



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Α.ΔΙ.Π.

H.Q.A.

ΑΡΧΗ ΔΙΑΣΦΑΛΙΣΗΣ & ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΣΗΣ
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΙΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΩΤΑΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE
AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF CRETE



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, CULTURE & SPORTS
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External Evaluation Report

Department of Political Science

University of Crete

(Rethymnon)

Opening Remarks

1. Introduction

The following text represents the outcome of a visit by a three-person team – henceforth the Evaluation Team -- to Rethymnon and Athens. The visit and the mission were carried out by:

- Demetrios Argyriades, Ph.D., Professor of Public Administration, John Jay College, CUNY, New York, as Coordinator;
- Panos Liverakos, Ph.D., Chief Technical Advisor on Human Resource Management and Development, UNDP, Bangladesh; and
- Andreas Savas Kourvetaris, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology, Northeastern Illinois University, USA.

Prior to their arrival in Athens as well as in Crete, the Evaluation Team received, in electronic form, detailed guidelines and documents including an elaborate Internal Evaluation Report, of some 500 pages, comprising several tables on the staff composition, the student body, activities and infrastructure.

The Evaluation Team is pleased to compliment the Department on the quality and structure of its Report, which helped the evaluation, ensuring rapid progress and an in-depth review in barely a couple of days and further enabling the team to draw specific conclusions and make recommendations in record time. The Team was told that the Internal Evaluation Report represented a team effort of the staff of the Department. It learned, in the course of its mission, that the *process* and the *outcome* of the Evaluation Exercise – both internal and external – would soon become the subject of a review by Members of the Staff of the Department, chiefly with an eye to the future. The Evaluation Team is very much in favour of steps in this direction, which it considers necessary, as well as very timely.

2. The External Evaluation Procedure

The External Evaluation of the Department of Political Science, University of Crete began, in effect, when the members of the Evaluation Team received the Department's own Internal Evaluation Report (IER), along with the External Evaluation Guidelines, in early February 2014. These were provided, in time, by the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQAAA). It is worth mentioning that the IER report, in both structure and content, made a favourable impression on the Team members, who found it both quite thorough and well written. Two weeks prior to the evaluation, the Evaluation Team received additional documents ranging from faculty members' CVs and study programmes to relevant statistics on students and other relevant data.

The Evaluation Team attended a briefing on Monday, 24 February at the HQAAA premises, outlining the context, content and scope of the evaluation; then travelled to Rethymnon for two full days – Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 February. They returned to Athens late on Wednesday night and met for several hours, on Thursday 27 February, in order to compare their notes and to prepare the external evaluation report.

During its visit, the Team received supplemental information and was thus provided with a comprehensive picture of the Department and its activities. On the first day of the site visit, the Team met with the Vice-Rector of the University of Crete, responsible for Academic Affairs, and the majority of the Department faculty members, first in plenary, and then in multiple group sessions. The day ended with a meeting involving a group of highly motivated graduate students. On the second day, the Team met again with faculty members but also with the Department's Secretariat personnel, as well as with members of the Department's Internal Evaluation Committee and the University's Quality Assurance Unit. In the afternoon, the Team met and exchanged notes with a sizeable group of undergraduate students; then proceeded to visit the University premises, specifically the Library, several classrooms and auditoria, faculty offices, the Secretariat offices and the University's catering facilities.

These lengthy sessions of Tuesday were mostly dedicated to detailed presentations of the mission, objectives and achievements of the Department. The fact that faculty members participated actively in the ensuing discussions gave Team Members opportunities to explore all major issues related to curricula, teaching methods, research activities, relations with civil society and the international network of the Department.

Most of the sessions of Wednesday were devoted to reviews of the faculty's publications and research work, as well as to the impediments affecting both their teaching and research efforts. Perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Department were further explored, together with plans to strengthen its position within the current national and international contexts. The day ended with a meeting with undergraduate students. Significantly, these students corroborated several of the findings of the previous day, ranging

from the relevance of the curricula, the academic experience, quality of class instruction, availability of teachers, as well as of reading materials, all the way to the level and quality of the university's administrative and auxiliary services.

3. Background and Context

“Kairoi ou Menaitoi!” (Times are Pressing.) The country, as a whole, is still in the midst of a crisis, the worst in 65 years. It has seen GDP shrink by 25 per cent. Unemployment is the highest throughout the Eurozone, or 28 per cent. Among the youth especially, the age group in effect which is the catchment area for university students, it comes close to sixty (60) per cent. Though one may not agree with the manifestations of protest and unhappiness, which take on many forms, or their frequency and duration, we need to understand the factors that have prompted and sustain them. We need to be reminded that the Recession struck after more than three decades of relative prosperity; that it takes time to fathom its causes and time to internalize that it will not go away, any time soon.

The student body of Greece represents a particularly vulnerable segment of the population. Their eyes are on the future but they suffer the effects of the present. Under pressure from their parents, an increasing number of whom find it progressively difficult to contribute to support of their children's education, men and women undergraduates, as well as graduate students feel the pressure of “what next?” Public Administration and the public sector at large, which used to represent an avenue of choice for graduates from Departments of Political Science and Law, are becoming far less promising or credible as outlets. What is needed in the country but is slow to come about is a veritable *paradigm shift*, with students and their parents growing progressively accustomed to a higher degree of uncertainty in the market for high-level skills; to university studies no longer wholly *gratis*; and to Bachelors or Masters degrees in political science leading to jobs outside the public sector; indeed outside of Greece.

Though poised, at times uncomfortably, between what *“ought to be”* and what *now is* (whether we like it or not), both teaching staff and students are making this transition and making this *paradigm shift*. Though still in aggregate terms, this may be formulated as a tentative conclusion that the Team was able to reach. Hard to substantiate, given the limited numbers of people interviewed, one could not fail to sense an emerging broad *consensus*, among both the staff and students, about the pressing need “to move on” and, if not fully “embrace the world” the way it is, at least accept it conditionally and try to understand it before, arguably, seeking to change it.

Our encounters and exchanges of three days, in the last week of February, have brought us into contact with teaching staff and students, who see a range of benefits resulting from the programmes set up within the framework of the EU and available to scholars in the field of political science. This represents an outcome of what the persons met described as *EXOSTREPHEIA* (“looking outwards”). The term was used repeatedly, by members of the

staff to express an active interest in multiplying activities, as bring all into contact with institutions and people, in the field of political science, both in Europe and beyond.

