

Akkreditierungsagentur  
im Bereich Gesundheit und Soziales  
Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences



## **Assessment Report**

**on the Periodical Evaluation of**

**the Study Program  
"Psychology"  
(Bachelor of Psychology)**

**at "Vasile Goldis Western University",  
Arad, Romania**

AHPGS Akkreditierung gGmbH  
Sedanstr. 22  
79098 Freiburg  
Telefon: +49 (0) 761/208533-0  
E-Mail: [ahpgs@ahpgs.de](mailto:ahpgs@ahpgs.de)

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## 1 Introduction

Study programs in Romania require authorization for provisional functioning, as established by Law no. 87 of 2006, which approved the Emergency Decree no. 75 of 2005. The Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport is responsible for authorizing provisional functioning of study programs. According to the Law of National Education no.1 of 2011 (hereinafter “Law of National Education”) Art. 150, Par. 1, the decision of whether to grant authorization is contingent upon the evaluation and subsequent recommendation of the study program by an external quality assurance agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

After authorization for provisional functioning has been granted by the Romanian Ministry, the applicant higher education institution may enroll students in the respective study program. Following the successful graduation of three subsequent cohorts (taking approximately five years for three year study programs), the higher education institution must submit its application for accreditation. The accreditation procedure is similar to that for authorization for provisional functioning: an external evaluation by an EQAR-listed quality assurance agency, takes place on the basis of which the Government decides whether to accredit the study program.

The AHPGS Accreditation Agency was tasked with accrediting Bachelor study programs offered by the “Vasile Goldis Western University”, Arad, Romania (hereupon: the University) in September 2018. The University submitted the documents in July 2018.

In October 2018, the relevant documents were forwarded to the experts for the evaluation of the programs and to review the available information, determine particular strengths and weaknesses, and identify any open questions regarding the study programs in writing.

The on-site visit of the University took place on July 9-11, 2019. In the course of the on-site visit, experts conducted discussions with the University management, representatives of the faculties, the teaching staff of the programs as well as with students currently studying in other programs of the University. Furthermore, they inspected the learning premises, such as lecture halls, classrooms, computer rooms, and practice facilities. Moreover, the experts had the opportunity to see the equipment and the capacity of the laboratories. The

University also provided a presentation including the most current information and statistical numbers regarding the developments of the University.

The following four study programs were subjects of the assessment for provisional authorization, accreditation, and periodical evaluation:

**Faculty of Dentistry:**

- “Dental Technique” (Bachelor)

**Faculty of Medicine:**

- “Nursing in General Medicine” (Bachelor)

**Faculty of Pharmacy:**

- “Nutrition and Dietetics” (Bachelor)

**Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical Education and Sport:**

- “Psychology” (Bachelor)

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS nominated the following experts to conduct the on-site visit:

**As representatives of academic institutions:**

***Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Arnold<sup>1</sup>***

Witten/Herdecke University, Germany

***Prof. Dr. Barbara Bräutigam***

Neubrandenburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany

***Mathias Maximilian Dilger***

University of Freiburg, Germany

***Prof. Dr. Barbara Freytag-Leyer***

Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

***Prof. Dr. Uta Gaidys***

Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany

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<sup>1</sup> The experts shown in italics did not participate in the on-site visit of the University.

**Prof. Dr. Marion Halfmann**

Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Kleve, Germany

**Dr. Rolf Heusser, MPH**

NICER, Zurich, Switzerland

**Prof. Dr. Holger Höge**

Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, Germany

**Prof. Dr. Johannes Keogh**

Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

***Prof. Dr. Kathrin Kohlenberg-Müller***

*Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany*

***Prof. Dr. Manfred Müller***

*Kiel University, Germany*

***Markus Stracke***

*Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany*

The proceedings of the Process of Periodical Evaluation conform to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as to the Art. 150 of Romania's Law no. 1 of National Education 2011; the Quality Evaluation Activities Guide for University Study Programs and for Higher Education Institutions: Part 1 Study Programs Accreditation External Evaluation Guide, and the Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ("Methodology").

The expert group surveyed the proper implementation of the criteria, standards and performance indicators, as specified in the above-mentioned legal texts as well as the compliance of the program with the normative criteria, as stated in the "Methodology".

The documents submitted by the University, the experts' feedback to the documents, the observations made during the on-site visit, the results of

discussions with the representatives of the University serve as the basis for the statements made in the Expert Report. Since the Expert Report investigates the fulfilment of the standards and criteria specified in the "Methodology", the structure of the Expert Report follows the logical succession of these criteria, as they are formulated in the document.

The following Fields of Activity pertaining to the program and the University were assessed by the expert group with respect to the corresponding criteria and standards: (A) Institutional capacity, (B) Educational effectiveness, and (C) Quality management, each with the corresponding Criteria and Standards.

## 2 The study program to be periodically evaluated

The study program "Psychology" is offered by "Vasile Goldis Western University", Arad, Romania, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical Education and Sport. The period of education is six semesters (three years).

The study program "Psychology" was launched in the winter semester 2002/2003. It is affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical Education and Sport. It is one of eight Bachelor study programs offered in this faculty. It is solely taught in Romanian. The general mission of the study program is to provide students with the skills to work as psychology specialists. 180 credit points (CP), i.e. 30 CP per semester, according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) are required in order to graduate from the program. One CP is equivalent to 25 workload hours. The total workload of the program constitutes 4,550 hours, of which 2,024 are contact hours and 2,526 independent study hours<sup>2</sup>. The contact hours include 360 hours of internship. The 20 CP received for drafting and defending the Bachelor thesis are added to the total amount of 180 CP (*see B.1 in detail*).

All modules are program-specific modules and have to be completed within one semester. The study program "Psychology" consists of 56 modules. 39 modules are mandatory, twelve are elective and five are optional. Per semester, students have to choose one elective module, i.e. six in total. Credit points allocated to the optional modules are added on top of the required total of 180 CP and are mentioned separately in the transcript of records. Overall, students have to study 47 modules, including Physical Education.

