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HELLENIC REPUBLIC
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HELLENIC QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF WOOD & FURNITURE DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF LARISA –
KARDITSA BRANCH

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External Evaluation Committee

The Committee responsible for the External Evaluation of the Department of Wood & Furniture Design & Technology of the Technological Educational Institute of Larisa – Karditsa Branch consisted of the following four (4) expert evaluators drawn from the Registry constituted by the HQAA in accordance with Law 3374/2005 :

1. Professor STAVROS AVRAMIDIS (Coordinator)

University of British Columbia, Canada

2. Professor ALEXIS GEORGACOPOULOS

University ECAL of Art and Design, Switzerland

3. Professor ANDERS GRONLUND

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4. Mr. VANGELIS VASILEIOU

School of Architecture Paris – Malaquais, France

Introduction

The External Evaluation Committee (EEC) visited the Department of Wood & Furniture Design & Technology (WFDT) between October 18-20, 2010. The group arrived in the late afternoon of the 18th from Athens by road and was met by the Department Head outside the hotel. After settling in the hotel, the EEC met for dinner with the Head, the Internal Review Committee (IRC) members and a number of other faculty members for briefing over dinner. The work dinner was conducted in an atmosphere of cordiality, hospitality and professionalism and after a brief introduction of the Institute's objectives and operational overview. In casual discussions that followed many issues regarding the Department, the TEI system, and the particulars of the evaluation process were talked about.

On the 19th, the EEC was transported to the WFDT main building located about 4 km from the town center along with three more other departments housed in separate buildings that also belong to the same TEI. Upon arrival, the team was greeted by the Department's Head (Assoc. Prof. Georgios Ntalos) who provided a brief description of the history, operational protocols and structure of the WFDT. Additionally, the EEC finalized the agenda for the visit.

The EEC decided to put the facilities visit at the top of the agenda list so that the evaluators might have a complete view of the infrastructure that would help not only with the understanding of the lab and teaching facilities level, but also assist in formulating more probing questions to the faculty members regarding their pedagogical and research activities. The EEC also visited teaching facilities during class time thus allowing for a limited first-hand experience with the teaching methods used in the labs/classes. The tour included the main building's surrounding area, the dedicated laboratory building located across the yard and the new kiln shed. Most of the facilities visited included laboratory space where wood technology and design related education takes place. The EEC notes the good number and variety of equipment for the size and scope of a unit such as WFDT which are used for both teaching and research, and the condition of the building where every effort is made by staff and students to keep it clean and pleasant without the normal political paraphernalia encountered in other Greek Departments.

Upon completion of the tour, the EEC had the opportunity to review a number of supplementary documents provided by the Department including a CD-ROM, booklets and books the program, various statistical data, samples of publications and descriptions of research grants. We were also given a demonstration of the webpage with all sub-sections related to curriculum and research. The EEC noted that the webpage is very informative and there is also an English version of it. It also contains nicely made videos related to various activities and lab demonstrations were also posted for current and perspective students to view. All other documents provided were in Greek. The EEC would like to point out that when there is a non-Greek speaking member of the committee, English version of all documents must be provided otherwise the work of the committee becomes strenuous and deficient. HQAA should make sure to provide the resources to the Departments if such situation arises in the future.

Subsequently, the committee had a long meeting with the IRC members involved in the Department's internal evaluation. The meeting was conducted in a very collegiate and professional mood. It started with the EEC Coordinator's introduction pertaining to the purpose and objectives of the evaluation exercise and the issues that the committee needs to

probe. Thereafter, the Head gave an overview of the Department's scholarly activities and the discussion begun. The committee members asked various clarification questions relating to the internal evaluation and many others related to issues not fully covered by the report. All attendees participated in the discussion. Overall, the committee left that part of the visit with a significant amount of data and clarifications that provided a more complete image of the Department. Lastly, during this meeting the Director of the four TEI departments in Karditsa, Dr. Byron Tandos came to the room to greet the EEC members and welcome us to WFDT on behalf of the TEI Larisa.

After a brief lunch break that took place in the TEI student restaurant where almost all students can eat breakfast, lunch and dinner daily for free, the EEC had the opportunity to meet with all Department faculty members and discuss all issues relevant to curriculum, teaching, research and operations. This meeting was very informative since the committee had the opportunity to listen to all levels of faculty present in the room.

