



**Committee for the Evaluation of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences  
Studies**

**The Open University**  
**Department of Education and Psychology**

**Evaluation Report**

**February 2009**



## **Chapter 1- Background**

At its meeting on October 31, 2006 the Council for Higher Education (CHE) decided to evaluate study programs in the field of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences during the academic year 2006-2007.

Following the decision of the CHE, the Minister of Education, who serves ex officio as the Chair of the CHE, appointed a committee for the evaluation of the academic quality of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences studies on April 29, 2008. On October 7 the committee was expanded and it currently comprises the following members<sup>1</sup>:

- **Prof. Susan Andersen, Department of Psychology, New York University-Committee Chair, U.S.A**
- **Prof. Victor Azarya, The Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Hebrew University (emeritus), Israel**
- **Prof. Yinon Cohen, Department of Sociology, Columbia University, U.S.A**
- **Prof. Susan Goldin-Meadow, Department of Psychology, University of Chicago, U.S.A**
- **Prof. Avishai Henik, Department of Psychology, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel**
- **Prof. Morris Moscovitch, Department of Psychology, University of Toronto, Canada**
- **Prof. Steven J. Sherman, Department of Psychology, Indiana University, U.S.A**
- **Prof. Varda Shoham, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona, U.S.A**
- **Prof. Seymour Spilerman, Department of Sociology, Columbia University, U.S.A**
- **Prof. Sidney Strauss - Chief Scientist at the Israeli Ministry of Education (previously- Department of Psychology, Tel Aviv University), Israel**
- **Prof. Barbara Tversky, Department of Psychology, Stanford University, U.S.A**

**Ms. Alisa Elon- Coordinator of the Committee on behalf of the CHE.**

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that there were 12 departments undergoing evaluation, committee members divided the visits amongst themselves.

Within the framework of its activity, the Committee was requested to submit the following documents to the CHE:

1. A final report for each of the institutions which would include an evaluation of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences .study programs, the Committee's findings and recommendations.
2.
  - 2.1 A general report regarding the status of the evaluated field of study in Israeli institutions of higher education.
  - 2.2 Recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

The Committee's letter of appointment is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The first stage of the quality assessment process consisted of self-evaluation, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report by the institutions under evaluation. This process was conducted in accordance with the CHE's guidelines as specified in the document entitled "The Self-Evaluation Process: Recommendations and Guidelines" (December 2006).

## **Chapter 2-Committee Procedures**

During May – June 2008 Committee members conducted full-day visits to five of the twelve institutions whose Psychology and Behavioral Science study programs the committee was requested to examine.

During these visits, the Committee met with the relevant officials at each institution, as well as with faculty members, students and alumni, and also conducted a tour of the campus.

***This report deals with Psychology studies at the Open University.***

The Committee's visit to the Open University took place on June 4, 2008.

The following members of the committee participated in the visit to the Open University:

- **Prof. Susan Andersen- Committee Chair**
- **Prof. Varda Shoham**
- **Prof. Seymour Spilerman**
- **Prof. Barbara Tversky**

The schedule of the visit, including the list of participants representing the institution, is attached as **Appendix 2**.

The members of the committee thank the management of the institution and the Department of Education and Psychology for the self-evaluation report and for their hospitality towards the Committee during its visit.

## **Chapter 3- Evaluation of Psychology Studies at the Open University**

### **Background**

The Open University was established in 1974 with a mission to open its gates to all individuals capable of higher education.

The university has no admission requirements; its doors are open to all. Students' academic ability is gauged only by their performance in the courses they take. In the academic year 2005-2006, 40,914 students were enrolled in undergraduate courses and 3,164 in graduate programs. In FTE (full time equivalent) terms, this is comparable to 16,579 undergraduate students and 1,274 graduate students.

The Department of Education and Psychology, which is one of seven academic departments at the University, was established in 1997, when the Open University was reorganized on a departmental basis. The Open University has offered dual-disciplinary degrees in Psychology since 2002 and a single-disciplinary Bachelor degree in Psychology since 2005.

