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ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
H.Q.A.
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ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT: **School of Architecture**

UNIVERSITY: **National Technical University of Athens**

February 2014



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
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07 March, 2014

National Technical University of Athens
School of Architecture

External Evaluation Committee (EEC) - Report

25 February – 2 March 2014

Professor Pierre von Meiss (coordinator)
Professor Yiorgos Hadjichristou
Professor Marvin J. Malecha
Professor Michael Romanos
Professor Elias Zenghelis

Site Visit Schedule

The External Evaluation of the School of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens took place in the Patisson campus facilities. The evaluation procedure was conducted in open meetings and included members of the faculty, students and invited alumni.

The EEC Site Visit Schedule follows:

Tuesday 25/2

12:00 – 14:30

- *Meeting with the NTUA Vice rector for Student Affairs*
- *Meeting with the Dean and the School Department Directors*

Wednesday 26/2

9:00 – 11:00

- *Visit of the School Area*

11:30 – 18:00

- *Presentation of Courses and Examples of Student Projects by School Professors*

19:00

- *Working EEC*

Thursday 27/2

9:30 – 16:00

- *Presentation of Courses and Examples of Student Projects by School Professors*

16:00 – 18:00

- *EEC Meeting with NTUA Alumni*

20:00

- *Working EEC with Dean, Department Directors and Selected Faculty*

Friday 28/2

9:30 – 18:00

- *EEC Meeting with Representatives of Quality Assurance*
- *EEC Working Session*

20:00

- *Working EEC*

Saturday 1/3

9:30 – 18:00

- *EEC Working Session*

Introduction

The documents provided by the School of Architecture included a summary of coursework and various analytical materials providing the basis for this assessment. A number of faculty presentations clearly demonstrated both the breadth and depth of curricular directions within the School. The most important documents provided to the EEC included a catalogue of Diploma Projects and a report prepared specifically for us documenting teaching, research, relation to society as well as administration and infrastructure.

The EEC toured all facilities related to the conduct of the academic programs. We were in particular pleased to be able to tour an exhibit of all accepted Diploma Projects completed in the previous academic term. They demonstrated considerable concern and ability of dealing with architectural and urban *space*, a capacity neglected these times by many other institutions.

The EEC was also able to meet students in open meetings and touring studio sessions underway. The students presented their concerns regarding the meaning and purpose of the evaluation process and expressed a number of concerns regarding the future of the program and their wellbeing and privileges during this extremely difficult economic period for the Nation. The meeting was a lively exchange of ideas demonstrating that the students have passion for their ability to study architecture and to insure that even those of the most meager resources will be able to study at the University in the future. The meeting also demonstrated that all students are not of like mind. It is worth noting that a negative spirit of distrust accompanies this process among both students and faculty. Following this meeting the EEC toured studios and was able during this period to meet individually with students both observing their work environment and related habits as well as solicit their opinions regarding the program in a more informal manner.

The EEC found a School of Architecture with a rich culture of professional studies and electives. It is a School leading to the generalist architect, with particular strength in history, restoration and a wealth of electives. It is a School with willing and enthusiastic students and faculty who pursue the issues of architecture with passion. This spirit is shared by alumni.

Internal Evaluation Procedure

The EEC recognizes that the School of Architecture community made a considerable effort to meet the requirements of the assessment process. Two days of very dense faculty presentations accompanied by detailed discussions has prepared the EEC to complete this evaluation process. We are confident that enough information has been acquired to this assessment procedure.

It is important to note that the EEC has not separated specific curricular tracks from each other precisely because of the interrelated nature of coursework and faculty responsibilities that was apparent throughout the visit.

A. Curriculum

The Departments (Tomeis) have originally been intended to replace the “idiosyncrasies of chairs” by a more collaborative pedagogical and research structure. Presently this structure has little effect on a singularly directed curricular experience other than providing a manner of developing elective options. There is an opportunity to take advantage of this administrative structure to give greater coherence to the curriculum in accordance with the interests of the faculty and their pedagogical and research responsibilities.

The curriculum is directed towards an instrumental education, preparing students to productively enter the profession. This is an unquestioned target shared by students as they aspire to be leaders in the profession. In coherence with this observation, the EEC suggests that internships be required before entering the fourth year (i.e. 6-12 months, without academic credits). This would also contribute to work with far more mature students during the final stage of their studies.