Admission requirements include a Baccalaureate degree or equivalent diploma. The admission to undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports is based on the weighted average of the baccalaureate exam (80%) and the grade of the Romanian Language and Literature (written test) baccalaureate exam (20%). Admissions are organized in two sessions during July and September. Foreign students have to provide a Romanian language certificate (level B1) issued by institutions authorized by the Ministry of National Education. Students receive information about the amount of the tuition fees in advance.

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<sup>2</sup> These hours include the elective modules that go beyond the 180 CP that are mandatory for graduating from the study program.

Upon graduation, students are awarded a Bachelor graduation diploma (Diploma de Licenta, cf. Law of National Education no. 1 from 2011), as well as a Diploma Supplement, comprised in both Romanian and English. Graduates of the Bachelor study program "Psychology" are awarded with the academic degree "Bachelor of Psychology".

The experts take note that the formal requirements of the study program are in accordance with the national Romanian requirements.

The study program "Psychology" was launched in the winter semester 2002/2003 and has been accredited once in 2007 according to Government Decision no. 676/2007. Currently there are 94 students enrolled in the study program.

The University with its Administration Board confirms in a declaration that the endowment and facilities for the study program is ensured for the future, including all buildings, equipment, apparatuses and personnel necessary for the implementation of the program.



### **3 Expert Report**

In October 2018, the application documents of the University were made available to the expert group for written evaluation. The expert group assessed the study program "Psychology" based on the Romanian standards and regulations specified under Section 1. They have also examined the factual and other program-related aspects described in the documents. The results of this review were forwarded to the AHPGS in November 2018.

Based on the written evaluation of each expert and the on-site visit, the expert group jointly agreed upon an Expert Report.

## **A. Institutional Capacity**

### **A.1. Institutional, administrative and management structures**

Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad was founded in 1990 as a Higher Education Institution, having a legal status as an Institution of private law and public utility, being part of the national education system. The University achieved institutional establishment by Law no. 240 of April 20, 2002 published in the Official Gazette of Romania no. 291, part I, of April 30, 2002.

The University has six faculties: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Economics, Computer Science and Engineering, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports, Faculty of Judicial Sciences. Finally, the University comprises also an Institution Organizing Doctoral Studies (IODS) with two doctoral schools of Biology and Medicine.

According to information provided to the experts during the on-site visit, the University currently has a total of 4,354 enrolled students. Thereof, 958 students are enrolled at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports, which was founded in 1995 as the Faculty of Humanistic and Christian Sciences.

The University currently offers 41 Bachelor study programs and 25 Master study programs. Some Bachelor study programs are offered in different languages and, in addition to the institution in Arad, in the cities of Sebis, Satu Mare, Baia Mare, Zalau and Marghita. Currently, 895 Students are enrolled in these branches. The Bachelor Study Program "Psychology" is solely offered in Arad in Romanian. The full-time study program is affiliated to the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports.

The following accredited and licensed Bachelor study programs are offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports: "Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education", "International Relations and European Studies", "Communication and Public Relations", "Social Assistance", "Applied Modern Languages" and "Physical Education and Sports".

Moreover, the following Master study programs are offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports: "Clinical Psychology and Psychological Therapy", "Educational Management",

“Management Communication and Human Resources” and “Evaluation of Public European Programs and Policies”.

The expert group assessed the compatibility of the written documentation and the University’s missions and objectives. Based on the information provided in the written documentation, the experts have determined that the main objective of the University is to offer a variety of higher education study programs. The programs aim to meet the needs of the Romanian and European labor market as well as to comply with national and European standards of education. The institution supports the programs and staff in line with the aims and objectives of the program and common standards of integrity (e.g. “Code of Academic Ethics”).

The University strives to contribute to the social and cultural life of the local community. The embedding of the University in the region is recognizable for the experts. The strong relation to the region is of mutual interest. The University provides skilled graduates, which are needed in the county and beyond. External stakeholders, for instance the city of Arad or the Church, support projects conducted by the University. The experts determine this as a distinct strength of the University.

Missions and objectives of the programs are stated by the University. With a glance at the study programs currently offered at the University, it becomes clear that these formulated missions and objectives are coherent. The Management of the University explains on-site that, due to low student numbers, merely 33 of the possible 41 Bachelor study programs offered at the University started in 2018/2019. Consequently, the University intends to cease those study programs with perpetual low application numbers. According to the University, a study program starts if at least 20 students enroll in it. In order to counter a decrease of student numbers and concomitant financial losses, the University outlines that the implementation of more study programs that need little expenditure is intended. From the experts’ point of view, this approach seems reasonable. However, the experts recommend that the University focuses on the medical field, which, according to the experts and the University, constitutes the strongest branch in the portfolio of the University. In the experts’ opinion, this is of particular relevance in order to establish a profile that is unique to the University. A profile that demarcates the University from other Higher Education Institutions will make the University more attractive for students and researchers alike, and would contribute to higher student numbers.

Another aspect of the University's mission is to intensify research activity among students with the goal of enabling them to contribute to the general advancement of knowledge in their respective fields. The experts take positive note of this. The experts are of the opinion that the University has well-functioning resources in the medical and bio-medical field and conducts adequate measures to participate on an international scale. The experts emphasize that the University succeeded in contracting companies from the private sector. They recommend, therefore, that the University focus on research in the bio-medical area and continue offering its research services to the private sector. In the non-medical fields, the experts recommend that the University conduct applied psychological research in the field of education.

With regard to the administrative structures, the University has accomplished to reduce administrative staff significantly in order to (1) create leaner structures, and (2) compensate decreasing student numbers. The experts value this as an accomplishment.

