

Dr. David G. Horner
Interview to Fortunegreece.gr

FG: You have been in charge of The American College of Greece for more than a decade; during a difficult financial time for the country, you achieved an increase in the number of students. To what do you attribute this?

DH: The total enrollment of The American College of Greece has grown from just over 4,000 students in 2008-09, the year I came to the College, to over 5,700 students this fall. I am pleased not only with this quantitative increase of over 40% but even more with the increase in student quality and diversity. This fall, the middle 50% of entering Deree students have high school leaving scores of 16.8 – 19.1. While the majority continue to be Greek students, we now enroll students from 73 countries. Over 200 U.S. and international universities are sending us students for study abroad. And, we have students enrolled in Parallel Study from every Greek public university. I had the good fortune to inherit a strong institution with an impressive set of resources (financial, facilities, personnel etc.) that gave us competitive advantages and allowed us to focus on longer-term results.

FG: When comparing the Greek and the American educational system, which one works best in your opinion?

DH: The Greek and U.S. systems of higher education are almost polar opposites. The core features of the U.S. system are institutional diversity, institutional autonomy and student choice. The core features of the Greek system are a public monopoly, centralized institutional control and centrally dictated student choice (i.e. the Pan-Hellenic exam system). And, obviously, the U.S. system is English language based; the Greek system is Greek language based. The current Greek government has announced its intention to introduce significant changes to the Greek higher education system; these changes are in the direction of the U.S. features just outlined. While the U.S. system is not perfect, it still is generally recognized as the global gold standard. In my opinion, Greece will be well served by transitioning in that direction.

FG: What do you believe will be the future of private education in Greece?

DH: My hope is that Greece will move in the direction of the U.S. as it relates to private education. Specifically, that would mean seeking to develop a much more robust “non-profit” higher education sector in Greece. While the U.S. has a significant number of “for profit” higher education institutions, many more U.S.

private higher education institutions are “non-profit”, and they enroll a much higher number of students than the “for-profit” institutions. 100% of the most prestigious private universities in the U.S. are “non-profit”, e.g.: Harvard, MIT, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, Tufts, Northwestern, University of Chicago, Stanford. Greece, by contrast, currently has few private, non-profit, higher education institutions. The American College of Greece is one among this small number.

FG: Where will universities focus their attention in the future and what will be the role of AI?

DH: In a world of increased resource competition (e.g. for students, financial support, quality faculty and staff), universities should focus on becoming more relevant to their specific operating contexts. In my view, delivering sustainable value to the students and the communities universities serve is both a moral obligation and a competitive necessity. The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is clearly one of the macro drivers of the knowledge-based global economy and will continue to impact education in various and substantial ways from how administrative work is organized and performed to how educational content is delivered.

FG: What are the benefits of STEM education for students and businesses looking for employees who have developed their soft skills?

DH: Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) education is the foundation for much of the world’s current and projected economic and social advancement. Students in the STEM fields have expansive employment opportunities and represent the “life blood” of technology-based or technology-transformed businesses. At the same time, there is a need for STEM knowledge and skills to be complemented by the “soft skills” developed through study in the arts, humanities and social sciences as well as experiences outside the classroom. The American education model on which The American College of Greece is built is designed to provide this sort of comprehensive, holistic student development.

FG: Do you think Greece has given education the attention it deserves?

DH: I do not think education in Greece has suffered from lack of attention but rather from counterproductive public policy. Some of this policy is unfortunately enshrined in the Greek Constitution (Article 16); some built up over the years to buttress the “Article 16 mindset” e.g.: prohibiting public university professors from

teaching in private higher education institutions in Greece. In my view, Greece's higher education system design was part of the root causes of the Greek economic crisis; reforming that system, therefore, is an essential element in revitalizing the Greek economy.

FG: Considering the rapid change in the medical industry and the crucial role of technology, Deree has added Biomedical studies to its curriculum, a sector that seems to have attracted the students' interest. What do these studies offer in terms of specialization and employability?

DH: Deree's new Biomedical Sciences program will equip students with the academic background to continue graduate or professional studies at universities around the world and fill key positions at hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, research centers, think tanks, and non-profit organizations. The program will incorporate mentoring by international experts and unique internship opportunities. Senior students will also learn the design and execution of clinical studies, an underdeveloped field in Greece. Deree aims to produce a new generation of visionary scientists doing research together to help in the fight against serious diseases, improve the overall health of Greeks and contribute to Greece's economic development.

FG: Which field of knowledge is going to rise in demand in the years to come? What are the new professions that will emerge?

DH: STEM disciplines and the health sciences will likely continue to expand as fields of study as will academic areas connected to major global issues (e.g. climate change). Most of the future professions will be today's professions – doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, psychologists, counselors, consultants, engineers, researchers, managers, entrepreneurs etc. – but new areas of knowledge will produce new jobs as well. I don't trust my "crystal ball" to predict particular new professions, but I do believe that the focus of educational institutions should be on preparing graduates who can adapt to a changing world of work and not just meet current job requirements.

FG: Tell us a few words about the strategic importance of partnering with Clarkson University. Are there any other partnerships on board?

DH: One of the key competitive advantages of The American College of Greece is its connection to the U.S. higher education system. We are building on that connection to form strategic partnerships with various U.S. universities. In the case

of Clarkson, we are partnering with an institution of similar size to ACG but with a focus in STEM education – an academic area that we intend to expand in over the next few years. 85% of Clarkson’s students major in STEM disciplines. Further, Clarkson alumni salaries rank in the top 2% of the highest salaries in the U.S., and one in five alumni leads as a CEO, senior executive or owner of a company. In other words, Clarkson has a very impressive track record in converting STEM studies into economic productivity – not just for the benefit of individual students but society as well. We see this as a perfect fit with our ACG 150 Strategic Plan to leverage education for economic and social impact.

Through our “outbound study” abroad program, Deree students currently have abundant opportunities to study at leading U.S. and other international universities (e.g. Harvard, University of California Berkeley, Stanford, Cornell, University of Virginia, Imperial College London, Emory University, London School of Economics and Political Science). In addition to expanding these opportunities in the future, we expect to selectively add academic partnerships with other U.S. universities with program specializations in areas of strategic focus for the economic growth of Greece.