Bar-Ilan University אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

לשכת סגנית הרקטור
Office of the Vice Rector

8 Tishrei, 5774
September 12, 2013

To:
Ms. Alexandra Bilik
Coordinator for QA
Quality Assessment Division (QAD)
Council for Higher Education
Jerusalem

Response to the Evaluation Report of the Committee for the Evaluation of Linguistics Study Programs

Dear Ms. Alexandra Bilik,

Enclosed please find the response of the Department of English to the report by the Committee for the Evaluation of Linguistics Study Programs in English Department at Bar-Ilan University.

"The members of the Linguistics Program in the English Department at Bar-Ilan University would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for the Evaluation of Linguistics Study Programs for their hard work and their collegiality, and for the thought and care that went into both the visit itself and into the writing of their report. The visit was felt to be a positive experience both by the members of the faculty and the students, all of whom enjoyed the opportunity to meet and talk with the members of the committee.

This response is divided into two parts: Part 1 reacts directly to the summary of the recommendations on page 23-24 of the report. Part 2 lists some factual corrections to data mentioned in the body of the report, most the result of changes which have occurred since the Committee's visit.

Part 1: Implementation of the Recommendations
Short term recommendations:

1. The Program thoroughly endorses the Committee's recommendation **to change the name of the Department from the Department of English to the Department of English Literature and Linguistics (המחלקה לבלשנות וספרות אנגלית).** We have received instructions from Ms. Pnina Agassi, the Rector's Deputy in charge of administrative matters, as to how to prepare a request to the University's Coordinating Committee to change the name of the Department, and we are preparing the necessary document.

2. The Program likewise endorses the Committee's proposal that the University request that the **MA in Research for Clinical Linguistics be included retroactively in the 5-year plan submitted to the Council for Higher Education in 2012,** and that the University take what steps are possible to ask for speedy approval for the proposed MA.

3. With respect to a **strategic plan governing immediate hiring priorities**, the Program has been following one for some years now. Our goals were (i) to cover all core areas in theoretical linguistics, (ii) to guarantee fruitful interaction between theoretical and experimental research in the Program, (iii) to strengthen clinical linguistics and (iv) to prepare in advance for the planned retirements of Professors Walters and Fine. In the last two years, we have achieved (i) and (ii) with the hiring of Dr. Laks (2011) and Dr. Weidman Sassoon (3/2013), respectively. Our next immediate priority is to hire in the field of clinical linguistics and thus strengthen the proposed MA program

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Linguistics in Clinical Research as well as prepare for the retirements of Professor Jonathan Fine (Language Disorders, Language and Psychiatry) and Professor Joel Walters (Bilingualism, Specific Language Impairment) in 2017. We have posted a preliminary notice on Linguist List (with the permission of the Dean) and have received a number of CVs from potential candidates in Israel and abroad, some of whom were highly qualified. Unfortunately, we have not received permission to go any further with the hiring procedure. We understand that with two recent hires we are not in a position to complain, nonetheless, the consensus in the Program is that a hire in Linguistics for Clinical Research is our top priority. We appreciate the need for a sociolinguist and a historical linguist. We would be happy to hire a computational linguist. However, discussions with students about their own interests and needs have indicated that this is not a high priority. While we agree fully that it is important to try and make a course in computational linguistics available to our students and increase computer literacy and facilitate work with large corpuses and so on, it seems that the students whose major interest is in computational linguistics self-select out of our program. In the long term, we would like to explore the possibility of a double major with computer science. Two new hires in computer science (Goldberg and Keshet) have opened new possibilities for collaboration which we have begun to explore.

4. **Additional computer equipment, student assistance for the Librarian.** We have (again) drawn the Dean's attention to these issues. However, in the wake of the recent cuts to the faculty budget we are not confident about finding the financial support for any additional student hours in the library (which we have in any case repeatedly requested over the last few years).

5. **English.** We are happy that the Committee appreciated the importance of English as the language of instruction. We are considering ways in which to provide support for students who need extra help with English. Unfortunately, recent budget cuts to the Humanities Faculty mean that the Department (Linguistics and Literature Programmes) are struggling to maintain the discussion sessions at the current level, and we are not in a position at the moment to finance any extra support/discussion sections.