Next, the EEC met with a group of four undergraduate students since the Department does not have a graduate program, yet. The committee would like to note that this number was way smaller compared to the anticipated one. The meeting took place in the absence of faculty or staff members. After a brief introduction of our backgrounds and the EEC's objectives, the students introduced themselves and discussed issues related to the curriculum, training and employment opportunities after graduation. The meeting was open and frank. Students discussed specific problems related to their curriculum and sequence of studies plus their anxiety about the future and work opportunities upon graduation. No particular problems were brought up regarding the class timetable, but there was a request for longer times when the Secretariat Office is open to students for obtaining pertinent documents. The committee sympathizes and suggests that the office extends its student operating hours and also proposes that this thing can be improved with some additions to the online system that will facilitate the downloading and signing of those required documents. Students were quite enthusiastic about the program and the teaching staff. Granted, there were a couple complains but overall, the EEC felt that the many positives outweighed the few negatives. Students had mixed reactions about the chaining of the courses and they were positive regarding the separation of theory from labs something that the EEC finds irregular according to international standards and will be discussed in detail later. When an EEC member asked the students if they would ever recommend this program to others or if they had the opportunity to do this again, they all replied positively. Although this is an indication of the appeal and uniqueness of the program it is not conclusive because of the very limited statistical sample (4 students only) and the conspicuous absence of students in the morning classes that the EEC noticed. The latter reveals that a lack of interest from a significant number of students is quite high. This overall image reveals one of the fundamental culprits of the Greek educational system, namely, young people studying a discipline of no or little interest to them for the sake of acquiring just a degree. This unfortunately is augmented by the low level of student preparation in high schools. This is a political and educational concern that must be urgently addressed by the State in a creative and firm way.

The second day, the EEC visited the Library, the student dormitories and the Student Employment Office. The Library is small with a limited stock of books and magazines because most of them can now be accessed online by staff and students. Dormitories are adequate and the Employment Office is doing a great service to the students by bringing them in contact with future employers and promoting the Department in the many trade fairs taking place across Greece. EEC also met with the Secretariat staff (one permanent and

one temporary person). They described daily operations and pointed out the problems created by the understaffing of their office. The EEC must commend the efforts the limited staff makes to support student and faculty activities. It is good to see that an online system for students to obtain forms and carry out registration related activities through internet is already in place.

In conclusion, the EEC members would like to congratulate the Department faculty and staff for producing a very detailed and professional self evaluation document that helped us to better and deeper understand the issues pertaining to the particular curriculum. We realized that faculty and staff is very proud of the program and the facilities, they try their outmost to motivate the students to become better, are fully committed to improvement and truly feel that this evaluation will help them to become a better group of teachers and researchers.

A. Curriculum

The Department is part of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Larisa at Karditsa. The Department offers a single undergraduate program. The planning of a postgraduate program is under consideration.

The mission statement of the Department is: *“To promote the spread and growth of knowledge in the areas of wood science and technology, furniture production technology and furniture design through teaching and applied research, as well as to provide students with a high level of technological training and knowledge for their own benefit and potential future employment.”* In summary, the goals and the objectives of the curriculum are to provide the highest level of education reflecting the needs of future employers in private and possibly public sectors. The curriculum covers the applied aspects of wood science and technology, furniture design, furniture construction with some economics, business and marketing aspects. The current coursework is quite focused towards the Greek value-added furniture sector and provides the necessary technological and design background for its graduates to seek employment in that sector. However, graduates of this program with some extra training could possibly become employable in other countries should the language barriers are dropped.

The curriculum is designed to meet the national wood value-added sector needs. This is a unique and much needed program offered in Greece. According to the internal review report, private stakeholders were and are important in designing the curriculum which is quite dynamic and evolves according to changing requirements of this business. The curriculum is regularly revised by the Department based on feedback from alumni and businesses in an effort to follow the current scientific developments and business demands.

The duration of the basic studies is eight semesters including six months of practicum (practical placement) in the last semester. The curriculum includes 39 courses of which 35 are compulsory and 4 are electives. A graduating thesis is mandatory. This is a one-stream curriculum and does not allow specialization in areas of possible evolving high demand such as design and furniture construction. This could be improved by offering more electives within and between the TEI system if such opportunity arises, namely, students taking a course in another Department or a faculty member from another Department coming to Karditsa to teach.