Beneficial though they be, such contacts and activities do not come without prerequisites. They pre-suppose a level of fluency in English, which cannot be taken for granted, especially among undergraduates. It was rewarding to see the focus placed on languages, notably knowledge of English and English terminology. This is a positive sign, though more ought to be done. The Team is of the view that, given present trends, notably in ICT and the fact that 80 per cent of all scientific literature is normally published in English, a high degree of competence or fluency in this language and needed terminology are a *sine qua non* not only of gaining access to outputs of research but also taking part in international fora, beyond the borders of Greece. Although it represents an added burden, learning and practising languages at the graduate level especially, is far more cost-effective than the massive translation of books, which students need to read in order to gain competency and to become competitive in the market for high-level skills.

4. Challenges and Constraints

The teaching staff we met are all university graduates of foreign universities, who have been variously exposed to a different environment – cognitive and linguistic. They are thus able to act as mentors and advisers, facilitating access to various fields and sources of interest to students. The library on campus is also of great help and, all things considered, may be described as a “state of the art” facility. Available on campus to teaching staff and students, it has proved a crucial resource, enabling the Department to accomplish its objectives. During its work however the Evaluation Team was made acutely aware of a range of *external constraints* over which the TMHMA (Department) has very little control. The team has detected three groups of such constraints to which it draws attention:

- a) a first group of constraints can be termed “*logistic*”, “*operational*” or “*bureaucratic*”. They, generally, flow from an institutional framework, to which not merely Crete and its Department of Political Science, but all Greek Universities and Schools of Higher studies are subject. The framework is top heavy, both highly centralized and hard to navigate, given the multiplicity of ever-changing rules and time-consuming procedures, which tend to void “*autonomy*” of much of needed substance. The present report will shed light on some of those constraints, which surfaced in the course of this three-day Evaluation;
- b) related to the above are “budgetary” processes and limitations. These have been exacerbated as a result of the crisis. The Team discussed this issue at some length with the staff. It pointed to puzzling “discrepancies” in the Report, between “low delivery rates (*aporrophitikotis*)” and claims of *resource-scarcity*. Delayed implementation of the available budgets, as well as resource scarcity tend to seriously slow down procurement and thus affect the work. Although this represents a generic situation, not specific to Crete or the Political Science

Department, it is clearly an issue that can be addressed and *ought to be* addressed. Some progress has been made, in recent years especially. Evidently, however, this has not been enough;

- c) a constraint exacerbated by the crisis is one which bears relation to the attendance of courses on campus. Unable to meet their expenses, many students are forced to go home. It must be borne in mind that neither the School nor the students are the ultimate deciders on matters of admission. Thus, a student from Ioannina, with a preference for Physics may end up being admitted to Political Science in Rethymnon. Of the students interviewed by the Evaluation Team, only a very small minority were Cretan. Although there may be advantages to the ensuing mobility and diversification of the student body, this pattern has its downsides. At times of acute crisis, students unable to meet the added cost of renting and living far from home, show a tendency to leave for variable periods of time. Of the 996 students enrolled in the Department, perhaps no more than half – or 500 at best – may be available on campus at any given time. Of those who are forced to leave, the more committed try some form of *distant learning*, effectively depending on teachers for advice, mostly through regular e-mails, to keep up with their home work. It needs to be understood that this adds to the *workload* of teaching staff, which can be quite substantial, given a very unfavourable staff/student ratio. Furthermore, such forms of “distant learning” are certainly sub-optimal, effectively depriving the students of one important *plus*: the face-to-face interactions with teachers and colleagues. Participation in seminars is obviously also impaired.

The Evaluation Team has touched on these constraints, which appear to be *systemic*. They have been in existence for longer than the crisis and ought to be addressed. Though cognizant of issues, which all too many see as intimately linked to the country’s political culture and so-called “*idiaiterotites*” of Greece, the Team wants to emphasize that such constraints amount to limitations that can be *asphyxiating*. Some of the interviewees often used this very expression. Not all constraints are necessary. They certainly depart from common university practice in most developed countries and obviously detract from the needed institutional autonomy. Particularly, the School’s limited say in matters of selection of the students and the numbers of admissions, as well as the inability of the latter to decide their field of study are questionable at best. There must be a better way.

These points have been reflected in the body of the Report and its recommendations. For now, it must be said that, given these severe constraints, the Political Science Department has performed remarkably well, to students’ satisfaction, as far as we could gauge. The Team has been impressed by the collegiality, team spirit and commitment of those among the staff that it could meet; the trust, among the students, that teachers have visibly inspired and, notwithstanding the burden that the *faculty/student ratio* of 1 to 36

certainly represents, if one discounts the students enrolled but out of campus, ability to acquit themselves of tasks in supervision, teaching, seminars and research. In all of these respects, the sixteen-member strong departmental staff gives very credible signs of being ahead of the curve.

5. Opportunities and Strengths

In spite of such pressing concerns, with numerous *constraints*, which must stand in the way of the accomplishment of the Department's objectives, the teaching staff took pains to underscore such factors, as they considered sources of likely *opportunities* in a not distant future. The Department and University are strategically located between the EU, North Africa and the Near East. The Department has developed links with several Universities in Britain, EU countries and Israel among others. Despite its peripheral status, small size and recent origins, it has gained a reputation that has already proved conducive to close relations and to likely future partnerships for cooperation. As shown in publications, which the Team was able to see, the Members of the staff are clearly well-informed on developments and trends world-wide, as well as possibilities available out there. With a background of studies abroad and stints in universities of foreign countries – mostly North America and Europe – several Members of the Staff showed eagerness to explore every available option. The objective is to place Crete on the map, take advantage of its assets and turn it into a centre of both comparative studies and exploration of issues, which are common to the EU and Mediterranean countries beyond its borders. Members consider these options as difficult but feasible. More than anything else, they view as necessary promoting “*exostrepheia*”, opening students' minds to ongoing global trends and urging them to embrace the future and the world.

A. Curriculum

1. Approach

In the words of its mission statement the Department of Political Science aims at deepening an understanding of modern political questions and training students to critically think and successfully cope with contemporary public policy issues; thus contributing to the development of the discipline, as well as of the Greek political and administrative systems, within the context of the European Union.