Because students do not enroll in a department but rather register for specific courses, it is difficult to present numbers of students according to academic departments. In 2006, the number of enrollments in undergraduate courses offered by the Department of Education and Psychology was 32,529, which represents 30% of all undergraduate course enrollments at the Open University.

### **Mission and Goals**

As indicated in the self-evaluation provided by the institution, The Open University was established in the 70's with the mission of providing access to higher education to all, young and old, rich and poor, near and far, educated and not, whether for a degree or for personal enrichment, without sacrificing standards. A central goal of the university is to increase access to higher education by population groups that would otherwise have difficulty attending traditional universities. This goal is pursued by study materials prepared by the Open University, is delivered through a mix of on-line and long distance courses as well as frontal tutorials. In line with its mission, the university has no entry requirements but it ensures quality control in student achievement through very careful monitoring of student performance. The outreach to a variety of communities within the country continues each year and now extends to translating course materials into Arabic and Russian.

The mission of the department, as stated in the self-evaluation, is to provide a comprehensive introduction to the field of psychology for students from diverse backgrounds, some with deficient qualifications for university study. The goal of the training is to produce graduates for labor market entry, as well as students prepared to pursue graduate studies. The evidence suggests that the psychology program succeeds

in achieving its goals, even with the very heterogeneous student body, validating the Open University vision and pedagogical techniques.

### **The Program of Study**

The Department of Education and Psychology at the Open University has had a BA program in psychology since 2002, either combined with a second major, or since 2005, as a single major. The organizational and physical proximity of psychology and education faculty, i.e., in the same department on the Ra'anana campus, has promoted fruitful collegial and research collaborations. As noted, the Open University combines distance learning techniques (primarily tailored textbooks written mostly in Hebrew by faculty and other experts, and also on-line lectures, CDs, websites, chat rooms, and email) with small, regional face-to-face sections conducted by tutors. The faculty initiate, develop, maintain, and monitor courses in the department, and accomplish their pedagogical tasks through working with teaching staff – course coordinators who write and mark exams, and tutors who function partly as teaching assistants and partly as teachers of the in-person classes at regional centers. Quality is maintained in this BA-level training in psychology by strictly supervising the demanding exams the department requires. Course enrollments reach a broad spectrum of society and, according to the self-evaluation document, stand at approximately 100,000 a year, attesting to success in outreach.

The five senior faculty members in psychology span cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and social psychology. Enrollments in psychology courses are high, approximately 30% of the total course enrollments at the Open University, and more than 32,000 enrollments in 2006. Graduates of the department have been accepted for masters and doctoral programs in first-rate universities. Moreover, by arrangement with Ben Gurion University's (BGU's) Psychology Department, the Open University's students studying psychology at the BA level are accepted into BGU's BA program in psychology without examination once the student has shown that he or she had successfully completed the required first-year course work at the Open University. This further verifies the esteem in which the undergraduate BA program at Open University and the Psychology Department as a whole is held in the country.

Although the committee did not examine in depth the departments' plans for establishing MA programs in psychology (and such programs are not yet accredited), the planned MA programs include one in social psychology aimed at business and one that combines neuropsychological, developmental, and educational approaches to provide students with expertise in learning and developmental disabilities for jobs in early childhood education. The committee is sympathetic in principle to the need for graduate programs because they tend to facilitate research productivity among faculty (through faculty-graduate student collaboration), increasing faculty morale, and further engaging BA-level students in research side-by-side with successful role models at the MA-level.

Based on our meetings, the faculty and students impressed the committee as happy and productive population that makes use of its many resources. The Open University has thoughtfully combined human and technological resources to invent and reinvent new ways to accomplish its ends. The new campus at Ra'anana has state-of-the-science and

built-to-last facilities. Particularly impressive, the full-time faculty conducts research in first-rate laboratory facilities at the main campus, and as a result, students are able to do the research required for their seminar papers by using this well equipped laboratory space.