Although, the program is rather extensive and covers various aspects of wood technology and design, the EEC feels that there is not enough flexibility due to a limited number of elective courses. Furthermore, the committee is not fully persuaded that a graduate can be proficient in both wood technology and design. Granted, the EEC also understands that this unique program tries to achieve a very difficult task with ambition, but the faculty members should reconsider the pertinent difficulties and the possibility of streamlining of studies towards either wood or design in years 3 and/or 4. The Department is willing to bring in curriculum modifications and follow new scientific trends the EEC understands that current institutional rules makes this a difficult task. We would greatly support changes to allow such modifications.

The EEC found an established process to track the professional development and the careers of graduates in order to get feedback pertaining to the value of the curriculum to their professional success. The TEI of Larisa and the WFDT department should be congratulated

for setting up a system like this.

The curriculum is considered to be reasonable and corresponding to the overall scope and objectives of the Department. According to the faculty members, the curriculum is implemented effectively with minor glitches. A major hurdle is the ability by law of students to continuously take examinations of one or many failed courses far and beyond the years of studies resulting in a confusing and incoherent sequence of attendance and an unacceptable length of studies. We realize that some students are also working to support their studies, but this comprises the minority of the total population. This is a major problem at all levels of tertiary education and must be streamlined according to standard international practices at a national level by the State.

The EEC noted that there is a distinct divergence between the theory and laboratory parts of the courses. Specifically, it was surprising to observe that laboratory parts are autonomous and independent from the respective theoretical ones. As a result, students can attend and pass the laboratory part of a course without having the required theoretical knowledge base. This arrangement is contrary to established international practices and should be rectified as soon as possible.

According to the current study framework as imposed by the State, the theory part of a course should be at least 50% larger compared to the laboratory part. Maybe for some programs this ratio works nicely, but for this program that is heavily dependent on hands-on experience, this stipulation hinders the better delivery of needed skill and thus an effort should be made to alleviate this rule. Naturally, this should come from the Ministry of Education since the Department is not allowed to do so and the EEC would like to strongly recommend such a change. This will allow the Department more flexibility to adjust courses accordingly and thus provide a more relevant program to the required skills of its graduates.

Another related weak point in the studying process is the fact that laboratory part of the course attendance is mandatory while that of the theory ones is not. As a result, participation rates are significantly lower at the theoretical part of the courses with disappointing overall success rates (the percentage of passing students out of all registered equals to 38.5%). However, although this rate seems low by international standards the EEC would like to note that is quite good by Greek standards and this is a testament of the good job the teaching staff is doing at WFDT and how much the staff works close with the students to make sure they get the material they need to succeed. Moreover, the mandatory nature of the laboratory part of the courses and closer involvement of the student in the course's learning process is reflected by the staggering student success rates in the former compared to the latter. The EEC strongly suggests the merging of the two.

Several courses require the background of others and it would be advisable to extend the existing structured sequence of prerequisites in the curriculum. Such "chain"-type relationship will help in better and easier comprehension and assimilation of the material by the students. This recommendation should be taken with great consideration regarding the workload and length of student studies and therefore, the "chaining" of courses should not be applied universally. For example, Wood technology, Wood Mechanical Processing, Furniture Production Technology and CAD design, just to name some, are good candidates. This "prerequisite" demand in international programs is quite common and logical and the EEC feels that the Department should consider it. Students mentioned that they do not like much

this because it gives them more freedom to choose, but from the pedagogical point of view we feel that this is the proper way of learning.

Although the coursework covers several aspects of wood and design, it could be enriched with at least one additional course pertaining to “industrial legislation and safety”. This is deemed important for persons that are going to be employed in production units. If the curriculum does not allow for such a full course to be added, the Department might consider offering a short intensive seminar (maybe 2 weeks long) that could be taken by students outside their regular hours of studies on top of some related topics currently covered in few regular courses. Lastly, the EEC thinks that additional courses on history of art and decorative arts and crafts as well as free hand drawing would maintain the creative force of the students throughout their studies.

The last semester is for the practicum of the students in related jobs. There is a high placement rate and the committee commends the Department efforts for running this difficult part successfully.

