



**THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR  
VISITING ADVISORS' REPORT**

**THE "LUCIAN BLAGA" UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU  
SIBIU, ROMANIA**

**June 5-10, 2000**

***Team Members:***

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***Purpose and Scope of the Visit***

The "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu (LBUS) invited the team of visiting advisors from the Salzburg Seminar to review a set of issues selected by the university leadership for their pertinence to the future development of the institution. These were the principal issues:

- Academic structure and governance within the institution
- University administration and finance
- Students' needs and the role of students in institutional affairs
- Technology in higher education, life-long learning, and distance education
- Role of the university in the emerging civil society

In preparation for this visit, LBUS conducted a self-study that brought forth the most crucial questions the University faces with regard to these issues. We reviewed the results of this self-study along with many documents and data compiled by LBUS. This body of information provided valuable background for the visit.

During our four-day stay in Sibiu, we held substantive discussions with the rector, the vice rectors and deans, several department heads, other representatives of the faculty and the staff, and a high official of the Sibiu

Chamber of Commerce. We also met with the General Director for Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Romanian Ministry of National Education, who provided a detailed overview of the reform measures being implemented or contemplated for the country's higher education system. (We regret not having the opportunity to hold formal interviews with students, primarily because our visit coincided with the peak of the examination period.)

These conversations allowed us to understand the particular conditions of LBUS—to the extent possible during a four-day visit—and to place them in the context of the nation's present situation and the challenges and opportunities emerging for the future. We were impressed with the remarkable vigor and optimism that prevailed throughout these meetings and with the clear sense of direction manifested by the University leadership. We particularly appreciated the warm hospitality, as well as the openness and candor that characterized every phase of this visit.

It is important to emphasize at the outset of this report that the purpose of our visit was not to perform a formal evaluation of LBUS but to share our observations and offer our recommendations on the issues presented to us. We relied on the available information and documentation, on the perspectives of the individuals we interviewed, and to some extent on our own familiarity with other systems of higher education. The limitations imposed by a short visit are considerable; nevertheless, we feel confident that we gained sufficient and accurate insights to make discriminating judgments.

### ***The Context***

As we perceive it, the Romanian context of higher education reform is characterized by certain progressive developments as well as obvious constraints. Of the progressive developments, these are the most notable:

- The Ministry of National Education's commitment to greater decentralization of the nation's higher education system
- The introduction of a global funding policy, based on a normative per-student formula, in conjunction with steps to promote accountability; e.g., written strategic plans, and annual "contracts" between the Ministry and individual universities
- The increased emphasis on quality-assurance processes
- The growing efforts to internationalize higher education
- The appearance of new options and heightened competitiveness in the realm of higher education

The most pressing and persistent constraint is the scarcity of financial resources. Its hampering effect on the institutions' ability to address structural and operational needs cannot be minimized. Yet, we were pleased to recognize that this impediment, serious as it is, has neither lessened the

determination of the leaders of the University nor dampened their enthusiasm for educational reform. We identified these other major constraints:

- The brain-drain of talented young scholars, who seek higher compensation and better working conditions both within the country and abroad, and the concomitant aging of the academic workforce at Romanian universities
- Remaining bureaucratic policies and practices in the administration of higher education institutions and in the relations between individual universities and the Ministry
- Very low student/faculty ratios, common to the entire Eastern European region but questionable in terms of cost effectiveness and operational efficiency

Within this context, LBUS stands out as a young university that has undergone a remarkably dynamic, clearly positive development in a very short time span. This impression is supported by several revealing figures. In its first ten years, the university increased its enrollment from approximately 2,000 in 1990 to close to 11,000 currently. During that period, the number of faculty members grew from 289 to more than 1,400. In some units—such as the School of Medicine; the School of Sciences; and the School of Letters, History and Journalism—the student population has grown by a factor of ten or even fifteen over the past decade. A similarly soaring expansion occurred in the number of graduate students, the number of instructional subject areas, and the number of partnership arrangements with universities abroad.

Simultaneously, LBUS has been receiving international recognition as a progressive institution, increasingly attuned to the changing circumstances of its country and its region in Europe. The Romanian Ministry of National Education acknowledged LBUS' outstanding performance as a center of academic innovation by awarding it a "Diploma of Excellence" in January of this year. This April, LBUS organized a conference on university management that convened the rectors of most Romanian institutions of higher education, private and public. Last October, LBUS co-sponsored with the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges an important international activity, the "Romania-United States University Presidents Conference," that engaged about sixteen American presidents and chancellors and about fifty senior administrators from Romanian universities in a conversation about shared interests and concerns. Recently, the Ministry of National Education accorded the status of Center for Romanian-American Academic Cooperation to LBUS in recognition of its achievements in promoting academic relations with the United States. Generally speaking, LBUS has established itself as a leader in fostering transnational, inter-university dialogues aimed at establishing "international standards" in academic programs.

