Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ARACIS

External Evaluator's Report

„Gaudeamus" Foundation - University
„Tomis" of Constanța 2024

3rd of July 2024

Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as ARACIS International Expert Evaluator for the Institutional Evaluation of „Gaudeamus" Foundation - University „Tomis" of Constanța (U TOMIS). The evaluation of the Gaudeamus" Foundation - University „Tomis" was carried out by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) as a procedure of quality assurance aimed to certify fulfillment of operating standards of the evaluated institution.

For the evaluation process the following Experts Committee, in charge of Institutional Evaluation at the Gaudeamus" Foundation - University „Tomis" of Constanța, was recruited:

Evaluation Director ARACIS:
Prof. PhD Marius Gabriel Petrescu; Universitatea Petrol-Gaze Ploiesti Romania
Coordinator of the Committee ARACIS:
Prof. PhD. Razvan Liviu Nistor; University Babes Bolyai Cluj-Napoca, Romania
International Expert ARACIS:
Prof. PhD. Razvan Ionut Ghinea; University of Granada, Spain
Representative of the Advisory Committee:
Prof. PhD. Laurentiu Rece; Universitatea Tehnica de Constructii Bucuresti, Romania
Expert ARACIS:
Prof. PhD. Dorian Cojocaru; Universitatea din Craiova, Romania
Student Evaluator ANOSR:
Calin-Madalin Oniea; Universitatea din Bucuresti, Romania
Student Evaluator UNSR:
Ilinca Daniela Sahlean; Universitatea Tehnica Gheorghe Asachi Iasi, Romania

The on-site evaluation period extended from 29/05/2024 to 31/05/2024. After my appointment as an International Expert Evaluator, I was informed by the Evaluation Director (Prof. PhD Marius Gabriel Petrescu; Universitatea Petrol-Gaze Ploiesti Romania), the Coordinator of the Committee (Prof. PhD. Razvan Liviu Nistor, University Babes Bolyai Cluj-Napoca, Romania) as well as the Technical Assistant (Stefania-MAria Armaselu - ARACIS) of the evaluation team on important aspects of the evaluation process, such as:

- Working methodology and the structure of the evaluation panels for Institutional Evaluation, including contact data.
- All important working documents, such as The Guidelines for Periodical External Evaluation of academic quality in accredited higher education institutions.
- Detailed meetings and visit schedule.
- Credentials and how to access the Internal evaluation reports and their annexes uploaded by the evaluated institution in their own cloud (https://univtomis.ro/acreditare-institutionala/).

As stated in the Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, engagement with quality assurance processes, particularly the external ones, allows European higher education systems to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programs and other provision.

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes, including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritize different purposes, can view quality in higher education differently and quality assurance needs to consider these different perspectives. Quality, whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teaching staff, students, and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of the study programs, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus inter-related. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management.

Gaudeamus Foundation – "Tomis" University of Constanta (U TOMIS) was established as a higher education unit within the "Gaudeamus" Foundation, which was born under the Constitutive Act of 10.11.1997, granted legal entity and was registered in the Register of legal entities by civil sentence no. 1207/10.11.1997 of the Constanta Tribunal, which remained final. The General Assembly of the founding members meeting on 06.01.2004 decided to operate some changes in the Statute of the Foundation aimed at the establishment of the "Tomis" University of Constanta, higher education institution, legal person under private law, according to the civil sentence no. 63/29.03.2004 issued by the Constanta Court.

For the purpose of the Institutional Evaluation carried out by ARACIS, the Evaluated Institution carefully prepared a Self-Assessment Report (SAR). This document was available as 63 pages .pdf document in their own cloud (https://univtomis.ro/acreditare-institutionala/), and I was able to access it easily, on-time and as often as necessary. To support information included in the SAR, a large number of annexes were uploaded in the cloud or were addressed as links to documents publicly available online in digital format. These documents were later completed with other additional documents, upon request from the evaluation panel. All these additional documents were uploaded to the cloud or sent directly by e-mail to the evaluation panel.

The evaluation also benefited of a large series of on-site meetings with different U TOMIS stakeholders, such as U TOMIS management and representatives, the contact person and the team that drafted the internal evaluation report, representatives of U TOMIS

Financial Offices, Quality Management Department, Ethics Committee, teaching staff, U TOMIS graduates, employers of U TOMIS graduates and U TOMIS students. A visit to different U TOMIS teaching and research facilities was also included, and members of the evaluation committee had the opportunity to visit, among others: several teaching spaces and research laboratories, library, reading room, University housing, sports facilities, etc.