The educational level of students accepted in the Department is deemed low both in basic knowledge and foreign languages. The current absence of any threshold in the national entry examination system further lowers the level of enrolled students. Institutional changes should direct students with appropriate background to enroll in this undergraduate program. This unfortunately is again a weakness of the whole system and unless some major overhauling by the State is undertaken, this issue will continue haunting the units of higher education in Greece.

The coursework does not seem to promote enough critical thinking however solving practical problems in the labs does cultivate problem solving techniques and promotes teamwork. The former can be improved and student intellectual development will benefit by an additional course in the 1st or 2nd semester aiming towards critical thinking and improvement of presentation skills. The latter can also be improved by more hands-on projects in the labs and by possibly increasing the lab hours and reducing (some, not much) the theoretical hours.

Overall, the EEC was highly impressed by the sincere effort from the Department’s members to develop a comprehensive undergraduate program that meets the needs of modern value-added industry. The curriculum is unique for Greece, very much needed by the wood value-added industry, dynamic and innovative, and of high caliber but, as we proposed above, there is always room for improvement. We realize that institutional constraints result in limited flexibility to form an independent competitive program and these constraints should be removed. Implementation of changes and possible addition of new courses will also require new faculty positions and the Department should actively pursue them on the basis of our recommendations.

B. Teaching

In general, detailed course outlines including learning targets and expected results are presented to the students.

According to the internal evaluation report, the majority of theoretical courses is carried out through lectures with the support of electronic means (power point presentations, overhead projections) and follow up discussions to ensure better understanding of the concepts involved.

With regard to the practical/laboratory part of the courses, the main teaching methods focus on applications of the theory and project assignments that are completed either in the laboratory or at home. Moreover, efforts are made to promote teamwork especially when in the lab. The EEC noted in one of the lab visits that students were actually constructing from scratch based on previous designs various items that were going to be used in practice on campus or elsewhere. In the latter case, during our first day of visit we were shown an information kiosk for the City of Karditsa located in a city park that was designed and constructed by students. This practice is highly commendable showing also the extension efforts of the Department and in particular their ties to the local community.

In the EEC's view, teaching methods could be enriched so that participation in the learning process is encouraged and enhanced. In this respect, possible introduction of more quizzes, mid-term exams, project assignments and presentations having clearly defined weight in the final mark could contribute to this end.

The total number of permanent and temporary faculty members is 10 and 43, respectively. Considering the total number of registered students (1276) in 2009 the teaching staff/student ratio is 1/24 which, at first sight, is satisfactory even though in practice this number is better, given the disappointingly low participation rates in class. The availability of teachers to respond and support students in need is considered satisfactory as it is stated in the internal evaluation report and confirmed by the students themselves.

Means and resources available are the Department's strong point and the EEC was pleased to witness it. Most of the laboratories are well equipped to adequately support course implementation. Many of the classrooms are also converted to "smart classrooms". It must be realized that due to budget limitations and the structure of the TEI system, this practice is not widespread however, in this case since the program heavily depends on equipment the staff has done a superb job using their industry networking and they unused funds in the TEI system to purchase many high quality equipment in order to deliver a high caliber program. This practice is highly laudable.

The problem raised by all stakeholders, is the absence of enough technical assistants in the laboratories. The EEC considers that this problem should be addressed in a more holistic approach through the introduction of the "teaching/research assistants" model by implementing a post-graduate program that will supply the needed help in the labs of a more general nature. Again this is not a TEI created problem but a problem stemming from the whole framework of advanced education in Greece and it must be address soon by the State.

The IT infrastructure of the Department is considered to be modern and sufficient to cover

its needs. The practice employed by some courses in using IT in the teaching process (electronic presentations and teaching material available online, course announcements and specific project assignments) is to be commented and serve as a model to the rest of the courses. CAD based design is also widely used where needed. The faculty members should be commended for this practice. Specific course sites must be created and maintained by the faculty members. Each teacher would be responsible for introducing and updating the teaching material as well as providing links to relevant subject matters on the web. This would help in familiarizing students with international developments and improving their linguistic skills.

Examinations are mandatory for all courses. There is a system in place that includes progress quizzes and final exams that can be written and/or oral or a combination of the two. The EEC finds this arrangement sufficient and according to international practice. Other more innovative examination methods such as group presentations are also practiced.

