



Tuesday, February 01, 2011

Ms. Michal Neumann
Head, The Quality Assessment Unit
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)
P.O.B 4037, Jerusalem 91040, Israel

לשכת הרקטור

Office of
the Rector

Dear Ms. Neumann,

On behalf of the Hebrew University I would like to thank the members of the Review committee for their report on the Institute of Life Science at the Hebrew University. We were very pleased with the committee's favorable impressions of the research done in the Institute as well as the quality of students at the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels, and we appreciate the committee's suggestions for making it even better. The report was discussed by all the members of the Institute, and the Institute's Chair wrote a response to the recommendations the committee made. The Dean of Science also provided a written response to the report. After receiving the Chair's and Dean's responses, the report and its recommendations were discussed by the Committee for Academic Planning (CAP), which is chaired by the Rector. CAP members questioned the Chair and the Dean about their responses and discussed the solutions they offered to the concerns of the committee.

The report makes two types of recommendations: Those having to do with changes inside the Institute and those proposing faculty-level or university-level changes. Concerning the suggestions for internal changes, the Institute plans to adopt the recommendations. In particular, the Institute decided to significantly enhance the support to young faculty members, and have established new excellence fellowships to its MSc students, as well as several awards for notable scientific accomplishments of all students.

The report recommends the creation of a Graduate School as a way to protect the interests of graduate students. Independently of the visit, and in line with the recommendation, the Hebrew University has changed its policies regarding the organizational structure of PhD programs. According to the revised organizational framework each institutes forms a Doctoral Committee that becomes responsible for the education of the doctoral students affiliated with it. Students will no longer be completely dependent on the good will of their PhD adviser. Institutes are also encouraged to develop courses specifically tailored for PhD students.



The report recommends the consideration of means to increase integration of the three campuses. We are well aware of the difficulties created by having relevant courses in different campuses. The Rector appointed the Vice Rector, Professor Oded Navon, as the person in charge of advancing the introduction and implementation of long-distance teaching technologies and better cross-campus coordination.

The report emphasizes its concerns about the shrinking number of institute members. We are concerned with this situation as well. We regard the Institute as one of our flagships and we worry that the weakening funding in the last several years were not conducive to its strength.

Finally, the most significant recommendation in the report concerns the separation of the Institute of Life Science from the faculty of Natural Science, making it an independent faculty. This proposal involves a major change at the university, with far-reaching academic implications. The Dean of Science opposes this change and the Chair of the Institute favors it. The meeting of the Committee for Academic Planning (CAP) initiated a process of deliberation on this issue. We have scheduled further meetings to continue this deliberation.

Let me end by reiterating our appreciation of the committee's work

Sincerely,

Professor Yaacov Schul
Vice Rector

המכון למדעי החיים ע"ש אלכסנדר סילברמן
האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
The Alexander Silberman Institute of Life Sciences
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



November 10, 2010

Prof. Yaacov Schul
Vice-Rector
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

פרופ' רן נתן

ראש המכון למדעי החיים ע"ש
אלכסנדר סילברמן

Yaacov shalom,

Prof. Ran Nathan

Elected Chairman,
The Alexander
Silberman Institute of
Life Sciences

We have read with great interest the report of the Committee for the Evaluation of Biology/Life Sciences Study Programs appointed by Mr. Gideon Sa'ar, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the Council for Higher Education.