The curriculum of the undergraduate programme provides core courses in classical and contemporary political science. These include political theory and philosophy, the role of the State and public policy, social actors and interest groups, international and European comparative politics and sectoral policies. It also provides courses in quantitative and qualitative methods and statistical techniques, and English for political scientists. Hence, the study programme departs from more traditional political science programmes offered in Greek universities, which commonly include constitutional and public law as core subjects.

It seems that the Department has a standing study programme committee periodically reviewing and assessing its curriculum, in order to remain an outward looking, specialized academic unit conforming to international political science norms and trends in teaching and research. Concurrently, it endeavours to accommodate students coming from different backgrounds, with different professional goals, prospects and aspirations.

The curriculum of the Masters Degree Programme provides advanced educational training in the domains of political theory and rights, of political analysis and of European public policies. The study programme aims to train graduates in the political and social sciences and other relevant fields; thus improving their professional career prospects in a highly competitive job market. The objectives of the curriculum seem to be consistent with the aims and objectives of the Department, as in its mission statement. It revised its curriculum in 2007 by adding some new courses, effectively aligning the study programme with the goals and aspirations of the Department, within the contemporary political science realm.

The Department also offers a Ph.D. Programme to Master's Degree graduates. Approved candidates may work on a doctoral thesis on a subject of their choice but in congruence with the research domains and specialisation of the faculty, and following an agreement with the faculty member responsible for overseeing their work. This approach adheres to European standards; however it could be further improved, along with recommendations made below.

2. Implementation

The undergraduate programme spreads over a period of four years (8 semesters). Students are required to take 6 classes per semester; effectively to undertaking a total of 48 courses in order to graduate¹. This is consistent with European and international standards, where undergraduate students need to successfully complete 48 courses (or 240 ECTS credits), in order to qualify for a Bachelors first degree.

The structure of the Department's undergraduate degree programme encourages students to engage in a participative, innovative and flexible approach². This attempts to

¹ 17 courses are compulsory for all; as well as 4 courses in English for political scientists. Students also need to complete 16 lecture-based, 10 seminar-based courses, and 1 elective selected from a pool of courses according to the students' particular interests and inclination. The Department also offers undergraduate students placement in public and private organisations with a view to gaining professional practical experience in congruence with their future employment interests. Practical experience placement exempts students from 1 seminar-based course. It counts towards the number of courses needed to graduate.

² In this context, the Department offers four alternative routes to graduation: [1] the classical route; [2] the placement route; [3] the dissertation route; and [4] the full-flex route. During the past two

provide students with the means required to integrate theory with the analysis and application of policy making, as well as the exploration of evaluation techniques and their uses in prevailing and emerging theoretical constructs.

Overall, the curriculum covers a wide range of subject areas, consistent with international norms and practices. It adheres to the stated mission of the Department. It is also well-articulated and communicated to the students through the study programme guide, which the Evaluation Team had the opportunity to study and discuss.

Although the Department has highly qualified trained staff to implement its curriculum, the current undergraduate student to faculty ratio casts some doubt on the adequacy of its resources in order to cope with its many teaching and research obligations. The table below shows student enrolment for the current and past academic years by level of studies.

	2012-13	2011-12
Undergraduate	949	850
Masters	95	83
Doctoral	46	48
Total	1,090	981
Faculty members	16	16
Undergraduate student to faculty ratio	59	53
Total student to faculty ratio	68	61

The statistics above indicate that the Department does not possess, quantitatively speaking, the needed human resources in order to fulfil its teaching and research obligations, in an adequate, sustainable manner. Indicatively, the undergraduate student to faculty ratio for the last academic year is a staggering 1 to 59 students; a ratio well above international norms. Although not all the students are on campus, at any one time, this does not really help lighten the load on the teachers; rather it introduces additional complexities.

The Master's Programme spreads over a period of twelve (12) months and the usual intake is a maximum of 24 students. The Syllabus for the Master's Degree Programme allows for specialization in one of two main areas: [a] political theory and rights; and [b] political analysis and European public policies. Once graduate students complete the required

academic years, more than half of the students chose the placement route reflecting their desire to connect with future employment opportunities as soon as possible in their lives.

number of courses successfully³, they are asked to prepare a dissertation, which is also a core requirement of the course. This assignment should have reference to an original scholarly topic associated with the subject areas of the student's chosen concentration. The length of the dissertation ranges between 20,000 and 25,000 words. Thus, the Master's Programme seems to adhere to the international norms for a course of this level.

A doctoral degree is awarded to a candidate once he/she has successfully defended a doctoral thesis. Of course, the demands are much higher than for the Master's degree. The thesis should be an original scholarly piece of work. As such, it is assessed by the Examining Committee. A doctoral candidate admitted to the Programme is required to regularly consult with his/her assigned supervisor and other members of the Advisory Committee appointed for this purpose. In some instances, the Committee may ask the doctoral candidate to attend certain courses, but this is not a mandated requirement. However, any participation of a doctoral candidate in activities associated with the Programme and graduate seminars is duly appreciated.

3. Results

The undergraduate study programme seems to enjoy a high reputation among the students and in society at large. This became evident through interviews conducted during the site visit. The curriculum is well-structured and seems to be consistent with the mission statement of the Department, as well as with international standards.

As far as the Master's Degree Programme is concerned, it seems that the Department has met its overall goals and objectives. The impression, which interviews with graduate students gave to the Evaluation Team, was that they are happy with the study programme offered.

The doctoral programme also seems to be producing mostly adequate results, considering the resources that the Department has at its disposal. The average time taken for obtaining a doctoral degree is 5.5 years, a period somewhat longer than the international norm. However, considering the fact that most doctoral students receive little support and may have to sustain themselves through employment outside the university, the time period is reasonable.

4. Improvement

³ The courses are divided into core courses – attended by all graduate students, regardless of their concentration – and elective courses. The students attend up to two courses assigned to other concentrations provided by the programme (electives). In total, students are required to attend at least six courses and take examinations at the end of each course. They are also required to enrol in at least three courses during the first semester.

