



Reply to the Committee for the Evaluation of Economics Study Programs

First, we wish to thank the committee members for their visit to our campus. We are grateful for all their attention and comments and very happy that the committee was impressed with our vision and mission to attract and cater to a diverse student population.

Addressing the issues raised in the committee's report, we wish to emphasize that the College has indeed changed its orientation from that of mostly-teaching to a more balanced orientation, with a much stronger emphasis on research (mainly applied and empirical research). The change was essential when the number of colleges grew from only 7 colleges in 1994 to more than 60 academic institutions that operate in Israel in recent years. The better colleges needed to establish their advantage over the lesser ones. Academic research was seen as one of the most appropriate means by which to indicate this advantage. Therefore, the emphasis shifted toward academic excellence, manifested mainly by quality research.

The shift was made clear in all the colleges' committees and to all academic faculty members in all the presidents' meetings with faculty and his speeches, and in all meetings of the vice president for academic affairs with individual faculty members.

Our responses to the committee's recommendations are as follows:

	Committee's Recommendation	Steps toward implementation
1.	"...there is a lack of clarity regarding the college's vision of the relationship between research and teaching.... There should be a better articulation of the balance between research and teaching, across the board, of the college's vision and goals, given the current budgetary model and available resources"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. We created a research authority to help researchers with national and international research funds, submission of proposals, etc. b. We are employing an expert at writing research proposals, who is available to all faculty members. c. We have increased the amount of funds for research that is allocated each year to active researchers at the college. d. We encourage researchers to attend professional conferences and present their studies in them. e. We are running an annual "Research Day", in which active researchers present

		their studies to enhance cooperation among the diverse departments.
2.	"To meet the goals that the institution has set itself, it should recruit at least two more faculty members, as it is currently below critical mass. It should prioritize candidates in applied econometrics."	Though it is quite difficult to recruit faculty for Economics (they prefer the more lucrative professional work outside academia), several new faculty members were recruited and their suitability will be checked in the coming academic year. Academic positions will be offered to those among them who will prove suitable. This may take a year or two while the quality of their teaching and their research fruitfulness is evaluated.
3.	"Given the size of the faculty, the program has had to rely heavily on adjunct lecturers. Yet, since the employment contracts are short term for adjunct faculty, there is some risk in this current employment uncertainty. "	It is true that like all academic colleges in Israel, the Academic College of Tel-Aviv Yaffo relies on adjunct lecturers. Our dependence on state budgets obliges us to maintain a ratio of 1 faculty member per 39 students. Currently, the proportion of students per faculty is 1:38 The terms of employment of adjunct lecturers, like the terms of all academic faculty, are determined by national employment agreements approved by the Council for Higher Education and the Ministry of Finance. Still, our college enables them to become "associate faculty" (Segel Amit) if they work at the college for more than 3 years or teach more than 9 hours per week, and are not employed full-time elsewhere. "Associate faculty" are offered full year contracts, with social benefits, unlike the adjuncts who are employed on a semester basis.
4.	"Promotion criteria seemed to be unclear to the faculty, and have a disproportionate emphasis on research. We were also surprised that there is no mentoring for new faculty, nor is there any official mid-term review for the tenure. "	Promotion criteria should be clear to all, but we will communicate them again to all faculty members throughout the coming academic year. The emphasis on research is only relevant for those who wish to attain higher academic positions as this is the main criterion for moving from lecturer, to senior lecturer, to associate professor and to full professor. Those who wish to become "teachers" (the parallel track) may easily do so, but in so doing relinquish the right to sabbaticals, research grants and so forth. Most of them do not wish to do that. Others, especially those who are professional experts

