ATHEA Accreditation Report

on

United International Business Schools (UIBS)
(name since updated to United Institute)

Brandschenkestrasse 38

Zurich, Switzerland

https://www.unitedinstitute.education/

https://uibs.org/index.php

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Executive Summary

United International Business Schools (UIBS) is a business school operated since 2002 by local subsidiaries of Global Education Corporation (GLEDCO) in 6 countries and across 9 campuses. Several degree and non-degree programs are offered leading to private Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees awarded by our main campus in Zurich, Switzerland. Several programs hold programmatic accreditation, and several campuses hold institutional certification from local quality assurance agencies.

UIBS was granted ATHEA Candidacy Status by the Board of Commissioners on May 17, 2021. The information in this report is based on the United International Business Schools' Accreditation Application (self-study submitted December 2022).

A site-visit team consisting of an academic (Dr. Matthew Andrews – site visit chair), an international expert in higher education (Dr. Cormac O'Keefe), a student (Maryam Nader), and the executive director of ATHEA (Oliver Olson, as an observer) conducted an on-site site visit on April 3 and 4th, 2023. Key members of the staff at UIBS participated in-person while staff based in other countries, such as Antwerp, Amsterdam, Barcelona and Milan, participated remotely. Faculty and students participated remotely. The ATHEA evaluators met with institute's leadership team, administrators, faculty, and students; the evaluators examined supporting documentation and sought clarification on relevant items from the self-study report. The Board of Commissioners concluded that UIBS fulfilled the critical criteria for accreditation and thus met all 10 of the accreditation standards; the Board of Commissioners has provided both recommendations for improvement and commendations for exemplary performance.

Section I - Introduction and context

Section 1.1. Institutional background and context

United International Business Schools (UIBS) is a business school operated since 2002 by local subsidiaries of Global Education Corporation (GLEDCO) in 6 countries and across 9 campuses. Several degree and non-degree programs are offered leading to private Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees awarded by our main campus in Zurich, Switzerland. Several programs hold programmatic accreditation, and several campuses hold institutional certification from local quality assurance agencies.

Section 1.2. Accreditation Self-Study

The Accreditation Self-Study was provided by: Camila Cepeda, Sarah Williamson and Thierry Kirschstein.

Section 1.3. Members of the Site-Visit team

Site-Visit Chair – Dr. Matthew Andrews, Dean & Director of Doctoral Research, International School of Management, Paris.

Site-Visit Faculty Member – n/a

Site-Visit Administrator – Oliver W. Olson, Executive Director, ATHEA

Site-Visit Student – Dr. Maryam Nader, International School of Management

Site-Visit International Expert – Dr. Cormac O'Keefe, Director of Education, Ironhack

Section 1.4. The site-visit

Site-Visit – Date: April 3rd and 4th, 2023

Section II - Assessment of each standard

Introduction

This section is limited to a summary of the findings from the Site-Visitor's report. See Section III for the recommendations and commendations made by the Board of Commissioners.

Standard 1 - Policy for Quality Assurance

Summary

The institution has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of the institution's strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this strategy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. This policy should be included in the institution's strategic planning process. All transnational activities of the institution including joint programmes, partnership arrangements, branch campuses, etc. should also be included within the policy for quality assurance.

Background information and analysis

UIBS's commitment to quality assurance is evident through its 360-degrees approach, involving internal and external stakeholders. The use of the PDCA cycle reflects a systematic and continuous improvement process. The involvement of students, alumni, professors, and various boards ensures a comprehensive perspective in monitoring and enhancing academic and non-academic activities. UIBS recognizes the importance of internal and external stakeholders. The institution actively engages with students, alumni, professors, and various advisory boards. The inclusion of feedback from these stakeholders contributes to the institution's responsiveness and adaptability. UIBS emphasizes its commitment to a culturally diverse student body and actively works to prevent intolerance and discrimination. The presence of a detailed Code of Conduct and a Policy Statement of Commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion demonstrates the institution's focus on creating an inclusive learning environment. UIBS offers a range of business and management programs at different academic levels, addressing credit requirements in various countries. The institution's adaptation to different education systems, such as offering foundation programs and dual bachelor options, showcases flexibility in meeting diverse student needs. In summary, UIBS appears to be a globally-minded institution with a strong commitment to quality assurance, stakeholder engagement, diversity, and program flexibility. The institution's approach to accreditation and collaboration reflects its strategic goals for sustained growth and excellence in education.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 2 - Design and Approval of Academic Programmes