The Evaluation Team was informed that the undergraduate curriculum was revised about two (2) years ago and thus seems to correspond to the needs of the students well. However, it also seems that, in its pursuit of excellence, the Department is constrained through set of external challenges. Concretely, it is not able to attract its students based on their career interest or other inclinations⁴. One may assume, accordingly, that whatever their rationale, such practices may well adversely affect programme implementation including its ability to take full advantage of the latest trends and directions of political science curricula and the ever changing student needs. The Team recommends that, if conditions permit, the curriculum should include some public management courses in order to equip students with added practical skills to aid them in the pursuit of employment opportunities in the job market.

The Master's study programme possesses a rational structure; its content seems appropriate for the purposes it serves. However, it may be enhanced if more electives were added provided, of course, that resources were available for this purpose.

The doctoral programme approach relies on the existing resources. These are really the Department's teaching and research staff. It adheres to European standards, but could be further improved if doctoral students could be better integrated into the Department's teaching and research activities. The students' active engagement could be rewarded either through the provision of a stipend and/or a teaching assignment. Unfortunately, the prevalent system does not allow for doctoral students to be gainfully employed in the Department, either as teaching or research assistants, while they work on their dissertation. The only way through which doctoral students may keep in close touch with the Department is through taking some graduate classes, to supplement their knowledge. As already stated, however, this is not mandated at this time.

It is recommended that the Department explore the possibility of charging some tuition fees for its Master's degree programme in order to support, with limited stipends, one or two of its Master's students, who would not otherwise be able to attend. The Department may consider extending this *stipendium* to one or two very promising doctoral candidates, enabling them to devote their undivided attention to their research and work as teaching assistants.

B. Teaching

1. Approach

⁴ Students are allocated to the Department according to results obtained by candidates through a country-wide university entry examination. Furthermore, the numbers of students allocated to the Department are centrally determined every year, by the Ministry of Education.

Based on the site visit and course syllabi, the Evaluation Team finds that the Department has a well-defined pedagogic policy. The faculty employs a multi-method approach in teaching, which maximizes student participation and engagement in the course material. This multi-method policy includes, but is not limited to, lectures, discussions, small groups, debates, mentoring, PowerPoint, information technologies and online learning management tools. The two-week examination system also closely aligns with the well-defined pedagogic policy of the Department.

While the teaching methods used by the Department are exemplary, the Evaluation Team finds that the resources necessary to employ them fully are inadequate. Lecture halls are often unavailable because no effective room reservation system exists at the UoC; such as would prevent double-bookings. Classroom projectors and instructional technologies frequently do not work. Wireless signals are often too weak for the internet to be used in classrooms or on campus. In addition, according to the information provided by the UoC, the Department is comprised of 996 registered students and 16 faculty members. The student/faculty ratio would, accordingly, be too high if *all* students were on campus at any given time. Although this seldom happens, the number is still high. This means that classes are large, faculty overworked and students left with limited opportunities for one-to-one interaction with faculty. Despite the high student/faculty ratio, however, interviews with both undergraduate and graduate students revealed that the faculty's zeal and devotion to its students fulfill most student needs. This includes collaboration on research, advisement and general counseling, even though campus resources outside the Department are lacking.

2. Implementation

The Evaluation Team finds that the Department's teaching procedures, teaching materials and course materials are of the highest caliber. The course material is up-to-date and relevant. It closely links research with teaching. Collaboration with students on research and such other creative activities, as academic conferences, fulfill the Department's mission and greatly benefit students and faculty alike. The students' overwhelmingly positive course evaluations further indicate an effective implementation and quality of teaching procedures and course materials.

3. Results

By all measures of teaching assessment, the Department's teaching is highly efficacious. Discrepancies in the success/failure percentages between courses are primarily matters of student preparedness rather than faculty teaching. Indeed, it is well known across academic institutions that required courses have higher failure rates than electives. Furthermore, the Evaluation Team does not find any significant differences between students in relation to (a) graduation rates and (b) final degree grades. The Evaluation Team believes that the Department understands the reasons for such results and makes every effort, in spite of the Department's very limited resources, for students to maximize their rates of academic success.

4. Improvements

The Evaluation Team finds that the Department has already proposed methods and ways of bringing about improvements, most of which, however, depend on crucial, additional resources. Central to good teaching practices is having and maintaining a significantly lower student/faculty ratio. The Department is acutely aware of the fact that this ratio is currently too high. The Team strongly recommends significantly increasing the faculty size of the Department in order to achieve a more satisfactory ratio; one that ranges from 15:1 to 20:1. In this way, the Department will be able to continue to meet further and better its students' needs. Employing Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) to conduct undergraduate discussion sections and to assist in grading undergraduate exams would significantly benefit not only the faculty's workload but also the undergraduates who may feel more at ease approaching a TA than a faculty member about academic issues. Being a TA would also significantly benefit graduate students themselves by giving them the opportunity to experience first hand the classroom responsibilities of faculty members.

The Department is likewise fully aware of the various limitations affecting the current student course evaluation process and, therefore, has expressed proposals to revamp it. The Evaluation Team recommends that the course evaluations occur electronically in the last two weeks of the semester, before final examinations, rather than during the seventh week of the semester. While high response rates are extremely difficult to secure for electronic course evaluations, particularly if left to the students' own initiative, the Team recommends that faculty members consider allowing students to complete the course evaluations during class time, preferably on the last day of class, while the faculty member steps out of the classroom to avoid any perception of undue influence.

C. Research

1. Approach

Based on the site visit, course syllabi, departmental materials and interviews, the Team's appreciation of the Department's policy and main objective in research at the undergraduate level is to encourage the development of analytical thinking, critical judgment and sound methodological skills. However, it also includes fostering an active civic engagement in communities at the local, national and international levels. This has been greatly helped by the frequent and active involvement of members of the faculty in research and related activities, notably those organized within the extensive framework of E.U. educational and scientific cooperation. Exchanges, in both Rethymnon and Athens, helped bring to light the broad thematic range and value of such activities, as add to the EXOSTREPHIA, which academic work demands of teachers and students as *conditio sine qua non* of adequacy and success. The Evaluation Team found the academic staff's mobility and involvement in the quest of outward-bound activities, research and publications to represent at once praiseworthy facets and most rewarding features of the Department's work.

The Team would like to urge perseverance on this path, which surely leads to progress and further raises the profile of the Department, nationally and internationally.

