

12.9.2012

**Response to the report of the Committee for the Evaluation of the department of  
Nutritional Sciences.**

**Ariel University Center of Samaria**

We thank the members of the Committee for their thorough and perceptive work at the Ariel University Center, and for their constructive, insightful comments.

First of all we would like to clarify that we believe in higher education in Israel's institutions and not only overseas. We believe that graduate studies in Israel are important for the future of the profession, and for the future of nutrition research and its adaptation to the Israeli population. Therefore, there is enormous significance to opening graduate programs in nutritional science specifically in academic institutions in Israel. We view this as a challenge and part of the institution's vision. At the same time, as in any democratic country, we will not stand in the way of students who prefer to continue their studies overseas.

Below is our response to the points raised in the Report.

1. Goals and mission. Throughout the report submitted to the CHE in August 2011, the issue of professional training of graduates in the Israeli healthcare system was repeatedly emphasized. We wish to clarify that as an academic institution, we have no impact on professional training procedures. Academic programs are under the supervision of the institutions of higher education, while professional training is under the supervision of the Ministry of Health, which determines the procedures. The BSc program allows students to enter into the Ministry of Health training program. From that point, the institutions have no control over the process. Therefore we cannot add the sentence "the successful completion of the dietetic internship that is a main feature of the BSc program in Nutritional Sciences" to the department's vision because that is not under our control. Therefore your recommendation cannot be carried out at this stage; this is possible only if the MOH policy changes and professional training becomes part of the curriculum. We also would like the waiting time for professional training to be shorter. To the best of our knowledge, the MOH is taking steps to reduce waiting time.

2. The Study Program. We were pleased to read your positive impression of the strengths of the program, which you define as comprehensive and as providing a strong knowledge base for students. We will continue to strengthen the program by adding new elements, to make it more challenging and up-to-date. In this section you noted again the long waiting time for internships, and we wish to repeat that this issue is not under our control.

- Introducing a course focused on an overview of the field of nutrition during the first year–

Two courses are taught that allow students to get an overall view of the profession and enter into the world of nutrition that opens up to them later in their first year.

“The Dietician and the Patient” (taught in semester 1 of year 1) – allows students to become familiar with various fields that a dietician will encounter in this work, including care of elderly, handicap individuals; understanding the nutritional requirements of the population including unique population groups; the food pyramid, etc. Lectures are given by experienced dieticians who specialize in each field.

“Guided Scientific Reading” (taught in semester 2 of year 1). This course offers the students opportunity to learn novel scientific information, including topics about the effects of various food ingredients, treatments of various conditions, etc. In this course, students acquire a preliminary foundation for future skills of searching for information, comprehension, and critical reading of scientific materials. The students learn to organize the data in the form of a lecture given in the class to the other students.

The significance of this course is that it exposes students to contemporary scientific topics, some of which will not be learnt as a part of the curriculum. For students, this is an excellent opportunity to learn about hot topics they heard or read about in various occasions or topics that they are personally interested in. The course stimulates students’ curiosity, that important trait that we wish to develop in them throughout their studies. In response to the committee’s comment, we will enrich the courses with additional topics and will invite additional lectures from various fields and a variety of research areas.

- Students – As a result of a detailed discussion with the President, the Rector, and the Dean, we concluded that we can accept 50-60 students per year. We will make sure we have enough laboratories, classrooms and laboratory and teaching assistants.
- In response to the committee’s comment, we made the following changes:

1. We cancelled the course “Computer Science” as part of the program. From this year, students must pass a qualifications test rather than participate in a course on the topic.
  2. We reduced the scope of the course in physics from 3 weekly hours to 2 weekly hours.
- The entire program undergoes re-examination by the instructors every year, and adjustments are made to courses that teach different aspects of similar topics. This review prevents unnecessary repetition of materials in the courses, but on the other hand ensures that the study materials are reinforced. At the same time, we determine the logical order of the various courses in the program.
  - Today we have four elective courses. From the next year onward (2012-2013), a new course will be added :Exercise Physiology, which will give students deeper understanding of existing courses - Nutrition and Physical Activity, and Physical Activity and Treatment of Disease. From the 2013-2014 school year we will permit and even encourage students to take electives offered by the Healthcare Systems Management Department and the Department of Molecular Biology.

We used the hours that became available after cancelling the Computers course and reducing the scope of the Physics course to introduce new courses: “Diabetes as the World Epidemic” and “Vitamins and Nutritional Supplements”. We believe the addition of these courses is critical. The courses you mentioned in your comments - nutritional needs of special populations e.g., pediatric, geriatric and athletes - already exist. We wish to note that the courses pediatric nutrition and geriatric nutrition are taught as a part of the teaching program only at Ariel.

3. The ratio between full-time faculty members and part-time faculty members will change gradually. We address the committee’s comment of this issue with all the seriousness and initiated a search for additional faculty members who would be hired full-time. Negotiations with potential researchers are currently underway. We understand the significance of hiring full-time faculty who will devote their entire time to teaching and research at the University Center. At the same time, we are proud of the fact that several of our part-time faculty members, are professional nutritionists and dietitians who work at various medical institutions and are respected practitioners in the private and public sectors (such as hospitals, Health Maintenance Organizations, Ministry of Welfare, nursing homes, etc.) and they bring with them both practical

knowledge and academic skills. These professionals are important to the department and we definitely decide to retain them. We are convinced that a department that trains students for practical work must include people who come from the fields. Experience shows that students gain enormous benefits from this combination of lecturers. Students prove the success both during professional training when they are required to work in the field, and when they are hired to work in clinical jobs after completing their professional training. We receive very positive reports about our graduates from various employers such as hospitals and Health Maintenance Organizations.

