



**Department of Communication Studies  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Ben Gurion University of the Negev**

**Report of the External Evaluation Team  
for  
The Council on Higher Education**

**November 2009**

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## **I. General Background and Executive Summary**

### **I.1 General Background**

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate the study programs in the field of communication in Israel in the academic year 2008-2009. Following the decision by the CHE, the Minister of Education appointed the following members of the evaluation committee:

Professor Joseph Cappella, University of Pennsylvania (Chair)

Professor emerita Hanna Adoni, Hebrew University (Sapir College and Netanya College)

Professor Wolfgang Donsbach, University of Dresden

Professor Mordechai Kremnitzer, Hebrew University

Professor Karen Ross, University of Liverpool (Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, Ben-Gurion University)

Professor Esther Thorson, University of Missouri (College of Management, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, Ben-Gurion University)

Ms. Michal Kabatznik coordinated the committee

The committee's work in the first phase suffered from two cancellations by previous members of the committee, one coming in shortly before the committee's work began. This, as well as time constraints on the side of the two Israeli members, led to the fact that at least in the beginning the committee lacked the breadth of perspectives and the distribution of labor that is required for such an important task.

The committee's work also was affected by the military situation in Israel and the Gaza strip that escalated shortly before the first field trip. This had basically three consequences: It was the reason for one of the above mentioned cancellations, it made it impossible for the committee to conduct its site visit to Sapir College (because the college had to be closed down), and it made it difficult for CHE to find additional committee members from abroad who would replace the cancellations..

## **I.2. Executive Summary**

The Department of Communication Studies at Ben Gurion is the youngest and smallest communication department in Israel. Currently it offers only an MA program and no major in communication for undergraduates. Undergraduates at BGU do take some courses from the Communication Department. The full time faculty is nevertheless impressively productive in applying for and successfully attracting research grants, academic publishing as well as fulfilling their teaching obligations. It also managed to make itself visible in the Israeli scientific community with three distinct areas of research, i.e., media structures, new media and media and minorities. Faculty and students unanimously praise the warm atmosphere and the open door policy. The department also shows diversity in the ethnic and geographical backgrounds of both students and faculty. The committee was particularly impressed by the intellectual quality of the adjuncts who add important content to that taught by regular faculty.

Nevertheless, the department faces several challenges, some of which are directly or indirectly related to its strengths. The first challenge is its size. The existence of only one tenured professor creates a burdensome workload for the head of the department and limits the chances of younger faculty for their own professional development. The latter might be one of the reasons for the relative high turnover among younger faculty members over the last years. The small faculty also limits the diversity of topics which can be taught and the development of research foci; although we acknowledge that the department has turned this into a strength by “branding” its specialist focus. The size also affects teaching structures with some PhD students teaching MA students and MA students in turn acting as TAs for their fellow students.

The second challenge is the quality of the MA students. Although most-- if not all -- of them are committed and bright young people, not all of them have joined the program with aspirations consistent with the department’s strengths or goals for MA candidates, i.e. to participate in a research-oriented curriculum. This can lead to frustrations among some students who find the program not applied enough or who have had to undertake supplementary courses. This has led to relatively high drop-out rates, at least among those who chose to study for an MA with thesis. The department has addressed these problems, to some extent, by its new offer of an MA without thesis but this tackles the outcome rather than the cause. The committee does not challenge the current ratio of about 40 percent of MA students who obtained an undergraduate degree from a college (about 60 percent graduated with a university degree) but the department must become more selective in admissions in order to improve the overall quality of the students and therefore the reputation of the degree more generally.

Department size and quality of the MA students are the main challenges. These problems have to be addressed if the department is to be maintained and supported as an independent unit. Two smaller challenges concern resources and publishing. The department will probably lose the equivalent of about \$ 100,000 per year in research income when the Burda Center ceases its sponsorship. The department must therefore find ways to make up for this loss, particularly since the faculty wants to maintain its focus on new media and new technology. Finally, while the committee acknowledges the considerable volume of research activity amongst faculty, we urge faculty to develop a more aggressive strategy to target publications in more visible and prestigious journals in the field.