Summary

The institution has processes for the design and approval of their academic programmes. The programmes are designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme is clearly specified and communicated, and referred to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Background information and analysis

Internal stakeholders include students, alumni, professors, Academic Council members, and Board of Directors members. External stakeholders encompass academic partners, employers, certifiers, accreditors, and professional associations. The institution employs self-assessment, external reviews, and audits for a robust quality assurance system.

Course evaluations and meetings with students and professors identify areas for improvement. Local staff and the Curriculum Committee collaborate to implement solutions. The Board of Advisors, integral to the process, reviews and approves structural or content-related proposals. New program proposals involve extensive desk research and feedback from an Advisory Board, which serves to provide industry-related feedback. Approved proposals are tracked for implementation, ensuring continual improvement and alignment with the institution's goals.

Recommendations for quality improvement

UIBS should seek ways to reduce the broad scope of responsibilities of the academic coordinator position which currently includes a very wide range of operational, student services and academic areas. To achieve this, UIBS should either add more staff resources or allocate certain tasks to other existing positions and/or teams.

Standard 3 - Student-Centred Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

Summary
The institution's academic programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and the assessment of student learning reflects this approach.

Background information and analysis

The institution employs a comprehensive assessment strategy that includes diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, and summative assessments. Students must be very active in their own learning; the system allows for flexibility in terms of what students study and how quickly they progress. For the PhD mentoring program, UIBS has implemented a mentor scheme for professors without a doctorate degree, ensuring a second assessor (mentor) is qualified and teaching in the same field. The grading process is standardized at each level, promoting consistency and fair comparisons among student grades. A variety of assessments, including diagnostic, formative, and summative, are conducted, covering a range of individual and group assignments, exams, and projects.

A Final Projects team monitors the quality of final projects, ensuring alignment with specific intended learning outcomes. Turnitin is employed for all assessments, excluding final exams, to verify the originality of student work, promoting academic integrity. The exam week, held at the end of each term, follows detailed guidelines outlined in the Student Guide.

To address concerns and maintain fairness, UIBS has well-documented procedures for appeals and complaints, both clearly explained in the Student Guide. This commitment to openness and procedural clarity reinforces UIBS's dedication to providing a fair and supportive academic environment for its students.

Reommendations for quality improvement

UIBS should improve guidelines and processes for giving feedback to students.

Commendations for quality improvement

The Athea Board of Commissioners commends UIBS on its agile multi-campus, transnational educational model which provides a flexible learning experience to students and effective individual student follow up.

Standard 4 - Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification

Summary
The institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations and policies covering all phases of the student "life cycle" including student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

Background information and analysis

Admissions Department at UIBS warmly welcomes qualified students from diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and religions, emphasizing a commitment to non-discrimination throughout the admission process. The transparent admission requirements and procedures are clearly articulated on our website and in the Admission Catalogues. The evaluation of new applicants commences upon the receipt of their application documents. For Undergraduate students without a high school diploma meeting access-to-higher-education criteria, a Pre-Bachelor Foundation program is available. Graduate students, excluding UIBS Bachelor graduates, are required to take an Inbound Test to identify any knowledge gaps, with Pre-Master courses offered to bridge these gaps before or during the Graduate program. To ensure academic progress, the Office of the Registrar and the local Academic Coordinator conduct regular reviews. All course enrolments and grades are meticulously recorded in our Digital Campus and Data Model. Seamless academic transitions is possible with UIBS policy of Recognition of Prior Learning (https://www.unitedinstitute.education/recognition-of-prior-learning-rpl/). Upon completion of program requirements, students submit a Request for Final Diploma form, accompanied by the Program feedback form and Outbound test. The Office of the Registrar verifies that all requirements are met before issuing the student's diploma. Graduating students receive a comprehensive package including a Diploma, Diploma supplement, and Transcripts.

