Alumni news of the University of Nova Gorica

April 2012
The University of Nova Gorica shall celebrate its 17th anniversary this year. A long journey is behind us, our successes have been numerous and the number of alumni of the University of Nova Gorica has exceeded 650.

The credit of founding the Alumni Club of the University of Nova Gorica association and organising past reunions is due to the Club’s founding members. Following an increase in the number of our alumni, we have reached the decision to give our Alumni Club a professional character, which shall enable us to deliver information in a more efficient way as well as to create new connections and re-establish contacts between you and your university. In autumn 2012 we are thus planning to organise the first official alumni reunion.

The history of the University of Nova Gorica dates back to 1995, when the Faculty of Environmental Sciences, the first international graduate school in Slovenia, was founded by the Municipality of Nova Gorica and the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana. Due to the implementation of new study programmes and the extending of its scientific and research activities, in 1998 our institution underwent structural changes and was renamed the Nova Gorica Polytechnic. The latter changed its status in 2006 and became the University of Nova Gorica.

The University of Nova Gorica offers undergraduate and postgraduate education and is involved activities in research and development, as well as in the transfer of technologies into a business environment. Research activities take place in five laboratories, three centres and one institute. Moreover, a new laboratory and a centre will be opened shortly. Study programmes of all three Bologna system lev-
els are carried out by six schools offering study programmes of first and second levels, and the Graduate School. More information about the current issues and our past activities follows. The University of Nova Gorica is also the co-founder of the Primorska Technology Park and the Edvard Rusjan Foundation, the only university foundation in Slovenia. The Edvard Rusjan Foundation promotes the development of educational and research activities at the University of Nova Gorica and raises funds for providing financial support to ensure the improvements in the development and infrastructure at the University of Nova Gorica. In the future, the foundation is also expected to provide funds for scholarships awarded to promising students, provided that enough donations are received.

Since 2010, the University of Nova Gorica has been the owner of a 16-hectare University Estate called Vilina. Its vineyards lie in the upper Vipava Valley, at two different locations ideal for winegrowing. At present, the Estate predominantly focuses on traditional varieties native to the local winegrowing area. The University’s active involvement in research projects and the European Union study exchange schemes is also to be noted. There has also been an increase in the number of exchanges of teaching staff and students within the renowned Erasmus Mundus programme.

Since English is the language of instruction at our postgraduate programmes, the latter are also popular among foreign students, who represent 26 countries and over 50% of the total number of postgraduate students enrolled in the 2011/2012 academic year. The University offers an attractive working environment for foreign scientists and teaching staff and as a result, the number of foreign experts becoming the University’s staff members has been increasing steadily, currently making up 21% of the total number of employees.

Special attention is devoted to acquiring new knowledge and experience through performing practical work at various businesses, where many of our graduates find jobs upon completion of their studies. Our students thus have an opportunity to be in constant and direct touch with practice. Our students are encouraged to take part in international exchanges, based on the agreements with numerous European universities participating in the Erasmus programme. We have always kept close contacts with foreign universities and launched joint study programmes. Since 2011, our Career Centre has been offering our students assistance in job-seeking activities and has organised various workshops and seminars.

The University of Nova Gorica has been striving to provide appropriate premises for its teaching activities, which represented a real challenge in the past. The Lanthieri mansion in Vipava is currently under renovation and in the following academic year it shall become home to the School for Viti-culture and Enology. A future project of highest importance in terms of the development of our institution is the constructing of a new campus and students’ residences. These improvements in infrastructure shall undoubtedly contribute to the international recognition of the University as a renowned scientific and educational institution.

It is our pleasure to be able to share the news about the University’s progress with you, alumni. We are aware of the fact that you can act as our best “ambassadors”, promoting the University worldwide through your own achievements. On this occasion, we would like to invite you to become an active member contributing to the University’s development. There are numerous ways of doing it, including offering financial support to the Edvard Rusjan Foundation, whose aim is to ensure the financial means as well as other types of support for the activities and the development of the University of Nova Gorica. Our goals can only be reached with the help of people, businesses and alumni, who, in the same manner as we do, believe in our institution and support it to ensure its long-term development.