## **II. Committee Procedures**

In the fall of 2008 the committee was invited to evaluate the undergraduate programs of seven departments of communication at colleges and universities in Israel. As one department (Hebrew University) had just undergone an evaluation by its own university this was dropped from the list. The other units were:

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev  
The University of Haifa  
Tel Aviv University  
The College of Management Academic Studies  
Netanya Academic College  
Sapir Academic College

The committee's work spanned the time between December 2008 (preparatory work) through June 2009 (completion of the final reports). Visits to Israel by the committee members from abroad took place January 3 to 9, March 7 to 11, and May 10 to 15.

The site visit to the campus of the Department of Communication Studies of Ben Gurion University took place on May 13 and 14, 2009. According to the arrangements between CHE and the department the committee met in consecutive meetings with:

- The rector of the university, the deputy rector and head of quality assessment system, and the deputy dean
- The head of school
- The heads of two committees
- Senior faculty members
- Junior faculty members
- Adjunct lecturers
- Students
- Alumni

(See complete list in Appendix.)

### **III. The Department of Communication Studies**

*\* This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the visit to the institution, and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Evaluation Committee based on the documentation provided by the institution, information gained through interviews, discussion and observation as well as other information available to the Committee.*

#### **III.1 Goals and General Situation**

The Department of Communication Studies at Ben Gurion is the youngest communication department in Israel. Since its establishment in 1999, it has only been allowed to offer a Masters program in Communication. Communications can be studied as a minor at the BA level and as part of general studies program within the faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The MA program received final approval by the CHE only in 2003. An application to the CHE to allow for a full undergraduate program in communication – as a joint BA degree - has been approved by the university and we understand will be submitted to CHE shortly.

According to the self-evaluation document, the Department of Communication Studies at Ben Gurion University sees its goals in the following:

- Expanding and intensifying comprehension of the penetration, activity and influence of conventional and new communication technologies in all aspects of life.
- Using and developing BGU's research infrastructure to study the increasing empowerment made possible by communications technologies.
- Encouraging and intensifying encounters between “technological” disciplines and the social sciences and humanities, yielding the scholars and research demanded by the emerging media environment.
- Developing a multidisciplinary approach that emphasizes knowledge and understanding of the character of mass media, their attendant practices and their unique integration of technological, social and cultural qualities and processes.
- Experience in the application of media technology, including awareness of ethical and aesthetic issues involved in the creation, production and evaluation of media discourse.
- Independent thinking, critical awareness and systematic research – especially important in a media development climate that may be afflicted with technological enthusiasm unaccompanied by the requisite knowledge, understanding, criticism and evaluation.

Communications is a small department, well-described by the Head of Department (HoD) as a ‘boutique’ department, with connotations of specialty and uniqueness. The department, although modest in size, does indeed attempt to specialize in particular aspects of the broad field of communications, most notably new media technologies, media institutions as well as media and diversity/minorities. Its primary goal is to provide excellence in teaching and research in those three main themes. The department is one of the smallest communication departments in the country, with 4.5 FTE positions and only one position at the tenured professor level. This small size places it at the edge of viability. There is an adequate critical mass necessary to run any department, even one offering a relatively modest teaching program. The limited number of full-time faculty and the relatively small number of students have severely limited the department's ability to pursue the vision and goals on which it was

originally established. Its geographical location in the south of Israel and a relatively high turnover of faculty have exacerbated the department's difficulties in maintaining a firm base from which to grow, although there has been a more stable group of core faculty recently.

The committee was impressed that despite its size and other limitations, faculty members have been very successful in research activities while fulfilling their teaching obligations with competence. Individual faculty members have been committed to pursuing research grants and, as a result, have produced a significant number of publications. The existence of the Burda Center for Innovative Communication, sponsored over the last ten years by an annual grant from a German publishing company, has certainly helped to pursue these goals, providing both funding for research projects as well as for the production of published outputs. Many of these publications as well as a significant number of MA theses have shaped the department's research profile which now has the potential to create a real 'branding' of the department in the three areas of scholarship which it sees as its specializations, namely: new media, media and minorities, and media institutions. The development of the department's research agenda, including its desire to establish its reputation in these three key research areas, has taken place in an atmosphere of collegiality and with an open-door-policy, an environment which is largely attributable to the style of the current HoD.

The committee was also impressed that the department's research interests are manifest in the structure and fabric of the department. The research focus on diversity is reflected in the diversity in the department's make-up. However, the small size of the department produces several problems, one of which concerns governance. Only the HoD (as the only tenured professor) can represent the department at the different governance bodies of the university. This places a significant administrative burden on a single person and limits opportunity for junior faculty for development. It also means that only the HoD sees student evaluations and is saddled with communicating to staff about a very broad range of courses. It was not clear to us how this huge but important task could be accomplished by the HoD. The department's small size might also contribute to a general perception that the department is under-resourced undermining its status as a desirable destination for both students and faculty and contributing to problems of recruitment of both students and faculty.