There is a mix of notes, books and other related material (internet based) that students depend on to prepare for studies. The list is quite complete and adequate for the program. The EEC was told that the updating of the course material is carried out frequently. However, the EEC found no evidence of procedures that secure a systematic updating and validating of the course material, especially taking into consideration that 1/4 of the teaching staff is permanent. Such procedures should be institutionalized.

The EEC noticed that there is a Department Newsletter that is electronically distributed to stakeholders and beyond. We highly commend this practice which is not common amongst the Greek university and TEI Departments.

While it is claimed that students are involved in research activities within the framework of a large proportion of courses, the reality is that the link between research and teaching remains limited, since students are not exposed neither to the research work of the Department nor to recent international research developments. It must be emphasized that a major weakness is the absence of any training on research design and methodology. Naturally, this is to be expected since there is no post-graduate program still in place. However, since the Department is planning to initiate such a program within the next two years, it is strongly recommended that a course dedicated to research design and methodology should be included in the curriculum and offered in one of the early semesters when the need arises. Such course can be of benefit to thesis preparation.

The mobility of the faculty members seems to be satisfactory and in line with the Department's research activities. The mobility of the students is also quite good through specific competitive European programs visiting and studying in European universities. There are also few students from European universities that have done work at the Department. The EEC is very pleased with this high mobility factor for this Department regardless of been in existence for only 11 years and with no official research mandate and post-graduate program. Regarding student mobility, poor linguistic skills are also a limiting factor. The Department is trying to teach English terminology to students in courses, but there is a limit to what can be achieved in this way. The onus is upon the students to improve their language skills.

Evaluation of faculty teaching by students is carried out by collecting questionnaires on a regular basis. The Department initiated this practice in 2006 on a voluntary basis and must be commended by taking such initiative which is mostly feared and avoided by the majority of Greek universities and TEIs. According to the internal evaluation report and our discussions with them, students are satisfied in general with the evaluation process and the quality of teaching. However, students also mentioned that many of their classmates do not take this process seriously mainly because they are not interested in the process itself and/or they belong to the large group of students who avoid going to classes (theory). Unfortunately, the EEC cannot propose any specific steps to rectify this situation under this system of education (meaning the State framework).

Last, but not least, the students voiced a concern about their hands-on experience in the labs. They mentioned that they would have liked to be able to use the equipment (machines and tools) themselves in their projects. However, under the current framework this is not possible. Students are not automatically covered by insurance when on campus as in other international universities so the possibility of an accident and the financial consequences strictly prohibits this practice. This can only be solved by the State and the EEC recommends action on this issue.

C. Research

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

The Department has an internal mandate to pursue applied research regardless of the fact that this contradicts the TEI operational framework. The latter does not make research mandatory, does not provide specific goals of new knowledge creation, and thus, does not provide the funding for necessary infrastructure and research focused post-graduate programs that could provide the force for such development. On the other hand, a significant amount of emphasis is placed on research when faculty members are judged for advancement. The latter has given a strong incentive to many faculty members to pursue this issue regardless of the difficulties related to funding. This is recognized and commended by the EEC. Regardless of the aforementioned, faculty members of the Department are actively pursuing research. No specific and clear metrics and standards have been set on paper by the Department for assessing research, probably due to the fact that no legal framework exists on this issue.

The EEC found that the Department has a good amount of lab space to satisfy current needs. Also, the committee noticed that many of the labs were well equipped to carry out the teaching load, but few had the variety and sophistication of equipment to pursue advanced research especially in EU supported programs. More funding should be provided by the State to achieve this level.

According to the internal evaluation report and the documents examined during the visit, the number of publications is very good considering that this is not part of their mandate. There is good peer-review publication record that for many members is deemed equivalent if not better to many Greek university and TEI Departments and even some international Departments of similar focus. This has been accomplished through significant effort by the individual faculty members via personal, local and international contacts. The publications list shows good collaborations with other Departments in Greece and abroad and shows an increasing trend. Many journals are ISI listed and with good impact index a fact indicative of the quality of the produced knowledge. Furthermore, conference participation has resulted in considerable research results dissemination. This effort is applauded and highly encouraged to continue in the future since conferences are considered a very important venue not only to present work, but also to network and foster new collaborations. This participation also brings good service on conference organizing committees and journal editorial boards. The Department members show some mobility in this area, but further effort is recommended.

