

## **Ben Gurion University of the Negev**

The Department Psychology at Ben Gurion University is to be commended, overall, for the direct and thoughtful responses to the 2009 recommendations and suggestions of the committee appointed by the Council for Higher Education to evaluate the department, and for the actions taken to implement these recommendations. It is evident that they took the task of implementation in the spirit in which it was offered, as a sincere attempt to support and improve a thriving program, and the openness to continued improvement and innovation in the department is notable. On the whole, it was heartening to see that many of the committee's recommendations have been addressed or been the subject of deliberation and planning for concrete changes. We recognize as well that a number of the committee's recommendations require resources or regulatory clarifications that are beyond the school's control. *The committee recommended largely that the department stay the course while making some needed improvements.*

### **1. Expanding mainstream social psychology**

*The committee recommended strengthening the presence of social psychology in the social, brain, and cognition area, both by protecting the two new social faculty positions (one on offer to a competitive candidate, and one for which the search was ongoing) and by conducting one or more additional searches in social psychology to expand depth and breadth of expertise in this area.* The department indicates that they have done just that, by making one hire focused on attitudes, goals, and self-knowledge (in 2010) and another focused on ethnical decision making negotiations, and economic psychology (in 2012). Hence they have significantly strengthened the social area. They have also decoupled Cognition and Brain from Social Psychology, so that these are now separate programs. In the new social psychology program, both social psychology and organizational psychology are in the same program and share a common core for the MA, diverging into applied and research foci when students proceed to the PhD.

### **2. Clinical psychology and an in-house clinic**

*The committee recommended that the department follow-up on its plan to establish an in-house training clinic where science and practice are integrated, clinical training is provided for members of the community and cutting-edge research is conducted.* The department verifies that the clinical/neuropsychology program has wanted to open an in-house clinical, as recommended, and asked the university (in 2011) for support in doing so. Although the response has been tabled, the department continues to believe it will make a significant contribution in the region by providing trained clinicians and research opportunities (especially given that frequent rocket attacks in the region make this especially important). However, substantial investment would be needed to implement this.

On excellence in the clinical program, broadly, however, the department has hired 2 clinical psychologists since the 2009 report (in 2010 and in 2012) and the breadth and depth of research represented in the area is impressive with the faculty clearly scientist-practitioners focused on evidence-based practice. These faculty could also supervise students directly in a projected clinic, and certainly these hires offer a significant

improvement of these programs.

*The committee also recommended, consistent with the above, that the department ensure that adjunct faculty hired to supervise clinical students value clinical science as informative and share the program's model and philosophy of training. The department did not respond to this particular recommendation, but did make the hires noted.*

*Along these lines, the committee's general report evaluating psychology in the Israel recommended that all clinical programs be brought up to international standards and better integrate clinical science and with clinical training by several means. To state these recommendations specifically, since they were not in the committee's report for this department, they include reducing the number of courses in each of the main areas (psychopathology, assessment, and intervention), and placing more emphasis on clinical science and evidence-based practice in these courses, while requiring at least one course in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and making an effort to ensure that adjuncts hired reflect the mission of the program, as well as, where possible, that students have to option to do a practicum at a site focused on evidence-based practice.*

Although no specific actions were described in the department's implementation report on these general-report recommendations, the committee's sense was that innovations in the clinical curriculum had already been undertaken (prior to 2009) in the direction of better adhering to such principles, making it quite a good example of a way to progress in modernizing clinical programs in Israel. The committee assumes that further changes in the program that are permitted by new rules to be issued by the Ministry of Health (based on extensive discussions with faculty at the universities and with the CHE) are likely to be welcomed by the department.

### **3. The developmental program**

*Regarding the developmental program, which focused on much-needed professional training in early childhood education, the committee expressed concern that the program director was about to retire and this might compromise the program's viability. In addition, although the committee found both the objectives of the program and its curriculum under-specified and unfocused, especially given the pressing need for a cutting-edge program in developmental (informed by developmental science and including well-structured applied training). The recommendation was to revamp and modernize this program while retaining existing faculty lines and recruit scientist-practitioner faculty in the area, while perhaps also opening a pre-school that might facilitate training. The department indicates that the program has had to close and multiple meetings have been held about re-opening it or developing a child-clinical tract as an alternative. The faculty in clinical-neuropsychology in the program, however, have just recruited 3 new faculty, and thus see a need to consolidate the program for now, rather than expanding into child-clinical. The department has also had a search ongoing for 3 years for a candidate in developmental with a strong research track record who also has applied training and is licensed, but has not found a sufficiently stellar candidate meeting these requirements. Thus, the program remains closed, although a university day care center will open at the university level in the next few years and the department is likely to participate in research there when it opens.*

#### 4. Faculty in cross cultural psychology

*The committee also suggested that, given the university's location in the Negev and its mission to contribute to the surrounding area, the department would benefit from having faculty in the department whose research is focused on cultural issues and influences. The department indicates that although they have yet to develop additional strength in this area, an existing faculty member will in fact offer a cross-cultural course on inter-group conflict with emphasis on the Arab-Jewish conflict and this will be conducted in collaboration with Jewish and Arab coordinators from the Neve Shalom School for Peace. Moreover, the department sought to make a new hire in the area of cultural differences and conducted a search but the candidates in this area that year were of less exceptional quality than those in the areas of social psychology in which hires were made.*

