academic content between the various parts of the curriculum is possible in some extend.

The program is designed for a full-time study form. The teaching methods seem to be understandable and acceptable in given circumstances; there is a mix of larger as well as smaller groups used during the teaching process (lectures/seminars), it seems. One of the stronger aspects of the program is practice that students undergo in preschool institutions across the whole region. The amount of practice is satisfactory and the system of organizing practice as well (there is involved a supervisor from the Faculty, and a mentor from the health institution





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site during the process of practice). Allocation of ECTS seems to be acceptable. An overlap of academic content between the various parts of the curriculum is possible in some extend.

As it is a common practice in the European space, the graduates of this programme have to undergo an internship and then pass the exam of the professional body before receiving the right to practice. The disciplines within the curriculum have analytical syllabuses which comprise at the following: the discipline's objectives; the basic thematic content, learning outcomes; the distribution of classes, seminars and applicative activities, students' assessment system, bibliography.

The program is in Albanian language. The Physiotherapy program and its specifics are modeled based on the standards, specifics and recommendations of the European Framework of Skills, Competences and Professions (ESCO) giving special importance to the connection of education and training with the labour market.

In the Physiotherapy program, the disciplines within the curriculum are organized in such a way as to enable students to understand and learn the logical flow of professional preparation for the chosen profession. Thus, teaching begins with general preclinical medical courses in the first semester, more clinical courses in the second semester, and then moves on to more professional courses in the following semesters. The same logic is followed with professional courses, in which case it starts with the basics of professional courses in the first semesters and goes deeper at the level of professional sub-fields. (SER, p.83).

#### Graduates of the Physiotherapy program will be able to:

- describe and argue theoretical and practical knowledge in basic sciences, humanities and professional sciences.
- identify professional (professional) and personal values (of the patient, companions, health professionals and other members of the rehabilitation team);
- identify the health determinants and health needs of the individual and different groups within the community using the "biopsychosocial" approach.
- define and apply different models of concepts, together with their benefits and limitations in different hospital and non-hospital settings.
- formulate short-term and long-term objectives of the rehabilitation process.
- plan, design, describe and direct the physiotherapeutic process.
- carry out the physiotherapeutic process in accordance with local and international laws in force;





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 assist in the establishment of support staff and cooperate directly in improving their professional role and in research.

The program is based on similar programs at the University of Ljubljana (Faculty of Health Sciences, study program of higher professional education in the first cycle in Physiotherapy), University of Zagreb (Faculty of Medicine, branch Physiotherapy), University of Prishtina and others.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant.

#### ET recommendations:

- 1. Consider including the subject of first aid in mandatory subjects.
- 2. Consider increasing the number of electives subjects.
- 3. Develop and support innovative methods of teaching that involve students as active participants in their own learning, flexible learning paths and alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning.

#### 2.5. Students

The Faculty of Medicine will organize admission for this new programme based on the regulations of the UFAGJ.

Therefore students can be admitted only if they completed secondary education in Kosovo and have a diploma attesting the successful pass of the Matura Exam, or similar education outside of Kosovo with a diploma recognised by MEST.

There is an admission procedure that takes into account the results in the Matura Exam, the results in the highschool and the results in the entrance exam. At this moment there is no data about the program on the website of the university. The ET is concerned that informing potential candidates too late about the existing of this program will mean that the first rounds of admission will not have sufficient candidates and organising several admission stages will affect the consistency and fairness of the applied rules.

The heads of the program plan to organize study groups that ensure qualitative teaching: 40 students/lecture, 15-20 students per laboratory exercises and 8-10 students for practical stages. However, should the program enrol 60 students in the first year, the division in study groups will be difficult. Moreover, interactive teaching does not depend exclusively on the dimension





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of the study group, but also on the teaching methods used by the teacher. They can consider using project-based leaning, study -cases etc. to involve students actively in their learning. At this stage only some general presentations of the intended teaching methods are available: `The teaching organization will be in the form of theoretical lectures, interactive seminars, laboratory exercises, clinical practice and self-learning` [SER, p.91] and the onlinde discussions did not manage to clarify them or offer more details.

`Eventual transfers between higher education institutions, faculties and study programs are clearly regulated in the formal internal documents, and are decided by the Faculty Studies Commission and the Faculty Council, according to the preliminary definitions in the provisional statute of the UFAG` [SER, p.92].