Based on the self-evaluation document and our meetings, it seems to us that thoughtfulness characterizes the Open University at every level. The Psychology Department is committed to developing new courses and revising curricula to reflect new developments in the field. The senior administration and the psychology faculty are aware of problems, especially the need for more research opportunities for faculty, for a larger number of faculty, and for doing more to retain course coordinators and tutors and improve their morale, which are the three major problems facing the department. The faculty and administration seem committed to addressing these issues and also seem almost universally proud of and committed to the mission of the university, and how it is being accomplished.

### **Faculty and teaching**

Given the nature of the instruction, the roles of faculty at the Open University differ from those at traditional institutions. Courses rely heavily on specially written textbooks, primarily in Hebrew. As indicated, there are three levels of teaching staff: senior faculty, course coordinators, and tutors. The senior faculty is responsible for development of courses and course materials; the course coordinators administer the courses, websites with chat rooms, and on-line lectures, CDs of lectures and materials, exams, and manage the work of the tutors; and the tutors, in turn, conduct face-to-face sessions with students in satellites all over the country. Each has a number of responsibilities, as noted below.

**Senior faculty.** The five core senior faculty in psychology seem highly dedicated to the unique model and philosophy of the Open University. They describe the environment as cooperative, and indicate that they are respected by their superiors. They regard the university as their academic home and are on site 3-4 days per week, though some are split between the main campus in Ra'anana and the Jerusalem site. Pleasant offices and a state-of-the-science cognitive psychology laboratory are draws. They have four main responsibilities: writing courses, supervising course coordinators and overseeing student papers, research, and administration. Research is valued in itself and also for its role in teaching and preparing teaching materials. The level of publications produced by the faculty is high, especially as their main mission is teaching. Faculty can apply for sabbaticals, research funds, and travel funds.

The areas of expertise of the faculty span the programmatic needs of the department, concentrating in cognitive psychology and social psychology, as noted. The senior faculty have been carefully selected. Applicants for this track start with a position of "guest lecturer," a tentative rank one can occupy for two years prior to becoming a lecturer. Course coordinators can apply, but they compete with applicants from outside the university. Promotion is based on teaching and research, and is usually slower than at regular universities because research is generally slower. There is no tenure but contracts as long as 10 years plus historical precedent provide general job security. In addition, salaries are 30% higher than at comparable institutions to compensate for lack of tenure.

The faculty describes the environment as less stressful than at other universities because there is more flexibility in schedules and because the pressure to publish seems less intimidating.

An increase in faculty is needed to cope with the sheer numbers of courses and students at the BA level. More faculty would also provide a critical mass for undertaking innovations that will foster greater interaction among faculty and students in the department, such as holding regular colloquia and fostering research collaborations. This would contribute considerably to faculty morale. The faculty also needs more time and resources for research. All core faculty are active and productive researchers, committed to their research programs as well as to teaching. The addition of master's programs is currently under discussion, and this would involve graduate students in research collaborations with faculty while still benefiting from the Open University's long-distance learning model. The committee agrees that such a change, if done well, could be valuable for the research productivity of existing faculty and good for the pool of potential graduate applicants in Israel. However, the committee strongly believes the long-distance model is unsuitable for effective clinical training. The presence of an MA program could be valuable for BA-level students as well, by expanding the range of the role models they have for pursuing psychological science in advanced studies and otherwise making use of their BA-level research training in their careers.

**Course coordinators.** There are 20 course coordinators, 13 of whom are also tutors. All have master's degrees and five have PhDs. Six are full-time or nearly so. They are specialized in the areas they teach. This position is regarded as a professional appointment rather than a training appointment, though many course coordinators are pursuing advanced degrees. The course coordinators write the assignments and exams, oversee course and tutorial logistics and grading, develop and maintain the course website, hire, train, and work with the tutors on lesson plans and seminar papers, and work with students, especially those experiencing difficulties. As noted, course coordinators are recruited according to programmatic needs. They must have MAs, and PhDs are desirable. A committee reviews the qualifications of applicants and selected applicants are invited for interviews and asked to prepare a study unit.