Concerning the collaboration between the department, faculty and University units, the experts encourage the University to look for common interests and to combine forces and resources. The University explained on-site that many courses have common parts, but some parts are specific to the respective study program. In the experts' opinion, the University would be well advised to detect those courses that are common to several study programs and combine the cohorts of the respective study programs. The most important result of this approach would be a reduction of the teaching load. Additionally, this would also help to facilitate the coordination of research activities and propel interdisciplinarity.

The expert group has been convinced of the University's commitment – as an institution – to offer high quality education opportunities. It was asserted that the University and its study programs function within the Romanian legal framework and that the institution promotes academic integrity and freedom among its students. Besides, the University regularly monitors its own activities, and students take an active part in management. Moreover, the needs of students with disabilities are taken into consideration (e.g. admission and exam requirements).

Internal assessment and audit processes take place in order to monitor the achievement of the objectives of the University. The experts have observed an

active collaboration between the administrative and teaching structures. The University has developed an ethical code of which its members are aware.

Regarding internationality, the experts took notice of the measures put in place by the University in order to pursue its international orientation. The University clearly communicated that internationalization has a high priority. The University achieves mobility of its students by means of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Erasmus exchange program. The experts took positive note of the summer schools that the University carries out every year. Furthermore, the University organizes international events and invites international guest professors. In view of accumulating a specialized vocabulary in a language of international use, Romanian students can attend English, French or German language courses throughout their studies. Simultaneously, international students have to attend Romanian language courses through their entire four years of study. Additionally, students of the Faculty of Medicine have access to subjects of other study programs at the University, including those conducted in English and French. Furthermore, the University's "International Centre for Language Testing, Academic Evaluation and Counseling" (I.C.L.T.E.A.C.) offers language training courses and exams and is approved by the Cambridge Assessment Great Britain and Educational Testing Service U.S.A.

The University explains on-site that its internationalization strategy aims at enrolling more international students. In order to achieve this, the "Department of Admission and Recruitment" was established which uses a wide set of marketing strategies in order to make the University internationally more visible. The Department cooperates with education agencies, which represent the University on international fairs. The strategy includes the use of social media, such as Facebook, linked.in, Twitter and Instagram, which reduces costs and is more efficient in reaching out to national and international students. It is important to note, however, that the focus lies not merely on international but also on national students. It became clear that the University aims at catering to the job market in Arad and its surroundings in order to strengthen the region economically.

Even though the experts acknowledge the measures put in place by the University, from the experts' point of view, the University, apart from maintaining its role in Arad and its surroundings, should present its internationalization measures in a more open and distinct manner (e.g. extending its partnerships

with foreign universities). The experts recommend that the University devise an internationalization strategy that clearly articulates goals and measures. This way it could further promote its attractiveness and unique character by standing out from other higher education institutions.

The experts recognize the possibilities for further development in the strategic alignment of the University in general.

Taking these facts into account, the expert group regards criterion A.1 as fulfilled.

## **A.2. Material resources and infrastructure**

Overall, the experts recognize that the University has sufficient material and financial resources with regard to the study programs currently offered. All facilities are in possession of the University. According to a declaration by the University Rector, the University declares that the endowment and facilities for the Bachelor study program "Psychology" are ensured for the future.

Looking at the premises and resources available for the desired number of students in the study program (50 per year), the experts conclude that the University is able to offer this number of study places. The study program "Psychology" started in the winter semester 2002/2003.

The experts also point out that tuition, academic success, and scholarships are established within the University. With regards to the scholarship system, the experts notice that merely students with above-average grades as well as students involved in honorary work, e.g. as student-representative in the senate, are awarded with scholarships from the University. However, apart from state funded programs, there are no support mechanisms for students with a disadvantageous socio-economical background. From the experts' point of view, supporting these groups would accord with the University's general motif to strengthening the regional civilian population.

Furthermore, with regard to the library and lecture halls, the experts assess that the lecture halls and seminar rooms are sufficiently equipped for providing adequate teaching and learning processes (e.g. whiteboards, portable projectors). Nevertheless, it became clear that the program-specific literature is currently not sufficient. Therefore, the experts urge the University to extend the library significantly both regarding printed and electronic books as well as databases. In this regard, the expert group encourages the University to establish more

partnerships with similar national and international institutions (libraries, publishing houses) in order to provide students and teachers' access to an even wider range of databases and learning and scientific material. The same argument holds true for psychological tests: (a) they are not sufficient in number and (b) the trend in psychological testing turns away from paper & pencil and goes to computer aided testing. Such electronic devices, however, are completely missing (e.g. Vienna Test System; see below). Hence, it seems necessary to teach testing on electronic devices for a number of diagnostic fields (clinical, personnel selection, sports, traffic psychology etc.).

The experts' criticize that there are no apparatuses in the laboratories in order to conduct adequate experiments. On-site, the University explains that experiments are carried out in educational psychology. Students also have the possibility to do experiments in the University under supervision of the teachers. Despite this information, the experts took notice that a Vienna Test System for adequately administering and carrying out psychological tests is missing. Concerning the equipment, the experts determine that the study program does not align with European standards in psychological study programs.

Additionally, the experts find fault with the fact that the Department is located too far away from the main campus, which inhibits student exchange and makes studying at the University more difficult.

Taking into account the University's need to improve the provision of program-specific literature and facilities, the expert group considers criterion A.2 to be partly fulfilled.

The University has to provide students with a wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material.

## **B. Educational Effectiveness**

### **B.1. Content of the study program**

The study program "Psychology" is affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Physical Education and Sports which was founded in 1995 as the Faculty of Humanistic and Christian Sciences. The study program's mission, general and specific learning objectives, curriculum and outcome competencies were presented in the written documentation. The curriculum description specifies the qualification objectives, competencies (knowledge and

understanding, explanation and interpretation etc.) and learning outcomes for each module.