Intermediate goals:
1. **Publicity/Visibility both within and outside the Department** - The University has made access to the Department's website considerably easier and we have used this to update the Linguistics pages with the help of Dr. Gabi Danon. We are using this both to increase awareness of advising possibilities within the Department and to increase visibility outside the University. We plan to make it known in all first year classes how and when undergraduate advising is available and to recommend to students to seek advice before registering via the university's on-line system. Until a few years ago, meeting with an advisor before registration in the fall was obligatory, however on-line registration has made it impossible to implement this practice.

2. In terms of **visibility outside the university**, we have begun to exploit options for public lectures at youth-oriented events such as Brain Awareness Week and Science Night, as a means of raising awareness of what linguistics is, as well as responding to invitations to lecture at events in the Speech and Language Pathology community. Professor Armon-Lotem and Dr. Ben-Shachar are particularly active in this. We continue to run open-days at the university and hope that the extra-mural lectures will feed into these.

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3. With respect to **tracking alumni** and **developing possible career advising for undergraduates** we are discussing the possibility of setting up an email network to keep track of recent graduates, especially for the graduates of the Linguistics in Clinical Research track. De facto, individual advisors have at least a partial network, since many former Ph.D. students stay involved to some degree with their supervisor's research group. It should not be too difficult to expand these to a more general network. It will take us longer to evaluate whether and how to provide any effective career advising for undergraduates. However, we hope that a network of alumni may at least provide an informal resource, since we will be able to direct undergraduates to alumni who can provide them with up-to-date information about the relevant careers.

4. **Balance between the Literature and Linguistics within the Department.** We are happy to contemplate a long term strategic plan to increase cooperation between the Literature and Linguistics Programs. An initial suggestion mooted at the end of the 2013 spring semester is a joint program in academic English, to be organized jointly by the Literature and Linguistics Programs.

5. We are exploring the possibility of raising external funding from the Council for Higher Education to fund a **computational linguistics class** directed at the linguistics student population. In the meantime, Dr. Gabi Danon's new course *Theoretical and computational aspects of syntactic representation* (37-582), while not a computational linguistics course, will include a basic introduction to some topics in computational linguistics.

6. With respect to the possibility of acquiring additional office space by merging the library with the general library, we have had a preliminary discussion among faculty members, and we are strongly opposed. The library is seen as a major departmental asset for a number of reasons: (i) physical accessibility of books, (ii) reserve shelves dedicated to particular course needs, (iii) an independent budget for buying books in linguistics and autonomy on decision making in collaboration with the librarian as to how this budget can be best used, (iv) a librarian whose primary responsibility is to serve the needs of the department (students and faculty), (v) the availability of help to students in English, (vi) a channel of communication with the Central Library is via our own librarian. Experience has shown that these advantages would all be lost if the Department did not have an independent library, since the Central Library is a highly bureaucratic structure. Most other faculties in the university have their own libraries. While the Humanities Faculty does not have its own library, the Departments within the Faculty have excellent departmental libraries. Losing our independent library would put us at a serious disadvantage with respect to every other Department in the University.

Part II Comments on the body of the report.

General update about faculty status; (Page 10) Since the Committee's visit in March 2013, the following promotions were approved: Sharon Armon-Lotem to Associate Professor, Michal Ben-Shachar and Gabi Danon to Senior Lecturer with tenure. The Program now has three Full Professors (Professors Fine, Rothstein and Walters), two Associate Professors (Professors Armon-Lotem and Saiegh-Haddad), three tenured Senior Lecturers (Drs. Ben-Shachar, Danon and Greenberg), one untenured Senior Lecture (Dr. Weidman Sassoon) and one untenured Lecturer (Dr. Laks)

