

**Self Evaluation in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies –
Responses Regarding Committee's Recommendations**

Committee's recommendations	University's (U) response / Department's (D) response
Specific Report	
University-wide recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a timely decision about the future of the School of Environment. There are obvious advantages and disadvantages for the Geography Department in this potential reorganization. The issue should be studied and a judicious decision should be made as soon as possible. Haifa Geography needs to know for strategic planning purposes whether it is a freestanding unit or part of a larger School of Environment. Moreover, this decision needs to be coordinated generally with environmental education and research which is being explored by other Israeli Geography departments. 	<p>(D) We have been exploring the development of an Environmental School at the University of Haifa for about a decade. The University's faculty members are leaders in the environmental field, both nationally and internationally. The original proposals looked at the benefits of combining the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies with the Department of Environmental Resources (which is only a graduate program)—and did not come to fruition, primarily because of internal departmental concerns in both departments. In December 2010 the Rector, looking at two new options, one a freestanding unit and the other an umbrella organization, requested that Deborah Shmueli (then head of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies) develop a proposal for the latter option. This took place through a series of open, facilitated meetings with the departments and four Faculties - Health, Management (Environmental Resources), Social Sciences (Geography and Environmental Studies) and Sciences (Environmental Biology) - over a period of eight months. The proposal was developed collaboratively—and then reached an impasse when the new head of the Dept. of Environmental Resources opposed the initiative. A potential Canadian donor had shown interest in funding an Environmental School, should the University management be supportive. The proposal has been frozen since December 2011. A broad interdisciplinary environmental core is vital, regardless of the decision regarding a School, however without a School, funding will most likely not be forthcoming.</p> <p>(U) The University Administration and the Rector's office recognize the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a School for Environmental Studies. We did not reject the idea but are working together with the Deans of several of the Faculties to find the institutional structure and solution that will give the best answer to the University and to the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies while promising a unique and excellent academic program.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an explicit effort to broaden PhD programs to recognize the fact that a majority of PhD graduates will not work in the academic world but in private- and public-sector jobs. A knowledge economy like Israel's has substantial demand for individuals who can do research and communicate results. PhD programs need to prepare students for work in scientific practice, think tanks, tourism, public health, product development, and the arts in addition to traditional academic research. • The PhD program suffers from an overemphasis on the student-advisor relationship at the expense of substantive interaction with graduate student peers. Students feel isolated in this system and lack opportunity for substantive engagement with peers who have different but complementary research interests. Coursework is required, but it is offered only at the MA level or outside the Department. Many PhD students (because they hold Haifa BA and MA degrees) have already taken some or all of these courses. We recommend that the Department rethink PhD requirements and provide the physical and social infrastructure to facilitate greater interaction among PhD students. (an additional comment of the committee, page 4) <p>BOTH the Department and the University respond to this recommendation, each at its own level.</p>	<p>(D) The input about the PhD program has been invaluable in our discussions about revamping the program. The program changes that the PhD committee is recommending to the Departmental Council include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of two <u>PhD level</u> required courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Theories and approaches to geography and environmental studies (one semester, 2 credits) ○ Methodologies and research organization – quantitative and qualitative problem solving (full year, 4 credits) • The doctoral seminar will be improved: a faculty member will be granted teaching credits for supervising the seminar and students will be required to prepare a written synopsis of their research presentations at the pre-proposal stage to be distributed to fellow students and faculty in advance of the seminar—facilitating meaningful interactions among participants when the students present their research (2 credits). Visiting lecturers and post docs will be integrated into the seminar. <p>The other suggestions regarding department-wide poster sessions, visits by outside experts and speakers, reverse post-doctoral fellowships bringing excellent scholars and their students to campus for a month, and group participation in international conferences will be embraced enthusiastically.</p> <p>The need for graduate student office space is urgent. We have repeatedly asked the University management to resolve this issue. In 2006, the Department realized that in order to recruit more PhD students, it had to re-plan its office space. The intention was to create a designated space for PhD students who would be able to come to the Department daily and work on their research project in a supportive and well equipped environment. The University financed the planning process and a physical plan was developed and submitted to the Vice-President for funding. As of today, the new designated space for a PhD laboratory has not been implemented due to budgetary constraints.</p> <p>Many of our PhD students already work in scientific practice and not in</p>