For this final stage the EEC suggests that the faculty consider a closer relationship between the dissertation coursework, the electives, the ninth semester studio, and the Diploma-Project.

Furthermore the EEC observed that because of large student enrollment in studio coursework, teamwork is introduced for mere practical reasons. Teamwork should be balanced by individualized responsibilities. In spite of the realities of this situation, EEC is impressed by the spirit of teamwork that was exhibited among students in the studio. The approach is enriched by a pluralistic mentality enabled by faculty interests and unified by a shared commitment to professional ambition. However, the EEC also wishes to express that this commitment to teamwork should not be an exclusive method driven by economic exigencies. It should not be an exclusive approach limiting opportunities for individualized instruction within each of the studios. As the student progresses through the curriculum individual discretion must be included in curricular experiences, both, for the student and for the appropriate assessment of student progress.

The ninth semester research associated dissertation project provides the opportunity to significantly enhance the Diploma Project either by direct linkage or by an exploration that informs the sophistication of the student. Earlier emphasis on critical writing would further enhance the ability of the student to take full advantage of this reflective opportunity. Greater emphasis should be placed on critical writing throughout the curriculum, beginning in the first year.

There is a need to articulate a clearer purpose or specialization in post-graduate studies that specifies either a philosophical position or a particular skill that enhances professional credentials. Each branch of inquiry in post-graduate studies should identify a philosophical or professional aim. Such clarity would draw students irrespective of the economic exigencies of the Nation. This would draw post-graduate studies into the diploma program enriching the ninth semester studio, the dissertation project and the diploma project. This further provides linkage from studios to Ph.D. Studies.

The School, University Senate and the Ministry must give attention to the development of a clear degree nomenclature making pertinent equivalencies to the internationally recognized Bachelor and Master degree designations. This will bring the School of Architecture into conformance with the international community and clarify issues of specialization, post-graduate programs and Ph.D. Studies. In particular, attention to this matter will enrich the linkage of the School with peer institutions in Europe who have adopted the bachelor/master degree nomenclature. Further this strategy will give greater opportunity for academic exchanges for the benefit of the mobility of students and faculty in both, academic and professional cultures.

To further enhance the international relationships of the School, the EEC strongly urges the offering the alternative for English instruction of the courses of the last two years of studies (4th-5th year) as well as for post graduate studies.

The EEC observes that there is a need for a faculty committee designated to watch over Ph.D. Studies on such matters as a time limit for the completion of the program, doctoral curricular studies (i.e. research method and paradigms), admissions practices, faculty participation and interaction with faculty scholarship, the preparation and oversight of dissertation committee chairs, and standards for the appropriate assignment of faculty to students. The EEC further observes that the School must find a way to manage Ph.D. Program enrollment. The total number of 177 students in this program is excessive and disconnected from faculty scholarship.

The EEC advises that the faculty must undertake the effort to correlate course offerings to the European Credit Transfer and accumulation System (ECTS). This effort must include reflection upon the number of examinations required of students with the recommendation that these be reduced. It must also include a reconsideration of the number of electives within the School and the faculty resources necessary to deliver such materials. The team understands that this implies a holistic reconsideration of the curriculum that will include course elimination, combination and creation.

The translation of the curriculum to the ECTS model may also provide the opportunity to allow students to move into other curricular paths within the University with minimal additional course requirements. The EEC strongly urges the consideration of this option for the benefit of the student. The lack of the students' ability to move among disciplines does not recognize the realities of contemporary learning behaviors. The University and the Ministry should reexamine the anachronistic practices that prevent this necessary flexibility.

The EEC noticed that issues of energy and sustainability were not evidently addressed in exhibited diploma work. These are issues of considerable importance that must be accounted for in this work. It is further observed that buildings that do not exhibit these qualities are not responsible architecture. Issues of sustainability and climate change must be clearly communicated to the students as societal imperatives that have a profound effect on the design strategies leading to architecture and urban design.

Issues such as sustainability and the introduction of new tools including information technology must be incorporated in the studio experience to master processes and challenges that will define professional practice. The mastery of such experiences must be taught in the context of design thought.

B. Teaching

The EEC is impressed by the dedication and passion of the faculty for the mission of the School and for the welfare of the students. However, along with this appreciation for the faculty is a grave concern on the part of the EEC for the impact of recent decisions by the University and the Ministry that leaves individual elected to positions without contracts, faculty working without salary, and the very real risk that it will become not only difficult but impossible to deliver required curricular course materials.

