

Faculty of Business and Economics of the Mendel University in Brno celebrates the 50th anniversary

As the Faculty of Business and Economics of the Mendel University in Brno celebrates the 50th anniversary in 2009, I would like to use this occasion to revoke the most important moments in the history of the faculty, its activities and to suggest the main features of its future prospects. To emphasize the importance of the faculty as an educational institution, we would like to quote T. G. Masaryk: "Independence will not save any nation – we will be saved by morality and education". Education is an integral part of the society and it is the main driver of its evolution. The highest educational degree is connected to a university and the faculty is a part of it.

The Faculty of Business and Economics is the oldest faculty of economics in Moravia. It was founded in 1959 and became the third faculty of the University of Agriculture in Brno. The faculty was oriented at the operations and economics in the agricultural sector. During its existence, the faculty educated more than 10 000 graduates of the master's level, 52 Candidates of Science, 73 PhD. graduates, 46 associate professors (docents) and 19 full professors. During the fifty-year history, nine deans participated in leading the faculty, and they did their job to the level that the socio-political system allowed. In the year of the foundation of the faculty, there were 10 departments concentrating mostly on economic and technical areas. It is necessary to mention that up to 1994, the faculty offered the specialization "agricultural mechanization", which was then transferred to the Faculty of Agriculture.

The fifty-year history of the faculty can be divided into two periods. First, for thirty years after the foundation of the faculty, the education activities were controlled by the state and the syllabi had to be centrally approved. The total number of students was 800–1 000, and there were about 60 lecturers. The only faculty program, "Economics in Agriculture", provided knowledge in economics and technical and technological issues of the agricultural sector. The graduates of this program contributed to spreading the good name of the faculty at the beginning of its existence. The relevant qualification structure

of lecturers and the experience in dealing with the state economic research led to the further progress of the faculty.

The second period of the faculty history started in the year of social changes, in 1989. This period brought about the independence to the decisions of the faculty. The faculty became responsible for its own actions. The ability of the faculty to handle the tools of independence is integrated into the history of the faculty.

The fundamental decision was made in 1990. It implied that the faculty would become an economic faculty in general. On one hand, it seems simple to educate the future economists. On the other hand, it was a hard work since the members of the faculty had to teach subjects that had not been taught before. Shortly after 1989, the faculty was focusing on education activities only with the absence of research and science. Modifications of study programs were unpopular among the members of the faculty because we had to do some personnel changes. Subjects that did not belong to the profile of an economist had to be abandoned. The faculty started the process of accreditation in 1991. The first accredited program was the Management and Economics that prepares business economists or marketing managers. It has been the key program of the faculty for nearly 20 years. It creates a brand that attracts students to the faculty. In 1992, the Economic Informatics program was launched. The aim of this program was to prepare professionals in information systems and technologies. Finally, the Finance program was accredited in 1996. This program prepares professionals to operate in the finance and capital markets, public administration or tax advisory. These programs are well accepted until now and can be studied at all three levels – bachelor, master and doctoral. The Management and Economics program is taught also in English at all levels. The students of the English program are paying foreign students, Erasmus exchange students and Czech students who pay for the program. In all three mentioned programs, it is also possible to apply for docent (associate professor) and professor recognition.

The most important factor of the success of every educational institution is the quality of education. For this reason, the faculty has been accepting only a limited number of students considering the human and material resources of the faculty. Since 2004, the faculty has moved to the newly built premises. The "Q" building provides offices, 3 auditoriums, 8 computer lecture rooms and 27 lecture rooms. To control the quality of educational process, the faculty runs an evaluation system. This system gathers the feedback from students, graduates and employers.

What determines the quality of education is its content and the abilities of lecturers along with the relevant organization within the study programs. Three-level study programs, the credit system (ECTS), the module composition, the categorization of modules into compulsory and facultative modules, the compulsory English modules and the university information system are the essential part of the education at the faculty. Also due to this, there are nearly 4 000 students at the faculty.