		<p>(clinical Ph.D.'s, engineers, artists and so forth), may choose the "Auxiliary track".</p> <p>We shall, however, improve our mentoring for new faculty. We do provide workshops to develop teaching and research skills (the latter only established a year ago and therefore not entirely assimilated). New faculty are encouraged to join them. New mentoring processes will be established in the coming academic year.</p> <p>As tenure in Israel is almost impossible to discontinue, official mid-term review for tenure are rather futile. Still, at the beginning of each academic year the Vice president for academic affairs meets with each faculty member to examine the possibility of promotion, and will continue to do so.</p>
5.	<p>"The committee was concerned to learn there were almost no TAs in the program. This is worrisome given the burden it places on the small faculty, as well as the negative effect on feedback to students and task grading. This situation cannot continue and must be resolved."</p>	<p>The number of TA's will be increased in the coming academic year.</p>
6.	<p>"The study program seems to be well balanced between theory and applied aspects. Yet, there is only a small selection of elective courses in economics and even fewer in general liberal arts. We would suggest, similar to the previous evaluation committee, to increase the number of electives both in economics and in social sciences in general. "</p>	<p>The program includes 112 academic hours, only half of which are economics as the degree is "Economics and Management". 92 of them are compulsory and the rest are elective. As all the program is divided between economics and management, the electives are also divided and the number of elective courses in Economics is limited.</p> <p>To improve effectiveness of the degree, most of the electives are organized as tracks: financial markets, human resources, innovation management and service management. Thus, a student chooses a track and the electives that are included in it.</p>

7.	"The school should also consider developing a computation track or component in the study program as a way of creating and enhancing big data courses and studies."	<p>We would like to emphasize that even today, students in the Economics program may choose to combine their studies with a track in Computer Science (as a double major), so that the computation track mentioned by the reviewers already exists. Additional electives in Big Data are planned for 2017/18.</p> <p>In addition, as the College aims to increase the number and variety of experiential courses, more courses in computer science and information systems that include experiential modules will be offered to economics students from 2017/18.</p>
8.	"The committee learned there is no clear policy regarding negative student evaluations and feedback. A clear policy should be set to deal more effectively with negative teaching evaluations."	<p>Students may not be aware of the impact their comments and evaluations have on the status and advancement of faculty, as the process of dealing with problematic faculty is lengthy, and students often do not see the consequences of their evaluations. We do try to improve teaching abilities before more drastic steps are taken.</p> <p>There are several steps undertaken to respond to negative student evaluations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Evaluations of faculty which are under the rank 5 (the scale is 1-7) are sent to the appropriate dean. b. <u>All</u> evaluations which are under the rank 5 (the scale is 1-7) are sent to the vice president for academic affairs and the president. c. Faculty members who scored low are called to the dean and the Head of the B.A. program to discuss their scores to examine whether the problem is in a specific type of courses (big compulsory courses, courses taught in inconvenient hours etc.). d. The dean and the Head of the B.A. program suggests means to improve the quality of teaching (workshops, tutoring, coaching by a colleague, etc.). <p>When the problem persists, adjunct faculty are replaced. For tenured faculty, courses are changed if possible.</p>

<p>9.</p>	<p>"The committee was impressed with the Alumni we met during our visit, which were all very positive and appreciative of the opportunity and education the school provided them. The college should improve its mechanisms for tracking and develop connections with alumni, as they are an important resource both for analyzing and improving the study program, and for creating employment opportunities for current students."</p>	<p>Alumni organization operates at the college since 2011, and a full-time employee is responsible for tracking alumni, updating their addresses and jobs, contacting them and inviting them to attend diverse functions in the college.</p> <p>Though our Alumni are in touch, and are happy to join our diverse ventures, we will try to further improve our connections with them from 2017/18.</p> <p>Currently, relationships are maintained through employing Alumni as coaches of students or TA's, inviting them to give talks at the programs' seminars, cooperating with them at the investment club, and so forth.</p> <p>In the US, Alumni tend to be active in their academic institutions. As the committee must have seen, this is not the case in Israel, where their contribution is minimal. Still, in some of our academic programs, relations with Alumni are stronger: they are invited to participate in workshops, in students' projects, as judges in professional competitions, as mentors to other students, etc.</p>
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