Commendations for quality improvement

The Board of Commissioners also commends UIBS on its learning platform which effectively facilitates the multi-campus model for students, faculty, and administrators.

Standard 5 - Teaching Staff

Summary
The institution ensures that its teachers, are appropriately qualified and competent to teach the assigned courses. The institution applies fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff. The institution performs research appropriate to the institution's mission.

Background information and analysis

The Careers Department at UIBS, in collaboration with the Academic Department, plays a crucial role in recruiting professors to meet specific course needs. The recruitment process is detailed in the Team Guide, where applicants can submit online forms through the UIBS careers website. Upon application, the Careers Department conducts an initial check and forwards approved applications to the local Academic Coordinator or Curriculum Committee. The applicant's details are securely stored in the UIBS careers database with formal approval. Local evaluators assess candidates based on academic background, qualifications, teaching and corporate experience, and areas of expertise. Successful candidates undergo a first interview, followed by an onboarding meeting if selected, during which school policies are explained, and a UIBS faculty email account is created. New professors undergo a trial period of three quarters, with ongoing evaluation. After confirmation, faculty members become permanent, and teaching rates are adjusted based on qualifications, as outlined in the teaching rate document.

Professors at UIBS are mandated to utilize the Digital Campus for course enrollment, attendance tracking, and grading, while Teams serves as a platform for communication and posting course materials. SharePoint, along with other Office365 apps, facilitates access to the Faculty guide and annexes.

During the challenging circumstances of the coronavirus outbreak, UIBS swiftly transitioned all courses across campuses to a virtual format using the Teams application. The platform's online meeting function enabled live virtual meetings, showcasing the institution's adaptability and resilience in the face of change. UIBS's successful shift to online learning during this period was made possible by the long-standing integration of technology, including the online learning management system, local video conference systems, and the collaborative efforts of its highly international and often remote team of faculty and staff

Recommendations for quality improvement

UIBS should implement a formal process for faculty evaluations.

Standard 6 - Learning Resources and Student Support

Summary
The institution has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and provides adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support

Background information and analysis

UIBS prides itself on its modern and standardized physical resources across all campuses. Main and branch campuses, maintained by the institution, offer various facilities including classrooms, open spaces, offices, lounges, kitchens, and toilets. Access is available to students with a personal badge or access code, ensuring flexibility in some campuses for 24/7 access. Satellite campuses within business centers, part of the Regus and Spaces business center network, provide rented meeting and training rooms. These centers maintain a standardized look worldwide, accommodating UIBS's need for flexibility and growth. Classrooms in all campuses are equipped with high-speed wireless internet, advanced audio-visual tools, comfortable furniture, and spacious tables. Meeting and conference rooms feature high-resolution conference cameras and noise-cancelling speakers for virtual courses and cross-campus meetings. While dedicated computer rooms are not available, students are expected to bring their own laptops.

In the digital realm, UIBS leverages resources such as the ProQuest online library through Office 365 accounts, offering globally accessible and cloud-based platforms for various educational purposes. Professors use Turnitin, a similarity checking software, for assignments and exams, ensuring academic integrity. The Digital Campus is a central hub for course management, including enrollment, attendance, and grading.

The institution has collaborated with JobTeaser to establish a digital career center since February 2019. This platform provides students with access to internship offers, events, company overviews, and recruitment process tips. Emphasis is placed on experiential learning opportunities, including company visits, study trips, internships, research projects, and guest speakers, enhancing the overall educational experience at UIBS.