Prof. Dr. Danilo Zavrtanik
Rector of University of Nova Gorica
Rector
prof. dr. Danilo Zavrtanik

Vice-rector for research
prof. dr. Gvido Bratina

Vice-rector for education
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prof. dr. Tanja Urbančič
prof. dr. Matjaž Valant
doc. dr. Branka Mozetič Vodopivec
doc. dr. Katja Mihurko Poniž
prof. Boštjan Potokar
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prof. dr. Giorgio Margaritondo, EPFL, Switzerland
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prof. dr. Corrado Sarzanini, University of Torino, Italy
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Student representative Jana Gregorič
Schools
School of Engineering and Management

Dean: Prof. Dr. Tanja Urbančič
The School of Engineering and Management has been producing human resources in the field of industrial engineering since 1998. The period between 2006 and 2008 represented an important turning point in the School’s history, as the new study programme Industrial Engineering was launched. At present, it is still being carried out on the first (undergraduate) and second (master’s) levels.

Recently, the number of students enrolled in the master’s programme has been rising steadily and consequently the School admitted the maximum number of students (30) into the study programme last year.

In 2008, the School participated in the external evaluation performed by the Senate for Evaluation of the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia. The commission’s report, fully accessible at http://www.ung.si/si/o-univerzi/kakovost/, points out a remarkably modern approach to the developing of study programmes, extremely good cooperation between the students and the teaching staff, as well as the opportunity for the students to work in small groups as part of various courses.

Our students’ achievements are often considered to be an important measure of our success. Some students were successful as early as during the course of their studies, for example by reaching the finals at the Podjetna Primorska entrepreneurial contest, or by being awarded for their diploma and master’s theses by various businesses (Trimo, SID banka). We have been constantly following our graduates, whose number by now exceeded the number 300, in their further careers. The broad profile of industrial engineers guarantees a wide range of employment possibilities and according to the data of November 2011, the employment rate had been 94.12 % within 12 months after the students’ graduation. Due to the fact that industrial engineer is a relatively new profession, a lot is still to be done in terms of its public recognition, therefore we have been presenting it to the prospective future employers. Changes can, however, be noticed as certain human resource scholarships, offered by various businesses, have been advertised in search for students of Industrial Engineering. In addition, individual businesses have been addressing their enquiries to our University and expressing their needs for industrial engineers.

Our School also has other important tasks to perform – to nurture its links to the local environment and follow international trends. The student project topics are selected by taking into account the interests of businesses, other institutions and local communities. Such an example is the joint project on the potentials in the development of the lower Vipava Valley, which was also documented in the form of a TV-programme. Erasmus study exchanges have also gained in popularity. We have thus regularly been receiving foreign incoming students, and, on the other hand, our students have also become interested in spending outgoing mobility periods abroad. Foreign students from the bordering Italian region, who are otherwise enrolled in study programmes at other institutions, can also gain an opportunity to participate in individual projects run in cooperation with the Slov.I.K. institution. We are also involved in the international project »Teaching, research, innovation in computing education«.

Our School is pleased to learn about new ways of establishing and maintaining connections with our graduates, some of whom have already become tutors to the new generations of students of the School of Engineering and Management. This, however, by no means implies that all the possibilities have been exploited, therefore we would appreciate each new appeal to cooperate, which shall help us reach the goals we have set with less effort.
School of Environmental Sciences

Dean: Prof. Dr. Matjaž Valant
So far, the number of graduates at the university study programme Environment has reached 89, while 9 graduates have completed the first-level study programme Environment. In total, 95 ecologists have earned their degrees at our School. Each year, the students who, besides showing continuous progress during their studies, were the first among their colleagues of the same generation to earn a degree are presented the *Alumnus Primus* award. Another award, *Alumnus Optimus*, is presented to the students obtaining the highest annual general grade average. These awards undoubtedly unlock many a door to the students in search for employment.