At the graduate level, the Department's policy and main objective in research are to develop communities of scholars with emphases on critical analysis, methods and sound empirical research. Indeed, faculty often give their students articles from such respected journals as the American Political Science Review to analyze, so that the students grow accustomed to becoming professional political scientists. While the Department has not set formal internal standards, it does assess research with such information technologies as "Publish or Perish" and "Google Scholar." These technologies provide valuable information on the efficacy of research and academic citations.

2. Implementation

Based on the site visit, departmental materials and the curricula vitae of faculty members, the Department promotes and supports important and innovative research activities. There is ample evidence that the Department seeks internal and external funding for all of its major research endeavours. It is important to stress that, in times of economic and fiscal austerity, securing needed funds for academic research and other creative activities can be extremely challenging and time-consuming. The Department should be commended not only for its high number of applications for funding but also its high number of successes in securing it. One may add that the Department's scientific publications, research projects and collaborations are of the highest quality, notwithstanding very limited institutional support and freedom in securing such support in order to promote and maintain this high quality.

3. Results

Based on the brief site visit and the printed material provided by the Department, it is possible to argue that the Department has been highly successful in implementing its research objectives at the undergraduate, graduate and broader professional levels. The efficacy of the Department's research work is further evidenced by the quality and large volume of scientific publications, research projects and research collaborations in spite of the faculty's evident institutional-structural constraints.

Based on its interviews with undergraduate and graduate students, the Evaluation Team finds that the Department has not only succeeded in creating a strong academic community but also successfully integrated its students into a wide range of research and other creative activities on and off campus. Accomplishing this has been no easy task, given the high student/faculty ratio, as well as other pressing institutional demands on the faculty. Furthermore, the Department has successfully promoted its research objectives notwithstanding the constraints to which reference is made throughout the present report. Its remarkably high visibility outside the Department and research acknowledgement throughout Greece, Europe and beyond are incontrovertible *facts*. The Department's

substantial research agenda is further fortified by its high national and international reputation.

4. Improvements

The Department acknowledges that its research work is primarily – though not exclusively – focused on Greece and South-eastern Europe. However, it has expressed an interest in expanding its scientific purview by submitting more manuscripts to Anglophone and Francophone journals and publication outlets. As important as publications are to the reputation of a faculty, department, and university, the faculty has also extended its research work to the general public through interviews on local, national, and international media outlets. Such initiatives undertaken by the Department are important, because they show that knowledge and information are not only for the use of an educated elite but also current and relevant for all segments of the population in Crete, Greece and beyond.

D. All Other Services

1. Approach

The Evaluation Team has been left with the distinct impression that the Department offers an environment conducive for academic work. The faculty, the students and the administrative staff feel enabled to engage in an active learning process. In spite of budget cuts and pressure on the available resources, it seems that a comfortable relationship has been maintained, with only minor disruptions caused by student political factions, which choose the path of “protest”. The students interviewed showed real appreciation of the prevailing conditions and the problems mentioned above, but took a constructive approach on ways to meet the challenge they entailed. Overall, it seems that students and faculty members are generally satisfied with the quality of support services. Much effort has been made to maintain certain adequate standards in providing these services despite the severe budget cuts of the past couple of years. On the “minus” side, however, access for students with kinetic disabilities is still limited, although it would appear that they are able to access such areas as the library, the catering facilities and several of the classrooms.

The Department did not indicate whether it has a plan or policy in place for trying to simplify administrative procedures. However, the University employs a number of mechanisms in an effort to provide several services electronically to both faculty members and students.

2. Implementation

The Evaluation Team has come out of its review convinced that both the faculty and administrative staff are coping satisfactorily with what, all things considered, are challenging circumstances. Apparently, most students recognize this to be a fact and part of a more general problem, nation-wide. This notwithstanding, the Evaluation Team recommends the

creation of a working group to explore creative ways of improving the situation within the existing overall constraints.

The library services are of an exceptionally high quality. The Evaluation Team has the impression that the library is run by fully committed and knowledgeable staff, dedicated to their work, ahead of the curve and highly motivated to facilitate the students. A small team of three members of staff, in the Secretariat of the Department, appears to be dedicated and quite effective in handling a large volume of work, as well as requests from students, in a fast and efficient manner. This unit services a large number of students, offering a wide range of services to students including help with transcripts, certificates and other services during the opening hours, which are often extended, however, in order to facilitate the student population. Overall, the Secretariat staff take pride in their work and seem happy that they are able to provide support to the best of their ability to both students and faculty members.

Computing facilities seem to be adequate, on the whole. They support the student body and faculty members alike in terms of exchanging information in such matters as grading, provision of syllabi, reference lists and even reading material. Members of a Special Technical Laboratory Staff (ETEP) provide continuous support and update contents regularly. The students of the Department enjoy free wireless internet access but, as already stated, the signal may be weak in some areas of the campus. More critically, classrooms seem to be in short supply and thus the Department is forced to use auditoria and classrooms belonging to other Departments in order to accommodate its needs. This shortage has resulted in overcrowded spaces and/or the double booking of rooms, which disrupt the conduct of classes. Therefore, much more attention should be paid to the allocation of classrooms and auditoria, as this can interfere with the proper conduct of classes, avoiding interruptions and ensuring adequate space for all attending students.

Last but not least, though a student ombudsman exists, many students are unaware of the institution. Thus, an effort should be made to explain to all the students the Ombudsman institution and its availability, if needed.

3. Results

As has already been stated, given the prevalent circumstances, administrative and other services are adequate and functional on the whole. Of course, there is room for improvement. The Evaluation Team has come up with a recommendation intended to enable faculty members and students to provide feedback systematically and on a continuous basis in order to improve such services further.

4. Improvements

The organisation of the Department seems to be quite adequate. Still, it may be good to explore the need to centralize certain logistical services in order to make them more efficient and more cost effective. Somehow, the need remains for the University's Administration to better address issues related to infrastructure facilities, i.e., classroom space and classroom audio-visual aids.

