



25.12.12

Council For Higher Education  
Committee for the Evaluation  
of Sociology and Anthropology Study Programs

**Re: Evaluation Report written by the Committee for the Evaluation of the Sociology and Anthropology Program at Tel Aviv University.**

We would like to thank the committee for its dedicated work and for the thoughtful comments it provided us.

**Mission and Goals of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (DSA)**

Since its establishment, the DSA has been striving toward diversity and derived its strength from this plurality. As the committee observed, the DSA "has put together an impressive mix of researchers who use a variety of methodologies in their studies." The department has indeed received considerable international recognition for its research. Undoubtedly one of the areas which gained our department's claim to distinction is the field of stratification and inequality. We have been blessed by outstanding faculty in that field. However, we would like to emphasize that this renowned specialty at our department certainly has not been its only claim to distinction. Faculty members are known in a variety of fields including political sociology, socio-cultural anthropology, gender studies, cultural sociology and organizational studies. The DSA has always seen its strength in diversifying its fields of scholarship. Moreover, we believe that the co-existence of sociology and anthropology at the same department has proved to be intellectually stimulating and enriching. The number of excellent students who are accepted to prestigious universities in the United States after completing their MA degree at our department in both sociology and anthropology is one of the best evidences for the vitality of this disciplinary co-habitation.

As observed by the committee, there is some overlap of faculty and research interests between the DSA and the Department of Labor Studies. The two programs have indeed developed considerable co-operation (both formal and informal) through advising students and through a series of joint appointments. Moreover, as of next year the Department of Labor Studies will launch a new B.A program with our close collaboration. It should also be stressed that Labor Studies is interdisciplinary in nature and has economists, IR people, historians, legal scholars and so forth. Thus, both departments believe that there are more advantages to this kind of cooperation rather than to administratively forming a joint school.



## The Study Program and Students

The BA program: As observed, most students in the BA program are pleased with their studies and appreciate the varied and rigorous program offered to them. At the same time, we do take into consideration the concerns that were raised mainly by top students (including: shortage of courses mainly in anthropology, repetition in theory courses and shortage of methodological courses). It is indeed our intention to review the program of studies while tackling these and other concerns. We are well aware of the decline in enrolment. While we cannot expect to go back to the rate of enrolment as it was before 2007, as this change has been mainly related to the competition with colleges, we believe we can at least retain the same numbers of students we currently have.

The MA program: As reported, we launched a restructured MA program. Starting in the current academic year (2012-13), each MA student has to choose a field of specialization upon entering the MA program. The four specializations are presented in the committee's report. Before further elaborating, we are very pleased to point out that our scheme of change has borne fruits. The number of applicants and new students in all specializations is satisfactory. Keeping in mind a background of steep decline in enrolment in other Sociology and Anthropology departments in Israel and in the faculty of social sciences at Tel Aviv University, the fact that this year we have more MA students than last year is considered a real success (33 vs. 23 last year). We believe that the numbers are going to grow considerably in the coming years.

As the committee observed, two of the offered study tracks are modifications of existing programs:

1. Organizational Studies and Organizations for Social Change - While no doubt it is too early to assess whether expanding the program to include courses taught under Organization Studies bore fruits, we have some initial positive evidence. First, the new program attracted a good amount of students despite the competition with new programs. Overall, the first semester has confirmed the rationale of the program that merging social change and organization studies leads to a focus on cutting edge research topics in both areas.

2. Surveys and Public Opinion - This track is indeed more practically oriented than the other three. However, it is in no way intended solely for training career-oriented students. Like in the other MA tracks, students are divided between those who choose to major without writing an MA thesis and those who end-up writing one. Owing to the rigorous program of studies provided by this track, the latter write theses that are sociologically embedded. The program also tightly prepares students who are planning to pursue PhD studies in sociology.



The following two tracks of studies are offered for the first time during this academic year:

3. Research and Critique in Sociology (Pan-Disciplinary Program in the report) - The tension between the high profile of FTEs in stratification and inequality and the decrease in the number of students who chose to focus on this field was one of the reasons for our decision to offer a track of studies that combines stratification and inequality with critical studies. We also believe that this track provides a most rigorous theoretical sociological foundation for its students. However, we must stress that we are, as is the case with the other new tracks, still in a process of testing and evaluation.

4. Socio-Cultural Anthropology- The high interest in anthropology among our advanced students was one of the main factors that urged the department to restructure our MA studies program. The result is more than assuring. The enrollment to the Socio-Cultural Anthropology in the first year is very high (10 of 33). The DSA acknowledges the strength which is based on high academic achievements and excellent teaching skills of the current relevant faculty. However, the department accepts the committee's observation that there is a need for at least one or two FTEs in anthropology in order to provide a top-grade anthropology program to our interested students and in order to attract many more others. In reference to another comment of the committee, we would like to emphasize that the perceived focus on Israel is contingent; it never was or will be part of deliberate decision. However, in order to develop a program which sends graduate students to study abroad we will need the university's financial support for travel and research grants for research conducted outside Israel.

The PhD program - The committee's conclusions regarding doctoral studies are well taken. We are planning to have a course in scientific writing as recommended. Also, we already introduced stringent criteria for admission, and we are planning to introduce a qualifying exam which will become a standard pre-requisite for dissertation writing.

## Faculty and Research

The department is well aware of the need for cohort replacement. The first step taken by the department is forming a search committee consisting of FTEs representing diverse fields of research including those mentioned specifically by the committee: anthropology, political sociology and stratification. The mandate given to this committee is to come up with a plan of hiring and consequently with a short list, which will be presented to the faculty council.

Finally, we thank the committee again for its recommendations, which intend to secure the continued strength of our department.

Sincerely,

Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni  
Chair