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Evaluation of interim reports re. implementation of the Evaluation Committee's recommendations relating to Industrial Design studies (Jan. 2008) at¹:

- Bezalel Academy of Art and Design
- Holon Institute of Technology
- Shenkar College of Engineering and Design

- Also included: Notes on the state of the programs in light of the General Evaluation Report (Jan. 2008) on Industrial Design Studies within the Israeli System of Higher Education.

Note: The term 'the Committee' in this evaluation refers to the Committee for the Evaluation of Academic Quality for Industrial Design Studies appointed by the Council for Higher Education, whose work was concluded in 2007. The committee's report was submitted in January 2008.

¹ A review of the interim report by the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, is not included herewith, due to the reviewer's affiliation with the Technion.

Bezalel Academy of Art and Design

The report addresses directly, in detail, the points listed by the Committee in its Prioritized Action Steps. Bezalel's report indicates as follows:

1. a) Overcrowding: The issue of overcrowding appears to have been alleviated in studio courses of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th years and has reached the international standard of 1:15 ratio of instructor/students. No information is provided about other courses or the 1st year studio.
 - b) Diversification of faculty: Bezalel reports new recruits to the teaching staff, including lecturers and teaching assistants. The teaching assistants and most of the new recruits are still Bezalel graduates (even though one of them has a Master's degree in another area from T-A University). While it is reasonable for the TAs to be Bezalel graduates or graduate students, the number of recruits from different backgrounds is still negligible and has contributed very minimally to the diversification of the teaching staff.
 - c) Women faculty: Bezalel reports three female recruits in the last three years and one female TA (out of six!). This is a step in the right direction but it does not seem to be enough. With the vacancies at the end of the current year due to retirement of two senior faculty, and the search for a new head of the Master's program, Bezalel has a chance to act more rigorously on this issue.
2. Beyond product design: Bezalel was asked to reconsider its strong emphasis on product design and expand its mission to a wider range of design options. The report by Bezalel states only that the department's vision and mission are reviewed by the staff twice a year and that future reviews will open up the department's goals; this will have implications for the future curriculum. In other words, to date the department prefers to remain with its strong emphasis on product design and has not (yet) seriously considered other options. This may be less dominant in the Master's program which has had, since its inception, a wider view of design.
3. Promotion criteria information: The Committee's report asked that orientation information, criteria and procedures for promotion (regular and adjunct faculty) and sabbatical rights be transparent and made available to all new and existing teaching staff. Bezalel reports real progress on this front, except for the issue of sabbaticals, which is not mentioned in their report.
4. Office space: The Committee noted that teachers lack office space. Bezalel reports that unfortunately it is impossible to expand their facility in the present location of the department on Mount Scopus. The problem should be alleviated in the future when Bezalel moves to its planned new campus in Jerusalem.

5. Workshops: The Committee commented that the workshops needed to be expanded and revitalized, and a solution to the overcrowding problem in them should be found. The report stipulates progress: a new digital workshop has been built and a ventilation system that sucks dangerous particles has been installed in areas where it was needed in the older workshops. As to the overcrowding issue, the answer is in point 4 above.
6. Interdisciplinary work and ties with industry: The Committee recommended that commercially oriented research be encouraged and supported more than has hitherto been done, and that interdisciplinary work be carried out (research and teaching) towards that end. Bezalel reports a new R&D center at the institutional level at Bezalel, where select academic projects can be further developed and brought to fruition. They cite a recent example, i.e. school desks that can withstand earthquakes. Interdisciplinary studies or collaborations are not mentioned in the report.
7. Standardization of credit points: The committee asked that the allocation of credit points for courses be reviewed and amended to standardize requirements in all BDes programs in Israel. Bezalel has not acted on this point and states that its credit point allocation abides by the CHE's guidelines. Bezalel recognizes the need for cross-program standardization but thinks that this is the responsibility of the CHE.
8. Enrichment of study through special opportunities: The committee recommended creating a new staff position to promote and coordinate opportunities for students to study abroad, work as interns in local firms or participate in other special enrichment programs. Bezalel has not acted on this point and continues to address such issues in meetings of the forum of department heads at Bezalel.
9. Library resources: The committee recommended updating the library's resources, physical and digital, and negotiating for courtesy privileges at the Hebrew University libraries. Bezalel reports the addition of several databases to the library resources and the installation of a city-wide interface that would enable all students in Jerusalem to borrow books from all institutional libraries, including the Hebrew University. Access for Bezalel students to databases of the Hebrew University is being examined.

In summary

Bezalel has addressed, and made progress on, a fair number of the recommended prioritized action steps. A number of issues remain unattended, and they are mainly: going beyond product design (undergraduate program), more interdisciplinary studies and research opportunities, more initiative towards enrichment programs, sabbatical possibilities for faculty, and a further effort to diversify the faculty with more non-Bezalel graduates and more women. The issue of office space is unresolvable at present, and the standardization of credit point allocation is seen as the responsibility of the CHE.

General

The comments below pertain to a selection of issues raised by the Committee in its general report on industrial design studies within the Israeli system of higher education. Issues of somewhat lesser importance have been left out, on the assumption that either the ID schools are not able to address them successfully (such as space requirements) or because they are of somewhat less importance.

