



Sesto Fiorentino, 12 September 2023

On September 11, 2023, Prof. Alberto Striolo from the University of Oklahoma, a member of the Steering Committee of the Degree Course, held a seminar together with Dr. Sepideh Razavi from the same University at the invitation of Prof. Pierandrea Lo Nostro. On this occasion, an informal meeting was held in the afternoon of the same day, at which Prof. Lo Nostro (chair of the Degree Course (DC), Teaching Commission), Prof. Stefano Cicchi (chair of the DC), and the two invited lecturers were present. Prof. Cicchi briefly outlined the situation of the DC summarizing what the major problems were.

1) limited number of students enrolled

2) difficulty of non-European foreign students to meet deadlines and attend courses profitably.

1) The DC has been the promoter of various initiatives that led, for the year 2023-2024 alone, to the submission of more than 300 applications that were analysed by the teaching committee. Unfortunately, only a fraction, <20%, were accepted on the basis of academic career and even fewer, <10%, passed an online interview. At the time of the meeting already some of the possible candidates had pointed out visa difficulties in arriving in Italy and had to give up their enrolment.

2) The foreign students enrolled in the DC are overwhelmingly non-European, from Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and North-African countries. It is evident from the very beginning of class attendance that the students' preparation is extremely heterogeneous and generally lacking in the experimental aspect. This creates delays in the attainment of educational credits that affect the whole course.

Dr. Sepideh Razavi, who is responsible for her department's enrolment of PhD candidates, noted that this aspect was unavoidable and therefore it was necessary to significantly lighten the teaching load in the first semester. In fact, the need to



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find housing, get used to new surroundings and a different teaching method requires that the pace of teaching activities be, at least for the first semester, slower. Prof. Striolo agrees with this analysis and suggests a revisiting of the teaching activities. In order to increase the internationalization of the DC activities, Prof. Striolo is in favour of hosting students of the Course at the Chemical, Biological, and Materials Engineering Department of the University of Oklahoma to conduct dissertations.

Stefano Cicchi