General Statements

Gaudeamus Foundation - "Tomis" University of Constanta operates under Romanian law, adhering to principles outlined in international human rights treaties, the Magna Carta of European Universities, and the Bologna Declaration. Its educational and research processes align with the principles of university autonomy, the University Charter, and higher education requirements. The mission of U TOMIS is to create an innovative learning and research environment grounded in humanist values, aiming to develop specialists who can support economic and social progress.

As a private institution of higher education, U TOMIS was established to address labor market demands by training specialists for both the public and private sectors. These specialists are expected to meet European standards in education quality and possess the ability to assume managerial and leadership responsibilities necessary for managing transformations and modernization processes in Romania.

U TOMIS has aligned itself with the Bologna process. Within its structure, the university offers three undergraduate study programs: Business Administration, Economics of Commerce, Tourism and Services, and Finance and Banks. These programs fall under the bachelor areas of Business Administration and Finance.

In developing curricula, course syllabi, and university methodology, the primary reference is the state higher education system with its extensive experience. The University has established collaborative relationships with higher education institutions both within Europe and beyond. The Faculty of U TOMIS operates according to the University Code of Ethics, promoting values and principles such as academic freedom, personal autonomy, justice and equity, professionalism, honesty and intellectual integrity, transparency, respect and tolerance, loyalty, and the responsibility of all leadership to fulfill educational, formative, and research processes.

The university's teaching staff contribute to the cohesion of the academic community, fostering a climate of cooperation and healthy competition to enhance the University's prestige. The main objective of the University is to develop and establish itself as a leading trainer of specialists and a generator of scientific knowledge. U TOMIS encourages transparency and participation in strategic planning and decision-making, and actively involves in related activities the academic community (decision-makers, academic staff, students) and stakeholders, including representatives from the social and professional environment.

Recommendations:

- *Continuously tailor the educational programs to align with the evolving demands of the labour market, societal needs and after consulting with all relevant stakeholders*
- *Develop closer links with potential employers of the graduates, by meeting on regular basis and consult, this way developing stronger real partnerships for future mutual benefit.*
- *Ensure the continuous professional growth and development of both teaching and administrative staff.*
- *Broaden the spectrum of financial resources to ensure a robust funding portfolio in the future.*
- *Design a comprehensive financial strategy that guarantees sustainable and rational development of the institution in the medium to long term.*
- *Explore opportunities to create collaborative joint study programs or double degree initiatives with other similar institutions.*
- *Increase efforts to accelerate digitization and technological integration of all types of administrative processes carried out within U TOMIS.*
- *Actively promote U TOMIS identity and institutional image.*
- *Increase visibility and attractiveness of educational offer at U TOMIS.*
- *Exploring opportunities to attract students from a broader geographic area, rather than just locally as is currently the case.*

Managerial Structure

U TOMIS has an organizational structure that corresponds to quality standards in higher education, an elected management structure organized in accordance with legal provisions and its own regulations, and a medium-term strategy whose objectives are achieved stage by stage and integrated into annual operational plans.

The representatives of the university community, such as teaching staff, researchers, employees as well as students can participate in the management and decision-making processes by submitting proposals/suggestions/recommendations for improvement of university activity at regular meetings of the university divisions to which they belong.

The management structures of U TOMIS, their duties and their functioning are provided in the University Charter. According to the Charter, the governing structures of the university are: The Administrative Council, the University Senate, the Faculty Council and the Department Council.

U TOMIS has a coherent, integrated and transparent management system, based on an efficient administration, adapted to the assumed mission and objectives. U TOMIS is headed by the University Senate, according to the legislation in force. The management of

the faculty is provided by: Faculty council, faculty council office, Dean, Vice-Dean and department Directors.

The administrative departments and services within U TOMIS. are assigned with appropriate staff in terms of professional qualification and conditions required for occupying the positions. Students designate their representatives in the management structures of the faculty and the university. The student representatives are approved by the faculty council.

U TOMIS has an effective administration, which ensures good management of income and expenditure budget. However, U TOMIS is encouraged to carefully monitor and maintain an operating surplus and a low share of salary expenses in total income, to ensure the financial stability of the institution in the medium term and to allow for investments. Also, the student-dependent financing might also force U TOMIS management to tackle future difficulties if the demographic development of the country and/or region does not vary in the short-medium term. Additionally, U TOMIS needs to continue efforts towards a wider digitalization of the administrative processes, as many of them are still required to be done on-site at the different administrative offices (such as Faculty Secretariat, for example).

