

THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR
VISITING ADVISORS REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB
ZAGREB, CROATIA

May 1-5, 2000

Team Members

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Foreword

This report is based on conversations conducted with a wide array of individuals at the University of Zagreb, including the rector, vice-rectors, deans, professors, and students, which took place during a site visit from May 1-5, 2000. A helpful external perspective was gained through a meeting with two executives from local enterprises. We were provided with many useful documents that served as background for the visit. Of particular note was the candid analysis of the university presented in the self-study report prepared for a quality audit to be conducted by CRE: the Association of European Universities. Because the audience for our report is the university community, we will focus primarily on our observations and recommendations, and be very sparing in presenting facts and descriptions that are known to the members of the University of Zagreb.

It is highly relevant, however, to preface this report by noting the important fact that the University of Zagreb is the largest, oldest, and most prestigious institution of higher education in Croatia. Its thirty-three separate faculties, sixty thousand students, and seven thousand employees make it a huge presence in the city and the nation. The university's size and special status are central to its future, presenting critical opportunities for the university to become a vital force in the future of Croatia and at the same time, posing significant challenges. Size, complexity, and prestige are often factors that mitigate against change. As we elaborate below, the barriers to reform are formidable, but not insurmountable.

We believe that this is an important moment in the university's history and that it is poised to move into a new phase of excellence through reflection, reform, and restructuring.

Opportunities and Constraints

A typical way to begin the discussion of an institution's future is to assess the opportunities and threats (or constraints) facing the university. Often referred to as a SWOT analysis, this exercise launches a realistic assessment of where an institution is currently and what lies ahead on its path to a brighter future. We heard about many constraints that the university faces. Among the most prominent ones were:

- Inadequate funding.
- Lack of university autonomy vis-à-vis the Ministry of Technology and Science
- Fragmented structure created by the status of each faculty as a legal entity.
- Unwillingness of the city of Zagreb to recognize the importance and the contribution of the university.
- Lack of national strategy as a context for a university strategy.
- Resistance to change from within the university.
- Lack of interest on the part of political decision-makers to change the status quo.

These are very real and serious obstacles. But in our opinion, the greatest threat of all would be to continue the *status quo.* We heard the university described as "frozen" on several occasions. Deep and pervasive change is difficult even when the list of constraints is shorter and less daunting, but failure to undertake real reform will eventually weaken the university to the extent that it will be marginal to the future of the country and unable to find its niche in a rapidly changing European and world marketplace for higher education.

Among the specific opportunities that can effect change and promote reform, we note the following:

- The prospect of closer integration with Europe through such programs as Tempus and through participation in the Bologna Agreement. This integration will involve revision of institutional structures and curricula.
- An upcoming revision of the Law of Higher Education later this year.
- The growing realization on the part of many in the university community that reforms are necessary and possible.

Only those opportunities that are seized are beneficial to the institution. And some must be created, not simply seized. The University of Zagreb can create the opportunity to reconsider its mission and to design its own future. We suggest that this re-envisioning center on the university's public role, exploring the ways that it can become a key contributor to the economic well being of Croatia and to the development of civil society. As a small nation and a new

state, Croatia's future lies in becoming a knowledge society, and the university is a rich resource for that development.

The Context

Higher education institutions exist in a political, social, and legal context that determine to a large extent how they function and how they relate to the larger society. This context is crucial in Croatia, and will require significant change if the university is to reach its full potential. While the visiting teams of the Salzburg Seminar focus primarily on institutional issues rather than on national policy issues, the two are often inseparable. Thus, we feel obliged to point out that reforming the national policy framework will be central to university reform. The university's lack of autonomy is a severe impediment to its development. The Ministry currently makes management decisions concerning personnel and allocation of resources that should be made at the university level. Under the present Law of Higher Education and current practice, the University of Zagreb is not in every sense an autonomous institution according to existing European definitions.

Ironically, the extreme autonomy of the faculties creates another set of problems. The status of the thirty-three faculties and academies as legal entities and the direct budget allocations to the faculties make the development of a university strategy nearly impossible. If the University of Zagreb is to become more efficient, effective, and responsive to students and society, it must have the capacity to act as a unified university, which it cannot do under the current Law of Higher Education. Additionally, the independence of the faculties makes them less accountable in terms of adhering to common university practices and standards.

