

Tamuz 5, 5776  
July 11, 2016

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

**Response to the Report of the Committee for Evaluating the Quality of Social Work and Human Services Study Programs at Bar-Ilan University**

Dear Ms. Alexandra Buslovich-Bilik,

Enclosed please find the Response to the Report of the Committee for Evaluating the Quality of Social Work and Human Services Study Programs at Bar-Ilan University. The response was written by the Head of the School of Social Work, Prof. Rachel Dekel. It was approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and me.

<b>RESPONSE – CHAPTER 4: STUDY PROGRAMS</b>	
<b>COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>ESSENCIAL CHANGES REQUIRED</b>	
1. That the School introduces a dedicated course on social work practice in diverse societies at the BA level and, indeed, at the MA level as well.	We thank the committee for this comment. We would like to stress that we pay attention to the topic of diverse societies in all of our coursework and this is an integral part of many of our discussions and curricula. Following this comment and our own thinking, we decided to offer a course on cultural competence next year at the MA level. In addition, in 2018, we plan to offer a similar course at the BA level.
<b>ADVISABLE CHANGES</b>	
2. That Bar-Ilan University ensures that an a priori (rather than ad hoc) budget allocation for fieldwork and clinical experts is made available to the School to permit careful advance planning for the important fieldwork education program.	We agree with this comment and ask the university to ensure that an a priori budget is allocated for fieldwork and clinical experts. We agree that this is essential for the ongoing operation of our school. The committee's support for this issue is needed.

3.	That the School articulates the relationship between the specializations undertaken at the BA level and those at the MA level and specify the intended learning outcomes for all specializations.	The BA program offers a broad base to two main approaches (specializations): Individual-Group or Community-Group. The curriculums in both specializations combine knowledge, attitudes, values and skill that prepare the student to become a professional social worker. On the other hand, the MA program offers three unique specialization tracks: Advanced Clinical Practice; Rehabilitation and Health; Community and Organizational Development. The MA program is intended for professional social workers with at least two years of practical experience after earning the bachelor's degree in social work. The goal of the program is to provide the students with new theoretical knowledge, to deepen their existing knowledge, and to teach them advanced therapy and research skills - in order to improve their performance in the field.
4.	That the School ensure that the requirements of its several MA degree programs are similar in terms of years of study and that they thereby comply with the Bologna model in this respect.	Please note that our regular MA program (in all three tracks) is a two-year program. This is in accordance with the Bologna model.  Our new Master's degree complementary program is intended for students with a BA or MA in other disciplines. The first year is a complimentary year. Following this, the students join the 2 year MA studies.
5.	That the School offer two core courses in its PhD program that will enhance students' leadership, management and policy skills – whether they secure ongoing employment in the academy or remain in the field upon completion of their studies.	Following this comment and in accordance with our own perspective, we actively pursue this recommendation. This year, Ph.D. students had a course on social policy. As part of the course, they had to write a policy paper within their own specialization. Next year, Ph.D. students will be offered a course on rhetoric. Moreover, as part of the Ph.D. seminar, students had training in communicating with the media and in developing leadership skills. Hence, we believe these issues received considerable attention and students are highly trained in leadership, management and social policy skills, alongside with advanced research skills.
<b>DESIRABLE CHANGES RECOMMENDED</b>		
6.	That the School considers the advisability of offering specializations in its BA program, especially given the curriculum space occupied by the mandatory Jewish studies course requirements.	We offer two specializations during the BA studies which are rather broad: Individual-Group and Community-Group. The idea behind these two specializations is that by offering more intensive training within the broader track, we train students who will later pursue a variety of directions, either by focusing on the individual level or on the community level. Students in both specializations learn several courses together. The methods courses are specific to each specialization. Students in each of the specializations learn one semestrial course on the other specialization. These specializations are mainly evident in the intervention courses. Specialization in one of these tracks is <b>essential at the end of the first year</b> of studies in order to prepare the student for entry level practice in either one of the specializations.