The main recommendation of the committee was to establish an independent FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES at the Hebrew University based on our Institute, matching the academic structure of the vast majority of leading universities in Israel and abroad. We believe that such a step is very timely and of critical importance. It is an opportunity for the Hebrew University to lead scientific research in Israel and worldwide, for the following main reasons:

1. Life Sciences is the largest and most active scientific field nowadays (see attachment), and there is no doubt that this trend will further increase over the next decades. As reflected in the topics supported by the ERC, most patents and external grants, Life Sciences play a leading role in the Hebrew University as well. The committee ranked our Institute of Life Sciences as superior in academic excellence criteria, and highlighted our teaching program as well. Yet, once organized as a FACULTY that can better attract leading researchers and provide much better infrastructure (a key weakness identified by the committee), these achievements could and should be multiplied by an order of magnitude.
2. Only by establishing an independent FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES can the Hebrew University prepare itself for the forthcoming biological revolution that will involve an unprecedented investment in life sciences research. Life Sciences constitute the largest target for governmental and private research funding in the world. Israel will undoubtedly experience a similar upsurge in life sciences research, and recent developments have already been supported by Nobel laureates, the Israeli Academy of Sciences, The Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council for Higher Education and the international community of philanthropists and investors. Establishing a new independent FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES at the Hebrew University is a necessary step in creating an attractive scientific center that will constitute a major target for the forthcoming investments, enabling the Hebrew University to lead scientific research in Israel and worldwide by promoting cutting-edge core facilities, and, most importantly, by attracting the best researchers in selected bio-topics in the forthcoming decades.

משרד ראש המכון:

גב' רות לישיצ'ינסקי

המכון למדעי החיים ע"ש סילברמן

בנין סילברמן 1-407

קרית אדמונד י' ספרא, גבעת רם

ירושלים 91904

Chairman office:

Mrs. Ruth Lischinski

The Alexander Silberman

Institute of Life Sciences

1-407 Silberman Bldg

Edmond J. Safra campus

Givat Ram,

Jerusalem 91904, Israel

Tel. 972-2-6585191

Fax. 972-2-6586103

Email:

ruthli@savion.huji.ac.il

Web:

<http://www.bio.huji.ac.il/eng/>

המכון למדעי החיים ע"ש אלכסנדר סילברמן
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3. The highly unusual structure of the Institute of Life Sciences situated within the Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics strongly limits the development of this field at the Hebrew University. This structure restricts and complicates faculty recruitment, and also confines joint appointments within the Faculty. This unusual structure also limits long-term academic plans, and impedes fast and efficient development of this dynamic field of research. Contrary to these limits of the existing structure, establishing a new FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES has many advantages, as a major vehicle for the growth of the Hebrew University, by attracting new talents and resources.
4. Establishing an independent FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES in Edmond J. Safra Campus will strengthen multidisciplinary research on life systems in one campus, without lessening the uniqueness of medical and agricultural faculties in other campuses. On the one hand, this will not weaken in any way the existing teaching and research collaborations with researchers from the sympatric Institutes of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Earth and Computer Sciences. On the other hand, only an independent FACULTY OF LIFE SCIENCES can fully utilize and further advance the merits of the Life Sciences Institute, as emphasized in the committee's report, of promoting interdisciplinary research across major biological themes ranging from molecular and cell biology through organismal biology to global ecology.

פרופ' רן נתן

ראש המכון למדעי החיים ע"ש
אלכסנדר סילברמן

Prof. Ran Nathan

Elected Chairman,
The Alexander
Silberman Institute of
Life Sciences

In this letter, we focused on the committee's main recommendation because we consider this critically important for the development of our university. We accept all other recommendations of the committee; in fact, a variety of measures have already been taken to implement them. For instance, we have significantly enhanced support to young faculty members, and have established new excellence fellowships to our M. Sc. Students, as well as several awards for their notable scientific accomplishments. The Institute has discussed the committee's report in its October 10, 2010 Council Meeting and voted unanimously on the crucial need to implement the committee's main recommendation. Most importantly, we stress that this is not merely an "Institute" to "Faculty" change of name; rather, in light of the ongoing biological revolution Israel and the world experience nowadays, it is now the right time to establish a highly attractive new entity in Jerusalem, the origin of major world cultures, making the Hebrew University a world leader in scientific research. We thus call the Hebrew University leadership to implement the main recommendation of this committee and to advance the process in a timely manner.