Due to these and other factors discussed below, the department seems to be at a crossroads where crucial decisions must be taken by the university, the faculty, and the department itself, about the future goals of the department and the strategy which needs to be put in place in order to achieve it and realize potential.

## **III.2 Curriculum**

### **Basic Structure and Statistics**

The curriculum offered in the department is primarily the MA in 'Comparative Media: Technology and Society'. A minor track in communication (new media, media and diversity, and media institutions) is also available for undergraduate students.

For undergraduates, the department offers a total of 28 credits and currently has the largest number of minor students across the university. From the self-evaluation report, it appears that approximately one-third of the students in the General Studies Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (231/649) opted to take communication courses, so that

currently, there are approximately 300 students taking these courses. In the current academic session, the department's minor program began with 143 general studies students which constitute an increase of around 50% over the previous two years. Students can opt to take communication courses as part of a general studies degree or as the minor track to complement their major subject. In addition to the main campus at Beer Sheva, minor courses are also available at BGU's campuses at Eilat and at Achva College (a number of the junior and adjunct faculty teach across two or even three campus sites – also at other colleges or universities in the country). The minor track comprises five basic courses, four elective courses, 1 seminar over two semesters and 1 workshop (for a total of 28 credits). The seminars and workshops are only available in the third year. There is a reasonable range of elective courses although the small size of the department means that electives are necessarily focused on research interests and specializations of faculty. The relatively limited number of choices is recognized by the faculty (and is discussed further below).

The MA program in 'Comparative Media: Technology and Society' has a relatively specialist curriculum with a clear focus on research. Although the Self-Evaluation suggests that applications to the program have been declining over the past two or three years from a high (100+) to fewer than 50 in the recent two or three years, enrollments in the program have remained relatively stable. For the academic years 2006/7 and 2007/8, 18 students were enrolled each year. Beginning with the academic session 2008/9, an additional track 'without thesis' was introduced. Both applications and enrollments might increase as a consequence of this additional track, although any increase needs to be carefully monitored in light of the department's limited resources.

A proportion of students enrolling in the MA do not have a strong background in communication studies (mostly those with a college background), and in this case, they are required to take three supplementary courses. Students with a humanities background primarily are also required to take an introductory course in statistics. For students on the thesis track, the curricular content comprises a mix of compulsory (required) courses, seminars, research project, thesis workshop and the thesis itself.

Although there are no specific, practice-focused courses, there is the opportunity for a 'practicum' where students are given the opportunity for hands-on assessment of the similarities and differences between academic and practical research. Among the students with whom we conversed during our visit, *none* said they were actually engaged in a formal activity described as a practicum although a number are working full-time in various media organizations so are explicitly involved in spanning the theory-practice divide. A number of the students expected the program would be more practice-focused than is actually the case. They expressed some dissatisfaction at what they considered to be the lack of practical training, despite the fact that the program outline makes very clear its strong focus on theory.

We understand that teaching of the mandatory courses in the program is concentrated on one day which the department believes enhances recruitment. Having tried different combinations, it has now settled on this highly concentrated format of delivery because most students do not live locally and/or are in paid employment, so it is easier for them to negotiate one day out of their working and domestic lives. Most of the students we talked with agreed that this was a major attraction in choosing the program. There was also some discontent with the fact that some of the elective courses are not available on the MA teaching day (currently Thursdays). Most of these courses are third-year BA electives which are also open to MA students, and this timing issue contributes to a level of student dissatisfaction with the course choices available. However, given the scheduling of all mandatory courses on one single day,



there is not much the department can do to overcome this problem without creating a different problem of scheduling on multiple days.

Although the courses are delivered across a two-year period, many students need an additional year (or more) to complete their thesis. There is currently no formal structure to the years following courses and although the drop-out rate of students is enviably low (currently around 10% for 2007/8), some structured meeting points in the 'writing-up' period could be useful to students. There are supervisory meetings taking place beyond the taught years of the program but bringing together of student groups could provide auxiliary benefits.

