

November 1th, 2012

BGU Response to the Committee for the Evaluation of Department of Sociology and Anthropology

The department takes this opportunity to thank the committee members for their thorough report, and assure them that all comments and recommendations raised will be considered and addressed in depth. As the youngest department of sociology and anthropology in Israel, the evaluation is of a great assistance to us and will contribute to the building of a strong department.

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology is proud of its achievements in research and teaching, as presented in the report. The committee indicates that the department has a **justified reputation in critical study of societies** from a comparative, historical, cultural, theoretical and interdisciplinary perspective. The committee favorably commented on the **departmental vision**, focusing its expertise in the areas of political sociology, gender studies, the sociology of Israeli Society and qualitative and interpretative methods. The committee favorably mentioned the cohesion of the department faculty and its collegial cooperation in these themes and across the fields of sociology and anthropology. The committee recognized that our department is the only one in Israel which is a **true dual-disciplinary department** in terms of faculty distribution and course offerings, and indicates that the **students are pleased with their studies**. The committee further praises the faculty for being **active researchers, producing many books and scholarly articles**.

Committee Major Recommendations

The committee offered some important recommendations, to which we turn now.

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology is among the largest departments in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at BGU, in terms of student numbers. The committee indicates that the 2011 ratio of 598 students in BA programs to 14 faculty places a great strain upon department resources, and it recommends increasing the number of faculty. The university authorities acknowledge that the enrolment/faculty ratio in the department is indeed too high, and we wish that in the spirit of the Committee's recommendation, in coming years the university will make it possible for us to hire new faculty members.

Another issue addressed by the committee is "critical studies". The committee is convinced that critical studies, which is a well-established subfield of the discipline, with its orientation toward questioning the social order and critiquing society, have a contribution to make and should continue to be, along with qualitative methodologies, a valued specialty in the department. We endorse this.

The committee also recommends that while maintaining these areas of specialization, the department must undertake efforts to develop expertise in quantitative methods by **recruiting three faculty members**, all with strong quantitative skills.

We fully support the Committee's recommendation to add three talented quantitative tenure track positions especially in stratification, organizational and comparative or historical studies. The Department indeed wishes to be able to cover more fully the range of themes and methods in sociology and anthropology.

David Newman, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, has informed us that he is interested in adding a faculty member to the department as part of the Five-Year Strategic Plan for the Faculty and University. We urge the university authorities to implement this recommendation as soon as possible.

Steps to Implement in the Coming Years

We wish to relate here to several steps of improvement we intend to implement in the coming years, following the Committee's report.

BA Program: The Curriculum in Sociology

The committee suggested that the department should include basic courses in the study program, such as work and occupations, and social stratification. We aim to review the BA program, and if provided with adequate resources in funding and personnel will add core courses in sociology.

BA Program: The Curriculum in Anthropology

The committee was concerned about the weak representation of cultures outside of Israel. We do offer several courses on other cultures - Japan, Tibet, Egypt and the Balkans, two of them by adjuncts. We aim to review the BA program, and if provided with adequate resources in term of funding and personnel, will replace the adjuncts with regular faculty.

The committee suggested that traditional anthropological theory and ethnography, including the substantial work done in Israel, should have greater presence in the courses. We aim to adopt this recommendation, and we will include it in the obligatory courses.

BA Program: Behavioral Science

The committee suggests that the department either clarify the uniqueness of the program or simplify its administrative structure. Following a discussion with the Rector and the Dean on the future of this program, it was decided that the program will include courses which will be specific to the program. We aim to include two new obligatory courses (2 credits each) in the 2013-2014 curriculum (we will discuss extra-teaching resources with the Dean and the content of the courses with the department of psychology).

Graduate Program: Additional Specializations

The committee suggested the opening of a new MA specialty in stratification, life course and family studies. The opening of additional specialization is conditional on the recruitment of three new faculty members, as suggested by the committee.

It is crucial to mention that already during the self-evaluation process and the drafting of the report, and after a long discussion within the faculty, we concluded that we will increase the collaboration between the existing three specializations (anthropology, critical studies, and organizations). Thus starting in 2012-2013, all MA students must study 8-10 credits of obligatory core courses – "Theories of Society and Culture", "Approaches and Methods in Social and Cultural Research", "Research Fronts in Sociology and Anthropology" and "Thesis Workshop" (for students in the research track only).

Graduate Program: Organizational Sociology

The committee argues that the offering in organizational sociology is limited and should be expanded. We will review the syllabi of the obligatory and core courses and make the necessary and possible changes.

Enhancing Collaboration

There are many sociologists and anthropologists in other departments in the university (in other departments of the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; the Faculty of Business and Management; the Faculty of Health Sciences, and etc.). We aim to initiate a meeting in which we will explore the possibilities of collaboration between the department and these faculty members. For example, we will consider cross-listing courses, joint instruction of research students, organization of joint workshops, and the submission of joint research proposals.

Research funds

The committee argues that the department raises only modest amounts of research funds, which is the result of the qualitative orientation of the department. It turns out, based on the data of the Research Authority, that our department is in fact very active in submitting research proposals. In the last four years almost half of the faculty raised funds from competitive grants (ISF, BSF, and GIF). Others received high evaluations. Nevertheless, we aim to encourage the faculty to submit more research proposals and, in cooperation with the Research Authority, hold a workshop on how to write strong application grants.