The School of Environmental Sciences is involved in numerous activities, of which working on an international scale as well as student project work are of a particular interest to our students.

As a part of the study programme curriculum, the students of the first-level study programme Environment are involved in the so-called Joint Project, which is carried out in the 3rd year of studies. The aim of the project is to learn basic research methods. Students work in groups and deal with various databases, scientific literature, information systems and perform research in laboratories. They are expected to develop critical thinking and thus be able to suggest solutions to the problem selected. They are also taught the basic concepts of research work: why to select a particular problem, what consequences and damage arise as a result, how to solve a problem and what benefits this shall bring. They can themselves experience the advantages and disadvantages of team work and develop a sense of responsibility towards other group members. The following Joint Projects are currently being carried out: Nanomaterials as anthropogenic pollutants, Solar power plant in a desolate quarry, Cell-mediated response to environmental stressors, Plastic waste in the Slovenian Littoral, and Ponds in the Karst region.

The School of Environmental Sciences has signed 18 Erasmus bilateral agreements, three of which were signed in the 2010/2011 academic year – the agreement with the Novia University of Applied Sciences from Finland, the Hedmark University College from Norway and the agreement with the Università degli Studi di Firenze from Italy. Each year we host foreign incoming Erasmus students, while our students also take part in study exchanges abroad. In the 2010/2011 academic year, our undergraduate students spent their outgoing Erasmus mobility periods at the following foreign universities:

- Roskilde University (Denmark),
- University of Perpignan (France),
- University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Duro, Vila Real (Portugal),
- University of Brasov (Romania).
School of Humanities

Dean: Doc. Dr. Katja Mihurko Poniž, Assistant Professor
In the 2011/2012 academic year, the School of Humanities runs four study programmes: the first-level study programmes Slovene Studies and Cultural History and the second-level study programmes Slovene Studies and Migrations and Intercultural Relations. In the 2010/2011 academic year, a new division, Literary Science, was launched within the second-level study programme Slovene Studies, while more foreign students enrolled in the Linguistics division of the same study programme.

We are extremely proud to announce that in the 2011/2012 academic year our master’s study programme Migrations and Intercultural Relations was run within the frame of the renowned higher-education Erasmus Mundus programme, promoting international cooperation, including international exchanges of students and staff members. The European Commission has considered our programme to be unique due to its interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives.

Through its four study programmes and its research activities, the School of Humanities has been striving to accomplish its mission to contribute to a tolerant intercultural dialogue in this border area. Our linguists involved in the JezikLingua cross-border project run an online consulting service for the Slovene language (Spletna jezikovna svetovalnica za slovenski jezik), whose main target audience are the inhabitants of the local area, the meeting point of two languages – Slovene and Italian.

In cooperation with the psychologists of the University of California, San Diego, our linguists, professors and students have been taking part in a joint project, whose aim is to study the connections between language and general cognitive abilities; while together with the linguists of the University College London they have been involved in a project in the field of psycholinguistics, studying the linguistic models of agreement. Moreover, within the joint project run together with the psycholinguists of the University of Leipzig, the roles of recursion and hierarchy in language are being studied.

In the recent years, the School of Humanities has organised numerous international symposia, dedicated either to Ljubka Šorli, poet and cultural worker from the Primorska region, to Damir Feigel, poet, or to the popular genres in the Slovene literature and the female authors in the 19th-century literatures of small nations. We have once again brought the »Škrabec’s Days« (Škrabčevi dnevi) to life by organising this event at the University of Nova Gorica in April 2011.

In addition, each September we run our traditional seminar »Literature at the Matura Examination« (Književnost na maturi), attended by a large number of teachers of Slovene. The lecturers at our School are involved in numerous international projects, our literary historians are active members of the COST action, Women writers in history, financed by the European Science Foundation.
School of Applied Sciences

Dean: Prof. Dr. Gvido Bratina
The School of Applied Sciences offers study programmes in the fields of natural sciences and technology. Since 2007, the School has been running the first-level study programme *Engineering Physics*, as well as the second-level study programme *Experimental Physics*, both of which had been launched to create a link between basic research activities in laboratories, and, on the other hand, applied research in industry and medicine. The lecturers are top-level experts who have achieved international success in various fields of physics, such as solid states, basic particles, electro- and thermodynamics and the mechanics of fluids.