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Email:

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<http://www.bio.huji.ac.il/eng/>

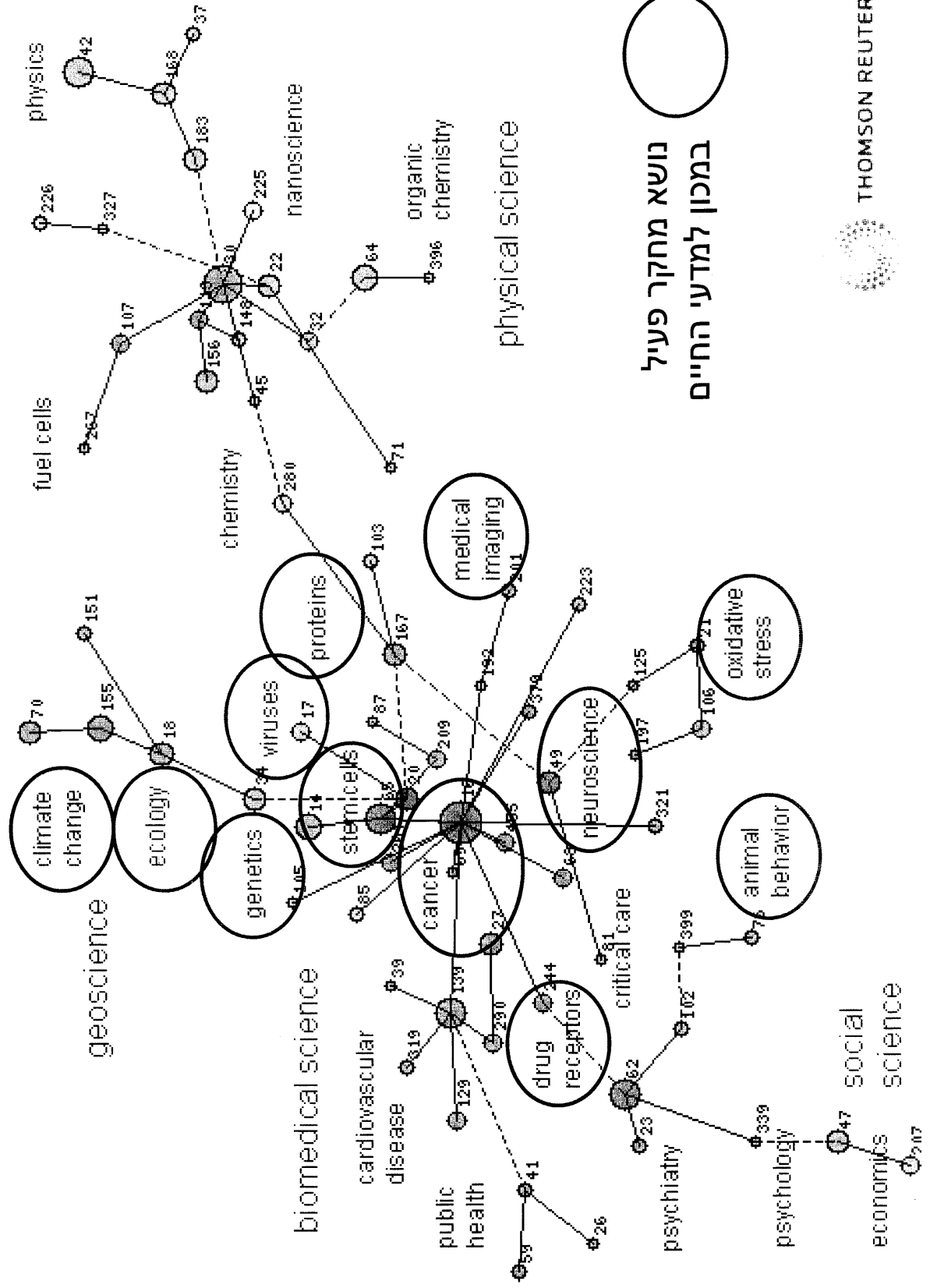
Sincerely,



Ran Nathan

cc: Prof. Menahem Ben Sasson, president
Prof. Sarah Stroumsa, rector

ISI's Global Map of Science

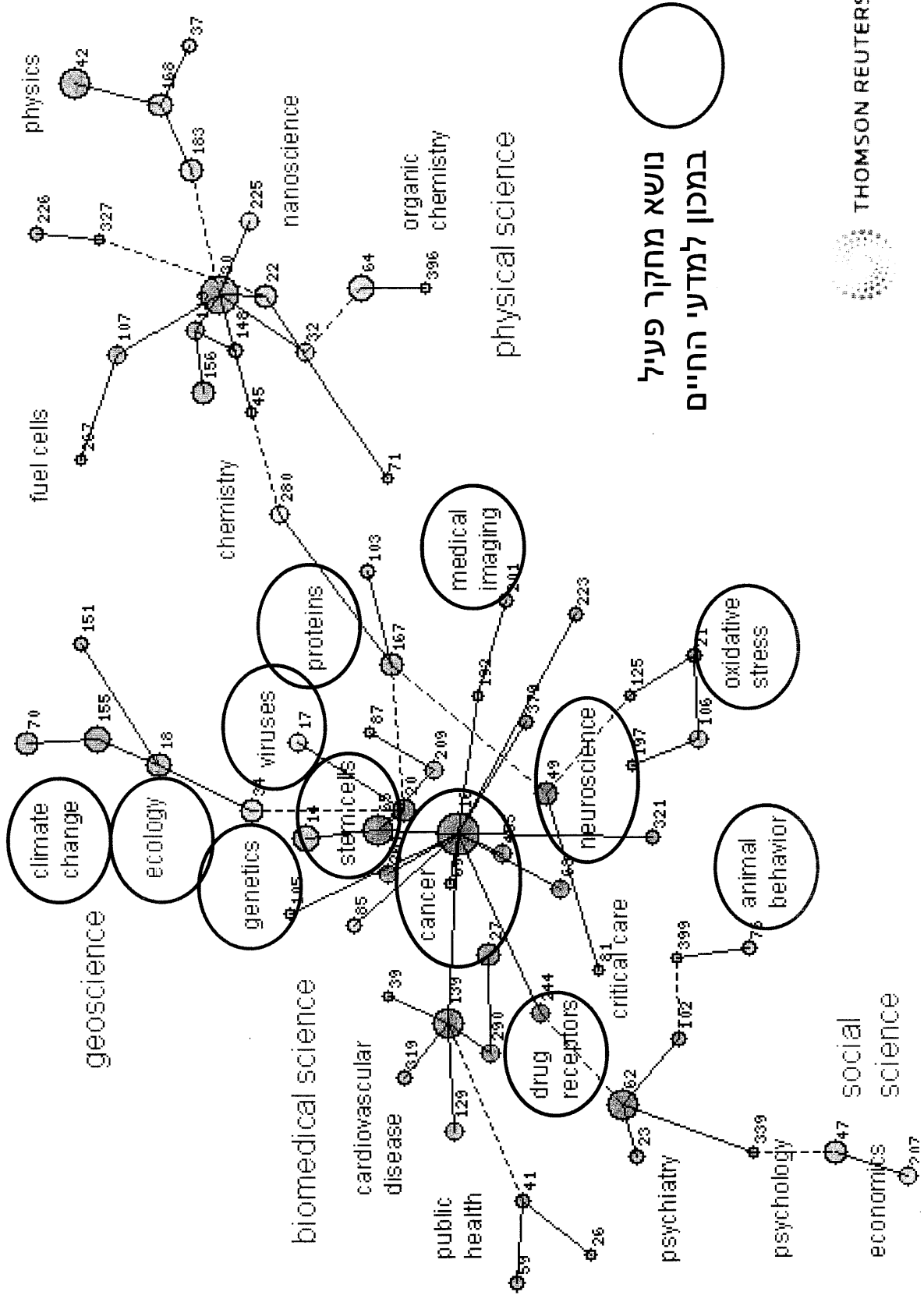


נושא מחקר פעיל
במכון למדעי החיים

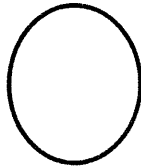


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ISI's Global Map of Science



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 במכון למדעי החיים



THOMSON REUTERS



Yaacov Schul
Vice-Rector
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

October 24, 2010

Yaacov shalom,

I have read the report of the Quality Assessment Committee - appointed by the Council for Higher Education to evaluate biology/life sciences study programs and - in response to your request - I submit my reaction and comments below. Please note that I agree with the recommendations stated in sections 3.5 and 3.6.1-3 on which I do not make any additional comments.

גד מרומ
פרופסור לכימיה יישומית
דיקן
הפקולטה למדעי הטבע

Gad Marom
Professor of
Applied Chemistry
Dean
Faculty of Sciences

Regarding the general recommendations (in Chapter 4 – General Recommendations and Timetable), the first points deal, by and large, with the effects of the current budgetary situation on strategic planning and related issues such as teaching and research programs, new faculty recruitment, etc. I support these recommendations in general.