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	<p>academia upon graduation—and are aware of the post-PhD options. It is something that is articulated as early as in the departmental PhD admissions interview.</p> <p>(U) The University Administration recognizes and supports the space problems in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. Indeed, active efforts are being invested in order to attain the funds for developing new buildings for the University, which will free space to be available to several departments, among which is the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the funding to upgrade equipment and facilities in Departmental laboratories. Software and hardware in the GIS lab do not allow students adequate access to this critical geographic tool. Lack of equipment in the Geomorphology Lab forces staff to send samples to commercial labs for processing, draining scarce outside funding. An immediate investment in the latter would reap benefits in efficiency and cost savings for the Department and University. 	<p>(D) GIS and remote sensing, and Geomorphology are critical fields in the Department and the focus of significant funded research. These infrastructure improvements are urgently necessary. GIS and Remote sensing require significant investment in basic infrastructure—computers, instrumentation and software—and additional faculty positions. Specifically:</p> <p><u>GIS-RS Lab Equipment and Infrastructure Needs:</u> The infrastructure requirements have not been met over the past 15 years and the needs are significant (lab, hardware, software and instrumentation):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new laboratory to accommodate 60 students (from our and other University departments) is critical. • Hardware is outdated (including scanners). • Annual software licenses, state of the art software updates, and purchase of digital spatial data bases and/or satellite images; • Revamping the courses and the teaching material by updating old instrumentation and acquiring new technologies are crucial in order to keep up with other geography departments and the profession at large requires additional investments. <p><u>GIS and Remote Sensing Tenure Track Positions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We issued job tenders for a tenure track position in Remote Sensing last Spring and are now evaluating a (very large) number of applicants. We hope to hire one person this year. • Another hire in GIS will hopefully happen the following year. <p>GIS and Remote Sensing are fields necessary across faculties, not just in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies –</p>

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	<p>these are basic infrastructure for a research university.</p> <p><u>Geomorphology</u> Over the past four years we have requested infrastructure improvements for the geomorphology lab, which in addition to the lacunas noted by the Committee, also poses threats to safety. Our proposal was approved by the Rector last spring and we await budget approval and implementation.</p> <p>(U) The geomorphology lab in the Social Science Faculty Building, rooms 0208-0209: The University Administration is aware of the situation in the lab. A budget of 200,000 NIS has been allocated to refurbish the lab. Safety arrangements will be installed (eye wash station, emergency shower, electricity supply conforming to the standard, fire doors, repair of sprayers, etc.). A fume hood will also be installed and the furniture arranged. The refurbishment is in the planning stage. After the project is approved by the head of the lab, it will be implemented. The project—planning and implementation—is expected to take five months.</p> <p>In addition, we would like to note that each year the Faculty of Social Science allocates approximately 45,000 NIS to aid the geography labs, especially for purchasing materials and computer equipment, and approximately 25,000 NIS for geographic software.</p>
<p>Departmental recommendations</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop plans for the future that are appropriate for Geography and Environmental Studies as either a freestanding instructional or as part of the School of Environment. Pursue robust short-term strategies that would work well irrespective of the Department's organizational future. These include buttressing enrolments, building on existing linkages between human and physical geography, strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, and upgrading GIS capacities. 	<p>(D) These are all recommendations that we are pursuing: undergraduate enrollment is up this year (particularly among our targeted populations – water and environmental technicians and tour guides). We will begin an outreach campaign for all Master's programs at the beginning of 2013, with each faculty coordinator taking the lead. Interdisciplinary linkages within and outside the Department are strong. We are also expanding our internship program (for 3rd year undergraduates and graduate students). We are now reviewing responses of a job tender for a strong GIS and remote sensing researcher who can work with both the human and physical geography faculty members, and further the linkages.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek a better balance between the thesis and non-thesis option in the MA program. While we applaud the 	<p>(D) One main problem with the Department's MA research track is lack of adequate funds to be used as incentives both for students and for</p>