Because needs for course coordinators depend on semester-by-semester enrollments, job predictability is difficult. Eighty percent of the University's income comes from course tuition. The conditions of employment have recently changed to provide more job security. There are four levels of course coordinators: Levels 1 and 2 are reserved for MA-level coordinators while the vast majority of PhD-level coordinators are at level 3. Level 4 is restricted to one person who has demonstrated more extensive research productivity, thus the promotion options for coordinators with a PhD are severely restricted. Being promoted to Level 4 is valued by coordinators and can facilitate research productivity, and yet is unattainable because there is only one such position in the department (and it is occupied). This has created some dissatisfaction among the course coordinators, only two of whom are full time at the Open University.

To deal with this dissatisfaction and to increase retention rates among the course coordinators the administration has recently created an academic promotion track that

should allow more course coordinators to advance to level 4. The committee strongly endorses this new initiative and regards its implementation as very important to the continued effectiveness of the program. Importantly, if this can be accomplished in a way that includes no fixed cap on the number of such promotions feasible (if warranted), making the decision to implement this academic promotion track with no cap would be especially valuable. At present, it is simply the case that the administration expects to allow further mobility between the tracks, as more senior faculty positions become available, with more course coordinators embarking on the senior faculty ladder over time. Beyond this important issue, all course coordinators can now apply for a 6-month sabbatical leave in order to focus on their research, and can also apply for research fellowships if they are working on their PhD – innovations that also matter a great deal to the morale among course coordinators, according to our meetings.

**Tutors.** A large group of tutors fills an essential role in teaching. They teach and meet with groups of students at study clusters across the country. Overall 80% of students participate in tutorials. The committee's impression based on meetings with tutors is that most tutors enjoy the interactions with students and would not want to be course coordinators. Tutors are like TAs, except that they also teach the frontal courses (i.e., those taught in person) at the regional centers, as noted. They are hired on a semester-to-semester basis depending on course enrollments, though many have worked at the Open University for years. Most work part-time at the Open University and part-time elsewhere as well, and many are graduate students at other institutions. Their salaries depend on the number of student-assignments they oversee, which does not take into account the level of complexity of these assignments, or the time they require. There is no advancement track but those who work steadily receive salary raises. The institution has established a mentorship system whereby more experienced tutors mentor new ones; this seems to be working well. They have workshops on tutoring and they get feedback from course coordinators. However, tutors indicate that they would like more meetings with course coordinators and other tutors to facilitate effective education in the department and to improve and then maintain morale. The committee regards this as a constructive step that Open University should take.

**Curriculum.** The curriculum encompasses all the building blocks of top-notch BA studies in Psychology at major universities. Teaching is done mostly through written materials and lectures recorded on DVDs and on-line. Students get direct experience in doing research, first by participating in experiments. In addition, all psychology students receive a tutorial in research design in which they read a review, pick a question, design a small-scale study, run it, and write it up. This is prior to a required empirical seminar supervised and graded by a faculty member, who in some cases will be from one of the major universities. The lower level courses rely primarily on course materials in Hebrew; the seminars, especially the research seminar, require reading of articles in English. Both faculty and students agree on a need to do more to integrate articles in English into the curriculum at an earlier point in the curriculum, and the committee strongly supports this. The comprehensive curriculum and high standards have allowed up to ten second-year students with 90 averages to be accepted into the highly selective BA program at Ben Gurion University without additional exams, as indicated, and this institution has also selected top Open University graduates to enter its elite graduate programs.

## **Students**

This is truly an open university. Anyone can take courses and work toward a degree, and can take as long as they like to advance through the program. This raises the problem, however, of determining who exactly should be identified as a psychology student. Hence, after students have completed four required courses in psychology, including a rigorous course in statistics, they are regarded as students in psychology. A message communicating this is then sent to the students with the recommendation that they turn to advisors in the department for further guidance about how best to pursue more advanced studies in the program. In 2006, 2,859 students had achieved this status. A third of those declared a major in psychology. Enrollments in psychology courses are high, constituting approximately 30% of course enrollments at the Open University, amounting to some 32,000 enrollments in 2006. Of those, more than 10,000 were in the required courses. In the past five years, 686 students completed the BA degree in psychology. Fifty-seven percent of OU graduates continue to advanced degrees, according to the department survey. Considering the background of the students at intake, the committee regards this track record as impressive.

