

# EVALUATION OF THE PSU 2003

Report to ATA, version 1

**What:** Pristina Summer University 2003  
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Pristina, Kosovo

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## Introduction

In Summer 2003 the Academic Training Association (ATA) asked me to function as the independent evaluator of the Pristina Summer University. Although I was the evaluator for the 2002 edition as well, I accepted the commission in view of the short time remaining until the summer school. The present report describes the observations I made during a visit to the PSU, and the conclusions I draw from these observations.

As criteria for my evaluation, I took the ones I derived last year from the ATA grant proposal that made the Summer University possible:

- a) the quality of the courses being offered
- b) the quality of the organisation
- c) the role of P.U., and the likelihood of successful transfer of responsibilities
- d) the success of the summer university in training young staff of P.U.
- e) the influence that the PSU has on the normal workings of the P.U.

I added one further criterion:

- f) the realisation of improvements planned in the general evaluation by the organisers of the Summer University edition 2002.

I will first describe shortly the summer university, then the visit on which this evaluation report is based, and review the PSU on the basis of the criteria *a. to f.* listed above. The report ends with a set of recommendations to the organisers of the PSU, ATA and the Pristina University (PU).

## Description of the summer university

Only a short description of the Summer University is provided here; for an in-depth description of the PSU, the reader is referred to material of the Academic Training Association (ATA).

The Pristina Summer University (PSU) edition 2003 was organised co-operatively by ATA, a Dutch NGO, and Pristina University (PU), the sole university in Kosovo. It is the third edition, with one more being planned by the current organisers (PU and ATA). After 2004, the summer university will

be the sole responsibility of Pristina University, which at the moment is inclined to organise further editions.

PSU consisted of around thirty university courses, all taught within three weeks in July-August. Courses varied in levels, but most seemed equivalent to advanced bachelor courses. Each course is attended by between 15 and 25 students, adding up to around 600 participants. Of these, approximately 75% came from Kosovo, and a majority of the remainder were from Eastern Europe. Most students from Kosovo were regular undergraduates from the university, but some participants were graduates of the university and already employed. As was the case in 2002, a special effort was made by the organisation to include Serbian students in the program. This is not obvious, given that Kosovo society is highly segregated and some in the Albanian majority harbour much resentment towards their Serbian compatriots. Nonetheless, 12 Serbian students now attended PSU, under markedly less tense circumstances than last year.

For every course, there was a visiting professor, a local co-teacher, and a logistics officer who was responsible for facilities and support. Many visiting professors were academics teaching in the EU or the USA, but a sizeable minority taught at universities in neighbouring countries (especially Albania). Visiting professors were recruited by ATA, but selected by the P.U. faculties. ATA selected international students, P.U. course topics, course coordinators and co-teachers (mainly through the hosting faculties). Co-teachers were expected to attend a training weekend prior to the PSU, in which they were prepared for their task and given some training in interactive teaching methodology. They were all members of the P.U. faculty; many course coordinators were P.U. students. The university also selected local students; a hard task this year since around five times as many applied as could be placed.

Teaching and other activities took place in buildings of the university. Classroom facilities varied from sophisticated to very basic. During my visit electricity was sometimes cut, which made use of overhead projectors and sound systems at times impossible.

Next to the courses, ATA organised discussions (Public Forums), excursions and social events for students and professors. Accommodation was provided for foreign students, some local students, and for visiting professors.

## Description of my visit

I visited Pristina during the second week of the PSU, from July 23 to July 27. In that time, I spoke several times to the organisers (both Amsterdam and Pristina staff of ATA), to several visiting professors and co-teachers, and to numerous students. From Pristina University, I spoke to one member of the PSU committee, the council supervising the PSU (dr. Elezaj), and with the vice-deans of two faculties (Agriculture and Physical Education). Other important organisers were unfortunately not available due to vacations (although I understand that a well-organised summer university does not necessitate the presence of its organisers, I was surprised to find the rectorate quasi-deserted).

In addition to these conversations, I took the opportunity to observe the PSU in action. I went to one public forum, visited the buildings in which the PSU was held, and attended one excursion. As most courses were now organised to coincide (to take advantage of the cool morning hours), I was able to visit only a few courses.

### a. Quality of the courses

Although the student evaluations organised by ATA provide a more complete picture, I formed my own impression of course quality by sitting in with several classes. Sampled were one course each from the Faculty of Philosophy, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics, and that of Education. In addition, I interviewed several students who followed other courses.

Visited courses were uniformly of a high quality. Visiting professors were clearly experts in their field, and many used innovative methods to get their message across. Most encouraged participation; in one science course the professor noted a lack of presentation experience in his Kosovar students and changed his plans, scheduling several presentations for each student. Another example is a course in Law in which students were required to present existing cases in the role of either the claimant or the defender. In some other courses, however, teaching was mostly frontal.