As the School addresses faculty appointments the EEC urges the recruitment and appointment of individuals who bring experience beyond the immediate culture of the School and the University. An institution with aspirations for international leadership requires a faculty with credentials from many institutions and experience in a broad spectrum of professional situations. This will bring the School into conformance with recently implemented National laws.

The EEC observes that there are too few visiting professionals to studio and studio reviews. There is a need to nurture a culture of visiting professionals associated with studio work. The environment of Athens provides a rich and diverse professional community to choose from. In this regard there is an obvious opportunity to also involve alumni in this endeavor and thereby create a support network.

The EEC also observes that there should be a greater effort to involve faculty from other schools within the University taking advantage of a wealth of capabilities otherwise not available to the students.

The EEC wishes to encourage more exploration and experimentation within the studio format characterized by teaching approaches as well as innovative topic materials. For example, the project "Greek Metropolis vs. Mediterranean Metropolis" introduced a fresh approach to studio instruction and topic investigation by opening a new learning horizon. This project encompassed the whole of the Mediterranean region across continents broadening the understanding of Greece on a broad context. The Team further advises that this culture must be cultivated in light of the fact that there is a substantial Ph.D. student community within the School.

While the EEC was informed of a student evaluation system, the direct results of this effort were not reviewed. However, this issue was the subject of a EEC conversation with the dean. Through this conversation it became apparent that a newly implemented system of course and faculty assessment has not been fully embraced by the students, thereby requiring additional efforts by the School to sustain this effort. The EEC was also informed that a faculty committee exists to oversee this effort. However, even without specific evaluation results, it must be said that the EEC observed great rapport between students and faculty.

C. Research

While the EEC recognizes that a substantial sponsored project culture exists within the School as a service to the Ministry, the University and to the public at large through community based work, there is little hypothesis-based research apparently underway. The Departments are an institutional infrastructure for research with the potential of clarification of domains.

Members of the team did observe research efforts underway among members of the Planning faculty that could inspire other faculty efforts.

Members of the faculty did express frustrations that recent staff terminations have had a detrimental effect on the ability to maintain research laboratories thereby further aggravating the efforts to successfully grow research initiatives.

The EEC wishes to stress that funds must be identified for the presentation of faculty scholarship at national and international workshops and conferences.

D. Other Services

The EEC is very concerned about National budget practices that have had substantial detrimental effect on key infrastructure elements such as the library, computer laboratory and general facilities and equipment. Such budget shortfalls threaten even the most basic ability to conduct coursework. The continuation of these practices such as a woefully inadequate, zero budget, allocation for either the library subscriptions and acquisitions or the updates of software and hardware in the information technology areas and important facilities management threatens the very essence of a university.

Presently information technology equipment is as old as seven years, well beyond the industry standard of three years. This budget posture severely threatens the student learning experience and faculty scholarship with the impact of undermining the credibility of the institution. In particular, students already do not demonstrate the necessary research and scholarship expected of an architectural professional that can only further be undermined by eroding library resources. Also, students simply cannot learn necessary computer skills by hand written examination. Skills such as integrated project delivery can only be experienced by extensive involvement with the latest computer hardware and software options.

The lack of operating budgets for the library and the information technology laboratory is further aggravated by significant reduction in support personnel. This must be adjusted so as to provide support for the scholarship of faculty and students.

The Team feels obligated to note that it is even apparent that the most basic facilities and equipment issues are interfering with effective course instruction. In architecture programs there is a direct relationship between quality of instruction and quality of facilities.

E. Strategic Planning Perspectives

The great advantage of the School's culture and heritage also poses a challenge, as new ways must be introduced in course offerings, learning strategies and program development. While incremental change strategies are most likely preferable, the dynamics of the rapidly changing world culture demand a more agile posture that also looks beyond traditions.

The School did not demonstrate that a comprehensive strategic plan exists. Such a strategic plan could accommodate a pluralistic attitude in curricular development. Toward this end the School must adopt a strategic posture that clearly articulates the assessment and decisions to guide the delivery of electives, the distribution of resources, and the difficult choices regarding course development, recombination and elimination. This is not only required because of the economic exigencies of the time but it is a mark of a vital organization. It is a fact that even the healthiest

trees must be pruned for their continued health. An open and vigorous strategic planning process best undertakes such an endeavor. The School is burdened by courses and practices that have accumulated over time. Strategic planning will provide the School the opportunity to address curricular change with a greater understanding of goals and objectives that both respect the culture of the place and plant ideas that will inspire the future.