- 1 Scope of design: The introduction to the Committee's general report stresses the enormous expansion of the meaning of 'design' to include, beyond products, also systems and services, and even experiences. This is particularly relevant in Israel where high-tech industries have long since recognized the key role of designers in successful system developments and in particular interface design and human factors related design. The term 'design thinking', mentioned in the report, has since gained considerable prominence and guides the growth of design curricula to embrace almost any design that is aimed at innovation in business. Disciplinary boundaries are more diffused than ever before and industrial design is hardly a stand-alone discipline, as most work is carried out in collaboration with other design fields as well as with engineering, management, marketing, psychology and many more.

The interim reports submitted by the ID programs under survey do not reflect an awareness of these radical changes, at least not in as much as can be deduced from the reported actions they took in order to better themselves in the past three years. It seems that the leaders of all schools are responsive to micro conditions in Israel but are not sufficiently immersed in cutting-edge global developments, and in the current design literature. The improvement efforts (some of) the schools made, successful in most cases, pertain to local issues that did indeed require revision and development. It would have been even more beneficial if all schools examined and refreshed their visions, missions and goals once in a while to ensure that they are on the right track to achieve educational excellence.

- 2 Teaching staff: The Committee expressed some concern regarding a number of issues related to the teaching staff – faculty and adjunct teachers: the small proportion of female teachers; the tendency of schools to hire their own graduates; and the small number of junior faculty. In the progress reports there is some evidence, albeit minimal, to an increase in women recruits. There is less evidence, or none whatsoever, regarding the other issues. The need to diversify the teaching staff should be self-evident but, possibly because of the limited pool of potential teaching staff and the convenience of hiring one's own graduates, it may be difficult to implement changes in hiring

- practices. New professional criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure, which have been enacted partially in some of the schools, may make it easier to find appropriate candidates. Such criteria should stress the different profiles of teachers, academic and professional, that a good school should be hiring.
- 3 Work assessment: In its report, the Committee noted that in some cases students' design projects were being assessed mostly on the basis of the conceptual ideas behind them. Professional development and completion were not sufficiently stressed, or taken into account in assessments. The committee saw this as an important point, but it was not reflected in its prioritized action steps as presented to the schools, and none of them commented on this issue in their progress reports. The tendency to stress conceptual work over worked out solutions prevails in all design fields in Israeli schools, and may be related to a common drive for creativity and a less-than-desired respect for high standards of execution. This may be a wider socio-cultural issue but schools of design should make their utmost efforts to achieve a transformation in this matter.
 - 4 Exposure to 'real-life' and international experiences: Internationally, it is common for ID students (just like any other students) to spend time outside of their own schools, either on exchange programs or in internship in professional companies and organizations. Israeli students have fewer opportunities to experience such extra-curriculum programs, primarily because of the small size of the country which limits the number of options and the high cost of going abroad. The Committee urged the schools to make bigger efforts to help their students benefit from such opportunities by fostering ties with schools and organizations abroad, and by securing funds to assist students to meet the costs. The impression from the interim reports is that with one exception the schools, although they agree with the potential value of such experiences, made little effort to considerably increase the opportunities given to students in this respect. The attitude is one of giving a blessing to students who are able to arrange such an experience on their own, but little effort is made to extend this to other students. It would be wise for schools to make bigger efforts in this respect. Not only would the individual students gain from foreign exposure, but so would the entire program upon those students' return.
 - 5 Infrastructure and resources: All the programs surveyed were found by the Committee wanting in terms of infrastructure, resources, or both. It may be the case that vital additional space for important activities cannot be secured by the departments themselves even with the best of intentions. However, proper design of existing facilities could go a long way to improve the quality of education. Starting with individual well-lit work spaces, going through formal and informal meeting spaces, exhibition and multi-purpose spaces,

office space for teachers, special activity spaces, ample library and academic networking resources, physical and digital workshops with properly controlled safety and health stipulations, and so on. Digital modeling, simulation and fabrication means, in particular, have become indispensable; none of the schools reports what progress, if any, was made on this front (admittedly, they were not asked to do so). Investing in state-of-the-art lab and workshop equipment has become a major budgetary hardship, which has not existed until a few years ago; but schools that will neglect this aspect of the education they offer will remain behind.

- 6 Research; interdisciplinary activity: The Committee thought that not enough research is conducted in the ID schools (other than, in a limited manner, by students in the framework of their assigned projects), and the departments have not developed proper conditions for research. Such conditions may include research or excellence centers, assistance in writing grant proposals and finding research partners, seed funding, etc. Schools – or institutes – must hire dedicated personnel for this purpose, and this is rarely done in the colleges the Committee visited. Research in design does not have to resemble research in science, but it can nonetheless be theoretical as well as practical. Research products that can be presented in international forums such as conferences and exhibitions enhance the reputation of the department and are instrumental in building collaborations with schools and companies around the world. The schools are advised to make a much bigger effort in this direction than has thitherto been done.
- 7 Allocation of credit points: The Committee noted that all the undergraduate programs that were evaluated offered 4-year programs towards a professional BDes degree. Yet, the number of credit points to be accumulated varies greatly: 120, 140 and 160 points respectively. One school made internal adjustments to the allocation of points, but has not changes the overall number of required points. Understandably, it is not likely for departments to make drastic changes in this respect on their own, as they must comply with institutional standards. The Committee thought standardization should be implemented in this respect. It is probably the responsibility of the CHE to inspect this matter (possibly in other disciplines as well). We look to the CHE to lead such an initiative and find ways to introduce it to all concerned programs.