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<p>training of teaching in environmental studies, the MA is moving too quickly and completely to the non-thesis option. Too few thesis students at the MA level will weaken the PhD program unless the Department recruits PhD students from other Universities.</p>	<p>faculty. The amount of money provided by the University's Graduate School for Master's research students has diminished over the past years. Budget cuts reduced the number of available scholarships and their amount per student. Moreover, financial incentives for supervising research students have also diminished. These two deteriorating processes place our Department in an extremely difficult situation when discussing the recruitment of more Master-level research students. Faculty members use their research monies to support students but this is insufficient.</p> <p>40% of our current PhD students (8 out of 20) did their Master's studies outside our Department. Four PhD candidates studied in other Israeli universities, two studied abroad and two completed their graduate studies in other departments at the University of Haifa.</p> <p>(U) During the last five years the University's management raised the sum of scholarships for MA and BA students from NIS 21 million to NIS 27 million, despite the many curtailments in the University's budget. We plan on increasing the budget for this purpose, and at the same time expect our researchers to secure competitive research grants in order to finance research students through these sources as well.</p> <p>Further, regarding financial incentives for supervising research students by faculty - the University is aware of the need to relieve the teaching load, especially for senior faculty members who supervise many research students, have administrative positions and lead major research programs. The University tries, within the broader needs of the entire University population, to ease the load of faculty members as much as it can in any given year.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit more students from other universities and encourage Haifa students to explore outside options. Admission to Haifa, particularly in the MA and PhD levels, should be restricted to areas of faculty expertise. Students who do not fit these areas should be steered to other programs that can better meet their intellectual and employment needs. 	<p>(D) We agree whole-heartedly and will proceed accordingly.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate, to the extent possible, thesis from non-thesis students in the methods courses. The non-thesis students (primarily the environmental studies teachers) have little interest in or use for quantitative methods. Provide them with meaningful alternatives that would be useful for their work as teachers and allow course instructors to focus on the needs of the research students. 	<p>(D) We have already implemented this suggestion in terms of the Research Organization course, which as of this year is only for thesis-track students.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build an infrastructure for its PhD program that facilitates greater interaction among the PhD students themselves. This infrastructure may include office or other gathering space for graduate students, coursework organized around problem solving rather than knowledge acquisition, support for published articles and grant submission, workshops that require a high level of interaction among participants, department-wide poster sessions, facilitation of visits by outside experts and speakers, reverse post-doctoral fellowships bringing excellent scholars and their students to campus for a month, and group participation in international conferences. 	<p>(D) These next two recommendations regarding the PhD committee are addressed above in the University's recommendations section.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge that many PhD graduates will not matriculate to faculty positions at Haifa or other Israeli universities and broaden the PhD program to train graduates for opportunities in corporations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and for contributing to the wider mission of geography internationally 	<p>(D) Addressed above in the University's recommendations section.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the amount of outside funding and bring a larger share of the existing faculty into the funding base. Although the Department does an adequate job in securing outside funding, some faculty members are not engaged in this process. Consistent outside support is necessary to maintain momentum and enhance facilities and support available to research 	<p>(D) This is an ongoing effort. We note that one faculty member, along with three faculty members from the University's Faculty of Law, have just been granted 900,000 Euros over six years to develop a Minerva Center for the Study of Law under Extreme Conditions (with an option of an additional six years based on outcome). This will involve considerable interdisciplinary research, much of it aimed at funding graduate students and young scientists. It will boost our Disaster and</p>

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students.	Emergency Management program as well as numerous other departmental research specialties.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to move away from a culture of faculty research based on the individual scholar and encourage collaborative teams with members coming from inside and outside the department. Big societal challenges are complex; they require complementary expertise. 	(D) Concur.
Response to additional comment of the committee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiring decisions are heavily influenced by the University's system of centralizing all vacated lines and opening them for University-wide competition. We are concerned that this approach makes it difficult for the Department to plan ahead and address its needs, particularly in GIS and remote sensing. (page 6) 	(U) The University Administration goes through a thorough and methodical process of evaluation before recruiting young faculty members. This process is based on an international search for potential candidates and careful examination of the academic excellence of potential candidates as well as on specific priorities of the University.