As far as I was able to ascertain, the regular curriculum was not duplicated in the PSU. The courses thus offered an opportunity for students of Pristina University to acquire skills and knowledge that they would otherwise not have access to.

Most students that I spoke to in breaks and after class were enthusiastic about the quality of the course. However, even to a casual observer large differences were obvious in the ability of students to process the course material. Each class contained a group of very active students who seemed to pick up most of what was taught, and a group of very passive students who did not get that much. In one course in the sciences, for example, some students participated actively while a majority seemed lost in the complex material and was rather disconnected from teaching. These differences may have been partly due to heterogeneity in entrance level – each course I visited was attended by PU students of different years, and thus different levels of knowledge. I also got the impression, however, that a not insignificant minority of the students was poorly motivated; several expressed to me that fun, social events and international contacts had been their prime reason to apply for the PSU.

In comparison with last year, a significant change was that some courses were now offered only in English, without translation (students in these courses were partly selected on their knowledge of English, and with a few exceptions were able to follow the teaching). Other courses were in Albanian only, with visiting professors from neighbouring countries with Albanian populations. As translation tends to slow down the course (each sentence has to be repeated), this is a development that can only benefit the PSU. Nevertheless, in courses I visited where English instruction was still translated into Albanian I was struck by the quality of many of the translators. Visiting professors I spoke to also expressed satisfaction with their translators.

A field on which relatively little change was noticeable as compared to last year was the role of local co-teachers. In just a single class in which I sat in did the co-teacher play an active role. In several courses no co-teacher was present during my visit, and in at least two cases this was standard. As was the case last year, I heard of several courses in which the co-teacher was very active, but to the detriment of the course. In one case the course had effectively been split between the visiting professor and the local co-teacher, with both lecturing at different times about unconnected topics. This was to the chagrin of the students, who were not enthralled of the co-teacher's lectures.

## **b. Quality of the organisation**

As compared to last year, the atmosphere in the organisation was much more relaxed. The organisers themselves attributed this to experience, continuous improvements in the concept over two years, and better preparation. Responsibilities seemed clearly divided, and more competencies than last year were in the hands of local staff. Students and professors seemed well informed, with a well-functioning helpdesk available for any questions. There were few mishaps in the organisation of accommodation, facilities and logistics. The two unpleasant surprises I witnessed during my stay were dealt with effectively.

Both students and professors had few qualms about the organisation. Although professors noted some inconveniences, these were blamed on local circumstances. On the whole, the summer school thus made an efficient, well-organised impression.

### c. Continuity of the PSU and role of the university in the organisation

The next edition of PSU, in the summer of 2004, will be the last one in the hands of the current organisers – ATA and PU. After that, the stated goal of the university is to organise the summer university on its own. In the years leading up to 2005 a transfer of responsibility was to be achieved from ATA to PU. Compared with last year, however, little seems to have changed in the basic division of labour. Management of the summer school was, as last year, wholly in the hands of ATA staff. University officials had no hand in the day-to-day operations, and many were, as already noticed, on vacation.

The role of PU was larger in the preparations. Many decisions were made collectively, with responsibility nominally in the hands of the PSU committee. The committee, the rectorate and the faculties of PU also played a major role in selection: faculties proposed courses, co-teachers and students, and did the ultimate selection in collaboration with the PSU Committee. However, I had the strong impression that the drive behind preparations – in the form of agenda setting, deadlines and pressure – still largely came from ATA staff.

As most PU staff and members of ATA I interviewed expressed a desire to continue being involved in the Pristina Summer University, a successful continuation in 2004 seems highly likely. Whether the summer university will still exist beyond that year is less certain. Attempts seem under way to arrange funding for later editions, which is clearly a pressing need. With regard to other issues, however, more effort from PU than currently expended seems to be required. Responsibilities will have to be reassigned, and decisions will have to be made as to who will do the practical work. More important, however, is a decision on who will do the overall process management and provide the drive to make new editions of PSU a success. The PSU Committee, created to fill this gap, has not yet started to fulfil such a role.

### d. The role of co-teachers

In the proposal for the grant funding PSU, much stress is placed on training young academic staff in the role of co-teacher. Investing in young academics “will offer a high return” (grant proposal, p. 12). The co-teacher role is envisioned as a way to involve P.U. staff in planning and executing courses, and training their didactic skills in the process.

Last year, I noted that not all co-teachers fitted into the description given of the target group (young and English-speaking), and that some did not seem as keen to apply new teaching methods as was assumed. These caveats still apply to a sizeable minority of co-teachers. It is not possible for me to ascertain whether perhaps a larger proportion of co-teachers fit the description than last year. Nevertheless, the selection process clearly does not yield a uniform population of young, enthusiastic local staff members. One of the reasons for this is the emphasis placed by the PSU Committee on the right expertise in the co-teacher. This is defensible if one accepts that providing good training to students is an important goal of PSU. It does raise the question, however, to which extent the goal of training young local academics is attained.