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Maintain the current financial policy, ensuring an operating surplus to secure the institution's financial stability in the medium term and to enable future investments.*
- *Strengthen the institutional management and financial capacity of U TOMIS by diversifying potential alternative income sources (such as providing services to public and private companies, securing research grants, sublease available spaces, organize conferences within the facilities, establish consultancy contracts with companies, engage in research contracts, participate in European projects, etc).*
- *Continuously strive to benchmark U TOMIS internal regulations and their implementation with existing national regulations governing Higher Education and Higher Education Institutions.*
- *Improve website's design and quality while ensuring it comprehensively includes information about procedures, competitions, surveys, results, reports, and more. Additionally, extend the archival records to cover as many years as possible.*
- *Enhance transparency by extensively publishing a broad spectrum of information on the institution's website and ensuring this information remains accessible for a prolonged period.*

Teaching Staff

The Evaluated Institution has made consistent efforts to assure the competence of their staff. Fair and transparent processes are applied for the recruitment and development of their teaching and research staff. The areas of activity at U TOMIS are interconnected, meaning that the teaching staff is carrying out both scientific and research activities through organization and participation in national and international scientific events, research projects and publications of scientific papers.

The Evaluated Institution assumes responsibility for the quality of their staff and provides a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. It was confirmed that the Evaluated Institution sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognize the importance of both teaching and research; offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff; encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research and encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

According to discussions with the U TOMIS teaching staff, it appears that they are satisfied with the existing facilities and overall working conditions. The faculty also reported being pleased with the students' level of knowledge. Additionally, U TOMIS management is recognized for being flexible and understanding in designing and preparing course schedules to accommodate the needs of both students and staff. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for professors and students who travel long distances to attend classes. Furthermore, it was confirmed that most of the U TOMIS teaching staff are actively involved in promoting the university.

The teaching faculty is appropriately sized for the number of students and the educational structure. However, the very limited number of young professors and the nature of the contracts of the actual teaching staff could pose a threat to the future of the educational process and the institution itself.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *It is recommended to develop a strategy for hiring new teaching staff to ensure the stability of the faculty, maintain the continuity and integrity of the educational process, and support the potential expansion of the educational offerings.*
- *Maintain and continue to implement effective policies and practices that ensure the high quality of teaching and research staff.*
- *Develop new strategies and policies to offer long-term full-time contracts to attract highly skilled candidates interested in pursuing professional careers at U TOMIS.*
- *Persist in identifying and utilizing innovative techniques for effective teaching and learning, including the integration of new technologies and the organization of training sessions for academic staff, with a focus on maximizing participation in these*

training sessions.

- *Promote the ongoing professional development of teaching staff to acquire new skills, methods, and techniques that can enhance their teaching effectiveness.*
- *Conduct continuous analysis of the teaching staff structure to ensure alignment with quality assurance objectives and compliance with legal provisions.*
- *Monitor the ratio of academic/teaching staff to students and compare it with benchmarks from other leading universities both domestically and internationally.*

Facilities

U TOMIS benefits of modern material and technical resources that support the activities of both students and academic staff, creating an optimal environment for education and research. The university is equipped with classrooms, seminar rooms, and teaching and research laboratories, all furnished with multimedia equipment including computers, video projectors and projection screens. The research center and the computer lab within the faculty meet high standards necessary for conducting research activities. All educational spaces comply with current regulations regarding facilities and space. The computer labs feature modern computers with multimedia capabilities and internet connectivity, ensuring that applied work in specialized disciplines can be carried out effectively. Each group of students has access to a computer, with a ratio of no more than two students per computer.

The U TOMIS library houses a wide range of resources, including monographs, university courses, specialized publications, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and bibliographies, available in both traditional and digital formats. The library offers students and faculty access to an integrated TLIB 400 library system for 20,000 records, featuring modules for cataloging, bookkeeping, OPAQUE, import-export, and circulation, along with a librarian user license. This system facilitates efficient management of the book collection.

The library and reading room provide good study and information resources. The size of the premises, the number of seats, and the facilities are matched to the student population. Additionally, the digital library (https://univtomis.ro/studenti-2/resurse-educationale/) includes textbooks, course materials, and university courses that can be accessed online by students and faculty, using individual user accounts and passwords.

