

24 November 2010

The Committee for the evaluation of Mathematics Study-Programs
by
Ms. Marissa Gross
Coordinator
Quality Assessment Unit (QAU)
The Israeli Council for Higher Education (CHE)

Shalom,

**Re: Response to the report of the Evaluation Committee in the field of
Mathematics at the University of Haifa**

On behalf of the University of Haifa, I'd like to express my gratitude for the work of the Committee and for their insightful comments. The Department of Mathematics has responded to most of the specific comments of the Committee in the attached letter. I'd like to respond to an additional comment and to two issues raised in the General Report.

Office for PhD students

The Department of Mathematics is now in the Faculty of Natural Sciences (it used to be in Social Sciences). In the future, the Faculty of Natural Sciences will be relocated to its own building and the department of Mathematics will most probably receive an additional office for PhD students.

Teaching courses in English

As of next year, the University of Haifa will start offering selected courses in English in all the departments. This is in line with the new policy to enhance the international profile of our students. We hope that the department of Mathematics will be a part of this endeavor.

Attracting talented junior faculty

We hope that, given the availability of CHE funds for 'returning scholars', we will be able to attract talented candidates more efficiently than we did in the past.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. David Faraggi
Rector

cc: Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, President
Prof. Gal Richter-Levin, Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences
Prof. Vladimir Hinich, Head of the Department of Mathematics
Prof. Nahum Finger, Chairman, Subcommittee for Quality Affairs
Council for Higher Education
Ms. Michal Neuman, Head, Quality Evaluation Unit, Council for Higher
Education

The Committee's Recommendations and Response of the Department Chair

Specific recommendations

1) *Both the University and the department should explore possibilities for cooperation or even an alliance in mathematics with the Technion. The committee recommends setting up a joint Ph.D. program in mathematics.*

Response: At present low-level cooperation exists between the institutions: some of our students attend Technion courses and vice versa. This can and should be strengthened by having the two departments coordinate their graduate mathematics courses.

One technical problem, however, hinders greater cooperation: Despite the proximity of the two institutions, there is no convenient way to get from the Technion to the University of Haifa by public transportation. Perhaps this could be addressed by the administrations of both institutions?

The possibility of uniting the two graduate programs is more remote: universities in Israel are (formally, at least) independent institutions, and it would be difficult to persuade the Technion administration that a joint graduate mathematics program is in its interest. Moreover, my personal discussions with the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Sciences at Utrecht, Prof. I. Moerdijk, persuaded me that even the "Mastermath" program in the Netherlands has some drawbacks. Consequently, it is unclear whether it can be copied here in Israel.

2) *In view of the increasing relevance of mathematics to all academic disciplines, the University should consider offering a mathematics course as part of the general curriculum for students in the Humanities.*

Response: We have already partly implemented this recommendation, as of this academic year. This semester the department offered a course: "A Window to Mathematics", targeted at the general student body. If there is sufficient student interest, we will be happy to repeat the effort and offer similar courses in the future. We have not yet attempted to persuade the administration that all students should be required to take at least one science course as part of their undergraduate degree requirements.

3) *Given the segmented structure of the University, with the unusual positioning of mathematics, computer science, and statistics, the deans should ensure that the potential of the Department of Mathematics is fully exploited.*

Response: We are not sure we can address this recommendation. On the departmental level, this semester we are offering a course in "Geometry and Physics", which we hope will serve as a basis for additional courses connecting mathematics with other sciences, and perhaps a mini-program in mathematical physics.

This is in line with the University's declared aim of strengthening the Faculty of Natural Sciences, which we hope will eventually lead to the establishment of the Departments of Physics and Chemistry. Beyond this, we believe that the University should take the lead in finding ways to exploit the department's potential.

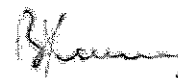
4) *The leadership of the department should design a strategic plan to safeguard and extend its core mission in view of the upcoming retirements and the planned developments in the Faculty of Science and Science Education.*

Response: We are renewing our attempts to recruit new faculty members, and hope we will find good candidates and (even more important) that the Rector will approve our recommendations and make the necessary appointments.

Our basic strategic plan is:

- (a) To preserve our current structure as a department covering a reasonably wide range of research interests in mathematics (given our size) by recruiting the best faculty members we can;
- (b) To try and expand our interaction with the rest of the Faculty of Natural Sciences in the direction closest to mathematics: namely, physics (which also satisfies a need of the new School of Maritime Studies) .
- (c) To increase our cooperation with the Departments of Computer Science and Statistics, with the ideal goal of eventually being part of one Faculty.

We are looking forward to a positive discussion of our proposals and needs with the new Rector of the University (who is himself a statistician).



Prof. Vladimir Hinich,
Department chairman