



To the Evaluation Committee,

We want to thank the *Committee for the Evaluation of Sociology and Anthropology* in Israel, which visited Hebrew University in January of 2012. The report offers the department a number of key ideas to help us continue to improve and remain influential as a center for research and teaching in Sociology and Anthropology. The visit by the committee listed a number of important ideas, including some specific steps we could take. Our purpose here is to outline our initial reaction to their ideas, to explain how we will implement changes seen as most essential, and to provide some further explanation on a couple of issues.

First, the department strongly agrees that Hebrew University is well positioned as a leading Israeli university as well as a highly rated institution worldwide and that our own department has a respected history in its own right. We are pleased to be seen as “an impressive and productive group” and appreciate the encouragement and input from this committee. We also agree that in order to maintain our “excellence and intellectual vigor” we will need to continue to be given the support of the university to strengthen ourselves in areas that have been dramatically weakened by retirements and departures. As indicated in the report, our faculty numbers have plummeted in core areas that have created wide gaps. This is particularly true in Anthropology, but also reflects the situation in important areas of Sociology, where upcoming retirements loom of prominent faculty that will further hurt the department.

Our responses are focused around the six specific recommendations detailed at the end of the committee’s document for Hebrew University, but we also incorporate some other reactions below.

המחלקה לסוציולוגיה  
ואנתרופולוגיה  
הפקולטה  
למדעי החברה

Department of  
Sociology and  
Anthropology  
Faculty of  
Social Sciences

הר הצופים  
ירושלים 91905  
טלפון: 02-5883050  
פקס: 02-5324339

Mount Scopus  
Jerusalem 91905, Israel  
Tel. 972-2-5883050  
Fax. 972-2-5324339  
<http://sociology.huji.ac.il>



## 1. Academic Excellence.

Although the report's agenda is focused on academic training within the department and how this training can be improved, the committee did mention that faculty tended to publish in "solid" journals rather than top-tier ones. We do not feel that this generalization does justice to the quality of venues in which departmental faculty publish their research for two reasons. First, the department is composed of four inter-related but distinct disciplines and what is considered top-tier for an Anthropologist for example may not be top-tier for a Sociologist. Thus, 4 papers published over the past 4 years in *American Ethnologist* and *American Anthropologist* mark a more than respectable showing for a small group of scholars. This also holds true for our record of excellence in publishing in the fields of Organizational Studies and Demography. Moreover, the committee's comment failed to take into consideration the impressive outlets for books published by a number of our faculty over the past few years including but not limited to Cambridge University Press, Wiley, Polity Press, University of California Press and Oxford University Press.

## 2. Rebuilding Anthropology.

The decline in Anthropology is influenced by the dramatic decline in faculty numbers associated with the track, having shrunk from 10 faculty members in the past to 5 current members. We have tried to counter this trend by hiring two excellent Anthropologists over the past couple of years: Eitan Wilf, who completed his Ph.D. at U. of Chicago and recently awarded the Alon Fellowship and our newest hire, Marcy Brink-Danan, who comes to us after several years as an Assistant Professor at Brown University. Dr. Brink-Danan's specialization in linguistic anthropology serves to enhance the breadth of anthropology at HU and was marked by the committee as one of our current gaps to be filled. That said, we fully agree that it is essential that our future hires in Anthropology also extend the intellectual and geographical breadth of our program, and we are hopeful the university will support our efforts.

We are also in basic agreement that there are advantages in considering



the creation of an inter-university graduate Anthropology degree. Unfortunately, we embarked on such an effort four years ago and there was very little interest from students at the time. Similar efforts in Israel have failed in African Studies and their success is yet to be determined within Economics. It is also a concern that as the strongest Anthropology group in Israel, the department may not benefit from such a move. Nonetheless, the department will take this issue and consider it in further discussions with Anthropologists from other universities.

### 3. Quantitative Sociology.

We believe that current trends in the field of Sociology are open to alternative interpretations. But, even if we accept that a global trend towards quantitative methods is occurring within top-notch Sociology departments, it does not follow that we necessarily need to abandon our own forte. One of the strengths of our department is its vibrant research tradition in qualitative sociology and the department feels that much is to be gained by the intersection of alternative research perspectives. Thus, while we acknowledge a need to strengthen both training and research in quantitative methods, we also firmly believe there is room for a department of Sociology in Israel that is more firmly rooted in qualitative methods. In such a small country, diversity across departments is essential and we see qualitative Sociology as one of our areas of “comparative advantage.”