As per the internal evaluation review, the Department has managed competitive research projects of European and national nature. The EEC considers the research success of the Department significant especially under the transition phase that the TEI went through recently, the short existence of the department and the lack of significant equipment infrastructure to attract large research projects. However, the commitment to the creation of knowledge of many of the faculty members and the commitment of the administration to support and promote such are highly commended. We also noted the good number of industry related trouble shooting contracts administered by the Department. This practice is very important because this is what the Greek value-added industry desperately needs to be competitive at a European and international level. Having a place where they can get qualified employees and find qualified experts to solve their problems is imperative to

Greece's national economy.

Most of the faculty members have been involved as primary and/or secondary investigators in projects. Considering that research is not part of the mandate, this level of activity is significant. The lack of a post-graduate program is considered a strong inhibitor for further development in this area.

There is also evidence for a more applied version of the research practicalities produced and distributed (knowledge dissemination) to the Greek potential users through a WFDT Newsletter and specific seminars sponsored by the Department. However, more effort should be made in this area especially with regard to the uptake of new knowledge by the pertinent stakeholders. We feel that by increasing its profile, there is potential for the Department to attract high quality students in the future.

Based on our discussions with the faculty members we are convinced that the Department is highly motivated in its majority to pursue more research in both quantitative and qualitative ways. The current momentum is recognized by all staff that needs to be preserved and specific action ideas have been proposed by the faculty. However, without significant seed funding much of this plan is not going to change the *status quo*. The EEC believes that if the TEI are to be considered "applied universities", research should be an indispensable part of teaching. This is because it promotes the introduction of students to fresh ideas, hands-on experience in the laboratory and allows the teachers/researchers to introduce new knowledge into their courses that makes learning fun and rewarding by stimulating creative thinking and problem solving ability. State funding targeted to applied research should become somehow available through competitive programs.

D. All Other Services

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

Based on the visit and the internal evaluation report, most faculty and student support services are clustered in very close by buildings within a large and well designed floor space. The library is quite basic with a limited book and journal selection, but with good internet access to the journal databases and books online. Also, there is good plant operations (mechanical, electrical, plumbing) support from various TEI Departments and outside sources however it was pointed out that this could in some cases be of a problem.

The organization and experience of the staff is deemed adequate in the Secretariat Office. However there is only one permanent and a temporary employee and the amount of work is very high for only two persons. Regardless, good service is provided and the staff always makes an extra effort to serve the students and accommodate their needs. In spite of what the EEC experienced and told, the students complained about the few hours the office is open to service their needs. The EEC recommends extension of current student service hours by an extra hour or two if possible under the same staffing situation and/or transfer of a second permanent employee from another TEI Department or the municipality of Karditsa. Furthermore, some of the paperwork the students require such as letters verifying their status could be provided electronically for them to fill out and just bring them back for signing.

The quality of the Department's webpage is deemed good and easy to navigate. Furthermore, the postings about courses and labs that are currently implemented are well done and deserve credit. However, it is highly recommended that a detailed course outline, objectives, prerequisites and outcomes are also posted and updated regularly.

The EEC notice good effort in the area of student counselling by faculty members and when seeking employment, cultural and athletic activities. The nearby location of eating facilities and dormitories does facilitate building up a student spirit that is so important to improve the quality of students life especially when most of the students come for various other places across Greece.

Overall, administration services and student support is deemed very good under the current budget constraints.

Although the EEC noted that there is some interaction with "practice" through specific seminars and workshops there we believe that this activity should be further pursued and when possible, implemented.

Lastly, the spotless condition of the building and all common areas is highly applauded. This is the result of the nice rapport between students and faculty and the group spirit that has been cultivated over the years, something that the EEC did not notice when visited one of the other Departments in a close by building during lunch.

E. Strategic planning, perspectives for improvement and potential inhibiting factors

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

The committee acknowledges the fact that the Department has included its vision and the mechanisms that it plans to implement in the future to improve teaching and research. These plans have been discussed and approved by all faculty members. No separate document concerning these plans has been produced, yet.

The mission of the Department is stated as to “*promote the spread and growth of knowledge in the areas of wood science and technology, furniture production technology and furniture design through teaching and applied research, as well as to provide students with a high level of technological training and knowledge for their own benefit and potential future employment.*” The objectives as listed in numeric form point out specific actions and ideas to make the experience of the students in the program more interesting and fruitful. The plan aims towards more active student participation, by providing a better learning environment through the application of advanced pedagogical methods should the funding situation and institutional framework along with the sincere participation of all the faculty members allows.