Felicitously, this vast and rapid development of the university has been accompanied by a remarkable continuity of institutional leadership. The current rector has been in office since 1992 and was recently re-elected for

another four-year term. It seems reasonable to assume that the extraordinary quantitative and qualitative growth of the University would not have been possible without such administrative stability and sustained sense of purpose; that is, without a "strengthened steering core," to use the term coined by Burton R. Clark. This trust in its steering capacity will be the institution's main source of self-confidence and durability during the period of consolidation that is likely to follow the present stage of accelerated expansion.

### ***Strategic Framework***

More important than LBUS' growth has been the formation of a distinctive institutional culture that sets it apart from most public universities in the reform countries of Eastern Europe. This culture has enabled LBUS to develop in non-traditional ways that are particularly unusual in the Eastern European context. From our observations, we characterize this culture as follows:

- **Continuity and strength of leadership.** Strong ministries and professorates but relatively weak rectors often characterize higher education in Eastern Europe. As noted above, the LBUS rector exercises unusually strong leadership, personally and through his management team. This strength of leadership is evidenced by a well-cultivated and broadly shared vision of the University and by the apparent trust and confidence that the campus community has placed in him.
- **Collaboration and cooperation across faculties.** Our conversations with the deans revealed existing and planned efforts to share resources across faculties and to develop collaborative interdisciplinary programs. In many ways, the somewhat unusual organizational composition of departments in some faculties makes such cooperation not only desirable but also necessary.
- **Sense of self-respect and self-reliance.** Despite the very difficult economic conditions in Romanian higher education, we heard few excuses and little blaming of internal problems on external conditions. On the contrary, we noticed a clear sense of self-reliance and a strong interest in developing new programs and identifying new means of support for the reform efforts.
- **Disposition to improve management effectiveness.** We found considerable interest in establishing quality control mechanisms for many management processes, engaging in strategic planning, and exploring new approaches to leadership development.
- **Emphasis on internationalization.** LBUS is making impressive efforts and allocating considerable human resources to place Sibiu on the higher-education international map. It is accomplishing this by establishing its presence and leadership in international meetings and organizations, by developing strong and sustainable institutional links (most notably with the University of Missouri and with the Philipps University in Marburg,

Germany), and by building an important library in support of international studies.

In summary, the LBUS culture has resulted in a healthy climate of organizational introspection and forward thinking. The leadership has identified the most important issues confronting the institution and is prepared to address them resolutely in the context of a rapidly changing society.

### ***Strategic Positioning for the Future***

Many of the classical universities of Eastern Europe and Russia are struggling with the challenge of positioning themselves for the changing demands and expectations that characterize the new circumstances of the region. As part of our review of LBUS, we tried to ascertain whether the leaders of the institution envisioned the University's future along the lines of a classical university or a nontraditional one. Often, young institutions find it difficult to resist the allure of prestige generally associated with classical universities, and they often become pale imitations of their paradigms. In doing so, they may squander the opportunity to become exemplary in their own way and in ways that better meet the needs of their societies. In our conversation with the leaders of LBUS, we were persuaded that their willingness to pursue excellence along nontraditional, innovative lines was strong and genuine.

The future of LBUS, as envisioned and articulated by the rector and reiterated by other University leaders, combines elements of the German and the American models. Their view is that the University will continue to emphasize research, particularly with applied purposes, together with social awareness and civic responsibility. In the best implementation of the concept, these two emphases would not just coexist side by side but would be integrated into a single institutional purpose.

While the emphasis on research would follow the German model, without aping it, the emphasis on social awareness and civic responsibility would try to emulate the American model. We understand that LBUS intends to establish stronger ties with companies and enterprises in the region to respond to their educational needs, to take advantage of the opportunities they bring (e.g., for applied research, for sponsored scholarship, and for the employment of university graduates) and to contribute to the overall development of the region. This is a wise course to follow.

We realize that LBUS draws many students from outside its region, and that its influence reaches beyond regional boundaries. After all, one of the University's most distinguishing and admirable characteristics is its international dimension. Yet, we believe that the unique strength of this institution as it projects itself into the future lies in its ability to think "region" and "world" simultaneously, to discover and harness the creative synergy between these two spaces in the accomplishment of its educational mission.