The dissolution of the National Council on Higher Education is also a setback for university reform. A national framework for quality assessment is vital to ensure accountability across faculties and institutions as well as transparency.

National policy reform will not solve all the university's problems, but it will be an essential component of real institutional reform and revitalization.

A REFORM AGENDA

In the course of our discussions, several important goals of the reform process became clear. We outline each one in turn, and in the following section, offer recommendations based on our analysis of the reform agenda.

Enhancing the Public Role of the University of Zagreb

Around the world, higher education is increasingly called upon to cast off the image and the reality of the ivory tower and to be an active partner in the economic, social, and cultural life of its region, country, and the world. Additionally, politicians and taxpayers are asking for a clear understanding of the return on society's investment in higher education institutions and for increased levels of accountability through evaluation and transparent processes. The University of Zagreb has the intellectual capital and the know-

how to make a tremendous contribution to national development and prosperity.

This will require reaching out to develop new partnerships with industry, government, non-governmental organizations, and civic and cultural groups. We heard often in our discussions that the university is not sufficiently appreciated by the larger community. In order for this to change, the university must take the initiative to find out what stakeholders think about the institution, what they need and want, and what the university can provide. Such an initiative should be a coordinated university effort, building on but not limited to the existing contacts and relationships of the various faculties. Collaborative research and contracts (already quite common across the university) are one piece of a larger, more complex relationship between the university and external stakeholders. An enhanced public service role will enable the university to be seen in a new light, as a partner and resource for economic, social, and cultural development.

Increasing Efficiency

The more limited an institution's resources, the more urgent is the need for efficiency. The current fragmented structure of the university creates inefficiencies through duplication and the university's inability to take advantage of economies of scale in such areas as purchasing, library facilities, and administrative costs. The structure of the curriculum results in proliferation of courses and inequitable distribution of work and resources across faculties. While some disparities are inevitable, some rationalization of the deployment of human, financial, and capital resources across the university would add significantly to the efficiency of the university and thus free resources for allocation to urgent needs. We recognize that increasing the efficiency of the university will require flexibility in reallocating resources—flexibility that the university currently does not have. The legal framework for the university will have to be changed in order for it to make any real progress on this issue.

Serving Students

Teaching and Learning: Our conversation with students corroborated the information prepared by the university. The student experience varies from one faculty to another. Some faculties have attrition rates of sixty and seventy percent; others are practically zero. Some students reported that their professors were inaccessible, not interested their students' needs, and unavailable outside of lectures. Others had much more positive assessments. Consistent themes that did emerge suggested that the University of Zagreb is still more "professor-centered" than "student-centered." The examination system is very onerous in some faculties and students are discouraged by what they perceive as arbitrariness in the examination process and a climate that expects failure rather than success. Many students spent close to thirty hours in class, although this too, varied by faculty. Students complained about the fact that they cannot take courses in other faculties and that their education did not prepare them for the world of work. (The latter observation was corroborated by an executive in industry who noted that they train graduates who are new employees for a year before they are on the job). In

short, the curriculum is perceived as rigid, old fashioned, and not sufficiently relevant for job preparation.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is becoming increasingly important in Europe not only as a tool to facilitate student mobility, but also as a mechanism for modernizing the curriculum. Although there seems to be some movement on implementing ECTS, we did not have the impression that it has yet been a significant force for changing the structure of the curriculum. If it is seen as a superficial accounting tool rather than as a new way to think about the curriculum, the University of Zagreb will be missing an important opportunity to streamline the curriculum and to participate in European forums for higher education cooperation.

Quality Assessment

Although the summary of the Self-Evaluation Report to the National Council on Higher Education (May 1999) describes how "renewed" courses were submitted to the (now defunct) National Council on Higher Education and then to the Senate, the effect of this process is unclear. Our discussions suggest that this process has not had a strong effect on rethinking curriculum across the faculties, or resulted in a significantly improved experience for students. Similarly, the pilot process to evaluate teaching staff was not perceived by the students as particularly important, widespread, or serious. Evaluation of teachers should be part of the overall institutional quality strategy to be developed.