7.	That consideration be given to directly tailoring perhaps two Jewish studies courses to the needs of social work students.	We thank the committee for these comments and will attempt to pursue this recommendation of offering courses in Jewish studies and social work. This issue will be discussed with the Head of the Jewish Studies Unit.
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<b>RESPONSE – CHAPTER 5 HUMAN RESOURCES/FACULTY</b>		
	<b>COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>ESSENCIAL CHANGES REQUIRED</b>		
8.	That the vacancies created by the impending retirements of senior faculty members be filled as they arise.	We agree with this recommendation, but, unfortunately, under the current university policy, vacant faculty positions are returned to the common pool of the university and are then redistributed based on university-wide competing interests at the time. This year two senior faculty members retired, but we were allowed to recruit only one new faculty member. Ads were posted and candidates from Israel and overseas were interviewed during the fall and winter, and the appointment of one new senior faculty member is already being processed.
9.	That retiring faculty are not replaced by part-time adjunct faculty given the already high level of casualization of the School's academic staff.	We agree and, as mentioned above, are recruiting one full time senior faculty member to fill this vacancy.
<b>ADVISABLE CHANGES</b>		
10.	That the School invest in the formal training and ongoing support of its faculty to optimize the limited resources available to supervise the theses of MA and PhD students.	We have an ongoing MA/PhD supervisor's support group. We will survey the needs of supervisors to identify potential content for formal training.
11.	That the Faculty or School introduce a <i>formal</i> mentoring program which, in the first instance at least, is focused on early career faculty members.	We shall continue, as we have done in the past, to assign a mentor for each new early career faculty member. The mentoring program includes a mentor who meets with the new faculty member about twice yearly together with the school director in order to accompany him/her and evaluate his/her progress. Of course this also includes informal guidance. In addition, beginning faculty is granted a reduction of two hours of teaching for the first two years, and receives help with translations and editing by Faculty of Social Sciences.

<b>DESIRABLE CHANGES RECOMMENDED</b>	
12.	<p>That, in relation to adjunct faculty members, the Faculty/School put in place procedures that would enhance their security in and the predictability of their employment.</p> <p>The nature of adjunct appointments is that they are temporary. At the same time we know that the junior staff organization is working to achieve an employment security agreement</p>

<b>RESPONSE – CHAPTER 6 STUDENTS</b>	
<b>COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>ADVISABLE CHANGES</b>	
13.	<p>That the School addresses the absence of policy practice content and insufficient exposure to community work practice in the BA individual practice specialization.</p> <p>In the past year a number of changes have been introduced in the BA programs designed to add policy practice and enhance the exposure to community work practice. In their second year of BA studies, for the first time, all students take two new semesterial courses: one on policy change and the other on the third sector. These courses are taught in addition to the mandatory courses on the topics: children, teenagers and parents, as well as work with the elderly, and are designed to address these populations at both the level of policy and practice. In the third year of BA studies students study a course on social work and media that is also aimed at a broader perspective.</p>
14.	<p>That the School reviews the matter of the intellectual rigor of some of its courses.</p> <p>In accordance with academic freedom which exists in all academic institutions, lecturers are free to determine the tasks and requirements of the courses they teach. Nevertheless the heads of the relevant programs review all syllabi, and carefully check them before submitting to the students. Moreover, lecturers in different groups of the same course mostly work in groups, thus coordinating their syllabi and making sure there is continuity between the courses and years.</p>
15.	<p>That the School ensures that instructors provide adequate feedback on student work submitted for assessment.</p> <p>We have carefully examined this issue and learned that in most of our courses adequate feedback is provided by the lecturers on student work submitted for assessment. However we will make sure and double check that all instructors follow these existing guidelines more strictly.</p>
16.	<p>That the School ensures that final grades in all courses are based on at least two bases of assessment.</p> <p>It should be noted that final grades in most courses are based on more than one assessment/course assignment. In general, in most courses the examination scores are only part of the final grade for the course, and the other parts are determined by exercises and /or other assignments (such as a written analysis of an article, with or without an oral presentation to the class). In courses with large numbers of participants it is difficult to give additional tasks beyond the final exam due to the lack of teaching assistants.</p>

17.	That a concerted effort be made to secure funds in order to help subvent the costs incurred by students in meeting their fieldwork requirements.	We totally agree with the Committee's recommendation that a concerted effort be made to secure these funds for out-of-pocket expenses (most notably transportation). This is a nationwide problem. Achieving this goal involves collaboration with other universities in the country, the intervention of the student unions, as well as cooperation of government agencies.
18.	That students in programs with a thesis requirement be provided with some training in the thesis supervision process and how to optimally use it.	<p>School provides each student with a faculty advisor (and sometimes two) who serves as a personal mentor, thus providing the student with maximum personal attention throughout the research process and the thesis-writing. The advisor is at the student's side during all stages of the research until the defense of the thesis before a committee of faculty members.</p> <p>In courses intended for students who write theses, part of the time is devoted to learning how to make the best of their meetings with the supervisor. For example, it is emphasized that it is their duty to devote time to prepare well the meeting and design it according to clear objectives. Students are also guided to summarize the meeting and already set goals for the next meeting. The importance of independent work regarding the implementation of the points raised in meetings with the supervisor will be emphasized.</p>

<b>RESPONSE – CHAPTER 7 TEACHING AND LEARNING OUTCOMES</b>		
	<b>COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION</b>
	<b>ESSENCIAL CHANGES REQUIRED</b>	
19.	That the School ensures that the syllabus for each course specifies (1) its intended learning outcomes and (2) the relationship of these learning outcomes to the intended learning outcomes of the overall program.	<p>The School has EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR BASIC PRACTICE and EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR ADVANCED PRACTICE, which are according to the requirements of The International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service (ISWDRES) of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).</p> <p>Currently our university requires a syllabus for each course according to a fixed format, which outlines the learning outcomes of the specific course, but does not specify the relationship of these learning outcomes to the intended learning outcomes of the overall program.</p>