Apart from these points that are fairly straightforward, the last two are highly significant, as they suggest a different organizational concept and framework for the Institute of Life Sciences in an independent separate faculty.

Let me say upfront that I entirely oppose this suggestion from reasons that I presented in part to the committee and that I reiterate below. The report does not explain at all why "there should be a Faculty of Life Sciences that is not under the Dean of Natural Sciences". For example, I fail to see in the report a listing of the disadvantages of the current structure balanced against the advantages of the proposed structure. Nor can I see a thorough assessment of the current Faculty structure, based on the comments that I made during my appearance before the committee. In fact, I find it rather strange that the heaviest, most significant point of the report is listed as if inadvertently at its end. The only mention of this point (in Section 3.7 –Faculty) is that "hiring decisions are made by the Dean of then Faculty of Science, not by biologists, whose recommendations the Dean sometimes overrides" (hence) "the Life Sciences should be their own Faculty with their own Dean".

My main argument for the retention of the present structure relates to the current research orientation in the Institute of Life Sciences, which enables extensive collaborations across the whole Faculty. As part of the faculty of science the Institute of Life Sciences is inclined towards physics, chemistry and computer science with a host of joint teaching programs, research projects and appointments, in biophysics, bioengineering and chemical biology. These in my mind are direct consequences of the present structure of the Faculty of Science, which supports and promotes interdisciplinary teaching and research.

By analogy, it can be argued that this recommendation by the Evaluation Committee if applied to the Faculties of Medicine, Dental Medicine or Agriculture will imply their separation into two faculties each, of biology and medicine in the first, of biology and dentistry in the second and of biology and agriculture in the third. In each of the four Faculties of experimental sciences in our university the themes of life sciences and biology are specific and unique – reflecting their compatibility with the Faculty's respective

קרית אדמונד י' ספרא
גבעת רם
ירושלים 91904
טלפון: 972-2-6585355/6
פקס: 972-2-6586978

Edmond J. Safra campus
Givat Ram
Jerusalem 91904, Israel
Tel. 972-2-6585355/6
Fax. 972-2-6586978
gadm@savion.huji.ac.il



designations. Would the committee make an analogous recommendation if it were to evaluate the Faculty of Medicine? This unfortunately cannot be answered on the basis of the limited argumentation in the Committee's report.

Removing the life sciences component from the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences will disrupt the typical harmonious interactions that are so unique and valuable. Such action can only be considered - if at all - in the context of establishing a single faculty of biology for the whole university. That however was beyond the scope of the Evaluation Committee.

Sincerely,

Gad Marom

cc, Prof. Sarah Strumsa, the Rector

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