#### Recommendation 1<sup>1</sup>

As we mention in this report, many students come to the MA program with false expectations concerning the role and number of practical courses which could prepare them for work in the communication industry. Although it is clearly not (and should not be) the department's goal to compete with the colleges in providing a practical training in the program there are, however, ways in which to integrate research and practical training for, say, journalism. This could make the curriculum more 'practical' without simply teaching vocational skills. The department might look for models in other countries that blend both approaches to the communication field in training MAs. Recommendation 2

The size and specific content foci of the department necessarily limit curricular offerings at both BA and MA levels. This is both a strength and a weakness: a weakness in terms of dissatisfaction with the relatively limited menu on offer, at least in terms of breadth; a strength in that students take courses which are complementary in nature and which together provide considerable depth in a narrow topical range.

We understand that very recently, the University has approved a new BA program in communication put forward by the department, which will be submitted to the CHE for their consideration. We did not receive the details of the proposed new undergraduate major and make no brief for or against it here. However, some of the problems faced by the department described in the self-evaluation document and acknowledged here could be resolved or at least addressed, if the department was allowed to offer a single honors BA program in communications under some conditions. We believe that if the proposed BA program: a) plays to the strengths of the department in terms of curriculum orientation; b) fills a gap in the curriculum and research orientations of other departments of communication in Israel c) has adequate resources, then it could indeed fulfill the department's aspirations identified in the self-study and contribute significantly to communication study in Israel while limiting competition with extant programs.

### **III.3 Teaching and Learning**

The size of the department has helped to create a favorable atmosphere between students and faculty and among faculty members themselves. Students, alumni and adjunct faculty all praised the collegiality and the open-door environment which is promoted and experienced in the department. All faculty members and the Head of Department (HoD) seemed responsive to student needs and made adjuncts in particular feel welcomed and integrated into the life of the department and valued as colleagues. We were very impressed with the quality and

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<sup>1</sup> All recommendations in the main document are collected together at the end in Section VI (short-term recommendations).

commitment of the adjunct faculty, many of whom were juggling teaching at more than one university or college, but nonetheless seemed to be discharging their teaching responsibilities to BGU with flair, enthusiasm, and intellectual rigor.

The department has also managed to deal successfully with the high drop-out rate witnessed in the early days of the MA program. The introduction of an MA without thesis appears to be a sensible development for a department of this size which has not recruited overly high numbers of students in the past. Unsurprisingly, however, the department's small size and historically high faculty turnover have created some problems in achieving full potential in terms of teaching and learning.

The department has a very young "senior" faculty compared to other institutions that we have visited. Young scholars are certainly an asset in terms of different viewpoints and perspectives, a closer relationship to students, and commitment to their work. However, they also need guidance for their own research and professional promotion by older, more experienced scholars. In the department's current situation, this function more or less rests on the shoulders of the only tenured professor, that is, the HoD. The age factor might also be a reason for the high staffing turnover as younger academics are more mobile in the early stages of their career. These kinds of instability, though, have a negative impact on students, especially at the writing-up stage when continuation of tutor support is vital.

In the undergraduate courses, the department does not seem to make use of teaching assistants as tutors for sections associated with lectures. From our discussion with colleagues who were described to us as 'TAs', it actually appeared that most of them only assisted faculty in preparing for their classes through activities such as literature searches, constructing powerpoint presentations, and grading exam papers. It was not clear to us if the limited use of TAs was due to financial constraints or the limited experience of the TAs themselves, most of whom appeared to be MA students. However, we believe that the use of TAs to take sections and thus facilitate more interactive opportunities for students would be beneficial.

### Recommendation 3

In discussion with these TAs, it seemed that one of them who was also an existing PhD student in the department, is actually teaching an entire course on her specialist topic, as a stand-alone MA course, without teaching input from a member of faculty. Although this was clearly a very competent person, we do question if this level of teaching is appropriate for a PhD student, no matter how good. There seemed to be insufficient scrutiny and oversight or mentoring provided for this person. Such oversight would mitigate our concerns. The use of adjuncts without PhD is common across colleges and universities in Israel and elsewhere but supervision of their activities is a must.

We also understand that some of the TAs who are also MA students are paid to act as a bridge between faculty and students. We have no problem when MA students are assisting faculty in the preparation of course materials but would suggest that tutoring one's peers is not appropriate. Recommendation 4

Some of the MA students expressed their attraction to the department's offerings for reasons of convenience -- for example, offering the bulk of course work on a single day. Of course, this approach while meeting the needs of many students who have professional and familial responsibilities limits the social and intellectual contact that is possible for those who reside in the vicinity of the campus.

