

Technion University

The Department of Behavioral Sciences at the Technion has offered a variety of responses to the 2009 recommendations and suggestions of the committee appointed by the Council for Higher Education to evaluate the department. But evaluating the actions taken by the department to implement the recommendations made by the committee has not been made easy by the department's report and the additional materials also provided. The latter were offered without explanation and were often incomplete and inconsistent. Moreover, some of the materials are partly or only in Hebrew, a language not read by most of the committee. The committee's report was offered sympathetically, in a cooperative, collaborative spirit; its recommendations were intended to help a program that appeared be highly successful to continue these successes, retain its integrity, and improve despite imminent retirements of two key members in this small department, a social science department in an engineering school.

As for the Department's "Response," many of the itemized responses are preceded by "we are aware" or "we do not agree." Many do not fully address the concerns of the committee.

The committee had been and still is impressed with the quality of the department, both the faculty and the program. However, there had been and still is concern about breadth, that the department faculty and courses did not adequately represent Behavioral Science. This was especially evident in the absence of a sociologist, a position the Department has still failed to fill, despite claiming years of efforts. But there are now other issues of breadth and coverage. The Department sent a set of course syllabi. It was not clear if these were the entire set of course offerings or partial. Because many of the syllabi are old and at least one faculty member listed as teaching is not on the list of faculty, there is no way of knowing if all of these courses are being taught. We were not provided with updated curricula for the BA and MA degrees. If the set of syllabi was meant to represent the entire set of course offerings, then there is further reason for concern about coverage. Standard basic courses in psychology are missing, for example, cognition, perception, development, and social. There is no anthropology and no economics and there is still no sociology. The courses offered look like a set of topics in applied psychology, primarily to business, somewhat to human factors. The program bears resemblance to the kind of program offered in some engineering schools in Industrial Psychology. This may in fact be a fine program, reflecting unfolding developments and needs in the fields, but it does not appear to be Behavioral Science. Perhaps for this reason, the Department refers to itself as IE, Industrial Engineering.

A. Faculty and programs. *A serious concern is maintaining the excellence of the department, given that it is already short of faculty and key retirements are imminent, which will deplete the faculty by nearly half. The committee recommends replacing retiring faculty pro-actively, to assure a smooth transition, and replacing retiring faculty with mid-career professionals, to maintain excellence.*

The program has hired new faculty, in Marketing and Strategy. Two key faculty who retired are still active in certain roles in the department. There is a possibility to hire a sociologist who shares interests with the current department's themes. The Department is awaiting CHE approval for a new Behavioral Sciences program with three tracks more aligned with

current faculty interests: cognitive psychology, human factors, and organizational psychology.

B. Program. *The graduate students need more advanced courses. There are several ways to address this; all or some should be adopted: Increasing the size of the faculty; creating formal ties with Haifa University that will enable students in both institutions to take courses in either institution; reducing the service courses to undergraduates thereby freeing faculty to teach advanced courses for the graduate students... The curriculum committee should continue to monitor the program requirements with continued student input.*

The committee's major point here was that the graduate students felt they needed more challenge in the form of more advanced courses. At that time, the faculty responded that they couldn't teach more advanced courses because they were teaching so many undergraduate courses. The department's response to the recommendations was to reduce the requirements for BA students and to increase the credit for two of the key remaining courses. At the same time, the department says it does not agree with the committee's recommendation to reduce the number of undergraduate courses. This is confusing, as they say they have reduced undergrad requirements.

The central concern, offering graduate courses that provide greater challenge to graduate students, was not addressed.

The department says they are attempting to integrate into the curriculum some courses taught at Haifa University, but there has been no concrete progress. The department added that part of the difficulty is tuition remission, a policy set by the CHE.

C. Program. *The department should consider requiring PhD students to teach discussion sections in undergraduate courses, and in some cases, MSc courses, as part of their graduate education (and not necessarily for remuneration, that is, as part of their regular graduate support). This would provide future academicians with valuable teaching experience as well as supplying needed supplementary undergraduate teaching. A teaching requirement is standard in most North American PhD programs.*

The department noted that most PhD students do some teaching, appropriately remunerated. This is to be lauded. Finding a way to make teaching (with faculty supervision) a mandatory requirement for PhD students is recommended as teaching is an important part of doctoral education.

D. Library. *The library needs more journals and e-journals, and students need access to on-line resources off-campus. A committee to address these problems should be established in the first year, with solutions instituted the second year. Joint library arrangements with Haifa University are advised. Because access to journals and books is needed by all institutions of higher learning, a nation-wide consortium, especially for on-line access to journals and data bases, should be seriously considered.*

The department acknowledged the problem of access to journals, noting that the situation is worse due to funds. The committee certainly realizes that some recommendations require funding the department cannot alone provide.

However, the department did not address the issue of off-campus access to archives. Given that increasingly more of the archives students and faculty need are in the cloud, the need for physical space is decreasing. Given that students and faculty increasingly carry their cloud connections with them and work from many different locations, it is essential to have off-campus access to archives.

E. Space for laboratories and research. *Such facilities are already cramped and more space will be needed in the near future. The committee recommends continuing conversations with the Dean to increase space modestly in the short-term and more substantially in the long-term.*

The department has been making efforts to increase laboratory space.

F. Alumni Survey. *The committee recommends that the department conduct a survey of alumni. The survey can ask former students about their further education, their employment, how they found their jobs, how their education contributes to their further education and their jobs, and more. The results will be useful for planning purposes and for keeping the department up to date with needed improvements and changes.*

Laudably, the department organized a reunion of former graduates as part of an international conference held at the Technion, and conducted a survey of the “invited alumni.” They plan to continue this tradition. The department did not say what percent of former students responded, what the questions were, what they learned from the survey.

G. Alumni Association. *The committee also suggests that the department establish ongoing contacts with alumni to build an alumni culture, which can be valuable to the institution and to the department. If the department were to establish a newsletter for alumni and to organize communities of graduates, perhaps by current employment or geographic region, this is likely to keep students involved with the university. Alumni groups often offer financial support to their alma maters as well, and support them in other ways too, making it in the university’s best interest to have ongoing alumni contacts can foster this.*

The department is working with the Technion to establish better connections with department graduates. Some have been invited to serve on an Industrial Advisory Board for the department. These efforts as well as the yearly reunion of alumni are to be applauded, and should bring benefits to faculty and students as well as to alumni.

Remarks regarding Sociology and Anthropology:

The response to the evaluation committee should be considered by the psychologists on the team as the program is void of any courses in sociology.

In its report the evaluation committee suggested that the Technion reconsider the name of the program (**The Graduate Program in Behavioral Sciences and Management**) and possibly drop the reference to behavioral sciences so as to align the title with the content of the program. The indirect response to this from the Technion is twofold: firstly the program was revised

and now includes a specialization in marketing which is interdisciplinary (and does not require an undergraduate degree in psychology). In order to carry out the program it recruited new faculty in the areas of economics and business who specialize in marketing. These are backgrounds that are not typically considered part of behavioral sciences, but nonetheless this does contribute to the interdisciplinarity of the program and expands it beyond psychology. Secondly, The department states that it is interested in recruiting a sociologist with specialization in areas that are relevant to the program and note that they currently are hosting a post-doc (Dr. Julia Bear) who they may eventually recruit. Since Dr. Bear's CV was not included it is difficult to evaluate this potential recruit (and it may be too early) but her achievements listed in the report seem promising and I would encourage the program to either hire her if suitable or continue the search for a sociologist (judging from candidates for departments of sociology in Israeli universities there are not many with a background relevant for the Technion's program, but the few I know of have strong academic records).