Università
della
Svizzera
italiana

INTERNAL GUIDELINES

ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LUGANO (**USI QA**)

1 May 2007

USI Quality Assurance Unit - USI-SUPSI Research service

Quality assurance at the University of Lugano (USI QA)

Internal Guidelines

A system for the management of quality contributes to better standards in teaching, research, and services. It is a necessary instrument for the development of academic activities, and generates greater transparency and trust among people who operate within the institution and outside it.

The Quality Assurance Unit aims to enhance USI's position as a university internationally recognised for its teaching, research, and services. By gathering data and recording key processes one can produce a coherent picture of the institution as a whole. Through an analysis of processes one may show that some of them are applied effectively while others, being implemented inefficiently, fail to achieve the intended aims. In the former case, it is the responsibility of the Quality Assurance Unit to contact the interested parties and work jointly with them to produce a strategic plan. It has become imperative to foster a "culture of quality" accepted and shared by each member of the University and enacted on a regular basis.

There follows a detailed description of the three main fields of application of quality assurance at the University of Lugano:

- Teaching Assessment (p. 3-4)
- Research Assessment (p. 5-6)
- Assessment of services and overall satisfaction with the University (p. 7)

1. Teaching assessment

1.1 Information on courses offered:

To be appropriate and thorough, information on curricula made available each term shall include the following elements:

- Subject title

- Campus location

- Objectives

- Contents

- Organisation (Logistics?) (timetables, classroom, etc)

- Teaching set-up

- Required and/or Recommended reading

- Course Requirements

- ECTS value assigned

- Form and requisites of examinations

The Faculties are responsible for ascertaining the completeness of information on courses, and for the publication of subject and teacher in the annual course prospectus.

1.2 Assessment of courses by students

Every course subject to a semester examination is evaluated by students through an on-line survey. Questions cover the following categories:

- Statistical data on students nationalities and on the level of studies reached

- Subjective opinion on the course contents (difficulty, workload)

- Course structure (preparation, timetable)

- Teaching support (material, assistants)

- Degree of motivation and overall satisfaction of students

- Overall opinion on the course

- Suggestions on how to improve the course

Course evaluation is carried out each term in weeks 11-12 in order to ensure that teachers can provide the appropriate feedback before the end of term. Detailed

evaluation on the assessment process is provided in good time to the parties directly concerned.

1.3   Assessment of examinations:

To the extent that students' performance during an examination may be seen as the product of the teaching received, the following procedures for the review of examinations may be applied:

- The tutor for examinations checks that the examination complies with the formal standards and he approves it.

- The overall examination results are collected, analysed and compared with the overall results of previous examination papers in the same area and/or with the overall results of examinations within the same session in other areas.

- Students have the opportunity to evaluate the examination papers and to provide a feedback by means of a short evaluation questionnaire.

1.4   Feedback:

The results of any course appraisal are presented in a full report to the individual teachers and the Dean of the Faculty. The complete file includes detailed information on the assessment process, with statistical data and suggestions, and with a rating list covering the results of all other courses in the same area. Teachers are expected to discuss the results with their students and agree on possible improvements. The Dean meets up with those teachers who have obtained poor results, and makes sure that they have provided the necessary feedback.

USI ensures that its teachers receive appropriate support in their use of new technologies with the assistance of the eLab team.

1.5   Communication:

The purpose of auditing teaching assessment is to achieve the highest possible standards of quality in teaching. Hence, constant monitoring along these lines is paramount; and so are motivation and support from the teaching and student community. To this end and to guarantee clear and explicit standards, a summary account of the teaching review must be made accessible on-line for teachers, students and the public at large.

2. Research assessment

Research audit is a vital element for USI's growth, both to guarantee quality of the research activities conducted, and to support the strategic decision of the specific authorities (University Council, the President, the Faculty Councils, and the Deans). By nature, it is an academic activity that must be carried out by experts in the sector (peers), albeit with data supplied in support by the appropriate USI administrative units.

