

Monday, June 13, 2016

Dear Committee for the Evaluation of the Social Work Study Programs,

Re.: External Review of the Social Work Study Program at Tel-Hai College

Allow me to thank the members of the external committee, for conducting the review of the Department of Social Work at Tel-Hai College. It has been our great pleasure to discuss with them the strengths and weaknesses of our Department.

Based on the committee's comments here is our response.

Committee Recommendation	Steps toward implementation (including time table)
<p><u>1.</u></p> <p>That the Department refrains from introducing an MA with a thesis track until the research productivity of faculty members is much higher than it currently is.</p>	<p>We accept the committee's recommendation, however we would like to stress that the research productivity of our faculty members is rather extensive in view of the council of higher education mandated teaching loads.</p> <p>We also want to mention that eight of our tenured faculty members have significant research background (five of them Professors) and most of them have supervised thesis students in the past.</p>

	It is important to note that a thesis track is crucial for the advancement of our research productivity.
<p><u>2.</u></p> <p>That the Department more clearly distinguishes the generic BA from the generic content of the MA program in terms of both content and intended learning outcomes.</p>	<p>The BA program is indeed generic in content and provides the student with the base knowledge a novice social worker needs. The MA program, on the other hand, offers specializations in select areas (Family, Groups and Stress and trauma), in addition to compulsory courses such as the philosophy of science, program evaluation.</p> <p>In the 2018 academic year a casework track will be added.</p>
<p><u>3.</u></p> <p>That any future expansion into new programs be based on adequate resourcing so that other activities of the Department's faculty members (most notably research) are not compromised by virtue of the new initiatives.</p>	<p>Any new academic initiative is subject to management budgetary assurance. The pros and cons of these decisions are seriously weighed. Since the college has put research at the forefront, no decision taken will jeopardize faculty's research activities.</p>
<p><u>4.</u></p> <p>That whenever a Master's degree with a thesis component is introduced, that Tel Hai College ensure that it's faculty are trained in thesis supervision and supported in this role on an ongoing basis.</p>	<p>Most of our senior faculty members have prior experience supervising master thesis'. For our younger faculty we plan to build a data base of member's expertise and suggest possible thesis supervision partnerships with university faculty. This will be initiated during the coming summer vacation (2016).</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>The MA Teaching committee will examine overlap issues between the BA and MA</p>

<p>That the Department review the issue of overlap between the BA and MA degree programs and ensure that the conceptual distinction between the two programs is clearly articulated.</p>	<p>degree programs and will make the necessary changes for the next academic year (2016-7)</p>
<p><u>6.</u></p> <p>That a formal course on culturally-sensitive social work practice be introduced as a core course in the BA and MA programs.</p>	<p>We accept the idea of the need for including culturally sensitive social work practice into our programs. However, we are in the process of examining the most appropriate way to achieve this. We intend to integrate this important aspect of social work across the board in all our courses already in the next academic year (both BA and MA)</p>
<p><u>7.</u></p> <p>That the Department improves its quality control processes in order to ensure that all student assessments set by instructors are rigorously and clearly formulated</p>	<p>The teaching committees for both the MA and BA are already meeting to develop a timetable for formulating and implementing a departmental policy on clear instructions for student assessments. Various models are presently being explored.</p>
<p><u>8.</u></p> <p>That the Department (College?) adopt a grading system that provides more objective parameters for grading student work, permits differentiation of the quality of this work, and addresses the issue of grade inflation.</p>	<p>The teaching committees for both the MA and BA have already met to develop a timetable for formulating and implementing a departmental policy on addressing objective parameters for assessing the students work and also addressing the issue of grade inflation. However, this process needs to be undertaken not only with our college's internal academic council but more importantly with all social work departments</p>