This is especially pertinent as I recognised several co-teachers from previous editions. If the same P.U. professors are tapped each year to be co-teacher, the training effect will be very limited. Dr. Elezaj informed me, however, that the PSU Committee has a policy of discouraging staff of being co-teachers multiple times in a row. If the goal of skill transfer from visiting professors to local professors is to be kept upright, this seems especially important.

## e. Influence of the summer school on the university

The previous goals are all subordinate to the one of improving university education in Kosovo. In this regard, the most important question to answer is whether PSU has a strong influence on Pristina University or not. Unfortunately, it is also one virtually impossible to evaluate in a short visit.

Many stakeholders suggested that the university was changed through previous editions of the PSU. Examples given were the ease with which ECTS was introduced in many faculties, and changes in teaching style engendered by the experience with visiting professors. Most of my interlocutors recognised, however, that modern instructional methods were by no means standard at P.U. To the contrary, student union officials described most courses as consisting of only classic frontal lectures, with an oral exam at the end. Course evaluation was, to their knowledge, not practised at any faculty.

From a pure quantitative standpoint, it is difficult to see how the 31 co-teachers in PSU 2003 can have much of an impact on regular instruction, given that around 1200 academics lecture at Pristina university. When I confronted PSU officials with these numbers, several noted that co-teaching may also have a trickle-down effect, in that co-teachers may share knowledge of new methods with others. Although this might occur, a way of broadening the impact of the summer school would be to involve more professors directly in the summer school. In the 2003 edition, not much has been undertaken in this direction.

## f. Suggestions from last year

Last year's independent evaluation ended with a list of recommendations for improvements to the summer school. Most of these suggestions were taken over by ATA and P.U. in their end report. Moreover, the organisers came up with several planned improvements of their own.

I went over all recommendations with the organisers of PSU 2003, to evaluate how much of these had been implemented. Of the 18 recommendations, 13 were more or less implemented, two half-heartedly so (giving educational value to sightseeing trips and stricter deadlines for course organisation). Three were not touched (organising a student board, organising mini-conferences, and a mandatory ECTS session), while the remaining two could not be evaluated. No reasons were offered for leaving certain suggestions unimplemented. Nevertheless, a score of two thirds of the suggestions implemented is a compliment to the organisation's capacity for self-improvement.

## Conclusions

On the whole, the PSU made an orderly and well-organised impression. Students were satisfied with the courses and with the facilities at their disposal, as is also evident from the student evaluations that this evaluator was able to inspect. Visiting professors also expressed satisfaction with their work and with the organisation. Moreover, it is my impression that the summer university offered high quality instruction to its students.

As compared to last year, several improvements were evident; most of those planned by the organisation were in fact implemented. Nevertheless, several weaknesses noted in 2002 were again evident. One is the selection of co-teachers. As was the case last year, a sizeable minority did not conform to the criteria set by the organisation. Moreover, several co-teachers of 2002 were again co-teacher in 2003, although a policy of rotation was supposedly in place. Whether this resulted from deficiencies in the selection process or from a dearth of suitable candidates was unclear to me. The latter possibility was suggested to me by many of those involved. Another weakness already noted in the previous year is that some co-teachers were not very involved in the course, while others did partake in lecturing, but of a meagre quality.

While these deficiencies may have had only minor effects on the quality of instruction, they are more significant in another light. Co-teachers were conceptualised as an important source of change within Pristina University. Given the numbers involved it is difficult to conceive of co-teachers having a major impact on the university as a whole. When a part turns out to be less than ideal carriers of change, this problem becomes even more acute. It thus seems very important to me that the PSU thinks of ways of involving more P.U. staff in the summer university than just the co-teachers.

Even with these critical notes, it is evident from the number of applications alone that the PSU is a major boon to students of the university. That is already sufficient to consider the Pristina Summer University a venture worthy of continuation. A successful edition in 2004 seems very likely. For editions after that to be a success, more planning and effort that was currently apparent seems necessary.

## Recommendations

- To involve more staff of Pristina University in the PSU, it may be an idea to formally invite all staff members to sit in with part of the courses. Visiting professors might be asked to furnish a program that could be distributed to staff members. Another idea would be to organise receptions per faculty in which visiting professors can mingle with staff members, leading perhaps to more possibility for collaborations.
- The idea of setting up an advisory council of students (with one representative per class) could perhaps be reconsidered. Such a council could advice on matters such as the social program, discuss complaints, and perhaps foster a stronger sense of community within the student body.
- The policy of discouraging co-teachers from teaching in next editions of the PSU is laudable, and could perhaps be implemented more forcefully.
- It is my impression that not all students were challenged to work to their full potential. Given that the summer university lasts only three weeks, it would be beneficial if courses were perhaps a little more intensive.