Further remarks:
- Page 9: Last paragraph: Indeed we are trying to compensate for the insufficient preparation of incoming students. However, budget constraints make it impossible for us to provide the ₃

supplementary discussion sections which would help us to do this. We were recently informed by the Administrative Head of the Humanities Faculty has informed the English Department of a cut in the Department's budget (0.25 FTE which has been used to fund discussion sections in both first year linguistics and literature courses (and two creative writing courses)). Although the Dean has rescinded this order, this is indicative of the uncertain status of funding for all non-tenured or tenure track positions, and de facto the situation is that essential discussion sessions led by graduate students are funded at the discretion of the Faculty administration on a year-by-year basis, and have to be renegotiated each year. We note that the Linguistics Program currently has only three discussion sessions accompanying three first-year courses (Introduction to Linguistics, Introduction to Syntax and Introduction to Semantics). This not comparable to the support provided in other Linguistics Programs where discussion sessions are part of the basic phonology course as well as the second level syntax and semantics courses.

- Page 10: five lines from the bottom: Should be Weidman Sassoon.

- Page 15: line 3: It is worth noting that the primary source of funding for Humanities Research in Israel is the Israel Science Foundation. One can be the Principal Investigator on only one project at a time, and funding is on average around 100,000 NIS per year. On the assumption that plausible financial support is 6000 shekels a month, a faculty member can thus fully support 1.5 students at any given time. (In practice the money is usually divided to provide a number of partial fellowships and to supplement Presidential Fellowships, which, as the Committee noted, are not sufficient to live on.)

- Page 16: End of first paragraph: We are aware of the difficulty encountered in making presentations by students who are not practiced in speaking English. On the other hand, encouraging such presentations is an essential part of working towards increased fluency.

- Page 17: Second paragraph: we are happy that the Committee recognizes the importance of the informal self-assessment by the Linguistics Faculty and constant reevaluation of the goals of the Program which is an essential part of the organizational structure of the Program.

- Page 17: *Issues concerning means of instruction and advising*: We are working to make undergraduate advising more visible. We would be very happy if the budget allowed more supplementary instruction for technical aspects of the coursework and we would also be happy to provide our graduate students with more opportunities for TA-ing.
  With regard to overlapping courses, our schedule reflects a consistent demand by students at undergraduate and graduate levels to concentrate their coursework on a limited number of days a week, so that they can work a number of full days in paid jobs. The schedule reflects the requirements for each 'year' in the program. Overlapping scheduling occurs when students want to take courses which are not generally intended for the year they are in or when they are majoring or minoring outside the Department. At the moment we do not see any way to avoid this.
  With respect to MA advising and the 'gap' between the advisor's comments and the logistical problems encountered in registering, it should be noted that the these occurred at the inception of the *Linguistics for Clinical Research* specialization, which coincided with the installation of the University's *Priel* on-line registration system. The combination of the two led to problems which we now hope and believe have been solved.

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- Page 18: *Involvement of students in Faculty Research*: We do in fact often advertise Research Assistant positions and encourage participation in research projects. A number of faculty members have expressed frustration at how difficult it is to get undergraduates to commit themselves to taking these jobs. We feel that while BA students express a desire 'in principle' to be involved in experimental work and research projects, they are often not prepared to make the commitment which would allow them to do this, and many of us have personal experience of students dropping out of projects after an initially enthusiastic response. It takes a long time to educate students into a culture of genuine research.

- Page 19: *Physical Space in Building 404 SAL*: We heartily endorse every word written.

- Page 20: *The Library*: As noted above, we see the library as a great asset to the Department. We would be happy to see it upgraded to allow workspace for students.

- Page 21: *Self-Evaluation Process*:
  In fact students and TAs were involved in the preparation of the report. When the report was prepared in 2011 we sent around a questionnaire asking for their input on many of the issues and their responses were included in the report. Because of the delay between the preparation of the report and the Committee's visit, some of the new students who met with the Committee had not been involved with the questionnaire. The others (as they admitted to us after their meeting with the Committee) had simply forgotten about it because it was so long ago".

We thank the CHE Committee for the helpful recommendations and hope to continue to improve the quality of Linguistics Study Programs in English Department.

Sincerely,

Prof. Miriam Faust
Vice Rector
In charge of Quality Evaluation

Cc:
Prof. Haim Taitelbaum, Rector
Prof. Joel Walters, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities
Prof. William Kolbrener, Head, Department of English

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