

Strategic Plan of Academic Development

OBJECTIVES

The School aspires to its continual advancement. This objective is achieved by the individual and, especially, the cooperative research and academic work of its members. It is also promoted by the School's association with major national and international research and academic centers, intent on cultivating Orthodox Theology in terms of scholarly consistency and credibility. Thus, it has already established several intramural collaborations with other Schools of the University and has reinforced its scientific and educational partnerships by promoting dialogue between Orthodox Theology and the Natural Sciences, as well as by highlighting the areas of Bioethics, Ecology and Christian Culture.

At the same time, the School aims at working together with the Church as well as with social and cultural institutions. This is dictated by the fact that Theology is both essentially and creatively linked to Greek society and, in general, to the human person. It is also especially connected to the Greek Diaspora and associated with the global presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The School seeks to highlight Theology as a discipline of the Orthodox tradition and culture not only in our country but in Europe as well. Furthermore, it particularly underscores the especial importance of Ecumenical Orthodoxy as a major discipline of the Humanities, which is of value for the "living" past (as a continuation of life and creativity), as well as for the present and the future of Orthodoxy around the world.

RESEARCH

Our strategic research objective includes the study and critical edition of Biblical, Hebrew and the full spectrum of Christian literary texts, having the unitary, textual tradition of the Church and of Orthodox Theology as our main line of research.

The Thematic Research Network for the Textual and Hermeneutical Ecclesiastical Tradition (THET - ΚΕΕΠ), has been an ancillary instrument in the implementation of our goal. A similar initiative, namely, the planned establishment of the Laboratory of Biblical Studies, though approved by the Senate of the University, is pending authorization by the Ministry of Education. Yet, the Graduate Seminar of Orthodox Theological Hermeneutics (*Exegeticum*) has been operating permanently since 2007 as a scientific Colloquium for hermeneutical studies, with speakers from the international academic community. Moreover, the two research centers – the Center of Sts. Demetrius and Gregory Palamas and the Center of St. Paul – established by decision of the University Senate in 2012 and 2013 respectively, as well as the Laboratory of Christian Education, founded by publication in the Greek Government Gazette (GGG - ΦΕΚ), have all reinforced the collaborative scholarly work among the School's various research teams. They have indeed also strengthened intramural cooperation and the intensification of international partnerships.

The formulation of common research strategies, along with concomitant research projects of faculty members, will significantly contribute so that the rich research dynamic of the School will be maximized in targeted areas.

EDUCATION

In the field of teaching and instruction, the School strives towards its further development by means of a detailed study and analysis of the distinct factors in the educational process. As an instrument in this investigation, it makes use of the full integration of the inventory cards of all courses in each of the School's curricula. It also plans on formulating general rules for creating a high and uniform level of education, compatible with international and European programs of study.

To this end, after a period of detailed scrutiny and internal deliberation, both the undergraduate and the graduate curriculum have been fully revised. This revision complies

with international standards vis-à-vis the individual components of the theological discipline and adopts new modules of instruction, such as seminars and workshops. Finally, it seeks to introduce ever more effective ways of online education.

Advantageous, we feel, has been the renewal and increase, in recent years, of the School's Teaching and Research Personnel. Specifically, 33 professors and lecturers currently serve at the School, as compared to 24 professors and lecturers in 2009. By and large, the new members of the faculty are young and competent people who are aware of the contemporary methods of research and instruction. Many have even worked and have completed their post-graduate studies or acquired their terminal degree (doctorate) abroad.

It is of note that five of the curriculum's 55 classes link the Undergraduate Program directly with Information Technology. It should be emphasized that the skills of students are complemented by providing them with certified, practical seminar programs in four areas: 1) The Art of Byzantine Chant, 2) Iconography (both since the 2013-14 academic year), 3) Pastoral and Social Work, and 4) Religious Tourism (both planned for the next academic year). Similarly, particular emphasis is also given to the pedagogical training of students, by taking advantage of the highly equipped Christian Education Laboratory, which is used as an E-Lab for all academic activities of the School.

INTERNATIONALISING

The prospect of the School in the area of extroversion and the firm commitment to the internationalization of its curricula, which we believe will decisively contribute to the sustainability of theological studies as a whole, in a world that in general does not favor the Humanities, is evident in two English language programs. These two fee-based degree programs have been shaped for foreign students, including those of Greek descent, and also in order to simultaneously serve the Erasmus and ERASMUS MUNDUS matriculating students.

Especially the English language curriculum, “Studies in Orthodox Theology,” is the first and only undergraduate program that has been approved by the Senate of Aristotle University and the first to directly use the potential of the new legal framework of Law 4009/2011.

Also, the English language, fee-based Graduate Program for foreign students, “Studies in Orthodox Theology,” is one of the four English language Graduate Programs of AUTH, approved by the Senate. This Program is scheduled to operate from the 2014-2015 academic year and is expected to attract researchers from abroad.