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

During its all-too-brief exposure to the Department, on Tuesday, 25th and Wednesday, 26th February, the Evaluation Team was made aware of challenges with which it has been faced in implementing its Programme. It was also able to witness, albeit in summary form, the Department's response. Repeatedly in this document, it has been made apparent that, in the Team's opinion, most of the existing challenges lie in the institutional framework in which the University and the Department function but also in circumstances largely outside its control. There is little, for example, that either the University or the Department may do to mitigate the effects of a social, economic and political crisis, which has taken its toll of the educational system and not only its universities. There is also very little that the Department may do to ease financial pressures on the students, though these adversely affect not only the students' ability to fully avail themselves of the facilities offered, but also the Department's capacity to teach and reach out to these students.

Where this three-person Team feels that high praise is due is in the Department's response to the challenge that those pressures on the students represent. The Members of its Staff have responded extending themselves as necessary, making effective use of information technology, limited though this recourse to e-mails really is in replacing the direct interface between student and teacher. Budget and staff resources have been reduced, further adversely affecting a somewhat unsatisfactory staff-student ratio. But although the Department has had to cope with conditions and to work in circumstances, which many would find challenging, it has also been affected by very grave constraints, which are generic in scope. These have their source in a framework of bureaucratic rules, regulations, conditionalities, procedures and work practices, which not only add to the workload but, furthermore, slow down and may indeed impede the implementation of programmes.

For instance, this may happen when delivery of supplies is delayed, or repair of needed equipment cannot be carried out in time because of slow-moving procedures or

failure to provide for amortization. Often essential tools cannot be made available in time for planned activities. This issue was frequently raised. It would appear, however, that it is hardly new. What several Members of Staff, academic as well as administrative, described as *asphyxiating*, the cumbersome existing institutional framework long antedates the Crisis. It needs to be revisited, reviewed and modified. To be sure, this is a problem affecting all Universities in the country but those in the periphery may be at a disadvantage in trying to cope with its strictures. The Evaluation Team recognizes that it may take some time before this core problem can be solved. But *solved it must be*, so that university staffs be not distracted needlessly but may devote their time and energies wholly to students, to teaching and research.

In its discussion with staffs, the Evaluation Team was made aware of efforts to think of ways of coping and getting the work done. For now, most of these ways have been *ad hoc* and informal. Undoubtedly, however, a more systematic and more long-term approach will be required. Departments and Universities must be encouraged to come up with concrete proposals for measures calculated to remove such obstacles and constraints, as gravely impede the flow of the Department's work.

Urgently needed improvements are possible and doable in the short-term. For the longer-term, however, strategic planning is called for. The Department should be invited to create an *ad hoc* group which will review best practices in Europe and beyond, with a view to optimizing prospects and opportunities, which are not beyond its reach but flow from the Department's advantages and strengths and the position of Crete half-way between North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Its very attractive location may enable the Department to provide a welcoming site for conferences, colloquia, research and training activities. Indeed it may be able, at very little cost, to attract and use the services of foreign professors emeriti and other visiting scholars for varying periods of time. Crete has the wherewithal to become a Centre of Excellence, if it applies itself to this task.

F. Final Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Conclusions

The Internal Assessment Report and Meetings, both in Athens and Rethymnon, offered the Team information that was ample and conducive to gaining an understanding of past and present developments, as well as current conditions at the University of Crete Political Science Department. Information was readily shared, questions were willingly answered and more data were supplied upon demand, until after the end of our visit. A shared commitment was evident to make this exercise productive and successful thus helping the Department and the University alike. However, having said this, the Members of the Team would not claim to possess a thorough detailed knowledge of the situation on the ground independently of the sources to which they have gained access. Their report reflects exclusively the fund of information to which they were made privy.

The overall impression, which we have gained, backed by substantial data, is one of a learning community trying to accomplish its goals under severe constraints and conditions, which could not be considered as invariably or altogether favourable. The problems and the challenges are not of recent date. However, they were rendered additionally complex as a result of the crisis, which has afflicted Greece arguably more acutely than other countries of Europe; and the youth, as shown in statistics, more than other age groups.

Clearly, under *conditions of crisis*, the Department and University try to accomplish their goals with sharply diminished resources, both human and material. The Evaluation Team was favourably impressed by the Department's fortitude and highly commendable outcomes under somewhat adverse circumstances. Its budgets have been cut and moneys made available to hire adjunct professors have also been curtailed. Concurrently, of the students, whose homes are out of Rethymnon or out of Crete, many were forced to leave, unable to pay rents and other living expenses. A variable number of students, amounting to almost half, are mostly out of campus at any given time. The most committed among them try hard to keep apace with the progress of the Course and with their studies.

There are probably few benefits and more costs to this situation. Some students may be able to cope with reading assignments, although they have no access – or only limited access to campus library sources. More importantly, they forfeit the ability to attend the seminars and workshops, where practice exercises, research and group discussions take place on a regular basis. They lose out on live contacts with other students and teachers. For supervision and guidance they must depend on e-mails exchanged with teaching staff.

Though valuable *per se*, such means of “distant learning” may be considered as *sub-optimal* at the undergraduate level. Moreover, they create an added burden on teachers, who spend long hours of messaging, after time spent teaching courses, partaking in the activities of various campus committees, carrying out administrative chores and supervising students preparing dissertations or practical work. One of the current programme's more creative departures is an effort to translate the theory into practice, imparting the mastery of methods with an accent on *learning to learn* and on *learning to do*. Clearly, building a *learning community* is not helped by the presence of these adverse conditions. Though still most Members of Staff acquit themselves of their tasks, keeping their office hours, even adding to these hours, being available to students at lectures, seminars and beyond, the cost may be substantial in the long run. Research is time-consuming, as are contacts with peers in Greece and abroad. The Evaluation Team considers that, under the circumstances that have been described, the staff of the Department has performed remarkably well.

Although the deep recession, currently afflicting the country, has added to the rigours which the Department faces, a number of the challenges, which it confronts have been in existence much longer. Indeed they have their source in the highly centralized, overly complex and rigid *institutional framework*, which both the administrators and teaching staff experience as constraining and cumbersome. The Evaluation Team does not wish to

pronounce itself on this score, beyond expressing the view that many of the facets of this institutional framework to which its attention was drawn, are uncommon to academia in most developed countries and certainly not helpful for the accomplishment of goals in education. By general agreement, *autonomy* represents a *conditio sine qua non* of Schools and Universities acquitting themselves of their tasks and meeting their objectives. To optimize performance, academic institutions need to apply criteria which are merit-based, demonstrably founded on knowledge and reflecting internationally tested best practices. Yielding to extraneous pressures or other considerations, unrelated to education, seldom pays in the long-run, although it may appear opportune under transient circumstances.