We currently see two important changes that need to take place. One is that we need to rethink how quantitative methods are taught within the department as well as how they are used in more advanced courses with substantive emphases. Quantitative training within the department needs to be enhanced but that training also needs to be put into practice when student are engaged in empirical research. This is no small challenge but it is one that we intend to explore and consider in the coming months. It will certainly be greatly facilitated by hiring more faculty with experience in quantitative research. Second, we need to explore ways to bring the existing quantitative researchers into closer collaboration with qualitative



researchers also within the department. Here, the department has been assisting groups of faculty members to begin research networks within our own department. These networks have only just begun – one on the social protest movement was mentioned in the report but one also exists on innovation and another on work and family. It will take some time to evaluate their worth, but our hope is that these efforts might foster both more innovative research and more interaction across different methodological approaches. Unfortunately, this step, which we see as highly promising, is severely hampered by funding limitations.

In terms of hiring, we also feel it is important to emphasize that we have already begun taking steps to strengthen the quantitative dimensions of the department. In particular, the department has just hired this summer (half-appointment) Dr. Liat Raz-Yurovich, a quantitative sociologist who recently completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Max Planck Institute, who moves us precisely in the direction the committee indicated. Still, the department should urgently hire in traditional fields of stratification as well as quantitative organizational research and will make a concerted effort in these areas. However, we continue to believe that our hiring should first focus on finding exceptionally promising scholars and subsequently how they fill gaps. We also believe that we can help in the interim by hiring more outside lecturers to teach advanced methods – both in regular semester courses as well as short 3-5 day intensive seminars.

#### 4. Organizational Studies

The report specifically mentioned Organizational Studies (OS) and in the general report criticism was raised about applied programs within the Sociology and Anthropology departments in Israel. This issue has become more apparent as the OS track in the MA has grown to be a larger proportion of the entire MA program over the past years. However, the department sees the OS program as one of our strengths but we also acknowledge that we should invest more effort to find better ways to integrate the program within the department. One step that is already



being taken is to urge more of the students to be on the research thesis track, although the number is already quite high. We hope that this will help to further shift the focus for students in the OS track and help fuel their interest in more academic questions – more consistent with the other research tracks within the department. In addition, we would like to explore efforts to make better connections across the different tracks. Thus, one of our anthropologists, Eitan Wilf, is teaching on innovation and we see this is an excellent opportunity to make connections with OS. We have also had some discussions between OS and Demography faculty on introducing organizational demography into the curriculum of both tracks. This latter step may be greatly facilitated if we manage to hire an additional quantitative member for the OS track. We also note that our newest hire in this track, Prof. Gili Drori, works with both qualitative and quantitative methods and we see this as one component of an effort to buttress the quantitative element within OS and Sociology more generally. In any case, we intend to develop a plan for better incorporation of the OS program within the department and we will report on how we will begin to tackle these issues within six months.

## 5. A Plan.

The department is engaging in a process now to set a number of goals and to determine how we will meet these goals with the help of this report. A first meeting is set to take place in early November. The goals of this meeting include outlining steps in order to accelerate the MA program so that students complete their degree within two years and to explore options for reducing the proportion of the TA positions that go to MA students and replacing that with other funding.

The committee noted the importance of also developing a hiring strategy. The logic is absolutely clear to us, and we accept the committee's recommendations about areas where needs are particularly pronounced. However, our strategy has been and will need to continue to be to focus efforts on hiring the absolute best scholars we can find. Otherwise, there is little chance any selected candidate will emerge from



the inter-departmental competition at the faculty level. We will build however on the recommendations of the committee to create a list of priority areas. These priority areas will be discussed in a departmental meeting and the senior hiring committee will take our needs into account when weighing the various candidates that submit applications and meet the highest standards.