Our conversations about the Young Researchers Program indicated that the experience varied greatly from one faculty to another. Various strengths and weaknesses were identified, but no mechanism currently exists for a systematic, cross-faculty evaluation of this important program. Attracting and keeping the next generation of teaching staff is a major challenge for many universities, and a particularly important one for the University of Zagreb. The new generation of teaching staff will be central to the capacity of the university to be a player in the knowledge economy.

Developing an institutional strategy for quality assessment will be an essential part of strengthening the University of Zagreb and positioning it for the future. Evaluation of the Young Researchers Program should be a part of this assessment.

International Contacts and Cooperation

An important goal of instituting these reforms is to enhance the university's international contacts and cooperation. If the University of Zagreb is to be a part of the Tempus Program, and to join other European universities in signing on to the Bologna Agreement, it will have to institute significant changes in the curriculum, in the structure of the diplomas and qualifications offered, and make other changes that will bring the university into line with the philosophy and practices of other European universities.

Ongoing Strategy Development

"Unfreezing" the University of Zagreb is not a short-term project or one time effort. In the continually changing environment and increasingly competitive marketplace for higher education, change is the norm, not the exception. Thus, the process of reflection and reform is an unending one, and by setting the process for change in motion, the university is developing a capacity for continued learning and improvement. The process of developing a university strategy will be as important as the product. What we are suggesting then, is that the university undertake a process of continuous self-examination, strategy, action, feedback. Transparency in accomplishing this will be an important ingredient of its success.

Recommendations:

1. We urge the University Rectorate and the Croatian Rectors' Conference to take an active role in shaping the necessary reforms at the national level that will provide the essential context for university reform. Policy reform at the national level is essential to reform at the university level. We recommend that the leaders of the University of Zagreb and of other Croatian universities work together to develop a shared policy framework for wide public discussion and action.

2. The university should create an ad-hoc Task Force of members of the university community (including students) and of stakeholders in business, the arts, civic organizations, and government to develop a strategy for identifying the needs of the larger society and to sharpen the mission of the university. The Task Force should pay special attention to the potential role that the university can play in meeting the economic, social, and cultural needs of Croatia. The stakeholders should comprise at least half the membership.

We believe that this Task Force should be a very open undertaking, reaching out to as many stakeholders as possible through forums, public reports on their deliberations, and generally engaging as many people as possible in an open discussion of the issues.

A second major focus for the Task Force should be to formulate a strategy for reform, with particular attention to the issues of the university's mission, efficiency, the student experience, and operational definitions of autonomy. This work might be accomplished through the creation of a working group under the aegis of the larger task force. Specific topics that the working group might address are cross-faculty analyses of enrollments, staffing, teaching loads, costs of instruction, graduation rates, and student satisfaction. Students should play a major role in the working group focusing on reform issues.

3. We recommend that the university accelerate and enhance its efforts to implement the ECTS system and that it develop a means to ensure that its implementation reinforces the process of curricular reform.

4. We urge the university to pay special attention to issues of transparency and accountability. A university-wide strategy for quality assessment should be developed that might include (but not be limited to) regular program

review, evaluation of teachers, student success rates, and an evaluation of the Young Researchers Program. Information should be gathered in such a way so as to permit comparisons across the university, and results should be shared and used for quality improvement. As one of the practical instruments for achieving transparency and accountability, a discussion of university-wide issues should be introduced both at the level of the faculty and the university senate as part of the agenda of candidates for the deanships.

Conclusion

The University of Zagreb has a tradition of academic rigor and excellence. It now needs to take that tradition into the twenty-first century through a process of reflection, re-envisioning its future, and restructuring. There are ample reasons for some people to wish to preserve the status quo, but there are also many at the university who see the need for a new future and who have the energy and talent to lead the effort to create that future.

In order for the University of Zagreb to undertake a series of related reforms, it will require a university strategy—a plan for its future that guides its component parts in pursuit of shared objectives. Greater integration of the university will be needed to achieve that goal, but integration is a means to an end rather than a goal unto itself. Nor does integration require uniformity or centralization. There is a great deal of room in the modern university for different approaches to shared goals. But the creation of shared goals requires flexibility and transparency that do not currently exist at the University of Zagreb. The Rectorate, of course, will be central to achieving the necessary integration, and structures and policies will have to support their work. The deans, too, will be essential to the process. Their role cannot be limited to leading their respective faculties; in addition, they must participate in shaping the future of the university.