To accomplish its educational mission, a university must have effective management structures, policies and practices. We believe that the

leadership of LBUS has already taken significant steps, and is committed to move farther, in that direction. From our perspective, this goal can only be reached through increased decentralization and accountability at all levels of administration. This approach implies the investment of greater authority, together with increased responsibility and heightened expectations on the lower tiers of leadership. Decentralized organizations tend to be less bureaucratic than centralized ones and, thus, better able to adjust to changing conditions. Perhaps paradoxically, decentralized organizations tend to be more cohesive in purpose and more united in purpose than centralized ones.

LBUS is soundly positioned for the future in strategic terms. It understands its mission, recognizes its institutional strengths and needs, and has a culture that promotes innovation, is alert to new opportunities and challenges, and enjoys visionary leadership. While there will be many obstacles along the way, we believe that LBUS is poised to become a highly successful modern institution.

### ***Recommendations***

- **Implementation strategies.** We recommend that the University consider the following strategic components as foci for the implementation of its vision: 1) innovative and flexible teaching options attuned to the challenges of a rapidly changing educational, social and economic environment; 2) applied research geared toward meeting the present and future needs of the region; and 3) internationalization of the institutional reach. The rationales for the proposed emphasis on these areas are discussed in the body of this report.
- **Curriculum study.** We recommend that the University undertake, in consultation with members of the outside community, an extensive and thorough study of its curriculum to determine whether new programs or areas of study should be developed (and, perhaps, some existing ones redesigned or discontinued) to meet the new educational and economic conditions of the region and the country. It may become evident through this study, for instance, that there is a need for new programs in leadership and business management, to be offered through the regular curriculum or as part of a distance education co-curriculum. Distance education, particularly in the form of targeted short courses and applied research activities, is one of the most effective means of providing life-long learning opportunities and reaching out to the outside community.
- **Assessment.** We recommend that the implementation of any major changes that may result from the curriculum study be accompanied by a solid assessment component. This component should include mechanisms for the collection, organization, analysis, and publication of relevant data, and for the regular evaluation of teaching performance and learning outcomes. In an increasingly competitive environment, it is reasonable to expect that higher education institutions be prepared to document their claims of quality for their educational programs.

- **Curriculum delivery.** We recommend that the University consider the possibility of restructuring its mode of curriculum delivery by moving toward a more flexible structure; e.g., a modular or credit-unit system. This flexibility would allow the institution to respond more swiftly and effectively to rapidly changing conditions in the educational market, would increase the international transferability of its academic courses, and would establish in a structural manner its unique identity as a modern, progressive, international university.
- **Student-faculty ratio.** We recommend that the University consider increasing its student-faculty ratio so as to approach international standards. While the prevalent view is that increasing the number of students has limited value as a revenue-generating strategy, given the low cost of tuition and the high cost of education, the potential of that strategy becomes more evident if it is projected over a long-term span and launched with the stated purpose of increasing the student-faculty ratio. Higher student-faculty ratios would result in increased fiscal efficiency through the reduction of the cost-per-student rate. A leaner LBUS would be in a better position to compete with its private counterparts.
- **Information technology.** We recommend that the University develop a multi-year technology plan to extend and improve access to the Internet and to facilitate the implementation of distance learning. An ambitious, comprehensive effort to bring the latest information technology to the academic and administrative functions of the institution seems to be out of reach at this time, given the scarcity of financial resources. Nevertheless, widespread, easy access to the Internet is so central to any educational strategy of reform and internationalization that it warrants a significant allocation of whatever institutional resources are available. With technology changing so rapidly, any delay in taking action makes the gap more difficult to overcome. We suggest that the initial focus of this plan be placed on increasing and facilitating student access to the Internet, and supporting distance learning and applied research.
- **Relationship with the outside community.** We recommend that the University develop effective mechanisms to strengthen its relationship with the outside community, both to enable it to respond nimbly to changing conditions in the community and to receive the invigorating benefits of ongoing consultations with community leaders. One such mechanism would be the establishment of an Advisory Board to the Rector composed of distinguished members of the regional, national, and international communities reached by the University. These advisors could be civic and cultural leaders, educators and other professionals, entrepreneurs and business people, alumni, etc. Individual faculties should also be encouraged to establish similar advisory bodies, whose composition would be determined by each Faculty's fields of study and their impact on the target community. In general terms, the professorate and the staff of the University should be encouraged to play an active role on community matters, preferably in ways that fit with their expertise and scholarly interests.