Students at the Open University are slightly older than students at other universities and typically work full-time. Some have previous degrees and are making career changes. They choose the Open University for one or more of a number of reasons: not wanting to go through the procedures of applying to universities (e.g., taking the psychometric exam); needing to work or take care of children; and being in high school or the army. Students report that they are happy with their education and appreciate the opportunity to pursue their education in spite of obstacles that would preclude attending a university or college. Students report that they meet other students through the cluster classes and other events, often begin study and help groups that are useful and allow deep friendships to form. They report as well that they do not miss the campus life of a traditional university because the Open University provides these academic and social opportunities.

Students also regard the curriculum at the Open University as more demanding than at a traditional university and believe they are at a relative advantage when they graduate. They see the tutors, course coordinators, and faculty as encouraging and responsive, available by email, telephone, and in person. Although most students plan to enter careers that involve helping others, they are especially enthusiastic about their research experiences at Open University in the seminar courses, and they indicate that they would welcome even more research opportunities.

Students recommend that the department include more original research articles in their courses and that this is started at an earlier point in their studies to increase their expertise in reading and understanding psychological science. The committee agrees that this would be valuable.

## **Research**

Research is conducted at the Ra'anana campus, on-line, and in collaboration with colleagues and graduate students at other universities. Open University students at the BA level are often collaborators, sometimes with research growing out of their research seminars, and often informed by faculty research programs, the international standard for research training at universities. First-hand exposure to research is essential for an undergraduate education in psychology as it gives students tools to interpret and evaluate the research on which the field rests and the research they will need to evaluate throughout their careers. The Open University appears to do this quite well, by having students take two seminar courses in which they design and conduct studies, and analyse the data. This is done well in spite of the focus on long-distance learning. Indeed, some students appear to work with faculty on the research of faculty members, and working to increase this would be valuable. The full-time faculty are all productive researchers, and their research is facilitated by external and internal grants. In-house faculty grants are competitive but attainable, and provide time off from teaching duties as well as support for research. The faculty at each level indicate needing more time for and support for research, and the committee strongly endorses this aim.

## **Infrastructure and Facilities**

The University recently moved to a modern and inviting campus in Ra'anana. All of the faculty have offices and use them to meet with students and to meet with other faculty, as well as to work on their own research and to write. They make liberal use of the library, the bookstore, and the cafeterias as well. As noted, faculty and students can conduct research in the state-of-the-science laboratory facilities at the main campus. There are also excellent auditoria for small and large audiences. The facilities serve as a conference site for related meetings, increasing the intellectual life on campus. The meetings draw participants from the surroundings and the country at large.

Based on the committee's meetings with faculty and students, our impression is that access to frequently updated e-journals is not problematic for faculty (although the committee did not visit the library), perhaps due to the university's sophisticated technological infrastructure for delivering its online curriculum. Certainly e-journals need to be available to faculty and they should be made easily accessible for students as well, if they are not.

## **Recommendations and Suggestions**

The committee's meetings at the Open University were lively, highly informative, and also intriguing to the committee due to the unique model of teaching and learning at this university. The committee appreciates the institution's mission and is impressed with what it is accomplishing. The committee offers several recommendations and suggestions below that will enable this university to further distinguish itself, while enhancing the quality of the department and the education it provides. The recommendations are offered in their approximate priority, although some are about equally important (vs. literally ranked) in their relevance to fostering excellence in the department.

1. The Department needs more senior faculty to cope with the large number of students and to establish a critical mass for collegial interactions among faculty and students, given that this is the Open University. Such interactions might include the department being able to offer regular research colloquia and the like. Further hiring would improve BA-level education, enhance the intellectual life of the department while fostering more research collaborations among faculty, and increase research productivity and morale as well. Hence, the committee strongly recommends that the Open University administration consider the need for additional faculty in this highly successful department and take the actions needed to make expansion possible. Hires that build on existing strengths in the department, i.e., in cognitive psychology and social psychology, would be particularly valuable.