The department has a very small PhD program (in the current academic session, it has three PhD students). Very few of the MA alumni were registered for higher degrees (4 out of the 10 we talked to) and only one had graduated from the MA program.

Recommendation 5

Even though faculty are involved in some of the department's committees, except for the HoD none appeared to have any major decision-making responsibilities. For example, besides the faculty member being evaluated, only the head of the department sees student evaluations. When we asked TAs and adjuncts about the process of monitoring and evaluating teaching, there was a lack of clarity over what those processes actually were, although some adjunct faculty had experienced colleagues 'sitting in' on their lectures, but with no formalized outcome. Recommendation 6

### III.4 Students

The committee's focus was only on the MA program, so comments in this section only relate to those students. The much larger group of BA students was not our focus and is not discussed further in this section. On the whole, the students we spoke to had mixed views of their program. On the one hand, they liked the fact that it was concentrated on one day as almost none lived in Ber Sheva and thus found travelling to the campus on one day to be very convenient. This is a major attraction of the program. On the other hand, they felt that the program had been misrepresented in at least two ways: (1) not all the options were available on the primary teaching day and thus their choices were much more limited than they had anticipated<sup>2</sup>; (2) there would be a stronger element of practice. Both these misconceptions seemed to be based on prior reading of the course prospectus, attendance at open days and the website. Although such misperceptions of communication programs as being mainly practically oriented are not unusual, the department will need to better communicate the theoretical and research-oriented focus of the program so as to minimize inaccurate expectations. Recommendation 7

The background of students was quite mixed with more or less equal numbers having graduated from colleges and universities. Around 10 per cent of MA students took their BA degree at BGU, a proportion that has doubled over the past two years. However, as noted earlier, there is a downward trend in applicants to the MA although this might change with the new MA without thesis. If the department is allowed to offer a full BA program, then a higher number of BA graduates will no doubt consider entering the MA program. Currently, with a significant proportion of students coming from a college background and with an emphasis on practice, faculty identify problems with students coming in with low level academic skills and subject-related gaps which then require remedial work. What was clear from the committee's discussion with the MA students was how few felt comfortable speaking in English, most much preferring to speak in Hebrew. This lack of confidence in the English language also impacted student's enthusiasm for reading texts written in English, and most sought to find translated versions. Recommendation 8

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<sup>2</sup> We believe that these are third year BA courses which are also open to MA students to take as electives.

### **III.5 Human Resources**

The permanent faculty are mostly junior even though they are accomplished in research and teaching. The small number of faculty requires them to spread themselves very thin and to teach core courses, leaving adjunct and junior faculty to teach the electives and workshops.

The department has very limited administrative support —only a part-time secretary and a Student Affairs Secretary who is hourly-paid. Although the number of full-time permanent faculty is modest, their size is complemented by a larger number of junior and adjunct faculty. This, coupled with a significant volume of BA minor and MA students, means that there is a considerable administrative burden falling on the shoulders of part-time staff which very likely has an impact on levels of service.

### **III.6 Infrastructure**

The Department has around 10 offices and each permanent faculty member has a private office. Two rooms are available to adjuncts. In addition, PhD students and TAs have their own dedicated office, and all rooms are equipped with basic facilities such as computers. IT-equipped teaching rooms are shared with other departments as are other lecture and seminar rooms. Presently, a media lab is being built which will have 40+ computer terminals and a range of high-end software, and students will have access to this new facility. Library resources for the study of communication seem adequate and the exponential development of digital resources means that e-books and e-journals are becoming increasingly important. The library also houses an important newspaper collection for historical media research. The department has a clear strategy of acquisitions and has often received unspent budget from other departments so that the resources available for communication students has continued to thrive in volume and depth.

### **III.7 Research and Publications**

Members of the department are clearly involved in a variety of research arenas, both as individual researchers and as collaborators in small and larger-scale projects. Given the difficulty in attracting research income more generally, the success rate of research bids is impressive, especially the large-scale, cross-cultural projects involving a number of countries. This track record is particularly important for building and sustaining thematic research, enhancing visibility and increasing the likelihood of success in the future. The research topics being pursued by faculty (and in some cases, adjuncts and research students) while superficially quite diverse, nonetheless cohere around a smaller number of core themes which provide a focus for the department's short-, and longer-term research strategy. These foci (new media; media institutions; and media and diversity/minorities) are also reflected in the orientation of the MA program which together, constitute a relatively narrow but specialist curriculum.

