

## **Tel Aviv-Yaffo Academic College**

The Behavioral Sciences School at Tel Aviv-Yaffo Academic College is to be commended for the direct and thoughtful responses to and clear organization of their report on implementing the 2009 recommendations and suggestions of the committee appointed by the Council for Higher Education to evaluate the school. 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 their openness to continued improvement 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 and plans for concrete changes. We recognize as well that a number of the committee's recommendations require resources or regulatory clarifications beyond the school's control.

### **A. The Undergraduate Program**

1. *The committee recommended that the school continue deliberations and make a decision about whether to offer a double major in psychology (with sociology/anthropology and/or other fields) or to continue offering a major in the behavioral sciences emphasizing psychology and also sociology/anthropology (in which case, training in the latter should be upgraded).*

a. The school and college did continue their deliberations on the above but found structural impediments within the college to offering a double major to be prohibitive thus far, even though they have not definitively been ruled out. For now, however, the choice is to strengthen sociology in the school.

b. *The committee recommended that students' training in behavioral sciences, if retained in the major, should be strengthened by offering at least one required course that explicitly compares and contrasts psychological from sociological approaches.* The school has now developed 2 such courses and is currently recruiting instructors for them.

c-d. *The committee recommended that sociology/anthropology be strengthened by reducing the apparently exclusive focus on the theory, by adding evidence-based courses in this field, and by hiring 2 or more quantitatively (or evidence-based) sociologists faculty.* The school has made some revisions to the curriculum accordingly and one quantitatively oriented sociologist has been hired as a faculty member.

### **2. Hands on experience**

a. *The committee recommended that course credit be offered to students for taking part in hands-on experience in the field (e.g., in the private sector) and in faculty research to enable students to further develop their competencies.* Credit is now offered for engaging in ongoing faculty research (even if few have availed themselves of this opportunity). The report offered no comment about research credits for field experience in other settings.

### **3. Changes in the curriculum**

a. *The committee recommended that at least one required core course use an English-language textbook and the school indicates that all courses now use such a text.*

b. *The committee recommended that at least one required (advanced) course also require that students read journal articles in English and the school indicates that this is now the case in most courses.*

## **B. The MA programs**

### **1. Strengthening the programs**

a. *The committee recommended that the scientist-practitioner emphasis of the clinical psychology and neurological rehabilitation be protected and strengthened, and the school has done so in part by providing students course credit (and crediting faculty as well) for conducting their final projects (in lieu of the MA with thesis)*

b. *The committee recommended that all students be required to take a diverse range of courses that are evidence-based (e.g., cognitive-behavioral therapy and/or family systems), and if feasible, be required to take a cognitive behavioral or family systems practicum as well, or offered the option. All students are now required to take a course in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and students in the clinical and medical psychology programs also take a course in family systems. The very limited availability of practica in CBT, however, constrains the school's ability to require such practica.*

c (i-vi). *The committee recommended that the existing course work be condensed to reduce redundancy across course requirements that currently focus on psychodynamic theory to ensure significant exposure to evidence-based approaches. The department indicates that an effort has been made along these lines (reducing semester hours required by 4-6) in the nonclinical programs, but the school believes it cannot make reductions or place further emphasize evidence-based approaches until new guidelines from the Ministry of Health (Council of Psychologists), in conjunction with the CHE, are issued. But the curricula of all programs except clinical have been modernized to make them more evidence-based.*

d. *The committee recommended that the school build on the strengths of the clinical and neurological rehabilitation programs by hiring one or more core faculty members in each area, and the school has done so.*

e. *The committee recommended that class sizes be reduced to no more than 20 and the school indicates that most of their courses are now 21 students or fewer.*

### **2. Programs in medical and vocational psychology**

a-b. *The committee found these programs to be less well defined than others in the school and to be less clearly sustainable because they are supported by an insufficient number of faculty. The school has decided to retain both programs and thus made 2 new faculty hires in each program and both curricula have been revised.*

### **3. MA thesis**

*The committee recommends that pursuit of MA with thesis – or its equivalent – is best in all graduate programs, and the school agrees with this, but indicates that it has not been permitted by the CHE to offer such degrees and has long worked to maintain equivalent training excellence requires a ‘final paper’ in lieu of a thesis. Students are now offered academic credit to allow for more time investment in this project.*

4. The school agrees that a 3-year program would be more suitable for its MA programs, but the CHE requires such programs be completed in 2 years.