Recommendations for quality improvements

UIBS should provide structured non-academic services to students in the areas of career support and industry exposure.

A governance committee should be formed to provide oversight of the finances and management of the institution

Standard 7 - Information Management

Summary
The institution collects, analyses, and uses relevant information for the effective management of their academic programs and other institutional activities with appropriate policies and procedures to facilitate clear communication with all stakeholders.

Background information and analysis

UIBS has IT systems and platforms which allow the institute to maintain a data base of its stakeholders and communicate with them; to plan courses and events; to track student progress; They use as usual sharepoint, team, plagirisam software TurnItIn, digital campus etc.

UIBS maintains an open-door policy for existing students, organizing quarterly student meetings to discuss campus themes in Q&A sessions. Meeting minutes are stored on SharePoint, and student suggestions and requests are tracked in the Proposed Changes document, with decisions made by the local Academic Coordinator or jointly with the Dean.

For faculty communication, an annual faculty meeting provides a platform for feedback, policy information, and sharing teaching best practices. Minutes are stored on SharePoint for reference. Course evaluations by students are consolidated and sent to professors, with the Academic Coordinator reviewing and discussing feedback, offering suggestions and support for improvement.

Communication to alumni includes preparing success overviews by the Marketing department for promotional purposes. Alumni receive regular updates through newsletters and invitations to welcome events at each campus every quarter. Regional alumni meetings are advertised through various channels, enhancing engagement through the UIBS website, social media, and newsletters.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 8 - Public Information

Summary
The institution publishes information about its activities, including academic programs, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date, and readily accessible. The institution also publishes information regarding its ethical standards and conduct, community engagement activities, and social responsibilities.

Background information and analysis

Maintaining the website and overseeing public information falls under the purview of the Marketing Department, serving as the primary source of information for the general public. The website is designed to be accessible on mobile devices, ensuring a user-friendly layout for tablets and phones.

In addition to the website, the school's Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts are actively used to share details about daily campus life and various activities. The website's homepage features a social media feed displaying the latest posts. Comprehensive information about UIBS's vision and mission can be found on the institution's "About UIBS" pages. UIBS's website provides comprehensive details on program-specific information, including starting dates, fees, language, credit system, program degrees, and requirements. Each program page showcases relevant programmatic accreditations and rankings. Additionally, the website features a dedicated accreditation, certification, and ranking page. Furthermore, UIBS and its programs are also highlighted on specialized platforms such as TopMBA.com and MasterStudies.com.

The institute publishes its adherence to ethical codes of conduct on its website.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 9 - Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Summary
The institution monitors and periodically reviews their programs to ensure that the programs achieve the objectives set for them and are responsive to the needs of students and society. Periodic reviews lead to continuous improvement of the academic program. Actions planned or taken because of the periodic reviews are communicated to all those concerned. A periodic review is also completed on the comprehensive quality assurance plan.

Background information and analysis

UIBS carefully monitors academic workload and progression through systematic data collection. The Academic Team gathers course evaluation feedback from both students and faculty, emphasizing the assessment of workload. This data is also used to review the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) in regard to the periodic review of programmes. The Registrar department plays a key role in recording and collecting data on enrolled courses, grades, and completed requirements, ensuring students meet graduation criteria. While students are responsible for tracking and fulfilling program requirements, Academic Coordinators provide guidance when needed. The Registrar department conducts a thorough review of student achievements before awarding the final degree, ensuring the completion of academic milestones.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 10 - Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Summary
The institution undergoes external quality assurance in accordance with ATHEA Standards on a cyclical basis.