The general mission of the study program is to train psychology specialists that are able to manage domain activities, to produce expertise and analyses on current issues as well as in the psycho-educational field. According to the University, graduates of the study program "Psychology" can access the labor market as: Psychologists; School psychologists; Labor market analyst; Assistant Researchers in psychology; Researchers in psychology; Labor and unemployment counselors; Career guidance counselors; Counselors for Youth; Advisors on addictions; Experts for training centers; Expert polygraphs; Professional competence assessors; Professionals for training, evaluation and professional Selection; Specialist labor and unemployment inspectors and Occupational safety and health inspectors. In addition, graduates may work as teachers if they take the psycho-pedagogical modules of the University.

The experts agree with the above-mentioned qualification objectives. However, in the experts' opinion the content of the study program is too broad since it includes nearly all fields of psychology. Furthermore, there are too many mandatory non-psychological modules in the curriculum, such as Physical Education. Thus, in the experts' opinion, the University would be well advised to concentrate only on psychological topics, offering one or two lines of specialization, such as clinical and diagnostic psychology and/or educational psychology. Additionally, the experts urge the University to establish interdisciplinary cooperation amongst the faculties. Regarding the study program "Psychology", the expert group recommends, for example, combining practical training courses with students from the "Nursing in General Medicine" and "Nutrition and Dietetics" study programs. According to the experts, students of each study program would benefit from these mutual courses.

The experts reach the conclusion that the study program focuses on qualifying students for social responsibility and personal development. The experts discern that graduates have good employment opportunities on the Romanian job market. However, the study program should strengthen the basic knowledge and training in experimental psychology to provide the possibility to continue a study of psychology (Master; neuro-psychology) in the European countries or abroad and to be competitive on the European job market. To become, for instance, an "Expert Polygraph" it is necessary to have training with such devices.



The curriculum of the study program "Psychology" comprises of compulsory and elective subjects. Both are an obligatory part of the curriculum. Regarding the elective modules, students have a choice between at least two modules. Further credit points allocated to optional subjects will be added on top of the 180 credit points obtained by the students upon graduation and will be mentioned separately in the Diploma Supplement.

The experts appreciate the optional modules which complete the offered courses.

As mentioned above, the "Psychology" program should be re-organized in order to include only psychological modules. Moreover, more modules on experimental psychology should be part of the curriculum. Modules are described in detail (e.g. with objectives, aimed competences, content and literature) and the program is relevant for the field of psychology. The experts take note of the fact that roughly 80 % of the curriculum is laid down as a rule on a national level, this includes also the module titles as well as the title of the study program. From the experts' point of view, this appears to be quite restrictive and, thus, limiting the academic freedom. The experts encourage the University to use the academic freedom wherever possible, especially within the preset modules, to sharpen its profile and strategy as well as to adhere to European standards, striving to become more relevant in an international context by defining its unique profile.

Alongside the theoretical curriculum, internships for instance in private psychological practices are part of the curriculum. The internships take place in semester 3 to 6, four hours per week in each semester (14 CP in total). During their practical training students are supervised by university teachers who are psychologists. In addition, an internship tutor supervises the students' activity during their internship hours in the respective institutes/organizations. The experts take note of the cooperation agreements and come to the conclusion that the University carefully selects its cooperation partners and ensures the qualification of the students' supervisors. It became sufficiently clear that the University strives to offer the same quality of practical training for all students at various cooperation partners.

Concerning the integration of research into the course of study, students have the opportunity to learn about performing research in their respective field as well as the opportunity to carry out their own research via seminars and

laboratories. In addition, during the annual University conference “The Academic Days of Arad”, students have their own section which gives them the opportunity to learn how to present research during a specialized conference. The study program “Psychology” has its own research plan. Even though the experts appreciate the research based on correlational techniques, experimental research should be included.

The credit system applied in the “Psychology” study program and at the University in general complies with the *Order of the Romanian Ministry of Education no.3617/2005* on the generalized application of the European Credit Transfer System.

The subjects in the curriculum can be evaluated during the semester through verifications and at the end of the semester through written and oral exams. All exams are conducted according to the “Regulations for students’ examination and grading”. A course can include one or more forms of assessment.

The University offers three exam sessions: regular sessions in winter and summer, a re-examination session and a session for recovering credits. They extend over a period of three to four weeks after the period of teaching activities. Re-examination periods take place after each academic year. If a student fails during the re-examination period, he or she has to repeat the failed modules and can re-sit the exam in the next year. Should a student not pass an exam during these sessions, he or she may retake that exam maximum three times. In order to be allowed to proceed to the next study year, students have to acquire at least 30 CP.

For the evaluation of the students’ performance in exams, the University applies a 10-point grading system (10 being the highest grade). The minimum passing grade is 5 points. Verifications may also be graded with the qualifications ‘passed’ or ‘failed’.

The study program is completed by composing a Bachelor thesis/licence exam (10 CP). The license exam consists of a written multiple choice test, a written thesis and an oral defense of the thesis.

The Bachelor degree examination takes place in accordance with the Ministry Order regarding the general framework for organizing final examinations in higher education and based on the institution’s own procedure approved

annually by the University Senate. According to the regulations in force, the Bachelor degree examination consists of two tests:

- a) test 1: Bachelor exam - written exam – multiple choice test (10 CP)
- b) test 2: defense of the Bachelor thesis (10 CP)

The number of credits allotted to written exam and the defense of the thesis (20 CP) is added to the 180 ECTS credit points for the entire program. The preparation and the writing of the thesis is credited with four CP and is included in the 180 ECTS. From the experts' point of view, the entire Bachelor exam is an obligatory part of the curriculum. Thus, the defense and the written exam should also be part of the official workload of the study program. Nevertheless, the experts acknowledge that the addition is a singularity in Romania due to the National Law.

To conclude, graduates of the study program "Psychology" appear to have good employment opportunities on the Romanian job market.