Visiting Advisors Team

Laszlo Frenyo Hungary

Laszlo Frenyo is president of the Hungarian Higher Education and Research Council, as well as a member of the Advisory Committee for Modification of the Higher Education Law. Dr. Frenyo was the president of the Hungarian Rectors Conference from 1995 to 1997, and served as chairman of its international committee from 1991 to 1995. He has also served as the rector of the University of Veterinary Science in Budapest, the same institution from which he earned his D.V.M. and Ph.D. degrees. Dr. Frenyo is a member of the Universities Project Advisory Committee.

Madeleine Green USA

Madeleine Green is vice president for international initiatives and director, Center for Leadership Development, American Council on Education (ACE). Her responsibilities at ACE include its international programs and leadership development activities. From 1978 to 1991, she directed the ACE Fellows Program, which prepares future leaders for positions in higher education administration. Dr. Green has written widely on topics related to leadership and management. Her recent publications include *Investing in Higher Education: A Handbook of Leadership Development* (1992); *The American College President: A 1993 Edition* (1993); and *Leaders for a New Era: Strategies for Higher Education* (1988). Her most recent volume, *Transforming Higher Education: A World-Wide View*, was published in 1996. Dr. Green earned a B.A. degree magna cum laude from Harvard University and a Ph.D. from Columbia University, both in French literature.

Josef Jarab Czech Republic

Josef Jarab is professor of English and American literature and former rector of Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic, and former rector of Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. He was a participant in "Dialogue," an international discussion group of experts on higher education from Europe and the USA. He has been a member of the board of the Collegium for African-American Research, and the Research Board of the Central European University in Budapest. Professor Jarab is an alumnus, and former faculty member of the Salzburg Seminar and was previously a resident scholar at the Seminar's American Studies Center.

Hans Wiesmeth Germany

Hans Wiesmeth has served as the vice-rector for research since 1993, and since 1994 the director of the European Institute for Traffic Engineering at the Dresden Technical University. Dr. Wiesmeth was an associate professor of economics at the University of Bonn from 1981 to 1988 and is currently a full professor of economics at the University of Dresden. He has held visiting positions at several institutions including the University of Haifa in Israel, York University in Ontario, Canada, and the University of Aix-Marseille in France. He has published extensively on the topics of theoretical economics, concentrating on microeconomics and general equilibrium theory. Dr. Wiesmeth received his degree in mathematics from the University of Erlangen-Nuremburg and his Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg.

THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR

Universities throughout the world are undergoing systemic changes in their governance, academic design, structure, and mission. The Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project focuses on higher education reform in Central and East Europe, Russia, and the Newly Independent States as universities in these regions redefine their relationships with governments and try to become more integrated into the global intellectual community.

The Universities Project is a multi-year series of conferences and symposia convening senior representatives of higher education from the designated regions with their counterparts from North America and West Europe. Discussion in the Project's programs focuses on the following themes:

- University Administration and Finance
- Academic Structure and Governance within the University
- Meeting Students' Needs, and the Role of Students in Institutional Affairs
- Technology in Higher Education
- The University and Civil Society

OBJECTIVES

Universities and other institutions of higher learning are seeking to reshape themselves in ways that will prepare them more fully for the twenty-first century. Even as these institutions are considering extensive systemic changes in their academic design, structure, and mission, all desire autonomy in governance and in their intellectual life. Accordingly, the Universities Project aims to promote the higher education reform process by inviting senior administrators to participate in conferences and symposia concerning issues of university management, administration, finance, and governance.

VISITING ADVISORS PROGRAM (VAP)

The Salzburg Seminar launched this enhanced aspect of the Universities Project in the autumn of 1998. Under this program, teams of university presidents and higher education experts visit universities in Central and East Europe and Russia at the host institutions' request to assist in the process of institutional self-assessment and change. By the end of 1999, thirteen VAP visits will have taken place, nine to universities in East and Central Europe, and four to Russian universities. A full schedule of visits is planned for 2000. The addition of the Visiting Advisors Program brings to the Universities Project an applied aspect and serves to enhance institutional and personal relationships begun in Salzburg.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information regarding the Salzburg Seminar's Visiting Advisors Program, the Universities Project, and Salzburg Seminar programs, please contact one of the Seminar's offices below.

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