What makes a difference between the university and other educational institutions is the research activity. Let us admit that in the 90's, this activity was placed behind the preparation of new syllabi. The significant change came in 2000. The faculty joined the programs of the Czech Science Foundation, the National Agency of Agriculture Research, the Tempus, Jean Monnet, the European Social Fund and obtained funding for its Research Plan for the Years 2004–2010. The research financed by these funds provides sources for specialized activities, topics of many diploma and doctoral theses that enable the professional growth. The indicator of importance of obtaining the grants is the volume of financial sources. It is about 30% of all the financial sources of the faculty every year. The faculty supports research activities by running the research centre. The research centre was founded in 2007. Its objective is to coordinate the grant application processes and support young researchers.

It is also necessary to mention the success of the university information system. It started in the second half of the 90's as the faculty information system. Its high standard and applications led to the decision of the university to introduce the system to other faculties in 2000. It is also commercially successful. Now, the same information system runs at four other universities.

The faculty has adjusted the organizational structure according to the needs of its educational and research activities. The structure of departments changed in 1996. As mentioned before, in that year, the faculty also adjusted the study programs. The organizational structure has remained the same. There is only one

exception. The Department of Economics was established in 2001, as there was a strong need to deal with the applied economic sciences. Currently, there are 9 departments, 1 research centre and 115 lecturers (including 11 professors, 18 docents, 57 senior lecturers). The biggest problem of the faculty is the age and qualification structure of its lecturers. The faculty supports increasing the level of the qualification structure as much as possible but the age structure problem remains. The 40–55 age groups are nearly missing. Fortunately, the situation is getting better. The younger age group has a huge potential and the qualification structure of this group is satisfactory. The average age of the big group of senior lecturers is 36 years. The faculty also successfully faces the fact that some lecturers have left to become members of the new Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies.

The faculty has to face a strong competition. It is necessary to get publicity, to attract new students and to be in everyday contact with the potential employers. To provide important contacts among students, the graduates and firms, the faculty has established the PR department.

Priorities of the faculty are based on the documents of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the CR. The faculty should educate qualified and flexible graduates who are open to the further study and acceptable in the European labour market. On the other hand, the faculty should also educate the big group of students who want to study at the university but whose abilities enable them to reach only the lower university degrees.

The long-term priorities are as follows:

1. Open access to the university for everyone who complies with the acceptance criteria while keeping up the quality of education.
2. Focus on talented students who have the potential for future research work.
3. Offering a variety of specialized modules and foreign student mobilities.
4. Supporting information technologies, electronic communication and e-learning (to be used for the distance study and the individual study forms).
5. Enhancing the knowledge by conducting research.
6. Including the knowledge of practice into the study programs and supporting analytical skills of students.
7. Considering the lecturers and students as the main actors of the education process.

Students are an integral part of the lecturing and research activities of their teachers and together,

as equal partners, they build the good name of the faculty.

Competences of students we declare by the demanded profile of the graduate. However, do we know the competences of the university lecturers? Let us list these competences:

- The possibility and necessity to perform the research activity as the primary activity of a university lecturer. Research differentiates a university lecturer from the others – the people who only interpret the words of other people. Research is an everyday work even though the results come out much later. Let students be our first opponents and younger colleagues.
- The possibility to educate students and to build their professional profile. This possibility requires

excellent lecturing skills and the ability to attract students. It should not be replaced by excessive demands of the teachers.

- The duty and right of the teacher is to contribute to the character of students by doing simple things – a fair and polite behaviour. We have to answer the question: Are we able to listen to the students? Are we able to answer their questions? Are we able to perceive a student as an equal entity?

The success of the educational institution is based on commitments, not on rights.

Let us wish the faculty a lot of success in its future educational and research activities and we hope that the good name of the faculty that has been built in past 50 years will remain good also in the future.

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