An example of a noteworthy achievement is that of Dr. Gregor Veble, Assistant Professor, who together with the development group of the Pipistrel, d. o. o. company, won the first prize at the CAFE NASA Green Flight Challenge 2011, having constructed the best energy-efficient electric light aircraft.

The School of Applied Sciences has been trying to implement modern teaching methods into our system of higher education, focusing on meeting the needs of development departments in high-technology industries and research laboratories. Both study programmes in the field of physics are thus practically oriented, and teach yet the first-level students to search for practical solutions beyond the frames of individual sciences, while second-level students obtain a deeper insight into this science, which enables them to either pursue academic careers or start individual careers at the development departments of various high-tech businesses.

An advantage of studying physics at the School of Applied Sciences is the limited enrolment policy, which ensures high-quality research work in our laboratories and centres. Our students regularly take part in lidar research activities, perform research in the fields of organic semi-conductors, quantum optics and astrophysics of basic particles, and take part in widely recognised activities, such as the measurements of the content of volcanic ashes in the atmosphere in Slovenia in 2010 as a result of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano eruption. So far, three students have successfully completed their first-level studies, while one student has graduated at our second-level study programme. All our graduates have either found employment or decided to continue with their studies at the University of Nova Gorica or abroad.
School for Viticulture and Enology

Dean: Doc. Dr. Branka Mozetič Vodopivec, Assistant Professor
The first-level vocational study programme Viticulture and Enology was first launched in the 2005/2006 academic year and the 7th generation of students was enrolled in the programme this academic year. The current number of students enrolled is 35 in all three years, in addition to 4 students in the process of graduation. So far, 7 students have successfully defended their diploma theses, while 13 more diploma theses are being written by students of the previous generations.

The School has unfortunately been facing a decrease in the number of the students enrolled. Consequently, we have launched various activities to promote our study programme and attract prospective students. Our graduates, who are now active in the fields of viticulture and enology, have also made significant contributions to the School’s wider recognition.

The teaching activities take place at the University’s Centre in Ajdovščina, where various facilities such as lecture rooms, a computer room and well-equipped laboratories are available. In the future, the School will be moving into new premises, the renovated Lanthieri mansion in Vipava. The reconstruction works are being coordinated by the Municipality of Vipava, which had been allocated funding for the renovation of the mansion by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and by the European Union. The renovation works are expected to be completed by November 2012, when the teaching activities of the School for Viticulture and Enology shall begin at this new location. The Lanthieri mansion shall also house the Wine Research Centre and the University Estate Vilina. In 2010, we started to cultivate grapevines in our vineyards in Podraga and Manče (7 ha), as well as in Lože (9 ha). A year later, we thus established a new unit, the University Estate Vilina, which is run by our first graduate, Nika Gregorič, together with the estate manager. At the University Estate, student practical training takes place, in addition to the practical activities which our students perform at various locations owned by our 26 partners.

Our students also boast with remarkable achievements at international competitions. At this year’s students’ competition in the sensory evaluation of wines, organised in Paris as a part of the Paris Agricultural Show 2012, our 3rd year student Mitja Turk earned 4th place.

As a part of the students’ practical training, the fifth Students’ Wine Festival shall be organised. This year, the students of other study programmes of the University of Nova Gorica as well as the students of other high-school institutions involved in viticulture and enology shall also be invited to attend the event. The festival shall take place on 24th May 2012.
School of Arts

Dean: Prof. Boštjan Potokar, Academic Sculptor
The School of Arts was founded in 2008 and has been active in its networking activities in Slovenia as well as abroad. In cooperation with the partner universities from Rijeka, Graz and Udine, it has been coordinating the ADRIART Erasmus project, whose goal is to establish an international second-level programme in the field of arts, the pilot launch of the programme is expected to take place in autumn 2012.