We note that the department has enjoyed financial and other kinds of support through the Burda Center for Innovative Communication since the department's establishment in 2001-02 (and indeed for two years before that). The Center, financed exclusively by a large German publishing company, has policy- and market-oriented expectations. The Center has enabled

the department to: host a number of important symposia over the past few years; initiate a visiting scholars program which has included important figures in the communications field; establish a post-doctoral and visiting fellows scheme; conduct a number of research studies via a competitive bidding process (the Burda Research Grant); disseminate research findings through the publication of reports and monographs. However, we understand that this extremely important source of funding is likely to not be renewed. So it is imperative that the department seek external research grants in order to sustain momentum and retain visibility.

#### Recommendation 9

The volume of research publications from this small faculty is remarkably high, demonstrating a significant commitment to disseminating and sharing findings and contributing to knowledge more generally. The range and volume of publications, from peer-reviewed articles to single-authored monographs, is extremely impressive, particularly given the fact that most of the faculty members are relatively young (at least in academic terms) scholars. We believe that the current trend in terms of volume and diversity of publications is extremely encouraging. However, although we recognize the importance and relevance of some of the outlets in which faculty are submitting their work, in order to increase the profile of individual scholars and the department/faculty/university more generally; faculty should consider targeting journals which enjoy a global reputation of research excellence. This wider publication strategy can only be part of the scholarly package since we also recognize that in order to maximize impact of scholarship which has a national focus, it is important to publish in national journals and in community languages. Recommendation 10

## **VI. Recommendations:**

### **VI. 1 Short-term Recommendations**

1 Introduce a regular program of ‘progress check’ workshops (perhaps each semester) which bring students together to discuss any issues, maintain identity with the course and with each other, make explicit the shared experience of the ‘lonely scholar’ syndrome; and encourage peer support. These could be scheduled as two day-workshops including a weekend day (Thursday/Friday). This could even extend to encouraging students to set up their own sites on *Facebook* or other kinds of online social networking activities.

2 Develop new forms of teaching that integrate evidence from communication research (such as journalism research, audience research, effects research) with teaching practical knowledge about the various fields in the industry.

3 Make better use of skilled TAs to facilitate sections in undergraduate courses which could offer higher levels of interactivity between tutors and students, and enable more consolidation and discussion of key points which might have been glossed in the lectures.

4 Ensure that MA students who are paid to be TAs, do not work with their own colleagues in a way which gives them authority over their peers, since this is both inappropriate pedagogically but also strains relations between students, possibly hindering learning.

5 Improve promotion of department and research specializations of faculty in order to attract more research degree students; perhaps offer incentives to good MA students to stay on to undertake PhD.

6 Strengthen the existing procedures for mentoring, monitoring and evaluating teaching competence. Make procedures completely transparent. Introduce regular classroom visits for junior faculty.

7 Reconsider all course promotional literature, both hard copy and online, to ensure that it accurately reflects the reality of course provision.

8 Improve the overall quality of students entering the MA program. Should a BA undergraduate program be approved, that the quality of students entering the Masters program will also likely increase as the “best and brightest” from the undergraduate curriculum may be more readily enticed into advanced training.

9 Increase interdisciplinary or collaborative projects with national and international colleagues in order to increase the possibility of greater research funding.

10 Identify high-impact journals and target these as the first-choice outlets for journal-length manuscripts; target high-impact publishers as first-choice outlets for book-length manuscripts; encourage strategic approach to publications which balances peer-reviewed articles in globally significant journals with books and chapters which have different kinds of impact and significance, particularly in local and national contexts.

## **VI. 2 Middle- and Long-term Recommendation**

The department is at a crossroads with one road leading toward growth and another toward the status quo and possibly stagnation. Growth and development may result from the addition of a BA degree in communication. Whether such a program will aid or hinder the department’s growth and development depends in large measure on the structure and content of that program. Our committee’s role did not include evaluation of the proposed undergraduate major. However, to the extent that the strengths of the current department are enhanced by the proposed program – namely (1) a focus on content strengths (new media, media industries, and minorities in the media); (2) adequate resources; and (3) complementary to existing programs of research and training, the cross roads reached could more readily lead toward growth and development of communication study at Ben Gurion University. If this scenario comes to pass, the faculty in communication will then need to chart a strategy for realizing its full potential. This is likely to include consideration of new hires and new programs, based on identifying a niche market which plays to the research and teaching strengths of the department as a whole, further exploits and builds on the ‘diversity’ agenda of the wider university, and offers something genuinely novel to a potential market.