During the on-site visit, nearly all the previously mentioned spaces, including the sports activity room and the university housing were visited. The primary concern in this regard is that the university operates in a rented space for a specified period. Although this complies with current laws, it poses a risk for the university's future, as there is uncertainty about how to proceed once the rental period concludes. While the available facilities allow U TOMIS to function adequately, there are areas that need improvement. For instance, it was noted that the professors do not have individual offices or spaces where they can meet privately with students to confidentially discuss academic issues. Additionally, access to the building is only via stairs, which severely limits or even prevents access for individuals with reduced mobility,

conflicting with the inclusive education principles a university should uphold. Furthermore, the library and study room spaces are somehow limited. Moreover, there is a need to pursue new agreements for university housing, with better conditions and a location closer to the main campus. The same is true for the sports facilities.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Develop a multi-annual strategic plan for acquiring or constructing owned spaces, which would mitigate potential risks associated with operating in rented premises and allow for investment in these facilities.*
- *Continue to develop the available teaching and research infrastructure and, where appropriate, consider upgrading existing premises, based on realistic investment plans in relation to projected revenues.*
- *Actively seek new partnerships and collaborations in terms of infrastructure, with the aim of increasing both the number and quality of services offered to students, the beneficiaries of the educational process.*
- *Improve access to the institution for individuals with disabilities and/or functional diversity. This issue should be tackled progressively, considering architectural and structural limitations of older buildings. In any case, it is highly recommended that any new building to be designed to grant access for disabled persons.*
- *Improve the availability of office spaces for teaching staff to ensure the provision of activities related to teaching (such as student consultations and course preparation) in a private setting that ensures confidentiality.*
- *Expand the space allocated to the university library and continue efforts to increase and update the book collection.*
- *Maintain efforts to continuously improve accommodation conditions and available services for University Housing facilities.*
- *Maintain subscription to software packages as well as continuously identify possible needs of both teaching/research staff and students in order to expand subscription and/or acquire more software packages.*
- *Continuous analysis of the opportunity to develop the book collection / other library resources, by acquiring titles published in recent years, related to all disciplines of study.*
- *Continue to equip all rooms related to teaching activities (lectures, seminars, projects, workshops, etc.) with most recent technical equipment.*

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Students

Overall, students are satisfied with the quality of the educational services at U TOMIS, as well as largely satisfied with the available teaching infrastructure. Also, students feel supported by U TOMIS management and teaching staff. During discussions with U TOMIS students, it seemed that they were not clearly aware of the procedures in place to be elected as Student Representatives. Some suggested that they are selected and proposed by Faculty Management while others indicated that they are selected by vote, during meetings in which might participate both students and Faculty management members (such as deans or vice-deans). This does not seem like the best approach, and U TOMIS should encourage establishment and promotion of clear procedures for election and proposal of student representatives within different bodies, in which, ideally, only the students should be involved.

U TOMIS students are informed about the evaluation process, the structure of evaluations, and consultation opportunities with professors, although these consultations are somewhat informal. They were also aware of the existence of a Career Counseling and Guidance Center (CCOC). Students were also aware of the procedures that are carried out for evaluating the teaching staff and University facilities and services. They also confirmed that they fulfill the surveys on a regular basis.

Students seem to use the website for obtaining most of the necessary information. This enhances the need of having an updated and comprehensive University website, as specified earlier. Students are informed at the beginning of the academic year about the services offered by the university, such as accommodation, scholarships, and CCOC. Students were familiar with the procedures required to access University housing and considered the price as affordable. Also, they were generally satisfied with the level of cleanliness and services provided. However, the number of students benefiting of this service is very limited, mostly due to the specificity of student type that are enrolled at U TOMIS.

It seems that some students participated in a conference organized in collaboration with a different University, but participation in this type of events is generally low. Although other communication sessions were organized (according to provided SAR and annexes), awareness among students is inconsistent. Improving communication with students is necessary. According to the discussion with student's representatives, there appears to be a lack of awareness about optional courses available at U TOMIS. Communication in this area also needs enhancement. Finally, students encouraged U TOMIS to support a greater attendance of students so they can build a stronger student community as well as the development of new study programs, especially Master's degrees.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Diversify the educational offerings by including new study programs, especially Master's degrees, to meet the needs and demands of former and current students.*
- *Support a greater attendance of students to courses so they can build a stronger*

student community.