Universities in Greece are in the public domain and funded from the budget of the State. To this extent accountable for the use made of resources that are placed at their disposal, the Schools and universities surrender *ipso facto* a measure of autonomy. Of course, this is well understood, as well as widely accepted. They are answerable to the Ministry of Education which, as in several other European countries, exercises a measure of supervision. On the basis of the evidence produced for its consideration, the Evaluation Team was led to the conviction that this measure of control and supervision might be considered excessive, as well as very cumbersome and time-consuming. There is reason to believe that it may interfere with the work of the Department, particularly in such areas as procurement and administration. Ostensibly, it accounts for periodic shortages of necessary supplies, slow delivery of equipment and completion of repairs. It sheds light on the conundrum of low delivery rates and apparent inability to use available funds. Even what is in the budget cannot be implemented or implemented in time and, therefore, may be forfeited.

Existing rigours, however, do not stop there. According to all accounts, the Department has no say or very little say over the number of students it will admit or indeed the composition of its yearly intake. This obeys criteria set by the Ministry of Education and a national “points system”, which takes only limited cognizance of the individual candidates’ choice of either university or subject-matter. A resident of Crete may find himself compelled to go to Thessaloniki; a candidate for science may have to enroll in programmes unrelated to her interests. Whatever limited benefits may flow from this approach, they add to the complexities under which the Department must labour. Concretely, the Department must accommodate a variable number of students, as well as make allowance for the undisputed fact that not all are motivated to the same degree or committed to their studies.

Mutatis mutandis, similar strictures apply to the recruitment or advancement of the staff. Though broadly merit-based, the system makes no allowance for personal details and leaves little discretion to the Department to choose a particular *profile* in line with given fields of specialization, that it may wish to advance. A system of rebuttals available to candidates enables them to appeal and possibly void a decision on formalistic grounds. This seriously detracts from a Department’s autonomy, as well as long-term planning. It limits its ability to develop and pursue a long-term development strategy; to shape a strategic

direction, with fields of specialization where it would seek to excel related research programmes as well as administration.

These multiple constraints to which the Department is subject adversely affect efficiency, as well as quality of work. Considerable time is needlessly expended in complying with complex procedures, whose utility is doubtful and may have more to do with long-established practices or preferences at the Ministry of Education, than requirements on the ground. The administrative culture and political environment of education remain highly centripetal, leaving little room for initiative and innovation by end-users. To some extent they explain a widespread dissatisfaction with facets of the system. Even the recent strike of administrative staff might well have been avoided under a less top heavy and cumbersome operational framework. *That the Department in question has been able, in spite of it all, to innovate in fulfilling its mandate, introducing new approaches, in line with global practices and, according to indicators, keep the students mostly appreciative, speaks volumes on the fortitude, the zeal and motivation of its staff, both teaching and administrative.*

2. Recommendations

In light of these conclusions, the Evaluation Team has grouped recommendations into two broad categories:

- a) general and long-term; and
- b) specific and immediate.

The Members of the Team have come out of this exercise, which has just been completed, convinced about the need to revisit and to improve the *institutional framework* for Higher Education in the country as a whole. This represents a task of very great complexity, as well as sensitivity which will prove time-consuming. It is hardly an undertaking that can be brought to fruition at times of major crises – social and economic. It is a task, however, that must be carried out in light of the best practices in Europe and beyond. We need to approximate the standards and benchmarks globally recognized as *quality education* and bear in mind the fact that, in the majority of cases, this presupposes a high degree of *autonomy* and *freedom to innovate*.

The Evaluation Team knows fully well that major reforms in the institutional framework may not right now be possible. However, it believes that some immediate improvements can be introduced. Specifically, it recommends, that procedures be reviewed, streamlined and simplified, enabling the Department to move faster with the purchase of equipment and supplies, within their set parameters and budget allocations. The need for multiple clearances should be minimized. Though fully recognizing the zeal and dedication of the administrative staff, the Evaluation Team is of the view that improvements may be possible in the discharge of their tasks, and that an overview of the existing arrangements is needed to bring these about. We ought to lighten the load on both the support staff and members of the faculty, who currently are involved in the running of committees in many different facets of the organization and administrative work. It the staff/student ratio

approximated levels generally accepted as sound this remark might not be necessary. With 16 faculty members and close to a thousand students, we need to accord priority to teaching, supervision and research and lighten other burdens.

In teaching and research, methods have changed world-wide. Best practices world-wide underscore the value of team work, participative approaches, recourse to modern technologies, practical exercises and conscious *preparation of students for the future and a globalized job market*. It has been recognized that traditional methods of teaching, learning by rote and dependency on exams do not help in these regards. Indeed, it might be argued that they tend to aggravate a *disconnect* and mismatch between university studies and life “in the real world”. Given the pace of change in every field of activity and sphere of knowledge, henceforth stress must be laid on the following:

- a) *learning to learn; and*
- b) *learning to do.*

Training for life-long learning has now become a *must*. It presupposes emphasis on the latest research methodologies, practical management courses, effective use of technologies and “getting your hands dirty”. However, use of these methods in a university environment demands staff/student ratios unavailable at Rethymnon. The goal would be to ensure close supervision by staff, participative processes and better integration and active involvement of graduates – doctoral students especially -- in teamwork, to make this experience rewarding. Staff/student ratios in Rethymnon fluctuate greatly from roughly 1/36 to approx. 1/62, depending on the number of students who are on campus at any given time. More importantly, however, the changing composition of students both enrolled and on campus takes away from *continuity* which is required and, therefore, from the attainment of the objectives that the seminars, laboratories and other forms of group work are set up to pursue.

