

Netanya Academic College (2)

The School of Behavioral Sciences at Netanya Academic College has provided organized and detailed responses to the Spring, 2013 response of the committee appointed by the Council for Higher Education to the NAC report of their compliance with the CHE's 2009 evaluation of their program. Because NAC's initial compliance report did not specifically address the suggestions and recommendations of the 2009 CHE report, the NAC prepared a second compliance report that does address most of the suggestions and recommendations from the 2009 CHE report. The committee appreciates the care and thought that guided NAC's most recent answers. Although several unresolved issues inevitably remain, the committee believes that the NAC has, on the whole, made excellent efforts as well as considerable progress, and is to be commended for both.

The committee appointed by the CHE consisted of experienced faculty from many distinguished universities both in the US and in Israel. The committee visited all the universities and colleges with established programs in psychology and the behavioral sciences in Israel, 12 in all. Thus, the committee acquired a broad understanding of those programs both within Israel and abroad. The mission of the committee was to help the programs in Israel maintain or achieve excellence. Maintaining excellence requires constant change. It is especially challenging in light of the last decade's dramatic methodological and conceptual changes in the fields that are rapidly yielding new findings that alter both basic and applied research methods and practices. New techniques for observing the living brain, new developments in the genetic and biological bases of behavior, new statistical and computer methods that use the internet to collect and analyze new forms of behavioral data and that allow large, diverse, international samples. Faculty with knowledge of the new findings and training in the new methods and applications are essential for educating the next generation of students. Fortunately, Israel has a talent pool with that expertise. Researchers in Israel are at the forefront of some of these fields, and are training new PhD students in those areas. In addition, many Israelis trained abroad in cutting edge research are looking to return. The NAC is in a good position to take advantage of that pool of talent in their new hires.

The 2009 recommendations of the CHE were given in this spirit, to insure that the students in NAC receive a comprehensive and future-looking program that will prepare them to work as professionals in the range of fields involving the behavioral sciences and to attend graduate school if they so choose. For these reasons, the committee has some concern that some of the responses of the NAC seem designed to preserve the existing situation rather than taking on the challenges of the future.

Faculty. The committee respects and values NAC's desire to have experienced teachers; however, we remain skeptical that instructors, especially those who

completed their education long ago, can remain current enough to offer future-oriented courses in so many diverse areas and disciplines. A related remaining concern is the disciplinary expertise of the faculty. Some have PhD degrees from recognized institutions in the behavioral sciences, but others have degrees in other disciplines or do not have advanced degrees (it is disturbing that one faculty member's syllabus still lists a PhD from Newport University, which was never accredited to grant PhD degrees and no longer exists). Some faculty members are admirably up-to-date in the relevant disciplines, actively publishing in international journals, but others have published very little in the relevant disciplines, if at all. Clearly, priority should be given to hiring faculty members at all levels who are up-to-date active researchers in the behavioral sciences. The most recent hires fit that requirement, and the committee advocates continuing this policy.

Curriculum. The NAC is to be commended for their courses in statistics, for requiring students to participate in research, for incorporating articles in English readings in their syllabi, for establishing an honors program, and for offering courses in economics as well as psychology, sociology, business, and anthropology. The breadth of courses spanning the behavioral sciences is impressive. Examining the syllabi reveals that most courses rely on a single final exam for course grades, a practice that is common in Israel. The committee would like to call attention to recent findings (notably by Roediger's group at Washington University) showing that students at all levels and for all kinds of content benefit from frequent examinations, even at the expense of additional class time. The benefit from frequent testing—even short, snap quizzes—comes from many factors, including distributed practice.

Like the NAC, the committee values and respects breadth beyond the major in undergraduate education, but breadth requirements should be thoughtful and systematic; a couple of courses in Jewish religious practices are not sufficient to constitute breadth. The committee agrees that team-taught interdisciplinary courses can be challenging, but such courses are given in other colleges in Israel and the US and both students and faculty find them rewarding. There are behavioral science programs with successful internship programs involving undergraduates in Israel; NAC might want to consult with them for advice. On the whole, partnerships between industry and educational institutions have brought positive benefits to both.