However, regarding the structure of the study program, the European perspective could be more emphasized in the curriculum. Hence, the University should try to close some gaps (e.g. workload, examination, profile of the study program) in order to guarantee international applicability of the Romanian degree in other European countries. In this regard, the experts also want to draw attention to the process of recognizing externally achieved credit points. The University recognizes credits obtained at other universities if they comply with the regulations on students' professional activity; the equivalence of credits is evaluated by an internal credit recognition committee inside each faculty. From the experts' point of view, the recognition of credits transferred from other universities (national and international) should be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, i.e. the burden of proof to demonstrate that an application does not fulfill the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> (Art 3.3 (5)); Each Party shall recognize periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education program in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education program in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education program which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought (Art.5.1 (1))

The study program "Psychology" contains 180 + 20 credits. The study program is offered on a full-time basis (six semesters/three years). The total workload of the program is 4,550 hours, which is divided into 2,024 contact hours, 2,526 individual work hours and 216 hours of practical training, which are included in the contact hours.

From the experts' point of view, the student workload should be evaluated on a regular basis in order to make sure that students are not overloaded or under-challenged. Additionally, the implementation of evaluation results to improve the study programs should be clearly documented. The experts also suggest combining smaller modules into larger units of modules to emphasize competence.

According to the University, the admission of students to the study program "Psychology" is based on the weighted average of the baccalaureate or an equivalent diploma (80 %) and the grade from the Romanian Language and Literature (written test) baccalaureate exam (20 %). International students have to hand in a Romanian language competence certificate. General admission procedures are stated in the document "Methodology on the Organization and Development of the Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Studies for the Academic Year of 2018-2019". The University assures to give priority to academic equality and ethics policies contained in the "Code of Academic Ethics". Thus, students may apply for academic or social welfare scholarships in order to assure equality throughout the University.

Annual admissions are organized in two sessions during July and September. Foreign students must submit a Romanian language certificate (level C1) issued by institutions authorized by the Ministry of National Education.

From the experts' point of view, the admission procedure of the program complies with the requirements of the University as well as with the national standards. The general recruitment and admission policies for students of the University are clearly stated. The University makes it also clear that all discrimination is prohibited.

Based on the described conclusions, the expert group considers criterion B.1 to be partly fulfilled.

The recognition of credits transferred from other Universities (national and international) has to be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

## **B.2. Learning outcomes**

From the experts' point of view, the "Psychology" study program can be sufficiently classified within the Romanian higher education system. The final qualification gained by its graduates corresponds to the demands of the Romanian labor market. The knowledge, competencies and abilities gained throughout the study program correspond to the final academic certificate to be awarded. The practical activity, which has been described under criterion B.1, enables students to adapt to real life circumstances and to apply their theoretical knowledge.

The teaching and didactic methods focus on problem-, team- and evidence-based learning as well as interdisciplinary learning and teaching. Lectures follow a weekly schedule. Multimedia devices such as power point presentations and educational films are incorporated and frequently updated. A Moodle E-Learning platform has been implemented by the University to increase the ability of providing students with information and access to courses.

From the experts' point of view, a mix between methods including interactive learning methods is applied. According to the University, the main responsibility of each course instructor is to increase student training according to their needs, expectations and goals. Furthermore, course instructors are responsible for the development of students' degree-specific as well as general competences, which are specified in the course descriptions provided by the University.

The expert group thinks that employability is given for graduates of this program on the Romanian labor market. The experts conclude that this positive outcome and development stems on the one hand from the dedicated academic staff and on the other hand from the open atmosphere and communication ethics at the University.

Regarding student support measures, tutors serve as mentors for the students throughout the course of the study program.

The expert group considers criterion B.2 to be fulfilled.

### **B.3. Scientific research activity**

The study program “Psychology” has a distinct research agenda, documented in a research plan. The experts value the correlational approach in the Faculty’s research. However, experimental approaches to psychology are generally missing. According to the experts, there should be more facilities suitably equipped to run real experiments as well as quasi-experiments (especially in the field of educational psychology).

Concerning the integration of research into the course of study, students have the opportunity to learn about performing research in their respective field as well as the opportunity to carry out their own research during seminars and laboratories, which should be increased in number. In addition, during the annual University conference “The Academic Days of Arad”, students have their own section which gives them the opportunity to learn how to present research during a specialized conference. Moreover, the University offers students the opportunity to participate in scientific clubs that are organized within the faculties and coordinated by professors.

In terms of further development opportunities, the experts recommend to expand the already developed research plan on the study program. Moreover, the evaluation of research should be clearly documented. The expert group also recommends involving students in research activities, assuming that this will very likely have a positive effect on structuring students’ independent study hours and motivate students to continue their studies after graduating from Bachelor programs.

Criterion B.3. is regarded as fulfilled.

### **B.4. Financial activity**

Currently, the bulk of the financial resources of the University are composed of tuition fees. According to the University, the tuition fees were adjusted according to current student numbers. Nevertheless, for a sustainable financing it could also be helpful to look for other financial options besides tuition fees (e.g. sponsoring, research, further education; *see also A.2*).

The University has confirmed in a formal declaration that “the endowment and facilities for the Bachelor study program “Psychology” at Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical Education

and Sport, is ensured for the future, including all buildings, equipment, apparatuses and personnel necessary for the implementation of the program.”

Furthermore, the University has taken measures to sell facilities owned by the University and reduced management allowances. One branch which has turned out as non-profitable, has been shut down and another one is in the process of being closed.

The experts recognize that the University carries out adequate measures for improving financial activities.

Criterion B.4 is regarded as fulfilled.

## **C. Quality Management**

### **C.1. Quality assurance strategies and procedures**

The University has developed an elaborate quality assurance system implemented by means of corresponding evaluation procedures. The University presented its quality assurance system in the written documents and in the documentation presented to the experts on site. The University proved that the application of quality management mechanisms has been reviewed and all the internal regulations have been simplified. Furthermore, the experts took positive note of an increased role of the students in the internal quality assurance system.

A quality assurance system is sustained at the University by the activity of the following structural components: The Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission (C.E.A.C.), faculty committees for quality assurance, the Vice-Rector for Bachelor and Master programs, quality assurance and students' problems, and the Department for Quality Assurance (D.A.C.). Members of the C.E.A.C. and of the D.A.C. are approved by the University Senate. The University emphasizes that the D.A.C. published a "Quality Manual" for internal use.