	in Israel so as not to hurt our students' chances of acceptance to advanced degrees.
<p><u>9.</u></p> <p>That if/when an MA thesis track is introduced, a system of mandatory training for faculty members in thesis supervision be put in place and that supervisors be provided with ongoing support in thesis supervision.</p>	<p>If and when the MA thesis track is implemented, we will make sure that faculty who supervise students' theses receive appropriate training and support from veteran faculty who have had experience in thesis supervision.</p>
<p>10.</p> <p>That, if/when an MA thesis track is introduced, thesis supervision be explicitly included as an integral part of a faculty member's workload (and this role be explicitly recognized in promotion procedures).</p>	<p>Unfortunately, this issue is not in the hands of the college. The Council for Higher Education is the institution in the position to change the present policy of teaching hours in the colleges. This is relevant in the promotion procedure as well.</p>
<p>11.</p> <p>If Tel Hai College is serious about improving the research productivity of Department of Social Work faculty members, then it will have to invest much more heavily in order to support this aspect of their role. Thus, teaching loads will have to be reduced while resources to facilitate research will have to be found and invested</p>	<p>At present the college policy of teaching load, lack of research money, is dictated by the CHE and the Budgetary Committee. The college has allocated substantial funds and created a research center for the Social Sciences and is creating (within the limits of the CHE policies) the most comfortable research environment.</p>
<p>ADVISABLE</p> <p>12. That Tel Hai College seek to ensure that its social work teaching staff – senior, junior and adjunct – are social work-trained and have some depth in practice experience. In the short-term, priority should be given to</p>	<p>All our tenure staff whose main academic appointment is in our department are trained and experienced social workers (14).</p>

<p>ensuring that those teaching first-year social work subjects are social work-trained and experienced and that those teaching foundation knowledge subjects from other disciplines be required to relate course content to social work.</p>	<p>From the total teaching staff 30 out of 55 are trained and experienced social workers.</p> <p>All social work core courses are taught by certified social workers. Other courses that are relevant to social work and taught by non-social workers are tailored to the profession and carefully examined by our teaching committee.</p>
<p>13.</p> <p>That Tel Hai College institute a formal mentoring program that, at least initially, focuses upon early career academic staff (Lecturers and Senior Lecturers and adjunct faculty interested in eventually securing a taken) in order to ensure that (1) all have the support and guidance to build a satisfying and satisfactory academic career at the College and (2) the risk is minimized of individual faculty members “falling through the cracks” as far as career path progression is concerned. (The Committee regards the faculty support as described on p. 66 of the self-evaluation report as inadequate.)</p>	<p>We will examine similar mentoring programs that already exists in other academic institutions and will work toward a well-structured mentoring program that will be infused into our program in the upcoming academic year.</p>
<p>14.</p> <p>While the Department of Social Work is to be commended for its investment in consciousness-raising around issues of cultural diversity, the Department should, in concert with what is found in qualifying professional social work education programs in other multicultural societies, introduce a</p>	<p>As we wrote in paragraph 6, we accept the idea of the importance of including culturally sensitive social work practice into our programs. We intend to integrate this important aspect of social work across the board in all our courses already in the next academic year (both BA and MA). However, we are reticent to offer an explicit course as</p>

<p>dedicated course at the BA level that explicitly deals with social work practice in diverse societies. (The MA program offers a “required seminar” on this topic but it is unclear how intervention-oriented this is.)</p>	<p>we believe that investing in developing cultural sensitivity and critical thinking skills among our students will better serve the needs of our clients for community inclusion rather than differentiation.</p>
<p>15. A review be undertaken of the quality of teaching in first year subjects.</p>	<p>The BA Teaching committee is currently reviewing the entire program and this comment will be taken into account during the future program structure.</p>
<p>16. The Department should introduce a more refined and accurate grading systems in order to more accurately assess learning outcomes attainment by students and address grade inflation.</p>	<p>Regarding grade inflation we responded in paragraph 8. We acknowledge that we need to consider ways to reinforce our faculty with state of the art assessment skills defining student's learning outcomes and assignment evaluation. We are planning to address these issues through a topic-centered workshop during the next academic year.</p>
<p>17. The development / fund-raising division of Tel Hai College should seek to garner more funds to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and to subvent to a greater degree practicum-related travel costs.</p>	<p>The college administration is the main source for student scholarship. To date, no student who was found to have financial/social difficulties was turned down for a scholarship.</p> <p>Because of the College's geographical location we cover at least a third of the student's practicum expenses.</p>
<p>18.</p>	<p>At present all fulltime faculty (in taken) have their own office space and computer. Since most of our faculty are present on campus</p>