Background information and analysis

UIBS operates campuses globally, holding the legal right to organize higher education in all cities and countries where campuses are situated. The exception is Milan, where authorization was requested, granted automatically after 6 months without additional inquiries. Degrees are issued by the Zurich headquarters based on faculty recommendations from the relevant campuses. The website and program overviews transparently communicate the private degree status to students. UIBS, as an institution, has no additional educational regulatory requirements to fulfill. Annual compliance reviews, assisted by local law firms, are conducted by the Managing Director or as deemed necessary.

UIBS holds programmatic accreditation for various programs through ECBE and ACBSP, adhering to ENQA Standards and CHEA recognition in the USA, respectively. Institutional certifications for several campuses include CRKBO, KMO-portefeuille, Qfor, BAC and NRTO, with Zurich and Geneva campuses being eduQua-certified. Details and accredited programs can be found on the UIBS website. State recognition efforts are underway for programs in Amsterdam, with regular review visits scheduled for accredited and certified programs and campuses. UIBS also offers a **Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Global Business top-up,** in which students receive an internationally state-recognized degree awarded by Coventry University in the UK.

The Academic Team and Academic Council play pivotal roles in the accreditation process, preparing relevant documents, attending site visits, and conducting internal discussions via Teams. The accreditation process follows a structured plan-do-check-act approach, ensuring thorough documentation and compliance with accreditation requirements. The outcomes of accreditation visits contribute to the global quality assurance plan, guiding future planning phases.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Section III: Summary of Actions Required, Recommendations and Commendations

Action Required

The following actions are required:

By April 30th, 2024, UIBS must meet the following conditions:

- Submission of a full strategic plan relevant for the next three to five years. The strategic plan must provide a coherent framework for goals and objectives in line with the institute's mission. These goals and objectives must be specific, measurable, and include timelines.
- Submission of a quality assurance (outcomes-based assessment) report which makes clear how the institution utilizes data in its decision-making process and how changes are implemented based on that data.

Failure to meet the above conditions may result in the withdrawal of accreditation.
Providing the above conditions are met to the satisfaction of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, accreditation is granted for the full seven-year period starting from May 30, 2023.

UPDATE: All conditions were met on or before April 30, 2024. Full accreditation for 7 years is granted.

Recommendations

- UIBS should seek ways to reduce the broad scope of responsibilities of the academic coordinator position which currently includes a very wide range of operational, student services and academic areas. To achieve this, UIBS should either add more staff resources or allocate certain tasks to other existing positions and/or teams.
- UIBS should provide structured non-academic services to students in the areas of career support and industry exposure. (Standard 6)
- UIBS should improve guidelines and processes for giving feedback to students.
- UIBS should implement a formal process for faculty evaluations.
- A governance committee should be formed to provide oversight of the finances and management of the institution.

Commendations

- The Athea Board of Commissioners commends UIBS on its agile multi-campus, transnational educational model which provides a flexible learning experience to students and effective individual student follow up.
- The Board of Commissioners also commends UIBS on its learning platform which effectively facilitates the multi-campus model for students, faculty, and administrators.

Section IV: Accreditation

By April 30th, 2024, UIBS must meet the following conditions:

- Submission of a full strategic plan relevant for the next three to five years. The strategic plan must provide a coherent framework for goals and objectives in line with the institute's mission. These goals and objectives must be specific, measurable, and include timelines.
- Submission of a quality assurance (outcomes-based assessment) report which makes clear how the institution utilizes data in its decision-making process and how changes are implemented based on that data.

Failure to meet the above conditions may result in the withdrawal of accreditation.
Providing the above conditions are met to the satisfaction of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, accreditation is granted for the full seven-year period starting from May 30, 2023.

Section V: Validity of the accreditation

The accreditation is valid until May 30, 2030 based on the condition that the institution meets the requirements as set forth in Section IV and continues to fulfil the accreditation requirements of ATHEA.

Section VI: Publication requirement

This report will be published at ATHEA's webpages (www.athea.org/publications).

The current accreditation status of the institution will be listed at ATHEA's webpage.

Publisher

This report is published by

Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation

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