At the end of each academic year, an internal evaluation report of the quality of education and research is presented to the Senate for its approval and then published on the official website of the University.

The University conducts annual evaluations of teaching staff members. The evaluation includes a self-assessment, a peer-assessment and a student-assessment. It aims to evaluate the teaching activity, research activity, and auxiliary

activities associated with the role of teaching.<sup>4</sup> The research activities and the professional reputation of the teaching staff are assessed individually by each teacher with the help of an annual self-assessment sheet. The sheet is accompanied by a file comprising concrete evidence for each filled in component. The University emphasizes that the self-assessment sheet is also used to allocate awards and bonuses. (Wages for teaching staff vary depending on the obtained final qualification – satisfactory, well or very well. Furthermore, each ISI (International Scientific Indexing) paper is rewarded with a certain amount, according to a grid approved by the Board of Directors). The teaching staff evaluation by students is conducted each semester and acknowledged by the respective professors. All evaluations are analyzed by the University Senate at the end of each academic year. The students affirm that evaluation results have consequences, such as the dismissing of teaching staff or the re-organization of courses.

Apart from this, regular meetings of the Quality Assessment and Assurance Committee with students contribute to the improvement of communication between students and instructors. The students participating in the QA Committee are representatives selected by the students of the faculty.

The University uses internal audit practices on key areas of academic activity in order to ensure that the commitments it has undertaken are rigorously followed in regard to public transparency. The University has its own “Code of Academic Ethics” that lays down rules of conduct, ethics and deontology.

The University also pays particular attention to the communication with external stakeholders such as employers and professional organizations. All communication is organized by the Alumni Association which organizes workshops and, together with the Career Counselling and Guidance Center, prepares graduate satisfaction surveys.

Information regarding the study program, its modular system, exam requirement and compensation measures, as well as the general information about the available support of students, is provided on the official website of the University (<http://www.uvvg.ro>), in the Regulations on Students’ Professional Activities, brochures, and flyers. There are various organizations within the University, such as the Career Counselling and Guidance Center whose main function is to

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<sup>4</sup> The University explains the auxiliary activities as follows: “updating the courses with last hour information in the field, update of the practical works and of the seminar with up-to-date data, drafting the lectures in PowerPoint, delivering bibliographic sources of actuality, involving the students in the research activities specific for the subject, participation in scientific events etc.”



support and inform students in the aspects of career guidance, personal development, and learning optimization. On top, teachers and tutors have their individual office hours when students can refer to them directly.

To the issue of equal opportunities and gender equality, the University's admission competition, studying and teaching processes offer equal opportunities for all candidates regardless of gender, origin or social class. The University is ready to provide special conditions for admission and studies for students with restricted and low financial resources.

The University supports students with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Students are encouraged to ask for help if needed. In addition, the students with disabilities get support e.g. through tutors<sup>5</sup>.

Considering the thorough implementation of the quality assurance system and the active participation of all University members in quality assurance procedures, the expert group concludes that criterion C.1 is fulfilled.

### **C.2. Procedures on the periodical initiation, monitoring and revision of the programs and activities carried out**

The experts highlight that the quality management system is ensured by central and decentral commissions and a quality management department. The commissions act in accordance with the quality assurance strategy of the University. Moreover, a "Quality Manual" is approved by the Senate for each study year. Students assess all teaching staff regularly.

The University implements procedures of periodical revision and evaluation of the study programs offered. Hence, the teaching staff is required to conduct annual self-evaluations and peer-assessments; students evaluate the teaching process every six months. According to the students on-site, their remarks and critique are considered by the University and lead to organizational and structural changes.

The experts conclude that the study programs are evaluated by different stakeholders on a regular basis by means of rational and effective methods.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the provisions of Art. 118 Par. 3 of Law No. 1/2011 on the National Education and of Art. 7 of the University Code on the student's rights and obligations, the Faculty of Medicine considers the issue of disabilities an issue for the academic society, and not for the individual. This type of approach requires the establishment of groups of academic mutual assistance to turn the individual responsibility into a collective one keeping in mind the need for rights and freedom for all persons with disabilities while taking their own decisions.

The assessment of the teaching personnel is discussed in detail below, under criterion C.4.

The experts underline that the quality assurance system of the University enables productive application of the obtained teaching and learning evaluation results. This refers to the introduction of necessary corrective measures and better organization of the programs, as well as the improvement of teaching methods, envisaged in upcoming academic years. Nevertheless, the experts point out that the use of ISO standards bear the danger of over-bureaucratization. Therefore, the experts recommend re-considering this quality assurance approach.

Considering these facts, the experts conclude that criterion C.2 is fulfilled.

### **C.3. Objective and transparent procedures of learning results evaluation**

Based on students' evaluations, the teaching process and the learning outcomes undergo a constant optimization process. Additionally, the University has established clear examination rules and a structured process for dealing with exceptional cases. Furthermore, the form of examination and the learning outcomes are clearly specified for each module.

In order to qualify for the final examination of a module, students must have met all subject requirements: attendance, passing the ongoing assessments and practical works. These are presented to the students by the lecture coordinator in the first course lesson according to the module description.

The final assessment in each course can be conducted in the form of a colloquium or an examination. Colloquiums are forms of oral examinations taken in, for example, optional courses. Practical competences are evaluated by way of an evaluation form, signed and certified by the supervisor.

Students' actions in case of appeal and re-examinations are well-defined and described in the regulations of the University. Hence, there are clear procedures established for the above-mentioned examinations and students are informed of these procedures in advance. The main function of examinations conducted in the program is to objectively evaluate students' achievement of the specific learning outcomes.

The experts sum up that criteria and regulations about grading are present (*see B.1 for details*). The forms of examinations generally fit the competence aimed

for by the study program and the modules. Thus, the evaluation of learning outcomes is appropriate.

