

9.11.2011

## Department's Comments on the Report of

### The Committee for the Evaluation of Public Policy and Administration

#### Study Programs

#### Ben-Gurion University Evaluation Report

We would like to thank the committee members for their in-depth evaluation, which gives us a sense of our strengths and weaknesses. We believe that this report provides additional depth to the self-evaluation process and will improve the program further. Below we specify our comments regarding the committee's evaluation and recommendations.

We find the report positive in most of its parts. The committee concludes that "*all things considered, BGU has an acceptable record of quantitative productivity and of making contributions to various fields of public policy.*" We plan to further develop our research productivity, focusing on publication in high-ranked professional journals and prestigious publishing houses. This process has already had positive results, as our faculty members publish books in major university presses as well as in leading journals such as JPART, PAR, Administration and Society, Policy Sciences, and others.

The committee mentions that "*[students] stated they had learned that public policy in Israel was made in unattractive ways, and often produced unattractive results, but that changing this was extremely difficult.*" We see this as one of the department's achievements, rather than as a weakness, as may be implied by the committee, because we believe that in order to change and improve decision-making mechanisms in the public sector, students first need to acquire a good understanding of the past and current conduct of Israeli public administration. We provide our students with critical thinking skills and, as discussed below, we intend to expand our courses in public administration with the aim of providing students with additional tools for the implementation of change in the public sector.

The committee also mentions that the department "*has learned the value of a 'special' week devoted to a particular project*". We should emphasize that this route of study has proved most fruitful for students and faculty, since it enables them to interact with top experts – both

academicians and practitioners. The committee observes that "*many faculty members appear to have adapted outside-class preparation expectations to the time students were actually able to spend on preparation, rather than assigning an amount of work that would be more appropriate for fulltime students.*" We would like to emphasize that the fact that students dedicate limited time to learning outside of class derives directly from the fact that they are part-time students who work in the public sector. The department has made a strategic choice to target and attract this population as a way of enriching the public sector with necessary managerial tools. In addition, these students bring with them experience and knowledge that contributes to their study and interaction with teachers and peers. However, we will aim at finding methods to ensure that this fact does not lower the demands or the quality of our program.

Most of the weaknesses identified by the committee have already been recognized by the department and were specified in the self-evaluation report. The committee focuses on two main routes of improvement.

First, the committee notes that "*the program does not seem to have the strategic choice (outlined in our General Report) to be a program with a "public administration" focus which might have been natural given the program's business-school location and the overlap between the study of business management and public administration*". The committee notes that "*There is some cross-registration into management courses (or courses on the business-government relationship) in the business school, but it is fairly limited. The limited cross-registration vitiates a possible advantage of locating this program in a business school. One important practical problem is having all public policy courses on the same day, to accommodate students with fulltime jobs; since business school courses are on a different day, many students will have no desire to take them. Perhaps (we do not know if this, or some other alternative, is possible) the second-year elective courses in public policy could all be held the same day as business-school courses – or the business school courses most attractive to public policy students – are held.*"

The department will make an effort to coordinate its program so that students are able to take advantage of relevant management courses offered by the Department of Business Administration. The department fully recognizes the importance of a "Public Administration" focus and the need to enrich the program with management-oriented courses. This is clearly stated in the self-evaluation report and in our strategic view. The department's synergy with the Department of Business Administration is evident in the existing (and popular among students) concentration in

Business Management. The concentration in its current form has experienced some difficulties due to the following reasons. First, in addition to the technical difficulties noted by the committee, we should add that many of the courses in the Business School that may be attractive to our students have pre-requisites that most of our student cannot meet. Second, and most importantly, our experience shows that public administration students need lecturers who mediate and adapt business and management tools to the public administration field and its complexities. At the current stage, courses in the business school are completely business-oriented and therefore do not meet these requirements. Therefore, we are planning a fourfold strategy to address the need to strengthen the "Public Administration" focus and enrich the program with management-oriented courses.

- 1) One option the department is considering is to add a concentration of elective courses titled "Public Management". This concentration will offer management-oriented courses that include practical and professional management tools adapted to the public sector in cooperation with the Department of Business Administration.
- 2) To carry out this plan, we will recruit, for the short term, adjunct lecturers in these areas. We will ensure that these lecturers are able to adapt management tools to the public administration orientation.
- 3) At least three of the faculty members are currently engaged in practical projects in public administration in Israel. Through these projects, they acquire knowledge and understanding of the specific needs in this domain as well as knowledge and skills in these areas. They will offer courses that include practical and professional tools. Two such courses have been already constructed.
- 4) We hope that in the near future we will have a new opening for a faculty recruit. If and when this happens, we plan to focus our search on candidates with public management education or candidates with management education who will be willing to adapt to public management. We are quite optimistic in this respect given our successful experience with the adaptation of previous recruits to the department.

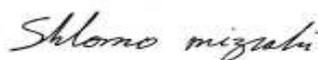
Second, the committee pointed out that since mandatory courses are offered in both semesters, student in the entering cohort do not all take mandatory courses together. The committee argues that *"this inhibits development of a common student culture that we believe may encourage*

*student work effort.*" This point has been fully addressed by the department in recent years as 5 out of 6 mandatory courses have been offered in the past two years only in one semester. This means that most of the students in the entering cohort take mandatory courses together. One course dealing with foundations of research is still offered twice a year because of the need to work very closely with students on research projects. Yet, in the coming year we plan to reconsider this aspect. Furthermore, we found that large classes (80 students) are not effective for the course "Quantitative Evaluation of Public Policy," and therefore we will endeavor to offer it in both semesters in the coming years.

The committee also observes that *"an introductory course in economics and/or quantitative methods...is taken during the first semester of the first year, rather than during the previous summer."* However, due to various administrative and technical issues, the Faculty of Management does not offer summer courses, thus making this possibility irrelevant.

The committee concludes that *"the coverage and content of the required courses was reasonable although the labeling confused us."* The committee refers to three specific courses as follows: "Quantitative Evaluation of Public Policy" is a microeconomics course that focuses on the economic justifications for government intervention in the economy and cost-benefit analysis; "Applied Economic Policy" is a mixture of macroeconomics, industrial organization, privatization, and regional economics; "Statistical Research Methods in Public Policy" introduces basic concepts in probability theory, and statistics. All the courses mentioned are good examples of our attempt to integrate theory and practical tools. This integration often requires the adaptation of general theoretical tools in economics, statistics, and political science to the public administration context. Therefore, courses offer theoretical tools, while the case study analyses and exercises are focused on specific fields in public policy and administration.

Finally, we would like to thank the committee for a most thoughtful review of our program and state that we are certain that it will help in the improvement process.



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