- *Encourage the establishment of a student association, which can help organize students and attract funds as well as other opportunities towards them.*
- *Intensify efforts to attract new students, particularly in light of the declining student numbers in recent years.*
- *Actively encourage a greater flexibility in defining students' educational path by increasing the number of optional courses.*
- *Continue to publish course materials on the online platform to facilitate student access to this information.*
- *The evaluated institution is encouraged to try to motivate students to take more responsibility and ownership for the development of the institution.*
- *Better communicate procedures for election and proposal of student representatives within different bodies.*
- *Continue efforts to digitize the administrative process of submission, collection of certificates, diplomas, etc.*

Research

U TOMIS has a scientific research strategy for the period 2022-2027, which was adopted by the University Senate. This strategy is aligned with the National Strategy for Research, Innovation, and Smart Specialization 2022-2027, as well as the National Plan for Research, Development, and Innovation 2022-2027. The scientific research strategy of U TOMIS is embedded in the University's mission as outlined in the University Charter. Based on this medium-term research strategy, U TOMIS formulates annual operational plans for scientific research.

The scientific research activities are organized and conducted within the Research Center at the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Studies. These activities are carried out in partnership with representative academic, business, and social institutions at both national and international levels. U TOMIS has established four partnerships with universities in the country, three partnerships with international universities, a partnership with AJPIS, and eight partnerships with the business sector.

U TOMIS promotes and supports interdisciplinarity and competition in research, with a Research Center operating at the university level. At the beginning of each academic year, the university's research center develops a scientific research plan. The main objective in the field of scientific research and innovation is to increase the research funds attracted to the university, diversify the funding sources for research activities, and provide complex services to private partners.

The annual research plan includes specific research topics by field, detailed research projects, allocated resources according to set objectives, implementation deadlines, and methods for capitalizing on research results. The research topics at the U TOMIS Research

Center are aligned with the scientific areas of the bachelor's degree fields and address the needs and requirements of the economic and social sectors.

Research is leveraged through various means, including publications for educational purposes, scientific publications, specialized courses, and consultancy. Between 2019 and 2023, faculty members published 30 books and book chapters with both international and national publishers, 16 articles in journals (ISI/Clarivate Analytics, ISI/Clarivate Analytics Arts & Humanities, ISI/Clarivate Analytics Emerging Sources Citation Index, or ERIH+ categories), and 98 articles in BDI-indexed journals. During the same period, two projects were submitted for national competitions: the POCU/449/416 project identified with no. 12814 "Social Entrepreneurship in a Solidarity Economy" and the project "Innovators – Young Entrepreneurs in the South Muntenia and South East Regions" identified with code 140992 on POCU/829/6/13. From 2020 to 2024, no projects were implemented and completed for the national project competitions UEFISCDI (PCE, PED, TE, PD) and PNRR.

U TOMIS regularly organizes scientific events such as sessions, symposiums, conferences, and round tables, which enhance the University's visibility within the academic research community. However, there are several key concerns regarding research at U TOMIS. These include the low number of faculty members engaged in intensive scientific research with international visibility, the limited number of research projects conducted at the university, and the very low involvement of students in scientific research projects.

Comments/Recommendations:

- Continue efforts to enhance research activities within the institution (new research *contracts, apply for and/or participate in research teams as members or project coordinators, publishing articles, books, or book chapters with prestigious publishers, etc.).*
- *Study the opportunity to implement a reward and/or incentive system for research activities among the teaching staff, whit the potential to improve the research ecosystem within the university.*
- *Continue to equip all research laboratories with equipment and software to conduct high-quality research activities that meet both highest standards as well as requirements of dealing with current scientific topics in the fields of interest for the University.*
- *Continue efforts to link scientific research to the needs and requirements of economic and societal needs.*
- *Identify and support the development of long-term research, including inter- and transdisciplinary approaches.*
- *Perform regular analysis of the results of research activity and setting up mechanisms to increase scientific production and international recognition of U TOMIS researchers.*

- *Increase support for U TOMIS researchers to apply for national and international research grants and to participate in research-related events.*
- *Identify opportunities for disseminating research results.*
- *Ensure that all publications authored by university staff are affiliated with the university.*

Internationalization

Academic mobility significantly deepens cooperation between institutions and has broader connections, positively impacting overall scientific and cultural collaboration. Developing relations with the international academic community is a key component of U TOMIS's future development strategy. The University aims to expand its network of collaborations and partnerships in higher education, focusing on the mobility of teachers and students with universities both within the European Union and worldwide.