Taking the above described facts into account, the expert group concludes that criterion C.3 is fulfilled.

#### **C.4. Periodical evaluation procedures of teaching staff quality**

The University has provided an overview about the teaching staff of the study program.

There are 16 tenured teachers affiliated to the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical Education and Sport who can teach in the "Psychology" study program. Of these 16 teachers, all are involved in the program: Four associate professors (25 %), ten lecturers (62.5 %), and two assistants (12.5 %). The experts point out that only four teachers have a PhD in Psychology. They recommend raising this number significantly in order to ensure a qualitative teaching environment. There are twelve teaching vacancies for the study program "Psychology". The vacancies are to be occupied by teachers that hold a Ph.D. in Psychology in the following two academic years.

Overall, the teaching and academic staff of the University shows a high level of commitment and potential for the execution and further development of the study program they are responsible for. The expert group came to the conclusion that there is a strong corporate identity and positive group dynamics among the university and faculty administrations

With the curriculum of the Bachelor study program "Psychology" in mind, the ratio between professors and lecturers should be balanced. Therefore, the experts urge the University to fill the remaining vacancies with a Ph.D qualification as soon as possible. Overall, the teaching and academic staff of the University shows a high level of commitment for the execution and further development of the study program. Still, from the experts' point of view, it is desirable to increase the percentage of teaching staff with a professional background in Psychology in the program.

The experts take note that all teaching positions are established in compliance with the requirements of legal norms and completed with tenured teaching staff in higher education in accordance with the Romanian law.

Mutual respect is conducted and confidentiality is guaranteed between the rector, dean and the evaluated teacher. Results of these annual evaluations serve as the basis for promotion proposals. The selection and employment of teaching staff are based on the principle of public contest; these procedures are regulated by the University's "Methodology of Employment on Academic Positions" as well as by the Romanian legal requirements (Law of National Education no.1/2011, Government Decision no.457/2011, Government Decision no.36/2013, Order no.6560/2012, Order no. 4204/2013). According to these regulations, teaching and other positions are publicly announced and the University chooses candidates for these positions based on an open and independent procedure. These procedures are transparent and available for potential candidates from the academic as well as from the work field. By means of such transparent contest regulations, the University seeks to strengthen its competitiveness together with its national and international visibility.

The teaching staff is periodically evaluated by means of both peer and anonymous student reviews. Student evaluations are performed at the end of each semester. They are anonymous, which encourages an objective assessment. The results of the reviews are processed by the Quality Assurance Committee. Students are informed about the results of the evaluations through their student representatives in the Senate. Should a member of the teaching staff receive an unsatisfactory evaluation result, a course of actions will be implemented in order to eliminate the existing problems. Hence, the results are carefully monitored and the improvements are continuously observed.

Based on these facts, the expert group considers criterion C.4 to be fulfilled.

#### **C.5. Learning resources accessibility**

Overall, the experts conclude that the University offers appropriate facilities and sufficient number for the execution of its currently running study programs. The students have access to three libraries in Arad:

- Central Library (Arghezi Complex): Monday-Friday 09:00-20:00, Saturday 09:00-12:00; exam session: Monday-Saturday 08:00-20:00,
- Medical Library ("Vasile Goldiș" University Campus): Monday-Friday 09:00-20:00, Saturday 09:00-12:00; exam session Monday-Saturday 08:00-22:00, Sunday 08:00-18:00,

- European Library of Biomedical Sciences: Monday-Friday 12:00-17:00; exam session Monday-Saturday 12:00-17:00.

The experts discerned that the program-specific literature for the “Psychology” program is not sufficient. The experts urge the University to significantly expand the library in terms of printed and electronic books, journals, and databases (*see also A.2*).

The University encourages students’ learning processes by offering resources and opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Moreover, the University offers various forms of academic support and counseling to students: e.g. consultations and tutorials. However, regarding infrastructure, accessibility for people with a disability should be improved.

The expert group considers criterion C.5. as partly fulfilled.

Program-specific literature should be expanded.

#### **C.6. Systematically updated data base, with regard to the internal quality assurance**

The University has designed an internal quality assurance system and established structures for monitoring and developing the quality assurance concept. Parts of the internal quality assurance system are regular student reviews, as well as the feedback meetings organized for this purpose. A more detailed description can be found under criteria C.3. and C.4. A regular track of the evaluation and review results is maintained by the University. Strategies for improvement are designed therefrom. A corresponding electronic system and database are also implemented. The experts conclude that the data and information policy seem to be adequate at the University.

The expert group considers criterion C.6. as fulfilled.

#### **C.7. Transparency of public interest information concerning study programs**

The results of quality assurance activities are summarized in a report, in order to improve the programs’ quality.

Through its website, the University supplies relevant information concerning its programs and its structures to the public. Thus, the University promotes its study programs online, through local printed media, and by running open days and workshops in high schools and other institutions. Furthermore, the

University collaborates with education agencies, which represent the University and its study programs on national and international fairs.

The experts conclude that the faculty provides information on qualifications, study programs, diplomas, teaching and research staff, student facilities and other aspects.

All in all, the expert group considers criterion C.7 to be fulfilled.

#### **C.8. Functionality of education quality assurance structures, according to the law**

The expert group was provided with an overview of the quality evaluation mechanisms and institutional structures. The Quality Management Commission regularly elaborates and reviews all corresponding policies and strategies as well as operational procedures. The expert group is convinced of the validity of the information provided in the application documentation, and its accordance with the legal framework, as stated in the "Quality Manual". Quality assurance and evaluation for the currently running programs are adequately developed at the University.

Structured processes and an evaluated organization underline the importance of the quality management at the University; the organization strives for continuous improvement. Central and decentral staff are involved in the quality assurance process. The experts conclude that the institutional structure for quality education seems to be adequate. Thus, criterion C.8 is considered to be fulfilled.