The implementation of these programs is feasible, because the School, through the AUTH e-grammateia (electronic registrar), has completed its administrative and educational processes, at all levels of education, with full recording (100%) of all inventory cards, that is, of both the teaching staff and of the courses and by issuing the electronic Study Guide, according to the new education legislation.

The School invests a lot in these two programs and is studying specific strategies for the development of coordinated actions that will ensure their implementation.

A constant objective is to increase academic cooperation further and to increase the exchange of teaching staff and students of all levels with foreign universities. We are also intent on encouraging the widespread use of electronic platforms courses (Blackboard, e-class, etc.) as well as the use of services related to electronic posting of scientific and research activities, such as “open journals”, “open courses” and the so-called “Synedriothiki” (Congress-Library).

The aim is to exploit the unique character of the School, which is the large number of foreign students and Greeks from abroad, particularly from Orthodox countries or Patriarchates. Moreover, we are studying ways of their effective linguistic training, so as to introduce them

to the textual tradition of the Church and so that they might follow their studies with greater ease. This purpose is aimed at increasing the possibility of drawing a greater number of students from abroad, after properly informing their ecclesiastical structures of origin.

DEFICIENCIES

It is of vital importance to address the serious deficiencies that exist in the School's infrastructure and equipment, as well as in its administrative and supporting staff. This will further enhance academic development. To this end, the School intends to exhaust every resource made available to it and will resourcefully approach every possible source that could provide or initiate solutions. To use a short-term contract or to employ people for practical exercises partially covers the educational process.

Also to be noted are the serious deficiencies in classrooms, rooms for laboratories, and educational equipment (particularly in the School Library) and non-rational use of the premises of the School. A severe deficiency is also the complete lack of technical and laboratory staff in the School. This is due to the deep pathogenesis of the human resources management of AUTH, the past and present administrations and the Senate of which have not implemented criteria and indicators of rationalization and transparency regarding the existing human technical and administrative staff.

CONCLUSIONS

Upon completion of the internal evaluation of the School, in the assessment of the Commission, the following positive and negative points have come to light:

Positive points:

1. The School has a revised program of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, approved by the Senate of the Aristotle University in the spring of 2013, that correspond to research and educational activities at an international level.
2. The introduction of seminar courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels has already created excitement among students and enhanced interdisciplinarity in instruction and scientific cooperation.
3. The administrative procedures and deadlines for the election of faculty members are in a strict adherence to the law.
4. The number of faculty members increased significantly, expanding the teaching, research and scientific perspectives of the School.
5. Novel methods in research and educational activities have been developed, that implemented of innovative ideas and produced international collaborations.
6. There is widespread cooperation with a variety of social organizations and national and international academic institutions, which produced significant results in terms of conferences, exchanges, and other scientific activities.
7. There is a significant participation of the faculty members of the School in national and international scientific and research programs with major distinctions. Recently, a work of research by our faculty members was awarded the prize of the Academy of Athens.
8. Special attention has been paid on developing scientific areas that contribute practically to the social ministry of the Church (Byzantine Musicology, Hagiography, Pastoral Ministry, Nomo-canonical Support).
9. After the revision of both undergraduate and graduate curriculum and their approval by the Senate of AUTH (the only programs that have received this approval pursuant to Law 4009/2011), the School has prioritized its readiness for the national certification of higher education programs. This work has been already decided by the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency and must be implemented by all universities in Greece.

Negative points:

1. There is a major lack of space that prevents a fuller realization and development of scientific and research activities of the School: classrooms, computer laboratory and the Research Centers of the School.
2. There is a major lack of administrative staff to support the administrative work of the School and particularly the Departments, resulting in delays and dysfunctions in processing and in educational support.
3. The participation of faculty members on proposals of competitive research programs of the European Union is limited.
4. The interest of student involvement in the educational work of the School is restricted due to limited employment opportunities after graduation.
5. There is no full activation of all faculty members in the research activities of the School.
6. On account of the heavy workload of faculty members, on technical and administrative matters, there were a number of shortcomings in the research dialogue held within the School, despite the innovative institutional structures view by the Senate as being pioneering.
7. Many faculty members are distracted on account of delegated teaching.
8. After the implementation of new curricula (undergraduate and graduate) the issue of the reassessment of elective courses has been raised already, with the aim of limiting the large number of offered courses, as well as the restriction of the number of graduate level courses, which can be activated according to the results on an annual basis.
9. Only a few faculty members utilize the electronic possibilities offered by AUTH Central Library. A hindering factor for this was the internal consultation of the review of all programs of the School, lasting nearly three years, and the final strategy put forward by the staff in constant anticipation for final decisions.