



July 28, 2010

To the CHE external committee

We thank you very much for your efforts and for your comprehensive and thorough look at our department's work processes. Your insights, comments and recommendations were welcomed by our staff members. Your report is being studied carefully. We have already begun thinking and discussing ways with which we can promote the issues mentioned in your report and implement consequential changes.

We have a few suggested corrections which we ask you to consider:

1. The formal name of our university is "University of Haifa", not "Haifa University".
2. A quote from page 6 of the report (referring to the Graduate Program in Quality) says: "... the size of this program has been decreasing (from 79 in 2004/5 to 38 in 2008/9)". In fact, the numbers of students were 78 in 2004/5 and 51 in 2008/9 (discounting drop-outs and third-year Track A students).
3. The final request for a correction concerns a remark on the bottom of page 9: there were 7 students in the biostatistics program, 5 of whom dropped out and either left the department or changed their study programs. On the top of page 10 a remark in parentheses says: "(it was felt that some of the students went into biostatistics, not because of interest in this sub-discipline, but rather because they were too weak to be accepted into the actuarial program)". Not a single student of biostatistics ever applied for admission into the actuarial program as well. Please see Remark 3 below about alleged weaknesses.

We present some comments and remarks concerning the committee's report. They are not argumentative, nor will they necessarily invite corrections in your text. We just wish to discuss a few points through our viewpoint and experience.



1. The undergraduate single-major track in statistics with actuarial studies opens in 2010/11.
2. 2010/11 will see a significant increase in the number of TA's per course, resulting in smaller practice classes.
3. Applicants for postgraduate studies at the University of Haifa may apply to at most three study programs they are interested in. These three choices are not ordered in preference. Some applicants cite two or even three choices within our department. We have found a clear distinction between student preferences when actuarial and statistical studies were concerned. Weak students in biostatistics do not usually survive the first semester, but, frustrating as it is to them, this does not imply that they were too weak to be accepted to actuarial studies (there is only a slight difference in acceptance criteria and it is rare that a candidate falls into this crack). True, only two biostatistics students out of seven successfully completed their first year in 2008/9, but they are strong students by any standard who would have been accepted to the actuarial program if they had applied.
4. Quality and Logistics programs are designed for students with a pre-defined minimum background in statistics or probability & statistics, respectively. All students must pass courses strengthening their respective statistical and probabilistic knowledge and bringing all students to a level enabling them to continue their studies. The very low drop-out rates in both programs verifies the fact that these challenges are surmountable by most students.
5. Half of the Logistics weekly class hours are indeed taught on Fridays, but none of the Quality courses and no Actuarial Studies courses are taught on Fridays. Quality Studies courses are taught on Tuesdays (full-day studies) in order to enable students to work in industry the rest of the week.



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Again we thank the committee for the important insight and strategic perspective with which it provided us. There are many important, some even crucial, issues raised by the committee and we have already begun discussing the ways to deal with them. As soon as the new academic year begins, the department's council will discuss all the committee's recommendations in an orderly manner and will combine these with the department's own vision, strategy and operative plans.

Sincerely,

Avner Halevy
Head, Department of Statistics