- **New sources of revenue.** We recommend that the University continue and intensify its efforts to identify new sources of revenue. LBUS relies already, to a significant extent, on non-governmental resources, such as enrolling tuition-paying students, applying for international contracts, renting its facilities, and developing fee-supported short-cycle courses and distance education. Currently, LBUS raises about one-third of its revenues from non-governmental sources, but its potential for growth depends to a great extent on its ability to increase that proportion. In our view, the two most promising targets for revenue growth are 1) fee-supported short courses, and 2) providing consulting services to area businesses. In a developing economy, short-cycle courses are an expeditious way of responding to specific labor-market needs. The University could conduct surveys to identify such needs and design short-cycle courses to address them. Institutional consulting opportunities could be sought either directly by the University, perhaps through an entrepreneurial outreach office, or through a separate foundation created for the specific purposes of supporting the University. Some of these consulting opportunities could take the form of applied research, which in turn would create excellent internship opportunities for students.

### **Additional Observations**

While we are not prepared to make specific recommendations regarding the following observations, we submit them in the hope that they will assist the university in its self-analysis:

- We noticed that there is no representation of women at the highest level of management and very little such representation in positions of leadership within the institution. This is, at the very least, a lost opportunity in accessing and developing an important pool of talent.
- The University enjoys excellent leadership at this point, and the recent re-election of the rector ensures continuity of the present leadership for at least four more years. Nevertheless, it would be prudent to explore ways of training and mentoring a cadre of potential institutional leaders, familiar with the international higher-education environment and knowledgeable about emerging institutional strategies, who would be prepared to continue the course of reform in the future.
- While the election of senior administrators by the professorate is a revered European tradition that has served many universities well, it has its downside, too. It politicizes to a great extent the exercise of administration and introduces an element of structural conservatism that may sometimes conflict with the reform agenda. Perhaps LBUS could find creative ways to increase professionalism in the administrative leadership without disregarding time-honored traditions. Reducing the teaching load of senior administrators would be a step in that direction.



- Romania's demographic projections point toward a substantial decline in the traditional university-aged population in the near future. These projections, combined with the expansion in the number of private universities, are bound to result in more intensive competition for student enrollment among higher education institutions. With such prospect in the horizon, LBUS needs to establish its competitive advantage by identifying, nourishing, and publicizing its niche of excellence, which, as we stated before, seems to lie in its well-deserved reputation as a "university on the move."

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Response from the Rector, September, 2000:

At the conclusion of admission examinations in June and September, 2000, student enrollment at LBUS increased from 11,000 to more than 14,000. This increase is mainly due to the development of a distance education system initiated three years ago, but which gathered momentum after the visit of the Advisors Team, which strongly urged the continued development of this sector.

Efforts to improve the faculty-student ratio were greatly strengthened as a result of the Visiting Advisors consultant visit. The overall number of more than 1,400 teaching positions - covered by full-time and part-time academics - has been reduced to 1,000, resulting in a higher faculty-student ratio but also in higher salaries. The faculty-student ratio was improved basically by discontinuing the old system of provisional employment for part-time academics (i.e. those on the teaching staff who did not actually belong to the LBUS academic community), and also by increasing the number of students in the teaching units, thus decreasing the number of classes. While this process began before the Visiting Advisors visited LBUS in June, it was reconsidered and considerably expedited after the very useful talks between the Visiting Advisors and the LBUS administrative staff.

## **Visiting Advisors Team**

### **Anthony Morgan                      USA**

Anthony Morgan is Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, co-director of the Utah Education Policy Center and special assistant to the president at the University of Utah. For 14 years he was Vice President for Budget and Planning. His international experience includes consultant work for the World Bank in Eastern Europe. His B.S. in political science is from the University of Utah, his M.A. is from the University of California at Los Angeles, and his Ph.D. is from the University of California, Berkeley.

### **Jochen Fried                              Germany**

Jochen Fried is Director of the Universities Project. He is the former head of programs at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. He was lecturer in German language and literature at the University of Ljubljana from 1986 to 1988 and from 1991 to 1993, and at Cambridge University from 1984 to 1986. From 1988 to 1991 he was a senior officer in the secretariat of the German Science Council. He is a graduate of the University of Düsseldorf where he received his Ph.D.

### **Peter Lee                                      USA**

Peter Lee is Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs, San Jose State University, California. Previously he was Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Center for Human Service Research and Development. His areas of expertise include human resources and organizational development, policy analysis, program evaluation, and strategic planning. His degrees are from the University of Hawaii and the University of California, Berkeley.

### **Juan Mestas                                  USA**

Juan Mestas is Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, University of Michigan-Flint, where he is also Professor of Foreign Languages. He was previously the Deputy Chairman for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Vice Provost and Dean of Students at Portland State University, and has been a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities. His Ph.D. is from the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

## **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.

The Salzburg Seminar acknowledges with gratitude the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Transport, which generously fund the Universities Project.

**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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