



GRADUATE PROGRAMME

in

PLANT MOLECULAR BIOLOGY & BIOTECHNOLOGY

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

EPEAEK II

Heraklion, Greece, October 3-4, 2003



Background

The External Evaluation Committee (Professors Paolo Costantino, Pierre Gadai, Carolina Gani-Spyropoulou, Andreas Sievers) - selected and invited by Prof. Kalliopi Roubelakis-Angelakis to evaluate the Graduate Program in Plant Molecular Biology and Biotechnology of the Department of Biology of the University of Crete – met in Heraklion on October 3-4/2003 in the Department's premises.

Professors Costantino and Sievers were members of a previous External Committee that had met on March 2000 for a previous round of evaluation, allowing continuity in the evaluation process.

The Committee met with Prof. Roubelakis-Angelakis who provided an overview and statistics on the Program also by means of its recent and very detailed web site. The Committee visited the laboratories and facilities available to the students of the Program and discussed with some faculty members involved in it.

Abundant relevant printed material was also provided in loco to the Committee to help in the evaluation process.

The Committee met with numerous students of both the MSc and PhD Program and had an extensive and very informative discussion with them.

Permanent Teaching Personnel and Infrastructures

The teaching personnel have remained to a great extent unchanged since the previous evaluation, and the Committee confirms the very positive result of the previous evaluation. The few new members of the teaching staff are also of great quality and up to the standards of the Program. The scientific publications produced in the teaching staff's laboratories are numerous and of good quality.

Infrastructures available in the Department to the Program are excellent and up to the best international standards, and the proximity of other high quality research establishments officially associated to the Program is of great help in ensuring a sound and stimulating scientific environment, as also remarked in the previous evaluation report.

Students

The discussion with the students participating in the Program confirmed to the Committee the impression of strong motivation and pride, as well as of intellectual vivacity. Due to the progress of the Program, this time the Committee had the opportunity to get opinions and impressions of both MSc and PhD students.

MSc students, while remarking the very heavy workload (particularly of the first year) declared themselves very satisfied of the training received both from the lectures and from the rotation in different laboratories.

PhD students are also very motivated, as well as remarkably mature and very much involved in their research projects. In their view, the older age they will obtain their degree as compared to other Greek and international Universities, where a MSc degree is not a prerequisite, may represent a disadvantage for their future scientific career.

The students gave the Committee the strong impression to form an enthusiastic and interactive community of young scientists.

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A major problem the Committee regards as limiting the students' efficiency and affecting the duration of their PhD is the absence of guaranteed and adequate scholarships – Government or otherwise provided.

Graduate Program

The Program has remained substantially the same as previously very positively evaluated. The excellent teaching modules have been appropriately updated, and a new one (Bioethics) has been included to the students' request. The already fairly heavy teaching load has thus been further increased, possibly too much so in the Committee's view.

The Committee particularly appreciated the rotation in three different laboratories as a mean to integrate the training of the MSc students.

Possible room for improvement of the Program is in the flexibility of the curriculum and in a more active role of the students in their training – e.g. their involvement in teaching (in particular for the PhD students) and in the elaboration of projects, journal clubs, seminars, as already stressed in the previous evaluation report.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Committee is convinced that the Program is of very good quality and meets very high international standards and thus fully deserves to be continued and further implemented and supported. The Committee recommends taking in consideration the points for improvement indicated above.

The Committee is convinced that the scientists trained by this Program will have a significant role in strengthening the international role and momentum of Greece in biological sciences.

The External Evaluation Committee:

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