2.1   Level of analysis

Within the institution, research assessment focuses largely on the individual research units (institutes, laboratories, etc.) and, subordinately, the Faculties and the University as a whole in the framework of institutional reviews (for example, Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities - OAQ). On the other hand, the assessment of research by individual researcher is carried out as part of the standard procedures for academic selection (appointment) and promotion. As a rule, this form of appraisal covers a five-year period to date.

2.2   Objectives and criteria

Given the differentiated nature of research, the assessment procedure of necessity takes several criteria into account, namely:

- Visibility and contribution to international research, with the appropriate bibliometric instruments depending on the scientific area

- Contribution to knowledge transfer nationally and regionally (with regard to both public bodies and private enterprise)

- Contribution of research to training and education at the basic level and above all, at PhD level

- Efficient use of the human and financial resources available.

The purpose of the assessment is not to produce a ranking of research units, but rather to identify their profile vis-à-vis the criteria and scope indicated and to check their consistency of their profile with the strategic mission of the different units.

2.3   Periodicity and institutional responsibility

Given the limitations of size, there would seem to be little use at the moment in introducing a periodic procedure involving the whole set of research units; instead, it may be useful to undertake ad hoc reviews where required and, in particular, where strategic decisions are in order, for example:

- whether to rescue or close down a research unit

- when status changes (e.g. from a laboratory into an institute)

- when joining a research project of strategic important

- when being awarded specific funds

The responsibility for the review lies with the President of USI, at the request of the Deans' Conference.

2.4 Procedure

As a rule, in agreement with international accepted practice, the assessment procedure comprises the following steps:

1) The President defines the specific assessment *mandate* and appoints a panel of independent experts, selected for their expertise in the field under consideration.

2) The unit under scrutiny drafts a *self-evaluation report*, complete with the quantitative indicators supplied by USI-SUPSI Research Service.

3) A *panel of independent experts* drafts a final report on the basis of the self-evaluation report, a visit to the Unit and related interviews.

4) USI's president discusses and approves the report.

2.5 Publication

Once approved, both the experts' and the self-evaluation reports shall be made public.

2.6 Indicators

The assessment of research shall rely on a set of quantitative indicators processed and updated year after year by the USI-SUPSI Research Service. Such indicators cover the following areas:

- Human and financial resources of the different units

- Third-party funding and more especially competitive projects awarded

- Scientific publications

- Research training, more especially for PhD candidates

- Mandates and technology transfer

The USI-SUPSI Research Service prepares a detailed list of these indicators, describes the methodology applied, and collects the data. Then, before publication, all data are checked by the heads of the units concerned, and subsequently they are posted on USI's web site.

3. Assessment of services and overall satisfaction with the University

3.1 Survey on services:

So that study and work at the university may be both pleasant and effective, USI has created a series of services for the benefit mostly of its students, teaching staff and administrative staff, but also of its external partners. In this context, quality audit is absolutely essential to guarantee that the services provided meet the specific needs and may function appropriately.

Every other year, therefore, USI carries out a global survey of services and of the satisfaction of USI students, alternating with a survey of the administrative staff (see 3.3), using an on-line questionnaire. The results obtained are processed and a report published on the University's web site.

3.2 Survey of ALUMNI:

A feedback from its graduates is an important tool for a university to measure the quality of its performance. It contributes steadily to developing and strengthening the institution, while also boosting its public image.

A yearly survey on the career opportunities of graduates is conducted by the Stage&Placement Service. The survey is aimed at better understanding how to access and fit into to the world of work, and to steer training and information services accordingly.

A parallel analysis is conducted among the same graduate students on the level of their satisfaction with degree programmes, attractiveness, organisation and study experience at USI.

3.3 Survey of administrative and technical staff

A university cannot operate without the valuable contribution of its administrative, library, and technical staff. The degree or satisfaction of USI's personnel is all important in ascertaining the correct functioning of the institution, the effectiveness of internal communication, and the quality of the relations between University staff. This sort of survey is carried out every two years, in alternation with the survey of services (see 3.1), and the findings are analysed in order to allow the required improvements to be made.