For more details on the structure, functioning and members involved in the Quality assurance procedures at the University see also criteria A.1, A.2 and C.1.

## 4 Evaluation Summary

The main task of the expert group during the peer review was to assess the “Psychology” study program and to verify its compliance with European and Romanian regulations (*see part 1 Introduction*).

In the view of the expert group, the “Psychology” study program complies with Romanian regulations as specified in the “Methodology” and the “Law of National Education”. Hence, the study program complies with the pertinent Romanian conventions as well as with all legal normative requirements.

The expert group acknowledges the high motivation and engagement of all persons involved in the program. Nevertheless, it became apparent to the experts that the University has to close some gaps in order to guarantee international applicability of the Romanian degree in other European countries. Hence, the experts encourage the University to use the academic freedom wherever possible, to sharpen its profile and strategy as well as adhere to European standards, striving to become relevant in an international context.

The on-site visit in addition to the documentation provided by the University, enables the expert group to recommend the Periodical Evaluation of the “Psychology” study program offered by Vasile Goldis Western University of Arad, to the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS.

Given the fact that the program meets the national normative requirements, the expert group recommends that the “Psychology” study program to be re-accredited by the Romanian Ministry of National Education.

The experts outline the following conditions:

- The University has to provide students with a wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material. (A.2 and C.5)
- Laboratories have to be enhanced in order to correspond to international European standards for psychological education. (A.2)
- The recognition of credits transferred from other universities (domestic and abroad) has to be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. (B.1)

At the same time, the experts attempt to provide constructive feedback and recommendations for further improvement regarding the concept, structure and content of the program.

The following recommendations are thus proposed for the University's consideration:

A) Institutional Capacity:

- The University should look for common interests between the faculties and, thus, combine forces and resources, e.g. with regards to personnel. (A.1)
- The University should focus on the medical field in order to develop a unique profile that demarcates the University from other Universities. (A.1)
- The experts recommend that the University focuses on research in the bio-medical area and continues offering its research services to the private sector. (A.1)
- An internationalization strategy should be devised that articulates aims and measures clearly. This way the University could further promote its attractiveness and unique character by standing out from other higher education institutions. (A.1)
- Support mechanisms for students with a disadvantageous socio-economical background should be implemented. (A.2)
- The number of tests available should be increased; a Vienna test System should be implemented in order to get students trained in applying computer based testing. (A.2)
- The University library could establish partnerships with similar institutions (libraries, publishing houses) within the country and abroad, in order to provide students and teachers with access to a wider range of IT resources, databases as well as learning and scientific material, especially for the new programs. (A.2)

B) Educational Effectiveness:

- Academic freedom should be used wherever possible, especially within the preset modules, to sharpen its profile and strategy as well as to adhere to European standards, striving to become relevant in an international context by defining its unique selling point. (B.1)
- Synergies with related study programs should be established in order to save human resources, guarantee interdisciplinary learning and research methods. (B.1)



- Obligatory credits to be awarded for the final exam should be part of the workload of the study program. (B.1)
- Focusing on competence, modules should be combined into larger module units and the student workload should be evaluated on a regular basis. (B.1)
- The staff should strive for more public, international, ideally peer-reviewed methods of publishing scientific articles to achieve a wider distribution of their results. (B.3)
- Experimental research should be part of the curriculum. There should be more facilities suitably equipped to run real experiments as well as quasi-experiments. (B.3)
- Students should be involved in research activities which will likely have a positive effect on structuring student's independent study hours and motivate students to continue their studies after graduating from Bachelor programs. (B.3)

#### C) Quality Management:

- The use of ISO standards bears the danger of over-bureaucratization and could, therefore, be reviewed. (C.2)
- The percentage of professors with a background in psychology (at least Ph.D.) teaching in the program should be increased. (C.4)
- Regarding infrastructure, the accessibility for people with a disability should be improved. (C.5)

## 5 Decision

### Decision of the Accreditation Commission of September 26, 2019

The proposed resolution of the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS is based on the University's application, as well as the expert review and the on-site visit described in the Expert Report.

The on-site visit at the University took place on July 9-11, 2019 according to the previously agreed schedule.

The accreditation decision is based on the Expert Report. The Expert Report, i.e. the proceedings of the Periodical Evaluation conform to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as to the Law no. 1 of National Education of Romania, 2011, Art.150, and Art.193; the Quality Evaluation Activities Guide for University Study Programs and for Higher Education Institutions: Part 1 Study Programs Accreditation External Evaluation Guide, and the Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS discussed the procedural documents and the recommendation of the expert group.

The standard study period in the full-time program "Psychology" is three years/six semesters. The study program encompasses 180 CP and comprises 56 modules of which 39 are obligatory, five are optional and twelve are elective. Per semester, students have to choose one elective module, i.e. six in total. The bachelor program "Psychology" is completed with the conferral of the academic degree "Bachelor of Psychology". The study program "Psychology" was launched in the winter semester 2002/2003. It is solely offered in Arad. The language of instruction is Romanian. The University offers 50 study places for the study program per year.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS considers that most Criteria (according to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as to the Law no. 1 of National Education of Romania, 2011, Art.150, and Art.193; the Quality Evaluation Activities Guide for University Study Programs and for Higher Education Institutions: Part 1 Study Programs Accreditation External Evaluation Guide, and the

Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) are fulfilled and therefore adopts the following decision:

The study program "Psychology" is granted the quality level of "Confidence" and the Maintaining of Accreditation.

Based on the Expert Report, the Accreditation Commission outlines the following conditions:

- The University has to provide students with a wider range of databases as well as learning and scientific material. (A.2 and C.5)
- Laboratories have to be enhanced in order to correspond to international European standards for psychological education. (A.2)
- The recognition of credits transferred from other universities (domestic and abroad) has to be regulated according to the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. (B.1)

For the further development and enhancement of the study program and the University as a whole, the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS supports the recommendations articulated in the Expert Report.