(a) The committee recommends that a strategic plan is formulated within one year for achieving this hiring aim.

(b) The plan should then be implemented in the second and third years.

2. Faculty and research coordinators need more research resources. The excellent, state-of-the-science laboratory for the department on campus is a positive development. It clearly facilitates faculty research excellence and productivity, and has enabled collaborations. The committee recommends that increased attention be given to finding other ways to facilitate research involvement among faculty as well and to implement proactive changes that accomplish this. One change might be to provide support for BA level research assistants; this would greatly benefit those students winning such fellowships in the special research opportunities that would then become available to them and would clearly benefit faculty research. Another might be to institutionalize the informal collaborations between Open University faculty and faculty and graduate students in other universities. A third might be to simply increase funding for on-campus research among faculty and for research sabbaticals abroad. A fourth might be to provide resources for regular colloquia in the department, an important move for enabling faculty to keep up with the research that is ongoing in the department (and elsewhere) and for expanding the research understanding of the select undergraduates who are most engaged in research. The latter would be still more essential if planned MA programs are implemented.

(a) The committee recommends that a strategic plan is formulated for achieving this aim in the best way feasible within one year and should including at least two of the four innovations noted.

(b) The plan should be implemented in the second year.

3. Regarding course coordinators and tutors, the committee recommends that the administration continue monitoring and improving the issues of morale, retention, productivity, and promotion. Many course coordinators have Ph.D.s or are working toward them, and need time and opportunity to advance, primarily to do research and publish, as they also aspire to regular academic jobs. Creating more secure and stable jobs (longer contracts) is challenging, given the unpredictability of income based on course enrollments

at the Open University (rather than semester enrollments as in the universities and colleges). Course coordinators praised the opportunities they have for taking research sabbaticals and obtaining travel grants but would greatly prefer more Level 4 positions, a status that could provide a career path for many and would provide stability and continuity for the university.

(a) The committee thus suggests that the administration seriously consider this to ensure that promotion criteria are driven by merit rather than by the scarcity of positions that would enable promotion, and this may necessitate finding a means not to cap the number of promotions allowed in principle in a given department.

(b) The committee also sees it as important that the Open University reconsider whether or not current compensation rules for course coordinators are equitable, and suggests that their compensation become based on volume of work rather than primarily on the number of assignments graded (which may vary in how time-consuming they are to grade).

4. The committee recommends that a face-to-face meeting of senior faculty, course coordinators and tutors is held at least once a year (and ideally once a semester). Such a meeting would serve to foster further communication, coordination, and collaboration between levels. The committee believes it should be feasible both to plan for and to implement this change in the first year.

5. The committee recommends a careful examination of the curriculum to ensure that courses taken become increasingly sophisticated, and that advanced, specialized courses build on earlier overview courses. The committee also recommends, consistent with faculty and student preferences, that reading materials in English, especially original articles, are included at every stage of the curriculum, rather than only in the most advanced stages. This would enable students to gain expertise in the language of science earlier in their education, getting a head start in learning research-oriented thinking, making third level courses less taxing and more valuable.

(a) Strategic planning for making these changes should be done in one year.

(b) The changes should be implemented in the second and third years.

6. Much time is taken up among faculty, course coordinators, and tutors with providing extra attention to struggling students who have less preparation – and this is likely to decrease the attention that is given to the more talented students at the university. The committee thus suggests that the faculty work to innovate ways of solving this problem, perhaps by taking advantage of advanced students as mentors, compensating them with tuition relief or some other form of compensation.

7. The committee encourages the University to continue to pursue its plan to establish an honor's program for outstanding students. This would greatly enhance undergraduate education and increase still more the number of Open University graduates prepared to

continue their education by getting an advanced degree in psychology. The committee thus suggests that this step is taken.

8. In addition, the committee recommends that the university's alumni survey be conducted more systematically so that most students graduating with a major in psychology are accounted for and their data are included in reports of outcome. The aim is to formally assess what students do with their education (in terms of job placement or subsequent education). The currently reported survey has too much missing data to estimate the number of graduates who apply for advanced studies.