Assessment results are published on time and students can reject a degree if they don't agree with it, but this is not a common practice in the Faculty, thus one can assume it will not be encouraged for the Physiotherapy program either. The ET recommends teachers to offer constant feedback to their students so that they can improve and reach the learning outcomes by the end of the discipline.

The results of the academic work of students are registered in the academic record, including their results during the practical stages.

Flexible treatment of students in special situations was not mentioned in the SER, but teachers explained they usually show this kind of special treatment to students who miss out on academic activities due to illnesses or personal family events. A special procedure should be adopted within the university/faculty to increase transparency about how to handle these situations, especially now when COVID-19 can affect many students.

The Faculty has done efforts to promote principles of ethical conduct and original work, but they still don't have an anti-plagiarism system in place. It is planned to develop one.

The students already enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine know their rights and obligations as the rules and regulations of the university are published within the intranet (internal online platform of the university), thus one can assume that this will also be available for future students.

The academic staff will announce consultation hours, just as they already do for the rest of the programmes. They are not very popular among current students, though when used students address both academic and personal questions. The students from other programs already functioning within the faculty were satisfied with the relationship they have with their teachers so one can assume this will also be the case for the new program.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant





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#### **ET recommendations:**

- 1. The university should consider informing potential students about this program on the website, with a mention that the organization of the program depends on the accreditation. This way interested candidates could prepare for the entrance exam.
- 2. Encourage teachers to offer constant feedback to students on their progress towards meeting the learning outcomes, so that they can adjust and reach them until finalising a discipline.
- 3. Organise an orientation week for the students who will be enrolled in the Physiotherapy study program.
- 4. Especially those teachers who teach in several programmes should be supported by the university to offer specially designed help and consultations for students in this new program.

#### 2.6. Research

The development of research activities in the Physiotherapy program follows the objectives set out in the Faculty of Medicine at the University "Fehmi Agani" in Gjakova strategic plan and is based on academic competence, infrastructure, and internal and external co-operation.

Physiotherapy program aims to integrate scientific work with clinical practice and industry, while the academic staff responsible for the physiotherapy program possess related professional and scientific knowledge and skills for the respective profiles. Also, the same staff engages in research work as a necessity for their re-election and advancement, presenting at local and international conferences and congresses, and publishing their findings in scientific journals indexed with impact factors. The nature, form and quality of individual and / or group scientific work of UFAG staff is determined by the Provisional Statute of UFAG, MEST administrative instruction no. 01-2018 on the principles of recognition of international platforms and peer-reviewed journals. (SER, p.96).

The academic staff of FM, respectively the physiotherapy program is engaged in teaching and scientific research according to the relevant profiles.

According to the regulation for scientific research activity, the academic staff of the university is obliged to do scientific research and research work in accordance with their professional skills and obligations arising from the strategic documents of the University "Fehmi Agani"





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in Gjakova. Each member of the academic staff is evaluated once a year for his contribution to the scientific activity. However, it was not clear how are they considered in the performance evaluation and promotion criteria. A list of publications is presented. ET suggests that the results of research done as part of the diploma work should be published at scientific conferences and symposia.

During the meeting the responsible person for program Physiotherapy say, that, there are a considerable number of physiotherapy research project with very high potential ongoing, from the physiotherapy staff doing their PhD in International Universities. The group of experts suggests that it will be necessary to allocate start-up funds for research in the field of physiotherapy.

To protect intellectual property, UFAGJ publishes all student / graduate diploma topics on the official website.

Compliance level: Substantially compliant

#### ET recommendations:

- 1. Intensify discussions with METS to increase funding for research.
- 2. Allocate some funds for starting research in the field of physiotherapy.
- 3. The results of research done as part of the diploma work should be published at scientific conferences and symposia.

#### 2.7. Infrastructure and resources

"Fehmi Agani" University in Gjakova, currently has enough space for the development of the teaching process in accordance with the EU directive, also our university offers good working conditions and facilities for students and academic staff [SER, p.108]. However, it is not very clear whether they will be enough to fit another new program.

The faculty management promises that another building will be built starting with 2021 and is expected to be completed by 2025. This might help with the space economy. Moreover, the heads of the evaluated programme made arrangements with representatives of the industry to organize the practical stages within their facilities – e.g. sport centres, spas etc. so that some of the pressure on the laboratories for the practical exercises is taken over by them.