Research Center

The committee urges the university authorities to assist the department in establishing a research center. Dean Newman suggests that "The Hubert H. Humphrey Center for Social Research", previously the main inter-disciplinary organization within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, should serve as the basis for the research center of the department. We aim to discuss the details of this proposal with the university authorities.

Data on Graduation from the Program

The committee suggested that the department collect data on the career plans of graduates, the rate of enrollment for higher degrees and the initial jobs of students who enter the labor force. We aim to implement this recommendation and, starting in the year 2012-2013, will conduct a survey of MA and Ph.D. graduates.

With regard to data on BA graduates, the collection of data will depend on the availability of funding, and we hope that the university authorities will supply the resources needed.

Committee Comments

In this section we wish to correct some factual points, where the committee may have missed some information.

Study Program: Quantitative Training

The committee indicates that the material covered in the syllabi of BA and MA courses is too elementary for a sociology department at a major university. As advised in the general report, we have compared the methodological curricula of BGU's sociology and anthropology department to that of Columbia University (CU), an elite American university. At CU, the methodological **undergraduate curriculum** consists of two classes of three credits each (though only the first is obligatory for sociology majors).¹ In BGU, the curriculum also consists of six credits, though all are obligatory. Four are in social statistics classes, while two are in the class "Quantitative Methods in Sociology", which the committee may have missed. All topics covered by CU's two classes are covered by BGU's three classes; the most advanced topic in both (BGU's advanced "Quantitative Methods" and CU's "Social Statistics") is two-way interactions in multivariate linear regression analysis.

With regard to **graduate curricula** the situation is slightly different: CU invests significantly more class time and covers slightly more material. At BGU, the quantitative methods graduate requirements are a single two-credit class, while in CU a 4 credit class is required. The CU class includes one additional topic not offered at BGU (either event history analysis, or fixed effects). The last topic in BGU's curricula is the next-to-last in CU – ordinal logistic regression. However, CU's training is for academic Ph.Ds. while BGU's training is for M.A students, of whom only about half are research students. Enhancing BGU's training would require resources that are currently unavailable, both in terms of funding and in terms of personnel, but we are looking forward to the assistance of the university in obtaining these resources.

Ph.D. Program

The committee recommended that the Department initiate workshops for students so that they may present their work-in-progress. Over the last academic year (2011-2012), we have modified the form and content of our Ph.D. workshop. The workshop is now obligatory for all Ph.D. students who receive funding. The workshop is now a multi-tiered forum, in which a minority of students grapple with proposal writing, while some are actively writing their dissertations, and still others are already oriented towards post-docs and the job market. Thus, new participants get a glimpse of future challenges, veteran participants share their experience, and the entire forum becomes more orientated towards publications and grant-writing. In addition to the biweekly workshop meeting, we initiated (in 2011-12) a two-day concentrated workshop (which took place in the Sede Boqer campus) in

¹ SOCI W3010 - Methods for Social Research, which is introductory and deals mostly with data collection issues, and SOCI W3020 - Social Statistics, which is not an obligatory class.

which we dedicated sessions to specific professional issues such as post-docs, publications, spells abroad, power-point presentations, etc. The workshop was an overwhelming success, both socially and professionally. It helped consolidate the Ph.D. student body as a supportive peer group, and an intellectual community. Several have already submitted papers or special journal issues proposals, as a direct consequence of the workshop. In addition, we have every Ph.D. student present a paper based on his/her dissertation to our departmental seminar.

Faculty and Research

Anthropologists

The committee indicates that there is a small group of anthropologists, focusing on issues of major importance to Israeli society. We indeed have the largest and most varied faculty in the country, which has done ethnographic work in cultures and societies outside of Israel (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Morocco, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Singapore, United States, and Vietnam) as well as within Israel. The demand for ethnographic experience and expertise beyond Israel's borders had been a guiding principle in hiring new faculty.

Publications

The committee indicates that faculty does not publish in the most influential journals of the sociology profession. We think that the committee provides a too narrow definition of the discipline and its important publications. Several of our faculty publish in leading general journals such as *American Sociological Review* and *British Journal of Sociology*; others who wish to be influential in their field of research often choose to publish in leading journals in the "mainstream" subfields of the profession such as *Organization Studies*, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, *Current Sociology*, and *Socio-Economic Review*; and still others publish in the most influential journals of the field of critical studies such as *Theory, Culture and Society*, and *Cultural Studies*.

Summary

We receive with appreciation the report of the committee, and think that all in all the Committee found the Department to be of high academic quality.

Except for several points on which we found it fit to make some informational clarifications, we mean to implement the recommendations of the Committee that meet the Department's own means. We endorse the major recommendations of the Committee, namely the need to change the students/faculty ratio and hence to add three new faculty tenure track members with strong quantitative skills, who specialize in stratification, organizational, historical or comparative approaches, and accordingly to cover more fully themes of sociology and anthropology that may not receive fullest coverage in the present, due to faculty shortage.

We hope to work with the University authorities to implement these recommendations of the Committee.

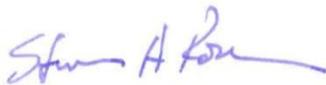
Sincerely,



Prof. Daniel Maman
Chair
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



Prof. David Newman
Dean
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



Prof. Steve Rosen
Deputy Rector
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev