

Tel Aviv University

The School of Psychological Sciences at Tel Aviv University is to be commended 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 school, 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 an excellent program, and their openness to continued improvement and innovation is notable. On the whole, it was heartening to see that most of the committee's recommendations have been addressed by concrete changes or by concerted deliberation about and plans 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.

1. Departmental Structure and Resources

A. The Undergraduate program

To reduce the burden on existing faculty of handling such a high teaching load, while maintaining their labs and research programs, training their research students, and administering grants, the committee recommended that psychology, as the laboratory oriented field that it is, be treated more as a life science and thus be accorded comparable resources for student support.

- a. The school indicates that the CHE has increased compensation, though not fully up to the level of the life sciences, and is hopeful that with further study of the matter, the CHE may bring compensation fully up to the level of the life sciences. The school is concerned as well to ensure that the increased compensation accrued to the university for this purpose does literally trickle down to the school in full.
- b. The university has upgraded the status of psychology to that of a school, making it the School of Psychological Sciences (as of 2011). The school indicates that this has clearly boosted morale and done a lot to improve the functioning of the schools programs, not least by offering greater flexibility in management due to having an independent budget and being better able to allocate funding to research and teaching.
- c. The school indicates that teaching loads have been decreased somewhat, in part through reorganizing the undergraduate program (e.g., allowing for more elective courses to be taken outside the school) and by consolidating adjunct and teaching assistant budgets. The school is also exploring ways in which mentoring graduate students in research may be recognized as legitimate part of the teaching load.
- d. The university has also done a lot to increase scholarships for PhD students, with 33 scholarships (for the approximately 100 PhD students) at 55,000 NIS each. This is often enhanced by 2-4 additional scholarships from the rector and 2-4 additional scholarships awarded by donors, allowing the school to run a scholarship-matching program. Although

10 additional PhD scholarships are still needed in the school's budget, it is clear that significant progress has been made.

e. The scholarship situation for MA students remains extremely problematic and pressing, as only 10 scholarships are offered for the approximately 250 MA students. It has yet to be resolved with the university's leadership.

f. In the spirit of raising faculty research support to the level in the life sciences, six faculty (vs. zero previously) have now been awarded university-dedicated budgets to support their research, and the school is hopeful that this number will increase in the coming years to bring such supports fully up to the level of the life sciences.

B. Decreasing size of student body relative to faculty size

The committee recommended that each MA program admit no more than 12 students per year, with the total number of MA and PhD students supervised by a given faculty member not exceeding 8. The department indicates that the 12 MA student limit has been achieved with the new limit of 4 MA students per faculty member and the typical total of 4 PhD students per faculty member, a target that has been met. The school believes the number of undergraduates admitted to the school should also be reduced (from 300 to 200), but has yet to get movement from the university on this. The school notes that student body size challenges could be addressed by increasing faculty size (from the fixed number 28.25 to 30 or 32), and would like to work toward this with the university.

C. Hiring new faculty to represent the discipline

The committee recommended that future hires in the school rebalance the representation of faculty across programs to build on existing strengths, and bring all programs up to parallel level of excellence. The school indicates that it formulated a strategic plan for the school's program structure and hiring, i.e., it will focus on 6 programs (social, cognitive, psychobiology, adult clinical, child clinical, and cognitive neuroscience), each with 5 core faculty. Hiring has thus aimed toward this and included a new hire in social psychology, as recommended. The school agrees with the committee that developing a strong developmental psychology program would be desirable and would like to pursue this but it would require a critical mass of new faculty precluded by the fixed number of positions now permitted (28.25 rather than the 32 that would be needed).

D. Increasing laboratory space

The committee noted a great need for new laboratory space and for a restructuring of existing laboratory space in the school and recommended it be addressed. Happily, the university has invested 4 million NIS in renovating the school's vivarium and animal research laboratories, and also made a new hire that should foster state-of-the-art animal research in the school. Significant additional square footage has been added to lab space and the restructuring has improved the use of existing space. Despite this, the school indicates that significant space needs remain and that the university leadership agrees. The university also recognizes that the need is for a new, modern building for the school,

and a lot has in fact been allocated and architectural plans developed, though success with potential donors has not yet been achieved.

E. Faculty mentoring

The committee recommended that the school develop a system for mentoring untenured faculty and to provide regular feedback to faculty at all ranks through the promotion process. Although no formal mentoring system was developed, unofficial mentoring processes have begun over the last few years, both by experienced faculty commenting on grant proposals of junior faculty and through informal talks by the school's head about promotion and scholarship. More assistance and mentoring of junior faculty as they ease into full teaching loads is also provided at the point.

2. Undergraduate Program

A. Curriculum

The committee recommended that the curriculum be scrutinized to ensure broad and deep coverage of the discipline and to minimize apparent overlap between courses. To this end, the school invested effort in revamping its undergraduate curriculum in just these ways, arranging that teaching quality is monitored, and making sure that mandatory courses are covered largely by core faculty. Electives have also been increased (including some taken elsewhere on campus). And an internal review committee approves the quality and appropriateness of course every year. The committee also recommended increased use of writing assignments in classes and more experience in speaking and discussing in exercise/discussion sections. The report did not comment on the latter recommendations, except to say that implementing them would require more teaching assistantships.

B. Advising

The committee also recommended that the school develop a system for advising undergraduates, perhaps involving faculty in the process and/or training graduate students and advanced undergraduates to advise younger students. In response, the school implemented an innovative advising system called, "Stepping Together," which has now been in use now for several years and even adopted by other faculties in the university. Special efforts have also been made to mentor students from minority groups.

3. Graduate Program

A. Curriculum

The committee recommended that the school establish a procedure for determining how much breadth and depth of coursework is appropriate and should be required in each program, perhaps by a program-specific curriculum committee. The school indicates that it is now evaluating the curricula of all programs periodically.

B. Advising

The committee recommended that more systematic student advising be undertaken to enable students to better monitor their progress within each graduate program, perhaps through a seminar in which students and faculty present their work and in which potential career paths can be discussed. To this end, each MA program now holds a seminar in which faculty and students present their ongoing research and get feedback on it. A comparable seminar is held for PhD students.

C. Clinical Programs

The committee recommended that the clinical programs be brought up to international standards by several means, including by reducing the number of courses in each of the main areas (psychopathology, assessment, and intervention), emphasizing clinical science and evidence-based practice in course content, requiring at least one course in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), making an effort to ensure that adjuncts hired reflect the mission of the program, and doing whatever possible to arrange that students have the option of doing their practicum at a site offering evidence-based practice training (e.g., CBT).

Although no actions have been taken within the school to move on these recommendations directly, the heads of the clinical programs have met with the head of the school to develop a plan for implementing new guidelines that the school expects will be issued by the Ministry of Health (after extensive discussions with representatives from the various universities and the CHE). The school assumes that most if not all of the committee's recommendations involving the clinical programs can then be implemented.

D. Alumni Survey/Alumni Outreach

The committee recommended that the school do an alumni survey to gain information about alumni job placement and to get a more information about relevant ways to improve training, and in addition, to stay in touch with alumni, for example, with an alumni newsletter. Although these recommendations have yet to be implemented, other faculties on campus have developed programs to track and engage alumni and the school has consulted with these other entities and is now weighing the advice and information received with the aim of initiating its own program in the upcoming academic year.