20.	That the School introduces a grading system (1) that is capable of capturing the extent which intended learning outcomes are realized and (2) which also permits clear, meaningful differentiation among students in terms of their mastery of curriculum content.	The school is aware of the problematic grading system in which too many students receive high grades that do not reflect meaningful differentiation between them. Since this occurs in all the schools of social work in the country, joint thinking is planned for next year by the Council of the Directors of University Schools of Social Work in Israel.
21.	That the School clarifies who examines MA theses, the assessment criteria and grading system employed, and the scope of the theses. (Theses should not be assessed by anyone who has been involved in the supervision of the thesis.)	The thesis is assessed by two judges who are staff members from the school. They give written estimates to the supervisor and the student before the defense. Defense is performed in front of two judges and the supervisor, and includes a presentation by the student and discussion of the thesis, after which the grade on the thesis is determined by a joint discussion among the judges. The final grade of the MA is determined by the student's progress during the research process and the thesis-writing, by the thesis level, and by the defense of the thesis before the committee. The supervisor is the only one who can relate to all the above components of the grade, and specifically to the research process, beginning with the proposal writing stage to the final submission of the thesis. The two external examiners of the thesis relate to all other components.
<b>RESPONSE – CHAPTER 8: RESEARCH</b>		
	<b>COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>ADVISABLE CHANGES</b>		
22.	That funding be secured to support two post-doctoral fellowships.	We agree that this is extremely important. We turned to the university authorities to allocate funds in order to allow for a stable program that would invite researchers from abroad who are interested in doing their post-doc studies at our school. Regarding our Ph.D. students who are interested in going abroad for their post-doc studies, we are considering turning to university authorities to allocate funds for this purpose, perhaps as part of the Ph.D. Presidential scholarship, and having criteria attached to it in the scholarship conditions. It is worth mentioning that the Rector of the University allocates funds for post-doctoral scholarships for women who completed their PHD at Bar-Ilan and are interested in doing their post doc studies abroad.

<b>RESPONSE – CHAPTER 9: INFRASTRUCTURE</b>		
	<b>COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION</b>
<b>ESSENTIAL CHANGES REQUIRED</b>		
23.	That a greater investment be made in library-held electronic and hard copy journals and books as well as electronic data bases to facilitate teaching, learning and research. The electronic materials also need to be readily accessible via the internet.	We have forwarded a request and are in discussions with the university authorities to increase funding for electronic journals and books that will be readily accessible via the internet, in order to facilitate teaching, learning and research. The School will also continue to assess the needs for specific journals and books required by students and academic faculty in coordination with the library.
<b>DESIRABLE CHANGES RECOMMENDED</b>		
24.	The Committee regards a suitable, dedicated new building for the School to be a matter of some urgency. At the same time it realizes that the gestation period for such a large project can be lengthy. However, it would be greatly disappointed if, by the next evaluation by the CHE, the School was not “happily ensconced” in a new building that has been appropriately designed and equipped to enhance its teaching and research activities. Undue delay in this regard will be to the detriment of the School’s hard-earned and highly-regarded teaching programs and research activities.	<p>With regard to this recommendation we are happy to announce that we have recently launched a Clinic Wing, a facility that enables us to expand the work and learning of our students, and is an opportunity to develop and offer innovative interventions.</p> <p>However, a building is much needed as we elaborated in the Evaluation Report of November 2014:</p> <p>"Unfortunately, the School still does not have its own building, and classes are held across the entire university campus, disjointed from faculty offices. This hinders professional collaboration and hampers the ability of social work students to develop a strong sense of identification with the School".</p> <p>The School is already in discussion with the Office of the President together with the Global Resource Development Department of the University, regarding how this might be achieved.</p> <p>Your support in this topic would be highly appreciated.</p>

25.	Similarly in the case of a lift in the library to enhance access for faculty members and students with a disability.	The University is now working on making the campus accessible to faculty members and students with a disability by installing elevators in a number of buildings that are not yet equipped with an elevator. The likelihood that a new elevator will be installed in the social work library is low because there is already an elevator in this building near the library which allows access, although cumbersome, to all the floors of the library. Nevertheless, we will review with the university authorities the possibility of making the approach to persons with a disability friendlier without requiring the special assistance of library staff (e.g. by enabling lower floor entrance protected by a code or entry by means of an electronic card).
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We thank the CHE Committee for the helpful recommendations and hope to continue to improve the quality of the School of Social Work.

Sincerely,



Prof. Amnon Albeck  
Vice Rector  
In charge of Quality Evaluation

Cc:  
Prof. Miriam Faust, Rector  
Prof. Joseph Deutsch, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences  
Prof. Rachel Dekel, Head, School of Social Work