Major goals according to the internal evaluation report include the improvement of the curriculum with course content evaluation and updating (this was completed in 2009-1010); active support of research and publication; active pursue of more collaboration with other educational and research centers, but also organizations and groups that are the natural employers of the Department’s graduates; encourage and support mobility of both faculty and students; increase research training of students; attract bright young scientists in joining as faculty; improve the visibility of the Department both nationally and internationally; establish a postgraduate program; pursue more collaborations with social and cultural foundations as well as with the productive sector; and hire more full-time faculty and staff; amongst other things. Overall, the EEC feels that the Department has a very ambitious plan that will require significant effort and more importantly, significant funding. An implementation strategy should be top priority of the Department in the near future.

The development of a post-graduate program is considered by EEC of utmost importance especially when viewed in connection to the proposed “Research/Teaching Assistant” model. Such a program could also be developed in collaboration with the potential employers so that the graduates will have the extra knowledge and experience that is not provided by the undergraduate program. The establishment of this program for the sake of having such a program should not be the driving force. The post-graduate program will provide the essentials to facilitate and stimulate wood and design research activities and interactions within and outside the Department. The identification of specific research “niches” will create funding opportunities both at national and international levels.

As potential prohibiting factors the EEC realizes the lack of enough staff, the lack of autonomy of the TEI system under the current operational framework, the low quality of students and the significant lack of funding that is particularly intensified by the recent financial condition of the State.

F. Final conclusions and recommendations of the EEC:

For each particular matter, please distinguish between under- and post-graduate level, if necessary.

In conclusion, the overall impression of the EEC is very positive regarding infrastructure, human resources, pedagogical and research activities, and current program of studies. The EEC was impressed by the enthusiastic attitude of the faculty and staff regarding past achievements and future prospects of the Department which has been in existence for only eleven (11) years. The evident pride of the people involved about the service they offer to the community and the value-added industry is also noted and commented.

Upon further reflection and in-depth discussion among the EEC members, specific important observations were brought about and hopefully, helpful recommendations were produced as listed below.

1. The single stream curriculum might not allow specialization in areas of potential high demand as such changes with time. This could be improved by offering more electives thus creating streams in both wood technology and design.
2. Several courses require others as a background and it would be advisable to extend the existing structured sequence of prerequisites in the curriculum. Such “chain”-type relationships will allow a better and easier comprehension of the material by the students.
3. A major obstacle is the perpetual continuation of student ability to take repeated examinations of one or many failed courses, far and beyond the years of studies. This results in a confusing and incoherent sequence of attendance and should be considered within the framework of future planning of the Department. The State should make important changes to the current framework allowing such detrimental practice.
4. The EEC observed that the laboratory part of the courses is autonomous and independent from the respective theoretical part. As a result, students can attend and pass the laboratory without having the required theoretical knowledge base. The EEC suggests merging of the two into one inseparable course.
5. The educational level of students accepted in the Department is very low both in basic science knowledge and foreign languages. A realistic minimum entrance grade should be implemented.
6. The absence of technical assistants in the laboratories creates multiple problems that could be addressed in a more holistic approach through the introduction of the “teaching/research assistants” model, which is described in this report.
7. All faculty members might consider developing their own respective course sites that will include updated teaching material, their past and ongoing research projects and links to relevant subject matters.
8. Evaluation of faculty teaching by students might be improved by an effective follow-up mechanism in place.
9. There is no evidence that a more applied version of the research outcomes is

produced and distributed (knowledge dissemination) to the Greek potential users besides on an individual basis through personal networking. The EEC recommends that the Department forms a standing committee to act as a liaison with the major stakeholders in the public and private sector. This can also work as a channel of feedback regarding the skills of the program graduates leading to potential curriculum changes as the faculty sees fit.

10. The development of a post-graduate program is considered of utmost importance especially when viewed in connection to the proposed “Research/Teaching Assistant” model.

The Members of the Committee

Name and Surname

Signature

1. Stavros Avramidis (Coordinator)
2. Alexis Georgacopoulos
3. Anders Gronlund
4. Vangelis Vasileiou