המחלקה לסוציולוגיה  
ואנתרופולוגיה  
הפקולטה  
למדעי החברה

Department of  
Sociology and  
Anthropology  
Faculty of  
Social Sciences

#### 6. TA positions.

The issue of funding for MA students is noted and is a serious limitation. There are very few options for students to fund their studies, which means they must work in parallel to their studies in the degree programs. Unfortunately, this forces them to extend their studies, which contradicts the university's new financial model. Given the new funding model being adopted by the university, which strongly incentivizes departments to enable MA students to complete their studies within two years, the department hopes to weigh alternative models to help accelerate the students in their studies. A committee is now in place weighing change to our existing approaches to hiring TA's and funding MA students and we intend to describe our changes and their expected implications in our plan.

#### 7. Faculty mentors.

The department actually has had a faculty-mentoring program for some time and this is modeled after the program currently required by the university. However, we now realize that we need to invest more in the implementation of this model. We will review the current system, which has been somewhat informal and attempt to formalize the process to give better mentoring to our young faculty.

#### 8. Data on alumni.

We fully agree that preparation for the evaluation has highlighted the meager data available for the department to make their own evaluations. In particular, the departments have no mechanisms to track their alumni and we absolutely agree that this information should be available. Where

הר הצופים  
ירושלים 91905  
טלפון: 02-5883050  
פקס: 02-5324339

Mount Scopus  
Jerusalem 91905, Israel  
Tel. 972-2-5883050  
Fax. 972-2-5324339  
<http://sociology.huji.ac.il>



there is data it is because specific individuals or groups decided to undertake to study this topic. For example, Professor Gad Yair carried out a survey of BA alumni. This survey was cited in our original report. Funding to continue with periodic surveys of alumni was not made available but perhaps will be reconsidered by the university. There is no reason the responsibility should fall on the department, which is not suited for this sort of undertaking and which does not have the resources. We intend to continue dialogue on this with the incoming Dean, regardless of whether the responsibility lies at the faculty or university level.

This process has proven to be useful for the department as a whole. The committee's input will provide us with important information as we begin to set up working groups to help resolve concerns and to continue to improve the department.

המחלקה לסוציולוגיה  
ואנתרופולוגיה  
הפקולטה  
למדעי החברה

Department of  
Sociology and  
Anthropology  
Faculty of  
Social Sciences

הר הצופים  
ירושלים 91905  
טלפון: 02-5883050  
פקס: 02-5324339

Mount Scopus  
Jerusalem 91905, Israel  
Tel. 972-2-5883050  
Fax. 972-2-5324339  
<http://sociology.huji.ac.il>



11/11/2012

Ms. Yael Elbocher, Coordinator  
Quality Assessment Division (QAD)  
Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Dear Ms. Elbocher,

We would like to thank the Spilerman Committee for their efforts in visiting the University, their analysis of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and their thoughtful recommendations. We found these recommendations very useful. The letter written by Professor Guy Stecklov, the Department's Chairperson, summarizes the department's response to the six specific recommendations that the committee made, making it clear that the Department is considering these recommendations seriously. In this letter I would like to refer in more detail to the concerns of the committee about the hiring practices of the Hebrew University.

The committee feels that the tradeoff between considerations of quality and considerations of planning are biased in favor of quality. Thus, the report notes, "The availability of quality applicants in the particular areas in which a department wishes to invest can be a rare occurrence and the administration should give weight to the fit of an applicant with the department's plan, as well as to the quality and promise of the candidate."

I do not think that anyone would argue against the importance of the two types of considerations. Like the committee, the Hebrew University believes that both the academic quality and the balance of areas within the academic departments are critical to the buildup of successful departments. Yet, history suggests that in the event that we are unable to find suitable candidates who can also fill gaps in the teaching curriculum in a given year, we should continue the search in the particular area until the top candidate is found. In the interim period we temporarily hire adjuncts, as is the practice in many top US departments. That is, given that our pool of candidates is very small, and that in any year the top candidates might be concentrated in one or two areas only, if our mission is to remain a center of scholarly excellence, we must recruit the very best applicants, regardless of specialization. This seems to be the correct choice for a small nation hoping to produce big science. It is difficult for me to imagine a comparable department with the same mission and vision as ours choosing a different strategy.

ג'  
)

Let me end by thanking the committee again,

Sincerely,

Professor Yaacov Schul  
Vice Rector