The faculty will share its spaces among the two programs already accredited and with the new Physiotherapy program. The latter was dedicated 2 laboratories - `One laboratory is equipped with all the necessary equipment for training students for general osteomuscular problems





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from the physiotherapeutic aspect while the other laboratory is dedicated to the care of palliative patients, which is also used by students of Nursing` [SER, p.109].

Currently the faculty only has 6 cabinets for teachers. Opening a new program might mean that new teachers will be hired and thus the pressure to get more spaces will increase. The faculty management should consider other solutions until the new building is built – e.g. renting spaces or agreeing with faculties from the same university to use some of the unused spaces (if any is available).

As in many universities in Kosovo, the budget and financial management within the university is centralised, with a majority of the funds coming from the MEST. This makes it impossible for programs to have their own budget plan, predict the budget they can rely on next year or make too many future plans. However, both the faculty management and the heads of the programe confirmed that the university management agreed to cover the expenses with the salaries for the new program as well as ensure access to some funds for research, materials and investments. This is however very uncertain and difficult to quantify. Teachers say that until now they were financially supported by the university to go to conferences and publish research articles, but no formal procedure for this is in place. It seems more like a sporadic effort than an institutional practice. More transparency in how funds are allocated within the university needs to be guaranteed. Currently, many of the research money comes from international projects, though it is a priority of the Ministry to increase research activity in Kosovo. MEST should allocate more specific funds to research in universities. Such funding opportunities will be needed by the teachers involved in the new program who will have to specialize their research activity in the new filed, thus need a consistent initial investment in both equipment and materials.

Due to these arrangements, the autonomy of the faculty or programmes is reduce. Therefore, even if the strategic plan of the university includes an increase in the number of academic staff, it is not clear how many will ensure the qualitative implementation of the new program (the Physiotherapy BA) nor whether the new hires will be done until autumn of 2021 when the program is meant to start enrolling students.

The university has a library that will be available for the students of the new program also. `At the moment the Faculty Library possesses 2047 titles and 4493 exepmplar. UFAGJ has a cooperation agreement with the Municipal Library (of the city - see annex) which based on the agreement our students can use the space of this library with a daily capacity of 450 seats, number of books 18582 pieces, individual and group rooms, can also use the literature and all





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other assets needed for students` [SER, p.120]. Discussions with the faculty members indicated that there are not sufficient books in the library related to the new field of study, but that they are confident they will manage to cover the needs for learning materials for their future students from other sources — e.g. accessing libraries from other universities where some of them are students. The effort is appreciable, but the university has to invest in a library section dedicated to physiotherapy as soon as possible. Solutions for access to online international databases — e.g. JSTORE, EBSCO etc. are urgently needed to support the development of original work both for students and teachers.

Moreover, teachers have declared they already prepared materials for the first semester of the study program, but not a practical stages guide. For the new program is essential to have all the learning materials, and laboratory materials as well as other administrative documents (e.g. the schedule) needed for at least the first semester of study. Especially because all teachers already teach within other programs, the ET is concerned they will not have much time to allocate to these tasks once the academic year 2021-2022 starts, thus encourage them to prepare in advance.

Compliance level: Partially compliant

#### ET recommendations:

- 1. Solutions need to be found until the new building is built for e.g. rent spaces both for teaching and for administrative needs.
- 2. Increase transparency in regard with the allocation of funds within the university.
- 3. Allocate funds for a library section dedicated to physiotherapy.
- 4. Intensify efforts to ensure access to students and teachers to international journal databases.
- 5. Finish preparations for the first semester of study as soon as possible, before the beginning of the academic year 2021-2022.

#### 3. OVERALL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE ET

In conclusion, the Expert Team considers that the study program BA Physiotherapy offered by University `Fehmi Agani` in Gjakove is *Substantially compliant* with the standards included in the *KAA Accreditation manual* and, therefore, recommends *accrediting* the study program for a duration of *3 years* with a number of *40* students to be enrolled in the program.





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**4. APPENDICES** (*if available*) – not the case

Expert Team					
Chair					
Prof. dr. Danica Železnik					
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)			
Member					
Delia Gologan					
(Signature)	(Print Name)	(Date)			