Based on an analysis of available documents and on-site meetings and discussions, it is evident that U TOMIS is committed to creating an institutional framework that encourages international mobility for students and faculty. This framework supports the development of learning, teaching, research, development, innovation activities, and cultural openness among its members. However, this ambition must be carefully examined, as the lack of proper internationalization is a notable weakness for the University. Several factors contribute to this issue, such as the specificity of student type enrolled at U TOMIS and, more critically, the lack of Institutional Accreditation. This lack of accreditation impacts the University's ability to participate in mobility programs and international joint activities (educational, research, etc.). Nevertheless, the recommendations provided aim to guide the University toward future development in terms of internationalization.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *Actively seek and promote agreements to increase the number of available mobility opportunities for students and faculty.*
- *Study the opportunity of developing and implementing study programs in foreign languages.*
- *Proactively promote mobility opportunities for both students and teaching staff.*
- *Further strengthen existing partnerships with foreign universities and actively seek to establish new international networks for teaching and research support.*
- *Promote the university and its educational offerings through the University website, international educational web platforms, and participation in educational fairs.*
- *Consider making the majority of relevant information about U TOMIS activities and study programs available in foreign languages.*

Quality Management

The institutional quality assurance policy is focused on the principle of improving the quality of all services provided at the institutional level, strengthening the quality management system and the partnerships with the beneficiaries of educational services, diversifying and correlating study programs with the strategic priorities of the state and aligning the institutional quality management system with international standards. U TOMIS actively promotes a culture of quality and mutual respect in the student-teacher relationship at all levels. The University Senate has established an efficient system for the evaluation and quality assurance of services provided. This system aims to enhance performance and increase the University's prestige within the national and international academic communities. To achieve this, the University created the Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance (CEAC). The Rector of the University holds overall responsibility for quality management, delegating the operative management of quality assurance and evaluation actions to the President of CEAC.

CEAC, through its structure and responsibilities, ensures the implementation of U TOMIS's strategies in the field of quality education, with student participation throughout the process. CEAC undertakes monitoring and evaluation actions, cooperates in audit and internal evaluation activities of the self-assessment reports of the three study programs, and implements complementary and applicative actions to develop a culture of quality. The activities of CEAC uphold U TOMIS's quality policy, as made public by the Rector's Declaration on Quality Assurance Policy in the University (https://univtomis.ro/).

CEAC at U TOMIS is constituted according to the law and approved by the Senate. CEAC operates based on the Rules of Operation for the Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance and annually produces an internal evaluation report, which is made public on the U TOMIS website. CEAC continuously proposes measures to improve education quality and adopt best practices. The main documents of CEAC are public and available on the U TOMIS website at https://univtomis.ro/management-institutional/ceac/. Through joint activities with other universities in the country, U TOMIS identifies and adopts best practices in education, administration, and research.

The verification of compliance with procedures, regulations, and operational plans is conducted based on the internal audit procedure and annual audit programs regarding quality. The policies and strategies for quality assurance are articulated through U TOMIS's Strategic Plans and the Rector's statement on quality assurance of the educational process. The Strategic Plan specifies the strategic objectives and specific activities to achieve them, along with the criteria and evaluation indicators adopted. U TOMIS emphasizes continuity in its quality assurance policies for teaching. Each year, CEAC presents an analysis report on the state of the university, structured by activities. This report reviews the implementation of the quality policy program and the achievement of U TOMIS's strategic objectives in quality assurance. The annual reports are published on the U TOMIS website.

U TOMIS has a procedure for the initiation, approval, monitoring, and periodic evaluation of study programs, detailing the stages and documents necessary for promoting new study programs. The Faculty Council holds primary responsibility for this process, annually evaluating the results of each undergraduate degree program and potentially revising the curriculum and discipline sheets.

The revision of study programs is initiated by the departments, following a program analysis, and is approved by the Faculty Council. Monitoring of study programs is a continuous activity conducted through various methods, including the analysis of learning outcomes, student-completed questionnaires on teacher performance, and internal quality audits.

Several individuals and structures within the university are involved in the periodic monitoring and evaluation of teaching quality: the Rector, the Senate, the Board of Directors, the Dean of the Faculty, the Vice-dean, the Faculty Council, and other stakeholders.

As an example of good practice, U TOMIS promotes students surveys on quality of teaching. The outcomes of these surveys are examined to assess their relevance and applicability in the teaching-learning process and others U TOMIS activities.