<p>Further infrastructure development should seek to provide all full-time academic staff with a private / non-shared office.</p>	<p>only two days a week the room sharing is organized so that they are alone on their work days. The college is always sensitive and attentive to faculty members who are in need of special arrangements.</p>
<p>DESIRABLE CHANGES RECOMMENDED:</p> <p>19.</p> <p>The Department may wish to consider the wisdom of beginning its optional/ additional BA concentrations so early (in the first year of BA study) as students will not have had the opportunity to develop a clear conception of the nature of professional social work practice, its scope, methods and fields of practice before slotting into a specialized stream.</p>	<p>We thank the committee for this comment as it gives us the opportunity to reexamine our decisions regarding the BA tracks (not concentrations). One of the two tracks (policy practice) starts only in the second year. Regarding Resilience and Trauma, while starting in the first year, is offered as an introduction to working with people in a variety of stress-related situations, of all ages and groups and not as a specialization. We would like to clarify that in both tracks these courses are taught as additions to all regular studies.</p> <p>The 2 tracks are voluntary and about 45 out of 120 students per year choose to participate with a full understanding that the study in the special tracks are in addition to the regular studies.</p>
<p>20.</p> <p>The Department may wish to consider the merits of an MA without generic content, that is, one whose overall focus is advanced practice in a select number of streams/concentrations for experienced</p>	<p>This is a good idea. We have already partially implemented this suggestion through increasing the number of credits for each track while also offering advanced core courses for all the students as written in paragraph 2.</p>

<p>social workers (family, stress and resilience, and management and supervision).</p>	
<p>21. Beyond exploring better ways to integrate the multicultural perspective throughout its study programs, the Department should seriously consider the introduction of a dedicated core and intervention-oriented BA course/subject on culturally-sensitive social work practice. (It is acknowledged that a “required seminar” on this topic exists at the MA level.)</p>	<p>This comment is addressed in paragraph 14.</p>
<p>22. One desirable change is to place limits on the amount of committee work required of junior social work faculty members on committees that are external to the Department of Social Work.</p>	<p>Only tenured faculty are obligated to serve on department committees. For other members it is their choice to take part.</p>
<p>23. The research undertaken by faculty members is very diverse. While some would claim that such diversity is a strength of the Department, others may see it quite differently. Thus, one way that academic units build their reputation is by the depth of the research they engage in a limited number of areas. It is recommended, therefore, that the Department of Social Work develop a research agenda in a small, select number of areas that builds on faculty members’ extant and demonstrable (through journal publications) research areas</p>	<p>We agree with the committee's recommendation. Our department is currently reevaluating its research productivity and during this process we are focusing on identifying the specific research areas where we are dominant and promoting these areas. This process is influenced by our current faculty interests as well as available resources for research.</p> <p>We would like to finalize this process by 2018.</p>

<p>of expertise (where possible/appropriate) as a means of building depth and reputation that will attract both research students (should an MA with a thesis track be introduced) and research monies.</p> <p>Domains/research themes listed on pp. 188-189 of the self-evaluation report would serve as a good foundation for crafting such an agenda for future research activities.</p>	
<p><u>24</u></p> <p>Those recruited to fill faculty positions in the future should be selected, at least in part, on the basis of their ability to complement / help implement the research agenda</p>	<p>We would like to be in a position of filling future faculty positions with candidates who can complement our research agenda.</p> <p>However, we are aware of the limitations of our geographical location in the northern periphery of Israel.</p>

Sincerely yours,

Prof. Shira Hantman,

The Vice-President for Academic Affairs