#### 5. The educational programs

**The PhD program.** *The committee recommended that the department make concerted efforts to obtain more funding for PhD students from the university and from outside donors. The department indicates that considerable efforts along these lines have been made and recognizes that further efforts must be made so that students in psychology gain funding that is competitive with neuroscience programs. The previous chair successfully devoted much effort to gaining extra funding for students, and others have enabled "presidential stipends" covering each year in the program for 3 students. Unfortunately, however, these funding sources are no longer available. Currently, 72% of PhD students receive university funding (2772 NIS monthly) supplemented by the department (1386 NIS monthly). If feasible, student are also supplemented in the summer months. Some students may receive a "chairman's prize," a Kreitman Fellowship, or funding from the International Sephardic Education Foundation. Some teaching may be available through the Eilat campus or the Orthodox College in Jerusalem, though not on campus due to lack of funding. (On such funding issues, see #9 below.)*

**The MA programs.** *Although the committee made no recommendations about forming new tracks within the MA programs, decisions were made along these lines that the committee sees as sensible. In particular, the cognition and brain track has been decoupled from social psychology, as is typical in other departments. The cognitive/brain track has been strengthened with 2 new faculty hires since 2009, one an expert in memory and one an expert on autism. The program faculty routinely use state-of-the-art neuroimaging, making it a still stronger program. (The university is also opening and Cognitive Neuroscience Department and a number of these faculty are on its steering committee.)*

In addition, social psychology, as noted, has been strengthened by faculty hires, and it has merged with organizational psychology, so that the new program offers the option, after the first 2 years of coursework, to pursue the research track in social or the applied track in organizational with internship and applied courses that begin after year two. Hence, if students wish to continue to the PhD, they have strong academic and research grounding, even in the applied program.

Finally, the research intensive graduate program in brain, cognition and social has

historically had a notably small number of applicants relative to the applied programs. Hence the department indicates that an innovation created for the undergraduate program now also serves as a means of graduate student recruitment, i.e., an undergraduate conference (termed Poster Day) for those students actively involved in research, and tours of faculty labs among undergraduates. Undergraduates from other universities are also recruited through summer scholarships (with stipends) to students wanting to spend 2 months working in the lab of a faculty member in the department. In addition, because the university's website in English is not adequate for the psychology department, the department took the initiative to hire a website designer to design a new department graduate program webpage in English, to better present the department and its training programs for prospective graduate students.

Not least, the clinical/neuropsychology track proceeds apace as noted above.

**The undergraduate program.** *Although the committee's report on this department did not make recommendations about the undergraduate program, the new 2012 Biology-Psychology dual major began has since been awarding a BSc. In its second year it attracted 140 applicants (as their first choice) and 177 (as their second choice). In the coming year the departments of psychology and biology, jointly running the major, agreed to accept up to 65 within the top echelon of such applicants. Although a basic need of this program is that it should have a separate budget to cover laboratory teaching expenses and a salary for a teaching lab assistant, the department remains classified within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (rather than as a life science), as the report notes, and has no separate budget to cover such costs. The department does not indicate if a proposal has been submitted to the university to treat it as a life science for the purpose of this new double major for undergraduates.*

*On the latter, see our point #9 (below).*

*Finally, the general report for psychology in Israel recommended that universities ensure that all undergraduates have access to experiencing hands-on research in the major. The department indicates that even at the time the committee visited, the department required all students to do empirical work both in the experimental and development courses. The department indicates that still another course was added with empirical research requirements in the third year of students' program. A laudable number of undergraduates are also actively engaged in research in faculty labs, where they are required to analyze data and write a report, and if warranted, may publish with faculty.*

As indicated, the department has also organized an undergraduate research conference, Poster Day, in which all student projects are exhibited, increasing exposure to research in the undergraduate program, presenting role models, and inspiring interest in graduate training. Lab tours of faculty labs are also offered routinely for undergraduates, especially if interested in graduate studies.

## **6. Infrastructure**

*The committee recommended that the library increase the number of e-journals available to faculty and students, and that these are kept up to date, not a year behind. The*

department indicates that it now subscribes to nearly 270 e-journals, and if these are kept up-to-date, this has been implemented.

#### **7-8. Alumni**

*The committee recommended that the department reach out to its alumni and design a follow-up alumni survey, develop an alumni group, and circulate a alumni newsletter to foster loyalty and fundraising.* The department had a PhD student (in 2011) begin work on such a survey, but concluded that a substantial survey (and related actions) would require funding for hiring a PhD student or clerical assistant; thus, this has not been implemented.

#### **9. Additional Note: A General-Report Recommendation**

*Although the committee's report for this department did not specify it, it is worth noting that the general report evaluating psychology at universities in Israel recommended that psychology at universities be treated as a life science – in terms of teaching loads, undergraduate and graduate support, laboratory space and facilities, and the like.* Given that relevant funding (and other) challenges are noted in the department's implementation report, this recommendation from the committee's general report seems worth highlighting.