The external quality assurance in its various forms verifies the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives. The Gaudeamus Foundation – "Tomis" University of Constanta complies with the legal provisions regarding the external evaluation in a cyclical manner, at the level of the study program and at the level of the institution. The university is provisionally authorized following the start of the procedure for institutional accreditation.

The evaluated institution proved to have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The policy has a formal status and is publicly available. The quality assurance policies at U TOMIS reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach.

As extracted from the analysis of the available documents as well as discussion with U TOMIS representatives and stakeholders, information about student evaluation surveys is provided during the last week of the course. Approximately 60-70% of students respond to these surveys, but it seems that a representative from the Quality Assurance and Assessment Committee (CEAC) is present in the room during the completion of the surveys, an issue that needs to be addressed. There are also surveys on available University facilities and services conducted regularly. There have been ICT and entrepreneurial skills courses provided by an external company for the teaching staff. Additionally, a GDPR course was offered. However, more can be done to improve and better organize these training sessions for faculty members. CEAC meets at least once per semester, but they convene more frequently when necessary. However, it is unclear who or what determines the need for additional meetings. Each CEAC

meeting concludes with minutes and a formal report.

The in-place internal auditing system has the potential to provide feedback to management, which can be included in the Rector's annual report. According to U TOMIS representatives, there are two professors who audit various functional aspects of the University. Internal audit reports have been produced, and recommendations have been made based on these reports. These recommendations have been communicated to the Rector, but it is unclear what measures have been taken in response. Normally discussions occur, but there is no clear follow-up.

Comments/Recommendations:

- *In order to create a real climate of quality culture, the institution is encouraged to more actively promote the purpose and benefits of quality assurance procedures among both staff and students.*
- *Develop a culture of quality that ensures a transition from formal compliance to real utility, leading to continuous improvements.*
- *The student satisfaction questionnaires should be filled at least once a year by the majority of students (at all levels). Consequently, the evaluation results should be considered for strategic decision-making. Both the results as well as the consequences are highly recommended to be made publicly available (as for example, on the institutional website).*
- *Increase efforts towards improving the activity of the Ethics Committee. If not available, develop a mechanism enabling the Committee to act upon the principles of self-request.*
- *Continuously carry out benchmarking studies in the field of quality assurance and align with national/international universities.*
- *Continuously collect feedback from the students regarding their career perspectives as they get closer to finishing their studies.*
- *Promote among different stakeholders (specially students) strategical decision-making and implementation carried out as a consequence of the results of the learning/development environment quality assessment.*
- *Continuous analysis of the information posted on the institution's website and its updating, as well as identification of the most intuitive sections for posting information for various categories of stakeholders.*
- *Communicate more effectively and publish on the institutional website any action planned or taken as a result of the monitoring and update of the study programs.*
- *Increase efforts of involving students and other stakeholders in the monitoring and review of the study programs.*
- *Update the code of ethics to align with current legislation and continuously benchmark with other institutions in the country.*

- *Continuously inform students and the university community about the university's norms and code of ethics.*
- *Publish the Ethics Committee report and the Rector's report on the university website and make it easily accessible.*
- *Formalize collaborations with other quality assurance structures in universities across the country.*

Conclusions:

U TOMIS, established under the "Gaudeamus" Foundation, adheres to Romanian law and international higher education principles. Its mission focuses on creating an innovative learning and research environment to develop specialists supporting economic and social progress. The University promotes transparency, participation in strategic planning, and decision-making, involving academic staff, students, and external stakeholders.

As a private institution of higher education, Gaudeamus Foundation - "Tomis" University of Constanta (U TOMIS) was established to address labor market demands by training specialists for both the public and private sectors. These specialists are expected to meet European standards in education quality and possess the ability to assume managerial and leadership responsibilities necessary for managing transformations and modernization processes in Romania.

U TOMIS has aligned itself with the Bologna process. Within its structure, the university offers three undergraduate study programs: Business Administration, Economics of Commerce, Tourism and Services, and Finance and Banks. These programs fall under the bachelor areas of Business Administration and Finance.

U TOMIS has a coherent and transparent management system aligned with legal provisions and quality standards in higher education. The University Senate leads the institution, supported by elected management structures like the Administrative Council, Faculty Council, and Department Council. Management involves teaching staff, researchers, employees, and students, ensuring their participation in decision-making processes. Financial stability is maintained through effective administration, with a focus on monitoring budget surplus and salary expenses.