(a) Such a survey should be planned in the second year.

(b) It should be implemented in the third.

9. Finally, the committee suggests that the department and the administration establish ongoing contacts with alumni, keeping track of students. The aim should be to involve graduates in the Open University both by a newsletter and by forming communities of graduates organized by discipline or current employment or geographic region (as examples). Alumni groups often provide financial support to their alma maters, making it very much in the university's interest to establish ongoing alumni contacts.

**Signed By:**



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**Prof. Susan Andersen**  
**Committee Chair**



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**Prof. Varda Shoham**



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**Prof. Seymour Spilerman**



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**Prof. Barbara Tversky**

# APPENDIX 1



18/11/2008  
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**Professor Susan M. Andersen**  
**Professor of Psychology**  
**Director, Doctoral Program in Social Psychology**  
**Department of Psychology**  
**New York University**  
**USA**

Dear Professor Andersen,

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, particularly as our nation reaches maturity in its 60<sup>th</sup> year.

This most important initiative reaches out to scientists in the international arena in a national effort to meet the critical challenges that confront the Israeli higher educational system today. The formulation 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 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 as the Chair of the Council for Higher Education's Committee for the Evaluation of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Studies.

The composition of the Committee will be as follows: Prof. Susan Andersen - Chair, Prof. Victor Azarya, Prof. Yinon Cohen, Prof. Susan Goldin-Meadow, Prof. Avishai Henik, Prof. Morris Moscovitch, Prof. Steven J. Sherman, Prof. Varda Shoham, Prof. Seymour Spilerman, Prof. Sidney Strauss and Prof. Barbara Tversky.

Ms. Alisa Elon 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 YuK-Tamir**  
**Minister of Education**

**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. Alisa Elon, Committee Coordinator

## **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 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.
- 5.2 Recommendations for standards in the evaluated field of study.

**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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# APPENDIX 2

### Suggestion for site-visit schedule - Open University 4.06.08

| <b>Time</b>  | <b>Subject</b>                                   | <b>Participants</b>  | <b>Location</b> |
|--------------|--|--|-----------------|
| 09:00-9:45   | Opening session:<br>The heads of the institution | President - Prof. Gershon Ben-Shakhar<br>Vice president - Prof. Ora Limor<br>Dean of Academic Studies - Prof. Tamar Hermann<br>Head of research authority - Prof. Miriam Souroujon<br>Head of Quality Assessment System - Dr. Sonia Roccas |                 |
| 9:45-10:10   | Meeting with the Head of the department          | Dr. Ronit Bogler   |                 |
| 10:10-10:30  | Meeting with the Head of Psychology BA programs  | Prof. Ruth Beyth-Marom   |                 |
| 10:30-11:15  | Meeting with the academic teaching staff         |  |                 |
| 11:15-12:00  | Meeting with tutors                              |  |                 |
| 12:00-12:45  | Meeting with undergraduate students              |  |                 |
| 12:45- 13:15 | Closed lunch of committee members                |  |                 |
| 13:15-14:15  | Meeting with senior faculty                      | Prof. Ruth Beyth-Marom<br>Dr. Eran Chajut<br>Dr. Nurit Gronau<br>Dr. Ravit Nussinson<br>Dr. Sonia Roccas   |                 |
| 14:15-14:45  | Meeting with committees                          | Head of Academic Disciplinary Subcommittee - Dr. Tali Heiman<br><br>Head of Study Program Approval Committee - Dr. Zippy Erlich  |                 |
| 14:45-15:45  | Tour at the institution                          | Distance learning technologies-Dr. Yoav Yair<br>Psychology laboratory - Dr. Eran Chajut  |                 |
| 15:45-16:15  | Closed meeting of the Committee                  |  |                 |
| 16:15-16:45  | Summation meeting with heads of the institution  | President - Prof. Gershon Ben-Shakhar<br>Vice president - Prof. Ora Limor<br>Head of Quality Assessment System - Dr. Sonia Roccas<br>Head of Department - Dr. Ronit Bogler<br>Head of Psychology Programs - Prof. Ruth Beyth-Marom         |                 |