

Infrastructure and Organization as a Focus of Quality Enhancement in Teaching February 2015

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Foreword

In presenting the present paper, the Teaching Evaluation Work Group marks the conclusion of its discussion of the third of four areas of focus relevant to quality in teaching and offers a basis for further, concrete discussion on the part of the University's leadership and persons responsible in the respective fields.

"Infrastructure and Organization as a Focus of Quality Enhancement in Teaching" (2015) thus follows in the series "Teaching – Quality – Evaluation. An Applied Concept" (2010) and "What Constitutes a Good Curriculum? An Applied Position" (2012).

As a fourth and final area of focus, "Qualification of Teachers and Continuing Professional Development" will be treated subsequently.

Introduction

In setting out its considerations, the Teaching Evaluation Work Group aims to assist the faculty and staff of the Angewandte in the organizational implementation of teaching programs and to provide them with concrete starting points for analysis and improvement of the status quo.

The quality both of the infrastructure provided and of the organization of studies and teaching vitally depends on cooperation between the teachers and persons responsible for organization. The latter include administrative personnel as well as persons with assignments in teaching, artistic development and research who have also taken on functions of leadership and/or administrative duties, such as members of the rectorate, heads of institutes, committee chairpersons, and others.

The Teaching Evaluation Work Group, in the first part of the present paper, begins by specifying the **basic prerequisites** for optimal cooperation of this kind in keeping with the Angewandte's understanding of quality.

Part two identifies relevant **areas of focus** in which concrete efforts aiming at further development and improvement can subsequently be undertaken.

The last part of the paper contains **key points** that can contribute to creating a sense of **commitment** on the part of all persons involved in addressing these areas of focus.

I. Basic prerequisites for successful cooperation between teachers and persons responsible for organization

The basic prerequisites described below express in concrete terms the Angewandte's understanding of quality. They can be understood as comprehensively applicable objectives. In the treatment of the relevant areas of focus (see Section II), they can serve as criteria permitting a solid grasp and clear assessment of the state of affairs in each case.

1. Common understanding of goals / Visions of teaching

A common understanding of the essential goals and visions of good teaching at the Angewandte is the basis for optimal coordination of individual action on the part of all actors in the field of teaching, considered to be a process of shared responsibility.

2. Understanding roles / Professionalism

The expectations that teachers and persons responsible for organization place on what they perceive as being their respective roles rest on mutual understanding and respect. This also means that each person must have a clear perception of his or her own role. As the demands with regard both to the content and the organization of teaching constantly increase and evolve, maintaining quality and professionalism in all cooperation is of vital importance.

3. Qualified initiation of persons in management functions

Persons taking on new management functions are thoroughly instructed as to the tasks involved, the formal and informal general framework, structures and available possibilities. The responsibility for seeing to it that this is done is clearly assigned.

4. Scope for acting on one's own responsibility

Clear definition of areas of responsibility and competence allows for constructive cooperation on an equal footing without recourse to hierarchical notions of subordination and superiority. Engaging co-workers in areas of activity that correspond to their respective fields of expertise and to which clear responsibilities (for the individual or for the group) are attached enables them to take responsibility for aligning their activity with the common goals and to meet (new) demands with the best possible results in a spirit of mutual support.

5. Gender and diversity mainstreaming / Inclusion

That people coming from the most diverse backgrounds should study and work together is seen as self-evident, and the experience is regarded as a form of enrichment. The needs of various groups are explicitly taken into account in the planning of the processes involved in daily study and work (language, age, disability, social and cultural origin, caregiver duties, working students, etc.). It is viewed as an essential and firmly established priority that the analysis and further development of processes and structures should include scrutiny to ensure that any possible direct or indirect discriminatory mechanisms are identified and eliminated.

6. The ability of the organization to learn and develop

In view of the fact that the goals and the substance of teaching constantly evolve, serious thought is also given on a regular basis to organizational structures in order to assess their ability to meet changing demands with optimal results. When bolstered by adequate structures of management, a willingness to deal with strengths and weaknesses in an open, transparent fashion makes it possible to define positions collectively and to identify potential for development. By development, not only the creation of new processes and structures is meant, but also the fundamental questioning of existing processes and structures as to their meaningfulness and necessity.

7. Providing support and assistance to teachers in administrative matters

There is a common understanding between teachers and persons responsible for organization that substantial efforts will be made to assist teachers in the carrying out of operational tasks (e.g. organization of space, administrative matters concerning course participants) and to support them in their performance of strategic tasks¹ (e.g. membership in a study committee), so that the burden can be kept at a minimum.

8. Transparency and coherence in determining access to resources

When necessary resources are being allocated (e.g. classrooms, equipment, organization of events), the requirements, criteria for decision and possibilities available are stipulated clearly so that the decision-making process is transparent to all persons concerned.

9. Integration of faculty and staff new to the University

Best efforts are made to integrate new members of the University faculty and staff from the outset in order to determine and satisfy needs for information and communication. It is both necessary and helpful here to observe the principle of reciprocity.

¹) Whether the duties attached to a position include strategic tasks depends in each case on the terms and conditions of service.

II. Relevant areas of focus

Set out below are all the areas of focus connected with teaching that the Work Group sees as being relevant to the question of quality of organization and infrastructure. For clearest possible presentation, in each of the areas of focus starting points for discussion have been formulated by the Teaching Evaluation Work Group separately as key questions for the rectorate that should support the realization of the focus areas.

- goals and visions
- curricula²
- teacher assignment / invitation of visiting teaching staff
- special requirements in the context of teaching assignments for a period of one semester each
- course coordination
- course evaluation³
- student assessment and implementation of statutory provisions pertaining to studies
- dealing with diversity
- information about courses offered
- Provision of and access to resources (classrooms, workspace, space for organized events, equipment and facilities, budget)
- library (open-access area, stacks, periodicals reading room, work areas, etc.)
- technical/technological infrastructure
technical/technological competencies and know-how
- continuing professional education and development
- organized events, presentations and publications as communication platforms relating to teaching
- communication and decision-making structures

2) See: "What Constitutes a Good Curriculum? An applied position." Vienna, 2012.
Available at <http://dieangewandte.at/quality>

3) "Teaching – Quality – Evaluation. An applied concept." Vienna, 2010.
Available at <http://dieangewandte.at/quality>

III. Commitment in addressing the areas of focus

In the interest of fostering the commitment necessary to effectively address the areas of focus, the following basic points should be heeded:

- Coordinated organization and clear distribution by the rectorate of responsibilities for addressing each of the areas of focus;
- Ongoing support for the persons responsible;
- Structured involvement of the groups concerned in each of the areas of focus, in particular the students;
- Documentation of the state of affairs in each of the areas of focus on the basis of the prerequisites set out in Section I of this paper, and clear specification of improvements to be made;
- Formulation of the planned improvement;
- Establishing criteria: On what basis can the effectiveness of the measures adopted be ascertained?
- Use of these criteria in evaluating what has been achieved;
- Ensuring that the areas of focus are addressed on a regular basis.