The students of the aforementioned universities learn about the uncovered aspects of Venice within the HiLoVy Intensive Erasmus programme – a two-week workshop on documentaries, organised in Venice and supervised by Rajko Grlić, renowned film director of international acclaim. The documentaries created at the last year’s workshop shall soon enter various film festivals.

In 2011, the School took part in the cross-border project »Researchers’ Night« (Noč raziskovalcev), bringing Dr. Peter Purg, Assistant Professor at the School of Arts, the award Prometj znaniosti za odiščnost v komuniciranju, presented by the Slovenian Science Foundation. Within this event, seven short documentaries about the work of scientists at the University of Nova Gorica were made and the public video contest RoL: Researchers – ordinary people (of unusual professions) was organised. In March 2012, we shall, together with the Planet Siol net portal, organise the fourth public Videorajd contest, which each time focuses on a different socially engaging topic. The contest is special due to the fact that the selected videos are shown on the displays in the city busses in Ljubljana.

The teaching activities, which are closely connected with the public sphere, also involve organising regular semester and annual exhibition of students’ works of art. Moreover, for the fourth time in a row, the Students’ Committe of the School has presented the Award of the University of Nova Gorica for student animated movies at the Animateka international festival of animated movies. The School has also taken part in the Komiža New Media Port Summer School on the island of Vis in Croatia, while the vŠUM project is also worth mentioning. Within the frame of the latter, our last year’s edition was hosted at CUK Kino Šiška, as well as at the Kiblix intermedia art festival in Maribor. This year’s edition shall be presented at the School’s next public event – Prvi odvod vŠUM_012 v CUK, taking place at Kino Šiška in Ljubljana on Thursday, 12th April 2012. More information about the School’s events, our students and alumni can be found at the public e-platform or in the newsletter of the School of Arts, to which you can subscribe.
Graduate School

Dean: Prof. Dr. Iztok Arčon
In the past academic year, the Graduate school, which comprises all PhD programmes of the University of Nova Gorica, launched a new PhD programme in the field of cognitive sciences, Linguistics, increasing the number of the third-level programmes to seven. In the past years, the majority of students have been enrolled in the programmes Environmental and Comparative Studies of Ideas and Cultures. Currently, there are 133 PhD students enrolled in various PhD programmes.

So far, 79 students have obtained a PhD degree at our institution, further 20 students have successfully completed special training programmes, while 46 students have obtained a scientific master’s degree according to pre-Bologna study programmes. All students are given the opportunity to perform their research work at the research units of the University of Nova Gorica, as well as at partner research institutions across Slovenia and abroad.

All PhD programmes are internationally oriented. Cases of such long-term close cooperation in the field of PhD programmes launched on an international scale are the programmes Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology, which is being carried out in close cooperation with the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) in Trieste, and the programme Economics and Techniques for the Conservation of the Architectural and Environmental Heritage, run together with the University IUAV in Venice, the University of Naples and the University of Udine. The majority of students of the aforementioned two programmes are foreign. Other study programmes have also been facing an increase in the number of foreign students enrolled, who currently make up more than a half of all students.

The high quality of the students’ research work is reflected in their numerous publications in acknowledged international journals, in their innovations, as well as in cases of the successful transfer of knowledge into the economy. Each PhD student publishes at least one scientific article. Numerous student awards also prove the quality and the contemporaneousness of our PhD programmes. Last year, Robert Vertnik, former student of the study programme Physics, received an international award for his PhD thesis, written under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Božidar Šarler. His thesis was ranked among 20 best theses in Europe in the aforementioned field.

Another interesting case is that of our former student from Brazil, who earned his PhD degree at our study programme Karstology last year. This year, he was appointed member of teaching staff at his home university in Brazil and implemented a new study programme.

The University of Nova Gorica aims to make all its PhD programmes accessible to all students who show interest and talent for research work, therefore it has established various scholarship schemes to help students co-finance their studies.