In spite of such constraints, the Political Science Department has tried to shift the balance away from traditional patterns to new methods and techniques, which correspond more closely to university practices, current in the world today. The Evaluation Team strongly favours this approach; indeed would recommend that it be carried further. It notes, in this connection, that, whether we like it or not, the aims in education have lately shifted greatly from theoretical pursuits, which still remain essential, to building *professional skills* and imparting *professional values*. Active methods are preferred because, through the introduction of participative processes, they encourage the development of social, interpersonal and communication skills, analytical capacities and problem-solving skills. Secondment to a stakeholder, either locally or elsewhere, and involvement in assignments of work or action research foster responsibility and disciplined work habits. Along with familiarity with a typical office environment and work-related tools, they help facilitate the speedier integration of young university graduates in the economy and society. This is especially relevant to men and women reading for a BA degree because they look to jobs at

the end of their 4-year studies. *Mutatis mutandis*, however, it also applies to students for M.A. degrees.

In this connection, moreover, the Evaluation Team wishes to draw attention and recommend a practice which has been gaining ground in the United States. Until ten years ago approximately, a thesis represented a very major part of the core requirements for the Master's Degree Programme; not any longer. Now-a-days, this has been replaced by a *capstone* exercise; so-called because it provides the conclusion and finishing touches on the work towards the degree. Noteworthy, in this regard, are the methods and the *process*, involving individuals in multi-faceted projects, which they must build from scratch. Typically, the output is a report which needs to be goal-oriented. Increasingly, the students in the USA are familiarized with this method and the writing of reports, by learning to draft briefs and structured memoranda at the end of their assignments, instead of the traditional term papers of the past. Traditional term papers find a place in the more theoretical parts of the Master's Degree Programme.

The Evaluation Team recognizes the fact that such new methods of learning tend to be *staff-intensive*. They depend for success on the quality of advising and supervision of projects, much emphasis on guidance, mentoring, monitoring and career counseling, as well as effective programme management. For Crete and the Department, this would present a challenge, given the shortage of staff and the financial crunch, which are not going away. The Evaluation Team is strongly of the opinion that some ways must be found to build, in the Department, a *team of teaching assistants and associates*, on whom such mentoring, counseling and supervisory duties may be devolved. These could be Ph.D. candidates, who may look forward to teaching, but also visiting scholars, both Greek and non-Greek, and retirees with doctoral degrees, or even prominent citizens with the appropriate credentials and public service ethos. One hopes they might accept to work *pro bono*, against symbolic rewards, for a stipend or for a nominal fee.

In "bureaucratic" cultures, it would be easy to invoke a number of reasons why this idea would "not fly". But, in these times of crisis, we need to start to "*think out of the box*" and look for ways and practices which have been tried and worked, in different parts of the world. We need to think *creatively*. *Flexibility* is required in the application of rules, where this would promote *innovations* and *departures* necessary to confront emerging challenges. In spite of the constraints to which it has been subject, the Political Science Department has already given signs of such a disposition. It has tried constructive approaches and has made attempts to *build partnerships* with schools and institutions both in Greece and abroad. Such partnerships build bridges, enable the Department to better acquit itself of its educational tasks and break the isolation to which it might otherwise be prone. *Mobility* is valuable and contacts with abroad, as well as inside Greece, are also very critical. The Department has been able to capitalize on programmes (e.g. Erasmus and Pythagoras) available to Universities within the EU. It has also taken advantage of Crete's unique attractions, history, archaeology, geographical position and infrastructure of services.

The Evaluation Team believes that more is doable in ways that *develop activities* but also joint endeavours in teaching and research, with other universities or centres of research, as well as *sources of revenue*. Well-performing Departments and Schools should be encouraged to develop cross-border initiatives in these directions. Beyond helping the Department fulfil its mission better, such *outward-bound activities* would raise its reputation and institutional profile and set it on the path to becoming a Centre of Excellence. In the course of its assignment, the Evaluation Team discussed two such proposals, the adoption of which it recommends: one is a *Summer School* conducted at annual intervals; the other – *Colloquia or Conferences* on current trends and developments in Europe and the Mediterranean region. Properly organized on a regular basis, they could place Crete firmly on the map of the world as a Centre of Excellence. Crete could well aspire to serve as an essential bridge between the two; a place where Europe, East and West, the Near and the Middle East and North Africa can meet and deliberate on issues of shared history or common current concern.

In the course of our discussion, we advanced a possible theme for such a regional conference:

“Democratic Governance, Secularism and the Modern State”

Though this may sound ambitious, it has been tried and worked. The world is full of examples of successful new departures, which have produced results. Mostly, they have resulted from long-term *strategic planning*, as well as SWOT analyses, which have endeavoured to turn constraints into opportunities and sought creative ways of coping with new circumstances. A well-known case in point is the International Training Centre of the ILO, in neighbouring Torino. It began after WW II as a school for mechanical skills. It has since become the hub of a complex of training establishments, which has transformed the city into a major regional centre. Two of its flagship programmes focus on *Social Dialogue* and *Training Union Leaders*. Both are highly needed in Greece. The ITC/ILO no longer depends wholly for funding on the Italian Government, as in the past. It charges service fees, which have proven competitive, and thus it has been able to “reinvent itself”, adapting to new needs, new demand and changing situations. It has taken full advantage of an attractive campus on the Po River and the many surrounding attractions. It may serve as an example. In the opinion of the Team, Crete has analogous assets, on which the University may well capitalize. Accordingly, we recommend that the Department take an early opportunity to contact or to visit ITC/ILO in Torino in order to study its practices and explore a possible partnership.

Related to this suggestion are two further recommendations: The *first* calls for further strengthening the fields of *Comparative Studies* with a focus on the region of the Mediterranean and the EU, and of international languages (English, of course, but others also). The *second* urges development of *linkages* with *Greeks abroad*. In Europe, the US, Canada and Australia there are large communities of Cretans, who could be invited to help

transform *their* School of Political Science into a Centre of Excellence. Universities in Britain and Israel, among others, are doing as much already. Many of them have established associations of friends (e.g. the American Friends of the LSE, AF of Technion, AF of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). Appealing to the alumni but also to other people, such associations of friends offer both financial and moral support to the school or university to of their choice. For example, the LSE has been able to finance major parts of its development and expansion of facilities (new library and new building) with the help of “friends” internationally. With support from diaspora Cretans the Department may be able to fund a number of stipends for graduate students especially, and conferences or summer schools. This is the way to go and, to the best of our knowledge, already some Museums in Greece have moved in this direction.

To sum it all up survival and success depend on innovation. And this, in turn, requires us to think positively, plan *strategically* and “*think out of the box.*”