**Signed by:**



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Prof. Joseph N. Capella, Chair



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Prof. Wolfgang Donsbach



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Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer



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Prof. Karen Ross



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Prof. Esther Thorson

## V. Appendices:

### Letter of Appointment (Sample)



February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Professor Wolfgang Donsbach, Budgeting Committee | הועדה לתכנון ולתקצוב  
Director, Department of Communication  
Dresden University of Technology  
Germany

Dear Professor Donsbach,

The State of Israel undertook an ambitious project when the Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE) established a quality assessment and assurance system for Israeli higher education. Its stated goals are: to enhance and ensure the quality of academic studies; to provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel; and to ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena. Involvement of world-renowned academicians in this process is essential.

This most important initiative reaches out to scholars and experts in the international arena in a national effort to meet the critical challenges that confront the Israeli higher education system today. The formation of international evaluation committees represents an opportunity to express our common sense of concern and to assess the current and future status of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. It also establishes a structure for an ongoing consultative process among scientists and professionals around the globe on common academic dilemmas and prospects.

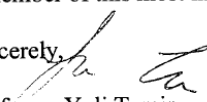
I therefore deeply appreciate your willingness to join us in this crucial endeavor.

It is with great pleasure that I hereby appoint you to serve a member of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of Communication Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Joseph Cappella - Chair, Prof. Hanna Adoni, Prof. Wolfgang Donsbach, Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer, Prof. Karen Ross, and Prof. Esther Thorson. Ms. Michal Kabatznik will coordinate the Committee's activities.

In your capacity as a member of the Evaluation Committee, you will be requested to function in accordance with the enclosed appendix. I wish you much success in your role as a member of this most important committee.

Sincerely,

  
Professor Yuli Tamir  
Minister of Education, Culture and Sport  
and Chairperson of the Council for Higher Education

*Enclosures:* Appendix to the Appointment Letter of Evaluation Committees  
cc: Ms. Riki Mendelzvaig, Secretary of the Council for Higher Education  
Ms. Michal Neumann, Head of the Quality Assessment Unit  
Ms. Michal Kabatznik, Committee Coordinator





October 07

## **Appendix to the Letter of Appointment for Evaluation Committees (Study Programs)**

### **1. General**

On June 3, 2003 the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to establish a system for quality assessment and assurance in Israeli higher education. Within this framework, study-programs are to be evaluated every six years and institutions every eight years. The quality assessment system came into effect in the academic year of 2004-2005.

The main objectives of the quality assessment activity are:

- To enhance the quality of higher education in Israel;
- To create an awareness within institutions of higher education in Israel of the importance of quality evaluation and to develop internal self-evaluation mechanisms on a regular basis;
- To provide the public with information regarding the quality of study programs in institutions of higher education throughout Israel;
- To ensure the continued integration of the Israeli system of higher education in the international academic arena.

**It is not the CHE's intention to rank the institutions of higher education according to the results of the quality assessment processes. The evaluation committee should refrain from formal comparisons.**

### **2. The Work of the Evaluation Committee**

- 2.1 The committee shall hold meetings, as needed, before visiting the institution, in order to evaluate the material received.
- 2.2 The committee shall visit the institution and the academic unit being evaluated – if possible - within 3-4 months of receiving the self-evaluation report. The purpose of the visit is to verify and update the information submitted in the self-evaluation report, clarify matters where necessary, inspect the educational environment and facilities first hand, etc. During the visit, the committee will meet with the heads of the institution, faculty members, students, the administrative staff, and any other persons it considers necessary.
- 2.3 In a meeting at the beginning of the visit, the committee will meet with the heads of the institution (president/rector, dean), the heads of the academic unit and the study-programs, in order to explain the purpose of the visit. At the end of the visit, the committee will summarize its findings, and formulate its recommendations.

- 2.4 The duration of the visits (at least one full day) will be coordinated with the chairperson of the committee.
- 2.5 Following the visit, the committee will write its final report, including its recommendations, which will be delivered to the institution and the academic unit for their response.
- 2.6 In the event that a member of the committee is also a faculty member in an institution being evaluated, he/she will not take part in discussions regarding that institution.