### **C. Infrastructure**

a. *Regarding library materials: Based on student complaints about the onerous process of getting reimbursed for use of the Tel Aviv University library, the committee recommended work to establish a way of streamlining this process. The school indicates that the process is free of charge but does not clarify whether or not the process has been simplified.*

b. *The committee recommended that better on-campus and remote access to the electronic journals and data bases of Tel Aviv-Yaffo Academic College, and the school indicates that they have now enabled both, and have increased their subscriptions to data bases. They also improved their existing inventory of assessment tools that are made available to students.*

c. *The committee recommended that the college find ways to enable electronic access to journal and data bases at Tel Aviv University. The school indicates that existing licensing arrangements prevent remote access to Tel Aviv University's data bases.*

d-e. *The committee recommended that more office space be made available to graduate students in the school and the school indicates that the college plans to significant increase its office space by 2013-14, though much of that space will be needed to accommodate the new faculty hired. The committee also recommended that additional lab space be created to facilitate increased engagement in research both by undergraduates and MA students. The school indicates that space for the expansion of psychobiology labs exists and can be made available as needed and that other lab space needs are met.*

### **D. Alumni Survey/Alumni Outreach**

*The committee recommended that the school or college do an alumni survey to gain information about alumni about job placement and potential improvement opportunities. The college has done this, as well as constructing a comprehensive alumni data base and launching a Career Management Center. The committee also recommended that the school or college develop and establish a regular a regular alumni newsletter, and the college has done just this.*

### **Remarks regarding Sociology and Anthropology:**

The evaluation committee found the Behavioral Sciences program at the Tel Aviv – Yaffo Academic College (AC, for short) to be of high quality, well planned and highly valued by the students. It is from this vantage point that the committee provided critical comments and recommendations that would hopefully improve an already highly regarded program. The committee's recommendations largely derive from a sense of imbalance in the AC programs both at the B.A. and at the M.A. levels. I will focus here on the B.A. program which has a sociology component.

The committee made several recommendations regarding the sociology component in the B.A. program.

*Committee Recommendation:1(a) There is a problem of structure that must be addressed. As it stands the program is more like a dual major (psychology & sociology/anthropology) program than a behavioral sciences program. As a dual major program it is imbalanced. The committee recommends either significantly strengthening the sociology component - hiring faculty, giving more structure to this program and enhancing the empirically oriented (evidence-based) courses, or focusing on a psychology major with multiple options for a second major or minors (e.g., sociology, political science, economics)*

AC response: While the AC is quite favorable toward having a stand-alone psychology program (to be taught in combination with other majors) it acknowledges the fact that for organizational and possibly accreditation reasons this is not possible at this time.

**This being the case the issue of balancing the program and strengthening the sociology component becomes more crucial.**

*Committee Recommendation:1(b) As a behavioral science program it should have at least one course that is integrative – addressing one or more issues from the perspectives of both psychology and sociology/anthropology possibly using team teaching.*

AC Response: Two such courses are now being contemplated and are expected to be including in the curriculum in 2013-2014.

**As there is no further information it is not possible to assess the adequacy of the courses the AC intends to add.**

*Committee Recommendation:1(c & d) As a way of balancing the program and strengthening the sociology component it is recommended that structure and sequence of this component be re-thought. Specifically adding empirically-based courses and increasing the share of electives while reducing the number of credits devoted to theory courses. In order to achieve a better balance the number of sociology faculty (specifically with empirical quantitative orientation) should be increased.*

AC Response: The course on "historical and intellectual sources of social sciences" which was a required course (5 credits) will become an elective course as of October 2012. This will make room for more electives in the program. The response also states that a quantitative sociologist was hired, a step that will strengthen the evidence-based orientation of the program. These are welcome moves in the right direction.

**It is somewhat unfortunate that this wide ranging foundation course which stands in clear contrast to the disciplinary specialization of psychology courses will no longer be required of all students.**

**More generally, the study program that was attached to the AC response does not dispel some of the concerns raised by the evaluation committee over the structure and the content of the sociology component. (a) In contrast to AC statement we note that the course on "historical and intellectual sources of social sciences" is still listed as a required course in the study program provided. (b) Assuming that the course will no longer be required, what effect will this have on the program? Does this simply make room for a few more elective courses from an open list, or will there be more structure? (c) What is the impact of the new hire of a quantitative sociologist? Is the person full time in the behavioral science program? Does this affect the structure of the program in any way? (d) The above clarifications are needed as it seems from the program that the sociology component still appears to have little structure and the logic of decisions concerning the list of seminars and elective courses offered is not evident. As one example the sociology component includes quite a few courses that are not sociology courses but rather represent other disciplines or general social sciences (e.g. human rights, local government in Israel, politics and the environment, philosophical foundations of economic theory, law and politics....).**

**One additional point regarding the treatment of the psychology and sociology components of the behavioral sciences program concerns English reading requirements. In response to the evaluation committee's concern the AC notes the use of English texts in all psychology courses (textbooks in the required courses and journal articles in advanced courses). Yet nothing is said regarding this requirement in the sociology component.**