The University ensures the competence of its staff through fair and transparent recruitment and development processes. Teaching staff engage in both scientific and research activities, contributing to national and international events, projects, and publications. Faculty members are satisfied with facilities and work conditions, and the flexible course schedule benefits both staff and students. However, the limited number of young professors and their contractual status pose a potential risk to the educational process's future.

U TOMIS boasts modern facilities, including classrooms, seminar rooms, and research laboratories equipped with multimedia technology. The library provides a wide range of

resources in traditional and digital formats, supported by an integrated library system. However, certain areas need improvement, such as the lack of individual offices for professors and limited access for individuals with reduced mobility. The University operates in rented space, creating future uncertainties.

Students generally express satisfaction with the educational services and teaching infrastructure at U TOMIS. They feel supported by the management and faculty. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the election procedures for student representatives, and communication about optional courses needs improvement. The University should support greater student attendance to build a stronger community and consider developing new study programs, particularly Master's degrees.

U TOMIS has a comprehensive research strategy aligned with national plans, fostering interdisciplinary research and partnerships with academic, business, and social institutions. Despite organizing various scientific events and publishing numerous research works, the University faces challenges like low faculty involvement in intensive research and limited student participation in research projects. Efforts should focus on increasing research funds, diversifying funding sources, and promoting research activities.

Developing international relations is a strategic priority for U TOMIS, aiming to expand collaborations and mobility opportunities with universities worldwide. The lack of Institutional Accreditation limits participation in mobility programs and international activities. U TOMIS is committed to creating a framework that encourages international mobility for students and faculty, supporting cultural openness and innovative research.

U TOMIS prioritizes quality assurance through a system established by the University Senate, managed by the Commission for Quality Assessment and Assurance (CEAC). The CEAC ensures the implementation of quality strategies with extensive student participation. The institution's quality assurance policies reflect the relationship between research, learning, and teaching, aligning with national and international standards. Regular internal audits and student surveys provide feedback for continuous improvement, although follow-up on recommendations needs better clarity and consistency.

U TOMIS demonstrates a strong commitment to maintaining high standards in education, research, and administration. The institution should focus on enhancing communication, increasing international collaborations, and addressing infrastructure limitations to ensure its future stability and growth.

The evaluated institution proved to have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The policy has a formal status and is publicly available. The quality assurance policies at U TOMIS reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. After analyzing the documents provided by the evaluated institution as well as documents available online or requested during the visit, it was clarified

the organization of the quality assurance system within U TOMIS; it was demonstrated that departments, schools, faculties and other organizational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students participate in quality assurance procedures; academic integrity and freedom is supported, that the Evaluated Institution is vigilant against academic fraud and that the Evaluated Institution is vigilant against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff. Also, the involvement of external and internal stakeholders in quality assurance was certified. It can be stated that U TOMIS principles of quality assurance of educational and research services, the methodology of quality management, the structures involved in quality assurance, as well as the procedures for ensuring educational effectiveness correspond to international standards. However, in order to create a real climate of quality culture, the institution is encouraged to further promote the purpose and benefits of quality assurance procedures among both staff and students. Also, U TOMIS should more actively promote among different stakeholders strategical decision-making and implementation carried out as a consequence of the results of the learning/development environment quality assessment.

As a conclusion, I will list some GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS that might guide the Evaluated Institution for future development:

Enhance Educational Programs: Continuously adapt and update educational programs to meet the evolving demands of the job market and societal needs, ensuring alignment with feedback from relevant stakeholders.

Strengthen Employer Partnerships: Develop and maintain strong partnerships with potential employers through regular consultations, fostering mutually beneficial relationships for future collaboration and employment opportunities for graduates.

Promote Professional Development: Ensure continuous professional growth and development opportunities for both teaching and administrative staff to maintain high standards of education and service.

Increase Digitalization: Enhance the degree of digitalization and technological integration within the institution to improve efficiency and support innovative teaching and learning methods.

Diversify Financial Resources: Broaden the spectrum of financial resources to ensure a robust and sustainable funding portfolio, enabling future investments and institutional stability.

Improve Research Infrastructure: Continuously equip research laboratories with the latest equipment and software to support high-quality research activities that meet current scientific standards and address societal needs.

Encourage Student and Faculty Mobility: Actively seek and promote agreements to increase mobility opportunities for students and faculty, fostering international collaboration and exposure.