The inability of the School of Architecture to control any aspect of student enrollment causes serious problems in teaching staff assignments, facilities and equipment allocation and student matriculation through the program. Transfer-students from programs as diverse as technical schools and other university programs particularly aggravate this. The regulation and management of student enrollment is a critically important issue directly related to program excellence.

It was reported to the EEC that because the State determines the number of students transferring from other architectural schools from a capacity of 90 students 120 students were originally admitted. Transfer students about to be admitted from Technical Professional Schools further augment admissions or transfer numbers. Thus from a planned admissions class of 90, the School must now address more than twice as many in the first year class, far exceeding the capability of the School to meet such instructional demands with any assurance for quality.

F. Final Conclusions and Recommendations

The EEC found a School of Architecture with a rich culture of professional studies. It is a School leading to *the generalist architect*, with particular strength in history, restoration and a wealth of electives. It is a School with willing and enthusiastic students and faculty who pursue the issues of architecture with passion.

The schools' historic position as **the** Greek place to become a good architect, its selective admission accepting only the potentially most qualified students, its dedicated staff and its prestigious buildings, confer a considerable responsibility and the capacity for renewal in order to continue as a "flagship", in the Greek as well as in the international context.

To encourage this institution to live up to its reputation and keep up with international standards for excellence in the long run, the EEC makes the following recommendations:

- a) Develop a *strategic plan* that clearly articulates the assessment and decisions to guide the delivery of electives, the distribution of resources, and the difficult choices regarding course development, recombination and elimination. (An exterior moderator may be helpful).
- b) In doing so, the overall number of exams should be reduced.
We encourage the school to question and articulate (connect) more clearly the relation between the 9th semester Studio, the Dissertation, the Diploma project, post-graduate specializations and PhD research.
- c) Introduce an internationally compatible structure and nomenclature of Bachelor/Masters degrees as well as adopt the comprehensive ECTS system (differentiated credits for courses). Introduce the alternative for most courses to be also available in English from the 4th year onwards. This will put the school on the international (competitive) scene as never before. This is your passport to the world, you have nothing to lose, only to gain from opening your doors on the basis of credentials.
- d) Preparing for the crisis coming to an end, we recommend the introduction of a one year internship before being admitted to the 4th year. Such should greatly enhance the students' mobility and maturity for applying to their most appropriate Masters' program, without disrupting any of the two cycles.
Our students have been « sitting on school benches » for 75% of their lifetime!
In pedagogical terms we are confident that a more gradual passage to architectural or any other practice would be smoother and more beneficial for the university and the society at large, including having to face to search for a job.
By all evidence a change of this nature would have to be agreed upon with the other five schools and the professional bodies.
- e) The world-wide over-production of architectural graduates questions your students' in-existing opportunities to adapt and transfer to another domain of studies after a year or two, we strongly recommend to the University to adopt a more flexible attitude whereby the students concerned will not have to undergo the humiliating administrative and socially expensive procedure of re-starting from scratch, such as new entrance examinations and without any previous credits taken into account.
- f) Create a "Doctoral School" linked to how to go about scientific research (i.e. during the first year of PhD), severely reduce the number of PhD to what the Faculty can realistically handle, introduce a time-limit (i.e. 3-4 years with possible exceptions).
- g) Faculty and staff appointments are to be characterized by an open transparent process, balanced among assistant, associate and full professors, and mindful of the need for a

professional school to have a mixture of tenured members, active professionals and visitors from abroad.

- h) Present Greek National budget practices are very risky. There are domains where savings may be operated, but some are totally unacceptable and self-destructive in terms of the Nations' academic credibility.
 i.e.: a university library with **no** budget for new acquisitions during one or two years is no longer to be taken into serious consideration. A university with **outdated** computer software and hardware for architects is seriously damaging its graduates' job opportunities. Offices, private or public, expect the newcomers to bring new know-how with them.

The members of the External Evaluation Committee have prepared this assessment collaboratively and thereby submit this document as a joint assessment report.
 We concentrated on enhancing the strength and potentials of the School of Architecture at NTUA.

Professor Pierre von Meiss (coordinator)

Professor Yiorgos Hadjichristou

Professor Marvin J. Malecha

Professor Michael Romanos

Professor Elias Zenghelis