

Raanana, 15.10.2012

Prof. Seymour Spilerman

Members of the Committee for the Evaluation of Sociology and Anthropology Study Programs

The Council for Higher Education

Jerusalem

Let me first thank all of you for your thorough examination of our self-evaluation report, for the courtesy and depth of the assessment process during your visit to the Open University on May 1, 2012, and for your useful remarks, suggestions and recommendations, which we read very carefully.

In general, we accept most of your recommendations. In fact, some of them have already been implemented during 2005-2009, the period covered in the self-evaluation report submitted to the committee. We were also gratified by the Committee's overall positive assessment of our programs.

Below, please find our replies to your specific recommendations:

1. Credits: The OUI calculates course credits differently from other Israeli Universities. While courses at other universities are awarded credits according to the number of weekly frontal teaching hours, the OUI grants credits according to the level and length of each course's reading material. The difference between the OUI and other universities in credits awarded for required courses, if any, tends to be minimal. For instance, "Introduction to Sociology" is a 6-credit course at the OUI, while it is granted between 4 – 6 credits by other universities. The difference in the number of credits tends to be greater in the case of elective courses. The reason for this is the relative "heaviness" of OUI elective courses, which tend to be more comprehensive and broader in scope than

parallel courses taught in other institutions. This is clearly taken into consideration and recognized by the CHE and its external reviewers when they evaluate and approve our study programs. Furthermore, in the review process of our course proposals, three reviewers, external and internal, are asked to address the question of whether the number of credits suggested by the course developers correctly reflects its scope. Not only is their answer to this question usually affirmative, but often, the external reviewers in particular, comment that the course's scope is too broad and the readings too demanding for the number of suggested credits. Since our courses are also constantly monitored by the department's senior faculty members, we strongly believe that the nomination of a special committee, consisting of representatives of other universities, in order to reevaluate our courses' credits is not really needed, and will certainly constitute a redundancy in our monitoring processes.

2. Recruitment of an Anthropologist: This is indeed a top priority for the department, however it depends on the available resources. We hope to be able to pursue this within the framework of the university's recruitment plan for years 2013-2018. This will no doubt strengthen the program's coverage of anthropology.

3. Reading materials in English: We agree with the committee's recommendation to introduce English-language readings during the early stages of studies. Therefore we will shortly be including English readings in our intermediate-level courses. Yet, given the less-privileged socio-economic and educational background of a significant number of our students (Arabs, Ultra-orthodox, etc.), we are concerned that incorporating English readings in introductory courses will be detrimental to these students' gradual adjustment to academic studies and may even cause them to abandon an academic education. Therefore we prefer to postpone the introduction of English reading materials to later stages of the students' studies, as mentioned above.

4. Updating: We are well aware of the need for our courses to be updated regularly, and are therefore expending much effort toward this goal. Completely updated versions of the courses "Introduction to Sociology" and "Introduction to Anthropology" will be taught in the 2013 spring semester. In addition, we will soon begin a comprehensive updating process of the courses "Trends in Israeli Society", and "Introduction to Social Sciences".

It should be noted however, that particularly in elective courses, up-to-date materials are regularly posted on the course websites by the course coordinators and the academic supervisors (senior faculty members). This ongoing online updating enables us to add new materials to the course readings each semester.

5. Cultural Studies MA program: We constantly monitor our new MA program in Cultural Studies. Following your advice, we are currently considering broadening the elective course list by having senior faculty members teach seminars in their fields of expertise. In addition, last year we raised the admission requirements for the research track, in order to maintain excellence and to limit the number of students accepted to this program. It should be noted that students who wish to write their theses on topics which are not academically covered by OUI senior faculty members, are referred to external tutors who supervise their work. As a rule of thumb, a second supervisor from the OUI is appointed in such cases in order to monitor the tutoring process. Until now we have not faced any difficulties in this regard. The feedback we have received from students in this program has been excellent thus far, which is quite reassuring as far as the academic quality of the program is concerned.

6. Employment conditions: The OUI is progressively adding level-4 positions for course coordinators, and a second coordinator in the department was recently promoted to this level. We hope that more level-4 positions will be made available in the future. In addition, course coordinators are encouraged to apply for senior faculty positions whenever an opening is available. In fact, two of the eleven senior faculty members in our department began their academic careers as course coordinators.

7. Salaries: we are well aware of the need to minimize fluctuations in course coordinators' salaries from one semester or one year to the next. To this end, the OUI has embraced a new method of calculating the capacity of coordinators' positions, which is now based on several years' moving average. This new formula, which has been already implemented, is designed to solve the problem of job instability for course coordinators.

We will continue to follow the various recommendations of the committee, and I thank you again for your efforts and suggestions, which will no doubt help us improve our study programs.

Sincerely yours,



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