### **3. The Individual Reports**

- 3.1 The final reports of the evaluation committee shall address every institution separately.
- 3.2 The final reports shall include recommendations on topics listed in the guidelines for self –evaluation, such as:
  - The goals and aims of the evaluated academic unit and study programs.
  - The study program.
  - The academic staff.
  - The students.
  - The organizational structure.
  - The broader organizational structure (school/faculty) in which the academic unit and study program operate.
  - The infrastructure (both physical and administrative) available to the study program.
  - Internal mechanisms for quality assessment.
  - Other topics to be decided upon by the evaluation committee.

### **4. The structure of the reports**

#### ***4.1 Part A – General background and an executive summary:***

- 4.1.1 General background concerning the evaluation process, the names of the members of the committee, a general description of the institution and the academic unit being assessed, and the committee's work.
- 4.1.2 An executive summary that will include a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic unit and program being evaluated.

#### ***4.2 Part B – In-depth description of subjects examined:***

- 4.2.1 This part will be composed according to the topics examined by the evaluation committee, and based on the self-evaluation report submitted by the institution.
- 4.2.2 For each topic examined the report will present a summary of the findings, the relevant information and analysis.

#### ***4.3 Part C –Recommendations:***

- 4.3.1 Comprehensive conclusions and recommendations regarding the evaluated academic unit and the study program according to the topics in part B.
- 4.3.2 Recommendations may be classified according to the following categories:
  - ***Congratulatory remarks and minimal changes recommended, if any.***
  - ***Desirable changes recommended*** at the institution's convenience and follow-up in the next cycle of evaluations.
  - ***Important/needed changes requested for ensuring appropriate academic quality*** within a reasonable time, in coordination with the institution (1-3 years)
  - ***Essential and urgent changes required, on which continued authorization will be contingent*** (immediately or up to one year).
  - ***A combination of any of the above.***

**4.4 Part D - Appendices:**

The appendices shall contain the committee's letter of appointment and the schedule of the on-site visit.

**5. The General report**

In addition to the individual reports concerning each study program, the committee shall submit to the CHE the following documents:

5.1 A general report regarding the status of the evaluated field of study within the Israeli institutions of higher education.

**We urge the committee to clearly list its specific recommendations for each one of the topics (both in the individual reports and in the general report) and to prioritize these recommendations, in order to ease the eventual monitoring of their implementation.**

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THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

BEN GURION UNIVERSITY

13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> May 2009

Evaluation Committee meeting, room 538, 5th, Building 72.

12:30-13:15	Opening session with the heads of the institution and the senior staff member appointed to deal with quality assessment	Prof. Jimmy Weinblatt -Rector Prof. Yael Edan- Deputy Rector, Head of Quality Assessment System Prof. Moshe Justman - Deputy Dean		
13:15-14:00	Meeting with the heads (academic and administrative) of the faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities	Prof. Moshe Justman - Dean Rachel Damri – Chief of Administration		
14:00-14:30	Meeting with the heads (academic and administrative) of Dept of Communication	Prof. Dan Caspi Sharon Toledano		
14:30-15:15	Lunch	4 Students		
15:15-16:00	Meeting with representatives of relevant departmental committees *	Dr. Zvi Reich – Teaching Committee Chair Dr. Tamar Ashuri – Minor students' advisor	Please list representatives of all the main committees	We leave the decision up to the institution as to which committees to invite.
16:00-16:45	Meeting with Senior Academic Faculty*	Dr. Nelly Elias Dr. Tamar Ashuri Dr. Natalia Khvorostianov Dr. Tal Samuel-Azran Dr. Zvi Reich		
16:45-17:15	Closed-door working meeting of the evaluation committee			

		Yehuda Bar Lev Alon Molian Deddy Markovich Noga Flandra Mor Hassid Avital Haddad Avivit Lev Sarid Orit Seltzer		
14:15-14:45	Closed-door working meeting of the evaluation committee			
14:45-15:15	Summation meeting with heads of the institution, faculty and of the Dept. of Comm.	Prof. Jimmy Weinblatt -Rector Prof. Yael Edan- Deputy Rector, Head of Quality Assessment System Prof. Moshe Justman - Dean Prof. Dan Caspi		

\* The heads of the institution and academic unit or their representatives will not attend these meetings.

\*\* The visit will be conducted in English with the exception of students who may speak in Hebrew and anyone else who feels unable to converse in English.