4. Students - We were pleased to hear about the favorable impression that our students made on the committee members. Committee members were exposed to students' satisfaction with the quality of teaching, the personalized service they receive, and the department's commitment to them. Students also expressed their satisfaction with the teaching staff and the fields of research.

Students' concerns with professional internship is understandable under the circumstances (this point has already been addressed at the outset of our response and we will not repeat it here). It should be noted that a senior representative of the MOH, who is responsible for the internships, comes to meet students at the end of their third year. She explains the procedure of the internship (the lottery, the placements, the procedures, etc.) and answers students' questions. This is a very effective and important meeting, as she allays some of the students' many concerns and clarifies the process. Furthermore, faculty members who come from the field are available to help all students, beginning from their first year in the program, in guidance and assistance in their deliberations.

5. Alumni – Following the committee's comment, it was decided to conduct an alumni meeting once every two years in order to hear from them about their employment experiences, and to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of their training and their preparedness for the job market. The conclusions will be applicable to the students, who will benefit from improved guidance by the department. The first meeting is scheduled in June 2013.

Furthermore, it was decided that two years after they receive their degree, alumni will receive questionnaires through which we will track their places of employment and examine for any correlations between their success in the job market and the various

courses or areas they studied. Furthermore we will ask them about any areas that are necessary for success and integration in work but which they felt were lacking in their academic training. We will consider modifications to the program based on the responses we receive.

Regarding the comment that some alumni change their profession, we believe that this is a legitimate process that exists in any other profession. Such changes occur due to personal reasons (unsuitability for a caregiving profession, pregnancy and childbirth, etc.) and due to objective reasons such as poor employment conditions, low salaries, etc. After we receive and analyze the alumni's responses to the questionnaires, we will be in a position to judge the reasons for attrition more accurately.

6. Research - We were pleased to see that the committee positively noted the benefits of research and its favorable effect on the students as well. At the same time we were surprised by the committee's statement that our faculty members conduct basic research on a broad variety of subjects and that this may not be the most efficient way to reinforce current research to move the disciplines forward.

We would like to clarify that department faculty have specific areas of research:

Dr. Tovit Rozentweig – diabetes laboratory

Dr. Ruth Birk – laboratory on nutrogeomics

Prof. Mona Boaz – epidemiology

Dr. Olga Raz – nutritional effect on cardiovascular disease.

In addition, research on topics related to nutrition are conducted in the department of molecular biology, with which we work in close collaboration. Our students participate in these research projects as research assistants and, later as graduate students.

7. Organizational structure – We were pleased to read that the committee was impressed that students have appropriate administrative support and that the head of the department works with enthusiasm and has created a dynamic program. We note the committee's comment regarding excessive centralization at the head of the department and we have therefore separated three areas that are now the responsibility of younger faculty members.

Dr. Tovit Rozentzweig is in charge of coordinating the syllabi developed by various instructors and is in charge of the instructors meetings that take place twice annually.

Ongoing topics are discussed at these meetings, the relevancy of the courses and the program are reviewed, consolidation of courses is considered to prevent unnecessary repetition of study materials, and to ensure a clear delineation of topics in the various courses.

Dr. Ruth Birk is in charge of scientific activities and she coordinates the department's research activities.

Dr. Sharon Gavriel coordinates the activities of the admission committee.

8. Teaching and Learning outcomes - We were pleased to read the committee's favorable impression. We agree with the committee's conclusions and therefore will take the following actions:

- a. We will conduct a comprehensive review of all the syllabi. Reading lists will be updated to include recent reading items; non-essential bibliography items will be reduced. In the more distant future we will conduct a comprehensive examination designed to prevent repetition of materials in different courses. Dr. Rozentzweig will coordinate the syllabi review.
- b. Grading will also be modified. In courses with an annual exam, we will also conduct quizzes and require written assignments. The problem with such tasks is the limited number of tutors and teaching assistants, and the heavy load of their responsibilities. A discussion on this topic took place with the AUC management, and we were promised necessary help in employing additional teaching assistants.
- c. The revised syllabi will be submitted to the Unit of Academic Development and Assessment during 2013. The Unit will direct instructors who are in need or wish to participate in any of the numerous teaching workshops that the Unit conducts every year.

9. Infrastructure - The department has moved to the lower campus, which offers larger, more spacious classrooms that have Internet access. The administrative office also moved to more spacious offices. The laboratories did not move. The AUC management is aware of the problems with several of the laboratories and we hope that these will be upgraded in the near future.

Regarding the committee's recommendation to incorporate distant-learning elements in the courses – We took this comment to our attention. We are aware of the enormous benefits

that students can produce from information systems. Today it is already possible to manage courses using the MOODLE system, which is a popular tool for creating and editing dynamic contents on the Internet for students. Learning materials are developed and viewed on a browser and students have no need to install any software. MOODLE offers a range of tools for learning and knowledge sharing, allowing users to upload files, conduct surveys and exams, manage forums and chats, develop wikis, etc. MOODLE has an intuitive GUI and complete support in Hebrew. We will try to devise appropriate ideas for the department, in coordination with the IT department and to introduce the system into the department's courses.

10. The head of the department and the Dean of the School of Healthcare Studies are in charge of reviewing faculty CVs.

**Dr. Olga Raz**

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Ariel University Center