

## **Staying the course. The Faculty of Philosophy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin as the leading one in this field of study in Poland**

**By the decision of the presidium of the State Accreditation Committee, whose mission is to safeguard the standards and improve the quality of Polish higher education, of 8<sup>th</sup> December 2011 the Faculty of Philosophy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin was granted the rare quality category 'Distinction'. This is the first and only so highly-assessed philosophical course in our country. "The credit for receiving such a high category goes to all those people, who have been making up The Faculty of Philosophy community – its academics, administrative staff, and students as well" said Rev. Prof. S. Janeczek, The Faculty of Philosophy Dean, when he received this decision.**

The State Accreditation Committee (SAC) is a legal body working for the quality of education, defining its tasks and its working procedures. Its reports highlight good practices and contain recommendations to help to improve quality across the higher education sector and to develop reference points and resources, which universities use to guide their policies for maintaining academic standards, as well as to help people to make a choice about where to study. The peer reviewers on its review teams have recent experience in higher education. Each team also includes student and PhD student reviewers. The SAC has the status of a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The distinction category is based on the inspection carried out by the SAC review team in 2008, after which the Faculty of Philosophy received a very good appraisal for 2009-2014. This appraisal reflects the way the Faculty of Philosophy assures academic standards and quality in the scope of the academics' competence, qualifications and research development (also in the international context), of programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide, of the ability to set and manage the strategic goals of higher education and the quality improving framework, taking into consideration the graduates' careers and the academic infrastructure. The highest evaluation mark – the Distinction – is awarded after the evaluation of all (or most of) the academic centres offering the same field of study. Its aim is to indicate those universities and fields of study that have worked out distinguished conceptions of studies and provide the best means to improve their quality.

Awarding the 'Distinction' the SAC claimed that "The Faculty of Philosophy is one of the pillars of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, and has a good reputation both in Poland and abroad. The philosophers working there were of great intellectual and organizational importance at this university, since philosophy was treated comprehensively there and included all of its traditional subfields. The development of philosophy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin was determined not only by the wide range of studies conducted by talented academics, but also by the activity of distinguished thinkers who have shaped the Lublin School of Classical Philosophy. A characteristic feature of The Faculty of Philosophy is the harmonization of philosophy and the natural sciences."

The research quality recognition mentioned in the SAC resolution confirms the latest evaluation of academic centres for 2005-2009. In the evaluation the Faculty of Philosophy has obtained the highest category. The Faculty's staff engaged in research activity – numerous publications and participation in the actual academic discussions (also on an international level) – determined this success. The academics' cooperation with foreign scientific centres is not limited to scholarships and research visits or membership in professional organizations, but it has a bilateral dimension. Philosophers of international renown not only take part in conferences organized by the Faculty of Philosophy, but they are the Scientific Council of the *Annals of Philosophy* members and they give lectures that are part of philosophical courses

(also of PhD studies). The most important lectures are the Jacek Woroniecki Memorial Lectures and the Stanisław Kamiński Memorial Lectures. Established in 2001 by Prof. E. A. Lekka-Kowalik the Stanisław Kamiński Memorial Lectures gather world-class specialists such as Barry Smith (SUNY, Buffalo), Richard Swinburne (Oxford University), John Searle (University of California, Berkeley), Peter Simons (University of Leeds), Simon Blackburn (University of Cambridge), Susan Haack (University of Miami), Peter van Inwagen (University of Notre Dame), William Sweet (St Thomas University), Linda Zagzebski (University of Oklahoma) and Eleonore Stump (St Louis University).

Beside the Faculty academics' activity, the SAC has appreciated several advantages of studying philosophy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. Not only the programmes of studies and learning outcomes or the quality of the educational programme, but also the students' research, public and cultural activities were assessed positively. Reviewers have emphasized the major role of philosophical education: "Philosophical studies teach how to think critically and stimulate unconventional thinking affecting creativity, which abilities are essential for any profession. The graduates often find a job easier than their peers who graduate from courses associated in popular opinion with the *career*." Moreover, the SAC has valued the specificity of the philosophical programmes at our University: "undergraduate and graduate programmes not only equip students with general knowledge, but also develop their inquiring minds. Students acquire skills involved in sound argumentation, precise writing, critical reading, analytical thinking, and a clear expression of ideas. It is not insignificant that philosophy is helpful in developing a rational worldview and could be associated with natural sciences." Besides that the Faculty of Philosophy has a strong focus on the educational offer. The doctoral studies are essential in this context; there are 147 PhD students in the academic year 2011/2012. An honour to our Faculty is, which was noticed by the SAC, that many academics working at the Polish departments of philosophy come from the Faculty of Philosophy of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. In some departments they constitute its hard cores.

The role of the Faculty of Philosophy placed in the University mission context was worth noting by the SAC. This mission is determined by "research concentrated on the analysis of the mutual relationship between natural sciences and religious faith, education and bringing up Catholic intellectuals as well as contributing to Christian culture." The SAC has noticed that the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in the Polish People's Republic was a university of great significance: "it was a defender of ideological independence, free philosophical and social thinking." The reviewers have emphasized the history of the Faculty, as well as its great personalities with Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II) in particular. Above all they have stressed the Faculty's crystallized identity manifested in the attention paid to "the high level of research and academic education, deepening and propagating Christian view of man and the world in the context of contemporary challenges, taking care of preservation and development of precious traditions and forming the younger generation in this way."