



EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
1/A Pázmány Péter sétány, Budapest 1117, Hungary
Phone: (36 1) 372 2997, fax: (36 1) 372 2912
DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS

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Review of the Master Programme in Applied Statistics at the University of Novi Sad

To whom it may concern:

The University of Novi Sad initiated the design, accreditation, and introduction of a Master Programme in Applied Statistics. The preparation of the programme has been done in close cooperation with several other universities in Serbia, and also with major stakeholders, like the Statistical Office and the Central Bank. Further, the University of Novi Sad has been successful in obtaining EU funding, in the form of a TEMPUS grant, to seek the advice of faculty members of foreign universities who are engaged in running similar programmes at their respective institutions. Professors from Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Hungary, including myself, have contributed to the design of the programme.

This is a well prepared and comprehensive effort, which has the full support of the Rector of the University of Novi Sad, and also of the Faculties of the University. This environment ensures that the programme is based on a joint work of professors from several Faculties of the University of Novi Sad. This does not only imply that all important aspects and potential fields of application of statistics are covered, but also that undergraduates with diverse backgrounds will be informed of the existence of the programme and will consider continuing their studies to become statisticians.

This diversity is a key aspect of the success of modern statistics. Diversity in applications and diversity of the backgrounds of statisticians. The programme fosters diversity by offering a common first year curriculum (with electives to prepare for specialization) and then a second year, when teaching is organized along the main fields of applications of statistics. Even in the second year, students can choose courses outside of their specialization and a smooth distribution of methodological and substantive expertise in the fields of applications will result.

Economy, engineering, medicine and the social sciences are the four fields that the students may choose from, but the courses offered also cover areas like official statistics, or biostatistics and epidemiology. Some of the courses offered are relevant for more than one specialization, like longitudinal methods or Bayesian statistics. This interconnected system of the presentation of various chapters of statistics makes not only the education of statisticians with varying expertise possible, but also implies a resource-efficient management of the entire programme.

The core statistical knowledge presented in the courses above is based on solid mathematical and computational foundations. The mathematical background is presented in a way that the differing levels of knowledge of students entering the programme from different undergraduate fields are taken into account. Further, the computational aspects of the programme are designed in such a way that best prepares the students for the individual software environments of the future employers. Although free-access statistical software, mostly R, will be heavily relied on, the students will be given a chance to acquaint themselves with different commercially available statistical software packages.

Employability of the students is further supported by including presentation skills in the curriculum, and also by the active cooperation with potential employers.

The entire design of the programme is in accordance with the 'Bologna-system' that is being employed all over Europe. This facilitates that students from outside of Serbia may enter the programme and the graduates may find employment or may enter a doctoral programme outside of Serbia, as well.

To support the remaining parts of the design and the implementation of the programme, the participants of the TEMPUS programme were asked to form a Board to provide advice and quality control.

Overall, I think, the programme is similar in coverage and quality to many comparable programmes in statistics that I know of in other countries and is ready for accreditation. In particular, I am directing an MSc Programme in Survey Statistics in Budapest and I see excellent possibilities for cooperation with the Programme in Applied Statistics in Novi Sad.



Tamás Rudas
Head & Professor of Statistics